

Advertising Communication-The Story of its Growth

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Abstract

It is very much in the fitness of the things to draw a historical time-sketch from olden times to the recent present to trace the development of advertising from its primitive humble beginnings on the clay tablets and tavern signs to the electronic/digital age of today. It is interesting to learn how civilised society has borne testimony to witness the growth of advertising over the years. Advertisements thus become portrayals of the socio-cultural and economic ethos of the times in which they emanate.

Keywords: *Cultivated wants, coercion, process, yardsticks, growth, consumer, medium, communication.*

The present research paper "Advertising Communication: The Story of its Growth" seeks to ascertain how, as a form of communication, advertising has been attempting to manipulate the consumer by indirect appeal since ages. David Potter has opined that its appeal essentially touches the chords into the desire in man to own, into the wants of an individual to possess-and its goal oftentimes becomes a way of command by enticing the consumer in the consumption of the goods and services under offer. Thus, advertising has been trying to motivate the consumers to buy a product not on the basis of its advantages and also not considering the consumers' existing needs, but because of the origin of a cultivated or forced want created using a mild psychological coercion to enhance sales of a desired product. As the English historian and essayist Thomas Macaulay also wrote that advertising is important to business in the same way as steam is to an industry. Nothing else except the mint can make its presence felt without advertising, he opined. All other products need to be exposed to the public eye.

Advertising discourse which is often viewed as a communication weapon of largely some recent origin is in fact, as old as civilization and commerce. Since olden times, it has always been necessary to bring buyers and sellers at one common platform. Without the buyer, no selling has ever proved productive. What has changed over the years is only the degree of the sophistication of the advertising process. This calls to trace the development of advertising from its nascent beginnings on the clay tablets and tavern signs to the electronic and digital age of today.

In the ancient and medieval times, advertising was brought forth by the oral mediums- by spreading the message through one to one interactions. The initial

successes in the spread towards modern advertising happened in the 15th and 16th century along with the development of printing. It was in the 17th century that newspapers in London began to carry advertisements on a weekly basis, and by the 18th century, such advertising had found impetus in letter and spirit.

The history of advertising was divided into three broad periods by Russell and Lane. The major yardsticks can be enumerated as a) The Premarketing Era; b) The Mass Communication Era, and c) The Research Era. The very nomenclatures speak up the related stories of growth of the different eras. The early history of advertising is so fascinating that one cannot remain uninterested. Advertising is believed to have started some 5,000 years ago. It is fairly understandable that the earliest known proofs were left by the very people who gave the world the Tower of Babel. Clay tablet of Babylonian days (of about 3000 B.C.) bear the inscriptions for an ointment dealer, a scribe, and also of a shoemaker. The ancient Egyptians too made use of a better medium on which to write their messages. To announce the arrival of ships which carried cargoes of wines and supplies of spices and metals, the Greeks used to make use of the services of town criers. Such criers were often accompanied by a musician to enhance wider publicity as well as wider reach. Such town criers later came to be regarded as the earliest mediums for public announcements in many European countries also for centuries. By around A.D. 1100, the innkeepers in France would have the town crier either blow a horn or gather a group to offer samples to advertise the finest wines available. Roman merchants, too, had a good sense of advertising. The ruins of Pompeii contain signs in stone or terra-cotta used to advertising a physical presentation of

a pair of horns for a butcher shop; a cow for a dairy, a shoe for a shoemaker and the like. These were the times when the symbols of advertisements were more direct. Such symbols then were largely predictable, easily recognisable, ensuring wider as well as quicker understanding and the resultant desired action.

The newspaper was the next most enduring advertising medium. The era of printed advertising, observes Chatterjee, was ushered for the first time in 1473 with a small poster by William Caxton promoting the sale of a book. Printed advertising was in general use by the mid-eighteenth century. Giving a glimpse of the firsts of firsts, the first printed English newspaper *The Weekly News* of London got published in 1622. The first advertisement in an English newspaper appeared in 1625. The first American newspaper to carry advertisements appeared in 1704, the *Boston Newsletter*. It printed an advertisement offering a reward for the search of a thief. It also printed a policy of return of a fashionable brand of men's clothing. By the time the United States was formed, the colonies had thirty newspapers.

During the 'Mass Communication Era' from the mid-1770s to about 1900, advertisements were increasingly gaining popularity in reaching large strata of the populations, the focus being on developing faster presses in the first place followed by an increase in the reach of broadcast media. The history of advertising, as we know it, dates back to the American Industrial Revolution of the later nineteenth century. Advertising took hold just as the country was entering its era of greatest growth: population was soaring, factories were springing up, rail roads were opening the west. During this period, a growth in the middle class, new inventions in mass production, expanded transportation, and high-speed printing presses combined to pave the way for modern marketing and advertising.

By 1952, there were as many as 109 advertising agencies, and advertisements had become the main source of revenue for newspapers. According to the first Press Commission, annual revenue of Rs.5 crore was obtained by newspapers from advertising. The emphasis upto this time continued to remain on advertising consumer goods of a luxury and semi-luxury category. For example, cosmetics were on the top of the list of the items advertised, followed by drugs, automobile products, food and beverages, banking and insurance. Advertisements, thus, become harbingers of the social and cultural changes all set to take place in near future.

In the sixties, the number of agencies had shot up to nearly 280 with a total turnover of Rs.35 crore, but the advertising focus remained unaltered. Consumer goods continued to dominate the advertising scenario, with textile advertisements in the lead, closely followed by cosmetics, drugs and the rest.

The seventies witnessed the growth of advertising on Doordarshan, Vividh Bharati and in the press. At the end

of 1980, the press still enjoyed the lion's share of 66 per cent of the overall expenditure on advertising, whereas radio, T.V. and cinema took only 15 per cent. A host of glossy periodicals like *India Today*, *Bombay*, *New Delhi*, *Surya*, and a number of film magazines made their mark in the last decade adding a charm in Indian advertising.

It was in October 1994 when, in India, the first online banner advertisement was created. It ushered the advent of digital marketing in the early 1990's. It only read: "Have you ever clicked your mouse right HERE? YOU WILL" It got published on *HotWired.com* – now better known as *Wired.com*. It got published especially in regard to a campaign which was being mastered by AT&T. Parle's *Melody Toffee*, *Amul Doodh*, *Zandu Balm*, *Maggi*, *Cadbury's Dairy Milk*, *Pepsi*, *Chocos* and *Fevikwik* were some of the most popular advertisements of that time.

To describe the period from 2000-2009 in Indian advertising, the term 'naughties' was hailed by the BBC. Advertising during these times took a sharp turn- it stopped being merely a commercial art form and transcended to its purer version - marking a direct appeal to the emotions. The *Fevicol* and *Asian* paints advertisements touched high popularity index by way of their great communication showcasing an eclectic mix of clever creativity and magical play of words. Catchy slogans and pun lines ruled the times.

In the last decade, online advertisements and the impact of Social media marketing trends have changed the texture of advertising for us. There is a plethora of Tik Tok dances and Instagram and Facebook advertisements which have erupted with the increase in the number of social media users. Brands are now shifting to social media platforms as most people prefer to shop online.

Today, even after more than 200 years of the existence of Indian advertising, the target group remains unchanged – a consumption hungry mass-oriented urban, literate group with a considerable income per month per family. There is no denying the fact that exposure to advertisements through the press and the electronic media is restricted largely to cities and big towns, though new avenues are opening up in rural advertising also.

These facts prove testimony to the popularity of advertising communication as a ripe subject for research. Its story of development is interesting as, with it has evolved a similar engaging narrative of changing consumer preferences, of the birth of new consumer needs which render it an ever evolving phenomenon of being termed as an indicator of growing wants and needs culminating towards new social changes.

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