

Effects of Pandemic on Advertising: A Content Analysis of Print Advertisements

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Abstract: *The pandemic has not only affected businesses across sectors and borders, it has also affected the way we do business. During the first wave and second wave of the deadly pandemic, advertising was one such industry that was affected. Many new brands, products were launched during the pandemic by those who saw an opportunity. Some brands did not change the product or introduce a new one, though they changed their narrative and advertisement campaigns. Many advertisements saw use of different language, different visuals and a different positioning. This study tries to find out the strategies used in advertising during the defined period. The content analysis of print advertising throws light on what the companies have said & how have they said it.*

Keywords: *Content Analysis, Print Ads, Advertising, COVID -19, Pandemic*

Introduction

Print advertisements have been a preferred way of doing advertisements since decades. Companies advertise their products for creating awareness about their brands and product use. Advertising and the use of different media has seen many changes over the years. Many new medium have not only changed how advertising is done, it has also brought about changes in the conventional media too. However, inspite of many new mediums now available for advertising, print advertising still continues to be an effective media for companies, not only in India but across the globe too.

Review of literature

Hackley& Hackley (2021) Even in 2020 half of the global ad spend was still being spent on traditional advertising. There are multiple reasons, why companies still prefer advertising in one of the most conventional media, like print. **Lalaounis (2020)** one of the main advantages of

print advertising is that it is self-paced in nature, which means readers can process the message in their own time, hence organizations can provide thorough information about their offerings.

Chawla et.al (2021) Pandemic has not only affected but changed how business is done. The COVID-19 outbreak has affected the routine company and customer behavior. It has ushered in a new era for businesses worldwide, and with advertising at the centre of it all posing its own set of problems, advertising strategy may assist.

The effect on business might have been different however, the effect on ad spends and its recovery is showing positive signs. Print ad volumes per newspaper per day remained almost the same during January 21-March 21 compared to January 20-March 20. As per the latest TAM AdEx data, the top categories to advertise on print also remained the same during both periods.

An article in Economic Times highlights that the second half of 2021 has witnessed resurgence in print advertising with brands across categories returning to the medium in a big way. Industry experts said most of the top categories have witnessed an increase in ad spends in July and the newspapers, which were heavily impacted due to the Covid-19 outbreak last year and the second wave during the second quarter, are already expected to spring back to normalcy sooner than anticipated. An article in Mint observes that the tone of the communication is also changing. Ads are being created which are not obtuse to the ongoing sentiment and situation in the country.

Aim and Objectives of Study

Print advertising is a big industry in India. Pandemic affected not only ad spends but also how advertisements are done in our country and world across. Since COVID entered India in January 2020, it affected the entire spectrum of Indian economy. A nationwide lockdown was imposed on the country from 25th March. One year later in mid March 2021, the second wave of COVID hit India.

This research was undertaken to understand if the print advertising has been affected by the pandemic and if yes, by what extent. This paper attempts to study the effect of pandemic on print advertisements. The scope of study is limited to print advertisement, during a specified time period in a popular vernacular newspaper of Ahmedabad city.

- To study the print advertisements, appearing in newspapers
- To analyze the content of print advertisements
- To understand the effect of pandemic on copy, headlines, illustrations and graphics used in print ads

Research Method

Krippendorff (1980) Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context Content analysis of 302 print ads was done. The

newspapers considered for the study were for the time period of two months, June and July 2021.

Unit of study: All the advertisements excluding employment ads, classifieds and government ads, were included as the unit of study. For the purpose of this content analysis study, the entire advertisement was considered as the context unit.

The Newspaper selected for the study was, Divya Bhaskar – Ahmedabad edition. The paper was chosen as the Gujarati paper is in Top three papers (as per their circulation) in Ahmedabad and is also the world's third largest circulated paper according to the 2019 report of Wan-Infra.

The elements of the advertisement which were studied and analyzed include the headline, body copy and illustrations/ graphic elements. **Belch & Belch (2003)** The basic components of a print ad are the headline, the body copy, the visual or illustrations and the layout (the way they all fit together). **Mogaji, E. (1947)** describes that the text used in advertising is considered as a verbal component; it includes all of the headlines, taglines and copy used to narrate the marketing communications. Photograph is considered the most prominent visual component of an advertisement. The advertisements were coded and bifurcated based on the content, the page, their size, language, terminology, illustrations and graphics used.

The newspapers were checked for advertisements; all advertisements except classifieds, government advertisements, and employment advertisements were included in the scope of study. All the advertisements were carefully studied. Tabulation of advertisements based on their language, the page number of the newspaper on which the ad is published, and size of ad, headline and body copy, use of terminology related to COVID, use of illustration, graphics, and product category advertised, use of brand ambassador etc was carefully studied and entered for analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The findings and analysis of the content analysis is as follows:

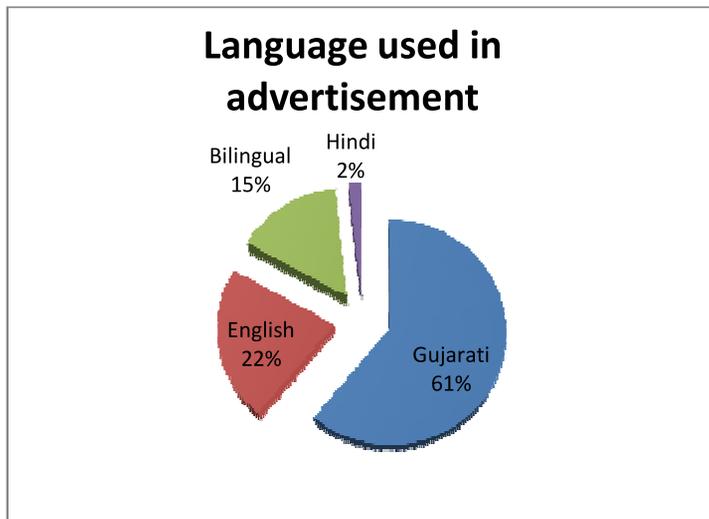


Fig.1 Language used in advertisement

From the total advertisement studied, 61% advertisements were purely in Gujarati language, as it was in a vernacular daily. 22% advertisements were in English, most of them were na-

tional brands. 15% were bilingual ads; most of them had a mix of both Gujarati and English languages, followed by Hindi & English ads. A very small segment of 2% had Hindi ads.

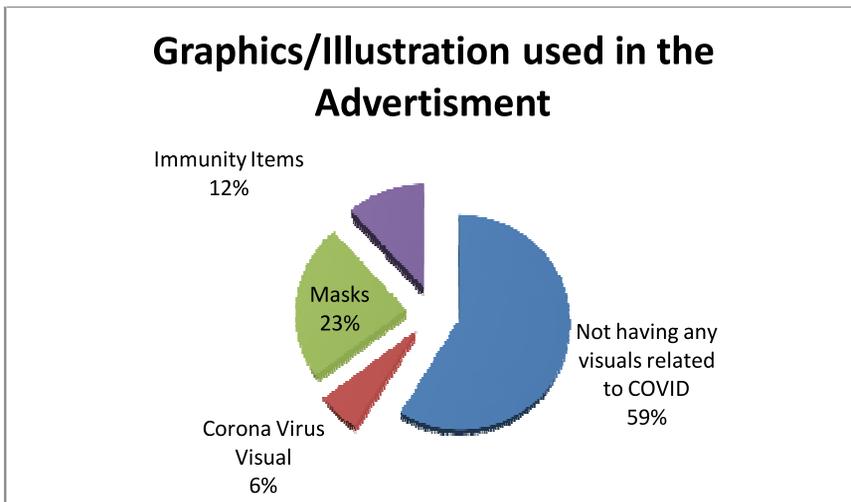


Fig.2 Graphics/ illustration used in the advertisement

From the total advertisement studied, most of the advertisement, upto 59% did not have any graphics related to COVID. However, various advertisements (23%) showed either the model

wearing the masks, or had images of masks for ensuring safety and some ads showed the COVID appropriate behavior by highlighting wearing of masks in illustrations.

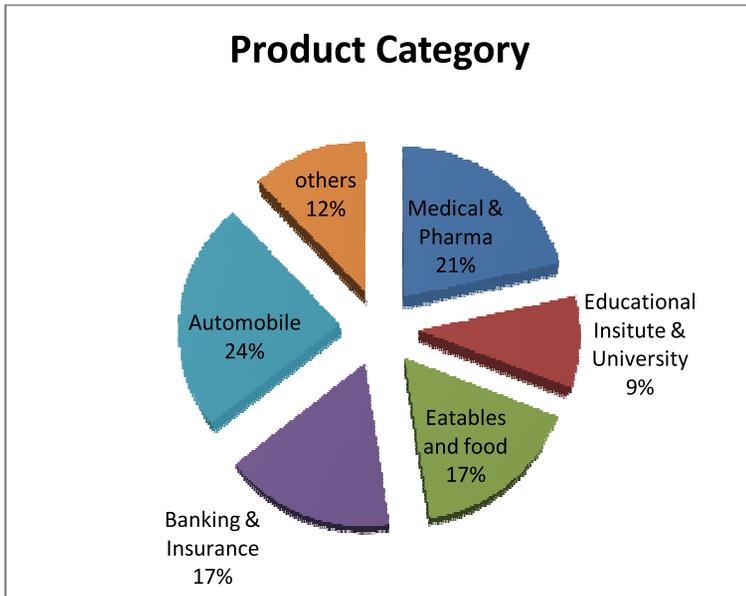


Fig.3 Product Category

From the total advertisement studied, most of the advertisements belonged to the automobile section. They included advertisements for products like two wheelers, cars, tractors and cycles. The next most advertised product category was medical services and pharmaceutical products like hospitals, medicine, physical testing and all

ayurvedic and herbal medicinal products. Banking and Insurance advertisements were the third most advertised category, many advertisements specified that it was the need of the hour to buy insurance cover. The food and eatables were the next category, included carbonated drinks, chocolates, snacks etc

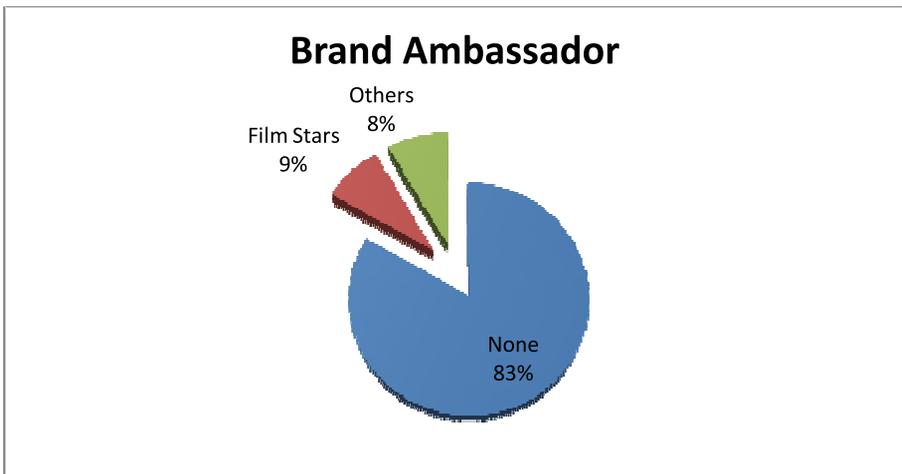


Fig.4 Brand Ambassador

From the total advertisement studied, most of the advertisement did not use a brand ambassador; however many of the ads had models though. A few of the advertisements had famous film personalities like Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar and Vidya Balan. Few other advertisements had television personalities too.

Conclusions, Findings and Suggestions

Effect of Pandemic on the Offering:

Some of the brands did not just change their advertisements. They had actually changed their offering or tweaked it to suit the requirements of customers hit by the pandemic. For examples, many educational institutes, universities came up with online batches and advertised about the mode of education.

Advertising in the pandemic also introduced new products and offerings. Some products which were new were also being launched and promoted through advertisements. For example, self test kits for Covid patients, fruit and vegetable cleaner liquids, insurance cover and policy for covid etc

Use of Words related to Pandemic:

More than 90% of ads used word to indicate the ongoing pandemic. 10% ads did not mention any words related to the pandemic. The most commonly used words were unlock with, safe, immunity, Covid-19 and online. Many ads mentioned Covid guidelines and Covid appropriate behavior, like wear masks, maintain social distancing etc. Some advertisements used hashtags which were specifically created for the pandemic, for example # in this together.

Effect of Pandemic on positioning:

Some brands could position themselves better in the pandemic, as their offering was either directly related to the solution or it was positioned like that. For example products like Zandu included taking steam of the Balm in the pandemic and used words like medicinal properties and pandemic.

Brands which were not offering a direct solution to the pandemic and its effect also tweaked their

positioning. For example Natraj atta chakki said no need to stand in a queue or come in contact with less people and safety of family.

Some products which were not a part of the problem or solution in the pandemic also used words which would associate their product to the ongoing pandemic. For example, Ghadi detergent powder used the words, it is better to be safe, wash your gamcha, mask, or handkerchief after use.

Effect of Pandemic on Promotion:

Many showrooms, shops and malls used the words like our showrooms are fully sanitized, staff is fully vaccinated etc. Some of the brand gave free bees like on shopping, masks were given free. Some also had incentives for Covid patients. For example, a University offered concession/ scholarship to students who had lost a parent in Covid.

Limitations of the Study:

The scope of study was limited to the advertisements published in one vernacular newspaper only. Also the study was conducted for a limited time period. If the scope of research is extended to more newspapers and a bigger time frame, the results could be different. A similar study is proposed for other medium like TVC and radio for better understanding of the effects of pandemic on advertising.

The paper draws attention to the effects of the pandemic, in the product offering, positioning, promotion and advertising. The pandemic affected every aspect of business. Every business that intends to maintain profitable relations with customers will have to show highest level of adaptability.

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