

REVISITING ANIMATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Kapil Chowdhury

Assistant Professor

Department of Fine Arts, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun

ABSTRACT:

As Indian television viewers became more diverse and tech-savvy, advertisers had to seek new ways to grasp their attention. Animation turned out to be the most widely used medium, as anything imaginable could be achieved with it – from talking animals to flying children. This paper aims to revisit the usage of animation techniques in Indian television commercials (TVCs) from the perspective of a qualitative case study grounded in cognitive and persuasion theory. The history of animation will be loosely correlated with the history of TVCs. Following that, the reasons why animation makes content more memorable and persuasive than any other kind (the dual coding theory, elaboration likelihood model, source credibility, and spokesperson character), and how these learnings were applied to create billion-dollar franchises will be presented. Finally, the research will touch upon the history and current state of the Indian animation and visual effects industry. Three Indian TVCs will be observed: “Chidiya Rani Aur Kachua” (2006), and “Crow” (2009) by McCann Erickson Delhi agency, and “Live the Frooti Life” (2015) clay animation advertisement by JWT agency. Based on the data obtained, it will be concluded that animation mainly serves three purposes in Indian TVCs: higher memorability if compared to plain-Jane live-action footage, high emotional and imaginary engagement (children, particularly), and relatively low expenses during the production phase. As stated in the conclusion of this paper, animation still has a strong effect on viewers. Whether this effect will be long-lasting depends on the industry resolving problems such as dependency on foreign animation studios to outsource quality work.

Keywords: Animation; Television Commercial; Advertising; Consumer Recall; Indian Advertising Industry; Marketing; Promotion;

1. INTRODUCTION:

Television advertisements are finding it difficult to reach their potential as the industry becomes more crowded. Between 6 pm and 10 pm, 20 to 40 television advertisements are shown every hour during peak hours (“Clutter”, 2015). This is clutter that television commercials are fighting through to be noticed. On top of this mountain of clutter, it will be hard-pressed to find a single television commercial that doesn’t have some sort of animated element, whether it be used as the primary medium or simply as an enhancement to live-action footage.

Animation can do the impossible. It can make people fly, dogs talk, and cars dance. This ability allows advertisers to utilise special effects that would otherwise be too expensive or impossible to capture on film. Along with eye-popping visuals that help them stand out from the clutter, inexpensive labour and animators aplenty have allowed animation to become one of many options for companies trying to advertise on television. This need for animation has also created a demand, and for animation specialists within the advertising industry (Baek & Layne 1988).

Since animation began, there has existed a relationship between television and cartoons. Animation was there at television's creation (Threadgould, 2005). Some believe it was Felix the Cat who appeared on that first television set. Only 10 households in the United States owned a television set at the time, and engineers were using him as a test graphic to help create broadcast standards ("Facts about Television", 2003; Aaker, Batra, & Myers, 1992). When the first animated television commercial made its premiere is debated, but most would agree it was somewhere around 1941 (Baek & Layne, 1988). Either way, once animated advertising got its hands on television, it wasn't going anywhere (Callcott, Lee, & Wei-Na, 1994).

Animation in advertising isn't foreign to India either. In fact, the animation and visual effects industry grew by 24 per cent in just 2021, and is forecasted to double by 2024 ("Animation Industry", 2022). With that in mind, this paper seeks to revisit its impact by analysing three milestone TVCs. Two commercials will be examined from the Big Babool campaign created by Mumbai-based McCann Erickson Delhi. "Chidiya Rani Aur Kachua" aired in 2006, and "Croo", which featured a crow flying around hostel areas, was created in 2009. The third commercial that will be analysed is from Parle Agro's clay-animation-inspired "Live the Frooti Life" campaign created by JWT. Through an examination of cognitive processing theory, persuasion theory, as well as children's programming research, this paper will attempt to give justification as to why animation helped these advertisements succeed. Finally, it will discuss what factors affect the Indian animation advertising market today.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 Animation and Cognitive Processing: Animated advertising theoretically holds more persuasive impact based on dual coding theory, which explains how our mind stores visual and verbal information differently. According to Paivio's (1971, 1986) coding theory, the human mind consists of two separate but connected coding systems: a verbal system for linguistic information, and a non-verbal subsystem for imagery. Information coded both verbally and visually creates twice as many memory traces as information coded by only one channel (Paivio, 1971). Clark and Paivio (1991) applied this theory to understanding media and education by explaining that teaching and learning using vivid, concrete imagery has consistently outperformed its descriptive counterpart on free recall tasks. Television advertising provides a natural application for this theory. Animated commercials can stimulate both verbal and visual systems by adding a storytelling voiceover to imagery, creating more recallable memory traces than realistic video footage and spoken language alone.

Studies that look at memory of television commercials bear this out. Krugman (19??) differentiated memory into recalled and unrecalled memory. He argued that repeated exposure to commercials over time builds up br, and memory, even if the consumer may not be consciously paying attention to advertisements while watching television. Animation accelerates this process. Norris, Colman, and Aleixo (2001) showed how memory and judgement of television advertisements were affected by memory of the show they appeared in. Since animation is usually humorous, exaggerated, and full of surprising stories, this argues for animation's effectiveness within television commercials. Similar research applies outside of TV commercials. Studies have shown that animated banner advertisements left an impression on users while alternatives did not (Li & Bukovac, 19??). Yoo, Kim, and Stout (2004) found that animation led to better performance across a series of effects starting with attention, and leading to purchase intention. Sundar and Kalyanaraman (2004), however, cautioned that the speed of animation affected arousal and memory. Thus, animation must be used judiciously based on the level of attention expected from the viewer.

2.2 Persuasion, Source Effects, and Animated Characters: Animations don't just help viewers remember. They create persuasive sources that exist within the advertisement narrative. Early work on source credibility, such as Ohanian's (1997) seminal work on the skills, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of an endorser, and McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer theory, was designed with people and celebrities in mind. Animated characters fill this role. Serving as surrogates that copy a person's meaning, advertisers can create entire new personalities that can be fully controlled and customised to fit the brand (Callcott & Alvey 1991). Callcott and Lee (1994) examined animated spokes-characters in television commercials and concluded that they are commonly used and strategically implemented in product categories where advertisers want to use humour, exaggeration, or fantastical stories that would be impossible with live-action characters.

Processing of these characters can be better explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion. When a consumer has little involvement with a product, attitudes are changed via peripheral cues (Central vs. peripheral routes to persuasion) such as colour, humour, or friendly animated spokes-characters rather than scrutinising the message itself (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). Animated spokes-characters are ideally suited for this persuasion route. The appeals of these characters are based on their imagery and stories rather than actual argument. The effects of these factors are strengthened by affect. Batra and Ray (1986) looked into how affect facilitates ad acceptance, and MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) presented a model of advertising effect based on attitude towards the advertisement. Both these studies suggest that positive affect generated towards the advertisement itself, without any thought about the brand message, transfers to a feeling about the brand. Animation's humour and perceived warmth create just that.

2.3 Animated Characters, and the Child Audience: Due to animation's pervasive link with children's programming, a logical extension of the previous point is that using animation in advertising creates special implications when the target audience is children. As illustrated by case studies later in this paper, animation's strong association with children's programs leads to questions about using animation. Research into the effects of animated characters targeted at children has produced findings that differ from advertising recall studies. The consensus is that children are directly influenced by the characters to want a product. However, lab-controlled research has shown that characters do not have a uniform influence over children. The characters' voice and actions matter more than the presence of a character alone (Neeley & Schumann 2004). Kraak and Story (2015) reviewed 19 studies on brand mascots and cartoon characters, concluding that while children's preference for brands and products changed when a familiar character was used, the magnitude of change varied greatly. While children below the age of 12 lack advertising literacy skills to judge intent behind the ads they view, they are still susceptible to these characters. De Veirman, Hudders, and Nelson (2019) have recently expanded this argument to include children's responses to influencer-style videos. They suggest that mechanisms of source-based influence once used to study the power of animated characters are now being used by vloggers and video game creators. Care should be taken when studying how animation and content using these characters affect children. Animation's effectiveness in advertising, such as the Big Babool advertisements discussed in section 4, works through persuasion, and less through claims.

3. ANIMATION IN THE INDIAN TELEVISION ADVERTISING SCENARIO:

One of the observations noted that India's animation and VFX industry has graduated from being a services industry to becoming part of India's growing media and entertainment economy. In initial reports such as FICCI and KPMG's media and entertainment industry report in 2015, animation and VFX were pegged as one of the sunrise sectors of the media

and entertainment industry. It also grew at a faster rate than established segments like print media and films. This trend accelerated over the decade. FICCI EY's media and entertainment industry report for the year 20 22 reports that India's animation industry grew 24 per cent in 20 21 to reach roughly Rs 30.5 billion rupees. Together, the animation and VFX segment is expected to grow twofold to Rs 180 billion by 20 24 (AnimationXpress, 20 22). The same report highlighted that advertisers themselves started leaning towards animated content. Major Indian brands began shifting budgets from action films to animation for commercials, as animation was cost-effective and easier when real shoots were not feasible (AnimationXpress, 20 22).

Despite having domestic growth, the Indian advertising industry still faces a dilemma. Advertising agencies in India come up with ideas for animation-led campaigns but the execution, i.e. the animation and VFX work, is done by studios with stronger production setups. Many television commercials over the years for brands such as Mentos candies, Kit Kat chocolate, and Bajaj Electricals appliances showcase this trend. While Indian agencies dream up the ideas for commercials, international studios animate them. This simply illustrates how high-end animation production has left India behind, and how cutthroat global competition for talent in animation and VFX is (AnimationXpress, 20 22). However, Indian studios are beginning to build up their capabilities. Viewers are slowly becoming accustomed to newer formats such as 360-degree videos and virtual reality experiences. All these factors point to idea generation, and domestic production gradually evening out.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted for this research is a case study methodology. The study attempts to understand the application of styles of animation in advertising narratives. Three television advertisements have been shortlisted that are well-known Indian television commercials and fit into the animation styles described above.

Advertisement 1: Chidiya Rani Aur Kachua by Big Babool features 2D Character Animation. Released in 2006.

Advertisement 2: Crow by Big Babool features Live Action with Animation. Released in 2009.

Advertisement 3: Live the Frooti Life by Parle Agro Frooti features Clay-animation and Live Humans. Released in 2015.

All three advertisements were analysed by studying the narrative along with the visuals. Secondary information was gathered from trade magazine articles, company statements, and reactions to the commercials and campaigns. Trade references include Campaign India (2009), Das (2011), Flo (2015), and Vinaya (2016).

Concepts that were discussed in Section 2 were also taken into consideration. This includes the coding theory mentioned above as well as research that looks at the influence of a source's characters on the audience, and research into child-targeted advertisements. This study is unable to conduct a recall test on subjects to see if they remember the advertisements, and if they went out and bought the products being advertised. The study replicates how other studies on animated agents/characters in advertising were conducted. Studies such as those conducted by Callcott and Lee (1994), and Callcott and Alvey (1991) followed.

Ideally, this research attempts to arrive at an informed description of how certain styles of animation employed elements of advertising that deal with cognitive and persuasion aspects described in this research.

5. CASE STUDIES:

5.1 Big Babool: “Chidiya Rani Aur Kachua” (2006): The chewing gum brand Big Babool by Perfetti had McCann Erickson Delhi come up with a television commercial campaign. What resulted were two commercials aimed squarely at children. The commercials are titled “Boy and Crow”. Aur Kachua.” This is because kids are the target consumer segment for chewing gum.

The commercial titled “Chidiya Rani Aur Kachua” uses 2D animation and was released in the year 2006. The animation begins with a scene depicting a tortoise. It cuts to a forest with a bluebird in a nest with two eggs. Another weird egg shows up in the nest, and it hatches and turns out to be a baby tortoise. The mother bird happily mistakes it for her child. When the mother bird instructs her babies to jump off a hillock to teach them how to fly, the baby tortoise pops a piece of Big Babool gum into his mouth and jumps. He floats on a bubble he blows while flying. One of his friends shouts out “Kachua Bhaiya is flying on a bubble too. The screen then displays the brand's catchphrase “Bade Kaam ki Cheez”.

Referring back to concepts listed in Section 2. The commercial uses one of the modes of persuasion. By using talking animals and ableist animals to perform human feats, the commercial takes advantage of animation's ability to depict the impossible. Animation has the unique ability of surpassing live-action films. The use of visuals with voiceover also lends itself to better retention of animated content over content that uses just words or just visuals. Using animation, the commercial also incorporates lessons on friendship and courage. This correlates with what Callcott and Lee had stated about animated agents being able to mix entertainment with a message. As the target audience here is kids, the advertisement uses pathos and a narrative to describe the product to viewers. This adheres to what Neeley et.al , and Kraak, and Story state about humans responding better to stories vs facts.

5.2 Big Babool: “Crow” (2009): McCann Erickson Delhi released a commercial titled “Crow” in 2009. The commercial depicts a battle of wits between a neighbourhood child and a crow. Each time the child takes his bicycle out, the crow flies above and drops bird droppings on his head in retaliation. On the final day of this bullying, however, the child devises his own plan. Right when the crow takes position to poop, the child quietly blows a huge bubble. It inflates like a hot-air balloon and takes him soaring high in the sky. He then retaliates by dropping something on the crow. Toothpaste, specifically – takes after the bird by dropping white poop of his own. Finally, the campaign tagline flashes on screen once more.

Kapil Batra, creative head at McCann Erickson Delhi, says their objective was to surprise children and make them rewind the commercial to see all the tricks. Nilesh Vaidya, director at the agency, believes Chidiya Rani Aur Kachua” in 2006, and “Crow” three years later, contributed to the steady growth in sales of Big Babool over those years.

Looking at this commercial from a theoretical perspective, people learn about the effectiveness of anthropomorphised animals in advertising. By attributing human qualities like mischief, contentment, and frustration to these animals adds realism to something rather difficult to do with real animals. The storyline of Big Babool's crow revolves around the concept of mischief-making and retaliation. This creates a connection with children who find mischief-making and breaking rules somewhat enticing. Another expert use of theory in this commercial is the use of repetition. By repeating the concept of the child retaliating against the crow, children are able to influence their parents into buying them the product. This is known as advertising manipulation of children.

McCann Erickson has cleverly used both real footage and animation to depict the story of Crow. This is one trend people see in the Indian advertising industry. While some advertisements are fully animated, others are hybrids that mix both elements. This brings us to the ‘conceptualisation’ stage of brand planning.

5.3 Parle Agro Frooti: “Live the Frooti Life” (2015): For over three decades, Frooti has been marketed to Indian audiences as a fruit drink. By the mid-2010s, competition in the fizzy drink market was beginning to affect Frooti’s slow growth. JWT, the advertising agency behind the product, decided it was time to put the product back on top. They came up with an integrated campaign with the tagline “Live the Frooti Life.”

What made this campaign different from other taglines was that it was not only a slogan but an entirely new concept behind how advertisements would be created for the brand going forward.

Frooti collaborated with clay animation- stop-motion animation created with clay figurines- and Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan as their brand ambassador. (Vinaya, 2016)

The commercial opens with a large mango being kicked, pulled, and punched by multiple cartoonish characters trying to squeeze juice out of it. The characters range from a tortoise to a rocket ship – All fail at their attempt. Cut to a clay-animation version of Shah Rukh Khan who juices the mango in one slick motion. With one hand, he makes the mango lift off the ground and levitate. From the mango rises a bottle of Frooti that parachutes down into the waiting arms of Shah Rukh Khan, who transitions the advertisement from animation to real life by taking the bottle of Frooti out of a shopping bag to take a drink. (Flo, 2015).

JWT designed this campaign to showcase the taste of mango juice without featuring the product itself. Rather, they used a visual concept to make Frooti feel fresh, youthful, and relevant to consumers. Additionally, they wanted to create a ubiquitous excitement across all platforms: print, television, digital, and social media. (Vinaya, 2016)

Some critics believed that the playing around with size, and having characters beside a giant mango, reminded them of the classic tale ‘Gulliver’s Travels.’ The visuals were humorous. They grabbed consumers’ attention. This created a campaign that was talked about. From sponsored competitions related to the ad, there was conversation on Twitter and Facebook. (Flo, 2015).

Post-campaign, Frooti would use this style again in later advertisements. They later featured actress Alia Bhatt using the clay-animation and celebrity methodology. One can conclude that Frooti found a style that they thought was reusable and sustainable, rather than a one-time concept.

Theory-wise, what Frooti’s campaign lacked was what Big Babool’s adverts mastered: persuasion of children. Frooti utilised a celebrity and real footage mixed with clay animation. As per McCracken’s (1989) theory of meaning transfer, they utilised Shah Rukh Khan’s fame and social ranking to bestow upon the product. At this point, animation was used as a method of telling a story that would captivate the audience’s attention (Ohanian. 1990).

Transitioning from animation to real-world footage helped persuade consumers. It connected the desire of wanting to try mango juice into a single powerful still frame. This ties into the coding theory by Paivio (1986), which states that when information is given to consumers using both verbal and visual imagery, they are able to remember it better because both sides of the brain are activated. This advertisement did just that: It told a story using visuals and included a real-life person consuming the product.

Frooti targeted youth and adults. Since the advertisement was not targeting children, it allowed consumers to think about the ad and process the messaging through what Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) referred to as the central route. Clay animation was not used in place of logic. Frooti wanted to stand out in a saturated market. Using clay animation allowed for the brand to feel youthful and new. It did not avoid logic but worked alongside it.

6. DISCUSSION: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, AND INDUSTRY IMPLICATIONS:

Looking at these three case studies together, it can be concluded that animation in television commercials does not have one use. Rather, its purpose evolves based on the style of animation being used and who it targets. However, all of these industries model their ideas off of these basic foundations.

Animation in children-based commercials like Big Babool uses the concept of storytelling that involves breaking rules and fantasies. Things that children are naturally drawn to (Kraak & Story 2015; Neeley & Schumann 2004). The advertisements target children not by making them process the message, but by attracting their attention. This is the peripheral route of persuasion according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model. (Petty & Cacioppo 1986) Persuasion in these commercials does not require any sort of argument. They created persuasion through emotions and entertainment.

Animations were used in adult- and youth-based commercials. The Frooti clay-animation commercial used celebrities along with the clay animation. Therefore, it did not use animation to avoid logic. In fact, animation was used to support what was already working. Frooti wanted to be unique in the minds of the consumer. Therefore, the brand used clay animation as a way to differentiate itself from the market and create distinctiveness. It also allowed the brand to transfer meaning onto its product, aligning with both McCracken's and Ohanian's theory. (McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1990)

Both of these methods impact consumer memory in the same way. Each commercial used pictures along with some sort of words, whether on-screen text or audio dialogue. By doing this, it triggered both parts of the brain, which, according to dual coding theory, increases the chances of consumers remembering the advertisement (Paivio, 1971, 1986; Clark & Paivio, 1991). Research even proves that advertisements with animation are remembered more than live-action commercials. (Callcott & Lee, 1994; Norris, Colman, & Aleixo, 2001).

This advantage of advertising using animation has had impacts on the Indian advertising industry as a whole. As mentioned in section 3, more brands are beginning to use it. It can be seen that there was even a spike in animation during the pandemic, where brands like Cred, Google Pay, Kissan, 7UP, Fevistik, and Munch switched to animated commercials. Brands don't just use animation for its psychological and cognitive effects but also because it is easier to produce. You don't need to book locations and actors or create complex set designs. The animator or creator has full control over the product. Everything is cheaper when it comes to animation (AnimationXpress, 2022).

However, there is an issue in the Indian industry. When Indian brands come up with ideas for animations, they send the work to studios overseas. India still outsources all of their high-end animation and VFX work. Had there been more opportunities in India for these specific services, the industry would be larger. This goes hand in hand with media reports that suggest more infrastructure and training of talent is the key to growing the industry (AnimationXpress, 2022; FICCI-KPMG, 2015).

Lastly, both of our case studies that featured kids took advantage of the fact that children under the age of 12 have not fully developed the ability to recognise advertising. They don't

know how to decipher when information is being used to persuade them. (Kraak & Story 2015; De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson 2019). Whenever brands use cartoon characters as mascots to sell their product, they have the power to influence kids. Whether it's for better or for worse. While viewers don't see advertisements taking advantage of children in this paper, external research has led me to believe that rules and regulations should be updated to address advertising techniques.

7. CONCLUSION:

Advertising has evolved into a platform for marketers to promote their brand, product, service, idea, and more. Over the seventy years of India's changing economy and society, the advertising industry has had to change with it. Gone are the days when agencies could only use newspapers, magazines, and television to target consumers. The digitisation of social media platforms is what drives Indian advertising today.

Throughout these changes, one thing has remained constant. Maybe even became more prominent, and that is animation. Animation will continue to be used in advertisements because it allows advertisers to persuade consumers.

In this paper, it analyses three television commercials. and proved why animation is used in advertisements. One reason was due to the coding theory. Advertisers used both verbal and visual prompts in their advertisements (Paivio, 1971, 1986). Animation also allows advertisements to persuade consumers through simpler routes. Meaning they don't have to process the information being given to them. This can be seen with children and advertisements (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Neeley and Schumann, 2004). When used with live-action footage, it can allow brands to transfer meaning and be distinctive. (McCracken, 1989).

Animation in India is quickly growing. It grew by 24 per cent in 2021, and is expected to continue growing till 2024. If advertising agencies and brands are spending money on it, then there has to be a reason. One that the study explained throughout this paper. But there is still one thing the Indian animation and VFX industry lacks. Outsourcing.

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