

Changing trends in Indian Print Advertising

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Advertisements not only capture the nuances inherent in the lifestyle of the common people but also help in mapping their desires. Advertisements help to trace the social history of people in a given space and time. In this context, Judith Williamson (1978:19) holds that advertisements do not generate meaning by themselves but invite one to make a new meaning by means of texts and visuals. This assertion is backed by Micheal Saren et al who point out that “advertisements utilize a pre-existing referent system of meaning, because the product, prior to signification in the advertisement, has no meaning” (2007: 128). Advertisements help to trace the social history of people in a given space and time. In this perspective, India before the era of liberalization in the 1990s was much different and naturally print and radio jingles ruled the roost. With the proliferation of satellite channels, advertisers shifted to a different medium. Television advertising became a staple of Indian life. Later advertisers tapped new media channels like internet websites. Now more interactive digital models are being proposed based on the revolutionary touch screen innovations.

However, it is interesting to note that it was in the transitional phase in the early 1990s that the dynamics of change in Indian print advertising can also be located. In other words, new media almost compelled print advertising to change its profile and mode of communication. A typical advertisement slogan of the early 1990s is copy writer and ad-maker Rituporno Ghosh’s slogan for the antiseptic cream Boroline: “*Jiboner nana othapora jano gaye na lage*” [“Let the ups and downs not affect our skins (existence/ life)”].

Ghosh in the single line brilliantly amalgamated the essence of physical reality with the philosophy of life. In literal terms the advertisement underscored the therapeutic benefits of using Boroline, particularly its quality of healing minor injuries obtained while playing sports or shaving, etc. On the more metaphoric level it expressed the importance of not being affected by the ups and downs of life. The advertisement proved to be immensely popular and boosted sales of Boroline, especially in West Bengal. However, seen from a critical standpoint, this advertisement does more than popularizing a product for in it is operative a process of transcendentalism that involves an intrigue play of the sign, the text making full use of the arbitrariness of the relation between signifier and signified.

An advertisement of the late 1980s (released on 5th January, 1987) captured the advent of computer in the field of technology.



The layout of the above advertisement depicts a robot shaking hand with Chanakya, “the epitome of wisdom and fountainhead of all knowledge” (as mentioned in the advertisement). Since the use of computers was still not so extensive, the advertiser used a ‘pre-existing referent system of meaning’ (Saren, 2007:128) to establish the efficiency of the particular brand. Though there is a detailed configuration of the computer mentioned in the layout, the prime focus is on the ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ of Chanakya which is now available ‘only’ through modern technology, or more specifically via the advertised brand, Aptek Computers. The advertisement is built on the myth of Indian history related to Chanakya’s supreme vision and decision making ability.

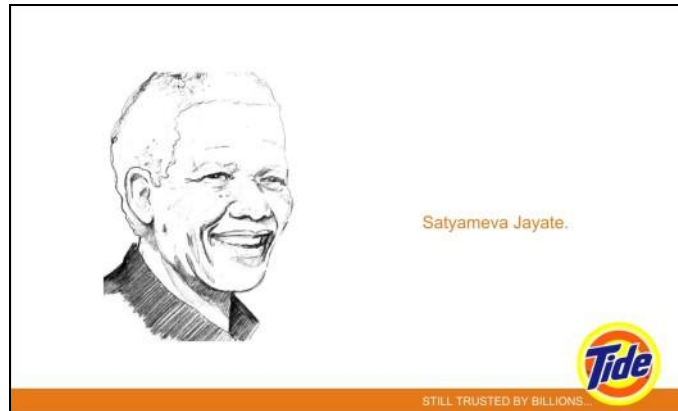
Another advertisement of the Apple Computer Education, released on 3rd January 1989 in *The Times of India*, marks the growing popularity of computer literacy among the Indians in the last phase of the pre-liberalization era in India.



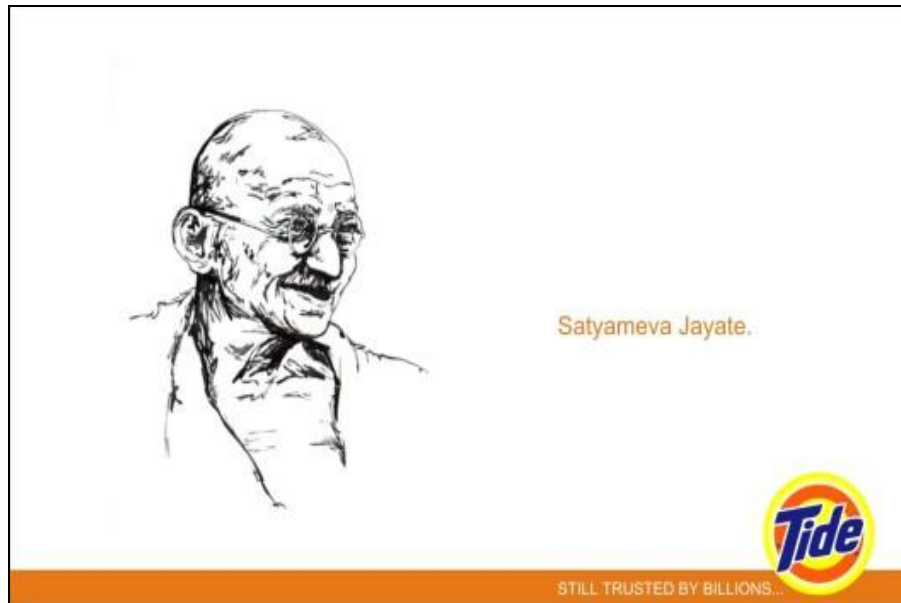
A kind of stress is laid in the computer advertisement on justifying the necessity of computer education. The illustration of the iconic ‘half eaten apple’ along with the text in white colour (“LOVE AT FIRST BYTE”) against a black background at once draws the attention of the viewers. The use of the word ‘BYTE’ (a unit of computer memory) as opposed to ‘sight’ and ‘bite’ is quite interesting. The subtle juxtaposition of digital interactive computer education with a romantic slogan (“COME, FALL IN LOVE WITH COMPUTERS”) is clearly evident from the advertisement. The essence of popular romance fused with the professional needs of the time probably helped the brand to popularize its product amongst the new generation in India. The picture of the apple consciously/unconsciously refers to the paradisaical love of Adam and Eve (though the half eaten portion may carry some sexual connotation), which is again the fruit of knowledge as well.

In recent times, the layouts of the advertisements have become relatively more sophisticated yet simple and effective. For instance, the following advertisement serves as a sign of a different order since the text and illustration in the layout have no direct relationship with the product being advertised. It may be argued that the photograph of Nelson Mandela (a

black man) helps the advertiser to establish the point of *Safedi* (whiteness) as propounded by the said product in its other advertisements.



The photograph of Mandela, the epitome of liberty and known worldwide for his clean (and clean-shaven) image, (sub) consciously persuades the consumer to think: *Tide detergent eradicates all darkness (black spots or dirt) and can make clothes as clean as Nelson Mandela*. The clean and honest image of Mandela is globally established, accepted and virtually worshipped by liberty-loving people all over the world. Moreover, the citation of the text *Satyameva Jayate*, a well-known mantra (3.1.6) from the ancient Indian scripture *Mundaka Upanishad* and later on adopted as the national motto of India, adds an Indian context to the advertisement. Additionally, the credibility of the brand, as claimed in the advertisement (“*STILL TRUSTED BY BILLIONS*”), is also backed by the phrase *Satyameva Jayate*. The bottom line is that the Tide product is trusted by billions just as Mandela is trusted all over the world for eradicating the ‘darkness’ of apartheid. However, it is interesting to note that the layout is not overstuffed with words and unnecessary propaganda, even though the advertisement is quite meaningful and fully indicative. The use of bright white background may also be regarded as an attempt to substantiate the fact of *Safedi* (whiteness). And this interpretation of the Tide advertisement is applicable in case of the following advertisement as well.



In the last few decades, advertising has become a multi-cultural and transnational industry. Western cultures and values are being increasingly imported into Asia. Western advertising agencies and multinational corporations long ago entered Asian countries, and are expanding their markets. In addition to food products such as McDonalds, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, Western culture is easily found in India through fashion, life-style, movies, television, music, etc.

The 1970s were the roller-coaster years; this decade observed the high of the 1971 war victory over Pakistan followed by the law of Emergency rule and later the euphoria of the formation of the first non-Congress government in India. It was also during these years that newly-graduated MBAs entered the advertising industry and at once changed the mode of Indian advertisements. The same decade witnessed the launch of the Liril girl, Karen Lunel, in an advertisement of Liril beauty soap which is considered almost as a milestone in the history of Indian advertising.

The 1970s observed the blockbuster film *Sholay*, which redefined the Bombay film industry, and also saw the ‘bollywoodisation’ of the advertisement industry. Britannia cast

the iconic villain Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan) in a Glucose D biscuit advertisement. The advertisement was so successful that it helped Britannia to open a breach in the Parle glucose biscuit fortress.

The decade also saw some unforgettable advertisements that captured the desires and lifestyle of a generation. Examples include ‘*I love you Rasna*’; Jenson & Nicholson’s ‘*whenever you see colour, think of us*’, and the ‘*Only Vimal*’ saree campaign. There was also a poster of the actor Rekha in an advertisement for the soft drink Gold Spot with the lines ‘*Livva litte hot...sippa Gold Spot!*’

It was also the decade when a brand named Nirma with the famous jingle “*washing powder Nirma*”, shook Hindustan Lever’s product Surf. Other immortal lines that emerged included: *Taste the thunder* for Thumbs Up and the Coke-Pepsi lines: *Thanda Matlab Coca Cola* and *Yeh Dil Maange More!*

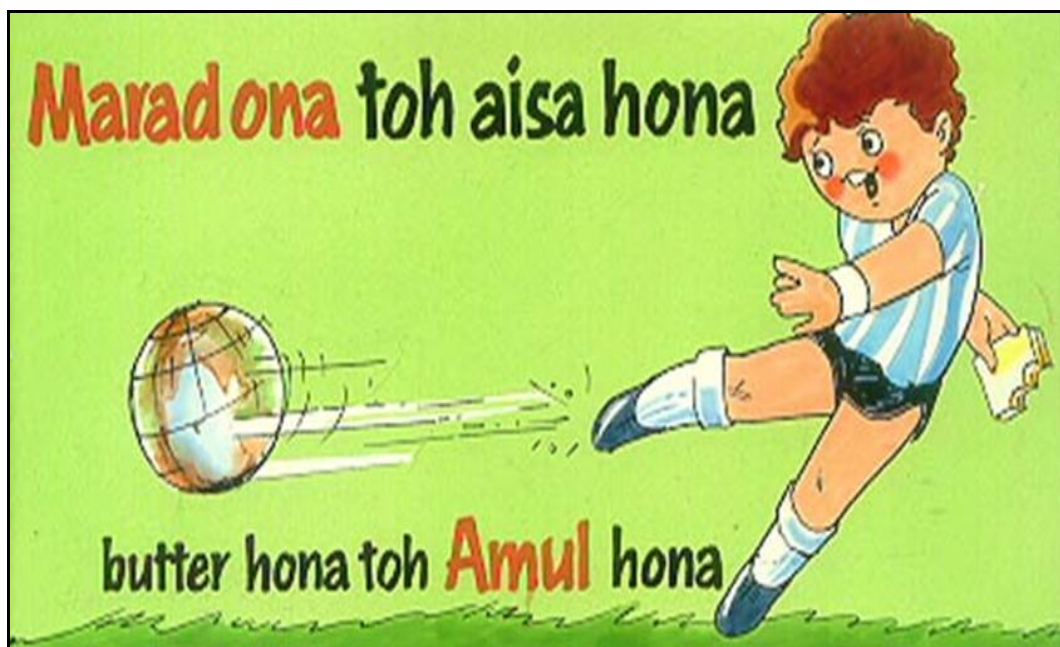
The 1980s gave birth to the age of aspiration. The sports event of Asiad, the advent of television and India’s World Cup victory took place in this decade and these happenings transformed the advertisement landscape forever. It was also an age when several new brands were born: Maruti, Ind-Suzuki, Hero Honda, Titan, and Videocon. Pepsi entered India by the end of the 1980s, and Andhra Bank launched India’s first credit card.

The liberalization in the 1990s opened the floodgates to new brands. International brands, exceptional new malls and new dreams influenced the Indian customer. International advertising networks rushed to India and Indian advertising reached out to the world.

The Amul Advertisements

Advertisements for the Amul brand of butter (and other milk products) are special in that they have an underlying message in them which is not only synchronous with the current happenings but which also assert the goodness of Amul products. However, the underlying messages in most cases are so relevant and beautifully inflected that consumers can easily relate to the idea of the advertisements. This makes them popular and effective in the field of advertising.

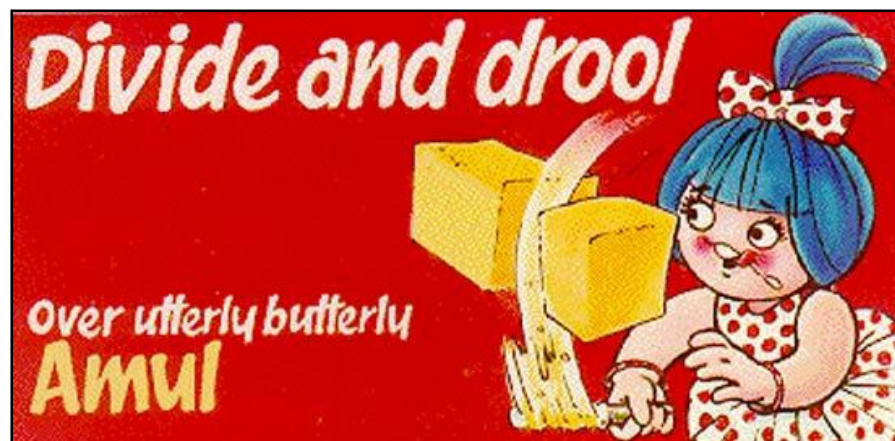
All present-day news-makers, from Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and US President Barack Obama to actor Shahrukh Khan, cricket maestro Sachin Tendulkar, and iconic footballer Diego Armando Maradona to even the social activist Anna Hazare have been featured by the advertisements. The Amul advertisements have often been described as some of the best Indian Advertising concepts because of their humour, (puns being their forte) and their mode of picking up current events to bring a point home. The following advertisements of Amul clearly show how the use of wit in reference to current affairs promotes the product:



The wording of the advertisement on one level reads: “Marad [h]ona toh aisa hona” (“If you’d be a man, be like this”). The use of the space between ‘Marad’ and ‘ona’ in the word Maradona is quite interesting. Maradona is undoubtedly the best footballer of all time. Likewise, the above advertisement projects Amul butter as the best butter in the world: “butter hona toh Amul hona” (If it’s a butter, it should be like Amul). This was advertised at the time when Maradona visited India in 2008. Moreover, since ‘Marad’ in Hindi refers to man in the wider sense of masculinity, this advertisement not only celebrates the excellence of the footballer but also refers to the point that Amul dominates the market just like men dominate in a patriarchal society.



A pun with the words 'bred' and 'bread' is evident from another advertisement (featured above) declaring that Amul is born and brought up in India. The advertisement emphasizes the fact that Amul is absolutely an Indian company, thereby hinting at the idea of 'swadeshi' or a celebration of nationalism. Also there is an interesting bi-lingual pun on the words 'foreign' and 'foren', since the latter word in Hindi means quickly. Thus the advertisement equates the butter with the idea of quickness or irresistibility. The text, along with the illustration, establishes the supremacy of Amul butter over foreign equivalents.

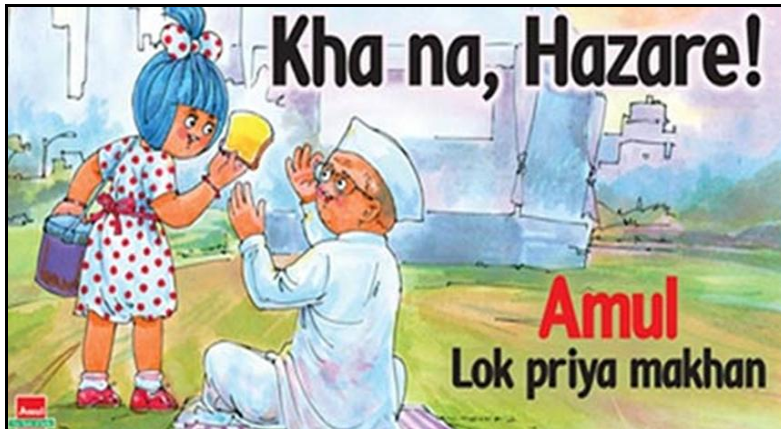


Another Amul advertisement (featured above) while depicting the deliciousness of Amul butter also subtly mocks at the policy of ‘divide and rule’ adopted by the British colonizers during the partition of Bengal when the British sensed that the patriotism in Bengal was gaining a strong ground. However, this is all left to the viewer’s imagination and wit because the policy of ‘divide and rule’ is still relevant in Indian politics. The wit is all the more pronounced since ‘rule’ here is ‘drool’- an attestation of the fact that Amul butter is so delicious that one has to drool over it. The advertisement just initiates this line of thinking and leaves the rest to the imagination of the consumer.



A pun on the words: “Canned and Khanned” can be seen in the above advertisement, mainly because canned cola drinks were being aggressively promoted by the three Bollywood Khans-namely Aamir khan, Shah Rukh khan, and Salman khan serving as brand ambassadors. These advertisements had become very popular just as Amul was popular with milk products. The popularity of Amul is backed up by the catch-line “Popular Khana” and, thus, the point of the advertisement is that Amul requires no brand ambassador like as Pepsi, Coca- Cola or Thumbs up (as evident from the use of the logos of

these soft drinks in the layout of the advertisements) clearly do. Finally, in this advertisement, there is a pun on the Indian title 'Khan' which is wittily twisted into 'Khana', meaning 'food' in Hindi.



An advertisement drawing on contemporary political events was featured when Anna Hazare's 'bhooch hartal' was in progress. The phrase 'Kha Na' along with the illustration can be interpreted in two ways, as either:

1. "Please eat Anna": requesting Anna to end his fast.
2. "Look Anna, food": Luring Anna to eat Amul butter and thus to end his fast.

The second interpretation entails a projection of Amul as a product that is so delicious that even Anna and his agenda would not be able to stand up to the deliciousness of Amul. The term 'Lokpriya Makhan' uses the popularity of Anna all over India to underscore the popularity of Amul products.

The above advertisements of Amul not only indicate that the advertising mode of Amul products which is explicitly associated with the use of humour but that they also exploit public memory of contemporary incidents occurring in a given space and time. The frequent changes in the catch-lines of the product are also a noticeable feature, and this is done not only because the advertisements react to societal changes, but also because they foreground the contemporaneity of an established, even traditional, brand.

Scholars studying advertisements have indicated that beginning from around the late 1900s, advertisements used strong female presence to provoke subliminal and unconscious desires (Peden, Lisa). Some advertisements use women images that are irrelevant to the product, but use them as a way to sell the product to the viewers/consumers. For instance,

some advertisements feature women even though the product being sold is Gillette which is chiefly a male product. In the images, the women models are clearly objectified as lures to gain the attention of the male of the human species. This kind of advertisements is also in keeping with the observation of Laura Mulvey who pointed out that the “Woman’s body is often dismembered to place focus on specific body parts, to give the viewer his or her way to build up a process to imagine the rest of the whole being” (Mulvey, p. 23).

Laura Mulvey’s observation is evidenced by another typical recent advertisement of Wild Stone soap for men, released on 7th August 2013 in The Telegraph.



The advertisement boldly announces: “LET’S PLAY DIRTY”, words carrying an obvious sexual connotation. The image of a ‘seductive’ woman placed in close proximity with a ‘dark & handsome’ man is absolutely irrelevant to the product advertised, since it is clearly mentioned in the layout that it is “PRESENTING SOAP FOR MEN”.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger states that ‘all publicity is anxiety’ (Berger, p. 2). He reads this anxiety against the backdrop of the universalizing culture of capitalism. Keeping this in mind, the analysis attempted here is related to the specific anxieties that arise in the

local history of capitalism in India. Many factors contributed to the advertising industry's growth and expansion in India. The sharp increase in the media options in all spheres made it easy to reach target audiences and also offered new advertising opportunities to media planners. Many companies were keen on exploiting the innovations in media in the early 1990s and trying to be the first to catch the fascination and attention of the audience. The result was that advertising in India created an incredible impact among the nation's peoples in the past few decades. Advertising has grown along with the press and today it has found its way into the other three media – Radio, Television and Internet.

Since in the initial period, advertising was all about informing, the early newspapers and magazines announced births, deaths, details of arrivals of ships from England, the sale of household goods and furniture, etc. Towards the beginning of the nineteenth century new products, discounts and special services got their place in advertisements. Thus, gradually, advertising started gaining power. It increased with the growth of trade and commerce. Leading newspapers like *The Times of India* and *The Statesman* had their own advertising departments which prepared layouts for advertisements. During the pre-independence era, Indian advertisements were mostly about clothes, travelling, eating and entertainment places, hotels, four-wheelers, tea, liquor, gramophones and tailoring shops for Britishers in India. In the post-Independence period, the focus of advertisements shifted from luxury goods to consumer goods bought mainly for time and labour saving purposes. In 1976, the first commercial advertisement appeared on Television, and in 1980 the first advertisement sponsorships were allowed.

With the policy of liberalization, initiated in the late twentieth century, the business culture flourished all around. This led advertising agencies to raise their creative standards and to bring about advancements in functioning. Increases in advertising expenditure and the promotion of foreign products have had lasting impacts on Indian culture through the undermining of traditional habits and behaviours and the creation of new wants and desires, often for products like soft drinks that have no nutritional benefits whatsoever. Other advertisements have worked through strategies that rework established cultural values and beliefs. The end result has been that the roles of men, women and children are changing in today's India and that identity and role-functions are changing within home and family. Similarly, advertising has significantly altered Indian concepts of beauty, worth and

personal cleanliness. Advertising has, thus, evolved as an autotelic artistic medium embedding short “stories” and “ideas” to create a meaning of different order.

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