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Historiography of Indian Advertising

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Abstract

Advertisements – both print and digital – form an integral part of this communicative discursive-consumerist grid. The history of advertisement in India is as old as the recorded – pictorial as well as scripted – history of India. As such it can be easily, and with some sense of justification, stretched back to Indus Valley Civilization or even before it in the form of cave paintings that have been found at various paces in India. The present paper aims to give detailed account of Indian Advertising.

Key Words: Advertisement, Media, Social, Consumer**,** Brand

Today the public space is saturated with mass media and its attendant communicative practices. Backed by technology, media and the market, and riding the juggernaut of liberalization, globalization and privatization (LPG), the mass mediated culture has ushered in a socio-semiotic space that is not only persuasive in its intent but is also consumerist in its thrust. Advertisements – both print and digital – form an integral part of this communicative-discursive-consumerist grid. The advertisement is everywhere. Advertisement intrudes all spaces, public or private, circumscribes human consciousness and everyday life and life rhythms. An integral aspect of global and local culture, advertising has become a universal form of mass consciousness, communication and consumerism. Employing various semiotic strategies – verbal and nonverbal, psychological, social or cultural, discursive or ideological – in various combinations, advertisements, both as mediums and messages, have turned into persuasive tools and techniques of contemporary life and living. It has become an integral component of modern-day social discourse that overtly or covertly aims to influence lifestyles, channelize attitudes and behaviors and manipulates the contours of human impulses and aspirations through consumption.

To make advertisements catchy and motivating, advertisers use and press into service popular social, cultural, psychological and ideological codes to construct and convey a range of meanings. They propel and sometimes break stereotypes, use images and sounds and wield the tool of language to derive and deliver their messages. While the advertisement is positioned as a pre-and-perpetuating text/ narrative around/ about the product, the packaging, through its design, appearance, elegance and content gives this pre-text an actual context. Taken together, both, in the form of memory/conditioning and its actuality as a product, converge to form a purchasing decision for the consumer of the product. While the advertisement conditions the choice, the packaging reinforces it and both in tandem assist the consumer in creating an overall perception/evaluation about/of the product, enables him/her making the 'right choice.' This sense of right choice/decision though in actuality is conditioned and mediated by market

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manipulations, i.e., the seductive power of the advertisements actualized through packaging, nevertheless, fills the consumer or the purchaser with a sense of an empowered/empowering decision making.

The history of advertisement in India is as old as the recorded – pictorial as well as scripted – history of India. As such it can be easily, and with some sense of justification, stretched back to Indus Valley Civilization or even before it in the form of cave paintings that have been found at various paces in India. As a highly evolved civilization and cultural urban hub, Indus valley civilization had probably evolved an effective economic interface that was effectively supported by a communicative network that we today term as advertisements. Dwelling on the history of advertisement in India, N. Muthukumar in his thesis entitled Celebrity Endorsement through TV Medium – A Study with Reference to Virudhunagar District, avers that: Advertising in India dates back to the Indian civilization. Relics of Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro indicate names engraved on exquisite earth, stone or metal works, which is comparable to the present trade mark system. Paintings or writings on wall indicating slogans or stone engravings indicate a form of advertising. The earliest forms of advertising were mostly used for religious purposes.

To spread the teachings of Budhha, the emperor Ashoka of Kallinga set up the rock and pillar edicts all over the Indian Territory between 563 and 232 B.C. These rock and pillar edicts can be called the forerunners of poster advertising of today. It was the outdoor advertising that came to light with the point of sale display in market places. The indoor visual communications were the wall paintings in the cave temples of Ajanta, Sanchi and Amraoti. Literally the Indian Advertising starts with the hawkers calling out their wares right from the days when cities and markets first began. Continuing with his surveys of advertisements history in India he states that as business preposition advertisements flourished in India only with the advent of the colonialism and its attendant economy. With the consolidation of British colonization the predominantly rural economy metamorphosed into an impersonal, urban-centric and market oriented industrial economy. Commercial advertising in India is of relatively recent origin. As Muthukumar tells us, in its professional avatar it got its first push through the efforts of B. Dattaram and Company. It was the first advertising agency that was establish in India in 1905.

The growth of advertising industry in pre-independent India remained sluggish as it lacked professional acumen or enterprise. Before the advent of the British India, economy was largely agrarian and village based. The economic transactions were localized but interdependent and self sustaining. The relations between the producers and consumers were direct and did not require any special efforts of what we today call advertising.

The situation started changing only after World War I when Indian market was swamped by foreign goods. This created a corresponding pressure on Indian print media for advertising space. Faced with stiff competition from foreign firms , the Indian firms had no choice but to be innovative to remain in the business.

Indian advertising got its real push with Swadeshi Movement in India in 1930s. It was a movement that aimed at creating a space for Indian goods and Indian market. The idea was to generate awareness about indigenous enterprise and identity and advertising was pressed into service as an ideologically committed communicative medium to combat colonialism. Post independence, Indian advertising industry has grown exponentially and has diversified in its form, medium and intent in many directions. Muthukumar tells us that the first professionally managed modern advertising agency, “Tats Publicity” was started by Lastromach, a British army officer, in Bombay. It was followed by D. Jekey More's operation in 1929 and the ‘Thompson Advertising Agency’ which started its operation in India in early 1930's. In fact, 1930's can be considered as the period of consolidation in the history of Indian advertising. The ‘Swadeshi’ movement made a turning point in the history of advertising in India as this

movement had led to the increased appearance of advertisements in the country with a view to popularize Indian goods against the imported stuff. The first full-fledged Indian advertising agency was set up in 1931. To improve the artwork and copy illustration, Indian agencies used to send their employees abroad for special training.

The All India Radio started telecasting various programs in 1936. In 1939, The Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society was founded to protect and promote the legitimate interests of the newspapers and to deal collectively with the Government, agencies and the advertisers. In 1941, Indian Languages Newspapers Association was formed to deal with the problems of Indian language newspapers (Muthukumar, ibid, p 21).

Muthukumar points out that the advertisement scenario changed dramatically after World War II. It echoed the changes that the war and its aftermath had wrought in all spheres of polity and economy. The Association of Advertising Agencies of India (A.A.A.1) was formed in 1945. In 1948 Audit Bureau of Circulations of India (A.B.C.1) was started on the lines of A.B.C of America. In 1952, The Indian Society of Advertisers was formed to promote the interests of advertisers so as to raise the standard of Indian advertising. After independence and with the implementation of Five Year Plans Indian economy prospered. These spurts in various activities enabled the distribution of products anywhere in the country and this marked the beginning of the 'Golden Age' of advertising in India .

Advertisements in the Indian print media achieved a considerable importance only from the beginning of the Twentieth century. Educational development and the popularization of media had also contributed much to the expansion in the field of advertising in India. Advertisers' Club of Bombay was started in 1955 and such clubs had emerged later in all the metropolitan cities in India (ibid. p 22). Indian advertising has evolved through changing faces. Elaborating on shift in advertising focus from pre to post independent India, Muthukumar in his research article (already refereed to earlier) says:

The pre-independence advertisements were mostly about ladies' goods, gents' clothes, travelling, restaurants and hotels and entertainments for the British people in India. Motor cars, electricity and lifts in houses were considered to be the items of luxuries in those periods. Many of the early advertisements were about hotels, four wheelers, tea, gramophones, cotton goods, tailoring shops, etc., and their target audiences were the British people in India, the princely families and the people from the upper strata of the society. It is only after independence and the abolition of the princely order that a newly-born middle class received the attention of advertisers. The advertisement scenario has since diversified in many directions that straddle print, electronic and new media. Advertisers now use diverse platforms for advertising. The evolution Indian mass media, its changing forms and the corresponding evolution of adverting in India as follows: Radio became popular means of mass entertainment and advertisement. Television and Film advertising also became popular. Radio Advertising has been introduced by the All-India Radio at Bombay from last November 1967. This pilot project was started with commercials being put over low power Vividh Bharati transmitters at Bombay, Poona and Nagpur. It has gained a wide popularity among the traders and industrialists. Radio Advertising has also been introduced in Calcutta since September 1968 and later extended to Delhi, Madras, Tiruchirappalli (l969); Chandigarh, Jullundur, Bangalore, Dharwar, Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad (1970), Hyderabad -Vijayawada (1971), Bhopal, lender, Cuttack, Jaipur. Jodhpur, Patna, Ranchi, Trivandrum, Calicut and Srinagar (1975). Advertisements have been accepted in many languages as tape recorded 'spot's of various durations Sponsored programs have been introduced in radios since May 1970. Now more than 85 percent of the total population in the country is covered by the All lndia Radio (A1R) (Muthukumar, ibid, p 23). Television and its allied medias are now well entrenched in India. It started in a very humble fashion by way of experimental transmissions in Delhi on 15th September 1959 the early

television advertisements were merely stills with voice-overs or short versions of cinema advertisements. Regular television was first introduced in 1965 and there has been a large scale expansion. The television set up in India was delinked from the All India Radio on April 01, 1976 under its new name 'Doordarshan,' a separate department meant for the full development of the medium and specialized skills peculiar to television. Presently there are numerous TV stations in the country. The year 1976 -77 was a turning point in the history of Indian advertising. It was in this year that the Doordarshan (DD) started accepting advertisements. Commercial advertising on television was introduced in a small way on 1st January, 1976 and the revenue from commercial advertising has shot up at an astronomical rate, leading to a flooding of sponsored programs and the opening of a second channel in Delhi and Bombay. The first burst of public sector advertising was in the 1980's but what catapulted the industry on to a higher plane was the landmark launch of colour television on August 15. 1982. Colour printing in Newspapers and Magazines also brought about a new hue to their readability. To proclaim the serious role of advertising in competitive scenarios, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) was born. The 1980's also witnessed the first round of sponsored television programming. From a Rs.100 million Industry in 1955, to Rs.1600 million in 1978 and to a Rs. 50,000 million industry in 1999, the advertising industry has traversed a long way. Satellite television has ushered in epochal changes in entertainment in awareness of trends and lifestyles abroad. It has also dramatically expanded media options and influenced the styles and substances of advertising, which is now richer and stronger in imagery and emotional appeal. The economic liberalization of the past twelve years has created challenges as well as opportunities for advertising. Indian products and services face fierce competition, both nationally and internationally. International brand wars are now being played out on Indian turf. Market research by various organizations have also been making spectacular strides in India. Hindustan Lever, the biggest marketing conglomerate of consumer goods in India, for instance, has pioneered the market research, particularly in rural India. Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA) and Lintas perhaps lead the country in market research competence. Specialist market agencies such as MARG and MODE have also come up offering their specialized services to the producers and marketers of both the industrial and consumer goods . Consequent upon the Globalization, the Indian advertising firms have also entered into the sphere of global tie-ups.

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