

## ANALYSING FEVICOL<sup>1</sup> ADVERTISEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF CONSUMER-CULTURE

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### Abstract:

Due to the global dominance of the “Consumer-culture”, more discontent has aroused now-a-days, rather than the happiness. According to Chris Barker, the ‘Consumer-culture’, is based on the assumptions, that we are not good enough, nor can we ever have enough. So, there always is an urge, to have a resistive response based on our own calculations, rather than having its thorough and complete understanding. As the result of resistance, either we start using their goods or, on the contrary, we aim at boycotting any particular product, through campaigns or using media-oriented symbolism. On a whole, it is the underlying sense of meaninglessness lying at the centre of contemporary lives, that needs to be addressed immediately. This can only be done, by adopting an alternative lifestyle, where one has minimum contact, with the consumer capitalism. Though, we cannot deny the fact, that we can never totally escape from, the Capitalist social relations.

It was the post-war period, that witnessed the rise of ‘Consumer-culture’ for the very first time, across western societies. Gradually, there also occurred a shift in the western culture, which became more of a visual and consumer culture, based on the images and meanings. The companies like Coca-Cola, Nike, Microsoft became the propagator of the ‘Promotional-Culture’. In the light of the Consumer-culture my paper aims to analyse, the ‘Fevicol’ advertisement. The basic purpose of this study, lies at understanding the branding process of ‘Fevicol’ in its advertising communications, using Television. My paper uses content-analysis as a research technique, to make out meaningful matter from the content.

**Keywords:** Consumer-culture, Sub-culture, Promotional-culture, Youth-culture, Popular-culture.

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<sup>1</sup> An adhesive brand

Writers practicing Cultural Studies try pointing out, how the ‘Consumer-Culture’ generates its meaning that serves to justify and reproduce the power of Capitalist domination. On the other hand, it also leads to the creation of new identities and lifestyles. As according to F.R Leavis and Thompson, the central task of the Cultural criticism, was to defend the ‘best’ culture, against advertising films and popular films, with its addictions and distractions. As Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), had tried to explore the characters of the English working-class culture, from 1930’s to 1950’s. Sympathizing for the working class, he also had a stark contrast for the development of the ‘Commercial-Culture’, shown through ‘juke-box boy’, ‘the American slouch’ and the loud music. He stated, how the ‘Commercial-Culture’ was responsible for, the lost authenticity of a culture.

The attitude of the ‘Quasi-Marxist Frankfurt school’ towards ‘Mass-Culture’ represented by Horkheimer and Adorno, stated in the essay *The Culture Industry as Mass Deception* (1979), shows how the cultural products are commodities, produced by the cultural industries. In their representations, they purport to be democratic, individualistic and diversified while in actuality, their representations are authoritarian, conformist and highly standardized. He tries to convince that the ‘Consumer-Culture’ puts an uniform stamp on everything, and the diversity of the product is such an illusion, from which no one can escape. For Adorno, the consequence of standardized commodities is the standardized reactions along with, the affirmations of life to it.

In the above light, my paper aims at analysing an adhesive brand ‘Fevicol’ and its marketing strategy involved in the advertisement. It is 90 second film, conceptualised by Pidilite Industries. As Fevicol has completed its sixty years of its building bonds in 2019, this ad shows the bond which Indians shares with each other. How a household essential ‘Sofa’ which gets its structure, and built from the ‘Fevicol’ glues the Indian families over generations.

The film starts in the setting of 60’s as the motion shows the black and white print. It depicts a typical Hindu marriage where ‘Sharmain<sup>2</sup>’, a bride goes to the broom’s house, along with a two-seater ‘Sofa’ given to her in the ‘vidai<sup>3</sup>’, a ritual where a bride bids farewell to her family and leaves her maternal home. In the subsequent frame this shy woman, is shown doing the household chores.

Later the woman marries off her younger sister-in-law. The decade now shifts to the 80’s. Now this sofa has been transferred from a small town, to a joint family in a new city, that is to the house of ‘Mishrain<sup>4</sup>’.

The next frame, in the early Twenty first century, opens with the collector’s family who has his own house, a nuclear family, government vehicle, servants. His wife, is shown sitting on the same sofa and watching television.

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<sup>2</sup>A shy woman

<sup>3</sup>A marriage farewell

<sup>4</sup>A Hindu sub-caste division of Bramhin community is Mishra. And the ladies of their family is called Mishrain.

It is noted that, how each time the sofa is refurbished, and the Fevicol bond still holds it together, in a sense implying that it is only through Indian values and cultures, that the generations are tied together, unlike the concept of western family culture.

Lately, we observe that the younger generation is more inclined towards the love marriage, and they are shown sitting on the same 'Sofa'. So, this discourse shows a transition from a shy woman in the early 60's, to a millennial woman who stood up to marry a man of her choice. From the woman who did household chores, to a woman whom her beloved served the tea. And the last line, beautifully says, "whether we celebrate the marriage with same fervour as we did it few decades back, or not, but one should always build their furniture, with an everlasting bond of Fevicol."

The film takes the audience on the journey of a multiple generations, through the perspective of a 'Sofa'. The spot opens in an old era, where a newly wedded couple heading towards their home, with a gifted sofa. To, how the same sofa is being handed over to generations. It showcases, how the sofa has witnessed various events through its lifetime, it had crossed the river and travelled miles for generations, yet it is going stronger and stronger. So, here the 'Sofa' is the epicentre in the advertisement showing, how after the marriage, a couple starts on a new journey, goes to their new house, where the furniture gives their home a foundation. And if, it is made with Fevicol, then the sofa will last forever, just like one's relationship.

In the continuation, I am recalled of Chris Barker, who in the book, *Making Sense of Cultural Studies*, says that earlier in 1970's Cultural Studies was concerned with the 'ideology' and 'hegemony' attached to advertisements and its consumption. Consequently, the textual and ideological analysis of advertising, stressed not just on the commodities, but also on the ways of looking, at the world. Like here, in the case of Fevicol-ad., on one hand it showed the family bondage, and on the other hand depicted, the concept of the family, that changed with respect to one's own 'Culture'. Gradually, over a period of few decades, the concept of the family turned from, joint to the nuclear. This ad. here, promoted the inter-cultural love marriages, practiced by the younger generations, choosing the inter-state, Bengali-culture marriages.

According to Chris Barker, it is the job of advertisement, to create an 'identity' for their product, by the bombardment of competing images, and associating the brand with the human values. The ad. here uses 'Fevicol' as the only adhesive, has created in the minds of people that, in the present scenario of the disintegrating family system, it seems to be the only solution, in binding the relationship, for generations. Additionally, he also stated the fact that, acquiring a brand was not simply about purchasing a product; rather it was more concerned with buying into, lifestyles and values.

That, is what Williamson says, that the 'object' in the advertisements, are signifier of meanings that we decode, in the context of the known cultural systems, as-well-as, they are products associated with other 'cultural goods'. Like, here in this ad., the image of the 'Sofa'

connotes certain meanings, like for example, it is a two-seater sofa, thereby promoting, the nuclear version of the family. Thus, in buying commodities, we emotionally invest in the associated images and thereby, it contributes to the construction of our 'identities', through its consumption.

### **Seeing the ad in the light of "Culture as a language":**

The operation of 'Language', according to Chris Barker, is the central concern and problem for the practitioners of Cultural Studies. Indeed, it is the investigation of 'Culture', that is interchangeable with the exploration of meanings, that are produced symbolically through signifying systems which works "like a language".

The phrase "Culture is like a language" implies, the co-existence of a variety of languages, and it is not always that the culture necessarily takes the form of, a verbal language. Rather, different types of languages have in common, a similar mode of organizations that generates meaning. It is the cultural code, that is represented through signs, and their associated meanings are arranged, by the convention, to stabilize its significance. After Saussure and Barthes, the cultural-texts was no longer seen as carrying, an universal meaning. Rather, they were seen as a historically contingent productions, premised on inclusions, exclusions and on the operations of Power. 'Structuralism', argued that all cultural texts are constructed with signs, that could be read 'like a language'. Thus, theorists of Cultural Studies understand, 'Culture' being constituted through signifying practices that generate and organize signs into 'discourse' and 'representation'.

In the above ad. we can see, how the gender coding at the very beginning shows 'Sharmain', associated with the domestic work. Later, in the contemporary times, the gender coding has been reversed, as seen in the case of the 'Ba.ngalan<sup>5</sup>' where the male does the household chores. So here, the 'Culture' of the dominating patriarchy is seen in the very beginning of the film which, works 'like a language'. As, all the meaningful representations are assembled, and they generate meanings similarly as does a 'language', that is, the organization of the sign, into the advertisement, the text. Thereby, the textual analysis of any text, becomes the primary tool for understanding any 'Culture'. And the language implicates in the form of 'Power' with cultural-politics, operating at the level of signification and the text.

'Culture' is understood to be a zone of contestation, in which meanings and versions of the world compete for ascendancy. Consequently, the issues of cultural representations are 'political' because they are bound with, the question of 'Power'. 'Power' is a social regulation, that is productive of the 'Self', that produces some kinds of knowledge, and identifies to appear while excluding 'Others'. So, in this context, cultural change is possible through re-thinking and re-describing the social order.

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<sup>5</sup> A resident woman of Bengal (An Indian State); A Bengali woman

As, in the case with the film, the language seems to be phallogocentric, that is of the male who has the 'Power'. Later, the cultural change can be seen in the film, as the social order has changed with respect to the versions of family, from the joint to the nuclear, woman moving out of their domestic spheres, and also had a say and choice, in their marriages.

Thereby, comes the idea of Marx, that 'culture is political' because 'the idea of the ruling class in every age, the ruling ideas, that is, the class which is the dominant material force of the society is, at the same time its dominant intellectual force'.

### **Analysing the Ad. in the context of, the 'Consumer-Culture':**

Cultural critics, have tried to find out the oppositional meanings, in relation to the commodities produced by the 'Consumer-culture'. They tried to find out how the commodities propagate the Capitalist status quo. Featherstone, a critic says, that the new heroes of consumer-culture display their individuality, and their sense of style in their assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, appearance and their bodily dispositions that they design into their lifestyles. In the case, of the above film, the younger generation, the Bengali couple's lifestyle can be seen in the light of the 'Consumer-culture' as they are working on the computer and their dressing 'Style'. For Hebdige (1988), 'Style' in the case of the spectacular 'subculture' displayed the codes of meanings. Through the signification of difference, 'Style' constitutes a group identity. It has no underlying message, or iconic transformation. It is the look and only the 'look'. It is in a way, the 'Representation' not the 'Resistance' but of classification of 'Power'. This is how it can be seen, that the younger generation in the film forms the 'Youth-Culture' which the media is propagating to us.

Chris Barker says that the 'audience' or the 'consumers' are the active creator of the meanings, in relation to their cultural sign. They bring their previously acquired cultural competencies to bear on the texts, so, different audience constitutes different meanings. It is thereby, my interpretation that the earlier part of the film, may have its settings in Uttar Pradesh as it can be predicted by, their use of 'Bhojpuri' dialect and culture. The later part, clearly depicted the Bengali culture, not only by the authorial voice of the text, but also indicated by the portrait of their marriage mounted upon the wall. So, in the above light it can be said that 'Culture is like a language'.

Although audience/consumers are always 'active' but this does not guarantee a challenge to the contemporary social order. 'Consumption' is an active process, and the audiences are the active creators of their meanings. Chris Barker says, that our sense of happiness depends more on everything, and the 'right' brands, in particular. Here, 'Fevicol-ad.' targets the working-class population. As religious, social, moral values are far stronger and decisive in the countries like India, and that is where, brands like 'Fevicol' score by appreciating the differences and playing according to those rules. The company knows its target consumers, and hence sets up their commercials with elements, that can be easily relatable for the target audience.

### **Conclusion:**

In 1989, the 'Post-Fordist' model of Hall and Jacques, impacted the most, within the umbrella of Cultural-Studies. As earlier was 'the Fordist' regime, that included the large-scale production of goods, in relation to the high consumption, which required high wages for its sustenance. But, during early 1970's the system geared towards mass production, and consumption, facing difficulties of the saturated western markets, with the capitalist crisis of overproduction.

Therefore, a shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism occurred, on the level of production, shifting from production of homogenous goods, to small-batch customization. It involved re-organization of the labour process, including multi-skilled labour-force with no rigid job demarcations. Thus, not only the 'Post-Fordism', refers to flexible specialization, but, it also helped in maintaining a relationship between the accumulation and consumption. Earlier, Fordism regime was based on the mass-advertisement, selling and consumption of the goods. Later, came the 'Post-Fordism', which used customization and niche marketing, as its base.

'Fevicol' is one of the iconic brands, in the Indian market. Its continuous success over five decades and uniqueness also in a way shows, the brand positioning by the advertising communications, be in print or in electronic media, which has been immensely popular among the masses. The adhesive brand, has gained so much popularity over ages, that, it has become an integral part of the 'Popular-Culture'. And thus, it has become a synonym word to indicate any adhesive, irrespective of any brand. Douglas & Craig(2001), says that the audiences has now become, more demanding than before, as along with the information, they also want entertainments from the ads., because they think, watching them, they are spending their precious time. At the same time, in a country like India, cultural and the traditional values also adds, to the consumption of any commodity.

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