

Breaking Social and Religious Stereotypes through Audio/Visual Advertisement and Audience Perception

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Abstract

There have been recent instances where some of the advertisements invoked the wrath of many social media users. While majority of the irked social media users called it a blatant disregard to the religious sentiments of the majority, the others saw it as breaking the religious and cultural stereotypes. The news about the boycott of such products and vigorous demands for pulling down of such advertisements were taken up by the mainstream media. This magnified the focus on this issue leading to more social media outburst. While there was a perception that majority of the people chagrined at the way advertisements showed some facets of the culture were majorly paid social media trolls, it becomes important to know how the perceptions fare at the ground level in the real world that's beyond the virtualities of the social media. For this purpose, this survey based study was conducted on the respondents who had watched selected advertisements that aimed to break the cultural stereotypes. The survey was conducted using google forms tools and the findings hint towards the majority belief that believes that such advertisements are not insults to the culture but a much needed churning to break the stereotypes that continue to put a segment of the society at a disadvantage. Furthermore the study finding reveal that the perception amongst the male and female respondents differ significantly.

INTRODUCTION

The famous and preeminent brand Cadbury gained praise for a revival of a famous and legendary advertisement that stressed the joy and camaraderie of sharing a bar of chocolate with a female friend celebrating the success of her male friend by dancing on the cricket field.

Cadbury reimagined this same story with one change, it was a guy celebrating a female cricketer hitting a six.

Decades later, what does this gender reveal mean? Is it simply a branding exercise or do advertisements have a social impact?

Are they simply tools to further business interests? Or do the stories and the conversations they provoke have significance beyond their express purpose?

Advertising is a mirror that reflects reality in general except for the distorted image of reality in situations. Advertisers promote the beneficial attributes of the product according to the values of society ignoring the harmful attributes of the product which corrupt the purpose of advertising and enables society to digest new values created by the advertiser as explained in a recent study by

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Raza, Bakar, and Mohamad, (2017). While creating an advertisement an advertiser must be very careful, strictly observing the norms and the values of the society, public opinion, traditions, and contemporary laws (Chan, Tsang, & Ma, 2015).

For some, Media is yet a threat to local cultures and beliefs. The texts and contents of modern mass media are challenging the generations-old customs, traditions, and religious beliefs, which are sacred and not compromise-able. Advertisements present lifestyles of a specific class of society that do not reflect the norms and values of the masses, they have nothing to do with this lifestyle, dressing, and immoral presentation. Advertising influences consciously and unconsciously our social norms and moral values (Okazaki, & Taylor,(2013). Specific dressing, pop culture, and obscenity badly destroy The social and ethical fabric of society as noted by Devedi, (2017).

A lot of time brands create advertisements with a message which questions our religious and cultural beliefs and tries for society to look at things from different perspectives. Even after brands try to put the sensitive issues in the most appropriate ways and raise the right questions, often there are times when the audience does not accept it or some segment of the society gets hurt. Most of the time in return great disapproval and aggression are received from the audience.

This paper is in context to such advertisements which tried to break Cultural or Religious stereotypes from 2017-2021 and received a strong backlash from the society in opposition of these advertisements, also it covers the audience's perception on the same.

CBS News in a comprehensive analysis postulated that in the new media ecosystem of the post-network era, an average American citizen is exposed to over 5000 ads directly and indirectly.

With varying yet comparable levels of internet speed, penetration, and usage, the number can be taken as average for developing countries like India.

Social media has charted a new path for advertising, where the one-way communication has given way to interaction. Instead of simply fighting for the consumer's attention, the new advertising ecosystem seeks to create conversations and engagement.

It is precisely this conversation that makes this study relevant, as these conversations can create a buzz or take the narrative in the other direction with brands at the receiving end of a negative press.

Social Relevance to the Topic

The effects of Advertising have been strong and prevalent across age groups since the time of television and print advertising. American Psychological Association charted a causal path between advertising and lifestyle choices with two seminal studies.

They charted a link between advertising for unhealthy and junk food and childhood obesity. Secondly, between alcohol and tobacco advertising and underage smoking and drinking.

Advertising, Similar to art, sets standards, creates and perpetuates 'the normal' and leads or defines the popular discourse and thus, psychology.

With the advent of social media, advertising has entered an all-pervasive and scrutinized epoch. With conventional gatekeepers and limits of the medium, advertising of the 20th and early 21st century remained within mainstream confines. Whether perpetuating stereotypes or pushing boundaries, advertising has led the way. With a shorter format and a variety of sources, advertising has always experimented with form and expression.

Advertising is a part of the glue that holds our culture together. It allows us to share a common experience in a landscape populated (for the better or worse) by brands, images, logos, and even silly jingles. We define who we are by what we buy and wear because we know the others judge us by what we buy and wear. And advertising influences those judgments. "We understand each other not by sharing religion, politics, or ideas. We share branded things, We speak the Esperanto of advertising, *luxe populi*," says advertising professor and commercial culture observer Twitchell. James Twitchell, *Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Materialism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), xv.

The advertisement Industry is not a newborn industry, we've been seeing this for quite a few years now. Brands use an advertisement to let their audience know more about their product, to put their product in the public's subconscious mind.



Where brands use advertisement to popularise their products, there are times when they do more to it and create something which touches an issue, maybe it is religious or social.

Objective

- Advertising is a part of the glue that holds our culture together, through this research, the research will help us study advertisements that received media attention on the basis of their religious and social depiction breaking stereotypes.
- Some advertisements seemingly take the moral high ground, though appearing to support equality, and overtly demonstrating their opposition to the negative themes in current society, this research will be a report study on advertisements breaking religious and social stereotypes.
- The study aims to understand if an advertisement that is intended to increase sales, can result in detriment in sales if the topic or portrayal is controversial.
- Controversial advertising methods tend to influence the audience in both negative and positive manner. The study will also help us understand the perception of the audience on advertisements that are breaking Social or Religious Stereotype

Hypothesis

- The way any social/religious topic is portrayed in an advertisement determines how consumers think about the brand.
- Most times, consumers do not get bothered by controversial advertisements.
- Despite putting up the issue appropriately, it is mostly not perceived on a positive note.
- Religion-based issues affect the maximum number of audiences.

Review of Literature

Controversy advertising and its background will be defined through business literature. Then psychology and communications literature will be studied to understand the part advertising plays in society, and how it can influence culture and

individuals. "It's difficult to use shock marketing without offending at least a portion of your audience. Some entities have been successful in finding the happy medium between being intriguing and being plain offensive, but for most, it is a struggle. India's diversity makes it hard to implement controversial marketing techniques without being shot down by one group of people or another. Most companies or people who shock their audience understand and accept that they can't be everyone's friends; the profit benefits outweigh the enemies made". Brands can benefit greatly from what is often referred to as "shock marketing." But even with benefits, you will face some losses, you may get new customers but will lose some old ones too. While some advertisers have undertaken controversial advertising campaigns that have been very successful, some have been damaging to the company.

Controversy advertising is a branch of advertising that wasn't officially acknowledged until the 1970s. There are many other similar branches of advertising that it could be mistaken for. Social marketing, for example, could easily be mistaken as controversial advertising, but it is the application of marketing to the solution of social and health problems, such as smoking, etc. The official definition of controversial advertising according to the International Advertising Association is as followed: Any kind of paid public communication or message, from an identified source and in a conventional medium of public advertising, which presents information or a point of view bearing on a publicly recognized controversial issue"(IAA, 1977).

The mere mention of the word "advertising" evokes an instant surge of negative emotions in people who see it as a way for marketers to coerce them into buying something they don't need. - stated by : Barbara Bean-Mellinger in *The Role of Advertising in Society* in *bizfluent.com*.^[ref. 5.1,1] For hundreds of years, advertising has straddled the line between good and evil, having been both the means of spreading the word about life-changing innovations and a convenient way for charlatans to hook their unsuspecting prey. - stated by : Barbara Bean-Mellinger in *The Role of Advertising in Society* in *bizfluent.com*.^[ref. 5.1,1] . Although many consumers find them annoying, advertisements

play a prominent role in shaping opinions about everything from products to politics. A Forbes article (2012) stated: "Advertising plays the same role in your media diet that vegetables play in your regular diet; most of us would prefer to skip that course and go straight to dessert. - stated by : Jasmine Roberts in *The Role of Advertising in Society in pressbooks*. pub.[ref. 5.1,2]

Using controversy in marketing campaigns is something that is becoming more and more acceptable by brands. If done correctly, it can be a great way to get your brand noticed. If it backfires, it can do more harm than good to your brand. - stated by : *International Journal of Social Science in Study on Controversial Advertising in India*. [ref. 5.1,3] . The ethical aspect of Indian advertisement is extremely important for restoration of our Indian culture and heritage. Indian culture is getting diluted by the western culture which influences our country to a great extent. To save our culture, norms and ethics regulations of such unethical advertisements are extremely essential. But today the numbers of unethical and obscene advertisements are increasing in numbers instead of decreasing. (Munjil, 2016) Around 70 percent of people have agreed to the fact that ethical guidelines be set to curb the offensiveness/shocking nature of the advertisements. - stated by : *International Journal of Social Science in Study on Controversial Advertising in India*. [ref. 5.1,3] . Love is a funny thing in India. Love whoever you want, they say. But only if they are of the opposite biological sex and belong to the same caste, class, and religion. Don't forget, they should also make north of seven figures per year. These terms and conditions are never openly discussed. Clearly, a part of the Indian population's conscience agrees that love is love and that superficial constructs like caste, religion, and gender have nothing to do with it. Change begins with us, and anyone in a position of influence choosing to spread this idea of love has always been more than welcome and appreciated, or so we thought. - stated by : *By Meghna Mathew in Tanishq Faces Backlash Over Its 'Ekavam' Ad: What It Says About The Indian Mindset in homegrown.co.in*. [ref. 5.1,4].

Sample

A research sample to a small, manageable version of a larger group. It is a subset containing the

characteristics of a larger population. Samples are used in statistical testing when the population sizes are too large for the test to include in all the possible observations.

The sampling of this research was convenience sampling.

Sample Size

The sample size chosen for the study was 100.

Sampling Method

In statistics, quality assurance, and survey methodology, sampling is the selection of a subset of individuals from within a statistical population to estimate the characteristics of the whole population. Statisticians attempt for the samples to represent the population in question.

The sampling method for was research which was used was - CONVENIENCE SAMPLING

Research Method

Research methodology is the specific techniques or procedures used to identify, select, process, and analyze information regarding a topic. In a research paper, the methodology section allows the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall Validity and reliability.

The research method used in this research is the ONLINE SURVEY METHOD

Research Tool

Date collection or research tools are the devices or instruments used to collect data, such as paper questionnaires or computer-assisted interview systems. They are used to measure a variable or to collect the information needed to answer a research question The questionnaire was the research tool used.

Target Group

In this research paper, the target audience was from the age group of 18 to 50 & above, this age segment of the society consumes advertisements mindfully.

Tanishq- Ektavum

Issued on 9th October 2021, Tanishq launched an advertisement under the campaign called





EKATVAM, which means “THE BEAUTY OF ONENESS” in the Sanskrit language. The main idea behind the campaign was to highlight the concept of beauty of oneness or Unity. The idea behind the campaign of Ekatvam was to celebrate the coming together of people from different walks of life, local communities, and families during these challenging times.

Advertisement link- <https://youtu.be/UYDNSxhSQNc>

Advertisement Description

This 45 seconds advertisement depicts a **HINDU** daughter-in-law in a **MUSLIM** household, where a ceremony which is similar to a baby shower is depicted, the daughter-in-law points out to her mother-in-law and says “Yeh rasam toh aapke ghar hoti bhi nahi haina!” to which her mother-in-law replies “Per betiya ko khush rakhne ki rasam toh her ghar mien hoti haina”

The advertisement beautifully portrayed a sentimental message which was that it was about love and not about religions.

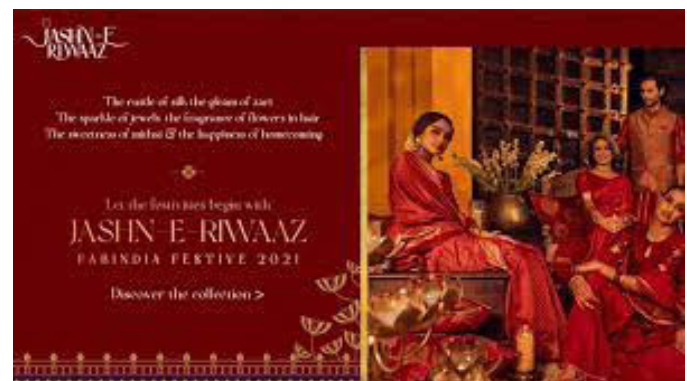
The advertisement soon became a matter of objection for some segments of the society leading to #boycottTanishq trending on social media. According to the audience, this advertisement by



Tanishq promoted and glorified the concept of “**LOVE-JIHAD**”

As per a report shared by Titan, which owns the brand Tanishq, there was a fall of total 2.58% on the day after #boycottTanishq trended on social media. The outrage was so strong that Tanishq had to not only withdraw the advertisement but also had to issue an apology for the same.

Fab India- Jashn-e-Riwaaz



On October 9, 2021, Fab India launched a new advertisement targeting festive sales during Diwali sees record sales and turnout each year (https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/diwali-festive-sale-crosses-rs-1-25-trn-breaks-all-records-in-10-yrs-cait-121110500886_1.html), brands across the spectrum come up with campaigns and offers during this time. Fab India is one of the preeminent Indian brands catering to the ethnic clothing and garment sector. With a majority of brands with the lion’s share of the market being from the west, Fab India holds a unique distinction of being a successful and valued Indian brand with



Drifter
@Soujugada



@TanishqJewelry Never ever buying jewellery from your brand 🚫🚫 even if u give for free

I challenge you .. Show a Christian & Muslim inter religious wedding & prove your secularism!! #tanishq #Hindu #BoycottTanishqJewelry #BoycottTanishq #EnoughIsEnough

2:07 PM · Oct 13, 2020

61 ❤️ Reply Share

Read 5 replies



Indian products created by artisans across the country, who also hold a share in the company.

Titled and captioned Jashn-e-Riwaaz, the advertisement sought to promote the new festive line of clothes released by the brand. The caption which takes the Urdu form of structuring and language has had predecessors across the history of India where a syncretic mixture of language, culture, customs, and beliefs have been omnipresent.

The ad saw an immediate backlash from sections of social media that found problems with a perceived Muslim phrasing of a Hindu festival.

Tweet of Mr Tejaswi Surya, A prominent social media presence and member of the ruling party, which got online traction and was one of the first tweets regarding this matter -

Deepavali is not Jash-e-Riwaaz. This deliberate attempt of abrahamisation of Hindu festivals, depicting models without traditional Hindu attires, must be called out. And brands like @fabindiaNews must face economic costs for such deliberate misadventures

The ad faced controversy across social media platforms- Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. #BoycottFabindia began trending nationwide on social media. The debate spilled over to primetime television with news channels conducting a debate. The brand withdrew the advertisement and gave an official statement stating the name was for the advertisement and not for Diwali.

While many users came out in support, the controversy took hold of both the brand and its campaign. To this day, the hashtag -jashneriwaaz, has takers from both sides of the opinion, posting about buying or boycotting products

Fab India's sales fell to a loss of 30%, a development without a precedent for the 60-year-old company (<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/stocks/news/fabindia-slips-into-losses-in-fy21-revenues-drop-30-to-rs-1059-cr/articleshow/88267009.cms>). But the loss was due to the covid time shutdown rather than the hashtag, as we see other brands and competitors of Fab India posting similar figures in the same quarter, as the country faced shutdown due to covid restrictions.

Feb Dabur- Karwachauth

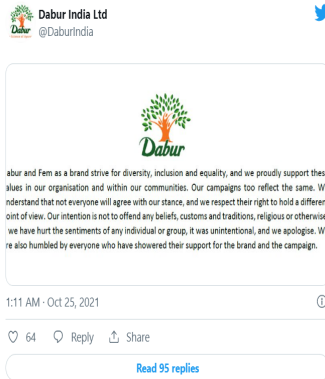
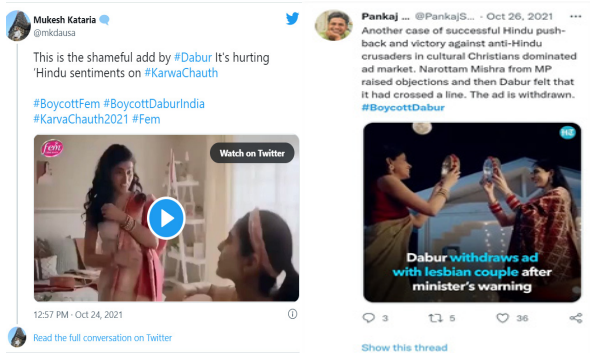


On, Dabur Fem issued an advertisement on the occasion of a Hindu festival- KARWACHAETH. The concept of the festival Karwachauth is that the female fasts from sunrise till moonrise & prays for her husband's long life. The core idea behind the advertisement was to celebrate the festival, promote their product and normalize the concept of same-sex couples.

Advertisement Description

Ad initiate when a woman is applying to blech to another female, further they ask questions to each other like "Karwachauth ka itta difficult vrat kyu rakh rahi ho?" then a mother-like figure enter the room handing over sarees and other ritual-related material. In the later part of the advertisement, it is relieved that they both are a lesbian couple.

Where the advertisement was sweet a segment of society found it disrespecting, and criticized the



ad for using a Hindu ritual to advocate and support change or the progressive thought. There was also a section of society that found the ad progressive and thought the issues raised were not appropriate.

The backlashing was huge and strong so Dabur, the parent company of Fem issued an apology addressing that their brand strives for diversity, inclusion, and equality and that they proudly support these values in their organization

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to understand how controversial advertising affects consumers' perceptions of both the brand and the social issue. From the psychology and communications literature studied, it was clear that there is a debate on whether advertising is a "driver" or "mirror" of change. The analysis shows that the majority of people agree that ads contribute to and make societies more united, and also agree that controversial ads help in raising issues that need to be discussed in our society. Using controversy in marketing campaigns is something that is becoming more and more acceptable by brands, the study shows that the majority say that controversial ads challenge the existing norms of

our country and hence they gain popularity and become a topic of controversy and discussion. Ads that are stereotype-shattering in nature tend to affect segments of different communities and can also stir the sentiments of the audience. And the analysis also suggests that social and religious people also get affected by some controversial ads.

It can work to reinforce existing beliefs. However, it is essential for corporations to be perceived as genuine, otherwise, it can work to push supportive consumers to no longer support the brand.

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