

# Indian Television Commercials in Transition: A Study of New Emerging Practices

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## Abstract

Mostly television channel's commercials were flooded with the trend of product-centric advertisements. We have observed that the commercials in general, laud the product specifications and its features, which repeat the same product features again and again. Interestingly, in the last decade commercials have been shifted moreover from product-centric ads to more creative ads that talk about an idea, which is close to the brand values. Some popular television commercials talk about certain ideas and take up deeper consumer insights instead of harping on the product solely. Television Commercials (in short i.e. TVCs) are going beyond the product features' details by setting with a new advertising communication strategy. TVCs are being used for the social approach along with their commercial motives. Therefore in this study, we have traced these changes of television commercials and analyzed also the television commercials' aesthetics values, the presentations style, and the social content behind it, which made this type of commercials worth watching.

## Keywords:

Indian advertising • Television commercial • Contemporary advertisement, Creative ads • Engaging content ads

## Introduction

Advertising, being a significant and an integral part of media has an important role in the communication field. Advertising influences not only the marketing strategy but also the communication strategy as well; in marketing strategy to the promotion of the product or service, and in communication strategy to construct the opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and mindset of the people. The messages of ads have potential to influence the attitudes and behaviours [1-3] and they are often powerful, persuasive and influential in shaping the attitude and behaviour of consumers [4,5] and this potential get more effective in case of television medium. Therefore, it becomes important that the message should be good, healthy, positive and deeper insight idea to get a favourable approach towards itself.

Television, an audio-visual medium, is a popular and effective tool for advertising due to its pervasiveness, impact and targeting abilities. The television channels are flooded with advertisements, and if we look at ads, we find that they laud the product specifications and harp about the product over and over again in general. Commercials are product-centric in general, that ingeminate the product and its features repeatedly; which could be the reason that audiences have the avoidance behaviour towards ads. These commercials are often showpiece with a photo of the celebrity holding the product and

harping specifications, for example, Wheel surf, Harpic cleaner, Fair and Lovely cream, Colgate active salt, Revital capsule etc. Television commercials, in general, are boring, silly, offensive, misleading, and not good enough to watch them [6-8]. In addition, Saiganesh and Parameswaran [9] studied the avoidance behaviour of audience towards television advertisements, and found that audiences do not watch the advertisements if they are irritating, uninteresting and meaningless; obscenity and too much of vulgarity in the ads which are not relevant to the product, and such disgusting ads are disliked by audience. They further stated that to get the returns the ad creators should focus on the quality of the ads, and should be created with likeable factors, which are watchable again and again.

However, a few changes we are coming to see from the past decade; changes in the content and message quality of commercials, has been valued more or the less. The quality of a few commercials' content is developed considerably over the past 10 years, and it is in a continuous process towards the betterment. It has emerged a new practice of qualitative ads, which can catch the attention of the audience towards television commercials; and this is the creative and sensitive power of an ad. Ads are coming with great stories with sensitivity and meaningful information that are worthy of their time. The Father of Advertising, David Ogilvy, attributed to Howard Gossage, said that "Advertising justifies its existence when used in

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the public interest-- It is much too powerful a tool to use solely for commercial purposes.”

Josy Paul, a chief creative officer of BBDO, tells in an interview with Quartz, the Indian ad world is moving away from slogans and taglines and has become a platform for change. “All through 2016, there was a trend of media houses getting into the creative and content territory. Media planning agencies have started getting into content creation as they are close to media opportunities” [10].

K.V. Sridhar, a former chief creative officer of Leo Burnett, who tells Quartz in an interview, “In his career spanning over 30 years in Indian advertising, He has never seen before such a wave of bold, socially-charged commercials as he has in the past decade. Indian brands ditching the mundane product-driven ad approach, switching to campaigns that carry a social message on everything from gender inequality to homosexuality taboos to political apathy” [11].

Therefore, such transition in television commercials has been traced and identified the new advertising practices that have evolved from the crazy product-centric messaging to new marketing communication strategies i.e. based on various social issues, with the pinch of social awareness, gender sensitization, breaking stereotypes, innovative content, and the great real stories.

## Methodology

An exploratory approach is employed to study the new emerging practices for advertising. For this, the samples of television commercials are collected through the convenient sampling technique from its digital version availed on YouTube. The inclusive criterion while selecting the sample was that if it is as an innovative content with the pinch of various social approaches. The time period for samples selection is this past decade, from 2008 to 2018 in Hindi and English both languages. To examine the new practices of television commercials, this study utilized a content analysis method to understand content nature in particular.

## Results and Discussion

Total 23 commercials of various brands have been extracted to analyze new emerging practices for this study purpose. These commercials have been tabulated with the stance each product has adopted that elicited the information needed to attain the objectives of the study. The table is categorized into five sections to gain information. Let’s see the table below for descriptions of data collection.

Sl. no	Product	Campaign slogan	Year	TVCs Name	Message or Content
1	Tata tea	Jaago re (wake up)	2008	one billion votes	Awakening nation to participate in functioning of the country's politics by voting
2	Tata tea	Jaago re	2010	khilanaBandPilanashuru	To discourage bribery and

					zero tolerance to corruption
3	Tata tea	Jaago re	2011	Sochbadlo	Sharing message of positivity with positive stories
4	Tata tea	Jaago re	2012	Chhotishur uaat	To take initiative for women's rights and safety
5	Tata tea	Jaago re	2013	Power of 49 kaalateeka	On women's empowerment, encourage women for their power of 49% of the electorate across India
6	Havells wire	Wires that don't catch fire	2011	Mother-Son	Slumdweller made a tongs of wire for his mother to use in cooking breads, so that she couldn't burn her fingers
7	Havells fans	Hawabadle gi	2013	Maid dining	Shows love and respect all
8	Havells fans	Hawabadle gi(winds of change)		Conversion	Talks about conversion the habit from smoker to non-smoker instead of the religion
9	Havells fans	Hawabadle gi		Old age home	Young urban couple adopting an aged person
10	The Hindu	Behave yourself India, the youth are watching	2012	Class room	In a classroom, teacher asks to play a political discussion with proper parliamentary behaviour, hence in between, class starts shouting and fighting, as same that

					happens in the parliament					all spheres of life and appeals to unite for their equal-half instead of better-half
11	Idea cellular	An idea can change your life	2013	Taxi wala	Shows honesty of a socio-economically underprivileged person, and appeals 'to kill the Raavan inside' and alive virtues					
12	Bournvita	Aadatein (habits)	2013	Boxer, Race	Associated with the girl-child, plays typical sport, as protagonist for product that was earlier with boys					Encourage 'Pre-activism', urging people to take the pledge in support of teaching gender equality to 14 children
13	Havells appliances	Respect for women	2014	Coffee maker, Mixer grinder	Shows in a funny way that women are not always for household jobs, it could also be done by a man easily through the Havells appliance					Shows how parents consciously or unconsciously teach children to be gender biased in common routine
15	HP laptop	Bend rules the	2014	I like your soch, but love my approach	Breaks the oldies corporate biasness, traditional prejudice and salutes young generation 's for its new approach to life					To defeat failure, changes our perspective on failure and encourage to look it as a learning experience
16	Dettol soap	Banegaswachh India (clean India)	2015	Dettol kadhula	Promotes hand washing habits among young children and their mothers in an engaging and entertaining manner					Shatters stereotypes by saying-cleanse all the dirt of mind, and works on basic human insight
17	United Colors of Benetton	United by half	2017	United by half	Highlights that women must be treated equally in					A successful young girl from a middle class family makes a video-call to her parents, shows that she is in a 5star hotel room, her achievements make her parents proud.
18	Tata tea	Alarm bajne se pahleJaag ore	2017	(wake up before the alarm rings)						Inequality getslearntE quality needs teaching
19	Tata tea	Alarm bajne se pahleJaag ore	2017							Let's practice gender sensitivity at home
20	Surf Excel	Daagachhe hain (stains are good)	2017							Haarkoharao
21	Ghadi detergent	Saare mail dhodalo (cleanse all the dirt)	2017							Festive ads
22	Airtel	The smartphone network	2015							Video calling, Boss

23	Tanishq	Wedding jewellery	2013	Remarriage	Featuring a woman's second marriage to a man who treats her and her daughter with love and respect.
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**Table 1.** Descriptions of data collection.

Therefore, if we see these commercials enlisted on the table, we find that the advertising sector has undergone evolution considerably over the past 10 years. The storytelling in commercials has matured and creative in a healthy manner, and brands are experimenting with fresher and innovative ways to connect with their audience on television in India. The change of scenario has been little short of revolutionary. The commercials' content is shifting their focus from product specifications to brand relationship building. Thus, the brand marketers and advertisers are looking for new content, trying for new ad ideas through some impactful practices, which the researcher identified as given below particularly (Table 1).

### Commercials talk about ideas and brand values with the pinch of Social Awareness

One of the first and most-fashionable trends or practices that are followed by advertisers. They are coming with commercials on various social issues, political, environmental, health and other issues, getting people to think about social concerns, which are important for rising public supporting and affecting meaningful changes. For instance, in Tata tea ads instead of talking directly about tea product, it creates awareness about the value of one vote, which is completely different from traditional ads. Not for a single moment, Tata tea discusses the product's quality and the question raised here that why should buyers buy only Tata tea since potential buyers don't get the details about the quality of this product. There are several brands of tea. It's interesting to observe the shifting patterns of ads filmmaking. Now ads don't talk directly about the product's features. In Tata tea case, Tata Company is promoting the 'brands large value' while creating awareness about the civil rights and values of election voting. Indirectly, these brands are creating good values for their products. Buyers buy a certain product because of the particular brand values. Table serial no.7, 8, 9, 10 commercials are on love and respect, religion, adaptation and on parliamentary behavior. In Havells fans, a 28 seconds long ad takes an initiative to adapt the old aged person by the young urban couple. This short duration commercial depicts the message boldly and widely rather harping

Fans product, which makes it completely different from the other similar fans product commercials.

Moving further, in table serial no.16 and 20, the social message of the importance of cleanliness and a healthy lifestyle are highlighted. These commercials are on hygiene and sanitation with its 'Dettol ka Dhula' campaign promotes hand-wash habit, and 'dirt is good' philosophy that bonds the parent-child relationship and advocates that getting dirty is good if it is for a good cause.

### Gender sensitization through commercials while promoting their brands

Another interesting practice has emerged in the last decade that some ads are promoting the ideas of feminism and women empowerment. The paradigm shifts in gender-based ads are very important because historically, ads have been misogynist and sexist. And this misogynist values has been celebrated not only in India but all over the world. Women are being portrayed as mere domestic roles and sex objects in almost every ad since ages; But now the structure of some ads have been changed in a gender-sensitive way and moved towards women empowerment. For example, Havells 'Respect for Women' with a long series of commercials to advertise several electronics and home appliances, discard the idea that women were expected to cook food, make coffee and do the ironing. This campaign gives a bold sound to women by saying 'I am not a kitchen appliance', makes it outstanding. These ads are created by Lowe Lintas in an entertaining manner, which connects their product with gender sensitivity while promoting the brands.

Table serial no. 17 commercial focuses on women to be treated equally not only in the public sphere but also in the private sphere as well. In this ad, there is no information about the product (as ads are generally supposed to be with) but filled with ideas and brand values with the pinch of gender knowledge. Serial. no. 18 and 19 commercials are towards women's equality by showing the ugly face of the society that vividly prevalent. These ads are urging to practice gender sensitivity from the home first because parents knowingly or unknowingly teach children to gender-biased in common routine. It encourages to pre-active by saying 'wake up before the alarm rings'. Thus, TVCs are now in vogue with the positive image of women and portraying in different capacities.

### Breaking stereotypes and tackling taboos

Advertisers took up this practice to get on better terms with the stereotypes, prejudices and social norms. Before further discussion here, first, we understand the stereotype; it is a generalized image, idea or belief about a particular type of person or thing. The stereotype is an oversimplified mental picture that is applied almost everywhere. Generally, we see it associated with gender value, but except this, it is also with other common social values. A stereotype can be on the basis of age, economic status, class, religion, cast, creed, ethnicity and many more. Indian television advertising has started reflecting to break norms and challenge stereotypes, though the ad world has to come a long way to attack social stereotypes.

In the table, sl. no. 12, 15 and 21 commercials are on gender stereotype, age stereotype, and social stereotypes respectively. HP 'Bend the Rules' TVC by BBDO ad agency, breaks the oldies corporates biases, which is completely different in the Indian ad world. It salutes the young generation for its new approach to life with titled, 'I like your soch but love my approach'. Havells fans 'Registrar's office' TVC featured a newly married couple at an office for their marriage registration, where the husband explains that rather changing her wife's surname he would like to adopt her surname. Ghadi, a detergent brand has just unveiled a new campaign by ADK Fortune agency, which tries to shatter stereotypes and works on the basic human insight.

Taboo topics such as menstruation, transgender, same-sex relationships and more have begun to be openly discussed. For instance, Whisper 'Touch the Pickle', a PandG's sanitary napkin brand bust periods taboos and age-old beliefs relating to menstruation commonly found in India. This commercial has also been the winner of Grand Prix in Cannes Lions. Havells fans 'Mother-Daughter' TVC for southern India shows helping and supporting approach to a girl child and treats in the same way even in her weaker (menstrual) days. Moreover, homosexuality which is still a crime in India, the past few years have seen a number of campaigns attempting to normalize it on screen.

## Conclusion

By seeing the above commercials towards these emerging practices it can be said, that commercials containing important social messages will capture a bigger market share in the coming years. Although, these are only some handful of ads in this huge world of television commercials; but no doubts, ads are tending toward such practices and going beyond the product by setting with a new advertising strategy. Commercials are now relevant to the social concern instead of relevant to the product. It tends to be looked at as a function of its ability to fulfil advertising and communication objectives. These television commercials have not compromised with entertainment values; in fact, it is more engaging and entertaining while talking about social awareness in a positive sense. The entertaining value is now healthy with the sensitive approach, instead of being the absurd, obscene and silly approach of entertainment. Hence, the way of the future is social content advertising that delivers authenticity and visual power which brands need to reach the world, and it can be said that this is the era of a new face of advertising.

The researcher reports, that Tata tea and Havells are the most responsible towards society among others as on the table. These two brands' focus has a through the years; their plenty of ads on social awareness with various topics are contributing a revolutionary role, which could be an example setter that how to play social responsibility through the advertising. The other thing that has been noticed is 'Lowe Lintas' advertising agency that played a leading role in trending such effective side of advertising strategy. The maximum commercials of brands and campaigns are conceptualized and created by Lowe Lintas ad agency; it improved the standards of ad-making and captured positive attention in the Indian ad world.

Beyond jingles and copies, the content plays a remarkable role in successful advertising. Advertising communication should remain user-conscious, meaningful and touching. A recent phenomenon is the ability of ads to get a product or service to sell while conveying bold, social messages subtly. Not all, of course, but some ads that leave a lasting impression; because the best creative knows the key to winning over consumers is to like stories that are worthy of their time. Therefore, these practices could be an overall new beginning towards a change; and hopefully, we soon witness the change.

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