

An Analysis of Cultural Components of Modern Advertisements in Pakistan, Custom of Ads and Influence on Public

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand and analytically examine the incorporation of cultural components in advertisements. It also intends to set grounds for investigating phenomenon of gradual metamorphosis of societal values. Additionally, it talks about whether incursion of modern advertisements are fostering competitive environment in Pakistani culture. It further discusses that to what extent advertisements influence psyche of common man. Lastly, it sheds light on the deviance of present advertisements content from religious principles. A brief summary of the analysis in the paper is presented along with the suggestions and contributions. Paper aims to confer positive outcomes in the field of research.

Key words: cultural component, advertisement, social competitiveness, social trends

“Contemporary culture is based on the appetite of buying. Modern man’s happiness consists in the thrill of looking the shop windows and in buying all that he can afford to buy, either for cash or on installments” (Fromm, 1956).

In today’s modern world, happiness has become synonymous with consuming and possessing material goods. Considering this notion, industrialists have bombarded common man with new products presenting them as their needs. Due to the advancement of technologies like TV, internet and print media, they have become increasingly instrumental in this regard. Therefore, advertising of these products has become inevitable. Now it’s like oxygen for the promotion of industrialism.

The core objective of all advertisements is to hit the senses of masses and to make them need and want what is being advertised. Advertise, by definition is to make something known to the public by any of the various methods. Hence, advertisement is a means of making something known in order to persuade people to buy. It is common phenomenon that what is more similar to us in terms of appearance is appealing and easily acceptable. Therefore, in order to be persuasive, advertisements for a certain society or culture should be similar to the values and beliefs of that culture.

Literature Review

It is worth mentioning that people are not inactive carriers of cultural meanings; they express their agency via culture and participate actively in culture (Chiu & Chen, in press). In other words, culture should be understood in terms of how cultural agents use cultural knowledge in particular social contexts to fulfill their goals. Similarly ad makers, intelligently incorporate cultural values to appeal masses.

As advocated by Tylor (1881) "Culture is complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"^[1]. It can be inferred that culture has many components which are specific to its people. These components involve values, norms which are governing rules, beliefs, symbols, language, folklore, food and social prohibitions. The meaning attached to possessions is another integral component of culture. The linkages between culture and advertisements have long been debated. A lot is being communicated to the audience through advertisements. Communication provides a means of transmitting the elusive aspects of culture, such as values and beliefs from one person to another or from ne generation to another. This communication process is inherently dynamic and at the same time continually evolving.

The linkages between culture and advertisements have long been debated. Because of difference in values across cultures, it has been identified that ad content varies across cultures. Advertisement content can be used interchangeably with ad appeal. Based on Polly’s framework

on advertisement appeals, Cheng and Schweitzer selected and examined a number of advertisement appeals and came to the conclusion that many advertisements are representative of western values (progressive appeals such as modern) or representative of Eastern, traditional values (appeals such as ‘traditional’ and ‘family’ but overall advertising appeal reflected local values. Caillat and Mueller have reported similar findings.

In the last couple of decades, Pakistani media has undergone significant advancements. Along with bringing opportunities for its native industrialists for advertising their products, it has brought many challenges. Numbers of television channels have increased and internet and social networking websites are now available for common man’s usage. This has hassled advertisers to ensure their presence not only on television channels but in electronic media as well. This has greatly affected the economy spent.

The current state of Pakistan advertising industry reveals that this industry is continuously growing with a high pace as media presence has become the matter of survival for companies (Gallup, 2008). As shown in table 2, the last two years have shown a remarkable expansion in the overall media size of Pakistan. Total print media spending has increased from Rs. 3.6 billion in 2003-04 to Rs. 6 billion in 2005-06 (60 %) and Rs.7.04 billion in 2007-08 (95%) which indicates that besides advertising on television, print media has also got considerable attention of the advertisers. At the same time, spending on other medium which include radio, outdoor and direct marketing has also shown an increasing trend during 2003 and onward. Further, the share of television advertising spending per year is rising continuously with higher pace than all other media.

Advertising spending on television increased from Rs.3.6 billion in 2003-04 to Rs.6.8 billion in 2005-06 (+88%) and has reached to its all-time high figure of Rs.14.80 billion in 2007-08 which is more than 3 fold of the television spending in 2003-04.

Following is the illustration of fore cited facts.

Table 1: Statistics about television Channels in Pakistan

Year	National Channels	Foreign Channels	Total
2003	5		5
2004	15	2	17
2005	16	5	21
2006	19	7	26
2007	37	30	67
2008	66	30	96

Source: PEMRA, 2008

Table 2: Total Advertising Spending (Billion Rs) - Four Years Trend

Spending	Fiscal Year				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Total Print Spending	3.6	4.2	6.0	7.46	7.04
Total TV Spending	3.9	3.6	6.8	10.55	14.80
Total Other Spending	2.3	2.87	4.45	4.75	5.12
Total	9.80	10.67	17.25	22.76	26.96

Source: Gallup Pakistan, Survey 2008

Such alarming budgets being spent on advertising industry is a point to ponder and the importance of professional persuasion cannot be underestimated. The greater number of television channels and competition for greater media presence has made people more aware of new products and they are now more quality conscious than ever. Advertising professionals in Pakistan envisage brilliance in advertising creativity as an imperative factor for improving the performance quality of this industry. Over time, this industry has become more sophisticated and advertising campaigns are carefully designed and deployed with increased effectiveness.

What comes to mind now is what dormant effect this is having on our culture. In marketing and advertising, cultural orientation has been studied in relation to communications and cognitive processes. An endeavor to write a review paper on this subject is made in order to elaborate the use of cultural components in ad appeals, the impact it is generating in shifting social trends and igniting social competitiveness. An attempt is also made to understand the degree of deviance of ad appeal from Islamic moral standards.

Methodology

Objective: The aim of present paper is manifold, for which a number of advertisements aired on various private TV channels, billboards and in print media were observed. Firstly, it is to understand and analyze the presence of cultural components in advertisement. Secondly, it is hoped that this better understanding, along with benefitting the field of research, will set grounds for the exploration of unrest create by advertisements. Thirdly, it aspires to look into the phenomenon of gradual change in societal norms and values, which can be accounted for by the display of advertisements. Lastly, it sheds light on the incoherence between Islamic teachings and latent and manifest content of advertisements.

Research Questions

- Do Pakistani ads mirror cultural components like values, language, norms, and dresses?

- Do advertisements results in the acceptance of changing trends displayed in them?
- Do advertisements create social competitiveness leading to chronic anxieties in the society?
- Are present Pakistani advertisements incongruent with religious values?

Research Hypothesis

- Pakistani advertisements will have amalgamation of the cultural mechanisms.
- Repeated exposure of advertisements actively permeates the targeted audience along with those who believe that they have self immunity.
- Focus on emotional component in advertisements promotes possession, consumption and hedonism.
- There is a difference between Islamic business ethics and strategies adopt in advertisements of today's world.

Procedure

- (a) Primary Researches Reviewed: Review is based on data and information obtained from articles, reviews on seminars and various articles in the electronic media.
- (b) Analysis of Advertisements: There are vast varieties of advertisements that are impinged upon the society. Therefore, it is difficult to study all sorts of advertisements. The type of advertisements that were observed for the study included ads about beauty soaps, washing powders, food products, and mobile phones. These types of ads were taken into account because cultural communication is perceptible in them.
- (c) Few adults were informally asked about subject matter and their opinions were incorporated along with the common observations of the authors.

Analysis and Conclusion

Living in today's world, we are being bombarded by a number of advertisements. Analysis of quite a number of advertisements and general observations of the authors led them to find answers to the following questions. These will be attempted for answering in the following section.

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Observation of several ads reveals that in all advertisements cultural norms and values are actively highlighted, Pakistani society is collectivistic in nature where sheer goals and benefits possess greater relevance. People value traditions, neighborhoods rituals share collective joys and sorrows. Such trends particularly highlighted in various ads include portrayal of wedding ceremonies, respect of parents, older people and shared religious rituals. As indicated by Gudykunst and Kim in 1984, collectivistic cultures are more nonverbal and communicate through contextual and implicit codes which are based upon culturally defined social expectations and rules. We can say that individuals and cultures are both guided by operating

values. In such a scenario responsibility squarely lies upon shoulders of ad makers to intelligently design ads through understanding local and cultural needs in order to increase appeal and accomplish economic interests. Suppose soap A would be preferred and gains wide popularity because it endorses “cleanliness” which is one of most closely knitted value and associated with godliness In Islam. Observation reveals that several ads incorporate manifest and latent appeals for cultural values in order to win faith and confidence of audiences in such a way that particular brand name endorses acclaimed values prevail in culture.

Ryan and Deci (2000) argued that in some East Asian societies, people often identify with choices made for them by significant others and the most important thing, which influences the individual behavior in collective society , is the consumer’s family, social and cultural environment (Stanton & Futrell, 1987; Loudon & Bitta, 1994; Cacioppo, Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). This too evident in certain commercials as younger give preferences towards decisions of parents and benefiting from advices of older people like one of popular add of oil utilize slogan ‘Jahan Mamta Wahan Dalda’ depicts significance of product associated with nurturance ,care and mother love .

Internal influences, such as social class, society, family, reference group, opinion leaders and culture also affects people in roles of consumer (Loudon & Bitta, 1994; Foxall & Goldsmith, 1994; Ralphs, 1993). Owing this notion certain advertisements communicate culture through their packaging style in traditional ways like bright colored packaging of some products by Engro Foods i.e: Tarang tetra milk pack and Omore ice-cream named ‘Badami’ ,apparently projects Punjabi rich culture in which scene of” carnival” shows harmony ,collective celebrations and enchanting music which are peculiar to provincial traditions .Also Mezban tea portrays Sindhi Hospitable culture ,where as its packaging also reveals Sindh traditional “Ajrak” as a combination of Red ,black and white . it is noteworthy to mention here that slogans and tag lines plays vital role in cultural communications as “Kha Badami,Maza Awami “ likewise Mezban Tea alludes that this tea signifies hospitality in Sindhi manuscript on its package.

Such cultural communications subliminally dilutes resistances. People start accepting them as their own products because they depict their identities. This clearly validates the fact that consumer tend to respond favorably to advertising and reward a particular advertisement with purchases if advertising message are similar with the core culture values of that country (Zhang and Gelb, 1996 Belk et al.1985). Hence we can safely claim that pakistani advertisements do incorporate cultural components as their main ingredients. Advertisements that reflect some local cultural values becomes more influential and people recall and speak about contents of advertisements with greater ease when interviewed in this connection.

A crucial concern now come into view, that do advertisement play an important role in changing trends by making them acceptable to general populace. In today’s competition of media large number of advertisements range from tooth paste to laptops periodically punch senses of everyone so its nearly an impossible task to remain ignored by advertisements for those

who not regularly watch television yet prone to be influenced by ads of billboards newspaper, magazines through regular repetitions .An estimation by survey infers that the current state of Pakistan advertising industry is continuously growing with a high pace as media presence has become the matter of survival for companies(Gallup, 2008).

We can say that the discretionary power of television viewers to avoid watching television advertisements has also increased (Hussainy et al., 2008). Present day viewer is well informed and clearly knows intentions of advertisements so can easily avoid to be manipulated by advertisements. This further advocated by researcher as viewers' attitude towards the brand become more favorable on the third exposure which become less favorable on subsequent advertising exposures Cacioppo and Petty (1979) Hence above notion holds true for present repeated advertisement exposures in every microseconds likely to induce aversions among target audiences.

Other side of coin gave a different picture during informal interview with people, about extent of persuasive effect by media advertisements. Most of them conclude that they don't take influence from ads because they know the intentions of policy makers and the real life is different from those projected in ads by celebrities .Discussion has come to a point where it is safe to imagine that advertisements are intelligently designed and well researched in terms of cultural preferences, likes and dislikes of individuals that's why possess inherent potentials to work on preconscious levels. Owing to this notion those people who view themselves as autonomous least affected by advertisement appeals or possess acquired self immunity do take impressions by repeated exposures "unknowingly".

Scott in 1921 acclaimed that "An advertisement has not completed its mission till it has instructed the possible customer concerning the goods, and then caused him to forget where he received his instruction". Moreover, repeated exposures of novel and creative advertisements likely to cast influence upon people with minor cognitive effort. This influence is easily observed, when people are informally asked whether they've felt any difference in the ads in the last ten years, interesting insights were revealed. An adult during informal interview for present study reported that "now advertisement show lesser proximity between males and females and we don't even feel awkward. We would have, if it were an advertisement of 1990s". He gave an example of EU Cream one of hair removing product's billboard, in which a man, standing right behind a woman, is holding her hand. This example validates the aforementioned point that advertisements subliminally foster changing trends along with making them more acceptable to its audience.

Most of present advertisements shown in our local Channels ,newspapers and bill boards orbit around sexuality, status , hedonism, inflated images of idealized life. They encourage the gain of material needs, possessions and pleasure seeking, glitters of power, compulsive consumption and lust for material goods which appeals human instincts. Because this is done to masses at once, they start fulfilling their ad-induced needs. This creates chronic anxieties in

modern man, apprehension to stay close to herd as all other people are running hysterically to accumulate money. In order to overcome left out feelings, the relationships, morals and values are swiftly transforming a” commodity “to be exchanged. Our traditional and moral values are trembling due to influx of western culture and diffusion of other cultural patterns in such a way that one can anticipate full blown “money dance “in few decades.

Advertising gives support in the development of consumers self-image (Richins, 1991) and product meaning (Friedman and Zimmer, 1988), with many consumers paying valuable dollars for branded clothing which featuring prominent logos, slogans and other corporate design (Polly and Mittal, 1993). Author’s observations of ads reveals that most of ads feature benefits rather than product attributes, they possess emotional appeal, luxurious display of goods and setting. As one of famous add of Coca cola ‘slogan is “Dil mangay more” likewise numerous such ads subliminally furnish new greed and promote hedonism rather than as instrumental means to end or promote concept of contented society.

“Its not that people value money more but they value everything else so much less– not that they are greedier but that they have no other values to keep greed in check.”
(Magnetin ,1987)

Above mentioned actuality intrigued the authors to study advertisements in Pakistan in the light of widely practiced religion i.e. Islam. Pakistan is an Islamic state and was taken by name of God where Islamic principles are to be abiding for all life situations. If we have a glimpse over what modern ads are depicting and consider religious teachings of business we can easily find wide divergences. Presently agencies use various kinds of attractive advertising appeals sexist images, adventures, romantic issues; offensive languages in order to lure the consumers and capture maximum market share.

In Islamic ethical system, it is not permissible to use sex appeals, romantic language to please and attract consumers because in sprit of Shariah such acts are counted as unethical and deceptive. Review of literature reveals that in contemporary business environment various add agencies are involved in such promotional activities which are incoherent with Islamic teachings. It is apparent that most of business utilizes freely vanity, sex appetite and envy as their main advertising appeals to promote their products.Despite the fact that in Islamic marketing ethics, it is unfair for a sales person to persuade buyer by overstating product attributes or to manipulate and exaggerate information related to product, in other cases if he tells a lie or hide something then blessing of Allah will be lost upon transactions. In the light of findings and observations we can conclude that modern advertisements clash with religious and cultural norms .We can say that in connection of various other encompassing factors for cultural decline, modern permissive advertisements pose a threat to Pakistani cultural images, moral and ethical values.

Based on the comprehensive details and facts mentioned in the paper we can conclude that advertisement industry in pakistani is having a great impact on the society, more than it is

commonly believed to be having. Studies from all over the world, from Western and Eastern parts of the world, are in agreement that incorporating culture in advertisements is a key constituent for industrialists, capitalists and entrepreneurs for selling their products premeditated for common man's consumption. Hence, all advertisements have entrenched cultural components. This holds truer for collectivistic cultures like ours, where non-verbal communication is more focused in advertisements. Advertisement industry in Pakistan is serving the purpose of subtly changing social trends. This happens subliminally; therefore even those who claim to be impervious are in no way protected from its impact. This steady and plodding aftermath is smoothing its way for an environment where people are determined to compete with each other. This happens as a result of unceasing apprehension for being better than others around; specifically in terms of materialistic possessions.

We can now assert that all of the above stated facts for modern advertisement are not in cohesion with the teaching of the religion of Pakistani society, Islam. If Pakistan claims to be an Islamic state, where Islamic ethics are supposed to be the guiding principles in every aspect of life, ad policy makers ought to rethink and innovate their strategies of promotion of their products.

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