Chapter 8: Recommendations: Developing a Cultural DNA in Advertising– a Tool for Advertising Planning

8.1 Advertising Planning: Developing a new tool in Advertising

Advertising reflects the culture of the society. Advertising strategy uses the tool of Brand positioning, a technique whereby a brand takes on a unique slot, unoccupied by other brands, in the mind of the consumer. The culture that a consumer has is usually studied in terms of the demographic and psychographic profile of the consumer. This study has assessed that culture plays an important role in advertising and therefore is a phenomenon that can create successful advertising. A Cultural DNA process is recommended, which can be a tool for advertising professionals to create effective advertising. This has been developed after many phases of research of the research undertaken. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions give a structure to the development of a theory of planning the cultural phenomena for a brand’s target audience in order to create greater differentiation in advertising that is developed.

Many studies have indicated that advertising reflects the culture of a market. In fact, the more an advertising campaign reflects local cultural values, the more persuasive will be the advertising. Hofstede’s (1980) four cultural dimensions has been used in many studies including that of Albers-Miller et al (1996) where Pollay’s (1986) 42 advertising appeals were reduced to 30, and the relationships of appeals to Hofstede’s Dimensions were undertaken. A content study of Indian advertising (2015) indicated that products of high involvement, involving rational consumer decision making used advertising appeals that were ‘Distinctive’ indicating a cultural dimension of Individualism, and also advertising that were ‘Effective’ and ‘Convenient’ indicating a culture of masculinity. A practitioners study on the cultural dimensions of Indian advertising gave findings to indicate that there are five waves of change taking place regarding the culture of Indian consumers: a wave of change for the better, change to succeed, change in traditions, change in the concept of globalization and change in perceptions of ‘value for money’. The third phase of the study was to do a consumer survey on the perceptions of culture that consumers assess after being exposed to advertising stimuli belonging to four product categories, High involvement Rational and Emotional products and Low Involvement Rational and
Emotional products. The findings of these studies have been collated to bring about a theory termed Cultural DNA of Advertising, a Tool for Greater Advertising Effectiveness.

The thesis touches upon various subjects: marketing, advertising, sociology, anthropology, psychology and other social sciences. However, it is important to know that the findings focus on the field of advertising and the results of this thesis is to help advertising professions plan better for their advertising campaigns. The recommendations also deals with the ethics of advertising and the appeal of advertising, in society. The purpose of this section is to develop a tool that can help practitioners bring about differentiation in their brands by looking at the cultural DNA communicated in advertising and brands, and help academicians consider further areas of research. These recommendations will broadly be classified in the area of advertising planning, advertising ethics and appeal and advertising culture’s research methodology.

How does one plan for advertising or judge creativity in advertising? The standard marketing answers lie in the so called ‘mixes’ of marketing, be it the 4P’s of Product, Price, Place, Promotion (or the newer form of Programs, Process, People and Performance) or the 5M’s of advertising being, Mission, Message, Media and Money or STP, which is segmentation, targeting and positioning. Textbooks on advertising and Integrated Marketing Communications would have typical sections that would cover areas that professionals need to cover when planning for advertising. The contents of three popular text books have been covered to show how Culture of the Target Audience is typically not given importance in advertising planning. A review of this shows the gap that practitioners play in projecting consumer culture in advertising.

In all the three books, much importance is given to integrated marketing communications, where a focused message is sent in different media, in order to bring about consumer engagement. The emphasis is given to the 5 M’s of advertising and these tend to be extended to different forms of communication. As a result of this advertising planning tends to happen in a sub-optimal manner, where the demographics and psychographics of consumers are briefly touched upon, unique brand positioning is attempted at, and creativity in advertising determines the success of a campaign. This paper believes that culture is as important aspect of the consumer, and can be a tool to develop advertising messages and make effective decisions in advertising.
Figure 12 : Comparison of Key Books on Advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title: Advertising and Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) by Kruti Shah (McGraw Hill)</th>
<th>Title: Integrated Advertising, Promotion and Marketing Communications by Kenneth E Clow &amp; Donald Baack (Pearson)</th>
<th>Title: Advertising and Promotion. An IMC Approach by Shimp (Cengage Learning)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Introduction to IMC</td>
<td>IMC</td>
<td>An overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMC as an Integral Part of Marketing</td>
<td>Corporate Image and Brand Management</td>
<td>Marcom Challenges</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Buyer Behavior</td>
<td>Ethical and Environmental Issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Promotions Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Part 2- Situational Analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Part 2 : IMC Advertising Tools</strong></td>
<td><strong>Part 2 : The Fundamental Marcom Decisions : Targeting, Positioning, Objective Setting and Budgeting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Behavior</td>
<td>Advertising Management</td>
<td>Targeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Process</td>
<td>Advertising Design</td>
<td>Positioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMC Agencies</td>
<td>Message Strategies</td>
<td>Objectives &amp; Budgeting</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Strategy</td>
<td>Media Channels and Planning</td>
<td>Overview of Advertising Management, Messages, Media and Measurement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding the Big Idea</td>
<td>E-active Marketing</td>
<td>Creating Effective and Creative Advertising Messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Execution</td>
<td>Alternative Marketing</td>
<td>Message Appeals and Endorsers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Execution – Print</td>
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<td>Creative Execution – TV</td>
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<td>Creative Execution - Radio</td>
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The above analysis indicates a gap in an advertising tool on Culture. Advertising is such a subject of interest even to the most common man. Therefore, everybody can have an opinion on whether an advertising campaign is good, average or bad. As professionals, practitioners try to be as objective in advertising by setting objectives as per the Hierarchy of Effects theory of Awareness-Interest-Desire-Action (AIDA) or DAGMAR (Defining Advertising Goals to Measure Advertising Results), and following a discipline of strategic thinking. The practitioner views cognitive (or knowledge/information), affective (emotional) or conative (behavioral) effects to persuade the consumer. Another advertising theory called the ‘Means-End Theory’ identifies the product’s attributes, consumer benefits, leverage points, personal values and
executional framework. Advertising becomes the Stimulus to which there is a Response. This is a leverage point whereby a product’s attributes and benefits gets leveraged by an advertising message to bring about attitudinal or behavioral change in the consumer.

The different phases of research have indicated that culture is strongly reflected in advertising and can play an important role in advertising effectiveness. Lack of consumer engagement amongst consumers is often a reality in many advertising campaigns. With advertising focusing on ‘Value’ and ‘Distinctive’ as key appeals that emerged in the content study, the issue arises that do consumers really want that? Advertising tends to be more effective when as a stimulus is relates with emotional appeals. Earlier research has indicated that both these appeals are largely rational. At the same time practitioners seem to agree that there are waves of change happening to the Indian consumer and the consumer is in fact ready to deal with advertising that can facilitate these waves of change. The phenomena of culture in advertising may be seen in terms of the following phenomena that professional can plan for when they develop effective advertising.

1. **Value needs to be communicated with cultural stimuli.** The content study indicated that Value is of being communicated in most advertising. This is not surprising since Indians are known to be price-conscious and cautious on spending. The new Indian consumer is demanding and discerning. They look for high quality and good technology. Advertisers need to ensure that value is communicated to consumers without bringing down the image of the brand. Communication of value tends to make the message tactical in nature. Advertising needs to communicate value in consumer language about innovation in product designing and value in the inherent product. Augmentation of product or service and differentiation can therefore be brought about. Advertising needs to ensure that the over-drive on ‘value for money’ does not affect product or brand augmentation and positioning.

Indian consumers are looking at high value to meet their expectations. This does not mean that advertisers need to only take the rational route to communication and focus on only the product. From a consumer point of view, products tend to be boring. Consumer needs, lifestyles and experience becomes more important. With technology products
dominating Indian advertising, and ever increasing purchasing power, it may seem
rational to give a technology and product message. However, brands tend to be
successful on emotional appeals. This means that advertising while requiring to
communicate ‘value’ needs to move away from ‘product’ or USP messages and find a
means to stimulate emotionally, the consumer’s mind. Advertising that tends to just
communicate competitive pricing and quality services tend to diminish the imagery of the
brand. However, in terms of advertising appeal and ethics, there was a difference between
the perception of consumers across the categories.

Figure 13 : Culture and Value for different Product Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HIR</th>
<th>HIE</th>
<th>LIR</th>
<th>LIE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power Distance</strong></td>
<td>Technology for more value</td>
<td>Respect for age and hierarchy</td>
<td>Value through information</td>
<td>Value through positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male-Female</strong></td>
<td>Common for all categories where advertising adds value by playing a role in male enlightenment and women’s empowerment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual-Collective</strong></td>
<td>Common for all categories where advertising adds value to play a role in reinforcing the mix of collectivity and individual aspirations for success.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></td>
<td>Common for all categories where advertising adds value to play a role in encouraging risk taking amongst Indian consumers.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethics</strong></td>
<td>Advertising is overall perceived as low in ethics and therefore could add value by projecting ethics. Within the categories there is a difference, with LIR being rated the lowest and HIE being the highest.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Appeal</strong></td>
<td>Advertising adds value because it is appealing, depicts a positive side to life and is important to consumers. LIR product advertising tends to be less appealing, entertaining and informative. HIR tends to be most informative</td>
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Value that gets communicated in advertising therefore can be done so by positively using stimuli that convey the cultural dimensions of advertising. Looking at this in terms of the four product categories researched, the following is proposed. It must be remembered that only in the dimension of ‘Power Distance’ was there any differences in the communications between the product categories. In the other cultural dimensions, there was no difference in the perception of consumers across the categories.

2. **Advertising Positioning without bringing about change is passive positioning.**

*Indian consumers* are now ready to change and in fact become catalysts to change. Looking at most contemporary advertising one may say that most brands when they advertise, want to bring about change in attitude towards the concerned brand. This study believes that this change in attitude can be more powerful when advertising hints at bringing about change in culture.

Television is known to be a low involvement medium and goes back to the 1960’s where Krugman developed a theory of passive learning. Since television is a medium where one relaxes and has no time to really reflect on the message, it tends to be a medium were learning is slow and more suitable for low involvement products. Cultural stimuli at this point would help in advertising speeding up the learning process, with the consumer questioning existing and desirable appeals in advertising. Top brands tend to create advertising that communicate the functional and emotional benefits and bring about behavioral change. Reinforcement of cultural stimuli in advertising would inspire consumers. When brands inspire consumers, that would mean that the marketing mix being used effectively to bring about the necessary change in attitude or behavior.

Advertising can approach change in a more active manner, in some of the ways shown below:
### Figure 14: Desirable Cultural Phenomenon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Change</th>
<th>Advertising Stimuli</th>
<th>Desirable Cultural Phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Change for the Better | Change for the better can happen with new products.  
Change for the better can fulfill the Indian dream.  
Change for the better can build diversity and liberal thinking.  
Change for the better can create a level playing field between men and women.  
Change for the better can help make fairy tales real, by a better experience of romance. | Lower Power Distance  
Male-/Female level playing field  
The right mix of Individualism and Collectivism  
Reduction of Uncertainty and risk aversion |
| Change to Succeed | Change in lifestyle through new products  
Instill and grow aspirations through judicious use of celebrities.  
Need to grow fast | Aspire for equality in lifestyles and lowering of classes.  
Reduction of stereotypes  
Positive impact on all four cultural dimensions |
| Change in Traditions | Change in:  
- Family projections  
- Male-Female | Project family in a modern and contemporary manner.  
Because of urbanization, friends |
3. **Advertising could be discerning in the depiction of Power Distance.** The quantitative study indicated that only in the use of Power Distance did consumers perceive a difference between the 4 categories of product advertising. Advertising can play a role in making a change in Indian exploitation of Power Distance. Class differences, evils of patriarchy and family relations can all be conceived through advertising. All dimensions of culture are reflected in advertising, however, Power Dimension can be projected in an innovative manner.

4. **Advertising can be a catalyst to change.** Since overall appeal of advertising is high across all product categories, consumers can be receptive to change. As organizations
grow internationally, the need for local relevance is great. Advertising stimuli based on culture can play a catalyst role in bringing about change.

5. **There is a need for greater ethics in advertising.** While advertising is seen as conveying ethical values and projecting good citizenship, it can play a more active role in making consumers more socially responsible, being concerned about the environment and encouraging a moral life-style.

### 8.2: Advertising Cultural DNA: A New Approach

Evaluating the Cultural DNA of advertising can serve as an advertising tool and a tool to judge creativity in advertising. This can be used by practitioners both in the marketing departments and advertising agencies to create effective advertising. The study also would like advertising not only to appeal to consumers but also play an ethical role. This will in fact make advertising that much more effective. This section will explain this and graphically depict this.

The cultural dimensions studied in this thesis and the results of the many phases of research can be put together to study the cultural DNA for any advertising campaign. Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance may be seen in one axis, because after all, the higher the Power Distance, the higher the uncertainty avoidance. It can therefore be seen in the diagram below with high Power Distance and low Uncertainty Avoidance. Similarly, the higher the level of collectivism, the higher the stereotypes of male and female, and lower the levels of collectivism, the lower the levels of stereotyping. Cultural dimensions are there for all types of product advertising. Advertising must play a positive role in portraying the culture of the consumer. Advertisers therefore need to plan for the reflection of cultural dimensions. While all aspects of culture can be planned for, depending on the product category, the advertising can reflect the following:

**HIR:** Technology, Information, Equality, Empowerment

**HIE:** Social Change, Ethics, Appeal, Aspirations

**LIR:** Ethics, Appeal, Health, Results
LIE: Distinctive, Confidence, Value, Appeal

Advertising performs the role of informing, persuading, reminding and bring about attitudinal and behavioral change. Consumer behavior theories acknowledge that culture influences consumer behavior. Positioning strategies have been the basis of creating sound advertising strategies. This thesis recommends one more step in the process of advertising planning which is the study of the Cultural DNA of a brand. This is based on the results of the many phases of research and the findings of the thesis. While brand positioning continues to be an important strategic tool for the creation of advertising, this study reinforces that it is important to create brand differentiation through the proper profiling of the consumer culture suited for the type of product being advertised. Cultural DNA is particularly important when it comes to creating effective advertising. To develop a holistic perspective to advertising planning, practitioners must be able to look at the cultural DNA.

The key elements of the assessing the cultural DNA of a brand is to ask the following questions:

1. Which category does the product/brand belong to: High Involvement Rational, High Involvement Emotional, Low Involvement Rational or Low Involvement Emotional?

2. Since Power Distance is a major dimension of High Involvement products, how can this be leveraged to be positive? This can be seen:

   for HIR through Technology and Information.

   for HIE, through bringing about Social Change and raising ethical issues.

   for LIR and LIE through reduction in Power Distance and greater risk and adventure.

3. For all product categories, the dimensions need the following positive orientation:

   Masculinity/Femininity: Equality, Empowerment, Appeal, Ethics

   Collectivism/Individualism: Relationships, Aspirations, Appeal, Ethics

   Uncertainty Avoidance: Distinctive, Confidence, Health, Results
4. Does the recommended brand positioning get augmented with the Cultural DNA.

This forms a basic structure, which this thesis is terming the Cultural DNA, to help advertisers make more interesting brand positioning and create greater uniqueness for the brand. The appeals for each dimension can be reviewed through a process of research, since this may vary with time. The figure given below therefore can be modified as per research data available on consumers for each product type. Practitioners can use the framework to make their advertising process more systematic and relevant to consumer culture. This can also be incorporated in the various advertising disciplines followed by leading advertising agencies (like O&M’s Butterfly or the T-Plan by JWT) so that there are cultural cues that creative professionals can refer to when developing an advertising campaign. This model can be further developed by researching different campaigns and getting consumer perceptions on the cultural dimensions existing in key advertising campaigns. The framework is shown below.

Figure 15: Advertising Cultural DNA for Advertising Planning
The framework given above puts into perspective not only existing cultural dimensions of consumers. The research recognizes that advertising plays a key role in the reinforcement of culture and therefore needs to play an active role in reinforcing desirable cultural aspects. The Content study in fact reinforced that advertising should portray appeals in a desirable manner so that advertising is both appealing and ethical.

Future research can identify good, bad and ugly advertising appeals, as per consumers. This study does indicate that there is a difference in appeals between the four product categories. HIR product advertising needs to show technology in a manner that suits consumer needs and can create uniqueness in brand positioning. Since information is important, the right levels of information needs to be given. For HIE product advertising the strategy needs to take into consideration that brands need to not only build imagery, but do so in a manner that can help reduce the cultural weaknesses that exist in a culture. Advertising can play an active role in this. For LIR and LIE product advertising, since frequency of advertising is much higher for the nature of these products, advertising, advertising could also play a role in bringing about desirable attitude change. For example the removal of color prejudice or class distinctions could be implied in the advertising. In essence this paper endorses what contemporary marketing is all about – marketing of the spirit. Through touching a cultural issue in advertising, advertising achieve the success that contemporary marketing requires.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research

This thesis is the tip of the iceberg and limited to the advertising selected for the content study, the practitioners interviewed and the sample of consumer surveyed. The subject has the potential to be researched on a larger scale, nationally, with urban and rural sample sizes, be compared with other countries to be used for cross-cultural research. Indian advertising includes messages in all forms of media including outdoor, signages, merchandise, banners and other items. The growth of the digital media has given rise to consumers who are connected globally, and therefore do not belong to an insular culture. Future research on this subject can take into consideration all these aspects.
Noted musician, AR Rehman has said, “If you respect a language and culture, it shows in your work”. Advertising is stimuli that plays a great role in the life of the consumer. It is important for creators of advertising to assess the culture that is being reflected in the advertising. With advertising being so important to consumers and playing a key role in influencing attitude and behavior, advertising practitioners have an opportunity to not only create path-breaking advertising, but in the process, create advertising that plays a powerful role in the success of products that are being marketed. This will not only reflect the true culture of the target markets the advertising is aimed at, but will also bring about the development of creative and effective advertising.