

Role of Images and Visual Cultural Identities in Advertising

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Abstract : This research has been undertaken to present the role of Visual imagery and identities on the advertising. Visual elements have been significant players since the advent of civilisations. Images being the direct reflection of cultures have been used constructively by the Commercial artists in various forms. Advertising in our Indian society is a more intricate design with national, transnational, global, metropolitan, *translocal*, regional, and local places, progress, players and dynamics engaging much wider multifaceted traditional means. Interplay of arts and society has been effecting and modelling each other in diverse forms with culture and integrity correspondingly. Advertising in return have induced social changes delineating the social world altogether in new forms.

Keywords : Visuals & Images, Advertising, Culture, Communication, Commercials, Social change.

Introduction : As per old Chinese proverb - 'a picture is worth a Thousand Words'. Universal language is easily understood by people in every walk of life. In most countries, cultures and languages, pictures are used in early stages of education. Till this day, pictures continue to tell the story of life and death, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, laughter and pain. Modern technology brings life in its true colours instantaneously through pictures from here and everywhere into our living rooms. The reach, power and potential that television, posters, newspapers, etc. have today, has not been surpassed by any other medium of transmission as yet. Its influences recall and comprehension even among the illiterate; it is even capable of shifting attitude, attitudes believe. Television which in Greek means wisdom from far off is the medium of medium, which could both create and destroy culture.

The culture of the society is largely reflected through advertising's audio-visual codes. Advertising through verbal, non-verbal, and symbolic codes project elements of material (artefacts, food, clothing, and sports, etc.) abstract ideas (ethos, values, attitudes, believes, etc.) politics, kinship and religion. Advertising mediums as a cultural product exhibits the cultural values of their producers and images of the social actuality in which they are produced.

In Indian context, feelings of different sections and reference groups of the society that the advertisements show these days are presenting more and more discussions of Indian culture and promoting all sorts of dysfunctional values and attitudes. This powerful socialiser of today is now vitiated with every kind of cultural misunderstandings, discontinuities, distortions, ambivalence and anomie (normlessness). India is a land of rich culture. Although several races, religions and sects are found in India, there is indeed an overall unity in diversity - a distinctive Indian value system, which all Indians share and feel proud of. The ads are, unknowingly as well as knowingly, weakening and breaking this Indian cultural system. Commercial populism of certain products, for instance, is largely the result of heavy exposure through TV and other advertisements and programs. Sheer repetition of ideas through attractive visuals persuades many citizens to believe what is shown.

Images, as cultural texts are functional in the procedure of cultural referencing and the process of adding and attaching cultural denotation to consumption experience. This is since images have iconic and indexical qualities. An advertiser benefits from the iconicity of images because this feature can be used to induce emotions from the consumers. Considering an iconic sign communicates features of the represented object, these features can be utilized as a stimulus to bring out emotions that have already been connected to the object. For instance, the picture of a beautiful female face is an iconic sign that communicates the beauty of the object pictured, and the appeal and desire produced by this beauty can benefit to sell a beauty product like lipstick.¹

¹ Chattopadhyay, R. (2014). *Understanding India : Cultural Influences on Indian Television Commercials*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd. Pg. 7

These stimuli, for drawing out sentiments, can be created through both the intrinsic characteristics of the images, further as well as how they are advertised. Publicists also profit from the indexical nature of images as well because, as an index, the image substantiates the information being conveyed and it assumes a documentary quality. Images also have an aesthetic attribute, which plays a key role in improving the emotional and visual appeal of advertisements. The Overall trend of Indian advertisements is attached to the usage of aesthetics being designed to appeal to the desires of consumers. The aesthetics of the imagery are meant to make the advertisements look bigger than life, in other words, and they reflect what they reflect what the average consumer would normally like to be.

It is not hard to see that many Indian advertisements look far more charming than the Indian reality visible off the screen. It is more plausible that an Indian car advertisement will show clean deserted roads, rather than the traffic congestion routinely faced by millions of Indians. *Chevrolet* advertisement, for example, shows a young man driving down an empty highway that is spotlessly clean. Having travelled widely in both urban and rural India over the last five years, that such driving conditions are rareness in contemporary India.

Likewise, in theme with its importance on the aspirations of customers, Indian advertisements direct to play down the variation between the infrastructure of a common regular Indian city with that of the city in wealthier countries. The aesthetics of the imagery, in other words, is used to polish these commercials and downplay the deviancies' in India's infrastructure. An advertisement for a *Cadbury* malt beverage, for instance, shows a young boy practising gymnastics in an empty indoor stadium that is a rarity again in contemporary India, but may not be in the U.S.

The connection among advertised language and the larger narrative of a piece of visual expression is to be noted in commercials. The advantage of quick editing, while showing an intense chase sequence in an action packed thriller, or the significance of mellow light, for example in a scene where the suppressed romanticism of the male cast is being exposed, or the addition of a hand- held the camera as opposed to a camera on a trolley, in a scene set inside a crowded marketplace.

The politics of the advertisement's representation is undeviatingly associated with this practice, of appealing to the purposes of the customer and producing a glamorized reality by putting on the polish. Consumerism and open free choice is glorified by advertisements, which form to be the devices of a capitalist society.

In a mosaic like country like India, the value of television is as a cultural artefact, a value that is independent of its intellectual content or artistic quality. Following its humble beginnings in 1959 and two decades of slow growth, television progress suddenly quickened in the 1980s, as more and more of the country was brought beneath the umbrella of national television. Television appeared as a technologically synthetic acknowledgement to a set of emergent and radical social, political and economic requirements. That history in turn is one that is directed not by an abstract method of innovation, but by such human things as intention, interest, determination and value. Television therefore became a distinct cultural product. It operated at the interface between the elite and the popular, the commercial and the public, the state and the citizen; and each of its functions. The forms of visualization, interrogation, reporting and dramatization which television manifested provided a very different public culture than any that had gone before. A technologically and institutionally distinct style of cultural encasing and portrayal was introduced by television, one that can only be understood in an interpretation of wider social, cultural, economic, and political influences.

It is frequently said that television has modified our world and culture. On the other hand, there is a complex interaction among the technology of television and the acquired forms of other kinds of cultural and social activity. Several people have said that television is actually a combination and improvement of earlier forms; the newspaper, the public conference, the educational class, the theatre, the cinema, the sports stadium, the publicity columns and billboards.

The decline of various life styles and characteristic sites to fast acting television conventions is thus a feature not only of commercials but of the kind of television within which they are significant. The addition of these precepts to a variety of products may be investigated individually, but the specific specializations to products and brands are at the infinite significance than the standard model in which the meanings of demand, satisfaction, and stress are considered usually given. And these are evidence of

the character of an aggressive culture, in which needs and satisfactions are negotiated, over a very wide range in terms of products, rather than of a detachable and marginal commercial business.²

Television becoming a famous social form, particularly in advanced industrial societies the affecting universality and general social visibility of television have captivated simple cause and effect identifications of its agency in social and cultural development. It is part of a general social model which separates social and cultural processes to such concepts as 'socialisation', 'social function' or 'interaction'. Therefore socialisation has been defined as 'learning the ways and converting a functioning member of society', but while it is clear that in all communities this process occurs, it is for just this reason an indifferent concept when executed to any real and particular social and cultural process.³

Twenty-first century TV offers an endless stream of images, unwinding at high speed. We no longer view individual programmes but flick from channel to channel consuming a constant flow of advertisements.

Advertising & Social Change in India

Advertising has often moulded our imagination because it mostly defines socio- economic class expectations telling not only the worth of commodities, who produces them and where they'll be found but also why we must have those commodities, and what they are going to do for us. Most of all, advertising describes life in a cultural framework and cycle which never lets us forget that a mass market dominates all production- and it never ceases reminding us of what that mass market is like to create constant desires and appeals.

The critique of advertising tends to be Platonic instead of historical, preferring to work out the course of future social order instead of being guided by the chances of the past.⁴ All the ones who think that advertising is the voice of mass culture and of values uncharacteristic of the emancipated mind, values which can rather easily be changed or extirpated fall in this category. On the other hand, it does not include many who have simple, non-theoretical, and legitimate objections to salesmanship everywhere in their lives. Basic ideas covering the process of consumption; advertising as a socializing institution; the idea of change in an industrial culture; and the language of social change constitute the connection of advertising to the cultural society.

Commercials delineate a social world. Within that world, social values are upheld more firmly than in our own world. The social unit is the household. In short, mass society is orderly and self-sufficient. It is reminded of this through the advertisement of consumption of idealised rather than actual historical circumstances. A society is depicted that conforms to the ideals of culture. Furthermore, those who have acquired desire or style; the rising middle class is given some idea of the way they should think, behave and consume. It acknowledges that we no longer pick our values 'automatically' ensuring certain social institutions are dead. Thus, Advertisement especially in the form of televised commercials has by now taken on moral authority additionally as authority over style.

Individualism and Consumerism that form the basis of Indian television commercials are representations of capitalist world value systems. The demand of the cultural crisis and depletion of collective and altruistic value orientations of Asian communities by the western television programming has been the preference of research for a fair while. The theoretical premise of cultural imperialism displayed the popular 'cry' for cultural degeneration and moral erosion of eastern communities due to extensive onslaught of western media content.

I think it is understood that advertising suggests new social relationships to accommodate new realities. It is not only about cleanliness but about ethnic equality, reverence for the past, and values for our civil religion. And it is about new and supreme

² Williams, R. (1974). *Television Technology and cultural form*. New York: Routledge Classics. Pg.68

³ Williams, R. (1974). *Television Technology and cultural form*. Pg.122

⁴ Berman, R. (1981). *Advertising and Social Change*. Beverly hills, London: Sage Publications. Pg 61

stages or rites of transition. Advertisements that used to sell satisfaction or pleasure are now selling something that mass society seems not to have: normal human relationships or the idea of them.

The language of televised advertising contains a consistent message to deliver about social life. It suggests not such a lot that consumption satisfies as that it participates in social change. It identifies change with perpetual youth; and by doing so makes some fairly momentous observations on Indian culture. We have only our desires, fed by the language of advertising to alter immediately while being forever the identical.

Reality / Level 1	
SOCIAL CODES	Appearance, dress, jewellery, make-up, gesture Behaviour, speech, expression, sound, etc.
Representation / Level 2	
TECHNICAL CODES	Camera, lightning, colours, editing, music, layout
Conventional Representational Codes	Narrative, conflict, character, dialogue, setting, casting, feel, etc.
Ideology / Level 3	
IDEOLOGICAL CODES	Collectivism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism, Caste, democracy, customs, values,

Source: Fiske, John. Television Culture. London: Methuen, 1987.

Conclusion:

As a form of popular culture, it is discussed, used as a communicative medium to represent, share, reflect cultural and social elements of the originating culture, and with these features, it becomes a reference in reaching the assets of culture. Depriving its roots from its 'dynamic plot', advertisements become a *creator of a popular culture and source of popular culture*. There is an exchange, supportive relation, dynamic interaction between the supporting media cultures. Advertisement texts are turned into 'borrowed texts' as the people or media consume them, much more than the product. Ads are utilized in articles, cartoons, TV programs, between friends, through life, and daily lexicon. They become 'objects to be consumed.' Intended or unintended, advertising advances consumer knowledge; functions for a positive purpose, educates, and generates publicity. It can be utilized for *social objectives as a public benefiting service for progressive messages*. By the mediation of advertisements, it is possible to reach a 'social tableau', to social indicators. Though they are conveyed in very short periods, advertisements might be meaningful in lightening and leading up minds, and are burdened enough to convey informative information.

Advertisers capitalize on consumers' values to persuade their attitude and behaviour via cultural ways. Thus, I come on a point that on the basis of aforementioned research bringing forth the intense importance of culture in Indian Advertising, the upcoming practitioners and advertisers must undergo cultural studies in their due courses so as to achieve an in-depth and real view for successful advertisements that precisely cater to the homeland's diverse target audiences.