Executive Summary

This study, on the dimensions of cultural values in contemporary Indian Advertising – A Consumer Perspective, was conducted for advertising of 4 categories – high involvement with rational consumer-decision making products, low involvement emotional decision making, and low involvement rational and emotional products. The thesis has undertaken both secondary and primary research. The study has been process driven, covering multiple phases: a content study of contemporary advertising, a qualitative practitioner’s study, a consumer survey, and an exploratory qualitative assessment of culture in contemporary advertising. The findings of the study indicate that culture is reflected in Indian advertising for the advertisements researched, in all the four categories of product advertising.

The literature review indicated that there are gaps in research for how culture is reflected and perceived by consumers of Indian advertising. The need for a content study methodology with qualitative inputs from experts in the field was identified as important. There was in fact a need for research of Indian advertising of the four categories of product advertising.

In the content study, for all categories, ‘Effective’, a Masculine cultural dimension emerged strong. ‘Distinctive’ reflecting an ‘Individualism’ cultural dimension was also strong. For High Emotional product advertising, ‘Status’ was a strong appeal reflecting Power Distance. For High Involvement Rational Product Advertising, ‘Convenient’ was a significant appeal reflecting a masculine cultural dimension. The content study indicated that advertising indeed is often not very focused and has multiple appeals in the execution. However, it was found that the most significant advertising appeal that was prevalent in all the categories was the concept of ‘Value’ or ‘Effective’. This appeal tends to be very functional, and therefore does tend to take away from the imagery required for brands to be effectively positioned in the market place. This also indicates the high use of tactical advertising in the industry very often at the cost of strategic brand positioning.

The Practitioners study gave a focus to this research that practitioners view culture in advertising as conveying a singular message of ‘Change’. Through a process of coding, five waves of change were enumerated by the practitioners: 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 findings reinforced a move for a new and confident India, reflected in Indian consumers and Indian advertising.

The third phase of the research was the consumer survey where young consumers were exposed to popular print and television advertising. The hypothesis was that the dimensions of culture depicted in advertising will vary according to the advertising of high involvement and low involvement products, with rational and emotional decision making. The study also researched whether consumer opinion regarding the ethics of advertising and consumer likeability of advertising will vary according to the advertising of high involvement and low involvement products, with rational and emotional decision making. The findings indicated that the four dimensions of culture is reflected in advertising across all the four categories. In the case of the dimension of Power Distance however, there were variances across the four categories. Factors that contribute to each dimension were studied across the product categories. The research indicated that the perceptions of advertising appeal and advertising ethics also varied across the advertising of the four product categories.

Since the research was conducted across different years, an exploratory update study was also conducted to reinforce that culture is indeed reflected in contemporary advertising.

The thesis analysis the findings and finally concludes with a recommendation for advertising practitioners to also study in depth consumer culture in the creation of advertising. A framework was recommended called ‘Advertising Cultural DNA’ for effective advertising planning. This theory will help practitioners sharpen their advertising planning, create effective advertising and help in better creative judgment of advertising campaigns by practitioners.