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MATERIALIZING CULTURE: A STUDY ON POSTMILLENNIAL ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT



Now Advertising has become a popular subject of study, approached from a wide range of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, literary criticism, and media studies. In effect, advertisements create a world, which is suitable to the needs of the fast growing business empires and also configure the systems of life and culture in accordance with the newly emerging purposes that markets have. They seem to be as the royal proclamations to the whole world, delivered by the ruling, competing multinational companies (the local markets are also not exceptional). The world of advertisements is carnivalesque in nature. For Bakhtin carnival is associated with collectivity. Here also the world of advertisements constitutes a collective body of real-unreal people. It is noted that as like a carnival, advertisements also create the chance for a new perspective and a new order of things, by showing the relative nature of all that exists. The popular tradition of carnival was believed by Bakhtin to carry a particular wisdom which can be traced back to the ancient world. This paper is, primarily, a cultural study of the market ideologies behind the production of advertisements. This study tries to analyse certain advertisements as well as their taglines in terms of their representation of culture, and the process of making value systems in accordance with their needs, and examines how these systems of representations copy and overturn the same old codes of values. This paper also examines certain key words such as purity/clean, trust/belief and attempts to study the materialization of these words for practical purpose. This study inquires the deep rooted notions of carnivalesque elements and approaches in the making and the functioning of postmillennial advertisements as well.

KEYWORDS: Advertisement, Carnaval, Festivity, Purity, Trust



INTRODUCTION

Culture is now a broad category of study. Raymond Williams, an illustrious thinker of late twentieth century, confesses that "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams 87), which explicates the semantic load within the word. Here it indicates "A particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or humanity in general" (Williams 90), as propounded by Raymond Williams. So it is obvious that culture is inextricably linked with people as well as society. Many writers and theorists such as Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon etc. have pointed out the significance of communication within the discourse of culture. N Gugi Wa Thiongo, one of the highly reputed post colonial writers, emphasizes that "Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (Thiong'o 153). These words undoubtedly state the kind of relation between language and culture, and the inevitable bond between literature and culture. Through literary works, writers communicate with readers in a different fashion, and that language of communication actually comes from the context of culture

As like so-called literature and other kinds of artistic expressions advertisements as a language has created a very solemn space in the domain of culture. Now Advertising has become a popular subject of study, approached from a wide range of disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, literary criticism, and media

studies. It is true that through the years of experience and experiments today it has acquired a particular position, especially in the discourse of cultural studies. During the time of boom in the sensibilities of both visual and print media advertisements, as a media of expression, get affected as much as the genres such as cinema, theatre, channel shows, video games...etc. Many times the language of advertisement enabled to determine the modality of expression in other visual and print Medias.

MATERIALIZING CULTURE

In terms of the material world, advertisements, so to speak, are a quintessential part of today's business world. In effect, advertisements create a world which is suitable to the needs of the fast growing business empires and also configure the systems of life and culture in accordance with the newly emerging purposes that they have. They seem to be as the royal proclamations to the whole world delivered by the ruling, competing multinational companies (the local markets are also not exceptional). In other words, what they are doing is to publish their concerns about the world through their products, that means ads are more than informing thing in the world. While analyzing advertisements, it is obvious that the values and perspectives that they supply, is so crucial especially considering their dominating nature.

This paper tries to analyse certain advertisements as well as their taglines in terms of their representation of culture, and the process of making value systems in accordance with their needs, and examines how these systems of representations copy and overturn the same old codes of values. This paper also examines certain key words such as purity/clean, trust/belief and

attempts to study the materialization of these words for practical purpose. This study inquires the deep rooted notions of carnivalesque elements and approaches in the making and functioning of advertisements as well.

In what way advertisements interact with human consciousness? This is a very serious issue, because the world around us stands on the feet of perceptions and interrelations among human being as though today it is extended to such a distance whereas the machines are also part of this web of bonding. The history of adds probably, starts with the beginning of language, or rather by drawing, which enables cavemen/cavewomen to inform or (advertise) something, may be a feeling ...to the dearer ones as part of their mutual existence. During these earlier periods as pointed out by many historians there were no divisions in their code of justice, that means the law and order, which was part of their life, was one among their systems of moral codes. But probably certain laws must be carefully implemented to their ritualistic life, where alternations were not possible, though; there were some flexible ones which would be extended or rather sidelined. Yet all these were integral to their moral consciousness. But later capitalism engages with the mass culture and its varying consciousness. It is the point where the tensions in so called-advertisements are actually pronounced.

POSTMILLENNIAL ADVERTISEMENTS

The world of advertisements is carnivalesque in nature. For Bakhtin carnival is associated with collectivity. Here also the world of advertisements constitutes a collective body of real-unreal people. They are real, yet they are different from their

original identities or from surroundings, as in the many other form of artistic expression. To be specific, A carnival is a moment when everything (except arguably violence) is permitted. It occurs on the border between art and life, and is a kind of life shaped according to a pattern of play. It is usually marked by displays of excess and grotesqueness. It is a type of performance. As like a carnival, advertisements also pose a space where everything is possible. For example the ads of scent "Axe" and "Vodafone zoo zoo" expose an align world which is strictly away from the so called human world. The faces that come across while watching the visual of "Domex bathroom cleaner" the viewers get confused due to the presence of ugly creatures on the screen. Here the possibility of presenting the impossible is obvious. Moreover, it is certain that ads lie in between art and life. Though it is an artistic creation, its major purpose is something different, in other words adds stands in-between art and life such as carnival. The element of playfulness is implicated within the text of add in many ways. Sometimes it may be the logic that is presented by the ad, for example, "surf excel" uses the tagline -"stain is good", in which the play is constituted by two small children and the situation is funny. On the other side the abundance of material, especially in the ads of jewels, food products, etc. shows another sense of play in the advertisements.

It is noted that as like carnival advertisements also create the chance for a new perspective and a new order of things, by showing the relative nature of all that exists. The popular tradition of carnival was believed by Bakhtin to carry a particular wisdom which can be traced back to the ancient world. For Bakhtin, carnival and carnivalesque create an alternative social

space, characterized by freedom, equality and abundance. The body is here figured not as the individual or 'bourgeois ego' but as a growing, constantly renewed collective. On a different plain, the same ideology works in ads. While looking at the ads of beauty soaps and protean rich powders, the visuals emphatically establish the new overarching truths –your body is continually changing, and to acquire a proper level of growth is very vital in the world of inequality. Therefore you must accept us (product). So this alternative space is worth looking at, and, to practice it, is much better than any other actions that you can perform in the long run of life.

Like carnival in many instances its defining feature is festivity – life lived as festive. Advertisements of foods, jewels, cosmetics and vehicles clearly depicts the life as a festival and offer a life full of festivity, joy, comforts and equality in material level. Carnival is also taken to provide a positive alternative vision, which is also true in the case of ads. Sometimes the kind of wisdom that is uttered or portrayed in the ads overpowers other dominant mainstream wisdoms. It is not simply a deconstruction of dominant culture, but an alternative way of living based on a pattern of play. "An emphasis is placed on basic needs and the body, and on the sensual and the senses, counterpoised perhaps to the commands of the will. It lowers the spiritual and abstract to the material level. It thus recognizes embodiment, in contrast with dominant traditions which flee from it" (Bakhtin 34). Generally speaking, carnival is more expressive rather than instrumental. But unlike carnival, here the whole process is instrumental –finally profit making in aim. But apart from 80s and 90s now the element of expressivity is gaining much current because of the competition in the field of

advertisements. Time and space are rearranged in different ways, whereas the audience cannot detect/identify very easily. But as in the case of carnival the agenda is to promise an ideal land and for that everything is visualized in a mood of celebration and laughter. Bakhtin portrays carnival as a positive, creative process which continues to carry the creative spirit, which is valid in the case of ads too.

According to Bakhtin "the carnival was laughter, the bodily, parody, the ugly the grotesque and so called low" (Bakhtin 5). The kind of laughter that is produced by certain ads can be seen as carnivalesque. For example, 'Vodafone zoo zoo' ads invited an attention towards the products and the advertisement as such. What is special about is its way of presentation and the humor that it generated. In a different way it parodies certain human nature, though it is not much obvious from the ads. These series of ads mocks at the human follies and short comings in a subtle way, but the purpose is not that one- purely business oriented.

The kind of body involved in that ad is also considered in carnivalesque sense. Especially in the ads of 'deodorants' and 'soaps' the human body occupies a central position. It presents the unpleasant aspects of the body in an exaggerated way, which is again carnivalesque in narration.

The ads of perfumes, toilet cleaners and even certain toothpastes are perfectly showing elements of grotesque. Such ads are created by graphics and other hi-tech technologies, which is very much critical in the process of profit making. Bakhtin says that the laughter is not sanctioned by the government or authority. But here there is a slight difference. Because the business world is the one of the primal force that

drives the government and our democracy. So in that way it is partly government sanctioned/ sponsored laughter.

MATERIALIZING VALUES IN THE ADOPTED SPACE

In advertisements taglines occupies a very central position. Tagline is a slogan which succinctly, memorably and descriptively sums up a company or a product. The art of crafting a tagline is quiet complex and several consulting companies actually specialize in creating taglines for their clients. A well constructed tagline can endure in the minds of consumers for years. Some taglines have actually outlived their products. Once a company has a tagline, it includes the tagline in all its marketing materials to get the tagline into the minds of consumers so that they think about that company frequently. A wide range of industries use taglines. Movies are famous for them; the taglines of many films have entered popular culture, regardless as to the quality of the film itself.

A product tagline is usually included in commercials and print advertisements, and sometimes on the product packaging as well, so that if someone remembers hearing about a "quicker picker-upper" on television, they can figure out which brand of paper towels the advertisement referred to. Organizations also use taglines to brand themselves and their family of products. Apple wants its users to 'think differently' for example, and Allstate lets its customers know that they are in 'good hands'.

In case of taglines they are actually working in a different way. In visual representation, an ad can travel any extent, but in case of tagline it has certain limitation, because it is primarily language. Here is the materialization of certain key ideas of the external world is going with the flavor of

new shapes. In case of advertisements they are using the images from the age old feudal concepts. Paradoxically, the product should be the highest post modern in the sense. Here the major concern of the company is to increase profits, therefore the advertising agencies, to a great extent prefer something that is within the minds of the audience for presenting the product. The ad of 'Asian paint' is the best example for that. Here the story comes in relation with a teacher and his ex-student. When he came to the house of his master after a long time and understand the pathetic situation of the master and his residence, and, as a result of that meeting he changed the paint and bring back the happiness and proud of his master. The relation between a student and his teacher is deeply rooted in the psyche of our culture. And they use it as their prop for finding a huge market for their product. In this way the so-called progressive, capitalist business world utilizes the age old cultural codes to promote their products and more than that they are also building certain fundamental concrete- concepts in the business world using certain 'abstract' words.

For example, the use of the word belief/ trust in taglines can be analyzed to understand the kind of materialization. Generally speaking, the term belief/ trust is very much associated with religion and specifically the moral world that we have. It is primarily an ideological construction. It is true that to a great extent these words never used in the matters of the temporal world. The Buddha considered true belief as primal to his eight folding path. Jainism also valued true belief as key to the doctrines of Mahaveera. Vedanta school talks of belief in god. The term *Maya* disfigures genuinely of all other material existent and considered



life as a mortal. According to them through the true belief in god anyone can achieve salvation. Christ once said that "your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50, 101). But the capitalist world has been using the term belief for a long time for promoting their products. Here the corporate companies are trying to adopt the keystones of human society for creating a similar world in the media, not for mutual existence, but for profit.

They are doing it with artistic skills. The analysis of the taglines of banks provides ample evidences for that. The fastest growing bank S. B. T's tagline is a 'long tradition of trust'. The paradox is, usually they are dealing with the thing that is very much material in nature. But they promote their banking in terms of the cultural norms. So they invite their customers in terms of this special value, and more than that this term is one which actually attracts the consumers. In Indian banks, trust becomes a key word. Especially in Indian culture, belief has secure such a serious position in social bonding. So these banking firms are collaboratly baptizing a new code of justice for money making. Here social responsibility is negligible, because that is here less concern. 'A tradition of trust' (Allahabad bank), 'trusted family bank' (Dena bank) are certain other example.

Yet another interesting example is the ad of Kalyan jewelers. Its tagline '*viswasam athale ellam*' is generating a different kind of feeling in consumers/ audience. Primarily speaking, this ad has any direct connection with the product. This disconnection, but never affects the marketing, instead of that this disconnection becomes a trading mantra. The ad shows the eloping of a girl and her return. A father- daughter relationship is featuring in this add. The

tagline in a sense actually derived its sense from the Christian saying that is "your belief will save you". Though the words are religious in nature, now it is part of the moral conscience of the world, without considering its specific religious background. Companies are actually invoking the old saying for their material needs.

The same happens in the other kind of product which have used the key word trust/belief. 'The most trusted name in news' (CNN), "believe" (Yahoo Personals) 'make believe' (Sony) are also works in this way. In short, what these multinational companies want is the trust in their products which will raise their turn over.

The idea of clean/ pure is also very crucial in an arena of advertisements. Here also companies instantly make their code of neatness. Like the term 'trust' in the banking sector, clean becomes so important in ads of beautifying products. In jewel it is purity that is very marketable. But time to time they are changing their perspective in association with their products.

Yet another important factor is the quality of ads, which is improved to such a level to telecast it as a feature film. These corporate have the idea that it is the ads that bring the consumers into the shops. So obviously the picturing should be important.

A kind of reverse trend is also visible in ads. The advertisement of "surf excel" is the best example for that. The content of the ad is simple. Two boys make quarrel to solve the roadside quarrel between their parents. The ad uses the tagline 'stain is good'. In a conventional point of view stain is something bad for dresses. It disqualifies the value of a dress and that person. But here the idea overturns the existing value, and the situation that they created is strongly

supported their notion. In that way stain becomes something positive.

CONCLUSION

In short, the growth in the field of media has made different kinds of alternative spaces. In case of advertisements, the pillars of its foundation are strong enough to present anything for the human societies and its props are being more and more carnivalesque in content. As part of the making of a new land in media adds are, first conceptualize, and the materializing certain keystones of human bonding, both for existence and money making.

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