

## Breaking the Binary: A Structuralist-Semiotic Analysis of Fashion and Gender Fluidity in Pakistan

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### Key Words

- Gender Fluidity
- Westernization
- Structuralism
- Semiotics
- Cultural hybridity

### Abstract

*This study explores the intersection of westernization, semiotics, and structuralist theory in shaping contemporary understandings of gender fluidity in Pakistan, with a particular focus on fashion as a semiotic system. As global fashion trends influence Pakistani youth through social media, celebrity culture, and consumer markets, traditional gender binaries are being challenged and redefined. By applying a structuralist lens, this research examines how fashion and aesthetics function as signs that contribute to the evolving discourse of gender identity and nonconformity in Pakistan. The study employs semiotic analysis to decode gender-related symbols in contemporary Pakistani fashion, including androgynous designs, gender-neutral clothing lines, and shifts in grooming trends. Through an analysis of visual media, fashion campaigns, and youth engagement with Westernized American aesthetics such as jeans, sneakers, hoodies, hip-hop fashion, Hollywood glam and influencer culture, the research investigates how signifiers of masculinity and femininity are being renegotiated in the Pakistani cultural context. Findings suggest that while urban, progressive youth specifically in Pakistan embrace gender-fluid aesthetics as a form of self-expression, cultural resistance persists, particularly in conservative and religious circles. The hybridization of western fashion with traditional South Asian attire reflects a localized negotiation of gender identity rather than a wholesale adoption of Western norms. This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender performativity, cultural hybridity, and the role of media in shaping societal perceptions of gender.*

## 1. Introduction

The great radical improvement has been confessed in the field of fashion, especially, due to the acceptance of fluidity and non-binary gender representations. The difference has been applied as a brand of defiant gender conventions in seeing fashion as one of the tools of discourse. The fusion of Western fashion and the local one has led to a unique statement that raises the question of the binaries of genders in Pakistan. The Pakistani society has traditionally been strict in terms of dress code. These norms are closely related to the cultural and religious traditions. Contemporary fashion is nonetheless getting out of these set recipes. Designers and brands are designing through androgynous creation to interest more individuals by uniting both sexes. In the recent years, these changes have been experienced in Pakistan. This is a larger movement in the world that challenges old fashioned gender rules, and fashion has a lot to say in this debate. The fusion of the western culture with the homegrown fashions has led to an emergence of a new language of dressing that acts as a challenge to the gender binaries in Pakistan. In the past, the dressing of both men and women in the country has been influenced by the culture and religion. Nevertheless, a recent phenomenon of the fashion business is marked by the violation of such strict classifications. The wider view of both genders identities is being embraced by the androgynous and unisex designs that are becoming more popular in the usage of the designers and brands. Rastah, as an instance, is a Pakistani streetwear brand established in 2018 that blends the Eastern traditional culture and the Western fashion. The products that Rastah employs include hand looms, wood block printing and manufactures clothing that represents a cultural blend and that would appeal to the local and the international market. The brand's recognition at London Fashion Week in 2023 highlights the global interest in this hybrid fashion story. The fashion industry is another part showing this change as there are more transgender people in the industry. The performance of actress Alina Khan in leading roles of the movies such as "Darling" (2019) and "Joyland" (2022) is a landmark as it was the first trans to be cast in the lead roles in major Pakistani films. Her success challenges the standards of the society and gives the tool of more representative media and fashion. Herein this paper, I will do a study of the semiotic elements of this sartorial change and explain how clothing and fashion is used as signifiers in the renegotiation of gender identities in Pakistan. The study targets to unravel the frameworks of informing and challenging the traditional gender constructs through studying the current fashion trend, media and experiences of individuals affirming to gender fluidity. This question is important to the perception of fashion as cultural expression and the comprehension of the general transformation of the society into inclusivity and diversity in Pakistan.

The study uses structuralist and semiotic explanations with the aim of investigating the shifting gender relations amongst the Pakistani youths due to the influence of the Westernization and digital media culture. The author uses this paper to analyze how the West (Tik Tok, Instagram, Netflix) as a digital culture and media space is the contributor to the semiotically mediated change in how Pakistani youth construct and negotiate their gender identities. It may also shed some light on how the language and the discourse on social media create new gender narratives, replacing or blending with the old one (Noor, Akram, and Zafar, 2024; Batool and Malik, 2024). The study will aid in understanding how language is used to construct gender identity within Pakistani society through the study of language structure and the mechanisms used in the semiotic code. It provides a localized distinct perspective of gender discourse in a non-Western context to expand gender studies to other non-Eurocentric hegemonies. Through the structuralism-semiotic analysis of

gender nonconformity, this paper presents a holistic model of how globalization, media and westernization are redefining gender perceptions in Pakistani society. It is critical to academic discourse, media representation and social policy, which makes sure that discussions on gender remain culturally relevant and theoretically grounded.

Most existing research on gender identity in Pakistan is sociological, feminist, or psychological, but few studies use a structuralist approach to analyze how binary gender systems are being disrupted by Western influences. The structuralist framework helps uncover how traditional gender oppositions (male/female, strong/weak, public/private) are being reshaped by globalized narratives. Although social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Netflix play a major role in shaping youth identity, limited research explores how they function as agents of semiotic transformation in Pakistan. This study investigates how digital media disseminates new gender signs and how Pakistani youth engages with or resists these changes. While there is research on gender resistance in Pakistan, it primarily focuses on conservative vs. progressive debates, without considering semiotic and structuralist shifts in how gender is represented and internalized. This study explores how Pakistani youth develop hybrid gender identities by merging traditional values with Western influences rather than fully rejecting either. This research bridges the gap by using a structuralist and semiotic lens to analyze how Westernization is transforming gender perceptions in Pakistan. It moves beyond Western-centric gender studies and provides a culturally specific analysis of how Pakistani youth negotiate gender nonconformity in a rapidly globalizing world.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

- i. In what ways does Westernization introduce new sign systems that disrupt traditional structuralist frameworks of gender and reshape the semiotic representation of gender fluidity among Pakistani youth?
- ii. How do linguistic and visual semiotic elements (e.g., language, clothing, symbols) contribute to shifting gender perceptions in Pakistan?

## **2. Literature Review**

Fashion, gender and cultural discourse have been viewed as a critical zone of academic investigation especially in globalization and non-conformity. According to scholars like Judith Butler (Butler, 1990) gender is performative, created by repetition of actions and symbols of a culture and not being biologically based. This paradigm has played a key role in the literature on the functioning of fashion as a means of disrupting normative gender categories. This is extended by such semiotic theorists as Roland Barthes who show how clothing can be used as a system of signs, which generate meanings that can be reflexive of, or subversive to, cultural ideologies. In the South Asian contexts, scholars have observed the increased effects of the Westernized aesthetics in the construction of youth identity. Safina, in her work (Safina, Pushkar, Yao, & Emanova, 2021) emphasizes the fact that fashion industries promote more and more global trends that disrupt the traditional gender binaries by introducing unisex designs and presenting androgynous figures. He suggests that such digital platforms as Instagram enhance these changes, making non-binary expressions visible, overcoming local borders. Nonetheless, these changes are not devoid of controversy because researchers. He also highlights that cultural resistance to

such depictions exists, and gender-fluid fashion tends to create controversy concerning authenticity, ethics, and cultural maintenance.

The binary opposition of male/female, modern/traditional and Western/Eastern is found across discourse in Pakistani media through structuralist analysis. Semiotic methods also demonstrate that visual information like clothing patterns, color scheme and body language are ideologically loaded when it comes to constructing gender fluidity as either enlightened or deviant. However, available sources also warn of unreservedly glorifying Westernized fashion as being liberating. The idea of hybridity, as discussed by postcolonial critics like Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), may subvert colonial dynamics and reproduce them at the same time, an aspect that is equally apparent in fashion discourses in Pakistan. In such a way, the literature explains the concept of fashion as a disputed zone where international discourses of fluidity bump into the local cultural frameworks. This two-sidedness provides room of resistance and negotiation in that Pakistan is an interesting place to study the dynamics of binaries that are both broken and rewritten in fashion.

The gender and media studies of Pakistan indicate the role of cultural texts in reproducing and disrupting binaries of normativity. In a semiotic study, (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017) presents the evidence that advertising is still strongly connected with patriarchal concerns using Pakistani television commercials as an example. In their results, they demonstrate how women are constantly presented in domestic positions and how men are portrayed as authorities and decision-makers with the use of visual indicators, linguistic signs and other symbolic elements. However, minor changes come to their analysis, and the dressing style and gestures start to blur strict descriptions, and it is possible that they can be read differently concerning gender identity. In the same vein, Hazir (Ullah et al., 2016) critically analyze the ideas of print media, showing how gender discourses tend to keep marginalizing women by labeling them as victims or subject of moral judgment. Simultaneously, discourses of modernity and fluidity are gradually infiltrating fashion and lifestyle magazines, and this is an indication that representational practices are changing. Expanding on these arguments, Shah (Shah & Ibupoto, 2024) uses ethnographic perspective to study the youth fashion in Sindh and demonstrate how clothing serves as a cultural capital to negotiate identity. Their results draw special attention to hybridization, in which unisex theme and the fusion of traditional and Western style challenge the established binaries in a subvert way.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The introduction of a qualitative research methodology will be involved to explore the effects of westernization on gender nonconformity in Pakistani youth through structuralist and semiotic methodologies. In this way, an in-depth and multi-level analysis of symbols, discourses and media portrayals as the main factors of creating and reforming gender identity can be made. Qualitative inquiry is especially appropriate to the study since it does not aim at quantification but interpretation, meaning-making and contextual understanding.

This study has used a semiotic analysis, structuralist analysis and thematic analysis as the analytical tools to study in detail the phenomenon of gender fluidity in fashion in Pakistan. The semiotic analysis will be based on the decoding of gender-based signs, symbols, and visual indicators of media and fashion writing, especially in terms of the way Westernized aesthetics transforms the concepts of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. Such binaries

as male/female, modern/traditional, and Eastern/Western will be noted by structuralist analysis as they are strengthened or disrupted in these narratives. Lastly, the theoretical analysis of recurrent motifs, discursive practices and how youths perceive these emerging genres will be followed using thematic analysis to determine how individuals can interpret and negotiate these emerging gender expressions within the context of the local cultural values.

The importance of Semiotic Analysis is that it enables the study to go beyond the surface level of observation and into the inner culture that is tangible in media texts and in the fashion campaigns. Gender identity in a context such as Pakistan is still strongly structured by heteronormative binaries; therefore, semiotics offers a method by which the subtle mechanisms of conveying non-binary images through symbols, colors, dress code, and body representations can be deciphered. In such a way, it is possible to observe how, when localized, Westernized aesthetics can be both a locus of dissent and assimilation. Semiotic analysis, therefore, bears direct relevance to the purpose of the project to interrogate the ways, in which gender fluidity is marked, contested, and re-visioned within modern-day discourses of fashion.

The Structuralist Analysis adds value to the study by accentuating the binary structures that still heavily influence the cultural discourses of Pakistan. Fashion campaigns and media representations tend to be swinging between the extremes of male/female, traditional/modern, and Eastern/Western, and that the space, where gender is negotiated, is created. The study will look at how these oppositions are maintained or destabilized through a structuralist lens, and in the process, find out how fashion is a potent instrument of cultural negotiation. This plays a key role in the study, in the sense that it locates the fashion industry as not only a location of aesthetics, but a social discourse that either supports or disrupts the cogent ideologies about gender.

The value of Thematic Analysis is that it relates media texts to the lived realities and perceptions by youth audiences, and makes the research not merely theoretical. Thematic analysis helps to reveal how people internalize or challenge cultural messages within fashion by identifying the repetitive motifs and patterns in the way youth respond to fashion (acceptance, resistance, or hybridization). Within the Pakistani context, where the generation change and globalization affect identity construction, this is a way of positioning media discourse within the context of daily cultural negotiation. Therefore, the thematic analysis reinforces the purpose of the project of learning how gender fluidity is not merely represented, but it is also enacted in the society.

The semiotic, structuralist, and thematic analysis jointly will guarantee a multi-layered methodological framework that puts into focus not only the symbolic but also the experiential aspects of fashion gender fluidity. Interpreting visual cues, interrogating cultural dichotomy, and following recurring patterns in the perceptions of the youth, this study creates a suitable and balanced way to connect theory with lived reality. These combinations allow the triangulation of these approaches to improve the validity and richness of results and enable the study to go beyond a single textual interpretation and embrace the wider cultural and social context. Further, the placement of westernized aesthetics into the Pakistani setting allows one to study the localization, resistance, or re-definition of global influences. This methodological approach is hence more than a suitable approach, it is a prerequisite towards unpacking the entangled relationship between fashion, media, and gender within a society that is a negotiation of tradition and modernity.

Finally, it gives the instruments to unveil how fashion works as the locus of identity and cultural change.

#### 4. Data Analysis & Discussion

##### 4.1 Semiotic Analysis: Generalizing Contemporary Gender Trends in Fashion

Semiotics, as developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes (Saussure, 1916/2011; Barthes, 1967), is the study of signs and symbols and how they create meaning in society. In traditional Pakistani society, gender roles have been strictly coded through fashion; men in shalwar kameez, neutral colors, simple patterns and women in embellished dresses, bright colors, elaborate jewelry (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). However, Westernization and globalization have introduced new gendered signifiers that challenge these rigid distinctions. There are contemporary gender trends in Fashion which are amalgamation of western and local hybridization. Gender-Neutral fashion has completely broken the binary. The signifiers of this current fashion include oversized clothing, monochrome outfits, unisex tailoring. That suggests a meaningful shift in moving away from hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine aesthetics to a fluid identity (Entwistle, 2020). For instance, Pakistani fashion influencers like Hussain Rehar and Mohsin Naveed Ranjha incorporating flowing silhouettes, unisex cuts, and softer fabric choices into men’s fashion. This results in challenging gendered dress codes. The picture shown below is the latest display by Hussain Rehar on their website (Hussain Rehar, 2025).

Social media also normalizes blurring gender lines in clothing. The Farshi shalwar, a voluminous and regal garment traditionally worn by men during the 1970s and early 1980s in Pakistan, made an unexpected yet powerful comeback in the spring of 2025—this time reappropriated by women as a dominant fashion statement during Eid celebrations.



*Reviving a silhouette once worn by aristocratic men, the Farshi shalwar re-emerged in Eid 2025 as a modern, gender-fluid fashion statement.*

The renewal provides foreshadowing to a broader, more intersectional feminism movement in Pakistan whereby not outgone aesthetics are discarded but repackaged. Women are coming to own their culture by having control on how it is worn and how it sounds. The trend of the Farshi shalwar, which lacks political motivation, collides with and poses questions to space (how women inhabit and negotiate physical and visual spaces), labor

(the handiwork embedded in the creation of such objects), and memory (what comes to mind and what gets forgotten in the history of fashion). When re-adopting a male garment in the fashion archives of Pakistan and flooding the digital sphere with it, women of 2025 do not only follow a trend, but carry out a minor performance of feminist historiography. The Farshi shalwar thus comes to be symbol and performance: a garment that comes with it the after-effect of an alternate period, and yet, in the crevices of its cloth, opens new significances to a generation who are recapturing tradition in their own way. Over the last few years, androgynous street wear has risen to prominence among the Pakistani young generation and is a blend of western culture, identity and defiance to their region. This can be observed in its style that entails slack silhouettes, neutral cuts, oversized hoodies, cargo pants, monotone colors (The Express Tribune, 2024). It is especially widely spread in the Pakistani metropolitan areas of Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. In any case, sociocultural resistance greets such a change. All the more digitally enabled and younger and urban layers have embraced more fluid ways of expressing gender, though the conservative and religious aspects consider such changes a betrayal of culture and religion. Gender, specifically, appears to be the most disputable question with uncontrolled hatred and toleration in the case of social media where part of youth attempts to express themselves and part of it attempts to suppress it.

Gender identity and other identifiers are bound to be faced with a never-ending war of traditional and modern, acceptance and denial, rigidity and fluidity, as Pakistan enters modernity. This change is indicated by the apparent changes in the patterned systems of signification according to gender in clothing, media and the daily activities (Butler, 1990). In the Pakistani case, for example, fashion serves not only as an act of identity but also as a dynamic form of resistance to the prescribed gender norms. This social development is bound to escalate as young people all over the world make their voices heard in a world that is becoming more and more global. The other factor is Men makeup and grooming trends. Increase in Pakistani men in terms of the makeup and grooming habits signifies an impressive shift in the socio-cultural gender aesthetics and the changing cultural perception of the male identity (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, 2024).

In South Asia, men in the region have not been afraid of cosmetics. The Mughal court performers used to often perform wearing rich makeup. The Viable transformation to modern cosmetics in the male gender is an effort of trying to dilute traditional perceptions about masculinity. Small local companies and L'Oréal and Maybelline are also selling products that target all genders, which means that the people are changing their attitudes. Since there has been ages of stoicism and austerity, the fact that one bears the beauty practices of men is a breakthrough move in the society and culture. Such changes permit different manifestations of fluidity and identity with gender. The consideration of cultural changes in the case of masculinity and beauty promoted gender identity change more inclusively in a socially accepted way. Signifiers that relate to masculinity include: lip color, eyeliner, shaping eyebrows and skincare. As an example, the idea about men possessing a soft appearance and light cosmetics has changed the story of Western fashion and K-pop (Khalid, 2024). HSY and Ali Xeeshan fashion campaigns feature gender deviation norms. Urban young men have begun to embrace new methods of self-care that have gone beyond the rugged masculinity stereotype. The transition is a shift in conventional masculinity. Rural and more conservative areas have risen in opposition to this change.

The adoption of "power dressing" by women in Pakistan and embracing of masculine cuts reflects an underlying change in the attitude towards gender, power, and fashion (Breward, Lemire, & Riello, 2023). Power dressing which consists of rounded shoulders and waist blazers, collared shirts, smart kan boot trousers, and precise stitching, has become the norm for women in urban centers across education and professional women in creative fields. These garments, traditionally viewed as markers of Western corporate aggression, are now being usurped by Pakistani women as emblems of autonomy, intellect, and resistance to femininity with its grace and submission. Kamiar Rokni, Generation, and Zara Shahjahan weave these flamboyant gowns into mainstream fashions with traditional fabrics and androgynous sharp cuts. Saba Qamar and Sadaf Kanwal, Pakistani celebrities, are good examples of this nonbinary gender image as they don and promote structured suits (Reviewit.pk, 2021). Even Hijabi and modest fashion feminists are adding oversized blazers and loose silhouettes to modern Islamic fashion. Women are reclaiming masculine-coded clothing through modern identity in Hijab. Feminism and fluid fashion trends blur the lines of gender constructs. All of this draws inspiration from Western corporate culture, where suits represent both formality and equality (University of Leicester, n.d.). Another prominent example of hybridization of fashion is the combination of embroidered sneakers worn with bridal lehngas (Usmani, 2024). That single trend grew so popular that almost every bride to be sought out the style.

#### 4.2 Structuralist Analysis: Examining Gender Binaries in Pakistani Fashion

The development of structuralist analysis allows scholars to explore how gender binaries are inscribed, reinforced, or resisted within the Pakistani fashion discourse. This particular approach incorporates Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs alongside Roland Barthes' semiotic critique of fashion and looks into how language, dress, and visual culture function as signifiers within a meaning-making system that both upholds and contests sociocultural gender structures in Pakistan. Saussure stressed that the link between a signifier (a garment, color, or fabric) and its culturally evoked meaning is, by definition, arbitrary and socially contrived. The Pakistani pastel-shaded, floral-patterned, and gown-like style categorized as feminine and dark-colored, stiffly-tailored, and sparsely decorated outfits categorized as masculine underscore this association in the Pakistani fashion context. These signs operate within binary oppositions of soft/hard, passive/active, or embellished/plain that underpin the structuralist framework of gender differentiation. Fashion practitioner's mythologization processes, with reference to Roland Barthes in *Fashion System and Mythologies*, 'explain' ideology and fashion, classifying 'myths (Barthes, 1967).' Pakistani fashion entities such as Sana Safinaz, Maria B, Gul Ahmed, and men's Amir Adnan or J. narrate orthodox patriarchal mythos centered on honor and authority; for them, middle-class divides are aestheticized in unemancipated form. Women are gown clad, often positioned as graceful, hierarchically subservient, and idealized "feminine," while men are uninhibitedly portrayed as strong "macho" figures.

More recently, some fashion brands began to transcend such binaries. Generation is an emblematic urban "forward" label that portrays women in utility wear, darker hues, imposing stances, and dresses them conscripted to traditionally male warriors. Feminist re-signification. In the same vein, Zaha and Elan started expanding their male lines, and with them blur the boundaries of cross-dressing. Previously deemed 'feminine' pastel-colored floral embroidered ensembles now adorn male models, defying ensemble stylistic restrictions and challenging rigid hierarchical gender sign systems discourses (Kress & van

Leeuwen, 2006).. Fashion influencers and public figures in Pakistan are increasingly challenging traditional gender norms. Many are known for their bold, gender-fluid fashion choices, often blending masculine and feminine elements.

#### **4.3 Thematic Analysis: Identifying Recurring Patterns in Youth Perceptions and Media Discourse**

Thematic analysis overviews the unique and even conflicting attitudes and experiences of gender and fashion among the youth of Pakistan towards the same and the presence or absence of such views in the media. It enables the identification, analysis, and description of themes in phenomena of text, images, and other visual materials, which clarify convoluted accounts of culture and gender fluidity. The youth people in Pakistan make it an interesting youth-ill phenomenon as they are deeply connected with the modern world, and yet are connected to the culture. They visualize gender and fashion in multiple places through social media (Instagram and Tik Tok), fashion magazines, television talk shows, and adverts (Vaingankar et al., 2022). The thematic analysis could not be done without the analysis of the young consumers, social media influencers, social media content and comments, and media and advertising, which critically define the scope of the data needed.

One of the key themes that surfaced from youth narratives is “Negotiating Tradition and Modernity.” Pakistani youth, in particular, seem to struggle with being more open and embracing fluid views of gender expression while still respecting the cultural and religious traditions (Lukens-Bull, 2005). For instance, young women view fashion not only as a form of self-expression but as a means of defiance to overly critical stereotypes. Yet, many women still grapple with societal expectations of modesty and family honor. Similarly, male youths have the desire to play with and deviate from the monochromatic styles of boxy, deep-voiced male figures to brighter, more colorful attire. The unfortunate thing is that the majority of them are subjected to social ostracism or stigma. In this theme, there is a grey space in which fashion is an instrument of compliance and an instrument of resistance. The other important theme is “Visibility and Representation. Majority of the youths discuss about being overlooked or not being counted in the media and fashion industry since they mainly promote a narrow-minded and heteronormative perception (Evans and Thornton, 1991). The absence of representation also encourages the necessity of fashion that in fact represents more than one face such as transgender and non-binary people. Social media celebrities that endorse gender nonconformity or non-normative appearances are proclaimed as heroes who narrate different narratives, and who encourage young people to embrace themselves.

Style empowerment is repeated to the fashion and is an instrument of empowerment, confidence and even struggles. Teenagers tell about the way they feel empowered to escape their identities and bodies through non-traditional or genderless dressing. Primarily, as an illustration, a young girl can wear sensational, neutral garments as a political boldness to oppose a gendered feminism provoked by patriarchy in the dominant society. In the meantime, a boy can play with cosmetics or ornaments to demonstrate his personal identity. These acts transcend the dressing and are an expression of trying to gain social approval and a control over one’s life. Thematic analysis of Pakistani media discourse reveals a co-existence of traditionalist and progressive narratives though in conflict with each other at times. Adverts and television shows are commercially inclined to capitalize on artistic and stylish displays of the fashion shows and propagate strict gender roles.

Women are subordinate to men and males are dominant. These kinds of representations reinforce the dualism above. However, the new media and digital spaces are considered counter public spaces which challenge the mainstream discourses. Alternative narratives are beginning to take shape in Independent and Social Media Content and they involve gender non-conformity and fluidity, hence becoming extremely appealing. Fashion brands are selling change without gender inclusivity and ambiguity that is used by progressive gap-fillers.

The theme of backlash and resistance is also covered in media discourse. The evolution of fashion and gender-fluid manifestations are commonly met with a conservative backlash, both online and offline. The discussion of social media arguments and remarks on newspapers indicates certain trends of moral panic in which non-conformist gender manifestations are taken as a threat to cultural and religious conservatism. The latter resistance highlights the precarious position of gender-fluid fashion in Pakistan and the cultural brokering of hybrid identity that young people have to engage in. Pakistani young generation is trying to change gendered relations with the help of fashion. It describes how fashion is being packaged not only as an emergent style, but as an extremely strong tool of self-identification, cultural expression and political expression. The above-mentioned structures reflect a predominance of a single logic: in the former, the perennial existence of deep-rooted traditions and binary systems; in the latter, a hastening movement towards inclusiveness and fluidity.

#### **4.4. Discussion**

The findings highlight how Western influences and transnational media are reshaping the socio-cultural frameworks related to gender norms in the society. Usually in the Pakistani culture, there was an emphasis and reliance on clear and stable gender binaries of male and female, with clothing, colors, and accessories serving as markers of gender identity. For example, the shalwar kameez worn in muted and broader icy colors was labeled as “masculine,” while bright-shaded, fitted, and embroidered garments were “feminine” markers. Within the structuralist approach to culture, these gender markers were treated as natural and immutable within the system. However, the introduction of Western styles, alongside the emergence of Instagram, TikTok, and global advertising, are rapidly changing and challenging these systems. Systems of meanings that were once defined are now endlessly redefined, and changing signifiers of gender are detached from their signified.

With Pakistani urban youth, and those more advanced in social trends, fashion is an avenue for experimentation that has, and is, undergoing rapid transformation. Through their adoption and exposure of androgynous branding and gender-neutral styles, young people are engaging in activities of semiotic reclassification and they are defying the idea that clothing must. New sign systems are presented in visual fashion campaigns, in particular, the ones on social media. The androgynous cuts, unisex branding, and neutral color palettes that are linked to it re encode gendered clothes as well. This effect demonstrates that in accordance with Roland Barthes, it is possible to say that fashion is a system of signs with signification where a system of meaning variably and mutually changes and develops. This

fashion does not simply represent a Western imitation to the Pakistani youths. Rather, it is a negotiation of identity: an effort to inhabit global modernity without yielding to local norms of hardcore gender performance. The overall results show the hardness amid eminence and resistance. The reaction to the backlash reacts oppositely which is manifested in cultural conservatism. But current trends have become a field of liberation and conflict. The structuralist-semiotic approach shows how the western signs have been re-packaged in Pakistan with a variety of concerns in the result, although not complete cultural obliteration.

## 5. Conclusion

The general effect of westernization, social media, and other shifting fashion trends has changed the way gender identity is imbibed amongst Pakistani youth. On the other hand, Pakistan was a strict fashion and grooming society; which clearly expressed masculinity and femininity in the past through fashion, in clothes, trend or lifestyle. These sorts have gradually been eclipsed by the mainstream media discourse on gender, especially facilitated by digital media, popular culture and Western celebrities. The rise of unisex dress, masculine casual and other progressive tendencies among men characterizes the development of rigid masculinity traits to loosely display gender expression. In the meantime, power outfits that are made of feminine energies but with the qualities of masculinity means that femininity is not confined to delicacy, colors and vibrancy. All these developments indicate that gender identity in Pakistan to a greater extent is undergoing a semiotic metamorphosis in which the connotations that used to be predetermined earlier are being redefined by modernism and globalization, individualism and self-expression. Notably, this transformation cannot be directly attributed to a copying of Western gender trends, but it is a hybrid form. Young Pakistanis are combining such traditional garments as shalwar kameez and embroidery with jewelry and such current trends as oversized fit, sneakers and neutral colors. One of the aspects of resistance that the hybridization entails are the ways in which the youth attempts to confront modern gender discourses, but they also find their identity through the lens of their culture and religion. Nevertheless, this transition is not associated with a sociocultural blowback. Even though the younger, more cosmopolitan and digitally-savvy generations have adopted less structural representations of gender, the conservative and religious elements of society consider such changes to be the erosion of cultural and religious faith. Gender, in particular, has proved to be the field where a part of the youth can express themselves and the rest of the society examines them. As Pakistan traverses into the modern world, issues around gender identity are interested to provoke a dilemma of the traditional values and modern, acceptance and reject, non-moving and movement. This change is manifested in significant alteration in the gendered apparatus of signification in garments, media and daily routines. This is one way of how the Pakistani context uses fashion as a dynamic means of resistance- not only as a way of self-presentation, but also of deconstructing, redefining and reconstructing gender identities. This trend is bound to continue as the international youth declare their entitlement to possess more of the globalized society.

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