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Asian Advertising In The New Communications Age

By

Alyque Padamsee

Paper No.31
For all our delegates in Asia, I have some good news and some bad news.

The good news for the year 2000 is: "Entertainment is in"

The bad news is: "Advertising is out"

I'll explain this in a few minutes.

The Title of my talk is:
"Asian Advertising in the New Communications Age"

What is this new Communications Age? It consists first and foremost of Satellite Television. Since the last decade in Asia, there's been a literal invasion from the skies, from outer space. Our mind space has been invaded by Star TV and others.

In India till recently, we had only 2 T.V. Channels, both government owned. By 1995, we will have over 90 channels. While Murdock and Turner and others are playing Star Wars in outer space, we in the advertising business have to gird our loins for the battle for Inner Space, for Mind Space in the consumer's Brand Preference List.
2. Consumer Communication has never had it so tough. Each television commercial is battling not only Brand competitors, but also fighting to be remembered in a market place full of seductive software like Dynasty, The Bold and the Beautiful and Santa Barbara (When Santa Barbara is on, the upper class streets of Malabar Hill in Bombay, are deserted ... and so is the cocktail party circuit!)

3. Today, the noise level is deafening. The average American Consumer is bombarded with over 2000 ad messages per day -- not only from 250 T.V. channels, but from the New Media like

1) E-Mail (Internet)
2) C-D ROM (CDI)
3) Video Phone
4) Shopping by T.V.
5) Virtual Reality
6) Citizen's Band Radio (and C.B. T.V.?)
7) 3-D T.V.
8) Advertisements
9) Infomercials
10) In-serial advertising
4. How to enter the Mind Set through the T.V. set is the challenge of the 90s and beyond. The advertiser has to overcome the Great Barrier Reef consisting of:

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A new invention of Arista Technologies of New York. This devilish invention helps you skip the ads while viewing a video-taped programme. When your V.C.R. is recording a programme, this device monitors the electronic indicators that appear at the beginning and end of each commercial. It simultaneously incorporates a timing and identification code onto the video tape. Commercial Brake then generates a playback map and stores it in its memory. Later, when you play back the tape, this device switches your T.V. screen to Blue as soon as the commercial starts and signals your V.C.R. to fast forward the commercial!!!
6. We hear the Yanks are very upset about the World Football Cup to be held in the U.S.A. They can’t understand why Football has only one half-time break for ad commercials ... unlike American Football, Basketball or Baseball, which are divided into smaller time segments so that the ads can take centre stage more frequently!!! We also hear that the T.V. networks are going to use Creepy Crawlies during the Football matches. So don’t be surprised if the ball and the players’ feet are often obscured by cans of Coke or Budweiser!

That’s certainly one way of overcoming the Great Barrier Reef. But I don’t think T.V. viewers will accept these Creepy Crawlies on their favourite programmes. So, what will Consumer Communication have to do to fight for attention during the commercial breaks. One crazy example is from Zee T.V., A Star Channel beamed to India, which believe it or not, has a wide following even though the programme itself consists of nothing but T.V. Commercials. Here’s an excerpt. It’s called The Dream Merchants and has an anchorman who you may have seen before.

7. Now, not every advertiser can afford to put on a Dream Merchants’ programme. And yet the one clear message that comes through is:

That unless advertising stands out, it will drown in the clutter. It will be shut out by the yawns. It will be jump cut by the channel Surfers.
8. The only answer is to arm ourselves with the three "Es" of the New Communications Age:

a) E for Entertainment

b) E for Emotion

c) E for Environment-friendly

As I said at the beginning, Advertising is out ... Entertainment with a Capital E is in. How do I know?

A little bird in Hollywood told me. Coke, the best known advertiser in the world has recently switched from an advertising agency, to an entertainment agency, because Creative Artists Agency, is run by the King of Hollywood, Mike Ovits. McCann-Ericksson, is wondering what hit them, while C.C.A. is busy gobbling up more and more ad agency clients. After the surprise and the shock, when you think about it, it makes logical sense... or should I say, Dollars and Cents. Because advertising has always been a part of show business. We are the Dream Merchants who sell products. And all said and done, Hollywood is the ultimate Dream Factory. So let's see what they have produced for Coke.

Obvious, Coke are interested in visibility rather than product information. Let's face it, unless you are a brand new Brand, or have some revolutionary new benefit to offer ... who wants to know about a product we know about!
9. So it’s goodbye to Rosser Reeves and his USP, adieu to Hardsell and all that rational claptrap. Today we’ve got to sing and dance and make ’em laugh.

10. Sweating over product formula and product performance takes a backseat to the Mega Appeals of:
   a) Sex
   b) Humour
   c) Suspense
   d) Status
   e) Shock Value

11. Before we get down to the Asian scene, let’s take a look at what our big brothers are doing in the West with these mega appeals.

12. I think Benetton has set a blistering pace when it comes to shock value. Take a look at this ad.

13. Here’s a T.V. commercial that leaves you stunned.

14. Status boosts the ego and the ego leaps across the Great Barrier Reef. Here’s a French commercial for Chanel is male perfume “EGOISTE”

15. Sylvester Stallone had you hanging to the edge of your seat in “Cliffhanger”. Here’s a Consumer Commercial that is the Alfred Hitchcock of the ’90s. Suspense in every frame.
16. I believe by the year 2000, the only battle ground for advertising will be the human memory. If you are forgotten, you are finished. Most of the award winning commercials that we remember are ones that tickle our funny bone. Humour is the all-time memory-jogger. Why? Because humour is a public emotion that can be shared unlike sex appeal or status. Everyone loves to repeat a joke that made them roar with laughter. And everyone loves to repeat a commercial that does the same. So you get double or triple the value, each one repeating your commercial to his friend or neighbours -- the Multiplier Effect. [Here is 1 of my favourites.]

17. And so we come to the most prominent appeal of them all, S.A. (Sex Appeal). Here's one that faces the issue of boredom fairly and squarely. No one switches on the T.V. to see endless parades of product shots. But add a little S.A. to the product and see what happens!
18. Now let's take a look at how Asian Advertising stacks up against the Best of the West when it comes to the 5 mega appeals.

18A Culturally, East is east and West is Beast! When it comes to Shock Value, we prefer 110 volts to 450 volts. But that doesn't mean that we are any less creative. It just means that it takes less to raise our eyebrows. Take a look at these 2 commercials from different parts of Asia that have the right amount of Shock Value for the East.

18B Status as we all know in Asia, means more than money. It is a matter of honour to impress your neighbours. The opposite is to lose face ... which in Japan can lead to Harakiri! Here are a few examples of Status with a capital S.

18C Since the movie industry in the East is bigger, than the Movie Industry in the West we bow to no one when it comes to suspense. We believe in grabbing the audience by the throat and not letting go for 30 full seconds! Hang on to your suspenders because the suspense is going stretch them.

18D In the HA HA category of humour, we in Asia prefer to laugh at other people than ourselves. We are a little thin-skinned when it comes to satire. We prefer to go for the belly laugh rather than the satirical chuckle. Nevertheless, a funny commercial has the widest appeal of all whether it's Asian, European or American. Here are 2 little gems from Asia that should put a twinkle into your early-morning eyes.
Now we come to the tabu subject of Asia - S-E-X Appeal. In India, not so many years ago, one of our ministers proposed that we put bras and panties on our erotic temple sculptures! PLAYBOY in Singapore is all boy and no play. Why, inheritors of the Kama Sutra and the Perfumed Garden are today so coy about this very human topic, I fail to understand. But being an experienced communications man, I realize we must respect our consumers' sensibilities or we will lose sales. But I am happy to say the following commercials raised the sales curve along with the libido.

Will advertising get bolder and bolder, as we approach the millennium? Should we take our cue from Hollywood or even Bollywood (Bombay's Hollywood that makes a 1000 movies a year compared to Hollywood's 300)? Take a good long breathless look at this Bollywood song and dance number that knows what basic instincts are all about. Incidentally, the title of the song which is sung in Hindi is, "What's Behind The Blouse" (Choli Ke Peechey Kya Hai). Sharon Stone move over!
20. Have you noticed recently that everything's going E for Entertainment. Whether it's the E channel on Star, or the colour supplement of your Sunday paper, or it's Clinton whooping it up at the White House. Even the news has gone E. Here's a picture from the Paris Open. What it's got to do with tennis Lord alone knows.

21. Talking about buttocks, poor young Michael Fay, the American lad who was caned recently in Singapore is poor no longer. He's just been offered by a newspaper, for a picture of his bare striped backside a bare half a million dollars.

22. Yes, this is where we are headed folks; news and information with an entertainment twist. [emphasis] WELCOME TO ADVERTAINMENT! It's the singer, not the song. It's the package, not the product. It's the advertising, not the brand. Beware, Walt Disney productions are taking over the world!
But it seems that network T.V. in America is not listening. They still want to hit you over the head with the "Buy this and buy it now or else" type of commercial. They don't seem to have heard of Information Overload. They believe in the reverse of David Ogilvy's dictum; "The Consumer is a Moron and so you can give him an ear bashing. Here's just one breathless example.

Why insult the intelligence? Why assault the eardrums? When you can seduce the audience with style and wit. The British do it best but we Asians are not far behind. Here's a set that should tickle your risibilities and enhance your self esteem as a thinking consumer. The first one is my favourite because it takes the mickey out of advertising itself — especially the cliche of the comparison commercial.

There's no doubt about it, that the biggest E in Consumer Communication is Entertainment. But what of the smaller Es? E for Emotion has always played a very big role in advertising, especially in the East. Our heart strings and purse strings are closely linked in this part of the world. So when Johnson and Johnson wants your empathy, Emotion is the key. "The Language of Love" is a global advertising idea that speaks every language from English to Hindi.
25. But as the year 2000 looms on the horizon, the E for Environment grows bigger and bigger. What are manufacturers doing to our world is the cry from the Consumer Protection Groups. Everything is being polluted. The air, the water, the earth and even our sex lives through AIDS. Is nothing safe? Can nothing be reversed? "Yes we can save the world", cry the Eco Brigade, e.g. the hole in the ozone layer can be closed if we use environment friendly products. The resources of our planet can be conserved if we use recyclable packaging materials. The forests can be saved if we use less paper or paper substitutes.

Take a look at a few Consumer Communications that use the Environment Friendly Platform.

26. In the end no matter which E you use, the goal you want to reach is E for Effective. In giving Asian Advertising a long hard look, we’ve got to admit that a lot of it is not just emotional, but sloppily sentimental. Often long-winded and spelled-out. If the message is simple, the shorthand of communication can be as sophisticated as you like. In our quest for making more effective commercials, technology has been the Great Leap Forward. It’s not just Steven Spielberg with his man-made dinosaurs, that have Jurassic-ised audiences, but computer animation (Computation, to coin a word), has taken a giant step forward for adkind. And we don’t have to look anymore towards Hollywood. No Risk - no Gain! What of the future?

Right here in our own Third World backyard, computer geniuses are sprouting like mushrooms. Alvin Toffler said, "There is no First World and Third World -- there is only the Fast World and the Slow World." You don’t believe me? Take a look at this fast reel from a Slow World country.