

## Changing Culture and Advertisements

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### Abstract

Advertisement is a potent medium of communication of ideas. An individual is bombarded with hundreds of advertisements in the form of television commercials, hoardings, newspaper promotions, flyers and pamphlets to name a few, suggesting new ideas, products and lifestyles at random. They are not only attractive owing to their presentation, but also informative, often creating needs that were not felt before. Therefore, just like any other social media they too have some social responsibilities. To sell alien ideas and products, alien contents and methods are used and are subsequently internalised by the audience at the cost of its own identity and indigenous practices. Conversely, stereotypes are promoted to maintain the popularity of certain products, with the reiteration of accepted age old ideas and gender roles. The imported image of women as sex objects and symbols, and the Indian variant of women as nurturing, serving, subservient workforce are perpetuated at the cost of releasing women from these gender stereotypes. Within the scope of this paper I want to discuss the social responsibility of advertisements, focussing on and comparing audio-visual commercials of TATA Tea and Amul, analysing their content and determining their agency in promoting issues of indigenous concern and empowering the marginalised and the weak, especially rural women; and how they too can be used as tools to spread awareness and making a difference in the lives of millions with locally and nationally relevant and contextual messages.

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Advertisements are ways of communicating information that are aimed towards marketing or selling ideas and commodities. They make the availability of products or services visible, delineate their utility to make them appealing to the customers, declare the place and price of purchase, among other important information that a consumer may desire. Advertisements employ branding which means associating a certain product with an image or idea that henceforth stands not only for itself but also for the product that associates itself with the image, the brand, like the automobile Ford Mustang which uses the image of a mustang to refer to its high speed; celebrities and public figures are popularly used for branding products at present time. Or they can use 'cause branding',<sup>1</sup> like the pink KFC bucket sporting a pink ribbon and promising to donate proceeds from the sales to the cause of finding a cure to breast cancer, to appeal emotionally or in a way that the consumer can relate to the brand and feel good about

<sup>1</sup> URL: [http://www.brandchannel.com/papers\\_review.asp?sp\\_id=1231](http://www.brandchannel.com/papers_review.asp?sp_id=1231), (accessed on 08.03.2015)

purchasing. Advertisements use audio visual aids to make ideas and products appealing and attractive to prospective buyers or target audience. They can create demand for a certain commodity by making it more appealing in comparison to previously and currently used similar products or options, or by creating an image or brand that will stand for it. For example by making celebrities endorse a product, and hence making them the brand ambassadors, advertising companies sell the product by selling the lifestyle or the image of the celebrity. As a result, what the consumers buy is the idea of the self elevated to celebrity-hood generated by the advertisement, realized by buying the particular commodity; example: fast cars, perfumes and clothing, which enhance the image of the man as a hunter or predator, helping him gain more attention from the opposite sex and establishing him as the winner or champion at his game or hunt. Often car models are displayed in the company of women models, making the statement more pronounced. Therefore, the buyer is not only buying a cost effective car, but also buying one which will make him look good to women, creating the same image for him as promised in the advertisement. The idea popularized by the advertisements goes with the product, so his friends and acquaintances are also reminded of the image in the advertisement when they see him with the car. Similarly for clothes, slimming and other products that enhance one's looks, men and women both climb the ladder of desirability by wearing the right clothes and having an attractive figure. Peterson and Kerin in their paper discuss how women are portrayed in advertisements, pointing out that the findings of such studies have been disparaging;

Advertising has been criticized for presenting women as simple-minded, non-career oriented, and male-dependent... advertising perpetuates archaic and distorted sex role stereotypes. This is the trend toward increasing eroticism and nudity in advertisements... the use of erotic or sexual appeals in advertisements is hardly new...What is new is the intensity of such appeals and the increasing number and variety of products being marketed with sexual overtones.<sup>2</sup>

We see fat people and people with a poor sense of style are ridiculed in advertisements no matter how intelligent they are or by what other ways they are contributing to the society, physical desirability becomes more important than intrinsic or other more permanent qualities. In turn the audience or buyers, especially young and impressionable ones pick up the idea and start believing that looking good and being desirable is the goal of their lives, and not spending time after real pursuits like education, co-curricular activities, sports, and social responsibilities.

In his paper *Doing Well by Doing Good: Case Study: 'Fair & Lovely' Whitening Cream*, Aneel Karnani points out, 'doing well by doing good' is a seductive proposition that has understandably captured the attention and imagination of many executives, academics, and public officials. Problems arise when there is a divergence between

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Peterson and Roger A. Kerin, "The Female Role in Advertisements: Some Experimental Evidence" in *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (American Marketing Association, 1977), pp. 59-63, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1250235> (accessed on 08.03.2015)

private profits and public welfare” where companies earn profits under the guise of doing good to the customers as popularised through their advertisements.<sup>3</sup> As examples he uses audio-visual ads where after using Fare and Lovely fairness cream a previously dark-complexioned girl turns fair and gets the job of an air hostess, and other similar ads campaigns used by Hindustan Unilever for this particular product. He further adds in the same essay, “as the countries develop economically, politically, and socially, these shortcomings will get remedied. Meanwhile, CSR is the best hope”, admitting the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as the need of the hour for a country like ours.<sup>4</sup> However, we must remember that advertisements do not change tastes, they play to the desires and wishes of individuals at a mass level, and may manipulate their preferences for a certain kind of service, and may affect the way one may prioritize, but they cannot change the taste of the customers. Nonetheless, by manipulating preferences and changing priorities advertisements prove to be influential and powerful tools in the hands of those who control them, as they can be used to control the masses to a certain level.

Advertisements aim at maximizing the demand, sale and hence the profit earned from a particular commodity. Many entrepreneurs, managers and advertisers believe maximizing revenues to be their only goal. They do not think that manipulating preferences can be detrimental to some, and simply believe that as business-people that is not their concern as they only cater to a certain taste but do not create the taste, only make a product look capable of satisfying that taste, often creating immediacy, in the need or desire to satisfy it. They make smoking look appealing, or drinking a fun activity, using hyper masculinity or exaggerating stereotypical male behavior, and it is also true that taste for tobacco and alcohol exists in the absence of these advertisements too; governments of most countries have made it mandatory to indicate the health risks involved in the usage of these commodities. However, consumers continue to use these items in spite of the warnings, but advertisements should still continue to provide all necessary information about a certain commodity. This is a part of the producers’ or manufacturers Corporate Social Responsibility,<sup>5</sup> which regulates the amoral profit maximizing nature of an entrepreneur by enforcing the spirit of abiding by national, and international laws and good standards and emphasizing on the need of ethical standards and values. Large firms set aside trust funds to aid social works and activities according to the directives CSR provided by the national governments in most of the countries; others go for regular donation for the disadvantageous and charity events. Advertisements can also be used to promote or even serve this end. Instead of using irrelevant alien contexts and imported contents in the ads to promote a product, advertisements can be used to serve this end by using contents that are

<sup>3</sup> Aneel Karnani, “Doing Well by Doing Good: Case Study: ‘Fair & Lovely’ Whitening Cream” in *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 13 (Wiley, 2007), pp. 1351-1357, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20141993> (accessed on 08.03.2015)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> URL:<http://www.unido.org/en/what-we-do/trade/csr/what-is-csr.html> (accessed on 08.03.2015).

actually relevant in the Indian context, and developing models that are more suitable to our needs and wants.

There are advertisements that address issues that are relevant to the Indian context and promote awareness along with making a good case for their products. These do not hard sell the products by stereotypical portrayal of men and women or by using celebrities, neither do they harp about the product itself, its quality or cost effectiveness. They simply use socially relevant issues and ideas for branding. Let us look at individual cases like the Tata Tea Ads that go with the slogan *Jaago Re* which means 'wake up', first launched in 2008; Tata Global Beverages worked with Janaagraha,<sup>6</sup> an NGO that works towards strengthening democracy by spreading the awareness the need of participating in urban local government among urban citizens, on a voter registration drive, with the campaign name 'Jaago Re!'<sup>7</sup> Following this, the company moved the campaign on to opposing corruption. Tata runs many charitable trusts, championing indigenous issues and supporting numerous projects for the uplift and development of the country, its environment and its people.<sup>8</sup> Extending its Corporate Social Responsibility to advertisements not only enhances its image but also makes its commitment to its social responsibility more pronounced.

In one such ad the 'Right' to vote of every Indian is presented as the 'duty' to vote, where the youth go around distributing disposable cups of Tata Tea urging the public to take a sip and 'wake up', one lady on her way to the movie theatre with her friends takes offence and states that she is wide awake and does not require a cup of tea, to which the youth then replies that if she is not voting on the day of election and instead treating it as a holiday and going for a movie with her pals, who are not voting either, then they are actually not awake, or in other words conscious of their own responsibility as citizens of India. A large percent of voters do not vote in our country and hence elections fail to uphold the true spirit of democracy towards which this ad points out.<sup>9</sup> In another ad a young man is enjoying his morning cup of Tata Tea when he is visited by a politician out on his election campaign. The politician confidently states that he has come to demand the vote of this particular voter, when he is invited to take a sip of tea with the youth who states that he must 'interview' the politician before deciding upon giving his vote. The politician is astonished and he along with his entourage laughs at the young man's proposal and asks him why the unnecessary interview, after all he is not asking for a job! The young man, the voter, reminds the seasoned politician on this occasion that running the country is the most important job after all and how can he vote for a particular candidate without ensuring his eligibility for the job. On many

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<sup>6</sup> URL: <http://www.jaagore.com/> (accessed on 09.03.2015)

<sup>7</sup> The Jaago Re! Website encourages discussion on burning social issues, URL: <http://www.jaagore.com/> (accessed on 09.03.2015)

<sup>8</sup> Amit Kumar Srivastava, "Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study Of TATA Group" in *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSRJBM)* ISSN: 2278-487X Volume 3, Issue 5 (Sep,-Oct. 2012), 17-27. URL: <http://www.iosrjournals.org> (accessed on 07.03.2015)

<sup>9</sup> URL: [http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main1/SVEEP/VoterTurnoutHighlightsLokSabha2014.pdf](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/SVEEP/VoterTurnoutHighlightsLokSabha2014.pdf) (accessed on 09.03.2015)

occasions politicians in India win elections on the strength of the promises they make, the gifts they give to their voters on these door to door campaign visits, this ad urges the citizens to 'wake up' and not to get influenced by the sweet talk, or personality or gifts but to use their faculties to judge the candidate, his social and moral standing (and also criminal record in some cases) before deciding to vote. In a third ad another politician is reminded by his wife, while he lovingly prepares tea for her, that he should not forget the 'women voters' who have the power to make or break the government.<sup>10</sup> Here the politician, a man, is shown making tea in his kitchen for his wife! This is an image that goes totally against the hyper-masculine image of a leader or alpha male, and why not! After all the elected members are there to serve the country, why should they not start from home? This ad also emphasizes upon the equality of men and women by showing both are efficient in housework and running the nation and builds an image of our country that we still aspire to achieve. Even though men and women work shoulder to shoulder to run the household, the business and the world, women are given a subordinate status to men, traditionally their contribution is not considered as important to that of the men. One business organisation that works towards recognising the efforts of women through their ads is Amul.

Formed in 1946, Amul is a brand managed by a cooperative body; the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. (GCMMF) jointly owned by more than three million milk producers of Gujarat, Amul spurred India's White Revolution, which made the country the world's largest producer of milk and milk products. Amul is the largest food brand in India and has ventured into markets overseas. Inspired by the success of this cooperative which exhibits the collective will and might of the village folks who went from measly inadequate production to surplus production of milk ensuring prosperity, director Shyam Benegal created his 1976 film *Manthan* (which literally means churning) which was India's submission to the Academy Awards that year and won the National Award the following year. The advertisements by the cooperative Amul not only make a case for the consumption of milk and milk products for the obvious health benefits, but also feature the difference it has made in the lives of the millions that are involved with it. If we study some ads by this cooperative we can trace the change in the lives and living standards of rural Indians as well as the change in the outlook of Indians, especially by its depiction of women. In one such ad, produced around mid nineties when they were celebrating their golden jubilee, comprising clips from the above mentioned

<sup>10</sup> "Power of 49: Empowering Women Voters" states: "In a country that is often plagued by apathy, Tata Tea's extremely successful Jaago Re campaign has done much to awaken social change since its launch in 2007.... Tata Tea has launched another hard-hitting campaign, the Power of 49. The initiative is aimed at highlighting the fact that women form as much as 49 percent of the electoral base, and can wield a great deal of power in the upcoming general election in India...women do not actively form part of the electoral process because the normal political discourse tends to exclude them;... however, that if they do come out in large numbers, women can swing the vote and influence the formation of government...The Power of 49 cause is so engaging that social media sites have picked up on the campaign and there is a constant buzz around it...There has been a phenomenal shift in the number of women voting in the state election (Dec 2013)...Jaago Re philosophy of identifying underlying trends before they become evident, the Power of 49 campaign was launched much before the need for informed voting by the female electorate became a matter of public discourse." URL: <http://www.tata.co.in/article/inside/Power-of-49-Empowering-women-voters> (accessed on 09.03.2015)

movie and the award winning song 'Mero Gaam Kathaparey' sung by Preeti Sagar from the same film, along with new footage recorded for the ad, women are shown going about their daily chores, like fetching water or doing housework, along with which they also carry milk pails to the dairy plant. They are no more than servers, but they are not just serving their household needs, but also contributing to the household income as bread winners alongside the men folk. The song has words that establish their financial wellbeing and independence owing to their profitable connection with the cooperative. Towards the end of the ad consumers can read on the screen: "Every morning 17 lac women across 9,000 villages bring in milk worth Rs. 4 crores are now celebrating their economic independence thanks to the co-operative movement Amul."

In the 2011 ad, with the same tune and some new words playing along, we see women using technology: computers and mobile phones, though their appearance and their clothes are still ethnic and rural, their smiles are pleasant and they are still in the background making a survey of their good work, and taking feedbacks from their consumers. They take quick snaps of happy customers and use the internet to promote and manage the growing business. We hear words that are spoken as blessings to young consumers who gain in health from the milk and products the cooperative takes care in producing. Not only do the young customers share the happy and healthy smiles with the milkmaids, as they consume milk and ice-cream, but also a mother who is dressed in western outfit, hinting at a corporate office job, gestures with a smile and a thumbs-up towards the milkmaids in appreciation of their great service. Again towards the end of the ad we read: "Every morning millions of Indians celebrate the Taste of India that brings economic independence to 30 lac women across 15,000 villages. Thanks to... Amul."<sup>11</sup> Though they use technology, they have not adopted the urban dressing or accommodations; they are happy and prosperous in their own quarters and field of work.

In the 2013 ad we see women getting recognition and respect from their male counterparts. We have a new song this time sung by a male voice where rural women involved in different occupations like teaching students, taking care of the farm, keeping the accounts and managing their business, are invited by the men and boys of their village and ushered into the village square while the words of the song recognize all their different faces, that of mother, leader and teacher. They are called 'Boss' or Sethani by their men folk, who happily take off their turbans, a symbol of their pride, authority and headship, and place them on their women's heads at the village square where their success is celebrated and they are felicitated. We have the final triumph that is empowerment and equality of women, especially the rural Indian women in this ad. Towards the end we can read on the screen: "Every morning 35 lac women across 16,000 villages bringing in milk worth Rs. 40 crores are now celebrating their economic independence. Thanks to... Amul, Asia's largest milk brand."<sup>12</sup> These ads not

<sup>11</sup> URL:<http://www.businesswireindia.com/news/news-details/amul-launches-news-tv-campaign/28701>, (accessed on 08.03.2015)

<sup>12</sup> Today 17,025 village societies comprising 32, 30, 000 lakhs (3.23 million) members work with Amul, URL: <http://www.amul.com/m/organisation> (accessed on 12.03.2015)

only encourage us to buy the product, but to buy the image of conscious hardworking men and women not for ourselves but for our country as a whole which is beneficial and relevant.<sup>13</sup> Not only has Amul provided the source of livelihood and vocation, confidence, identity and self respect to poor Indian villagers, it has done so by working constantly for the uplift of the rural poor and also making them self sufficient in preserving their environment by taking up activities like Green Gujarat Tree Plantation Campaign by milk producers of dairy cooperatives where more than 311.98 lakhs trees were planted; or by creating a Relief Trust working towards extending aid to people and places affected by natural calamities.<sup>14</sup> So much so that even the World Bank holds up Amul-type CSR as an example for others to emulate.<sup>15</sup>

Both of these companies have followed the guidelines of CSR not only in their CSR sensitive business philosophy, structure, policy and relations and by creating trust funds, we see they have extended the breadth of CSR to their promotional activities. No wonder they have reaped positive results from their endeavours. Research proves that “image fit and altruistic attribution are cues that consumers use to evaluate company trust worthiness when linking to a social cause; functional fit significantly influences perceived company expertise but not trust-worthiness; and trustworthiness has more weight than expertise in judgments about corporate social responsibility.”<sup>16</sup> Neither Tata Tea nor Amul enumerate the beneficial qualities of their products in the above mentioned ads, nor do they have testimonials of experts vouching for the purity of these goods, what we have is the effects that are desirable from the young and the working populace of our country. Again in keeping with the fact that advertisements do not create tastes but only manipulate preferences, it is true that only a socially relevant ad will not turn coffee drinkers to tea drinkers, nor will they suddenly increase the number of health conscious citizens who will give up their tea and coffee and revert back to milk alone. But knowing that Amul is benefitting so many rural poor and is the most successful business concern of its kind in India, consumers are encouraged to buy their products, which are also cheaper than their foreign competitors, knowing that they are putting money back into the country instead of sending it to a foreigner’s account; as well as small scale industries and cooperatives have much to learn and be inspired by the success story of Amul. We may say that these two concerns are ‘doing well by

<sup>13</sup> The illustrations and messages promoting the household item Amul Butter are extremely interesting and always making a statement on contextual issues. The scope of this paper does not allow us to study them in detail, but they deserve to be mentioned here as the present discussion is on socially relevant commercials. Many such campaigns can be found in the company website, URL: <http://www.amul.com/m/amul-hits> (accessed on 11.03.2015)

<sup>14</sup> URL: <http://www.amul.com/m/tree-plantation>, (accessed on 11.03.2015), URL: <http://www.amul.com/m/amul-relief-trust> (accessed on 11.03.2015)

<sup>15</sup> Press Trust of India , “Emulate Amul-type CSR, World Bank Official Tells India Inc”, November 9, 2012, URL: <http://www.indiacsr.in/en/emulate-amul-type-csr-world-bank-official-tells-india-inc/> (accessed on 12.03.2015)

<sup>16</sup> Enrique Bigné Alcañiz, Ruben Chumpitaz Cáceres and Rafael Curás Pérez, “Alliances Between Brands and Social Causes: The Influence of Company Credibility on Social Responsibility Image” in *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (October 2010), 169-186.

doing good’!<sup>17</sup> While Amul just upholds the hard work and changed life of many rural poor through these ads, Tata uses cause marketing,<sup>18</sup> or popularizing the product by speaking of a burning issue or upholding a cause. By doing so these advertisements are bringing awareness and information that is not just relevant to the particular product, but over and above that in easy hours of television watching or entertainment one may be shocked out of one’s complacency by the words *jaago re*; it is true not all of us will interview politicians or treat women and other marginalized groups equally, but it is nice to see that there are constant reminders for us to do so. Impressionable young people may decide to check out the candidate they are going to vote for, or choose to cast their vote responsibly and not just go and vote for the candidate their family is voting for. Again young people prefer to do what is in fashion, what makes them look smart and is good for their image, if being a responsible questioning citizen is made to look appealing on screen, just like owning high end mobile handsets and fast cars, then they might actually prefer to become aware instead of acting smart with accessories to stand in for their smartness. Cause Marketing is also a form of selling the product, but the Tata concern has enough funds to make any celebrity the face of its beverage brand (superstar Shah Rukh Khan endorses their tea from time to time), even Amul is big enough to hire any sports star or supermodel to endorse their products. That they have chosen to go with welfare messages and is taking active part in directing the attention of the audience in the ethical and required direction is what I think is commendable. They are asking passive consumers to become active producers of a brighter future.

The question is can advertisements be instrumental in changing the dominant trend of a social group, from not voting to voting, or from voting under influence, bribe or duress to voting independently; or even from voting without knowing anything about the candidate, to making a well researched and informed decision for a suitable candidate? It is certainly worth a try. Even if it fails to urge the audience to act positively, it may provoke thoughts towards the right direction, prompting the audience to think of things that were never spared a thought before; and if these ads can plant a seed of thought in otherwise inert minds, that seed of thought may germinate and go a long way. Ads can certainly be used to spread the change that has already taken place. Traditionally household and housework are the accepted limits of women in our country, where turning from housewives and milkmaids into earning members of the family is a big leap in the socio-economic culture of rural India. Like the milk farmers of Jammu and Kashmir, who visited Amul and felt inspired by the way the cooperative was running,

<sup>17</sup> Aneel Karnani

<sup>18</sup> Cause Marketing is a “joint funding and promotional strategy in which a firm’s sales are linked and a percentage of the sales revenue is donated to a charity or other public cause. However, unlike philanthropy, money spent in cause related marketing is considered an expense and is expected to show a return.” URL: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/cause-related-marketing.html> (accessed on 11.03.2015); Forbes India calls TATA Tea the ‘Champion’ of cause marketing, “With the right mix of ad campaign and social awareness, Tata Tea seems to have got the perfect brew.” Nilofer D’Souza, “Tata Tea: Champion of Cause Marketing”, Dec 6, 2012. URL: <http://forbesindia.com/article/philanthropy-awards-2012/tata-tea-champion-of-cause-marketing/34249/1> (accessed on 11.03.2015)



the success story of Amul may inspire their counterparts in other parts of the country.<sup>19</sup> By popularizing this success story, these ads may go on to inspire more rural women in engaging in cottage and small-scale industries or co-operative bodies in order to become self-sufficient and turn their lives around. Women in these ads present a powerful image, who are not only capable but inspire awe and respect in their men folk, who are shown proudly and happily relinquishing the headship of their individual families in favour of their worthy wives with the transfer of the turban, as these women have contributed in drawing out the families from poverty and an uncertain future to prosperity and security, deserving the title of the 'boss' lady or the Sethani.

We have a lot to say about the past from the encoded, printed documents as well as art and such forms of visual materials we have inherited and accumulated over time, posterity will make comments and pass judgments upon us too from what records of our thoughts ideas and activities we leave behind. We must choose the image we want to leave behind for ourselves, how we brand our products says a lot about how we brand ourselves. Ads too comprise our cultural texts,

Advertisements penetrate and pervade our visual culture and play a significant and profound role in the symbolic and material milieu of everyday life. Contemporary life can be better understood by critically investigating advertisements as part of a larger social construction of the visual experience...advertisements...(are) cultural sites and commodity narratives that require urgent attention by educators and students.... by investigating advertisements as an experience through ideological and affective investments.<sup>20</sup>

We will be remembered as shallow or enlightened by future generation. We must, therefore, open our eyes and choose the image that is most beneficial for us, not just externally, but qualitatively or internally and strive to achieve and promote it.

<sup>19</sup> "Amul inspires Kashmir milk farmers", URL: [http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/amul-inspires-kashmir-milk-farmers\\_100141919.html](http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/amul-inspires-kashmir-milk-farmers_100141919.html) (accessed on 08.03.2015)

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Tavin, "Looking for Meaning In and Through Art Education" in *Visual Arts Research*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Visual Culture, (University of Illinois Press, 2002), URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20716062> (accessed on 08.03.2015)