

Indian Popular Culture

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Lecture-23

Advertisement campaigns

The earlier topic we covered was on visual narratives, advertisements, Indianness, and everyday nationalism. Moving from everyday nationalism and Indianness, we will talk about ad campaigns and why they are important. The difference between an advertisement and an ad campaign is that campaigns last for a longer period of time. They may revolve around a product or an event. We also see political campaigns running for a year or six months, or events like literacy and other aspects that constitute the economy or society at large.

The American cultural historian dismisses the idea of advertisement, calling it the folklore of industrial society, suggesting we don't need to pay much attention. However, consumer behavior is influenced by what we call advertisements, and there are many layers in the advertisement industry. It might not be as simple as it seems.

Advertisements in the conventional sense have often attempted to change behavior by introducing new products and selling them based on rational and emotional benefits. They target the emotions of the audience to sell products and change behavior through emotion. At times, advertising has used social trends to sell products and services under the radar. For example, during the age of gender equality, many ads feature men in the kitchen, like the Act II popcorn ad where the father makes popcorn for his child. These gender-equal ads are becoming more common, like the Nirma ad with Akshay Kumar. Earlier, women featured in Nirma

ads because washing clothes was largely associated with women, but with the discourse on gender equality, Akshay Kumar now appears in the ad.

Campaigns educate and inform the public. If they run for a long period, they repeatedly engage with consumers and leave a lasting impact. If the campaign focuses on education or public information, it becomes easier to deliver that message. As mentioned, B. Dattaram was the one who set up the first advertising agency in Mumbai.

1905 and to date, it has been more than a century. The long history of Indian advertisement has grown and evolved with time. There is a term called femvertising, which comes from females and advertising. This concept portrays women as consumers and objects of consumption. Women, largely as a gender, have been projected, even in cinema, as objects of desire, revolving around sexuality, lust, and various desires. This is quite common in advertisements as well.

For example, deodorant ads or men's undergarment ads often place women in contexts that don't make sense, yet they appear in a sexualized or sensualized manner, presented as objects. Social media nowadays uses the term femvertising to describe female empowerment through socially focused marketing. Objectification occurs, but femvertising aims to undo it by empowering females through socially focused marketing.

The problem arises because heteronormative society often projects women in various ways without consideration. Addressing this, female empowerment is important, though it should focus more on providing equal opportunities and treating individuals as equals. How do Indian women express themselves? One example is Vimal's campaign with the tagline "Only Vimal," featuring the line, "A woman expresses herself in many languages, and Vimal is one of them." This sari campaign by Vimal stood out for its stunning models, attempting to present women in a different light, even though inclusivity was not fully achieved.

Makeup was once a taboo, but Lakme began to challenge this perception. The name Lakme derives from Lakshmi, reflecting its French origin. Nehru asked Ratan Tata to establish a cosmetic brand in India to promote domestic use of cosmetics.

Importing cosmetics made them more expensive in India, so Nehru wanted an Indian brand to dominate the cosmetic market. This led to the creation of Lakme. Lakme addressed perceptions that makeup was associated with being a "loose" or "fast" woman. Previously, makeup was stigmatized as something only certain types of women used to attract attention or to signal modernity. Lakme challenged these notions by asking, "Is it bad to look good?" It promoted the idea that using makeup to look and feel good about oneself is empowering, embodying what we now recognize as femvertising.

There is often debate about whether natural beauty is superior to makeup. However, if makeup makes someone feel good, why is that problematic? Lakme, as the sole cosmetic brand in India at the time, played a crucial role in shifting these perceptions.

Regarding masculinity in advertisements, Indian ads historically depicted macho men. A notable example is Lifebuoy, with the slogan "Tandoorusti ki raksha karta hai Lifebuoy," which featured only men or boys. The ad focused on protecting men's health, promoting the soap as essential for maintaining a man's well-being. Another slogan was "Lifebuoy hai jahan, tandoorusti hai wahan," suggesting that where Lifebuoy is present, men's health is assured.

Another notable ad demonstrates its relevance by highlighting an interesting point. It contrasts using milk and dry fruits for your body with using charcoal for your teeth, then suggests, "Brother, sometimes you should use your brain as well," promoting Colgate. This ad emphasized that while you take care of your physical health with milk and dry fruits, you should not neglect your dental health. The striking part is that the ad primarily featured men, associating them with Colgate.

Later, many brands began promoting charcoal products for oral care. In the past, people who could not afford toothpaste used sticks from trees like neem or

charcoal to brush their teeth, benefiting from their herbal properties. Over time, charcoal was incorporated into toothpaste formulations for its cleaning properties. One issue is that the Colgate ad focuses solely on men using their brains, ignoring the question of gender and the lack of attention to women's needs. This highlights a broader problem with how masculinity and gender are addressed in such ads.

The Ariel "Share the Load" campaign aimed to promote gender equality but initially missed the mark. It took time for Ariel and other companies to recognize that household chores are responsibilities for everyone, not just women. The phrase "share the load" can be problematic as it implies that sharing chores is an exceptional act by men, rather than a basic expectation. Ideally, it should be portrayed as a shared responsibility for all. Although later Ariel ads began to reflect this idea more accurately, the initial campaign suggested that men were performing a great deed by participating in household chores.

In response to the popularity of fairness products among men, Emami launched a cream specifically for them called Fair and Handsome. This was in reaction to the realization that many men were secretly using products like Fair and Lovely.

The launch of Fair and Handsome allowed men to embrace the concept of the metrosexual man, which shifted traditional notions of masculinity. This trend led to a surge in grooming products for men. By around 2010, advertisements began depicting changing male roles: men cooking in Whirlpool refrigerator ads, preparing Act II popcorn for their families, and doing laundry in Ariel ads. Previously, ads like those for Nirma featured women like Jaya, Rekha, and Sushma handling household chores, but now men, such as Akshay Kumar cooking in a food van, were shown participating in domestic activities.

The portrayal of masculinity in advertisements has evolved, reflecting broader changes in societal attitudes. Another interesting shift occurred in tobacco advertising. Charminar, a cigarette brand, promoted relaxation with the slogan "Relax with Charminar," suggesting that the brand provided an experience of

relaxation. Other ads highlighted themes like "Men of Action" and "Scissors Always Satisfy," and introduced India's first king-sized cigarette in the late 70s with the slogan "Live Life King Size."

However, in 2003, the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) was implemented, banning direct tobacco advertisements and brand promotions. This legislation prohibited the advertising of any tobacco products on media platforms, marking a significant change in the landscape of tobacco marketing.

The inclusion of graphic health warnings on tobacco packages marked a significant shift. In movie theaters, anti-tobacco ads began appearing, depicting the struggles of individuals suffering from mouth cancer due to smoking. These ads initiated a wave of change in anti-tobacco campaigning. Post-regulation, the "Tobacco Kills" campaign featured graphic imagery illustrating the severe health consequences of tobacco use. Cigarette packets now carry graphic images warning of oral cancer and other health risks. Celebrities, including sports figures like Rahul Dravid, have advocated for a tobacco-free life. Known as "The Wall" for his reliability as a cricketer, Dravid's ad emphasized, "Want to play a long innings in life? No more tobacco," encouraging people to avoid tobacco in any form.

Another significant shift occurred in sex-related campaigns. The government once promoted Nirodh condoms as part of family planning efforts, highlighting their role in preventing HIV and other STDs. Sanitary napkin ads, however, were surprisingly restricted to post-10 p.m. slots on Doordarshan, while condom ads were shown throughout the day. This discrepancy reflects the greater taboo associated with sanitary napkins compared to condoms, even on a channel like Doordarshan, where advertisements were limited to late hours to avoid airing during children's viewing times.

Discussing women's hygiene is often considered taboo, yet discussing condoms is relatively more accepted. During Indira Gandhi's era, government campaigns on population control included vasectomy promotions as part of family planning efforts.

In West Bengal, regional AIDS awareness campaigns featured Bula Di, a Bengali woman in a sari and red bindi. She addressed misconceptions about condom use, such as the belief that using a condom implies distrust. Bula Di countered this by stating that condom use is a sign of a healthy relationship, effectively challenging and breaking down these misconceptions.

The Kama Sutra premium condoms ad took a bold approach by presenting condoms as instruments of sensual satisfaction rather than a civic duty. Bollywood celebrity Sunny Leone, known for her liberal sex symbol image, was featured in this campaign.

The National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC) ran a successful ad campaign promoting egg consumption. The ads used humor and catchy slogans, such as "Sunday ho ya Monday, Roz Khao Ande" (whether it's Sunday or Monday, eat eggs every day), making the message memorable and widespread.

The National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC) ran pun-based ads with taglines like "egg-citing," and a series called "Try an Experiment." They also shared interesting recipes featuring eggs. As the world's largest association of poultry farmers, NECC has around 35,000 members and plays a significant role in improving the egg industry. Operating as a cooperative, NECC ensures that the selling rate from farmers to consumers is among the lowest globally, around 35 to 40 per cent. Founded by Dr. B.V. Rao, NECC embodies a cooperative spirit, allowing farmers to determine their selling prices and maintain autonomy in pricing and consumption.

Another notable long-running campaign was Fevicol's, known for its creative and memorable ads. One critically acclaimed ad featured a rickety bus and highlighted Fevicol's adhesive strength through humorous "sticky situations." Fevicol, produced by Pidilite Industries, used these ads to build a strong and enviable brand property, combining humor, thoughtfulness, and cleverness in its campaigns.

One memorable Bollywood-style Fevicol ad featured the tagline, "Fevicol can mend everything except broken hearts." The ad showcasing the rickety bus is

particularly famous. In this ad, a crowded bus, with people clinging to every available surface, moves along while maintaining its integrity, thanks to Fevicol's adhesive strength. The tagline on the back of the bus reads "Fevicol ka jod hai." Despite the bus's poor condition, the people stay attached, symbolizing the strength and durability of Fevicol's bond. This ad won the Gold Lion at AdFest in Cannes in 2001, a prestigious accolade equivalent to an Academy Award in the advertising world. The ad can be interpreted in two ways: as a metaphor for Fevicol's ability to hold things together and as a symbol of national unity, suggesting that Fevicol can keep things intact.

Another significant campaign was related to fairness creams, which became a form of activism. In 1919, the first commercial fairness cream in India was manufactured by E.S. Patanwala, an entrepreneur and perfumer from Afghanistan. He moved to Mumbai from Jalra Patan in Rajasthan, and his entry into the Indian market marked the beginning of the fairness cream industry.

The fairness cream was named after King Zahir of Afghanistan, as a tribute to his homeland. The product, known as "Afghans," was the first commercial fairness cream introduced in India. In 1975, Hindustan Lever launched Fair & Lovely, a fairness cream marketed as being soft on the skin compared to the harsher bleaching creams.

The fairness industry has become one of the largest FMCG segments in India. In July 2020, Hindustan Unilever rebranded Fair & Lovely as Glow & Lovely in response to backlash over the product's implication that fairness is desirable. The backlash resulted in a significant drop in Hindustan Unilever's stock. The criticism stemmed from the product's promotion of fairness as a standard of beauty, which many viewed as exclusionary and reinforcing colorism. The fairness ideal often intersects with class and caste issues in India, making the rebranding a significant move towards more inclusive marketing.

Earlier, when people looked for a bride, they considered two main factors: caste and qualities like being "sanskari," which equates to being well-natured. The idea

of beauty often meant being fair skinned, reflecting deeper societal issues and problems. This led to activism campaigns like #UnfairAndLovely and DarkIsBeautiful, marking the beginning of Fair & Lovely's journey towards inclusivity. It eventually rebranded as Glow & Lovely and Glow & Handsome.

Another significant campaign involved cold drinks in India. While Coca-Cola and Pepsi are not Indian brands, Thumps Up is. The brand's association with celebrities like Salman Khan and later Ranveer Singh highlighted its image of being "rough and tough." Cold drink ads often featured sports personalities, implying that these beverages refresh athletes during games.

In the 1990s, as India opened up to global choices with economic liberalization, the cola market saw intense competition. Coca-Cola, which had existed in the 1970s, re-entered the market post-liberalization. In 1996, Coca-Cola officially associated itself with the Cricket World Cup, while Pepsi cheekily countered with ads featuring Sachin Tendulkar and a tagline suggesting no official connection with Coca-Cola. Cola companies, in general, adopted English phrases like "Ye Dil Mange More," inspired by Janet Jackson's "The Heart Wants More," and "Ye Hai Right Choice Baby," "Youngistan," and "Thanda Matlab Coca-Cola." The book Cultural Studies by Raj Thakur includes a chapter titled "The Cultural Economy by Leisure and Indian Premier League," which explores how the Indian Premier League and cola campaigns are intertwined with sports and cultural representation. He discusses the late capitalist economy and its influence on the Indian Premier League, and how postmodernism has impacted attention spans in sports. While ardent cricket fans still enjoy test matches that span five days, and One Day Internationals that last a day with 50 overs, the craze for T20 matches is extraordinarily intense. In the cultural economy of leisure and the Indian Premier League, he explores these ideas.

He also notes the blurring line between leisure, sports, and entertainment, showing how they converge. The cultural economy integrates advertisements, making them part of the entertainment experience. The concept of "poetry in action" is particularly intriguing. For example, "Karbonn Kamal Katch" refers to a phone,

demonstrating how language and branding creatively intersect. It is also the advertising brand that endorses or sponsors a particular match. For instance, the Max Mobile strategic timeout in matches used to feature simple discussions, but now it is highlighted elaborately. Brand associations with these segments are part of what is referred to as "poetry in action."

It's not just IPL; it's Vivo IPL or Tata IPL. Previously it was Vivo IPL. It's never just IPL; for advertisement purposes, it's always Vivo IPL or Tata IPL. The name itself has become integral to the IPL branding, rather than just "Indian Premier League sponsored by Vivo" or "Indian Premier League sponsored by Tata." This reflects the dynamic integration of brands into sports.

Another example is the cola wars. In one ad, Pepsi featured a can with a Coca-Cola cap, making fun of Coca-Cola and releasing it during Halloween. The tagline was, "We wish you a scary Halloween." Coca-Cola responded with a cheeky reply: "Everyone wants to be a hero," mocking Pepsi for trying to be a hero while wearing Coca-Cola's "cape."

Moving on to ad campaigns focused on bringing change, we previously discussed the Teach India campaign by the Times of India group, created by JWT in 2009. Teach India aimed to make India a 100% literate country by encouraging volunteers to spend two hours a week teaching underprivileged children. In the first phase, they sought volunteers to commit two hours a week to teaching. The second phase involved top educational institutions across the country dedicating two years to teaching underprivileged kids. This campaign was a significant change-bringing initiative by the Times of India group.

Another impactful campaign was Lead India, also by the Times of India, which aimed to galvanize the country to act and change the status quo. Lead India won the 2008 Grand Prix at Cannes. This campaign featured Amitabh Bachchan, showcasing the infrastructure and changes in the country over the years, with Bachchan's speeches highlighting and glorifying the nation.

Another noteworthy campaign, which I did not include in the sections on men and masculinity or female objectification due to its distinctiveness, is the "Men Will Be Men" campaign for Seagram's Imperial Blue. The song featured in the ads remains the same across all versions of the advertisements.

The newest instalment in the Seagram Imperial Blue series features actor Karan Vahi in an ad titled "Crossing." In this ad, Vahi's character sees a beautiful woman at a crossroad and decides to impress her. He pretends to help an old lady cross the road, but his real intention is to catch the woman's attention. As he helps the old lady, she smiles and walks away. However, when Vahi turns back, he sees another attractive woman coming from the other direction. He promptly turns the old lady around and pretends to help her cross in the opposite direction.

This ad is part of a series that portrays a narrative from a male perspective, often normalizing sexist behavior. The series frequently depicts women as objects of desire and reduces men to behaviors like greed, possessiveness, and lust. The protagonists rarely show genuine human emotions and often act in ways that are more about impressing others than reflecting authentic feelings. While some find these ads humorous and dismiss them lightly, others criticize them for normalizing sexist behavior.

Lastly, let's discuss pink-washing or rainbow-washing. This term refers to when advertisements featuring LGBTQ+ themes appear only during specific times of LGBTQ+ celebration, such as Pride Month, and not throughout the rest of the year. This tactic is seen as an attempt to capitalize on the LGBTQ+ market without genuine year-round commitment.

In the late 2000s, LGBTQ+ identities began to be featured in audiovisual marketing campaigns, and by 2021, brands had produced at least 150 ads featuring LGBTQ+ identities. This surge, especially noted in Pride Month, followed the 2018 decriminalization of Section 377, which was a significant milestone for LGBTQ+ rights in India.

While some brands genuinely promote inclusivity, others engage in pink-washing or rainbow-washing. For example, Suta, a brand selling sarees, has featured queer models during Pride Month. Another example is Prakriti Singh, who also contributes to this discourse. Prakriti Singh, the founder of one of India's asexuality forums, was also featured during Pride Month. However, outside of these specific times, you won't see models from the queer community represented in their general marketing. This illustrates the concept of rainbow-washing or pink-washing—where brands only showcase LGBTQ+ representation during high-profile periods and neglect it throughout the rest of the year.

In contrast, Starbucks released an ad that says, "Your name defines who you are, whether it's Arpita or Arpit. At Starbucks, we love and accept you for who you are, because being yourself means everything to us."

This concludes our discussion on various ad campaigns addressing societal issues and how they reflect broader social concerns.