

## ADVERTISING OF INCLUSIVITY IN INDIAN MEDIA: NORMALISING LGBTQ+

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### ABSTRACT

*The representation of queer community in Indian advertisements is visibly evolving as we witness their representation in the marketing industry. Representation and inclusivity inform about the collective unconscious it encompasses. Advertising and marketing in India have played a significant role in bringing about socially aware adverts conveying a message and demonstrate social commitment of the LGBTQ+ community. The intent of this paper is to display how representation through Queer characters in advertisements OR LGBTQ+ marketing is helping normalize the Queer discourse. It was observed that these advertisements normalised humanising love and relationships beyond the binary sexes, genders, and sexualities. The frontstage put forth by an informed and inclusive backstage is worth looking into. The paper will furthermore analyse how the narrative about Queer community has changed, and how this change in the narrative is further changing the perspective by showcasing inclusivity and diversity in Indian advertisements.*

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**Keywords:** LGBTQ+, Pride Marketing, Indian Queer Discourse, Queer Representation, Advertising.

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### Introduction

"It requires an endless parade of brand extensions, continuously renewed imagery for marketing and, most of all, fresh new spaces to disseminate the brand's idea of itself." (Klein, 1999, p21)

Advertising is always on the lookout for 'fresh new spaces' as Naomi Klein puts it, for brands to disseminate and expand their reach. And it is genuinely interesting how they are going about it with regards to the inclusion and representation queer discourse in Indian advertisements. This paper aims to enlist, view, and analyse the chosen sample pool of ads and display how the representation is changing, how it is evolving and gradually getting better. Accordingly, the paper will investigate these 'fresh new spaces' that brands are looking into to 'disseminate the brand's idea of itself', thus arriving at the current 'fresh new space' of LGBTQ+ marketing.

Labels once required to identify and categorise different groups, are now a subsection of the target audience. As a result, advertising has become challenging as well as exciting as the audience has become diverse and are accepting various ideas portrayed on screen. Being massively pervasive due to their reach on various platforms and the incapability to avoid them altogether, advertisements are the perfect medium to send a social message, raise awareness and sell allegiance. Let it be observed, allegiance here takes the form of representing queer discourse, being inclusive by acknowledging them as a part of audience and typify queer people in advertisements.

Advertising now, is selling *inclusivity* as the subliminal message; the socially aware world in which their product could play a part. As the frequency of mentioning LGBTQ+ increases, the way it has over the course of last decade, it lessens the discomfort associated with them. Through analysis, this paper aims to show how inclusivity outside the margins of stereotypes lessens the stigma surrounding taboos. The paper will furthermore analyse how the narrative about queer community has changed, and how this change in the narrative is further changing the rigmarole by showcasing inclusivity and diversity in Indian advertisements.

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The researchers have referred to the Theory of Representation by communications scholar Cedrick Clark (1969) in supplying how the discourse has pushed past three stages to enter the fourth stage of representation. Also, it has been deduced how the discourse is steadily headed towards accepting and including identities that did not match the conventional narratives. Additionally, the researcher has also elaborated on how an informed backstage is responsible for a rational and relevant frontstage. In achieving so, the researcher has referred to the Theory of Performance by Erving Goffman (1959).

It is compelling how advertisements are willing to be inclusive and are attempting a sensible approach rather than a sensitive one. The subliminal direction towards normalizing this discourse is steadily reducing the hesitancy by raising awareness.

### **Research Methodology**

The sample pool has been shortlisted based on their relevance to the objective of the paper. The sample pool has been analysed and organized based on their approach to inclusivity, relevance and awareness of the subject and their attempt to represent.

### **Aims and Objectives**

- To analyse the advertisements on how they have displayed inclusivity.
- To identify how they have bridged the gap with queer representation.
- To observe the Theory of Performance by Goffman and its application.
- To compare results with Clark's Theory of Representation.

### **Hypothesis**

- Advertisements or LGBTQ+ marketing is normalizing the Queer discourse.
- The narrative is not sensationalizing but humanizing.

### **Analysis**

#### **Amul**

Tagline – 'Out of the Closet Out of the Fridge'

Representation - Lesbian

The brand Indian audience can count on to represent a topic with blunt self-assurance in short, subtle, and simple way is Amul. The print-ad by Amul is the perfect evidence of this claim. With the tagline 'Out of the Closet Out of the Fridge', Amul's wordplay diverts the attention of people to the metaphorical closet, which resembles a refrigerator. And surely, Amul encourages both people and Amul butter out of their respective closets.

The ad visibly displays the mascot of the brand— the Amul girl sharing bread and butter with two girls. Dressed to match each other like couples sharing a style, the girls obviously have eyes for each other. On a closer look, one notices the two girls holding hands, one painting the nails of other, while the mascot hands them the buttered bread.

In addition to the tagline, which is obviously hinting the colour scheme of the advertisement gives away the rainbow of spectrum to which it is referring. Amul's shoutout is a solid step towards representation and inclusivity.

#### **Bhima Jewellers**

Tagline – 'Pure as love'

Representation - Crossdresser or/ to transgender

Bhima Jewellers display something as simple and normal as fascination with pretty things. The captivation to elegant and shiny jewellery turns into a curiosity to wear them no matter the biological sex. The aesthetic appeals to the protagonist's style and the proximity makes them brave enough to push boundaries steadily. Bhima Jewellers take a step further by showing an accepting family where the parents aid the transition of their child.

The slow transition from curiosity to try new terrains to intentionally pursuing a journey not biologically laid out for you has been humanized. The protagonist intentionally discards the appearance associated with their biological sex and the family aids the process.

The advertisement humanizes the simplicity of having a taste that is notable, and the unique approach the protagonist has towards it. The normalcy exhibited by the family displays the love they have.

- **OkCupid**

Tagline - Love doesn't discriminate, neither do we. #AllyOfLove

Representation – LGBTQ+

The advertisement takes the form of a video questionnaire with participants being asked to turn on their camera if the answer is yes. People of different sexes, ages, and sexual orientation make the sample pool by answering the questions. Over the course of the advertisement, their similarities are shown. By their responses, one can decipher the normalcy of relationships despite differences of preference. The hesitance to approach someone, the excitement of holding hands in public, fighting for their love, and different approaches to love. OkCupid displays different sexes, races, and sexualities bonding on their similitudes and sparks one experiences while exploring a romantic relationship.

Love doesn't discriminate. And OkCupid asks whether you are an ally of love. The focus is on similarities and relatability, or how, despite the differences, something brings them together.

- **Closeup**

Tagline - #BreaktheBarrier

Representation – Gay

Closeup normalizes the sentiment of being lost, feeling a spark towards someone and being hesitant to approach the stranger in a public place. Even a place like a dance club may prevent someone from approaching. The barriers being both self-inflicted and socially inflicted. Closeup displays this hyperawareness and discomfort with a woman, who is older than the man, two men and a woman belonging to a different race than the man. The advertisement focuses on how a possible connection may be defied due to fear of being judged. And the similar feelings of the six strangers. It proceeds to advice that despite the barrier one must push and outgrow the judgemental gaze for their personal benefit. To move on take a risk at love.

The voice-over, "And don't tell me that silver linings don't exist, I'll keep convincing myself to break barriers, I will be way too beaten and tired, and they will judge and disapprove, but does it matter? This is my story" follows the three protagonists bravely approaching their counterparts.

- **Zomato**

Tagline - Let's get one thing straight. Love is love.

Representation – The Pride Flag

The food delivery company Zomato opts for a universalist approach to love. Instead of prioritizing sex, sexuality, or gender, the message conveyed by Zomato prioritizes the universalism of love. It fixates on emotional connection between human beings and the unpredictability of love. Additionally, the ad displays the message by choosing the color scheme resembling the LGBTQ+ flag. Short, subtle, and simple Zomato normalizes by humanizing emotions and the connection.

Being a food-delivery service the ad, complete with a rainbow colour scheme, takes the form of a delicious burger. And employs the clever use of 'straight' as a pun.

## **Conclusion**

With differences in biological sexes, gender, and sexualities, the chosen advertisements imply that they are just people who are relatable. Advertising willing to sensitize others as well as themselves displays how an informed backstage is important. Through the evolving narratives they have humanized their characters and their emotions rather than outright promoting their product or extending queer stereotypes for effect. They are willing to learn and include.

"The front acts as the vehicle of standardization, allowing for others to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits that have normative meanings. As a "collective representation," the front establishes proper "setting," "appearance," and "manner" for the social role assumed...in order to present a compelling front, is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner." (Barnhart, 1994) Being informed on this discourse will ease their acceptance as a part of society. As the trivializing recedes, humanizing will begin. Once considering the previous sentence, it is understandable why brands are

eager to include, curious to approach, and willing to represent the population that has not received much screen-time. The brands are willing to think about what would appeal to them, what dream would appease them, what would make them feel included and less hyperaware. Instead, they have taken a leap into representing sensibly by including them as a part of focus group. It is an inclusion of a demographic that was not shown this frequently in advertisements before; the spotlight and scrutiny cease to exist when there is a group.

This is a sure step towards normalizing; not sensationalizing. Simplifying the narrative by being honest. Queer people are just people with *different* journeys. The findings of this research show how the representation is approaching the fourth stage of representation i.e., respect (Clark, C. 1969). The narrative of queer characters is steadily shifting from comic-relief in bad taste and ridicule (Clark, C. 1969) to sensible expression.

Brands willing to represent multifaceted people and representing people diversely is the inclusivity sensed through the illustration of queer people; outside their stereotypical narratives—as comic-relief or ridicule. The conclusion derived from this willingness is that Indian ads are ready to be inclusive and normalize the LGBTQ+ community.

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