

Contribution of Advertisement in Construction of Identity

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Identity –construction is a gradual process of unfolding of potentialities of self. Entire process is akin to socialization from the functional perspective. It is none the less important to mention that in today’s world media play the most prominent role in formation of identity. Advertisement is situated within a system of visual representation. Moreover, in every aspect advertisement has given some sort of messages. It would include the process of identity construction in its fold. Actually identity is constructed through the process of response of events, interactions, relationships and even situations. The role of advertisement is note worthy in this matter. Actually advertisement negotiates an identity. Impact of advertisements varies from one individual to another with respect to different interpretations. Traditional homogenous identity turns into heterogeneous through the intervention of ad world. Scope of uniqueness in identity increases the chance of presence of multiple directionalities. Now consumerism becomes the buzz word. In this information society identity is defined in consumerist term. Hence advertisement acts as a bridge through which a complete identity begins to mature.

Key Words: Identity, Advertisement, Self, Representation

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary livings entail manifold processes of contemplation with enormous opportunities of execution. Variations commence to take place from the very foundation of socialization. The spell of multiplicity continues through out the life in each and every sphere. Personality of individual is no exception. Henceforth the conceptualization related to identity has got a innovative dimension in this ever shifting era. Perception of self is known as identity in common parlance. Identity construction incorporates the process of gradual unfolding of potentialities though there can be some sparks of instant feelings. During the life long phase of identity construction several agents have to play significant role. All important agents like family, educational institutions, work place and mass media have designated role in shaping identity of an individual. In this information society, lifestyle becomes inseparable from mass media. Among all other resources of media advertisement deserves special attention for its overwhelmed and far reaching impact in the life of individual. In this paper an attempt is made to discuss the role of advertisement in creation of individual identity.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary sources like articles in journals and books. The concerned objectives of the study are - 1] To discuss the process of identity construction through

advertisements and 2] To establish the link between advertisement in the process of identity construction.

Purpose of Research

Contemporary world is governed by advertisements in several media. Mediated human life is holistically transformed the outlook of individual. Branding as a buzz word enters in the scenario with the solid foundation of cultural expansion with a connotation of globalization. The purpose of research moves around the focal point of consequential attribution of transformed self as well as identity in considering the effectiveness of advertisement. Truly the shaping of identity is influenced by advertisement directly as well as indirectly in the mediated life –world. Creation of identity essentially links with specific steps, today each and every step has direct connection with advertisement. Hence, the impact study involving the inter relationship between ad and identity becomes a serious issue of academic discussion. In terms of research orientation two issues are highly significant in the periphery of serious discussion. One is the implication of the procedural transformation of self with respect to the impact of advertisement (question focusing on ‘what’) . Simultaneously question arising on the inter connection between advertisement and identity of individual (question regarding the issue revolving on ‘how’).

Sources of information: Apart from advertisements are collected from audio- visual media principally, there are strong influences of ad coming through social media. Content of ad also changes over time span. Advertisements in TV, radio , Cinema houses, newspapers [e paper and print version] and similar sources are exposition of propensities for the consideration as the source of information.

Contemporary composition of self is comprised of several identities focusing on explicit roles on the basis of circumstances with a dichotomy of private and public. In the course of development for the creation of identity , group membership is anchored by amalgamation of essential identities. Social identity theory expands on the basis of two separate processes --- categorization and comparison. According to common perception , a link can be detected between advertisement induced excitement and the purpose of the identity of consumers. The reflection is perceived in affective responses of the specific consumers’ identity . From this perspective significant aspects can be recognized as feelings, emotive orientations and self efficacy. Subtle or

unintentional presentation of self should be associated with the newly emerged image of identity.

III. PROCESS OF IDENTITY CREATION

Identity is defined by the consequence of experience. Identity is invariably linked with representation which is an inseparable component of experience. It can be said that individual identities are becoming increasingly fragmented under conditions of globalization with accelerated global flows of commodities, culture and people. Consequently identity of people turns to be disembedded. According to K. D. Vryan, [The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology: 2007] analysis of identity is explained as definition of people in social terms. They depend upon shared meanings and situate their bearers within variously structured and enduring sets of social relations. Social identities define persons as members of particular groups or set of people. For the creation of identity consumption of sign, interpretation of signs and knowledge of meaning of sign --- all are necessary parts. In a broader sense identity incorporates several factors like ethnic group, region, gender, age, education, health, income and class, occupation and work place, leisure activity, friends and peer group, family, consumerist attitude, nationality, sexual preference and mass media. Production of advertisement is related with differential products in various modes like banners, sign boards, print media [magazines, newspapers], visual media [films, serials and programmes] internet and cyber media. In practical scenario advertisement is related with leisure activity. Thus it becomes a valuable component of modern entertainment. The link between advertisement and creation of identity depends on time and place. Advertisements implies expressive communication with respective to shared understanding. Undoubtedly advertisement gives an idea of trade mark which should be intrinsically striking with the presence of symbols, signature colour and so on. Advertisements are, after all, aestheticized articulations of the core values of a society. Those values can shift or come under strain. Advertisements focus on certain issues like geography, leisure practices, cultural heritage and social relationships and social values.

Modern technology has interpreted identity in a different perspective. New mode of communication technology has freed interaction from the necessities of physical co presence. In theoretical terms it can be said that new technologies have expanded the array of generalized others contributing to the construction of self. According to Cerulo, 'I', 'me' and 'generalized other' are linked with the establishment of 'communities of mind' and the negotiation of co presence and cyberspace identities. [Cerulo: 1997] Conceptualization of identity can be done in several ways. As a concept identity is described as life narrative which is presented to others. Advertisements help to develop self perception through which the process of representation in the wider society takes place. According to some, construction of identity is done on the basis of the choice to pick from a set of available roles. Advertisements help to make a choice from several existing

roles. Identity is consistent to some theoreticians, for others identity is associated with changing aspect. Advertisements are concerned with both of the aspects. The individual constructs his or her identity reflexively, responding to events, knowledge, relationships with other people and other stimuli in a constant, dynamic process. Advertisement can be treated as a stimulus. Social and cultural forces are treated as valuable component in the process of the formation of identity. Advertisements are examples of such cultural forces. Thus advertisements are considered as significant media for the creation of identity. In post modern society individual is absolutely threatened by several 'dilemmas of the self' [Giddens: 1991] Dilemmas arise from fragmentation, powerlessness, uncertainty and a struggle against commodification. Advertisement plays contributory role in construction of such dilemmas. Through advertisements individual can get required idea as well as information for the execution of roles. It is well accepted fact that modernity is intertwined with socially defined structure of interaction with respect to roles, norms, customs and expectations. The concept of identity arises from that complex process. It can't be ignored that one can be trapped in the process of making identity amidst of web of roles, expectations and relations. Advertising images are related with aesthetic objects. The key element of creativity has got its expression through styles, fashion and its integration with art culture system. [Lury: 1996] [As mentioned in Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images by Schroeder J. E. and Zwick Detlav] A system of visual representation comprises advertising as the most valuable component.

IV. LINK BETWEEN IDENTITY AND ADVERTISEMENT

Explaining the concept of social identity involves a sum total of dual processes of the way of presentation of self and understanding of self identity in relation to others. These two processes involve active role of advertisements. Way of self presentation is largely shaped and influenced by the genre of advertisements. The action of the advertisement is prevalent in the context of understanding of self. This process is sequenced on the basis of organization of surroundings with reference to meaning. This capacity is largely influenced by advertisement.

A significant role is performed by advertisements in promulgating gender specific tasks.. The concept of 'Visual genealogy' can be applied with all encompassing impact of photography, fine arts and graphic designs. On the basis of Ritzer's comment it can be mentioned that 'We emphasize how ads produce and manipulate social signifiers rather than how individuals appropriate their symbolic value'. [Ritzer: 1996] Advertising acts as a representational system that produces meaning outside the realm of the advertised product. [Goldman: 1992] [As mentioned in Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images by Schroeder J. E. and Zwick Detlav]. Abstract connections can be made between lifestyle and brand. Viewers are asked to transfer meaning from the look of the people in the ad - their

image, lifestyle and physical appearance – onto the product [Williamson 1978] consciously or not – the creation and reception of the ad [Schroeder 2002] [As mentioned in *Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images* by Schroeder J. E. and Zwick Detlav]. By the process of comparison particular behaviour of consumer can be influenced by advertisements. Actually lifestyle choices are regarded as significant component of modern identity construction. As other traditional routes of identity formation have declined, identities have become more tightly linked to particular lifestyles. In the context of urban society the existence of displaying a particular lifestyle is highly relevant. Particular purchases provide a means to demonstrate a strong commitment to a particular marginalized identity.

Reception approach is linked with attribution and construction of meaning (derived from ad) with the receivers. Messages of ad are always open and polysemic i.e. linked with several meanings of multiple levels. Interpretation of meaning depends on the context and culture of the receivers. On the basis of Mcquail's study it can be said that ad can be used as a window on events and experience. This not only extends the vision of viewers but enables to have a perception of self. Ad can be visualized as a mirror of events in society and the world. The angles and directions of the mirror are decided by others. Thus the formation of identity is perceived by others. Ad can act as filter or gatekeeper for selecting parts of experience for special attention. It simultaneously involves closing off others' views or opinions. The situation of ad is like signpost, guide or interpreter for some people. Ways of interaction have got sensibility in this way. Ad acts as the forum or assembling platform for the presentation of information and ideas. Hence the probabilities of getting responses and feedbacks are encouraged through ads. Ads sometimes operate as screen or barrier. It indicates the possibility of cutting off from the reality to provide a false perception of the world.

On the basis of Lasswell's [1948] study, Mcquail [1994] developed the concept of media tasks in society. These tasks are completely applicable for the context of ad. These functions are linked with creation of identity. There are five such components like information, correlation, continuity, entertainment and mobilization. Individual can get an access of transnational as well as globalized concept through ad. Henceforth individual personality becomes free flowing and world prone.

On the basis of post modernism, it can be said that individual never makes consumption choice solely from the utilities of the products. This is also true that with the acceleration of pace of society, identity becomes unstable and fragile. In this context the role of ad is very much significant in molding personality also. Symbolic meaning of the commodity plays a contributory role here [Belk:1988, Bourdieu:1994, Dittmar:1992, Douglas:1982, Gabriel and Lang:1995, Giddens:1991, Goffman:1959, McCracken:1988] . [As mentioned in *Globalization Media Culture and Society*

by Usha Srivastava] Symbolic meaning operates in two levels – social symbolism and self symbolism. Social symbolism is the way of constructing social world. Self symbolism is the way of constructing self identity [Elliott: 1997] [As mentioned in *Globalization Media Culture and Society* by Usha Srivastava] Cultural meanings are transferred to brands. Brands are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity. [McCracken: 1987, Mick and Buhl: 1992] [As mentioned in *Globalization Media Culture and Society* by Usha Srivastava] Following post modernism self is defined neither as a given product of a social system nor as a fixed entity which the individual can simply adopt, but as something does the person actively create, partially through consumption. [Dittmar: 1992, Gabriel and Lang: 1995, Giddens: 1993, Glover 1988, Solomon: 1996, Tyler: 1978] [As mentioned in *Globalization Media Culture and Society* by Usha Srivastava]

Thompson [1995] defines the self as a symbolic project, which is constructed by individual on the basis of available symbolic materials. In this context a coherent account is presented on the narrative of self identity. Ads can be visualized as a component of symbolic material. The relationship between advertisements and consumers is dialectical. Ads not only help in creating, modifying and transforming cultural meanings for the consumers. [Lamnar and Cooper: 1983], [As mentioned in *Globalization Media Culture and Society* by Usha Srivastava] but also represents cultural meanings taken from the consumers' world view and invested into advertised product. Advertisement is a means for creating or transforming meanings into culture and cultural product. The meanings of advertisement emerge from interactions between consumers. These will have socially recognized meanings. The ubiquity of brands in developed countries is such that we live in a rich 'brandscape'. [Shery: 1987] from which we must select a personal 'brandscape' in which to live. [Biel: 1993] [As mentioned in *Globalization Media Culture and Society* by Usha Srivastava]

Identity theory focuses on self not as an autonomous psychological entity but as a multifaceted social construct that emerges from people's roles in society. Stryker defined two identity related concepts --- interactional commitment and affective commitment. Interactional commitment is reflected through number of roles associated with a particular identity. Affective commitment refers to the importance of the relationships associated with identity. By acknowledging the impact of social networks on people's self concepts, identity theory links the wider social structure and social network to the self concept. It connects social structure to the maintenance of social relationships. [Serpe: 1987] [As mentioned in *The Lifestyle Puzzle* by Henrick Vejlgaard]

In relation to advertisement homogenous as well as heteronomous types of identities can be easily determined. Advertisement can create stereo typing of identities involving similar kind of identity in a generalized way and over simplified fashion due to the process of imitation. On the

contrary, in some special context dissimilar identity can emerge with the help of advertisements. Some individuals are staying apart from the common pattern by adopting completely different style with the influence of advertisements. Sometimes image oriented identity begins to take place with overwhelming presence of advertisements. Viewers want to be like the advertised role as well as image. They give sufficient attention to build their identities in the path of ad related imitation i.e. a process of adoption of media induced image. This is very commonplace to define and present identity in terms of media imagery. There are chances of uncritical acceptance of others' expectations in the situation of constructing identity. On the other hand, fear of distortion and exaggeration may occur.

Visual identity is related with logotypes, symbols, colours and so on whereas name, use of stories and similar aspects are components of verbal identity. The role of determination of identity through ad can be easier with the labeling and classifying people to put them in a box.

Modern concept of identity is invariably related with age structure. The impact of ad is obviously active until a person attains adulthood. Though identity building process continues through out the life, the influence of ad is too prominent in younger stage. The influence becomes weak with the increase of age. Wertham pointed out several effects influencing identity structure of the child [Wertham: 1955] [as mentioned in Key themes in Media theory by Laughey D.] Passivity, misconception, imitation, identification and desensitization are note worthy effects. Very often children copy their favourite characters seeing them from ads. During the period of contact with ad, a process of subconscious identification takes place. Actually the visible consequence of such uncontested involvement has made the child one step forward towards desensitized.

Advertisements have ability of constant negotiation and renegotiation of identity. Actually ad allows several interpretations because the entire genre of ad works within various sectors of parameters. Caughey described that the identity of media figure to some extent influences reconstruction of individual identity. In this context Caughey defined and analysed two concepts as 'cultural imaginary' and 'international imaginary'. According to Usha Srivastava these two concepts can be merged under one heading of 'mediatized imaginary'. [Srivastava: 2010]. 'However all of the above cited Imaginary realms may be seen as extrapolation of Lacan's Imaginary order to a larger collective that has to do with communal identity, the media and how individuals find themselves in it.' [Srivastava: 2010] In practical scenario these concepts act as reservoir of constructed images. This can be reflected the nature of identity.

It is popular belief that women are portrayed as stereo typically famine sex object or housewives or mothers in contrast to men's position of authority and dominance. Dyer [1982] argued that in different ads, women are looked as dependent. Her study shows that advertisements are related to

women in aspects of home products, food products and beauty products. [As mentioned by Abbott, Wallace and Tyler in An Introduction to Sociology Feminist Perspectives] Myra Macdonald [1995] in her book Representing [As mentioned by Abbott, Wallace and Tyler in An Introduction to Sociology Feminist Perspectives] pointed out that women has identified three constructions of feminine identity like capable household managers, the guilty mother and the new women playful, indulgent, sexually aware and adventurous. Sometimes they are portrayed as superwomen also. According to Goldman advertisers forced to recognize greater participation of women with reference to changes in gender relations. The vision of career women becomes the target of new market.

Lifestyle can be used to describe the process of identity construction through specific manners. Lifestyle includes the preferences of individual in clothing, food and leisure activities. These subjective choices of individuals are expressed in terms of 'taste'. A close introspection can reveal link between tastes with identity. Advertisements can act as significant catalysts in this matter. Consumer culture creates consumer citizens. Consequently universalization of consumer culture is markedly present now. Identity is based on this trend of consumerism. Nature of buying becomes true marker of identity. New identities are fluid, temporary and open to change. A fluid lifestyle and consumer identity reflects a fluid social context, and helps, according to some critics, particularly the youth to generate a form of identity [Miles: 2000] [As mentioned in Cultural Studies by Nayar P.]

Identity is showcased by ads with special mention to some tag lines like 'Be Yourself', 'Develop your self esteem' 'Complete man'. Identities get coded as objects of consumption. [Nayar: 2011] Advertisements play the role of cultural intermediaries to generate desire for several products. Representation through ad seeks to create a relationship of identification between the product and the consumer. Four kinds of identities are mostly focused through ads. These are – aesthete consumer, Indian –ness, empowered consumer and consumers who trust only other consumers' testimonies. An example can be given by the print version of Innova ad with the presence of Amir Khan. [The Hindu, 15th March 2007: 24] [As mentioned in Cultural Studies by P.K. Nayar] Over the visual is the text 'Everyday. Many Roles. Unlimited Reasons To Celebrate.' Visual ads also say that there is a class of people who have the power, occasion and desire to celebrate. Casual dress and informal contexts are pillars of markers of the specificity of the ad of Innova. The sense of miniaturization of human being is also prevalent there. Sometimes multiple identities are showcased through ads. In some specific cases ad can define the difference between desirable identity and real identity. In this context there is a chance of developing a feeling of relative deprivation. Identities are constructed through representations that ultimately have a strong linkage with commodities. Representation of different products suggest that certain identities are desirable than others. In order to acquire

desirable identities, it is necessary to own and consume certain products. Thus consumption of goods is the prerequisite to identity formation. Brand conscious identity is wholly created by ads. People can get information regarding several brands through ads.

On the basis of a study of Cantril [1947: 149] [As mentioned in Key themes in Media theory by Laughey D.] seven features of susceptibility of media effects can be located. These are easily linked with the construction of identity through ad. These aspects are social insecurity, phobias, amount of worry, lack of self confidence, fatalism, religiosity and frequency of religious attendance. Cultivation theory discusses that viewers can't escape from gradual encroachment of media into their everyday life. According to Meyrowitz (1985) [As mentioned in Key themes in Media theory by Laughey D.], the middle class and the ghetto family inhibit the same social networks of information and knowledge, so their sense of physical separation – the fact that they live in different places – is insignificant compared to their sense of mediated togetherness. Thus the concept of 'placelessness' is defined by Meyrowitz. He analysed the situation by the idea that people are no longer defined by physical boundaries or places. Ad provides such a wonderful framework of construction of identity with this focus of placelessness.

Identity formation through ads can be done in several ways like reducing insecurity impersonal level, learning about society and world, gaining insight into own life as well as into others, experiencing empathy with other's problem, feeling of connection with others, gaining entry into an imaginary world and experiencing emotional release [like the function of safety valve]. The impact of ads on the construction of the identity individual can be negative also. A tendency of imitation can grow from this kind of perseverance. Thus there can be possibility of loss of creativity, individuality and detachment from the reality though positive aspects can't be ignored with sufficient focus on domain of information. Through ads different trajectories of information come and individuals become enriched with those sources. In fine, for proper structure of identity a balance of influence of ads with the art of execution of them in real life is a necessary prerequisite.

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