

Reimagining Consumer Identity and Experience: A Social Semiotic Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Themed Restaurants Inspired by Popular Culture Narratives

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Abstract

This study employs multimodal discourse analysis to examine how restaurant adaptations inspired by popular culture narratives in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad, communicate and construct consumers' identities and experience through visual and semiotic modes. The themed restaurants are approached as sites of mediated communication that speak through their design, and narratives transforming multi-sensory immersive dining experiences. A sample of 4 themed restaurants was selected to investigate the extent to which the ambience and atmospheric cues of these restaurants reconceptualize consumers' sociolinguistic identity, experience, and their need for uniqueness. This study has embarked on what Leitch (2008) referred to as post-literary adaptation, and going beyond mere adaptation theories in which stories were adapted into other forms of social existence, such as restaurants, is the case in point. Approaching restaurant adaptations as a linguistic spectacularisation of novels, stories, and television shows, the resulting analysis expands the boundaries of adaptation theory by delineating the central theme and the related atmospheric cues that make the adaptation more appealing. For this, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) social semiotic multimodal discourse analysis approach has been selected as the main theoretical framework to analyze restaurant adaptations. It was found that by adapting meaningful environmental cues, these themed restaurants fostered an immersive experience for their consumers in terms of decoration and memorabilia.

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Introduction

Restaurant adaptations develop specific meanings and feelings for consumers' immersive experience. These restaurants are built around a particular theme or story. Hollywood movies, novels, and television shows act as fodder for these newly emerging themed restaurants. The themes are styled through architectural ambience, background music, lighting, smell, color, culinary specialty, and the environment of the restaurant. The themed restaurant provides entertaining stimulus to consumers' five senses: sight, smell, taste, hearing, and haptics. Hence, collectively the five senses *deliver humans a comprehensive perception of a space* apart from good quality food (Yu, 2009: vii). Kress and Leeuwen (2020) stressed the significance of visual discernment and the indirect approach of symbolization that assist in enhancing consumers' theatrical experience in a

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themed restaurant (see also Alam & Amjad, 2026; Amjad, 2025; Amjad, 2017). In this regard, Morgan (2010) and Munoz (2009) described the universality of *Pine and Gilmore's* book stories and themes, which remained a good way to bring an exceptional experience to the service business of the restaurant industry. Such themes actually build strong ties between the business communities and the consumers. The themed restaurants attract higher-income consumers as it offers social value for them (Eliwa, 2006: 67). They recognize it as an influence on their socio-economic status and that their preferences are treated with top most priority (McColl-Kennedy and Schneider, 2000). Thus, as a product of adaptations, the themed restaurants are gradually gaining more attention from consumers than the traditional restaurants all over the world.

Restaurant adaptations are becoming in vogue in Pakistan. The theming provides the restaurants of Islamabad with out-of-ordinary discourses that transport the consumers into another social space and time. The present study focused on four themed restaurants of Islamabad adapted from *Harry Potter*, *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, and horror-based movies. Approaching themed restaurants as the linguistic spectacularisation of these novels and television shows, the subsequent analysis expands the boundaries of adaptation theory, moving even beyond the cinematic zones. Hence, the themed restaurants of Pakistan are a kind of transmediation which moves beyond the conceptual boundaries of adaptation theories. These media range from literary works to television shows or movies, thereby providing both food and entertainment and a memorable experience to their consumers. This study seeks to create a fusion of these two realms by contextualizing the restaurant industry at the nexus of post-literary adaptation and culinary, and therefore provides a medium to commodify other cultures' experiences (MacCannell, 1976).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the scope of the ambience and atmospheric cues of themed restaurants and re-conceptualize consumers' sociolinguistic identity, experience, and their need for distinctiveness. It also explores the dimensions of the image of the themed restaurant adaptations inspired by popular culture narratives that provide customers' satisfaction towards it.

Literature Review

The word adaptation is defined as a process of modification or reinventing any work of art or text which inculcates multiple meanings (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014). As a result of this adaptation process, the continuous shift of text from one form to another is a healthy symbol of imaginative and creative survival (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 32). Instances like *Star Trek*, which initially was a failing television series, survived its annihilation through adaptation into other media representations of comic books and novels, thereby gaining new audiences. Furthermore, in order to live up to the spectators' expectations, multiple adaptations are attempted into various forms and mediums to gain viewership or readership (Hutcheon, 2006: 42-43). Consequently, a constant flux between the original and the adapted source have long existed since the birth of screen adaptations (Leitch, 2007: 22 and Stam, 2008: 4). In spite of the class prejudice, iconophobia, logophilia and dislike for the corporeal form, the creative minds have continued to mold and adapt or adopt original work of art into different mediums and genres (Stam, 2008: 5-7).

The contemporary world of adaptation studies primarily concentrated its attention on the transposition of a literary piece of work or art into film. The tensions between literature and film have resulted in a number of adaptation theories. The traditional notion of fidelity prevailed, which marked the highest position of literature to film or other forms of social media when placed on a hierarchical scale (Leitch, 2007: 27). This derogatory comment was provoked on the basis of the assumption that adaptation was a kind of replication rather than reinvention or creation and also for

the preservation of integrity to the original source. As opposed to the fidelity approach, the other kind of adaptation usually retained the structural narrative and reinvented the source text. But the appeal of adaptation studies cannot be fully grasped by taking into consideration only novels and films. Hence, the literature/film dichotomy is replaced by newer innovations such as theme parks, themed restaurants, and interactive modes as in video games, thereby allowing a broader perspective of adaptation theories and studies. Here, the adaptations take the original source as a mere raw material and are the most radical form of adaptation (Klein and Parker, 1981).

Nowadays, the post-modern era has enveloped other adapted modes of music, visual art, video games, comic books, theme parks and theme restaurants. This shift of focus on multiple directions moves across transmediation concept that pays less attention on what has been lost during the adaptation process but emphasizes more on what the text has received from the new form of creation (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010: 56). For instance, the story adapted into a video game or restaurant may lose its original narrative pace but gain other qualities of “tactile interactivity” and scope of immersive experience. Even the entertainment industry has built franchises upon these concepts of video games like *Resident Evil* and *Battle Ship* and theme park rides of *Disneyland* for the purposes of social and market significance (Leitch, 2007: 250).

In adaptation studies, restaurant adaptations also find meaning by moving beyond the three kinds of adaptations. In restaurant adaptations, normally the food is backgrounded to the presentation of the theme. The theme is therefore used to attract the customers. These themes have a direct market appeal. According to Gottdiener (1997: 78), themed restaurants “reduce the product to its image and the consumer experience to its symbolic content”. Hence, the consumers immerse themselves in this artificially created environment away from the reality of the world, where the sense of taste, along with smells, sounds and sights, gives them an experiential entertainment environment.

Rathod (2014) pointed out a number of themed restaurants in which the concept takes primacy and affects the architecture, food, music and the “overall feel of the restaurant.” According to him, restaurants like *Ithaa Undersea Restaurant*, *Hard Rock Café*, *Jekyll and Hyde Club*, *Rainforest Café*, *Graveyard Café*, *Modern Toiletin Taipei Café* and *Buns and Guns* attract customers solely on the premise of the theme itself. These are based on the idea of fun, fantasy, music, and abstract ideas, etc. Their success lies both in the creative as well as the culinary expertise. *Ithaa Undersea Restaurant* offers a scenic view of marine life along with delicious seafood. *Hard Rock Café* is decorated with a big guitar on its exterior side and is designed on the theme of celebrities of the rock and roll music industry. *Jekyll and Hyde Club* entertains its customers with an animatronic soundtrack and is based on the Victorian gothic novel of Robert Louis Stevenson. *Rainforest Café* revolves around the ecological concept of the rainforest. It comprises a set designed with plants, waterfalls, and automatons of animals. One eerie type of themed restaurant is found in India named *Graveyard Restaurant*. In this restaurant, tea and butter buns, as its culinary specialty, are served on coffins which are used as tables. The customers visit the place as they find themselves lucky after having dinner among the tombs of a famous Sufi saint of the Mughal period. *Modern Toiletin Taipei Café* serves soft chocolate with a cherry on top in toilet-shaped bowls while sitting on western-style commodes to its customers and patrons. The drinks are complimentary and provided in miniature urinals. *Buns and Guns Café* is built around the concept of military invasion, with helicopter sounds serving as background music. The environment is a reflection of Lebanon’s war with Israel, and the food menu, like “Mortar Burger” and “M16 Carbine meat sandwich” (Rathod, 2014: 16), itself is reminiscent of this theme.

Simpson (2003) described the theoretical importance of theme and entertainment in restaurant design. According to him, there is a need to work on design methodologies for restaurants with respect to the needs of consumers who want to get out of the tantrums of their urbanized life. He has also undertaken case studies of restaurants in America that value the notion of theming within a new “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Yu (2009) investigated the importance of themed restaurant sensory design, which assists in delivering customers a “comprehensive perception of themed spaces.” He found that the sensory design had a significant influence on the customers and hence proved to be more profitable to the restaurant owners.

Ariffin et al. (2012) studied the influence of atmospherics cues of themed restaurants in relation to the reactions of customers. They gathered qualitative data from 300 customers and then interpreted their responses in relation to the restaurant’s environmental elements. It was found that several dimensions, including waiters’ uniforms, artifacts, color, lighting, and designed walls, contributed towards the overall consumer’s behavior. Several studies have been conducted on restaurants’ design in relation to the atmospherics from the viewpoint of commercialization (e.g., Babin and Attaway, 2000; Ezeh and Haris, 2007; Hoffman and Turley, 2002; Kotler, 1973; Reimer and Kuehn, 2005; Ryu and Jang, 2007; Turley and Milliman, 2000 and the references cited therein).

Puspita (2015: 290) discussed the role of concept for restaurants in relation to servicescape and physical evidence. It was found that physical evidence of theme throughout the restaurant design stimulates “customers’ responses towards the company’s image”. Furthermore, it helped the customers to distinguish between fast food and fine dining based on the physical evidence of the atmospheric cues of themed restaurants.

Lakos (2013) investigated the service delivery procedure in relation to the ethnic themed Thai restaurants. According to him, three factors are relevant to the ethnic themed restaurant design, that is, internal design, the choice of staff or employees, and the style of services presented to the customers. In this study, he highlighted the importance of Thai culture and etiquette for the successful business of an ethnic-themed restaurant in addition to the dining experience. But Lili (2014) stressed the customer’s demands or expectations with respect to uniqueness and authenticity behind their choice of ethnic-themed restaurants. He found that these ethnic based choices reflected the customer’s social distinctions.

The theoretical orientation to the themed restaurant research conducted earlier clearly manifests that it is indeed rare to find one such in relation to multimodality and adaptation studies. Hence, the present study becomes a significant contribution to adaptation studies and social semiotic studies, as investigations were made in the local context of the capital city of Pakistan, which is Islamabad.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study analyzed four themed restaurants of Islamabad. A qualitative analysis was considered suitable to analyze the common emerging themes of these restaurant adaptations (Creswell, 2013). For this purpose, fieldwork was carried out to record different images of the four themed restaurants. During the visits paid to the restaurants, field notes were also taken with respect to music, lighting, and smell in order to capture the contribution of the atmospheric cues in contributing to customers’ immersive experience. This study has embarked on what Leitch (2008) mentioned as post-literary adaptation, and going beyond mere adaptation theories in which stories were adapted into other forms of social existence, such as restaurants, is the case in point.

Approaching restaurant adaptations as a linguistic spectacularisation of fiction work, stories, and television shows, the resulting framework analysis expands the boundaries of adaptation theory by delineating the central theme and the related atmospheric cues that make the adaptation more appealing. It includes lighting, color, culinary specialty, and the general atmosphere that the restaurant externally portrays. For this, Kress and Leeuwen's (2020) social semiotic multimodal discourse analysis approach has been selected as the main theoretical framework to analyze restaurant adaptations.

This study combined Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) social semiotic multimodal analysis and visual culture theories to describe meaning in restaurant spaces. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006; 2020) described social semiotics as having an analytical grammar for representational, interactional, and compositional meaning. Visual culture theories describe the broad ideological and cultural frameworks of semiotics and the frameworks of consumption and identity. When combined, these frameworks allowed the study of themed restaurants as semiotic systems as opposed to merely aesthetic environments, which are used to formulate social relations and consumer identities. This echoed the social semiotic approach to public and consumer discursive spaces, where similar findings have emerged for the role played by visual and spatial design in negotiating identities (Amjad, 2025).

This study used van Leeuwen's (2008) social actors and social actions framework to identify the different ways people are positioned, how agency is given, and the social actions which take place in themed restaurants. This study used frameworks of semiotics and design to describe the social actions which took place in themed restaurants as opposed to the aesthetic environment in which the actions were framed. This study used micro-semiotics such as design, color, and images to describe the social actions framed within themed restaurants.

Multimodal Analysis of Themed-Restaurant Adaptations

Social semiotic multimodal discourse analysis was used to analyze meaning by combining the linguistic and semiotic components of the restaurant images. Rather, a critical analysis of the visual image ought to recognize that different components comprise a visual where messages may channel the restaurant customer's experience. Such modes, in addition to others, include color, graphical imagery, layout, order, directionality, and the context from which the dimensions of the visual image were derived, according to Kress and Leeuwen (2020). They asserted the importance of various modes in analyzing the themed-restaurant adaptations. In this framework, a superordinate mode is a dominant thematic structure that organizes meaning across a space (e.g., Harry Potter or Game of Thrones central narratives). A subordinate mode is a semiotic resource that is supportive (e.g., décor, lighting, menu design). A hidden mode is an implicit meaning cue that is arranged (e.g., a layout, artifact, and color). To ascertain the meaning-making process in themed restaurants, several channels or modes, such as the superordinate, subordinate, and hidden modes, and details from particular contexts were employed. Using the unlocking of the codes metaphor, the following unlock framework is applied to analyze the restaurant adaptations multimodally (see Figure 1). This approach is an extension of the existing tradition of social semiotic multimodal analysis of South Asian visual/performative spaces such as musical performance in *qawwali* (Sufi devotional music) (Amjad, 2017), digital conflict memes discourse (Alam & Amjad, 2026), and visual graffiti discourse (Amjad, 2025).

The goal of this analysis is to use some dimensions of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020) social semiotics framework and specifically operationalize representational meaning (what is shown, and what social actions are depicted), interactional meaning (which positions social actors and audiences in relation to meaning), and compositional meaning (what determines salience and coherence). Van Leeuwen's (2008) model of social actor representation is utilized to see how restaurant spaces reinterpret social activities, and how social relations and power are framed. This approach describes how design in multiple modes defines meaning and structures identity and ideology. Figure 1 shows the hierarchical interaction of semiotic modes in themed restaurants. The model shows that dominant narratives focus the use of subordinate and hidden modes to create intended perceptions and experiences for customers.

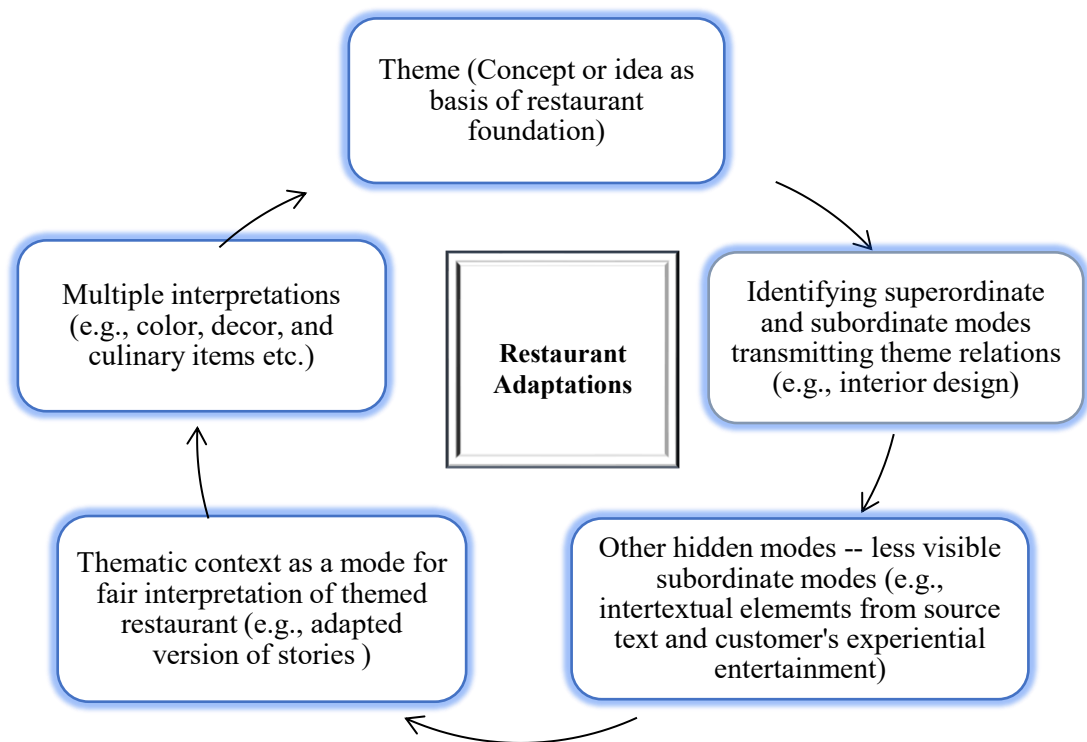


Figure 1. Multimodal framework for Analyzing Themed-Restaurant Adaptations
Source: Adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen (2020).

Sample and Demographics

The purposeful sampling to select the four themed restaurants was based on three specific criteria. These included: (1) each restaurant offered a different *Harry Potter*, *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, and horror cinema narratives, which are all examples of a globally known popular culture; (2) each exhibited a long-term commitment to consistency of décor, menu, service design, and ambiance; and (3) each formed a loyal clientele in the competitive restaurants of Islamabad. While the other themed restaurants did exist in that city, these were the best examples of the clear, organized, and comprehensive application of the strategies related to the different types of adaptations the research was concerned with. Restaurants that offered only partial theming were not considered because they did not demonstrate a comprehensive engagement of various adaptive strategies to the theming process.

The sampling provides a basis for a thorough analysis that directly answers the research question of how popular culture narratives, through various semiotic resources, are transformed to cater to a consumer's need for identity and experience.

Data Collection

The data consisted of several images of four themed restaurants in Islamabad. It also included observations regarding color, lighting, and culinary items in the form of field notes.

Sample and Demographics

The sample was based on four case studies of themed restaurants selected purposively from multiple locations in Islamabad, Pakistan. These include *Café Cross Bones*, *Hogwarts Café*, *King's Landing Café and Grill*, and *Heisenberg Café*. It took three weeks to complete the data collection procedures. The findings of the study were symptomatic of the aforementioned themed restaurants only.

Data Analysis

This study is designed to explore the meanings in the ambience and atmospheric cues of the four themed restaurants, and hence it provided a foundation for adaptation analysis and discussion.

Café Cross Bones

This themed café is adapted from the horror-based Hollywood movies. It used the haunting theme but remained original in terms of décor and culinary items. The whole idea revolves around the horror-illuminati concept in an eating and drinking place. The very title of this restaurant, *Cross Bones*, reflects the horror theme as bones and skulls create an uncanny environment for the customers to dine in along with their friends and relatives. The very entrance of this themed restaurant provides its customers with a nightmarish kind of atmosphere, with skulls studded on the sides of the main door, as shown in Figure 2. The tags on the right-hand side of the frame alert the customers to beware of the haunted place where evil creeps around inside the restaurant. The background image of the tree and the full moon, which are reflected on the glass door, adds to the spookiness of the restaurant's exterior design. In other words, it contributes to the main theme that is horror.



Figure 2

This themed café used lighting effects to provoke a horrified atmosphere. The customers experience a scruffy environment during dining. The lights are dimmed and are of a yellow color to enhance the grimness of the atmosphere. The small fixtures, as seen in Figure 3, range from small bulbs to small chandeliers is another element of lighting to add to the horror and fear of the themed restaurant. Figure 3 clearly shows the chandelier made of spinal cord bones, mini bulbs inserted inside each skull, and a hand of bones pointing in the upward direction.



Figure 3



Figure 4

This horrifying dose is adapted even in the restaurant's interior design, as is evident from Figure 4. The ceiling is full of hanging spiders and their webs, along with the droopy skulls. Figure 5 manifests that the coffins are also part and parcel of the restaurant and are attached to the walls with chains around them. There is a hole in the coffin, and a loose hand dangling out of it is just another element contributing to the haunted atmosphere. The environmental cues are apt with the central theme of the restaurant.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Café Cross Bones' menu is displayed on the walls and is personalized in accordance with the main theme. Even the food is adapted to the horror theme. This is made evident from the welcome drinks, which are presented to the customers as complimentary but with a skull in the center of the dish (Figure 6). The horror theme is intensified by the placement of mini artificial spiders around the drinks, and above all, spiders are placed on the top of the skull too.



Figure 7

Figure 7 also shows how the presentation of drinks is done with eyeballs fixed in the umbrella, and this further adds to the horror theme of the restaurant. The customers are attracted due to the horror environment it has generated through its culinary items.

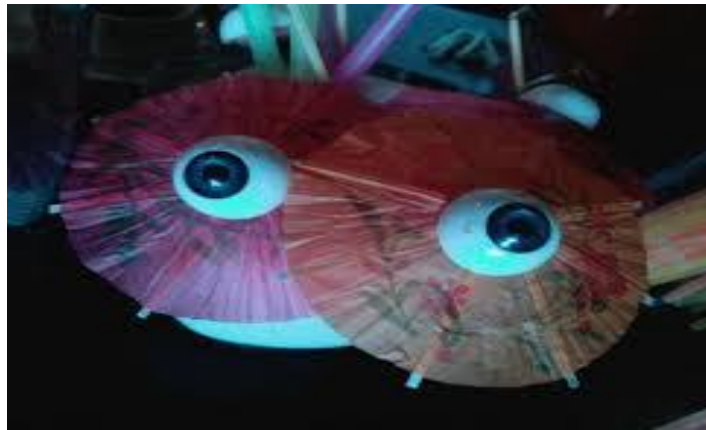


Figure 8

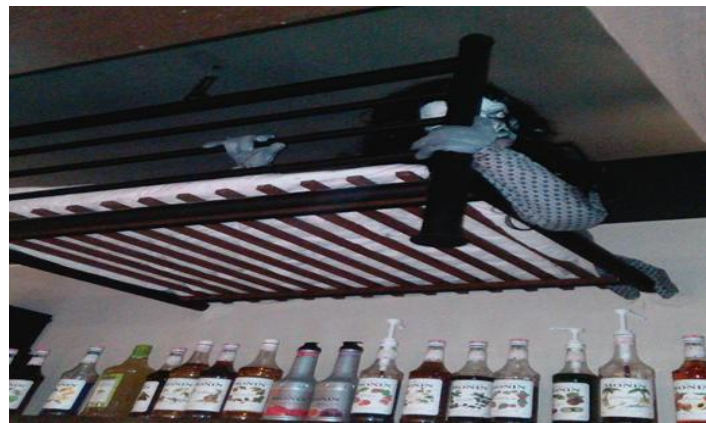


Figure 9

Figure 8 shows the drinks preparation area is decorated to project the horror theme again. The image of an exorcist girl is placed right above the drinks corner (Figure 9), which aligns with the general ambience of the restaurant.

There are desserts which are themed with edible ghost props and a witch's hat, as is evident from Figure 10. Even the brownies are decorated with comestible eyeballs and chocolate spiders (see Figures 10, 11, and 12).



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

The customers are not only provided with themed-based food, but they provide the immersive entertaining atmosphere. In *Café Cross Bones*, the participation of customers in Karaoke sessions is one example of this immersive experience (see figures 13, 14, and 15). Another instance is evident from Figure 12, where the customers relish good memories by taking selfies with their friends and relatives against the horror-based background of sculptured ghost faces adorned on the restaurant walls.



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

Hogwarts Cafe

This café is adapted from Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series and is opened right after the release of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. This café is based on the fictional British magic school named Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Brady (2013) is of the view that Hogwarts is not a creation by Muggles (a person having no magical ability and magical lineage) and is full of magical support. This school also provided food to the students who got admission in order to learn the tricks of wizardry. So, this café has adopted and adapted the theme of magic, charms, and apparition in its ambience as well as the food items, where Muggles are tolerated for entering and enjoying its spellbound entertainment with food. The magical concept aligns with every nook and cranny of the restaurant. The very title of this themed restaurant, *Hogwarts*, is repetition without replication based on the Wizarding School of Witchcraft and Potter mania. To the extreme right frame, inside the glass door are the hanging *Harry Potter's* spectacles. The main door is painted with the "Coat of arms of Hogwarts," and it first appeared in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997).

The restaurant door reflects the symbols of the four Potter Houses, where children were trained for magic talents since birth and were given wizardry acceptance at the age of eleven by the owl post. This owl post is evident on the left side of the restaurant wall, where an owl cage was placed on the trolley. According to the restaurant management, whosoever bears the qualities of the

four Houses may visit the restaurant and become a part of this unique experience. This adaptation of the four Houses shows each house's mascot and House colors: the Gryffindor lion, the Slytherin serpent, the Ravenclaw eagle, and the Hufflepuff badger. A very interesting text appeared on the wall: "Platform 9¾," which was adapted from the novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998). The customers' attention is grabbed by creating this unique idea of a half-stuck cart for travelling to Hogwarts and thereby moving them away from reality into the magical world. At the same time, their 11-year-old memories are also revived with the very idea of reading *Harry Potter*. The Hogwarts journey begins from the platform of nine and three-quarters at King's Cross railway station in the novel, but the restaurant uses it as a symbol of moving into the restaurant (see figure 16). The customers' feedback is also given in the form of sticky notes through owls. In fact, Harry Potter-themed café fandoms get internal bliss from this experience.



Figure 16

It is evident from Figure 17 that the main entrance of *Hogwarts Café* welcomes visitors with the Hogwarts symbol and the broomstick, which was awarded to *Harry Potter* right in his first year at the Wizardry School for showing exceptional flying skill in Quidditch (an enchanted competitive game comprising flying challengers).



Figure 17

The style and design of the café is adapted from the Great Hall in Hogwarts. It comprises hanging candles down from the ceiling, and some school books are also placed on the shelves (see figures 18 and 19). The walls are adorned with *Harry Potter* memorabilia, from mounted still photographs of film characters to magical articles studded on the walls (as captured in Figure 20). Everything in this café aligns with the *Harry Potter* theme; the way the spells are written on the walls, such as ‘Expecto Patronum’, ‘Wingardium Leviosa’, ‘Avada Kedavra’ and ‘Alohamora’. Furthermore, figures 20, 21 and 22 show that the posters, photographs and the selected excerpts from the *Daily Prophet* (a widely read newspaper in the Wizarding world) are also displayed on the walls. The restaurant décor aligns with the main theme that even the dining tables are stamped with *Harry Potter* spectacles. In addition to that, “I must not tell lies,” written on the walls, is again an adapted version of the novel when *Harry Potter* was punished by Umbridge (a senior professor and undersecretary to the Ministry of Magic) as a result of corporeal punishment. An exact scene from the novel is reproduced with the dangling candles in the air as the one that happened in the Great Hall of Hogwarts when delicious food was served to the students as well as the teachers.



Figure 18

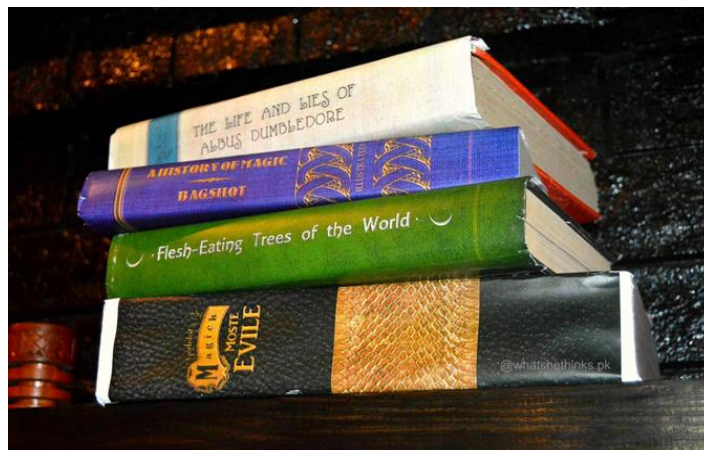


Figure 19



Figure 20

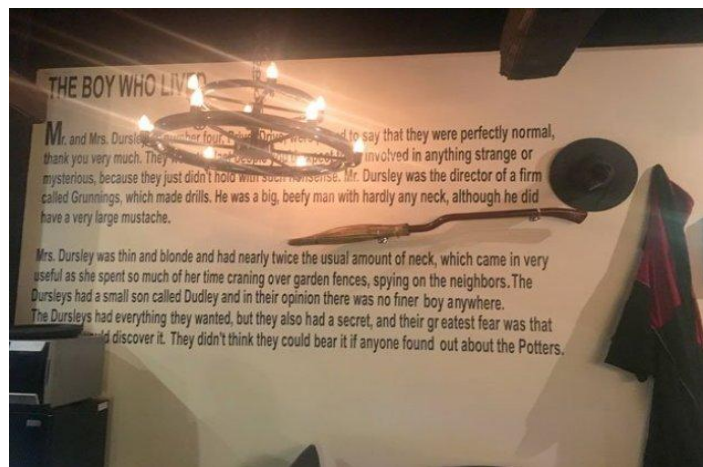


Figure 21

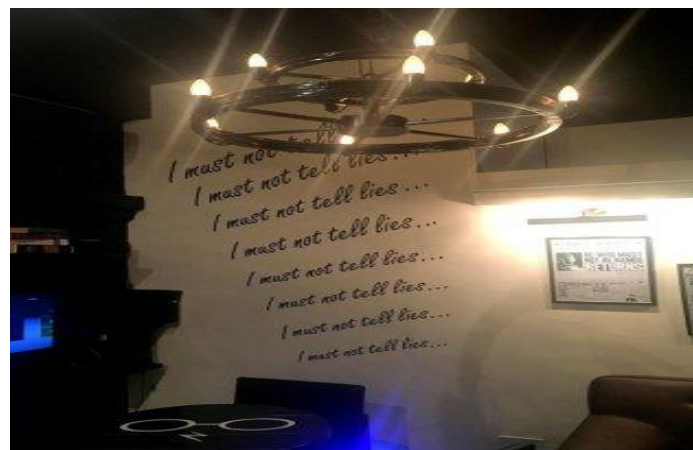


Figure 22

The café is also decorated with miniatures of *Harry Potter* and its fellow characters from the movie. The whole atmosphere reflects the magical realm of the *Harry Potter* world (as is evident from Figures 23 and 24), where food is served along with the books and *Harry Potter* caricatures on the serving tables.



Figure 23



Figure 24

Even the dresses of the restaurant management are replicating the characters of the novel (Figure 25), thereby making the customers feel as part of the wizard world. This form of adaptation is moving from the hyperreal world into the world of reality, where the customers are enriched with the kind of experience by becoming part of the Potter Mania world.



Figure 25



Figure 26

The cafe serves themed food, as is evident from the menu (Figure 26), which is chalked on the walls. For example, Dragon fire burger and Hungarian Horntail, as well as Fire lemonade goblet, Gryffindor's Red Lion, Black's Brew, Fishy Green Ale, The Goblet of Fire and Butter beer were offered for the customer's relish. The shakes were prepared by the House of Gryffindor, as shown in Figures 27 and 28 (with the assumption that it was responsible for mixing potions in the novel).



Figure 27



Figure 28

Hence, *Hogwarts Café* not only provided the customers with themed food but also provided the opportunity for die-hard fans of Potter mania to purchase themed mugs, tattlers or pendant and time turners (Figure 29). This café does not indulge the customers in learning magical tricks, but they can find some good books on Potter Mania Wizardry World.



Figure 29

King Landing's Café and Grill

This café is based on the theme of a popular American TV show, *A Game of Thrones* (Season 1) by Benioff and Weiss, aired on HBO in 2011. This show was adapted from the first part of Martin's fantasy novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (published in 1996), which goes by the title of the café. This themed café is based on the original story of violent conflicts between claimants regarding the succession to the Iron Throne among the various kingdoms of Westeros and Essos. Hence, the setting of the café is tailored accordingly. The very entrance of the café displays the image of chess game players (king, queen, knight, and bishop), and the door is also painted with the portrait of the noble family head belonging to the Westeros continent.



Figure 30

The café's décor aligns with the main theme, as shown in Figure 30. The concepts of royalty, power, and violence are aptly manifested in the famous portraits of the Lords of the noble families featured in *The Game of Thrones* (as shown in Figure 30). The color black is selected for the walls to give the image of the King's throne and castle. The lights are deep yellow and hanging on ropes from the ceiling of the restaurant, manifesting the dark atmosphere of *The Game of Thrones* (see Figure 31 and 33). In addition, several quotations from the TV show are also adapted and printed on a cloth banner which is attached to the walls. The axe is placed right on top of the wooden door, thereby presenting the symbol of violence. The entire ambience is projected as if the game of bloodshed is about to begin.



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

The walls of the café are decorated with photo frames in line with the themed café (see figures 32- 34). Figure 34 portrays the theme of bravery and chivalry, and that courage is gathered only in terrifying moments. This was the basic creed working behind *Game of Thrones*, where the conflict arose because of achieving the throne and ruling over others. Figure 35 comprises some of the famous characters of season 1 and their oft-quoted dialogue regarding bravery.

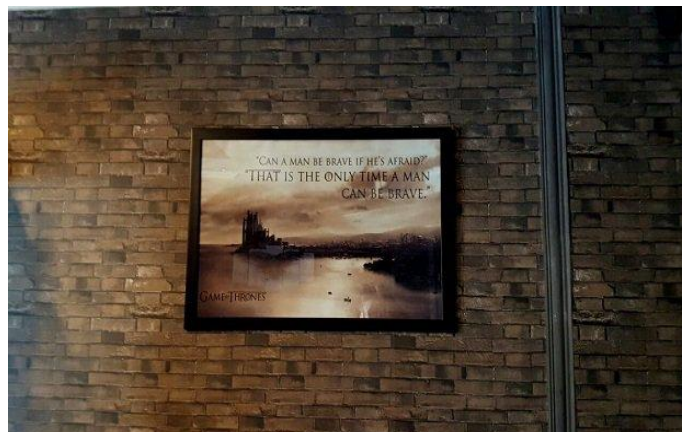


Figure 34



Figure 35

This themed café not only provided a unique environment but also presented unusual culinary items to its customers. The food, in fact, parallels the expectations that the atmospherics of the café set. For example, Little Fingers, King of the Andale, Valor Spaghetti Pasta, Sand Snake Spiral Pasta, Cheezy Khelisi, Red Keep and Hound's Chicken were on the menu list. Even the red colored drinks that are offered to the customers go with the dark theme of *Game of Thrones*. The red color theme is adapted from the novel as well as the TV show, and it symbolizes blood that is shed in the battling for the attainment of the throne succession (as is shown in Figure 36).



Figure 36

The customers are not only provided with good quality food but also with entertainment in the form of mini games for which they are given memorabilia as well. In this regard, the customers are offered a mighty mountain burger challenge where they have to finish the meal in a specific time period (see figures 37 and 38). If they win this game, they are awarded a 50 percent discount, and their names will be written on the wall with other game winners in the Hall of Fame of the café. Furthermore, a 10 percent discount will be given on every visit until their record is beaten by some other customer. The immersive experience is further enriched when the winner sits on the iron throne, which is in keeping with the main theme of *Game of Thrones* (see figure 39).



Figure 37

**Figure 38****Figure 39**

Heisenberg Cafe

This café is adapted from the crime drama series aired on American television by the name of *Breaking Bad*. The café is in line with the chemistry laboratory of the TV show, where Walter White (a Chemistry teacher) prepares crystallized methamphetamine and sells this formula for the survival of his family. The café's name is displayed in the form of the arrangement of chemical elements, thereby adding to the theme of the café (as shown in Figure 39). The café is designed with the help of a personalized periodic table with the names of the restaurant management on the wall. The entire setup of a chemical laboratory and the apparatus used in the kitchen for eating and cooking purposes parallels the main theme of the American drama (see Figures 40 and 41).

**Figure 40**

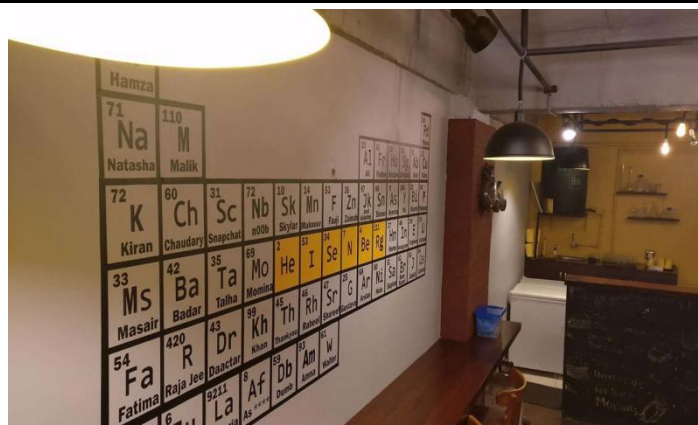


Figure 41

The restaurant management's dresses are in keeping with the chemical environment. The masks as well as the yellow dresses match the theme of *Breaking Bad*, as all the students wore yellow dresses in Walter's laboratory. Figure 42 shows the restaurant's reception full of conical flasks and other chemistry equipment, creating an impact of some chemical discovery.



Figure 42

The theme is not only manifested in the overall environment of the restaurant or café, but it mirrors the food which is served to its customers. The names of food items are reflective of the names of the characters of the TV show. For example, “The Danger” and “Hank’s Tank” were served to the customers along with the lemonade drinks with injections inserted in the glasses, as is evident from figure 43. In addition to that, special drinks are prepared with the help of equipment used in the chemistry laboratory (see figure 44).

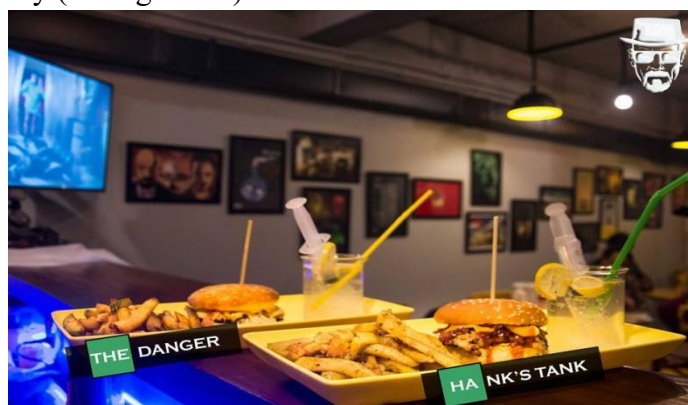


Figure 43



Figure 44

In short, the four themed restaurants provide their customers with amazing food along with a multi-sensory immersive experience in the form of Western cultural adaptations at their disposal. In this globalization era, it is a blow to their own identity as they are moving away from their cultural values and adopting the Western form of culture in the name of uniqueness. In other words, themed restaurants are created for the customer's delight, surprise, and excitement. Hence, it is a subtle terrain form of cultural invasion which has resulted due to the influence of the global popular culture.

Conclusion

This study illustrates, via four specific case studies, how themed restaurants operate as situated, compact systems of signs by selectively recontextualizing narratives of global popular culture. This is in opposition to making broad statements about all the themed restaurants in Pakistan. These restaurants have a social semiotic structure in which customers' identities are constructed by the allocation of social roles, narrative participation, and the ideologies contained within the elements of design. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on themed restaurants by framing them as cultural interfaces and places where sociolinguistic agency and identity are fused with consumerism, as opposed to being strictly entertainment outlets.

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Ethical approval

The collection of data in this study adhered to the pre-existing standard ethical guidelines pertaining to the principles of permission, honesty and trust (Mallinson, Childs and Herk 2013). Informed consent was sought from the restaurant management before capturing the images of themed restaurants. The restaurants' identity was not possible to conceal as the purpose of this study

was to investigate the adaptation processes or strategies involved in restaurants and the consumers' experiences. The study did not involve any kind of public promotions of the restaurants, as the themed restaurants were undertaken to explore the boundaries of adaptation theory that moved even beyond the cinematic zones.

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