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Development And Anti-Development Messages In Advertising

By

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DEVELOPMENT AND ANTI-DEVELOPMENT MESSAGES IN ADVERTISING
By R.V. Rajan, AMIC India

Advertising in India has made rapid strides in the last two decades. Thanks to the open Economic policy followed by the previous Government and the wide reach of Television medium there has been a virtual boom in the advertising business in the last few years. The vast untapped rural market constituting 80% of the population of the country, is opening up to the marketeers of products and services!

This has also resulted in the vastly improved presentation of advertising messages. The technical qualities of both the electronic and press media are of very high standards - easily comparable to the best in the world.

What is interesting is that all these capabilities of the advertising industry are today being effectively used for creating development communication as well.

In the first two decades after India got its independence, most of the development messages produced by the Government were dull, uninspiring and totally lacked creativity and credibility. All that has changed now.

PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

It was in the early seventies that the Government of India approached the Advertising Agencies Association of India and Indian Society of Advertisers to help them develop an effective campaign for promoting Family Planning messages to the vast population. A high level Committee consisting of some of the top names in the industry was constituted. The Committee went about the whole job in a professional manner. Four top Advertising Agencies came forward to produce campaigns, each one catering to a different region based on the regional peculiarities, traditions and customs. The campaigns were launched with a lot of fan fare, but somewhere along the line, the bureaucracy bungled and the campaigns never completed their course!

All the same, the role of professional advertising agencies in creating developmental communication, was established. Today, every Government department has a panel of professional advertising agencies, whose services are sought and paid for whenever the need arises.
Another important development in the last two decades, is the increasing awareness among the business community to be involved in the developmental activities connected with the immediate community. This has resulted in a number of commercial organisations both big and small helping the Government in spreading the development messages.

Concept of Family Planning, importance of education, health, improved agriculture and other practices, and lately environment protection are some of the subjects in which a number of organisations are helping the Government either actively or indirectly.

The organisations which help the Government can be classified into the following broad categories:
1. Private and Public Limited Companies
2. Public Sector Companies
3. Voluntary Social Service organisations like Rotary, Round Tables, Lions, etc.
4. International Agencies like UNICEF, CRY, etc.
5. Advertising Agencies

All the above organisations are today helping by sponsoring events or advertising programmes, aimed at spreading the development messages.

For example, clubs in Rotary International Dist.323 in South India, as a part of a massive Polio Plus Campaign (the fight against the Six Killer diseases among children), produced two - 2 minutes commercials featuring a super star and a leading comedienne to sell the concept of immunisation to rural people/urban slums.

The spots produced by the Rotary Clubs and telecast by the Government on prime time of local TV have become great hits. So much so, that the villagers/poor folks go to the Primary Health Centres and ask for 'Rajinikanth drops' and 'Manorama drops' while referring to the Polio Plus drops.

A post campaign study showed that these poor people were not completing the full courses of immunisation. The Rotary Clubs therefore, have produced another spot highlighting the importance of follow up action and donated the film to the Government/TV.

UNICEF in India, with the help of professional film producers and featuring some top stars, have produced a series of one minute commercials covering a wide variety of subjects like Family Planning, Adult Education, Anti Dowry stories, Immunisation/Health education, etc.
These sleekly produced spots in Hindi, the National language, are telecast every day at prime time 9.00 p.m. on National Network and are seen by millions of people spread across the country.

UNICEF has also produced language versions of many of these spots, for telecasting on the regional network.

Round Tables in Madras produced a very effective commercial on ‘Drug Prevention’ and donated the same to the local TV for free telecast. This very effective TV spot, has not only been doing a good job in fighting the drug menace among the youth but also has won awards for creative communication.

While there is a general trend towards producing ‘Quickies’ for TV telecasting, the practice of producing good documentaries on development subjects are also very much in vogue. But thanks to the involvement of professionals, the documentaries are interesting, entertaining and communicate the intended messages very effectively. For instance a leading industrial group in Madras has produced a documentary on deforestation and donated the same to the government. Another company has sponsored a film on leprosy eradication/Traffic safety.

Some of the top advertising agencies have now decided to donate their time and talent in the development of creative communication for some development messages every year.

LINTAS India has been a leader in the field, whose social service campaigns have won awards and recognition in International Competitions.

A number of other advertising agencies help develop creative strategies for Press, Radio, Outdoor and other printed media like posters, leaflets, etc. If one scans through the dailies and magazines one find a number of development messages sponsored by companies and created by advertising agencies and some of them even sponsored by advertising agencies themselves!

It can be said with confidence that professional advertising techniques and media planning have come to stay in promoting the development messages among the Indian masses.
ANTI-DEVELOPMENT MESSAGES

Government being the monopoly owners of the electronic media (TV & Radio) scope for Anti-Development messages finding places in these media is absolutely nil. One cannot therefore find advertisements for cigarettes or liquor on TV/Radio. While there is a blanket ban on promoting liquor consumption through media advertising, there is no such ban on cigarettes advertising in other media. But a number of leading publications, dailies and magazines do not accept cigarette or liquor advertisements as a corporate policy.

Recently, a leading cigarette company launched a special cigarette for women, featuring a leading film star. This campaign has had lot of opposition from concerned voluntary organisations and general public.

Increasing consumerism and awareness among consumers about their rights is helping to prevent Anti-development messages from spreading. Recently the National TV has banned the advertisement of 'Pan Parag' - a betel nut based chewing powder, as experiments have proved that the habit can lead to cancer.