Chapter 5: Practitioners Study

5.1 Overview

Advertising practitioners include professionals in both advertising and media agencies and in marketing organizations of corporations. The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To systematically find out from advertising practitioners how they view the different dimensions of culture reflected in Indian advertising.

2. To assess how practitioners see the culture, language and values communicated in Indian advertising.

3. To identify the challenges that advertising practitioners face in assessing the culture of their target audience.

In-depth interviews were based on an Interview schedule and a set interview guideline. This was recorded by a digital recorder. The discussions were complex and indicated the difficult nature of the subject of culture. Since the paper is on Advertising, an attempt was made to focus on how advertising portrays the culture of the consumer. During the interview, one realized that the quality of feedback was influenced by the Companies the practitioners worked in, their personal demographics and the brands they worked on. Practitioners were told to refer to not only the advertising they developed, but also the advertising seen in media. The interview schedule was designed in a manner that allowed practitioners to elaborate on the different aspects of the portrayal of culture in advertising, since respondents tended to discuss the nature of Indian culture. Generally, it was found that agency practitioners were more sensitive to cultural issues of consumers compared to clients or marketers. Since the sample consisted of senior professionals, the opinions were analytical and came from the many years of experience that the professional had had in the field of creating advertising.

The format of the interview schedule was initially shared with the respondent so that the scope of culture could be assessed by the respondent. The initial response on culture was confused because culture can mean different things to many. One practitioner said, “Indian Culture has to be understood in terms of the target group. Very often a staid culture when it undergoes change,
a new culture emerges. Indian culture gives the do’s and don’ts of life. We have an Indian culture where we hold on to traditions, but are easy to change.”

All respondents agreed that culture of consumers is important to assess when developing effective advertising. Respondents needed to be explained the different dimensions of culture (as per Hofstede) and be given cues to explain their perceptions of how advertising reflects the different aspects of culture. At the end of the interview, respondents were asked to give a focused response, in a word or phrase to explain the culture in advertising, the language style in advertising and the values being conveyed in advertising. The purpose of that was to get a clear picture of this topic.

Culture was seen as a broad umbrella which incorporates many layers. Some agency practitioners remarked how India as a country, just a few years ago, was relatively unknown country in terms of advertising and overall awareness. Now, brand India is seen as an emerging economy, and is much spoken about. It took many years (as per the ad agency practitioner) for Indians to shake off the history of invasion and come in terms with an Indian identity. India is now recognized for its IT industry and as an emerging global player. All respondents felt that advertising communicates to an India that is large, diverse and changing. Advertising therefore has to pick up the common threads of regional diversity and communicate in a meaningful manner. With a population that has over 70% below 35 years of age, it was felt that the young have created a culture of their own - of values and thoughts which are relevant to them. There is a greater acceptance of change.

Respondents were asked their views on how Cinema, TV programs and Advertising portrays Indian culture. The overall response to this was that Indian Cinema (henceforth referred to as Bollywood) is a culture by itself. This has defined drama in Indian families and portrayed the role of the hero, heroine, villain and family roles. Bollywood has developed a dance culture in India, which has become popular in Indian weddings and parties. Bollywood songs are the basis for entertainment of the average Indian, and Indians belonging to any type of class. In fact, Bollywood and Cricket unites classes and creates a common culture amongst diverse Indians. Bollywood also plays a role in portraying changing lifestyles, fashion and customs. For example, traditionally the North Indian wedding had small celebrations (involving only extended
family and close friends) before the main wedding. After the success of some films, the weddings have become more elaborate with DJ, music and dance. Bollywood therefore is a key entertainer in India and is a trend setter. Bollywood gives extreme drama with heart rendering stories. Television programs like sit coms are on the other hand portraying very traditional family roles. Every respondent referred to the ‘Saas-Bahu’ (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) popular soap to explain how TV stars are dressed in traditional attire (“even sleep wearing jewelry”), and portray joint family drama with many modern twists. Respondents believed that advertising needed to fulfill the commercial task of communicating about the product and brand, but tended to portray a culture that is ‘aspirational’. Advertising therefore becomes a hidden persuader to transport consumers to another world of success, fame, fantasy, heroism and dreams. Advertising may borrow from Bollywood to do this, but rarely follows the path chosen by Television programs. Advertising in facts combines the best of Bollywood and the aspirations of consumers. Advertising woos the consumer to creates a dream world, where he lives well, has a loving family, a good looking spouse, fun friends, beautiful homes, successful careers and a feeling of happiness. As one respondent said, “It is difficult to say if society is ahead of advertising or vice versa. I think today advertising is ahead of society. One end of the consumer, even in the middle class is pushing the society to new norms. Advertising is sensitive to this. Aspirations drive middle-class India. Celebrity lives are ‘aspirational’ and their lives are making consumers wanting to succeed like them.” The influence may be seen as per the table given below:

Figure 7
Influence of Bollywood, Television and Advertising
Advertising in India, according to a few participants, is an entertainer of consumers and therefore is liked. May be because, as one participant said, Indian advertising commonly uses celebrities from Bollywood and Cricket, who are icons to consumers, and whose presence creates entertainment. However, advertising plays a key role in building aspirations of the consumer and not only reflecting the culture of the consumer, but building a new culture for the Indian consumer.

In order to assess a pattern in the responses, the responses were examined in depth to understand the different cultural portrayals in Indian advertising. The responses established certain patterns of Indian culture and reinforced practitioners understanding of the culture of the Indian consumer. The findings of the research indicated five key waves of culture that seem to be prevalent in Indian culture. The focus seems to be on Change. Advertising invites consumers to a better world and is perceived as a change agent that offers a new way of living to the Indian consumer. There was an overall sense of optimism in the advertising practitioners of a new India, where from a closed economy, markets have opened up and consumers are not part of a new digital age. Five patterns were observed that emerged through the interviews regarding the portrayals of consumer culture in advertising were: Change for the Better, Change to Succeed, Change in Traditions, Change in the concept of Globalization and Change in perceptions of Value for Money.

5.1 Wave 1: Change for the Better

“Something good is happening in this country and there is an uprising” is the optimism with which one of the participants expressed. In fact this optimism was prevalent in all the practitioners interviewed. Change in culture is reflected in advertising whether it is change in the way new products have entered an open market, or the change in consumer values and lifestyle. Advertising projects change as a major phenomenon in Indian culture. Practitioners believed that change to get a better life happens through new products, building an Indian dream, creating unity in diversity, changing the male-female equation, building romance and bridging class differences in the society.
New Products: The Indian consumers' choices were so limited in the closed economy prevalent till 1990. The opening up of the Indian economy brought to the Indian consumer a choice in products available to the rest of the first world. Practitioners felt that advertising has communicated the basic availability of new products and has created an exciting world for the Indian consumer, of new cars, technology products, consumer goods, durables, telecom and the plethora of digital and other services available in the current Indian market. Indians get excited with the availability of new products. Advertising builds the power of spending in the Indian consumer.

The Indian Dream: Most advertising portrays a dream of what people are seeking, projects a pretty picture and an ideal world. Indian confidence has emerged such that a consumer feels confident to bring about change. Liberalization has brought in a sense of empowerment, where consumers suddenly have access to money with loans easily available and are able to build their dreams without having saved for it. The upper-middle class youth have developed, as one practitioner said, “elitist pretentions” and built new dreams.

Unity in Diversity: Though India has a diverse and pluralistic culture due to the presence of many states, as a country, advertising helps in projecting a unified country. Practitioners believed that there is no one India. In a southern market, consumer fantasies are quite different from the North. Consumers in the south tend to be religious, traditional, have respect for authority and are be compliant to society norms. Northern consumers, as one practitioner said, believe “more about one-up man ship”. Many campaigns tend to be developed based on Northern consumer culture. The cultures where women have assumed stronger roles, because of the matriarchal systems, as that in Kerala and the North-East have not been commonly projected.

Male-Female Level Playing Field: Change for the better is also seen in the male-female role depictions in advertising. Men and women are projected in roles that show greater sense of partnership in decision-making and sharing of household chores. This is of course done with a sense of reality. Advertising today while portraying the nurturing quality of the woman, also
advocates a balance. Men too, when portrayed as the provider to a household, are now also depicted as being more complete, with more human and nurturing qualities.

**Romance:** Advertising is creating change in the way romance is portrayed amongst Indian couples. All practitioners agreed that romance in Indian advertising is held back, “cutesy”, and often implied that it takes place only after marriage. After all, the arranged marriage system is still prevalent in India. Indians are known for their inhibitions on public demonstration of affection. Kissing is not seen in advertising because there are social and political activists who can object to the advertising, and practitioners have experienced advertising being objected to because of showing a kiss.

Romance is projected innocently and tacitly and often “feeds off Bollywood”. Earlier, romance was shown in a playful manner like girl chasing boy around a tree like a Bollywood movie. Today it tends to be more westernized, like a candle-lit dinner. Even romance between old couples is now seen in advertising. As one respondent said, “Indians do not acknowledge romance. There is no modern symbol of love. The society is very intolerant of lack of conformity. Romance shown in advertising is limited to a diamond ring given to the wife, or romance after marriage. Very Indian indeed”.

**5.2 Wave 2: Change to Succeed**

Advertising builds ambitions in consumers and urges them to succeed. Indian culture was traditionally influenced by Hindu philosophy where life was peaceful and where one accepts one’s destiny or ‘karma’ and considers life a ‘maya’ or illusion. The way of life portrayed in advertising however, builds aspirations for consumers to succeed. Advertising uses various stimuli for this, including the common use of celebrities, technology and a buildup of a culture of individualism for success.

**Technology:** Advertising has promoted in an appealing manner technology products like the mobile phone, the computer and the internet. The smart phones have created a technology plus while the telecommunication revolution has created greater connectivity especially benefitting very mobile consumer segments. Consumers of all classes now realize that adapting to
technology is most important to succeed and earlier fears of new technology need to be done away with. Traditionally, in India, since service was so easily available (like getting a mechanic for a car break-down) people were anxious to deal with anything technically complex. Advertising has simplified technology through concept selling and making technology a cultural reality. Mobility and the growth of the internet has also helped in unifying India’s diverse culture.

**Celebrities in Advertising:** Indian celebrities, primarily Bollywood and Cricket stars contribute to building the values, fashion and lifestyle of India. Celebrities also gives attention to new brands. Indians celebrities are limited in number (for a population of 1.2 billion), but are growing. This is because of the growth of Cinema, Cricket and participation of Indians in events like the Olympics and world Chess or Billiard tournaments. The youth imbibes the lifestyle of the celebrities. As one practitioner explained, “Indian consumers are aware of their personal lives. “Actors, Salman Khan and Ranbir Kapoor live with their parents, a famous star has an arranged marriage, musician, Rehman at the Oscars dedicates his award to his mother. Actor, Amitabh Bachhan is often rated as the top icon despite being 70 years old. People emulate these values and life styles.

Another aspect of culture reflected through the use of celebrities is the communication taking place that success can happen against all odds. Heroes have emerged from small town India and from backgrounds that are not privileged. Consumers now do not want to go to government jobs but for jobs that will take them to a new lifestyle. They see how Cricketer Dhoni from a small town succeeds and makes it big. Other film actors include, mega star Shahrukh Khan, Priyanka Chopra (again from a small town) and many others.

**Success through Individualism:** Success at any cost is the mantra of the youngster. This is a very western concept, and as one participant said, it’s here to stay. This brings about a disturbing trend (according to this practitioner), of a new consumer that is intolerant, self-centered and non appreciative of a culture that is pluralistic. As another participant said, “People want to make it. Life is about yourself where Individualism is a trend, and success is key. “Success is key. Can I
be as powerful as another powerful person?” High end liquor advertising portrays people who are not only open to change, but changed with a new lifestyle, and have tasted success. Why wait till you are 40 to be a CEO. “

An individualistic life style portrayed in advertising creates a fantasy which only success can give – an ability to travel abroad, buy fashionable clothes, live in a posh neighborhood and experiment with new brands and products Indian society has indeed evolved from the pre-liberalization days where images of a car was the spacious Ambassador, having the space to contain many members of a family to the latest luxury brands of cars that focus on style and design and give stature. Advertising creates a need to grow fast so that young people can succeed fast and gain acceptance amongst role models and peers.

5.3 Wave 3 : Change in Traditions

India is known to be a traditional society with joint families and patriarchy, the practice of many rituals in religion (whichever the faith), vegetarian diets, arranged marriages and clear role definitions of males and females. How does advertising portray the reality of Indian traditions while creating a dream world of material possessions? Advertising is sensitive to traditions and does not mock old traditions, and is sensitive to Indian values like respect for elders, religion, and hierarchy. The practitioners expressed views on how advertising while depicting reality, does tend to portray an exaggerated reality of Indians making changes in traditions, to aspire to be modern and contemporary in thinking. As one practitioner said, “Indians are traditional, but easily adaptable to change”. Advertising portrays the new Indian family, the Indian way of life, changes Indian stereotypes, builds contemporary religious rituals and creates new lifestyles for the traditional Indian.

The Indian Family: “The great Indian family will never go away”, said one practitioner. The essence of Indian reality is the presence of family bonding. The presence of grand-parents and parents is common in Indian advertising. Touching the feet of elders is commonly shown in advertising, and respect for parents as an integral part of Indian culture is depicted in advertising.
The extended Indian family is a strong force of family in India. Even with couples living by themselves, away from their parental homes, it is common for grown up children to be in touch with their parents on a daily basis. However, major changes are taking place in today’s society, thanks to, according to practitioners, the portrayal of a contemporary lifestyle in Indian advertising. Some of the changes are:

- Husbands and wives are portrayed as equal partners in advertising. This is in contrast to clear role definitions of a traditional Indian household.

- While the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship (usually a disturbed one because of the joint family structure) is still a rather common plot in Indian advertising, today’s daughter-in-law, even if she does not work, is smart, and while wanting to impress her mother-in-law, is not craving for her approval. She is intelligent and independent in her decision making as a home-maker, who is taking important and not minor decisions in the household. She and her husband are the pillars of the household and partners in decision making. Working women are commonly depicted in advertising. Very often guiding their husband and being shown as the wiser one.

- Children are still the main focus of the Indian family and forms the essence of a happy family.

- The patriarchy is giving way to the dominance of the nuclear family. In fact, as explained by one practitioner, “Nuclear families show a brand in a progressive light.”

- Marriages are getting more multi-cultural, which means that the arranged marriage system is giving way to what is termed commonly in India as ‘love marriages’. This creates greater pressures on the joint family structure and creates a greater demand for nuclear families. Advertising projects reality of the majority, and usually depicts Hindu marriages.

- In contrast to earlier traditions where a man continues to have his primary role as a son, where there is no transition to being an adult, today the man is portrayed in advertising as having a key role as a partner to his wife.

- Indian family culture overall creates an environment with greater inter-dependency, protectiveness and nurturance. The concept of independence in terms of transition to being an adult is not there.
- The concept of glamorous grand-mothers is also becoming popular in advertising. They are younger, wearing casual clothing and technology savvy. Romance between old parents is also depicted where couples are shown having fun.

- The responsibility of the son towards the parents is still depicted in advertising. The Raymond’s brand had a television commercial where the mother is sad because the son has got a job abroad, but is happy because the son has bought a ticket for her to accompany him. Famous advertising like Master Card has shown a son gifting a vacation to parents in Disney Land.

Male-Female Stereotypes: Advertising reflects the stereotypes existing in society about the roles of men and women. Advertising tends to work at the aspiration level where men and women are projected in the manner which they desire to be. Before a housewife was limited to the home. As one practitioner said, “In earlier days, the son belonged to the mother.” Today the wife is a partner and has a relationship of being a friend and a partner with her husband. Earlier the husband focused on the job, and the wife focused on all aspects which he could not do like going to the bank to preparing food. Research indicated that a woman wanted not to be seen in a passive role as a housewife, but as a home-maker who is the pivot of the family (not just the doer) and who is capable of being an active decision maker, providing solutions to problems. The woman is therefore more empowered and is a partner to her husband in a home. Much advertising today is women centric, moving out and is a “Home-maker 2.0”. This is because advertising creates people’s aspirations. As explained by a practitioner from an ad agency, “Is the average Indian woman like that? No. The average Indian woman wants to be like that.” Subsequently, the male is portrayed as a person who looks for advice from his wife, participates in the household chores and looks after kids. The practitioner went on to explain that the Whirlpool advertising in India started from portraying the women as a house-wife, then as a smart home-maker to the current ad where she comes back from work and her husband has prepared a drink for her in the refrigerator.

‘Miss-understood’ (as another practitioner put it) were what often women were portrayed as. However, the biggest change agent in Indian advertising is the portrayal of women. It was felt that a quiet revolution is taking place. This started with the growth in the Call Centre industry,
where women were trained with foreign accents and were in a position to get good jobs. Their expectations therefore came to level playing field with their male counterparts. “This will be the biggest change agent in India.” However, as one practitioner commented, even now women are being portrayed in a patronizing light, because of the patriarchal nature of India’s social society and even today it is not common for Indian advertising to show men and women sharing household chores. The woman has to use the fairness creams the perfumes and the clothing to get her husband’s attention. And woo him to purchase expensive jewels.

**Friends:** Friends are now commonly used in the plots of Indian advertising. Practitioners reiterated that ‘Friends’ now play a very important role in the life of a youngster. Bollywood movies (like Dil Chahta Hai), Television programs like Friends, the success of the Telecom leader, Airtel’s television campaign on ‘Every Friend’ and other films have created importance to the relationship one has with friends. Some felt that to some extent, friends have got priority over family in today’s advertising. This is especially relevant for younger people where camaraderie and fun are seen as very important.

**The Indian Way:** Advertising rides on the underlying ‘proud to be Indian’ ethos in the young – who is the nonchalant, confident Indian who believes that he or she is the best. The young have created a sub culture that is relevant to them and not necessarily in sync with what they have been taught. This Indian is proud of the state he comes from, the food he eats, and recognizes that he is a traditional person inside while having a modern lifestyle. Today’s Indian is proud of his/her roots, language and way of life. This youngster, would buy a new luxury car, and not drive to the closest bar, but take his or her grandparents blessings first. Advertising therefore addresses Indian consumers who are confident and aspires for a bright future. The concept of ‘Jugaad’ was also seen by practitioners as a characteristic of the Indian way. The ability to improvise in difficult situations, be adaptable and work out quick solutions makes this Indian consumer be open to change.

India is a country known for spirituality, yoga, Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence and peace. However, advertising appeals to a need for status and esteem in consumers, especially for the higher income groups. Status is shown through the cars, clothing and homes of consumers. The
setting of the house in advertising would be shown as very contemporary and western. There is youthfulness, modernization, westernization and consumerism in the culture of advertising in India today. Symbols of success become the brand of automobile, foreign travel or neighborhood of residence. Foreign travel has become a very popular symbol of success.

India has a feudal and hierarchical environment both at home and at the work place. Caste is usually not depicted, because it is not endorsed and seen as positive. Class difference is shown the way it is, as part of the landscape. The younger or poorer person will often upstage the richer. Advertising plays a role in uplifting the lower classes because lower income groups often shop high end brands and want the shopping experience. Advertising does not change class difference. Advertising shows it as is. The story may use roles like a maid servant, guards, gardeners etc.. “This is a society which we would like our society to be. Rid of class prejudice.” Some participants felt that depiction of class in advertising is unpleasant and therefore not usually used in advertising. Many practitioners referred to the recent Havel (electrical products) advertising campaign on ‘Winds of Change’. In one commercial the lady of the house asks the maid-servant to sit at the dining table with the family and in another commercial a bridegroom was telling the registrar, at his registered wedding, that he intends to take the last name of his wife. Such commercials will set the trend to break class differences. As a practitioner said, “this needs a bold advertiser and a bold ad agency”.

When asked about the role of Patriotism in Indian advertising, all felt that Patriotism is a stimulus that does not directly seem to work in advertising. However, public holidays like Independence day and patriotic songs (like Vande Mathram) are strong stimuli used in advertising. Patriotism is used more indirectly like a winning cricket team or a story from a Bollywood movie. Being Indian is more important than made in India. With greater growth and development, the patriotism appeal may work better in Indian advertising.

Religion: While India is a religious country, practitioners felt that religion is not overtly shown in advertising because of the country having a secular ethos. Advertising is sensitive to religious groups and tends to be secular. Many brands advertise during important festivals like Diwali, and Holi, celebrated across many states of India. Advertising however does not depict
the religious rituals of the festival but the social customs of purchasing new clothes or eating special foods. Advertising in some ways has created greater awareness of customs like buying gold (through jewelry advertising) during a festival called Dhanteras or being vegetarian during another Hindu festival, the Navratras. These kinds of rituals during festivals get reinforced by advertising. However, in general, practitioners believed that showing the religious aspects of religion in advertising tends to alienate groups and therefore are not used in advertising. This is typical of economies like India which is secular in nature and is a democracy.

5.4: Wave 4: Change in the concept of Globalization

Even before liberalization in the 1990’s, things ‘foreign’ were valued in India. Being a closed economy, Indians did not have the access to global brands. Since post-liberalization in the 1990’s, Indians have access to brands and products available anywhere in the western world. Advertising exaggerates this and projects a brave new consumer, a young adult who has a capitalistic dream and is in control of his life. Advertising, as one practitioner said, portrays that it is good to want more and places the Indian consumer on par with his or her counterpart in the west. A common comment by practitioners on globalization was “What is the meaning of globalization? Now Indians are part of a global world.” It is as popular to hear western music at the discotheque as it is to dance with Bollywood music. In fact, the latter is more popular. Some of the ways advertising manifests this is in terms of the clothing used in the models of the advertisements, portrayal of sexuality, the use of humor and ‘glocalization’ or the strategies of global brands adapting to Indian markets.

Clothing: The advertising of the 1970’s and 1980’s would usually have women in Indian clothes like saris or salwar-kameez, and have men in western attire. Today’s advertising shows women in western clothing and men in western clothes that are more stylishly cut. Advertisements for jewelry and festivals often have women shown in traditional saris. The saris too have a new and contemporary look. Practitioners observed that advertising also uses a combination of western and Indian (fusion) clothing. The trend is also not to make the models look too artificially dressed, and show them in more casual clothing. The choice of models in contemporary advertising is also not the typical good looking model, but faces that are
interesting and have character. An interesting comment made by a practitioner was, “Today, western clothing is seen as Indian”. The jeans and T shirt belong as much to India as to the West. The westernization of clothing and the Indian attire of salwar kameez and sari, are also used across all states in the country, despite each state having their own regional clothes. While advertising portrays reality, it also indirectly builds a uniformly dressed Indian.

Sexuality: Similar to global advertising, women in Indian advertising are also sometimes sexually portrayed. This is usually done with a western look. A practitioner gave the example of how when actress, Katrina Kaif, has drops of mango juice dropping on her lips, sexuality is spelt out for the mango drink (called Slice, a Pepsi product). This commercial also receives the highest number of hits in the internet. A practitioner mentioned, “Some ads have become very bold like that of condoms. This is not our traditional culture, but acceptance for the same is happening.” Advertisers however hesitate to have sexual portrayals of women as too overt, since then they can find objections from the media or social activist groups.

Humor: Today’s advertising in India also uses humor. Traditional environments often do not encourage the use of humor and irreverence. Advertising however is encouraging the Indian consumer develop a sense of humor. As one practitioner said, “Confident nations are able to stand up for whom they are”. The acceptance of humor in advertising signifies that Indian consumers are confident enough to laugh at themselves. Mention was made to the successful television commercial of an Indian job portal, Naukri.com, where an employee makes fun of his boss, because his confidence of the job portal finding him an optional job. Irreverence by a wife (in a positive manner), to a husband is also being made more acceptable with the use of humor. However, parents are always shown with respect. Usually Indian respect for hierarchy does not allow comments against authority. This is changing. Through the use of humor, advertising also expresses what consumers feel repressed about, whether it is a troublesome boss, a meddling mother-in-law or an authoritarian husband.

Glocalization : India is the only country where McDonald’s promotes a vegetable burger (called the ‘Aloo-Tikki’ burger). Most successful foreign brands develop marketing strategies according to both local and global considerations. KFC also has greater spice in its chicken in
India and promotes chicken with rice. Advertising therefore communicates the ‘glocal’ strategies of leading multi-national brands and creates a reality for the Indian consumer. The Indian consumer therefore is as surprised not seeing the vegetable burger at a McDonald’s outlet in the west as an American is surprised seeing an ‘Aloo-Tikki’ burger in India. The rise of the internet, the retail and media revolution and other global influences have made the Indian consumer more global in approach. Add to this the sale of heart shaped balloons and red roses during Valentine’s Day or the sale of Santa caps during Christmas. Advertising rides on these trends and portrays a new and global India.

**Environment**: Care for the Environment amongst consumers still needs to be developed. The campaign saying no to fire-crackers had worked well, but most brands in India do not have an environment story as their main-stay. Practitioners mentioned one-off communications for brands like Nokia and Toyota, but here too, the emphasis was to sell the product. Environment responsibility is not being adequately being handled.

**5.5: Wave 5: Change in Perceptions of Value for Money**

India’s per capita income is only $1527 per annum. Indians tend to be very price conscious and have traditionally been careful spenders. Today’s consumers are however looking at price in a different way and are more open to spending. From the overall feedback of the practitioners, this seems to be like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the state of the economy has made the Indian consumer be careful spenders with an economical standard of living and on the other hand, they are enjoying a new life-style of high living.

**Economical Living**: Except for the extremely rich segment, most young Indians having a lifestyle that is equivalent to their counterpart in the west would have their parents exposed to the standards that were prevalent in a closed economy, characterized with socialistic thinking and insular living. Indians therefore still come from backgrounds where spending is controlled. Not wasting is a key cultural aspect of Indian upbringing. The concept of being risk-averse, sacrificing for long term savings was part of Indian culture. Practitioners now feel that the situation has completely changed with the new consumer. For example, while the Maruti cars
was always positioned as an economy car, today the Company realizes that there is growth taking place in the luxury segment with Audi’s, BMWs and Mercedes Benz’s becoming important players in the Indian market. Maruti therefore also brings in elements of style and design in their communications. McDonald’s too, though seen as an economy brand in advanced countries, needed to create the Happy Meal at Rs 20 in India. According to the practitioner who was involved in the launch of the brand in India, McDonald’s decided to use classic Bollywood stars to project old prices. They recognized that, in the words of the practitioner, “Indians, as rich as you may get, because of Nehruvian ways, are careful spenders. So this use of old Bollywood stars added imagery. “ Advertising creates needs across classes, even for those who cannot afford to pay. In India, it is difficult to migrate from one social class to another. This creates frustration.

**High Living:** The practitioner marketing expensive Scotch whisky and wines remarked that the luxury consumer segment is price insensitive in India, compared to the Western markets. The tip of the pyramid consists of consumers who are spending on luxury brands and experiencing luxury vacations. The desire to try out new products is high, since brand loyalty is still not strong.

Even in luxury products, the Indian consumers want some clear answers for what he purchases – sometimes driven purely by value or his feeling good about it. Sentiment is the single biggest factor influencing purchase decisions. The collective mood of the consumers is usually confident and upbeat. As the practitioner elaborated, that the current slowdown is not caused by price of energy, but when consumers stop “whining” about corruption, lack of infrastructure, no electricity. “Confidence brings about a bounce in a country. Leaders and Government should play a role in changing the sentiment of the market. Even in boom times things were not all that right. Advertising plays a role in building this sentiment.”

**High Involvement and Low Involvement Products:** Practitioners felt that advertising makes the same cultural assumptions of the consumer for high involvement and low involvement products. Both use commonly celebrities who endorse all types of products. All products tend to be pitched as premium product. Products like automobiles and durables more commonly
use status as an appeal. Low involvement products like personal care products use value propositions based on greater personal appeal and success. One practitioner mentioned, that the culture portrayed in low involvement products is light and frivolous vis-à-vis high involvement products.

5.6: Conclusions

Advertising is the truth well told. All practitioners felt that consumer culture is most important to develop effective and impactful advertising. In order to get a focus of the in-depth interviews, the last question was more structured, where the practitioners were asked to state in a word or a phrase the culture, language and values communicated in Indian advertising. The purpose was so that practitioners could get clear in their own mind what was the most important aspect of culture that they see is reflected in Indian advertising. Reference was given to an earlier research undertaken where the culture, language and values were identified for different countries for countries like the USA, UK, Germany and Japan. This helped the respondents answer in a focused manner.

Since the numbers interviewed were suitable for in-depth interviews, the responses for this were not tabulated. The responses again was usually explanatory, but indicated a pattern that practitioners felt was what advertising communicated. Culture was described as family, togetherness, achievement, relationships, aspirations and success. This implies that the main dimension that seemed to emerge was collectivism in terms of relationships but having the individualistic drive to succeed. The language style used in advertising was simple, entertaining, persuasive, emotional, soft and having a fusion of English with the vernacular language. The values what practitioners feel are reflected in the advertising are to achieve status in an ethical manner, through use of words like ambition, seek value, aspire, respect for elders, honest and status. The details are given indicated in Figure 8.
Some of the challenges that advertising would face may be seen in as follows:

1. **Identifying the pressure points of culture.** With the target audiences in India being heterogeneous with media not being segmented, it becomes difficult to address diverse cultures. No wonder advertising tends to focus on a dream-world of aspirations of consumers, since this can be common across segments. In order to engage with local markets, Brands tend to use more Indian symbolism. The meaning of this symbolism may not be homogenous. Advertisers find it beneficial to focus on the consumers need to change for a better life and success. The dynamic nature of change makes the world of advertising that much more exciting. However for advertisers to feel the pulse of the consumer in terms of dealing with change requires very sophisticated research techniques to properly assess changing culture of the consumer. These pressure points of culture need to be identified.

2. **Speaking a common language.** Advertising needs to speak a common language to these heterogeneous groups. The western world has a common language of television. In India that role is still largely being played by the Bollywood and by Regional cinema. In the early days of advertising, advertising was always created in English, and then translated into different languages. Today’s advertising attempts at creating concepts in languages. The logistics of doing this in so many languages makes it a difficult task.
The use of English alphabets in the vernacular (termed as ‘Hinglish’ for use of Hindi with English) to be delivered in so many languages poses communication barriers.

3. **Dealing with the Social churn.** Advertising is part of the promotional mix in Marketing. The task of communicating to audiences that are undergoing a major social churn is significant, considering that the industry skills and sensitivity in the understanding the myriad of cultures in India could be limited. With the revolutions taking place in media, retail and the internet, Advertising’s task of projecting the good materialistic side of life, may overlook societal objectives of inclusive growth that is so essential in a country like India, where poverty and class differences are so rampant. How can advertising deal with this social churn in a responsible and ethical manner?

The study’s next phase is to undertake a consumer perspective of the dimensions of culture in advertising. Future research can be undertaken on how consumers perceive the different dimensions of culture in advertising and whether there is a difference in the dimensions that are perceived in products that are of high involvement and that of low involvement. The cultural factors that influence the makes advertising more noticeable can also be assessed. Are consumers that are traditional in lifestyle finding advertising less appealing than consumers who are modern? Consumer opinions on the ethics of culture communicated in Indian advertising also could be researched.

The study has been limited to advertising practitioners based in Delhi NCR area and the observations are only relevant to an urban, young Indian target audience. The findings are based on the experience and perceptions of practitioners and has been interpreted by the author, who is also a senior practitioner in the field of advertising with over 35 years of domain expertise.

. Culture of a nation is a difficult topic to undertake primary research. As Mahatma Gandhi has said, “A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people”.

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