

# Myths Prevailing In Indian Advertising

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**Abstract:** India being the land of snake charmers has always been influenced by the culture & tradition penetrated deep into its roots. Advertising today has enveloped every nook and corner of India effecting its masses to a high extent. Advertising & Culture go hand in hand. In advertising industry it is often a debate whether culture is reflected in Advertisements. Identifying cultural dimensions correlating with the content seems to be helpful in understanding consumer psychology. Slowly and gradually the mythological tales are being far removed from the understanding of cultural roots. But the fact is that stories, symbols and rituals construct the subjective truth (myths) of ancient and modern cultures around the world. Getting acquainted with mythology can give an innate understanding of human nature and the philosophical questions related to it. Advertising enables an audience to become a prospective customer wherein their purchase behaviour complements and enhances their lifestyles which are based upon combination of factors, including visual presence of products and services in the advertising, prices and their past experiences. In present market scenario, there has been a paradigm shift in consumer acceptance of what is reflected in advertising. As a result situation of certain products and services has somewhat become complex. Products and services that society believe should be available for purchase in market or to be seen by mass audience are prone to diverge in front of those who disagree with this conception For e.g. some believe that birth control products and advertisements related to it should not be available for audience below age of 18. On the contrary special educational sessions are being organised regarding this issue in schools and colleges irrespective of what age audience is. Advertising has thus accelerated the rate of acceptance by creating a culture fully imbued with ideas, products and deliberate settings just to overcome the causes that may lead to a change. This paper will justify the notion that Advertising efforts leave their imprint on culture, be it negative or positive. There is no one mythology for the world today, in fact people have their own mythologies either reframing old ones or creating new ones.

**Keywords:** Indian Culture, Mythology, Myths, Consumer Psychology, Innovation

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising has likely been around almost as long as Humanity itself. Today it has enveloped every nook and corner of nation effecting the masses to a high extent. Indian Advertising is the window to the society. It is a story told in a minute. Thus it is not surprising that it reflects what the society's prevailing views are. In advertising industry it is often a debate whether culture is reflected in Advertisements or not... well presumptions are they go hand in hand. Indian mythology indeed is a one step closer to the society. The stories, symbols and rituals construct the subjective truth (myths) of ancient and modern cultures around the world. That's why... plenty of Myths surround Indian Advertising even to this day. A Transition- In present market scenario, there has been a paradigm shift in consumer acceptance of what is reflected in advertising. Products and services that society believe should be available for purchase in market or to be seen by mass audience are prone to diverge in front of those who disagree with this conception. For instance, in India it is often seen that girls are told at a very young age to be extra careful about their complexion. Advertising in India tends to project fair, cosmopolitan image of a female as being signified in Indian film industry. It touches the cord of society assuming that all aspire to have the image projected in films. It is hard to combat a preconceived mind-set regarding glorification of the skin that finds many manifestations in our Indian myths and fables. It is a widely held assumption that dark complexions are inferior to fair ones and this prejudice establishes itself in everything from hiring practices that favor light-skinned employees to matrimonial ads that list fairness as an unchanging characteristic of the future bride or groom. (Image 1.1)

The message makes itself very clear that fair skin is synonymous to beauty and success, and therefore the products that promise fairness are in high demand by the Indians customers. While racism roots deep in India's history, in today's time it finds countenance in consumer behavior and strategic advertising.



fair skin = beauty and caste  
"fairer girl gets the boy" theme

### 1.1 Fair & Lovely advertisement

As India's economy continues to boom, the market appears to be a driving force behind the discrimination against dark skin. The fairness industry began as a reaction to consumer demand. Till date in India the sales of fairness products beats the sales of popular beverages like Coca-Cola and tea. While fairness creams were developed to fulfil a precise demand of Indian consumer, the survival of the industry now depends on the

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perpetuating mindset of the consumers wanting fair skin. All feel about the advertisements shown. The first advertisement eminent cosmetic companies strengthen this sentiment by viewed and analyzed was P&G's 'Touch the Pickle' campaign roping in famous celebrities for endorsement to be persuasive for sanitary napkin brand Whisper. The 30-second film shows a girl touching a jar of pickle accidentally, while her grandmother and her grandmother's friends, the film then shows the girl product will satisfy the need with an emotional quotient added to going on to break a few more taboos for girls on their periods. it. Changing trends in Indian Advertising: Ever since She is seen wearing whites and being active in sports, while the Independence, Indian advertising has undergone sea changes. elderly women are cheering for her. (Image 2.1)

The period of mid-sixties showcased some sales oriented advertising which was further characterized by more aggression than ever before. On the contrary the period of urbane advertising at the beginning of 80's bought a consumer boom in the country, with increased use of sophisticated and professional, emotional values and appeals that were used to make the advertisements more entertaining and pleasing. Keeping in consideration the product's features, each product not only tried to create a position in consumer mind but also their cultural and social beliefs. It should not be thought, however that stereotyping is necessarily unhealthy, for it does serve the function of simplifying the complexity of social interaction. Stereotyping can be helpful for it alleviates ambiguity and enables a fairly rapid and easy evaluation of people and objects. On the other hand, it may give too simplistic an evaluation and lead to the formation of prejudices and to discriminatory behavior. It is thus important to ascertain the national stereotypes or images existing in a particular market. While positive images can be easily used to advantage, it is far more difficult to overcome negative images. Besides myths surviving in advertising strategies, few common age old beliefs about Indian Advertising are-

- Creative ads sell
- It works only for some business (well every business needs to create some buzz at least)
- It is needed only when business is slow/ when product is not good (products like Apple break all such taboos)
- It is an added expense to business (it's rather an investment)
- Advertising creates consumer needs

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the present day advertising consumers tend to trust the product being advertised with a myth. There is a diversity of possible reactions with a probability that people don't understand the "core message".

## OBJECTIVE

My study will justify the notion that how Advertising efforts leave their imprint on culture, be it negative or positive. There is no one mythology for the world today, in fact people have their own mythologies either reframing old ones or creating new ones giving birth to the diversified perception towards prevailing myths in Indian advertising.

## METHODOLOGY

For examining the notion of Myths & Mythologies surviving in Indian Advertising, an Inductive & Qualitative research approach was adopted. A set of randomly selected 25 people from different cultures and religious backgrounds were made to view three TV commercials portraying a similar common theme, 'Myths' prevailing and pertaining and possessed by Indian society. Later certain questions were asked related to how they



2.1 P&G "Whisper" TVC

The second advertisement analyzed was for Kellogg's published on May 30, 2012 showcasing a house wife with a sexy slim figure and husband can just not his eyes off her.



2.2 Kellogg's Special K advertisement

The campaign boasts of the challenge to all women as to tell when was the last time your husband gave you that second look, which was completely unexpected by you. The Third emotional advertisement campaign of Dabur Vatika titled #BraveandBeautiful (image 2.3) The film takes a look into the life of a cancer survivor and the challenges faced by them. The commercial shows a young mother who is a Cancer survivor, trying to get her 'normal' life following her cancer treatment. Having lost her hair, the film begins with her looking at an old picture of hers in the morning. As everyone leaves for work, the young woman prepares for her first day back in office. At first she tries to hide her bald scalp but eventually she decides to wear a saree as her husband displays her bald head, as her spoils from war. As the woman enters her office, she seems hesitant thinking about the reactions people will give on her appearance, but the hesitance is soon put to rest as her colleagues lovingly embrace and welcome her back. One by one, all the ladies take off their bindis and place it

on the side of her head, an act that symbolises the warding off of negative energy. The film ends with a shot of the teary eyed lady with the writing, "Some people don't need hair to look beautiful."



.3 Dabur Vatika 'Bold & Beautiful' TVC

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Themes explored with the three campaigns-

- a. Subliminal Messages
- b. Consumer's Reaction
- c. Potential Effects on consumer behaviour

The participants strongly reacted to-

- a. Objectification of Women
- b. Exaggeration of the concept/ topic
- c. Alluring jargon

The First Advertisement of a sanitary napkin brand is objectifying a woman and her associating feeling in a more confident manner. Myths and mythologies are an integral part of Indian culture. But when it becomes affected within one section of society, so much that it becomes the unspoken rule, someone has to take a stand. The campaign was thus an effort of revolution, asking every Indian women to step out of the menstruation-prone taboos that they have grown up and living with. According to the P&G-IPSOS survey, 50 per cent of urban Indian women still follows the age-old beliefs that range from washing their hair only after the fourth day of the periods, not watering plants during those days, or the much talked about touching pickle jars. Regional variations were also seen of related tabooed whereabouts. Women debarred of freedom to choose better for themselves are still seen suffering due to their ignorance and indecisiveness. The participants believed and agreed that their social context inspires creative thinking and creative communication which in turn impacts society and shape social fabric by an in-depth understanding of what a woman wants. The Second advertisement seems a little strange to the participants to be found in a TVC of this sort. Merely by looking at the ad it became quite evident that it was targeted towards woman and a stereotype belief that they need to be dieting and eating healthier to maintain a slim weight in order to look attractive, attention seeker and be accepted. The ad giving off the cultural message that these are the main priorities in a woman's life; to be a sexual being subjective to the man and to maintain a good slim figure through eating these healthy, low calorie, snacks. The Third advertisement surpasses the talked about myth surviving over the years, that beauty is attached with hair and hence this commercial is a bold step in the effort to be something "different". Cosmetics enhance external beauty but with this film, our idea is to take a much more meaningful stance on beauty and go beyond the physical appearance of a woman. A woman is stronger (than a man) when it comes to

## ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The global reach of such advertisements in present day scenario results in finding a way in the consumer's minds, and allowing better recall of the brand's name. It enables to develop a mind-set with a sufficiently strong impression and a perception that women have been and will be treated as an object. Such advertisements also leads to formation of prejudices and to discriminatory behaviour. It also stimulated the depiction of not necessarily how we actually behave as Men & Women but how we think Men & Women Behave. Today when Indian advertising has undergone a sea change, these advertisements have also come up brought a transition in society with empowering women customers by portraying their aspirations & taking life changing decisions and most importantly hitting the proposition "anything related to sex is a forbidden topic" with a change.

## CONCLUSION

Advertising industry in India has come off age and shown rapid growth in the last decade. Changing social trends have been the main reasons contributing to such high growth. Indian advertising has advanced over last 70 years, replicating the change that the country's society has experienced. Today being an integral part of the globalized world, consumers are no longer a product of our traditions. The market is only waiting to cash in on people's hidden aspirations. In the process of selling a product, idea or service advertisements tend to induce supplemental images, exaggerated claims in form of superlative degrees. Some of these contribute to the growth or provoke some undesirable facets of the society's functioning. Growing consumerism and overdose of mindless entertainment is the trigger to current age advertising. Indian advertising till date reflect their perennial connection with mythologies giving a root cause to the surviving myths. Rasas in Indian mythologies do give us the appeals for effective communication reciprocating a strong impact on consumer viewership and acceptance to pursue advertising lifestyle. Indian advertising has always been a people business and that is the reason it still doesn't fully imitate the diversity prevailing in the society. And people are still linked to their roots and have strident points of view leaving very little room for experimentation. The campaigns do have a significant impact but at the same time, like an old said belief "every little drop fills the ocean" at the very least it is also triggering some thought. Indian consumers had certain myths but slowly gradually these have been redressed. Not only modern masses, but even conservative people are now prone to change their thinking. The process of Globalization is interposing dramatic changes in Indian life styles with profound magnitudes than are apparent virtually. Gradually the world that we are moving in, competition is getting ferocious with each passing day. New markets have been captured giving way to economic liberalization which is further intended to develop a system free from all rigidities, discriminative bureaucratic controls. Realising the life with a socio-economic role today people have accepted advertising as a whole. They know that advertising is contributory in raising their standards of living seeking its incredible ability as an informer, educator,



entertainer and a trend setter. Indian Advertising is all set to become a revolutionary medium of cultural change. "Many nations of consumers talk and live like ads," Advertising is not just a mirror but has also turned to "a perception creator". Set formulas are at play and diversity is just a spoken word, but we are progressively seeing the flicker of changes.

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