

ISSN: 0976-8165

Bi-Monthly, Refereed, and Indexed Open Access eJournal

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English



Vol. 8, Issue- IV (August 2017)

UGC Approved Journal No 768

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Linguistic and Culture: The Issue of Hybridization in Indian TV Advertisements

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Article History: Submitted-16/06/2017, Revised-23/08/2017, Accepted-03/09/2017, Published-10/09/2017.

Abstract:

With the socio-cultural dimensions of globalization, language, culture and society, altogether, formulate the content of media. The Indian advertising world is not an exception of this fact, as a country with several numbers of languages; it is a great challenge to convince the multilingual population. Various Hindi TV advertisements carried some elements of hybridization in order to bridge the barriers among different languages to reach the mass public successfully. Linguistically, hybridization is the merging of two languages to form a new one, which has a similar trait to its origin. Nowadays, this technique of creative mixing of languages is often seen in TV ads to represent different cultures. This promotes both multilingualism and multiculturalism for “unity in diversity”, thus emphasizing uniformity in products use. This paper tries to understand these concepts through literature reviews on the topic and analysing some TV ads in India, which will ultimately succour in perceiving this phenomenon in terms of the inter-relationship of language and culture.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Hybridization, Media, Advertisement, Globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian media, today, is engulfed with technological advances and competitive marketing, the aim is very high to reach the thousands of Indians across the states. The biggest challenge for the makers is to connect with its viewers and favourably convey the message, however, in a multilingual and multicultural country like India, such a task is not at all easy. As with over twenty-two official languages, in addition to Hindi and English and hundreds of dialects, along with cultural differences, the projection of the products need arduous focus and research.

In fact, “we live in a socio-cultural, economic and political environment dominated by media [...], whose influence, manipulative role and power of shaping values, beliefs and behaviours has long been noticed and acknowledged.” (Fratila and Parlog vii) As well, media “circulate more readily and extend beyond page-bound formats to include interactive representations [...] This is to say that multimodality combined with digital technologies extends grammar to include voice, visual, and music, among other modes for articulating ideas beyond written language.” (Domingo 177)

The fusion of languages and cultures is a popular scenario in the mediated world in India, for “provid[ing] a multinational reflection, fostering intercultural knowledge and understanding,

crucial to effective interlingual and intercultural communication transfer and exchange within the *global village*". (Manoz 1)

Language and Culture's Inter-relationship

Language and culture are interdependent as "a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." (Brown 177) This inseparability of language and culture can be further emphasized by Kramsch's (3) claim that "the way in which people use spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, for example, through a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions. Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality."

Cultural Globalization

Looking at it with an optimistic eye, globalization "has been perhaps the most significant force in creating and proliferating cultural identity." (Tomlinson 270) Globalization, according to Albrow (9), "refers to all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society." Consequently, cultural globalization "affects directly and to various degrees most forms of cultural expression, in ways that can vary from marginalization and hybridization to cultural destruction and obliteration." (Conversi 43) However, "this very shrinkage and restructuring of the world, paradoxically enough, has the effect of focusing more sharply on questions of localism, identity formation and cultural roots." (Tam 504)

Furthermore, Pieterse (49) observes that cultural hybridization is "the way in which forms become separated from existing practice and recombined with new forms in new practices." Hence, he defines globalization "as a process of hybridization that gives rise to a global *mélange*." (45)

Hybridization

Initially, the concept of mixing two languages or two cultures was looked down as integrity lies solely in originality (one language or one culture). However, gradually, hybridity started to be "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of 'in-betweenness', the straddling of two cultures and the subsequent ability to 'negotiate the difference' (Hoogvelt, 1997, p.158)." (Karanja 4) Accordingly, "hybrids exist when different cultures come together in the same place to create something that did not previously exist." (Dear and Burrige 303) On the same token, while talking on hybridity of languages in the Indian context, Kachru (138) comments that "a mixed form or a hybrid is described as one, which is composed of elements from two or more different languages. Hence, a hybrid comprises two or more elements and at least one element will be from a local language. These hybrid forms are also referred to as Indianisms."

Furthermore, Kraidy (148) classifies hybridity as the “cultural logic of globalization” and adds that it ‘entails that traces of other cultures exist in every culture, thus offering foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities.’ Ultimately, the amalgam of culture and language has culminated into a hybridized society with a new identity: the “Third Space”.

Hybridity and Third Space

Bakhtin (271) puts forward that the “conceptualization of language features a dynamic understanding of words and symbols, whereby utterances are not encapsulated in a vacuum but reside in living interaction with the social world.” While defining hybridization, he establishes two types of hybridity: intentional and unintentional; he further explains the former as “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the consciousness, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor,” whereas the latter is somehow the effect of language change historically, “by means of a mixing of various languages co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language.” (359)

One of the pioneer of the notion of hybridity in postcolonial cultural discourse, Homi Bhabha (1994, 1996) puts forward that cross-cultural interactions evolve into a ‘third space’, simply meaning that encounters of past and present linguistic/cultural elements usually produce meaningful features in the future. He emphasizes that “these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood [...] that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.” (Bhabha 1-2) Hence, as Meredith (3) observes;

the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility. It is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ (Bhabha 103) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorizations of culture and identity.

Some other scholars acknowledge Bhabha’s concept of third space, Soja (61) studies the latter from a spatial trialectics’ outlook. Rutherford (211) insists that the primordial aspect of hybridity lies in the ability of arising new opportunities, symbolizing the ‘third space’, instead of tracing “two original moments from which the third emerges”. Bhatt (188) asserts that “the third space introduces a new hybrid code to offer multilingual experiences of cultural difference as well as a sense of entanglements of different cultural tradition.”

Cultural and Linguistic Hybridization

The wave of relocation around the globe has created a plethora of cultural and linguistic exchanges, which leads to a gradual tolerance towards such changes, setting the once alienated term, hybridization, as the new craze.

Cultural hybridization can be defined as “the concept of cultural junctions where different cultures arrive, meet and collide with each other and ultimately deformed and reformed into a hybridized culture that has its own identity and language.” (Dasgupta 21) In fact, the fluctuating nature of culture somehow weakens its authenticity, as Holton (150) advocates that “cultures have become so intermixed that there is no longer any pure or authentic culture distinct from others”. However, “cultural hybridization takes place in multicultural joint ventures but this process happens unevenly and in different parts of the venture.” (Kwok-Bun and Peverelli 219) As a consequence, Wang and Yeh (175) argues that “cultures not only hybridize, but in the course of hybridization may also generate new characteristics and distinctions and make new connections with one another.” Certainly, the increase in global interactions and the notions of multiculturalism have escalated cultural hybridization.

Hybridization among languages is the result of linguistic globalization, in other words, for economic and cultural growth, the world is in quest of multilingualism. Languages are no more considered as merely a bookish knowledge, in fact, more emphasis is put on soft skills and verbal interactions. Researchers have gone far beyond monolingualism, Ludi (14) explains that “the phenomena of multilingualism and particularly of translinguistic [...] are] rather respected as a sign of a rich multilingual personality. In this conception, linguistic and cultural identity is not necessarily indivisible and translinguistic markers announce a self-confident plural — multicultural and multilingual — identity.”

Bakhtin (358) claims that linguistic hybridization is “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.” Undoubtedly, Muñoz (2008, 1) rightly elaborates on the essence of communicative habits, where “a language, any language, is a map, cartography, a representation of reality and an evolutionary device which has made the cultural identity of people possible with the best of its artistic and social expressions.”

Hybridization in the Indian Media

India has a vibrant pompous media industry, covering written as well as audio-visual ones in various languages and cultural settings across its numerous states through several means of communication. Essentially, “we live in a socio-cultural, economic and political environment dominated by media [...] whose influence, manipulative role and power of shaping values, beliefs and behaviours has long been noticed and acknowledged, and has triggered a wealth of research along the years.” (Fratila and Parlog vii)

The KPMG-India Report (2017) on the Indian Media and Entertainment Industry, lists the television, print, films, digital advertisement as the largest ones respectively. The television’s imposing presence in the Indian society has been lasting since ages and it is still the universal media, despite the contemporary proliferation of the internet and online media. In fact, with versatility and diversity, television has embraced multiculturalism and multilingualism positively by easy flow of such events in its contents, an “exposure to a televisual culture at

odds with traditional norms and values.” (Sinclair and Harrison 47) Thereupon, Thussu (593) observes that the “creation of one of the world’s biggest television markets, consisting of an increasingly Westernized, middle-class audience [...], with growing purchasing power and aspirations to a consumerist lifestyle, has attracted transnational media corporations into ‘Desi’ globalization.” Moreover, Straubhaar (681) establishes two dimensions for the globalization of television, where he particularly draws attention towards the close relationship between globalization and glocalization within the Indian context,

“There is a strong globalization of media operations toward the advertising-based commercial market paradigm. That is accompanied by a systematic shift in the forms or genres of programs that are produced, so globalized content models or patterns tend to spread. They are, however, adapted to local cultures and circumstances, a process described by Robertson (1992, 1995) as glocalization. This process in turn is driven and bounded by audience desire for cultural proximity and relevance. Within these new structural boundaries, regional, national, and local producers also receive new resources to work with, both material (finance and technology) and symbolic (ideas and models). This interplay between globalizing structures and regional, national, and local producers’s agency in content can be looked at in terms of structuration (Giddens).”

Along these lines, Thussu (596) reinforces that the “localization of global genres [...] and editorial priorities [...] lends a more ‘authentic’ voice and therefore a greater degree of credibility to the output. Such indigenization – whether it is in the realm of popular entertainment or television news – is an increasingly important dimension of globalization discourse.”

At this point, it has to be mentioned that the other forms of media in India along with the advertising industry, are as well globalized, glocalized and hybridized to a certain extent, however, this study will deal mainly with the advertisements on Indian television. There lies an inseparability between the TV and the ads, the latter should have the potential to catch and retain the attention of its viewers, it has crucial limited minutes to lure the consumers, no stone is left unturned in this course, various techniques and settings are utilized in its process to create an impact. Hybridization is a recurrent method in the Indian advertising world, as it influences how different speech communities are projected in the narratives. It also “involves the generation of new ways in which to understand and to generate possible new cultures,” (Wang and Yeh 188), where, as Pieterse (55) illustrates the interculturalism perspective functions through the “cross-cultural plots of music, clothing, behaviour, advertising, theatre, body language, or . . . visual communication, spreading multi-ethnic and multicentric patterns’ (Canevacci)”.

Instance of Hybridization in Indian Advertisement

An advertisement can simply be defined as the promotion of any product among the public, which main motto is to connect with its customers in an effective way. In other words,

“advertising consists of all the activities involved in presenting to an audience a non-personal, sponsor-identified, paid-for message about a product or organization.” Stanton and al. Since long, television has always been considered the most popular and effective platform for marketing purposes as it tends to connect with the audience directly.

Over the period of time, with technological advancement the world has turned into a global village, similarly, one of the largest democracy, India, has also shrunk more or less into a common frame altogether within the media. The recent years have seen the propaganda of Hinglish (English/Hindi code-mixing) along with the regional languages, which can be traced in the media, movies are dubbed and released simultaneously throughout the country, ads also follow the same fate, and there has been a liberal wave towards linguistic and cultural variations in the media. It “has led to the emergence of complexities regarding concepts like language, culture and identity where these concepts seem to reconfigure and approximate themselves in the digital space. This has eventually led to re-defining a hybridized concept of language, identity and the multiculturalism, creating global culture networks and leading to cultural junctions.” (Dasgupta 21) Indeed, as Fratila & Parlog (x) remark, the “*invasion* of foreign words, the use of colloquial language in written media and linguistic (and cultural) hybridization in global circumstances [...] are caused by the language users themselves. The phenomenon should be accepted, its reasons should be looked for and efforts should be made to develop cultural and language awareness.”

While making the promotional videos, the makers have to recognize and follow their targets while catering the choice of its prospective audience, which comprises of the latter’s ethnicity, social belongings, cultural values and linguistic ability. However, at the same time, they should aim at a larger group as well, this is where hybridization positions itself, in one way, and it facilitates the advertisement to instantly hook up the attention of the consumer. Ultimately, it “allows producers to borrow ideas to enlighten an established story model or to make content adjustments to cater to the needs of a different audience, but it also creates a need to adapt, repackage, or transform an existing product to make it more appealing to different viewer groups.” (Wang & Yeh 177)

Analysis of some Hybridized Indian Advertisements

Some popular hybridized advertisements were studied and it was broadly classified into several categories: Food, Entertainment, Mobiles, Household Appliances, Fashion and Online Shopping, while analysing how creatively the cultural norms and languages were modified to appeal the mass public. Roughly, about 50 TV Commercials were shortlisted and divided into the above mentioned frames, out of which 23 were scrutinized in depth. It has been noted that the promotions of food items are the most hybridized ones, undeniably representing the diverse gastronomy of India, some all-time favourite are: Maggi 2-Minute Noodles, Kurkure and Amul Butter.

In 2012, the megastar, Amitabh Bachchan launches the punch line for Maggi 2-Minute Noodles, “Har 2 Minute Mein Khushiyan” in a storytelling style, covering tales from various parts of India with the respective regional slang. Recently, the company has enhanced the

taste of the noodles with “Maggi Masala of India” (2017), in other words, “Super Chennai”, “Amritsari Achari”, “Mumbaiya Chatak” and “Bengali Jhaal”, representing more or less the four cardinal points on the Indian map, with the tagline “Ab Har Taste Apna”. Similarly, Kurkure products are endorsed by some famous Bollywood actors: Boman Irani, Parineeti Chopra, Ramya Kishan, Farida Jalal and Kunal Kapoor, forming the Kurkure family, who overcomes each other’s differences and mischief with the promotional line “Tedra Hai Par Mera Hai.” These Kurkure clips have been dubbed into several languages and have as well incorporated some distinctive linguistic elements. Correspondingly, the pride of Indian dairy, Amul Butter is widely used in the Indian cuisine, in 2010, a honest ad was made, highlighting its efficient used in the popular dishes across various locations, such as the evergreen street food: Pav Bhaji, the Irani Snacks: Bun butter, kids’ favourite: sandwiches, South Indians:Dosa, Punjabis’ Dal Makhani and Naan, altogether, in few seconds the Indian culinary practices were embraced magnificently. Till date, with the slogan “Amul- The Taste of India”, Amulads and hoardings are known for both their authenticity and state-of-the-art.

In addition to these food products, there has been another type of hybridization among the franchised of international food brand in India, for example, both the American fast-food chains: Subway and McDonald’s, have altered their menus to meet the requirements of the Indian customers. A *desi* flavour has been added to satisfy the local palates as the following menus indicate: Subway (Aloo Patty, Chatpata Chana Patty, Chicken Seekh Kebab, Chicken Tandoori) & McDonald’s (McAloo, McSpicy Chicken, McPaneer Wrap, Veg Maharaja Mac). However, Subway has maintained its universal slogan “Eat Fresh” in their advertisements while McDonald’s keeps experimenting with the local settings, this year, it has the punch line “Hum Hai Different Different But Together”.

The soft drinks market in India has developed and grown tremendously over the years, brands like Coca Cola, Pepsi and 7Up have some of the most skilful catch phrases and innovative promotional clips. In 2003, Coca Cola got associated with Aamir Khan and initiated the campaign “Thanda Matlab Coca Cola”, in an attempt to outreach consumers all over India. Aamir Khan enacted in several clips as different characters from various cultural backgrounds: a Nepali tourist guide, an over-reacted Bengali, a rowdy Mumbai kar, a Bhojpur officer, a Punjabi Farmer. On the other hand, 7Up TV commercials featured the Fido cartoon since the 90s until the 2010s, where different concepts popped up, with code-mixed taglines as “Hum Toh Hain Like This”, “Dil Bole ... I Feel”, “Gussa Hatao ... Chill Machao”, “Mana Lo Food Love With 7Up”, “Andaz Sabse Cool”. In 2013, 7Up came with a unique campaign of two promotional videos:

“In the Kathakali film, a Kathakali artist hands a bottle of 7Up to a girl waiting at the corner of a street. As soon as the girl accepts it, the audio system starts playing an eccentric mix of music from varied genres like dandiya, rock n roll, and so on, to which the artist gives an exuberant, though not strictly classical, performance. In the Kimono film, a Japanese woman clad in a Kimono hands a bottle of 7Up to a young man waiting near a station, and then breaks into lavani (a dance form of Maharashtra).” (Gangal and Menon)

Both clips glorify cultural hybridization, “the Kathakali film was shot at a real street corner in Kolkata, while Kimono was shot in Mumbai”, while using “rhythm and unexpected choreography to enliven the mood”. (Gangal and Menon)

During the cricket tournaments, a series of TV commercials as well as the game’s promotions are made, displaying sportsmanship and unity. The Indian Premier League (IPL) is one of the leading sport events in the world, its format comprises of each team representing an Indian city. The team is usually made up of both Indian and international players; ultimately the game itself is an example of global hybridization. Its marketing offers a plethora to various sponsorship with the slogan *ManoranjanKaBaap* [King of Entertainment], the ads are always vivid, energetic and harmoniously social, altogether this league is a win game for the Indian companies as each team is sponsored by noted brands, namely Vivo Smartphone (the title promoter since its beginning), Pepsi Co., Kingfisher, Reliance, Delhi Land & Finance (DLF), Sony Pictures Network (SPN), Vodafone are among many other sponsors.

The television holds a vital place in the Indian household, with the introduction of numerous private channels and satellite TV networks, the population is left with many choices. The TV commercials of the entertainment industry often mirror their cosmopolitan viewership. Tata Sky has long been associated with the Bollywood perfectionist, Aamir Khan, who led the campaign (2012) through different hilarious characters in variant accents with the punch line “Isko Laga Dala Toh Life Jingalala”. In 2016, aiming the rural India, the “#Family Jingalala” campaign was initiated with Amitabh Bachchan as a Bohemian rapping on “Yo Se, Yo Se” in a Rajasthani background, portraying the TV show preferences of a rural extended family, and how Tata Sky can fulfil their choices.

The mobile network operators have expanded and facilitated communications across the country. Quite obviously, their ads represent a blend of cultural facets, ranging from social status, age, literacy, language and ethnicity; they tend to bring the crowd together. In 2011, Airtel made a breakthrough among the youngster with its vogueish colloquial song, “Har Ek Friend Zaroori Hota Hai”, while Vodafone sets the trend with its cartoon portrayal, Zoozoo and Idea Cellular brings its anthem song “You’re My Pumpkin Pumpkin Hello Honey Bunny”. Till date, these mobile network operators are following the same style as they are all targeting the lot. On the same token, mobile phone marketing is as well in great competition, with each other flaunting its specifications. Recently, Gionee Smartphone, which trademark is the selfie flash, brings two youth icons and craze, Alia Bhatt and Virat Kohli, to sing the linguistic hybrid song “Selfiestan”, which mainly aims at the younger generation with an unification concept. The makers behind the ad explains that *Selfiestan* “is how an ideal world should be. A world of equals and a world where people come closer to each other, where one can express their emotions freely and connect with strangers.” (“What is Gionee’s”)

Household appliances’ commercials are not culture-bound, as there is no discrimination in its use, for example, in 2015, the Indian electronics brand, Videocon advertised a scintillating montage of whimsical incidents of Indian homes for its Washing Machines, with the touching

line “#India ke Rang”. Another array of spontaneous tales (2012-17) was triggered by Voltas AC, in the character of the jolly Mr Murthy, who keeps relocating from one city to another, (Shimla, Delhi, Chennai, Rajasthan and so on), and efficiently adjusting to the climate due to “Voltas All Weather AC”, with the frequent visit of his sceptical father-in-law and intruding neighbours.

Wedding ceremonies are like a festival in India, it is one of the biggest family events, prevailing with costly chic attires and jewelleries along with glorious food and rhythmic tunes. Almost all the jewellery TV commercials captured this occasion with either an emotional appeal or humorous act, for example, the 2017 Tanishq ads reveal the father-daughter equation, “the video shows the wedding day at the bride’s home in different cultures across the country. While the traditions and culture changes, the relation that a father and daughter share is always the same.” (“New Tanishq Ad”) The promotion of garments also tends to project cultural unison, Virat Kohli’s ad (2017) of the ethnic brand Manyavar goes against the cultural boundaries with the tagline “Har Tyohaar, India Ka Tyohaar– Manyavar”, where he addresses about “the various festivals of our country and how all the festivals are for everybody irrespective of their caste or creed. [...] We all need excuses to celebrate happiness which can be in the form of any festival.” (“See The Spot”)

Lately, the boom of online shopping has offered the customers a plenitude of choices at their comfort. The e-retailers are striving in their marketing strategies, to get hold of the mass without any distinction of social groups. Amazon’s ads usually incline to lessen the plights customers around India encounters while shopping online, such as its campaigns: “Ek Bar Amazon Try Toh Kar ... Ho Kar Befikar” (2015), “Apni Dukaan”. Flipkart has chosen an amusing means to convey its message through kids playing adults in various daily situations and get-ups, carrying punchy lines as: “No Kidding. No Worries.” (2016), “Kids Are Back”. In addition, while inaugurating its new logo in 2015, Flipkart releases a brilliant short film promo “Ab Har Wish Hogi Poori”, which truly creates sentimentalism across the multicultural population. The campaign prolongs later in a series of relationship gratifying videos about the euphoria of wish fulfilment.

E-commerce has rendered travelling accessible and flexible with a variety of options in accordance with one’s budget, time limitation and convenient. Two leading Indian travel companies, Make My Trip and Yatra.com have always been ingenious in their promotional clips by endorsing the heartthrob Bollywood idols to motivate and guide the potential travellers. Yatra.com books Ranbir Kapoor as their brand ambassador in 2017, for commencing their new campaign “Koi Nikal Pada Hai! Yatra.Com-India Ka Travel Planner”, he encourages people to travel and discover new places while throwing light on different traveller’s purpose and demand. In a like manner, in 2016, Make My Trip adds Alia Bhatt and Ranveer Singh’s names to their ballyhoo, “Dil Toh Roaming Hai”. These two, with their bubblyness and dazzling acts, make each clip of the regional series, authentic and convincing, by giving special attention to the travel portal and app’s beneficial component.

Concluding Remarks

Looking back at the studied Indian TV Commercials, it can be assumed that they evidently fulfil the basic criteria of advertising: awareness, benefits, influence and visibility along that they have to include hybridization as a demand of multilingualism and multiculturalism to acquire the global reach.

Indeed, the popularity of the selected ads reveals its impact on the audience, who has been able to connect with them efficiently. Thus, the use of cultural and linguistic hybridizations is a successful method to gain the attention of the viewers as it reflects their cultural and linguistic habits. At the same time, there is a sense of identification with the promotional clips as well; there is curiosity and acceptance of the other's culture and language. Ultimately, promoting both universalization of products' use and hinting at the need for *Unity in Diversity* as nowadays with the constant relocative population flow, it is quite a dilemma to maintain a stagnant cultural and linguistic frame. So, conclusively, today's Indian consumers have to be lured with hybridized marketing strategies as they are linked to the hybridized virtual culture.

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