

Indian Culture and its Reflection on Advertising : A Perceptual Study of Advertising Practitioners

* *Freda Swaminathan*

** *Ipshita Bansal*

Abstract

India's diverse culture is reflected in the advertising released by top advertisers. This study looked at how advertisers and advertising agency personnel perceived the culture prevalent among Indian consumers, the cultural dimensions of Indian advertising, and its impact on the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. This is a qualitative study conducted amongst senior advertising practitioners from advertising agencies and advertisers. In-depth interviews were conducted to study how the depiction of different stimuli in advertising like celebrity endorsements, humor, language, clothing, religion, patriotism, festivity, and lifestyle influence the culture of consumers. Other aspects like romance, technology, family, friendship, and environment were also studied. Hofstede's dimensions of culture were used to gain insights on the subject from practitioners. The research identified five waves of change that are transforming the culture of Indian consumers and this is reflected in Indian advertising. These waves have been discussed in detail as waves that bring a change in consumer culture, for a better life, a change to succeed, a change in traditions, a change in the concept of globalization, and a change in the perceptions of value for money. The paper concluded with an assessment of the challenges that advertisers face in dealing with the diverse culture that is prevalent amongst Indian consumers to create effective advertising.

Keywords : culture, advertising strategy, traditions, change

Paper Submission Date : June 3, 2014; Paper sent back for Revision : August 27, 2014 ; Paper Acceptance Date : October 1, 2014

Advertising practitioners include professionals in both advertising and media agencies and in marketing organizations of corporations. The advertising that gets created reflects the culture of their target audience and society in general. Noted advertising researcher, Richard Pollay, 1986, had said, "Most of the criticism of advertising comes from those who focus on advertising's social role, whereas most of its defense comes from those who emphasize its economic functions" (p. 19). The social role of advertising also includes the culture that is projected by the advertiser, and the perceptions of the communications by the receiver. The topic of culture has been much written about in the social sciences. Culture has been defined in the Oxford dictionary to include, "the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society."

Significant advertising research has been undertaken based on the work done by Hofstede. Hofstede in 1980 defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (p. 21). According to Edward T. Hall, India would be termed as a high context society, where the culture is governed more by intuition or feelings. This can be compared to low context societies like the USA, where the culture is more rational, linear, direct, and to the point. The advertising stimuli developed for a culture will tend to reflect the high context and low context nature of the society (The cultural context, n.d.).

Cultural dimensions have also been described in an organizational development theory called OCTAPACE, that is, openness, confrontation, trust, authenticity, proaction, autonomy, collaboration, and experimentation -

* *Professor*, FORE School of Management, "Adhitam Kendra", B-18 Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi – 110 016.
E – mail: freda@fsm.ac.in

** *Professor & Dean*, Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies, Bhagat Phoolsingh Womens' University, Khanpur Kalan (Sonapat), Haryana-131 305. E-mail : ibansalindia@yahoo.co.in

cultures that are required for successful organizations. Human behavior and practices, therefore, set culture (Jafri, 2012).

Review of Literature

Understanding the cultural dimensions of advertising has been a challenge for marketers because of the complexity of this subject. Hofstede's five cultural dimensions have been a basis for the understanding of much research since his study in 1980. The definitions of the dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long/short term orientation have remained the same (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). These dimensions have been applied to studies in advertising to find that in individualistic cultures, advertising tends to play a persuasive role, while in collectivist societies, relationship marketing is the key (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). The importance of monitoring cultural values to create effective word-of-mouth marketing communications has also been researched (Lam, Lee, & Mizerski, 2009). Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2006) found that interpretation of visually complex advertising depends on the culture of consumers. Exposure to aspects like local traditions, literature, and culture brings about variations in the comprehension of complex visuals in television advertising. The study indicated that imagery has "no literal or obvious meaning" (p. 65), since consumers refer to past product usage and advertising communication in order to respond to the stimuli.

Research amongst advertising practitioners gives many useful insights about the creative nature of advertising. Methodologies often include both quantitative and qualitative research, sometimes called "mixed research" (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013, p. 22). The advantage of conducting mixed research is that the findings complement each other, there is completeness, potential to develop a hypothesis, expand earlier studies, and compensate for the weakness of earlier research. While validity is common in quantitative research, validity of qualitative research has also been suggested in terms of descriptive validity or accuracy of reporting, researchers' interpretative validity, and the findings having theoretical validity. The development of meta inferences as theoretical statements has also been outlined. Creativity in advertising tends to be viewed differently by advertising practitioners and customers (West, Kover, & Caruana, 2008). The former tend to be pragmatic in terms of being original, but being relevant and goal-directed. Customers, however, tend to judge an execution of advertising in their definition of creativity. Practitioners, therefore, tend to be cautious in being creative in advertising. Cultural nuances in advertising, therefore, will tend to be communicated with caution. Creativity also enhances advertising through the depiction of divergence (Lehnert, Till, & Ospina, 2014). Divergence is when the something different or separate is depicted as an advertising stimulus. This contrasts to advertising that is meaningful, where the level of creativity tends to decrease.

Brands are a symbol of popular culture (Guzman & Paswan, 2006) in India, where lifestyle and cultural roots play an important role in the development of brand image. Indian advertising commonly uses celebrities from the film industry or refers to colorful occasions like festivals or Indian weddings. All these stimuli reflect Indian culture in Indian advertising. In fact, advertising influences consumer culture and plays almost a colonization role (Kelly, Lawlor, & O'Donohoe, 2005). While advertising is also influenced by a multinational's corporate ideology, its presence becomes a social expression. The present study includes in-depth interviews with creative professionals in advertising agencies. They felt that indeed, cultural factors and corporate culture influence the culture reflected in advertising. The creative teams in advertising agencies play the role of being cultural intermediaries and influence the culture in society with their observations. This becomes visible in mass media, including bill boards, and sets an environment where advertising contributes to the overall look of the city.

India is a country that is rich in culture (Singh, Srinivasan, Sista, & Parashar, 2008). Five antecedents to national culture in India have been identified. Social identity deals with mass public culture, language, religion, literacy, sex ratio, and territorial mobility for members. Culture is also seen in a historical context of myths, historical memory, territory, homeland, colonization, and external influences. Economic parameters, institutional factors, and geography are the other antecedents. Mahapatra (2013) researched Indian consumers to find that emotional appeals are more effective than rational appeals. However, for some segments who are more educated

and belong to an older age group, a mix of rational and emotional appeals seem to work. In general, consumers are attentive to advertising and get engaged in the emotive communication. Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010) distinguished between hard-sell and soft-sell appeals in advertising. The former uses a rational appeal, while the latter an emotional. The three aspects that were considered were the extent to which the appeal induces feeling and thinking, how implicit and explicit are the appeals, and the extent to which the appeals use images versus facts. The research refers to the Foote, Cone, and Belding (FCB) matrix, where products are classified as high or low involvement and involve cognitive (thinking) or affective (feeling) information processing.

Deleersnyder, Dekimpe, Steenkamp, and Leeflang (2009) in their study found that advertising's sensitivity to business cycles is influenced by the role of national culture. In cultures that are high in long-term orientation and power-distance, advertising is less cyclical, whereas it tends to be more cyclical where uncertainty avoidance is high. Hollis (2009) reported that globalization does not necessarily mean that consumers will move towards one culture, and that there is a great need to study audiences who are heterogeneous. Local brands tend to score higher on being part of a home culture. Communication is the major means of conveying global or local culture. Even countries that share a common language like the UK and the USA have distinct cultures. American culture, while widely accepted in cinema and television, is not accepted in some countries, including India. Only 23% of the Indian respondents found American popular culture appealing. This is due to India's heritage and the presence of a successful 'Bollywood' movie industry. Marketers, therefore, need to study the cultural nuances of diverse markets and have greater understanding of local cultures. Mishra and Mishra (2011) in their study found that consumers who were more materialistic are more positive toward television advertising. Materialistic values make consumers more pre-disposed to the adapting to new innovations and making changes in their lifestyles and consumption experiences. Materialistic values, therefore, also become a tool for segmentation and marketing strategy. Subrahmanian (2012) explained how organizational culture is the adrenalin of any organization. In Indian IT companies, amongst the 200 employees interviewed, the dimensions of authenticity, experimentation, and autonomy were less and that organizations must work for a culture of openness, trust, and collaboration.

Patel (2012) found that western brands influence the aspiration for a western lifestyle and also bring about a sense of confidence in Indians to take on the world and be individualistic. Hollis (2009) gave a point of view that "brands provide new cultural reference points and topics of conversation" (p. 1). Virani (2013) described Gen Y of India as optimistic, with a positive outlook, confident, independent, ambitious, and competitive.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- (1) To assess the dimensions of culture reflected in Indian advertising.
- (2) To analyze culture, language, and values communicated in Indian advertising.
- (3) To identify the challenges faced in assessing the culture of target audiences.

Methodology

Primary research was conducted through a structured, open-ended questionnaire administered to a sample of 20 practitioners for 45- 90 minutes in April-May, 2013. These were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed and coded. The practitioners were senior professionals from advertising agencies, media or marketing, who were holding senior positions (Vice-President and above) and had initiated a major advertising campaign within the last 10 years. Details of the practitioners are given in the Table 1.

The practitioners were probed on how advertising projects Indian culture on Hofstede's five dimensions of culture, on depicting society as open-minded, trustworthy, authentic, collaborative, showing initiative, and being able to experiment. The role of celebrities and stereotyping, especially of classes and women was also assessed.

Table 1. The Profile of Practitioners

Participant No.	Sector*	Sector Domain
1	Agency	Automobile, Durables
2	Agency	Soft Drinks, Fast Food
3	Advertiser	Airline
4	Advertiser	Beverages
5	Advertiser	FMCG,
6	Ad Agency	Snack food, Tyres
7	Advertiser	Batteries, Kitchen sink
8	Advertiser	Banking
9	Advertiser	Snack food
10	Advertiser	Apparel, Beer
11	Advertiser	Micro chip
12	Media Agency	Telecom, Foods, Alcohol
13	Agency	Washing Machines, Juices, Two- wheelers
14	Advertiser	Insurance
15	Advertiser	Banking and Financial
16	Advertiser	Shoes
17	Advertiser	Scotch Whisky
18	Agency	Two-wheeler
19	Advertiser	Computers
20	Agency	Cellular phones

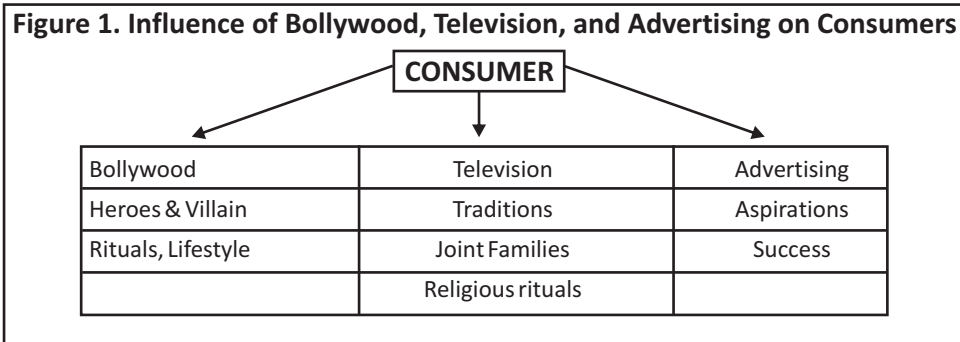
*Agency means a person working in an advertising agency, while an advertiser means a person from the client side who is a senior person in marketing. A media agency deals with media buying.

Other aspects covered were clothing, religion, patriotism, festivity, romance, technology, family, friendship, and concern for the environment. Finally, the practitioners were asked whether an appropriate depiction of consumer culture creates successful advertising.

Analysis and Discussion

All respondents agreed that culture of consumers is important to assess when developing effective advertising. Because of India's diversity, advertising has to pick up the common threads of regional diversity and communicate in a meaningful manner. The role of Indian cinema (or Bollywood), television, and advertising were seen as having unique influences on the consumer. Practitioners were excited about the way Bollywood in India has created new rituals and lifestyle (like the dance culture) in Indian society and defined the roles of heroes and villains. Television has defined traditions, and has given character to the Indian joint family and religious rituals. Advertising builds consumer aspirations and defines success. This is depicted in the Figure 1.

In order to assess a pattern in the responses, the responses were examined in depth to understand the different cultural portrayals in Indian advertising. The focus seems to be on *change*. Advertising invites consumers to a better world and is perceived as a change agent that offers a new way of living to the Indian consumer. There was an overall sense of optimism in the advertising practitioners of a new India, where from a closed economy, markets have opened up and consumers are now part of a new digital age. Five patterns were observed that emerged through the interviews regarding the portrayals of consumer culture in advertising. These were : change for the better, change to succeed, change in traditions, change in the concept of globalization, and change in perceptions of value for money.



Wave 1 : Change for the Better

Advertising projects a society where there will be a better life. The world that is projected in Indian advertising promises change for the better through various ways.

➤ **New Products** : Advertising has communicated the basic availability of new products and has created an exciting world for the Indian consumer, of new cars, technology products, consumer goods, durables, telecom, and a plethora of digital and other services available in the current Indian market. Advertising builds the power of spending in the Indian consumer.

➤ **The Indian Dream** : Most advertising portrays a dream of what people are seeking, projects a pretty picture, and an ideal world. Liberalization has brought in a sense of empowerment, where consumers suddenly have access to money with loans easily available and are able to build their dreams without having saved for them.

➤ **Unity in Diversity** : Though India has a diverse and pluralistic culture due to the presence of many states, as a country, advertising helps in projecting a unified country. In a Southern market, consumer fantasies are quite different from the North. Consumers in the South tend to be religious, traditional, have respect for authority, and are compliant to societal norms. However, consumers in the North, as one practitioner said, believe “more in one-upmanship”. Many campaigns tend to be developed based on the consumer culture prevalent in North India. The cultures where women have assumed stronger roles, because of the matriarchal systems, as that in Kerala and the North-East have not been commonly projected.

➤ **Male-Female Level Playing Field** : Change for the better is also seen in the male-female role depictions in advertising. Men and women are projected in roles that show a greater sense of partnership in decision-making and sharing of household chores. Advertising, while portraying the nurturing quality of women, or men as providers to the household, also advocate a balance for both men and women.

➤ **Romance** : Advertising is creating change in the way romance is portrayed amongst Indian couples. All practitioners agreed that romance in Indian advertising is held back, and often implied that it takes place only after marriage. After all, the arranged marriage system is still prevalent in India. Indians are known for their inhibitions on public demonstration of affection. Kissing is not seen in advertising because there are social and political activists who can object to the advertising.

Romance is projected innocently and tacitly and often feeds off Bollywood. Earlier, romance was shown in a playful manner - a boy (hindi film like) chasing a girl around a tree. Today, it tends to be more westernized, like a candle-lit dinner.

Wave 2 : Change to Succeed

Advertising builds ambitions in consumers and urges them to succeed. The way of life portrayed in advertising builds aspirations for consumers to succeed. Advertising uses various stimuli for this, including the common use of celebrities, technology, and a buildup of a culture of individualism for success.

➡ **Technology :** Advertising has promoted, in an appealing manner, technology products like the mobile phone, the computer, and the Internet. Consumers of all classes now realize that adapting to technology is most important to succeed, and earlier fears of new technology need to be done away with. Advertising has simplified technology through concept selling and making technology a cultural reality. Mobility and the growth of the Internet have also helped in unifying India's diverse culture.

➡ **Celebrities in Advertising :** Indian celebrities, primarily Bollywood and cricket stars contribute to building the values, fashion, and lifestyle of India. Indians celebrities are limited in number (for a population of 1.2 billion), but are growing. The youth imbibes the lifestyle of the celebrities. As one practitioner explained, "Indian consumers are aware of the personal lives of celebrities." Actors, Salman Khan and Ranbir Kapoor live with their parents ; a famous star has an arranged marriage ; musician Rehman at the Oscars dedicated his award to his mother. Actor Amitabh Bachchan is often rated as the top icon despite being 70 years old. People emulate these values and lifestyles.

Another aspect of culture reflected through the use of celebrities is the communication taking place that success can happen against all odds. Heroes have emerged from small-town India and from backgrounds that are not privileged. They see how cricketer Dhoni from a small town succeeded and made it big. Other film actors include mega star Shah Rukh Khan, Priyanka Chopra (again from a small town), and many others.

➡ **Success through Individualism:** Success at any cost is the mantra of the youngsters. An individualistic lifestyle portrayed in advertising creates a fantasy which only success can give - an ability to travel abroad, buy fashionable clothes, live in a posh neighborhood, and experiment with new brands and products. The Indian society has indeed evolved from the pre-liberalization days where image of a car was the spacious Ambassador, having the space to contain many members of a family to the latest luxury brands of cars that focus on style & design and give stature. Advertising creates a need to grow fast so that young people can succeed fast and gain acceptance amongst role models and peers.

Wave 3 : Change in Traditions

India is known to be a traditional society with joint families and patriarchy, the practice of many rituals in religion (whichever the faith), vegetarian diets, arranged marriages, and clear role definitions of males and females. How does advertising portray the reality of Indian traditions while creating a dream world of material possessions? Advertising is sensitive to traditions and does not mock old traditions, and is sensitive to Indian values like respect for elders, religion, and hierarchy.

The practitioners expressed views on how advertising, while depicting reality, does tend to portray an exaggerated reality of Indians making changes in traditions, to aspire to be modern and contemporary in thinking. As one practitioner said, "Indians are traditional, but easily adaptable to change". Advertising portrays the new Indian family, the Indian way of life, changes Indian stereotypes, builds contemporary religious rituals, and creates new lifestyles for the traditional Indian.

➡ **The Indian Family :** "The great Indian family will never go away", said one practitioner. The essence of Indian reality is the presence of family bonding. The presence of grand parents and parents is common in Indian advertising. Touching the feet of elders is commonly shown in advertising, and respect for parents as an integral

part of Indian culture is depicted in advertising. The extended Indian family is a strong force of family in India. Even with couples living by themselves, away from their parental homes, it is common for grown-up children to be in touch with their parents on a daily basis. The way family is being projected in advertising is undergoing some changes. Husbands and wives are now equal partners in household decision-making. Husbands relate to their wives more than their mothers. The daughter-in-law is not subservient to the mother-in-law, but is independent and intelligent, often working. Patriarchy is giving way to the nuclear family. As one practitioner said, "Nuclear families show a brand in a progressive light." Multi-cultural marriages are often depicted. Advertising has also projected grandmothers differently - they are glamorous, modern, and technology savvy. Romance between old parents is also depicted.

However, still, the Indian family culture reinforces an environment with greater inter-dependency, protectiveness, and nurturance. The responsibility of the son towards the parents is still depicted in advertising. The Raymond's brand had a television commercial where the mother is sad because the son has got a job abroad, but is happy because the son has bought a ticket for her to accompany him. Famous advertising like that of Master Card shows a son gifting a vacation to his parents in Disney Land.

➤ **Male - Female Stereotypes :** Advertising reflects the stereotypes existing in society about the roles of men and women. One practitioner from an advertising agency referred to a research finding which indicated that a woman wants not to be seen in a passive role as a housewife, but as a home-maker who is the pivot of the family (not just the doer), and who is capable of being an active decision maker, providing solutions to problems. Much advertising today is women centric, depicting women moving out and being a "Home-maker 2.0". Subsequently, the man is portrayed as a person who looks for advice from his wife, participates in the household chores, and looks after the kids. The practitioner went on to explain that the Whirlpool advertising in India started from portraying the woman as a house-wife, then as a smart home-maker, to the more current advertisement where she comes back from work, and her husband has prepared a drink for her in the refrigerator. However, as one practitioner commented, even now women are being portrayed in a patronizing light, because of the patriarchal nature of India's social society and even today, it is not common for Indian advertising to show men and women sharing household chores. The woman has to use fairness creams, the perfumes, and the clothing to get her husband's attention so as to woo him to purchase expensive jewels for her.

➤ **Friends :** Friends are now commonly used in the plots of Indian advertising. Practitioners reiterated that 'friends' now play a very important role in the life of a youngster. Bollywood movies like *Dil Chahta Hai*, television programs like friends, the success of telecom leader, Airtel's television campaign on 'every friend' and other films have created importance regarding the relationship one has with friends.

➤ **The Indian Way :** Advertising rides on the underlying 'proud to be an Indian' ethos in the young - who is the casual, confident Indian who believes that he or she is the best. The young have created a sub culture that is relevant to them and is not necessarily in synch with what they have been taught. This Indian is proud of the state he comes from, the food he eats, and recognizes that he is a traditional person inside while having a modern lifestyle. The young Indian of today is proud of his/her roots, language, and way of life. This youngster, would buy a new luxury car, and not drive to the closest bar, but take his or her grandparents blessings first. Advertising, therefore, addresses Indian consumers who are confident and aspire for a bright future. Status is shown through the cars, clothing, and homes of consumers. The setting of the house in advertising would be shown as very contemporary and western. There is youthfulness, modernization, westernization, and consumerism in the culture of advertising in India today. Symbols of success become the brand of automobile, foreign travel, or neighborhood of residence. Foreign travel has become a very popular symbol of success.

India tends to have a feudal and hierarchical environment both at home and at the workplace. Caste is usually not depicted, because it is not endorsed and seen as positive. Class difference is shown the way it is, as part of the landscape. Advertising plays a role in uplifting the lower classes because lower income groups often shop high

end brands and want the shopping experience. Advertising does not change class differences. Some participants felt that depiction of class in advertising is unpleasant and, therefore, is not usually used in advertising. When asked about the role of patriotism in Indian advertising, all felt that patriotism is a stimulus that does not directly seem to work in advertising. Patriotism is used more indirectly like a winning cricket team or a story from a Bollywood movie. Being Indian is more important than made in India. With greater growth and development, the patriotism appeal may work better in Indian advertising.

➤ **Religion :** While India is a religious country, practitioners felt that religion is not overtly shown in advertising because of the country having a secular ethos. Advertising is sensitive to religious groups and tends to be secular. Many brands advertise during important festivals like Diwali and Holi that are celebrated across many states of India. Advertising, however, does not depict the religious rituals of the festivals but the social customs of purchasing new clothes or eating special foods. Advertising, in some ways, has created greater awareness of customs like buying gold (through jewelry advertising) during a festival called *Dhanteras* or being a vegetarian during the *Navratris*.

Wave 4 : Change in the Concept of Globalization

Advertising has made being Indian and global as one and the same thing. Now, Indians are part of a global world. It is as popular to hear western music at the discotheque as it is to dance with Bollywood music. Some of the ways advertising manifests this is in terms of the clothing used in the models of the advertisements, the portrayal of sexuality, the use of humor and 'glocalization,' or the strategies of global brands adapting to Indian markets.

➤ **Clothing :** The advertising of the 1970s and 1980s usually had women in Indian clothes like saris or salwar-kameez, and had men in western attire. Today's advertising shows women in western clothing and men in western clothes that are more stylishly cut. Advertisements for jewelry and festivals often show women in traditional saris. The saris too have a new and contemporary look. Practitioners observed that advertising also uses a combination of western and Indian (fusion) clothing. The trend is also not to make the models look too artificially dressed, and show them in more casual clothing. The choice of models in contemporary advertising is also not the typical good looking model, but faces that are interesting and have character. An interesting comment made by a practitioner was, "Today, western clothing is seen as Indian". The jeans and T shirt belong as much to India as to the West. The westernization of clothing and the Indian attire of salwar kameez and sari are also used across all states in the country, despite each state having their own regional dresses. While advertising portrays reality, it also indirectly builds a uniformly dressed Indian.

➤ **Sexuality :** Similar to global advertising, women in Indian advertising are also portrayed sexually. This is usually done with a western look. A practitioner gave the example that when actress, Katrina Kaif, has drops of mango juice dropping on her lips, sexuality is spelt out for the mango drink. This commercial also received the highest number of hits on the Internet. A practitioner mentioned, "Some ads have become very bold like that of condoms. This is not our traditional culture, but acceptance for the same is happening." Advertisers, however, hesitate to have sexual portrayals of women as too overt, since then they can find objections from the media or social activist groups.

➤ **Humor :** Today's advertising in India also uses humor- like the famous 'Hari Sadu,' the painful boss shown in the Naukri.com commercial. Advertising is encouraging the Indian consumer to develop a sense of humor. Through the use of humor, advertising expresses what consumers feel repressed about, whether it is a troublesome boss, a meddling mother-in-law, or an authoritarian husband.

➤ **Glocalization :** India is the only country where McDonald's promotes a potato burger. Most successful foreign

brands develop marketing strategies according to both local and global considerations. KFC also has greater spice in its chicken in India and promotes chicken with rice. Advertising, therefore, communicates the 'glocal' strategies of leading multi-national brands and creates a reality for the Indian consumer. The rise of the Internet, the retail and media revolution and other global influences have made the Indian consumer more global in approach. Advertising rides on these trends and portrays a new and global India.

➡ **Environment :** Care for the environment amongst consumers still needs to be developed. The campaign saying no to fire-crackers worked well, but most brands in India do not have an environment story as their main-stay. Practitioners mentioned one-off communications for brands like Nokia and Toyota, but here too, the emphasis was on to sell the product. The responsibility towards the environment is not being handled adequately.

Wave 5 : Change in Perceptions of Value for Money

India's per capita income is only ₹ 6,243 per month, as per the Central Statistics Office, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (2014). Indians tend to be very price conscious and have traditionally been careful spenders. Today's consumers are, however, looking at price in a different way and are more open to spending. From the overall feedback of the practitioners, this seems to be like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the state of the economy has made the Indian consumer to be careful spenders with an economical standard of living and on the other hand, they are enjoying a new lifestyle of high living.

➡ **Economical Living :** Except for the extremely rich segment, most young Indians having a lifestyle that is equivalent to their counterparts in the West would have their parents exposed to the standards that were prevalent in a closed economy, characterized with socialistic thinking and insular living. Indians, therefore, still come from backgrounds where spending is controlled. Not wasting is a key cultural aspect of Indian upbringing. The concept of being risk-averse, sacrificing for long term savings is part of Indian culture. Practitioners felt that this situation has completely changed with the new consumers. Advertising creates needs across classes, even for those who cannot afford to pay. In India, it is difficult to migrate from one social class to another. This creates frustration.

➡ **High Living :** A practitioner marketing expensive Scotch whisky and wines remarked that the luxury consumer segment is price insensitive in India as compared to the Western markets. The tip of the pyramid consists of consumers who are spending on luxury brands and are experiencing luxury vacations. The desire to try out new products is high, since brand loyalty is still not strong.

Conclusion and Implications

Advertising is the truth well told. All practitioners felt that reflection of consumer culture influences whether advertising is effective or not. In order to get a focus of the in-depth interviews, the last question was more structured, where the practitioners were asked to state in a word or a phrase, the culture, language, and values communicated in Indian advertising. The findings are depicted in the Table 2. Culture in Indian advertising is perceived as family, togetherness, achievement, relationship aspirations, and success. Language style and values depicted in advertising are also depicted in the Table 2. Since culture is an abstract concept, there are challenges faced by advertisers to use cultural dimensions as effective stimuli in advertising. These may be summarized as follows:

(1) Identifying the Pressure Points of Culture : With the target audiences in India being heterogeneous and media not being segmented, it becomes difficult to address diverse cultures. No wonder advertising tends to focus on a dream-world of aspirations of consumers, since this can be common across segments. In order to engage with local markets, brands tend to use more Indian symbolism. The meaning of this symbolism may not be homogenous.

Table 2. Advertising Styles Reflected in Indian Advertising

Culture	Language Style	Values
Family	Simple	Ambition
Togetherness	Entertaining	Seek Value
Achievement	Persuasive	Aspire
Relationships	Emotional	Respect for elders
Aspirations	Soft	Honest
Success	English cum Vernacular	Status

Advertisers find it beneficial to focus on the consumers' need for change for a better life and success. The dynamic nature of change makes the world of advertising that much more exciting. However, for advertisers to feel the pulse of the consumer in terms of dealing with change requires very sophisticated research techniques to properly assess changing culture of the consumers. These pressure points of culture need to be identified.

(2) Speaking a Common Language : Advertising needs to speak a common language to these heterogeneous groups. The western world has a common language of television. In India, this role is still largely being played by Bollywood and regional cinema. In the early days of advertising, advertising was always created in English, and then translated into different languages. Today's advertising attempts at creating concepts in languages. The logistics of doing this in so many languages makes it a difficult task. The use of English alphabets in the vernacular (termed as 'Hinglish' for use of Hindi with English) to be delivered in so many languages poses communication barriers.

(3) Dealing with the Social Churn : Advertising is part of the promotional mix in marketing. The task of communicating to audiences that are undergoing a major social churn is significant, considering that the industry skills and sensitivity required for understanding the myriad cultures of India could be limited. With the revolutions taking place in media, retail, and the Internet, advertising's task of projecting a good materialistic side of life may overlook societal objectives of inclusive growth that is so essential in a country like India, where poverty and class differences are so rampant. How can advertising deal with this social churn in a responsible and ethical manner?

This study indicates that the depiction of culture plays a central role in advertising communications and that there is a major transformation in Indian culture. For advertising to be more effective, cultural cues can become a stimulus that can build advertising properties in the campaign and enhance creativity. The five waves identified in the present paper can serve as communication platforms that help in differentiation & unique brand positioning and creative strategies.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study is limited to advertising practitioners based in the Delhi NCR region and the observations are only relevant to an urban, young Indian target audience. The findings are based upon the experience and perceptions of practitioners and were interpreted by us (we are senior practitioners in the field of advertising and education).

The study's next phase is to undertake a consumer perspective of the dimensions of culture in advertising for high involvement and low involvement products. Consumer opinions on the ethics of culture communicated in Indian advertising are potential areas of research. The need to have systematic consumer research for effective advertising is important because, after all, as Mahatma Gandhi has said, “A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the souls of its people.”

References

- Bulmer, S., & Buchanan-Oliver, M. (2006). Advertising across cultures: Interpretations of visually complex advertising. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 28(1), 57-71. DOI:10.1080/10641734.2006.10505191
- Deleersnyder, B., Dekimpe, M. G., Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M., & Leeflang, P. S. H. (2009). The role of national culture in advertising's sensitivity to business cycles: An investigation across continents. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(5), 623-636. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.46.5.623>
- Guzman, F., & Paswan, A. K. (2009). Cultural brands from emerging markets: Brand image across host and home countries. *Journal of International Marketing*, 17(3), 71-86. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jimk.17.3.71>
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences. International differences in work related values*. Beverly Hills, CA : Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G. J. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (revised and expanded 2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hollis, N. (2009, May). *Culture clash : Globalization does not imply homogenization*. Millward Brown's POV. Retrieved from <http://www.milwardbrown.com>
- Jafri, M.H. (2012). An empirical study of octapace culture and organizational commitment. *International Journal of Retailing & Rural Business Perspectives*, 1(2), 187-194.
- Kelly, A., Lawlor, K., & O'Donohoe, S. (2005). The creative perspective. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21 (5 - 6), 505-528.
- Lam, D., Lee, A., & Mizerski, R. (2009). The effects of cultural values in word-of-mouth communication. *Journal of International Marketing*, 17(3), 55-70. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jimk.17.3.55>
- Lehnert, K., Till, B.D., & Ospina, L.M. (2014). Advertising creativity : The role of divergence versus meaningfulness. *Journal of Advertising*, 43(3), 274-285.
- Mahapatra, S. (2013). Impact of TV ad message using emotional versus rational appeal on Indian consumers. *International Journal of Business Insights and Transformation*, 6(1), 86-93.
- Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (2014, February 24). *Advance estimates of national income, 2013-14*. Retrieved from <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=103248>
- Mishra, M., & Mishra, B. B. (2011). A quantitative assessment of materialistic value and its relationship with consumer behavior in Indian culture. *The IUP Journal of Marketing Management*, 10(2), 33-53.
- Mooij, de M., & Hofstede, G. (2010). The Hofstede model : Applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(1), 85-110. DOI: 10.2501/S026504870920104X
- Okazaki, S., Mueller, B., & Taylor, C.R. (2010). Measuring soft-sell versus hard-sell advertising appeals. *Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 5-20.
- Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.). *Culture*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/culture>
- Patel, N. (2012). The effect of global brands on the culture of Indian urban consumer. *IJSR - International Journal of Scientific Research*, 1(4), 94-96.
- Pollay, R. W. (1986). The distorted mirror : Reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, 50 (April), 18-36.

- Singh, S. K., Srinivasan, V., Sista, S., & Parashar, M. (2008). Cross cultural conceptualizations: A case for multiple national cultures in India. *IIMB Management Review*, 20 (3), p. 249.
- Subramanian, M.U. (2012). Achieving high involvement and satisfaction through octapace culture in IT companies. *Zenith International Journal of Business Economics & Management Research*, 2(5), 131 - 138.
- The cultural context. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.sagepub.in/upm-data/42958_2_The_Cultural_Context.pdf
- Venkatesh, V., Brown, S.A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative divide: Guidelines for conducting mixed methods research in information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 37(1), 21-54.
- Virani, F. (2013, April 8). *Towards an educated India. Generation Y ignore at your own risk.* The Free Press Journal Knowledge, p. 4.
- West, D.C., Kover, A.J., & Caruana, A. (2008). Practitioner and customer views of advertising creativity : Same concept, Different meaning? *Journal of Advertising*, 37(4), 35 - 46. DOI : 10.2753/JOA0091-3367370403