



The Hyper Real Discourses In Consumer Culture: A Study Of Surrogate Advertisements In Indian Context.

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Abstract

Man's way of living is now not just his own choice but a manipulation of the consumer culture. Surrogate advertisements that promote intoxicants, cannot promote their products in an usual way, so they device creative and manipulative techniques to enter the psychological, cultural, aesthetical, social domain of the consumers. With the increase in number of their sales, it has now become an alarming issue to be addressed and researched. This paper aims to study selected surrogate advertisements telecasted in India and how they intervene their products into the lifestyle of a consumer. The study would employ Jean Baudrillard's notion of Hyper reality as a methodology to study the hyper real discourses implied by those advertisements. The study would concern in decoding the advertisements and how they submerge their real illicit factors by entering the cult of culture and creating a feel good factor among the consumers.

Key words : Surrogate Advertisements, Hyper reality, Jean Baudrillard, Consumer culture

I. Introduction

In this post modern period, the fine line between the real and the illusion is converging to such an extent that the world around is now interpellated with Hyper reality. In the consumer culture, this becomes a more concerning issue, as every brand projects themselves the best of it's kind. They attempt to incorporate their product in the lifestyle of the people in a way that it would become an indispensable part of the everyday life. The surrogate advertisements works delicately on this principle where they make their brand as a part and parcel of a consumer's life. They enter the cultural, political, social, economic domain of an individual and establish themselves as a part of the culture itself. This paper aims to study such surrogate advertisements circulated in India and how they have created a hyper real world of their own in the consumer culture.

II. Objective of the Study

The society has now turned to a media manipulated society where people live more in the simulation of reality than the reality itself. The false promise of a desired condition of living has created a psyche among the people to inhabit in an hyper real society. The Surrogate advertisements use this desire as weakness and promote their products by channeling it to a hyper real condition. In recent years, there has been rise in the consumption of intoxicants in India which creates a query about the working of those surrogate advertisements circulated in India. This paper aims to study these surrogate advertisements telecasted in India and their hyper real manipulation.

III. Methodology

The present study uses both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of data include the study of selected surrogate advertisements telecasted in Indian Television. The secondary sources include a study of the research papers, articles, book reviews and critical discussion of the critics working on the relevant topic. This study would employ Jean Baudrillard's notion of Hyper reality as a methodology to study those advertisements and their impact on the consumer culture. It will use a descriptive and analytical research method to study these selected advertisements.

IV. Advertisements : The Bridge

Advertisements are a bridge among the consumer and the product. Usually it was the need for a product that governed the consumer demand of the product. But nowadays, a product is not brought just out of need. The advertisers strategise policies to sell out their product. They create a pseudo need among the consumers. Advertisements are not only bridges that link but have become a directive that manipulates the consumer psyche. They generate a curiosity among the consumers. They present their product's use as a cult. They make their product as a trend. Advertisements are broadly divided into two categories as Commercial and Non-Commercial. Surrogate advertisements are a sub-category of Commercial advertisements.

V. Surrogate advertisements

Surrogate advertisements are unique form of advertising which is used to promote product which are often banned and restricted by the government regulatory bodies. They are not directly promoted but rather their brands promote a different product in a disguised way. Their purpose is to establish a brand value. Products such as tobacco, alcohol and cigarettes are banned from being promoted, hence the manufacturing company promotes them in disguise of some other products. The technique of Surrogate advertisement originated in Britain when the housewives started protesting against the liquor manufacturers and advertisers as the illicit drinking habits of their husband was leading to domestic problems in the household. The brands were forced to adopt an alternative way of promoting their liquors with its near resemblances such as juices and beverages. In the 1920's, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States, began regulating the advertisements of products pertaining to harm of health, forcing the alcohol and tobacco manufacturers to adopt an indirect way of advertisements. In the Indian context, Surrogate advertisements also has a dominant role in shaping the consumer culture. India has been a country that is known for its moral and traditional values. To preserve its cultural sanctity, it views on consumption of intoxicants as sinful and derogatory. But even among such conservative culture too, the alcohol and tobacco industry continues to strive. To counter such, an early initiative was taken in 1975 by the Indian Government by introducing the Cigarette Regulation Act. In the 1990's a strict ban was imposed upon promotion of intoxicant products especially in the visual mediums such as Television commercials. The imposition of Television Networks Regulation Act 1995 further restricted the direct promotion of intoxicants in India. Since then, alcohol and tobacco manufacturers both indigenous and foreign companies adopted creative and implicit ways to promote such products through surrogate advertising. They incorporated themselves in the consumer culture in such a way that they assumed as social symbols. They created a hyper real culture to which everyone especially the youths fell prey.

VI. Notion of Hyper-reality

Hyper reality is a condition where there is suppression of reality to such an extent that the fictional, simulated experience is perceived more real than the reality itself. The fiction and the reality are blended in such a fine manner that the reality loses its grandeur and the false experiences become true experiences. Jean Baudrillard propounded this notion of Hyper reality in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). According to him, Hyper reality generates models of real without origin or reality which implies hyper reality is a representation, a sign without an original referent. The Postmodern society is fragmented, illusionary, polysemic system that is governed by social, political, economic and cultural activity. In advancing technological societies, the human consciousness cannot differentiate the real and the non-real. The visual, auditory, olfactory, sensory perceptions are appealed in a way that it creates a simulation of the reality but to the mind that simulation is perceived as the reality itself. The current consumer cultural domain can be analysed using Hyper reality.

VII. The Hyper real discourse of the Surrogate Advertisements in India

Advertisement itself has now become an industry which are now a great determinant in promotion of a product and brand. The brands keep on updating their products and re-launching their products as per the contemporary consumer culture. Even the same products are advertised again and again by updating it with the new contexts of the society. Even at times celebrities, renowned figures and scientific affiliations are used to further enter into the popularity realm among the consumers. With the introduction of television commercials, the scope of advertising has now expanded to a vast horizon. Intoxicants such as tobacco, alcohol and cigarettes although being banned or restricted from direct promotion, yet with the device of Surrogate advertisements, they now have the liberty to showcase the brand value everywhere.

VIII. Cult of the Culture

The primary purpose of the surrogate advertisements is to create a brand value. Since it cannot directly promote the intoxicants so it uses a relatable product and promote the brand with it. For example the alcohol brands equate their product with sparkling water or packaged drinking water. The tobacco brands equate their product with *Pan masala*. (Betel Spices). Their idea is to create a cult among the consumers where consumption of their products would be like participating in the popular culture. They establish themselves with a superiority complex that consumer would have for themselves. Even the brands use unique tags aided by the audio-visual medium. *Kingfisher* aired its advertisement in 2018, with its tagline “ Kingfisher-the King of Good Times”, thus correlating with fun, party culture. *Bacardi* in its 2020 advertisement equates the process of making a drink to the music with their tag line “Bacardi- The sound of Rum” . Since alcohol is consumed more by the men, *Imperial Blue* celebrates masculinity and its stereotypes in a humorous tone claiming their tag as “ Imperial Blue - Men will be Men” in it’s advertisements over the years. *Royal Stag* in its 2022 advertisement , further elucidates their brand with life using their tag line “Royal Stag- it’s Your Life, Make it Large”. It even employs a wide range of celebrities from all across different fields that further create an impressive aura of their product. *Officer’s Choice Blue*, encapsulates the moral, gentlemen qualities to its brand value. In its audio-visual discourse of 2017 advertisement , it showcases high rank officials being morally upright in their actions which is shown in its tagline “ Officer’s Choice Blue- Deserves Respect”. The tobacco brands too create an aura of their superiority. Although they manufacture cheaper products as compared to alcohol, yet they do not remain behind in perceiving themselves as a part of popular culture. *Paras Pan Masala* claims itself as the star of every occasion with its tagline “Paras – Unbeatable Taste, Unbeatable Fragrance” . *Silver Elaichi* parallels itself with class, quality and gentlemen quality of an individual using tagline. “ Signature Silver Elaichi- My Style, My Signature” . *Rajnigandha* in its 2015 advertisement equates the process of its making as a craft where great quality ingredients are mixed which is claimed in its tagline “Rajnigandgha – It’s not that ordinarily that I become Rajnigandha” . The claim of superiority of all those products make their consumers feel alike. They themselves find it amusing in consuming those. They become a style statement, a reflection of refined culture. They showcase themselves as high quality products that are meant for people of same high class thus creating a hyper real condition. The derogatory aspect of their product are diminished and the high stature claims are considered more vital among the consumers. The hyper real claims are more regarded and the reality gets disregarded.

IX. Feel Good Factor

Surrogate advertisements create a hyper real feel good factor among the consumers so that they feel less guilty over their consumption of intoxicants which then turns to an addiction. Surrogate products are addictive products which entraps the consumer physically and psychologically. Their idea is to convince the new consumers about the goodness of their brand and what they will feel after consuming it. *Blender’s Pride* in its 2022 advertisement claims how one will be confident and in the spotlight with their tagline “ Blender’s Pride – Face the Light with Pride” . *Budlight* in its 2022 commercial claims itself as a simple safe drink which can be easily enjoyed by everyone as it states in its tagline “Budlight – Easy to Drink, Easy to Enjoy”. Social values such as friendship is further elucidated in brands like *Macdowell Platinum* which sates in its tagline “MacDowell Platinum : Celebration of Friendship” in its 2020 commercial. In fact these brands use situations to their advantage and intervene the real life experiences of the people. Heineken used the pandemic situation of 2020 and presented itself as an optimistic hope of enduring this struggling phase. In its audio visual advertisement it sympathized with the social situation of people being unable to meet each other and hoped to meet again, with its tagline “Cheers with Heineken –We will meet again”. In its another version of the advertisement telecasted in 2023, it used the pleasure principle and described it’s feeling as

expression of Ah! . This is further attributed in its tagline “Unique balanced taste for that first Ah!” Although being sold cheaper in rate than alcohols, the tobacco industry too promotes the promise of making it’s consumer feel good. *Kamla Pasand Pan Masala* promises of providing an “ unique taste “ , *Goa Pan Masala* equates itself as the “ booster of success” in the 2012 commercial . *Pan Bahar* in its 2017 commercial claims itself as “ identification of success” . All these products creates a feel good factor among its consumers whereby submerging the health hazard associated with them. They create a hyper real condition where they are portrayed with goodness. They are equated with a sense of serene feeling that consumers forgets to notice their illicit effect.

X. Aversion from Reality

Surrogate advertisements provide a hyper real condition where people learn to live with desired reality rather than the actual reality. People love to see themselves with higher values and higher social standards and the surrogate advertisement use this motif to crawl in their products into the consumer’s psyche. People especially the youths starts in-taking these intoxicants not out of any need but due to their psychological urge to portray themselves as better, cool, people from a standard strata of the society. This is further emphasized with the employment of celebrities and renowned figures which in one hand creates a consent and in the other hand creates a dreamscape where people like to feel themselves like the celebrated personality. The brands foster their products as larger than life, greatness, better experience, gentlemen, masculine, craft, music, celebration but deep inside they hide the real adverse effect of the intoxicants such as heart diseases, lung diseases, addiction, domestic violence and other social evils. Surrogate advertisements in India that are telecasted in television commercials amass a wealth of across Rs 600 -800 crores. India has now become the 3rd largest liquor market in the world. In 2019, 2.25 trillion rupees was collected as tax on alcohol and 356 billion rupees was collected as tax on cigarettes. These figures are alarming for a country like India where the society is governed by set of social values. In 2019, it was surveyed that there are 160 million alcohol consumers and 267 million cigarette consumers. This is more concerning as most of the consumers include the youths. Thus the surrogate advertisements and their manipulation in creating a hyper real condition needs to be studied further.

Conclusion :-

In the post modern world, digital advertisements have assumed importance more than their commercial purposes. They have shaped and reshaped the cultural domains of the society. Surrogate advertisements being an unique way of advertising has been a significant medium of mediating messages. The intoxicant products could not be advertised with the true claims as they do not form a goodwill in the health and formal aspects of society and hence they create a hyper real condition that dictates over the consumer culture of the people. Consumers remain ignorant of the hazardous side of the intoxicants and are duped by the unreal claims. The hyper real discourses in the surrogate advertisements have become an interesting case study in the contemporary times.

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