

# Transgression of Natural Societal Norms in Light of Indian commercials: An Intercultural Study of Rural and Urban Viewers

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## Abstract:

In very simple terms definition of transgression says that- "It involves a violation of moral or social boundaries" but if we are talking potentially then transgressive narrative themes are also considered as "unsafe" narrative themes. Unsafe because it offers breaking of some firmly set social rules.

This paper is an attempt to present how topics which are considered as transgressive at some period of time are converted to normally acceptable or general topics after some duration in terms of Hindi commercials. In this study an effort is made to analyze the effects of such restricted mentality of society on advertisement creation

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In the second section of the paper we will compare acceptance of these changes in the adverts from the people of two different background (Rural Vs Urban) which in turn deal with the question that how commercials on such topics affects the psychology and thought process of Indian mass..

**Keywords:** Transgression, Media, Advertisements, Commercials, Ethics

## I. INTRODUCTION

The word transgression is originated from Latin word *trānsgressiō* which means stepping across. Therefore etymologically transgression has been defined as the process of "crossing over"; or moving from an ordered rational to an unordered and irrational state. The act of transgression is the transgressing or passing over or beyond any law, it could be civil or moral. The present era may be considered as anti structuralism and anti humanism in terms of media presentations. In fact there is the influence of post structuralism (post structuralism is also based on "violation of fixed social structures"). In contemporary social media time transgression is an important concept because it instigates the idea of boundary crossing especially when we are comparing commercials of olden days to newer ones.

Advertisement or Media Ethics' can be used in different ways. Primarily the "term" refers to recent developments and to the period, approximately in early 1990s, when the term

'Advertisement ethics' came into common use in our

country. Originally this term is used in academy and research. As the term entered more general usage in the media and public

discourse, it often became equated with either "Principles for making commercials or more broadly with what can be called "Advertising ethics in India" framed by Advertising Standards council of India (ASCI) In this broader sense the history of advertisement ethics goes back to the origin of advertisements and ASCI, again taken in a broad sense, meaning commercial exchanges and later meaning is also somehow related to the economic systems as well. The third stand corresponds to a third sense of advertising ethics which refers to a movement within advertisements or the movement too explicitly build new ethics into the structures of corporations in the form of ethics codes, ethics officers, ethics committees and ethics training and to violate old and commonly acceptable societal ethics. The term, moreover, has been adopted world-wide, and its meaning in Europe, for instance, is somewhat different from its meaning in the United States. It is because socially acceptable ethics vary from society to society. This shift

from one set of ethics in any respect to another one is known as transgression.

This study is about comparing the Indian adverts from two different decades, their differences and the perseverance of the mass for these difference. To accomplish the study we will start with an examination of few selected extracts from Indian advertisement industry which includes a comparison between few advertisements of 1990s to those few of 2010s, where different stories are told on the same topic in different era and conventionally considered acceptable and effective though they were not that much acceptable before some time.

Then it will aim to analyze and show how viewers in various ways negotiate their own local orientations to the status of topics as transgressive in respect to the time and local environment and how participants build rapport through their shared alignment to and enjoyment of transgression for sometime earlier. These commercials are established as playfully open and permissive through the time.

Next a peer discussion would be made that how much is it possible to mark out transgression between the ads of ancient times (ads on those restricted topics) which were considered as ban and focused on "rude and forbidden" topics to those of 2010 and although these newsworthy and high-involvement scripts of such commercials diverge radically from prototypical small acts, viewed as phatic communion, they nevertheless meet some of its core criteria-the use of ritualized sequences, the strengthening of relational ties, and low commitment to veracity in past days but at the same time do these commercials of 2010 are acceptable forever.

Finally in the last section of the paper we will have an intercultural study of rural vs urban people related to these changes in the adverts. For this purpose we will collect the data in the form of questionnaire to study and compare acceptance of these changes in the adverts from the people of two different background (Rural Vs Urban) which in turn deal with the question that how commercials on such topics affects the psychology and thought process of Indian mass.

## II. YESTERDAY AND TODAY OF INDIAN COMMERCIALS - A GLIMPS OF TRANSGRESSION

1. Pan Parag- Pan Parag is a popular product even today, but for its commercial years ago bollywood top veteran stars Ashok Kumar and Shammi Kapoor were

cast. The dialogue "baratiyon ka swagat pan parag se kijiye" is still remembered.

Later on the advertisement for the same product came with a new slogan "The choice of young India" in which number of youngsters is shown working and getting success in various sections of job and life.

Point of transgression- This advertisement of 1990s was basically framed on the theme of "Say no to dowry" which also follow some societal norms of that time in a hidden manner. Like – Females were not suppose to take pan parag kind of chewing materials therefore they are shown doing so in the advertisement. On the other hand in the commercials of same brand in 2010s females are presented at the same status as those of men who are sharing all the different sections of life with male and pan parag is choice of both men and women for refreshing themselves.

2. Dhara- A little boy running away from home goes back just at the thought of his mother's "garma garam jalebi"

In recent advertisement of Dhara cooking oil contains number of sections where people are eating delicious food without having any stress for intake of bad cooking oil as these items are made in Dhara cooking oil.

Point of transgression- Innocence of child is presented in a heart touching manner in the commercial of 1990 where even a servant is deeply attached with the family. In the commercial of later time period a background of centered family is presented in all most all the subsections of the commercial.

3. Hamara Bajaj-This old commercial is remembered with its unforgettable slogan "buland Bharat ki buland tasveer- hamara bajaj hamara bajaj". This commercial is also a compilation of number of small-small sections showing people enjoying their lives having two wheelers of Bajaj.

In Scooters were getting replaced by motorbikes, the company was changing, and so was India. The campaign also marked the transition from umbrella branding to individual

Point of transgression- Earlier Bajaj was a brand which represents warmth and family values now it's a tag name which represents youthfulness and irreverence.

4. Asian Paints- The old commercial from Asian Paints touches a cord with people with its portrayal of an

army jawan and his sons eager wait for him during Diwali.

In all advertisements for Asian paints in 2010 one or the other bollywood face is shown, for example Saif Ali Khan, Soha, Dipika Padukon etc. They are presented as an owner of big houses upgrading its beauty with Asian Paints.

Point of transgression- The central theme for the advertisement for 1990s is based on warmth of son-father relationship and a background of combined family is been presented as a support in the advertisement. Advertisements of Asian paints on air during 2010 and so on are based on famous faces where females are stereotyped as a piece of beauty where as major and important role is played by the male character for the brand.

### III. BASIC POINTS OF TRANSGRESSION AND ETHICAL FALLOUTS

Women in marketing communication- How much has really changed?- In 1990s women were often depicted as spouses, homemakers and mothers in advertisements although in reality, background covers the idea where women is characterized as submissive, unintelligent, dependent and preoccupied with their physical appearance in commercials.

During the era of 2010 and so on the sexuality of women is being used to sell a product even though the woman's presence has no legitimate relation to the product. This portrayal of women as highly sexualized is directly connected to today's culture which believes "Sex sells". Very clear example for the above is all the commercials on-air these days for men deodorants and inner wears



In the above advertisement of lux cozy inner wears

presence of female in the background is only as a stereotype of sexual object with no relation to the product.

Masculinity and Representational Practices- Advertising images have typically drawn upon clear cultural categories to depict gendered consumer selves: "advertising agencies have to learn, then employ, quite specific cultural vocabularies as a precondition for advertising specific consumption practices to particular consumer groups [...] Ad agencies must acquire knowledge of consumers' symbolic meaning-systems in order to invest the advertising development process with its culturally meaningful potentiality" (Hackley 2002, 215–16). However, signs of "transgression" have appeared on the representational horizon. Contemporary ads that depict men's bodies in compelling and provocative ways suggest a change in the limits posited by the traditional male gaze of advertising. Earlier the masculinity was represented in a form of

- Alert and conscious of surroundings
- Standing upright
- Eyes open and looking around
- Mean expression on face
- Gripping things tightly with hands
- Hands in pockets
- Serious

But now it is shifted for

- Bodies are controlled
- Physically active
- Looks smart and handsome



Salman Khan in limca advertisement during 1990s



Salman Khan in Dixy Scott advertisement during the decade of 2010

Transgression at the part of role portrayed by Children in advertisements- In commercials during mid of past number of kids appeared in advertisements were very less in comparison to these days and more over their presence was used more for evoking emotions related to childhood, for example innocence, purity, child like love and

affection etc. but now that is overtaken by the commercialization of childhood. As per the legislation meant for the using children in advertisements

a. it shall not directly exhort minors to buy a product or a service by exploiting their inexperience or credulity

b. it shall not directly encourage minors to persuade their parents or others to purchase the goods or services being advertised

but both of the above can be seen in commercials of this decade of 2010

example- Advertisement of Tata salt- where a boy goes to the shop and ask shopkeeper to give him a “shudhdha namak”.

Forbidden themes- A Transgressive narratives- Commercials of 2010 bring a number of forbidden themes to attract customers and increase their sell.

There was on air commercial advertisement of virgin mobile in which a girl confessed to her parents that she is lesbian. Such topics were banned even to discuss in society during 1990s therefore there were no chance to bring it openly in advertisements.

Another case of restricted or forbidden themes can be marked in the advertisements of few cold drinks like Mountain dew (Dar kea age jeet hai) and Thums Up (Aaj kuch tufani karte hai). In these advertisements of above said soft drinks actors are shown performing daring scenes. Such risky and dangerous deeds were banned to show in olden days on any social platform.

Impact on Urban Vs rural Viewers: An Intercultural Study-

In this section we have set of 10 questions related to new Indian adverts on the viewers, their impact and their popularity. This survey was conducted with the help of 150 respondents from each rural and urban background. Most of the respondents are college going students.

#### Research Questions

i) How the youngsters of India perceive the changes from the Indian adverts of two different decades.

ii) Which one the more popular among the youngsters of India.

#### Research Instrument and data collection-

Questionnaire is the main research instrument for this data collection.

#### Population of study-

The respondents for this analysis were students from different age group (under graduation and post graduation), different social background (rural-urban, from different states of the country) and different genders (male and female). Before starting the survey the respondent were informed and shown the adverts analyzed in this paper

#### Data from urban respondents-

S.No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	These changes makes the adverts catchy	31	64	30	11	14
2.	The viewer prefer to see adverts of new trends because of prestige factor	56	23	13	20	38
3.	New adverts can be easily memorized by viewers	35	46	12	23	14
4.	New adverts gain popularity quickly	63	21	15	18	33
5.	Adverts of new trends have a pleasing effect on you	44	31	17	27	31
6.	New adverts provide a sense of modernity	57	26	11	33	23
7.	New adverts make you feel foreign	42	32	13	24	39
8.	New adverts have an appealing effect on people of every age and gender	56	29	16	15	34
9.	New adverts leave a long term effect on the minds of viewers	68	24	10	20	28
10.	New adverts have a stronger impact on people belonging to every class of society	26	38	31	23	32



(ii) Data from rural respondents:-

S.No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	These changes makes the adverts catchy	18	32	47	31	22
2.	The viewer prefer to see adverts of new trends because of prestige factor	26	23	34	42	25
3.	New adverts can be easily memorized by viewers	28	16	21	43	42
4.	New adverts gain popularity quickly	63	20	10	24	33
5.	Adverts of new trends have a pleasing effect on you	22	17	12	57	42
6.	New adverts provide a sense of modernity	53	36	15	23	23
7.	New adverts make you feel foreign	25	22	16	43	44
8.	New adverts have an appealing effect on people of every age and gender	24	31	14	46	35
9.	New adverts leave a long term effect on the minds of viewers	31	21	14	37	47
10.	New adverts have a stronger impact on people belonging to every class of society	21	18	30	44	37

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS-

To analyze and discuss the findings of the data, we consider first two criterion (strongly agree and agree) of the scale as agree and last two (disagree and strongly disagree) as disagree. Then we have converted them into percentage.

Findings for the questionnaire are as follows:

(i) 63.3% urban and 33.3% rural respondents believe that changes in adverts from old to new makes the adverts catchy. 16.6% urban and 35.3% rural respondents disagree to this statement. This denotes that this high percentage of urban students think that changes in adverts make them more special and attractive in comparison to old adverts. Therefore they catch the attention immediately. On the other hand the percentage of students from rural background is very low for the same question which shows that they do not find it more attractive.

(ii) 52.6% urban and 32.6% of rural respondents believe that most of the viewers prefer new adverts in comparison to old adverts because of prestige factor. 38.6% urban and 44.6% rural respondents do not agree with this statement. This group of agreed respondents believes that new adverts are always different and provides newness to the viewers. In turn viewers also memorize these new ways of presentation and use them in their conversation to enhance their prestige. Though followers of this view are comparatively very low in rural

area.

(iii) 54% urban and 29.3% rural respondents agreed that it is easy to memorize new adverts by the viewers though 24.6% urban and 56.6% rural respondents denied for the same question. This also means that new adverts are uncommon and unconventional and this is why they are able to capture mind of viewers. This results to easy memorization of adverts.

(iv) 56% urban and 55.3% rural respondents said yes to the question that "do these adverts gain popularity quickly". 34% urban and 38% rural denied for the same question. Such huge number of responses in favor shows that new adverts make them famous quickly because they carry variation in their expressions from old adverts.

(v) 50% urban and 26% rural responses were in favor that new traditions in making gives adverts a pleasing effect. 38.6% urban and 66% rural respondents said no to the same question. Respondents in favor agreed that rhyming in new adverts amuse them and leaves a positive impact over them.

(vi) 55.3% urban and 59.3% rural respondents believe that new adverts are symbol of modernity. 37.3% urban and 30.6% rural respondents denied this fact. They also believe that in comparison to old adverts new adverts are precise and trendy. These adverts provide sense of newness and advancement.

(vii) 49.3% urban and 31.3% rural respondents think that new adverts make them feel foreign because of new themes and new presentation techniques same as other develop countries. 42% urban and 58% rural were not agreed to this statement. This gives the viewers feel of

non- native instead of local. Though this percentage is less than 50 percent but in comparison to not agreed (42%) and neutral (8.6%) this is quite high as far as urban respondents are considered.

(viii) 56.6% urban and 36.6% rural respondents think that new adverts attract viewers of every age and gender. On the other hand 32.6% urban and 54% rural were disagreeing to the same statement. This indicates that there is no age or gender boundary to observe modern adverts. They are being marked and liked by the people of every age group.

(ix) 61.3% urban and 34.6% rural responses were in favor that new adverts leave a long term effect on the mind of viewers. 32% urban and 56% rural respondents denied for the same question. Again this shows that new adverts have long lasting effect and viewers don't forget them easily.

(x) Only 42.6% urban and 26% rural believe that these new adverts have their strong impact over people from every class and society. Other 36.6% urban and 54% rural were not in favour. However the percentage of urban respondents, in favor is only 42.6 but still majority is in favor that this impacts each and every class of society. on the other hand very less number of rural respondents are in favor.

## V. CONCLUSION-

To analyze and differentiate between advertisements of different decades is to acknowledge their representational power both as cultural artifacts and as bearers of meaning, reflecting broad societal, cultural, and ideological codes. We need to keep in mind those scenes—particularly advertising scenes—are not mere pictures, accurately representing some external world: “the photograph both mirrors and creates a discourse with the world, and is never, despite its often passive way with things, a neutral representation” (Clarke 1997, 27–28). Though the above statement was made for photographs in advertisement but here this is also true for presented scenes in Hindi commercials.

A very clear example was seen on Monday i.e. 26th of January 2015 when news came that four friends were travelling to Agra to see the Taj Mahal have been killed by a train after attempting to take selfies in front of the moving vehicle. They were trying the stunt, according to the survivor, Aneesh. The accident happened on Monday at the railway tracks off Mathura, near capital New Delhi.

Our interpretations are meant to suggest possibilities,

both in terms of what we take as intended messages as well as resistant meanings. Images, saturated by a long cultural history, constitute an engaging and deceptive culturally and historically bound visual language system. Advertising imagery—as a subset within this system—interacts with it, borrowing from and influencing the larger world of visual culture.

The results also indicate that the role of woman in television advertising has changed over the decades. Although, woman in India, are portrayed as traditional and stereo typical over the decades, there is a difference in product categories advertised by them. Advertisers in the decade 2010 are willing to portray woman in male dominated advertisements as compared to advertisers of 1990s. The findings of the study are in sync with those found by Munshi (2000). He states that the portrayal of women has changed, but only slightly.

This analysis has attempted to cover a number of advertisements as possible to study the changing themes and ideas television advertising in India. However, it has not covered all the advertisements and hence future researchers could cover more number of advertisements. Further, the changing portrayal of men and women could also be studied more deeply and a comparative analysis of the two would add more insight to the study.

Here it is also makeable that cultural conceptions of gender identity, sexual fulfillment, and their part in the promised good life of consumer choice will come under intense pressure. Understanding the role that masculinity—and femininity—plays in consumption, visual history, and representation signals a step toward understanding how the market structures and subsumes basic ontological concerns of being, desire, and identity and these are the basic reasons to bring transgression in commercials of any language so is the case with Hindi commercials as well.

Analysis of the data in the second section of the paper clearly proves that the changes in adverts are well noted and marked by the viewers. New adverts are more in focus and noticed by the viewers in spite of the fact that we have good number of viewers who are more in favor of old adverts. If we separately talk about data of urban and rural viewers, most of the urban respondents are in favor of new advertising methods. They enjoy these presentations; they accept that these adverts are effecting them in number of ways. On the other hand Rural respondents are comparatively less in favor. It may be because they are not much exposed to the new cultures

shown in the new adverts.

In order to 'belong' in the global scenario and in the global community, India's advertising industry is far ahead of its times to attain a distinctive identity of its own. This global identity and the need to belong and be at the level of other developed countries, India has been working hard to attain recognition at the international level. Thus the status of new adverts in Indian advertisement industry is overwhelmingly high and equally envious

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