

## PATRIOTISM AS AD PROP!

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{*MONOJIT LAHIRI investigates.*}

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Is nothing sacred in today's crazy clutter-breaking-obsessed-times? Come Independence Day or any other patriotism-specific day, dozens of ads, instantly flood the publications! Do these huge ads make any sense, carry any weight? Monojit Lahiri spoke to some evolved souls to seek answers

Every year, come Independence Day – or Republic Day or the birth/death anniversaries of the Gandhi's or Nehru's come around - a zillion ads, with differing degrees of engagement, conviction or focus, blitz our publications. Why? What is their basic agenda or objective? Do they achieve it? Aren't the advertisers wasting the tax-payers money? Does anybody care to see, note or remember them? In short, who is doing what for whom?

Most Communication Specialist summarily dismiss most of these ads as “sheer tokenism, sycophancy and outstanding examples of how not to project landmark events of national importance!” However some believe, that these affairs – for the evolved and sensitive communication practitioner – present amazing opportunities to showcase the nation's new-found pride and confidence as being up there with the best. Celebrate their sense of self-reliance, their glowing image in the league of nations as a vibrant democracy making huge strides, deleting forever their erstwhile complex of the white man or their goods and services. Veteran ad person Esha Guha elaborates this point “I am not sure however if this has been done with any consistency. Connecting the core values of a product / service with the nation's vision and values can be a fascinating and exciting challenge, if leveraged intelligently. However, there should be a brand-fit – like the patriotic I DON'T WANT TO GO ABROAD Hero Honda TVC or HAMARA BAJAJ, MILE SUR ... TVCs – otherwise it will appear corny, clichéd and contrived like most ads of this genre”.

Political commentator and Media personality Paranjy Guhathakurta adds his spin to the debate. He agrees that there is definitely mega-posturing and wearing-patriotism-on-my-sleeves factor on an over-drive “as clearly manifest in these rather embarrassingly inane ads. They can only be matched by the hysterical brand of patriotism emerging from

the NRI fraternity. Distance – for them – lends enchantment, I guess! However, despite this lapse and the fact that a disturbing divide and disparity continues to define our amazingly complex land, we continue to remain a solid democracy and zap the world! This needs to be recognized, understood and celebrated. Seen in that light, these ads are doing their job for whatever they are worth. They may not be the most creative, imaginative and professional examples of advertising excellence, but the intent is honourable and well-meaning.”

Cigar Czar Chetan Seth offers a light touch. He compares this exercise to “event management and believes that it provides the government agencies and PSUs a great, legitimate outlet to spend big bucks, paying homage to whatever is the flavour of the day! In the normal course, not





being an FMCG or ad-driven product/service, the Sarkari guys have no need to advertise. These events provide rare and eagerly awaited opportunities and they freakout ... in the process, a great time is had by all!"

Lloyd Mathias, an independent marketing heavyweight (Pepsi, Motorola, Tata Tel) has his own professional take. "Its true, that come these days, lots of brands seem to leap onto the nationalistic bandwagon, flashing empty patriotic slogans and the tri-colour to display solidarity with the spirit of the day. Most times, [like the hordes of PSU ads] it's done without imagination, creativity or focus." However, Mathias believes, should a brand anchor it and establish a relevant and powerful connect with patriotism – like the fabulous PEPSI FREEDOM ads in 1997 commemorating India's 50th year of independence – then it could result in powerful and memorable communication. Otherwise, mostly its lazy marketing and a sheer waste of money."

Veteran Nargis Wadia [founder and chair person of INTERPUB, whose gorgeous presence rocked the sixties and seventies!] also believes that "context is the key. The Gandhi-fronted MONT BLANC ads, for example were silly and amateurish attempts at leveraging patriotism in advertising. The challenge is to identify and establish, in a creative and memorable manner, products, causes or concerns with a suitable brand-fit". The last words appropriately must come from a bright and attractive Mascom student, Anupama Sharma. Bringing all her youthful optimism into play, she opines that "these ads may not be great examples of creative excellence, but who cares? Life is about passion and emotion and these occasions allow

us to express them with patriotism full-on! Do birthdays, anniversaries and special days happen every day? Don't we celebrate them with feeling? We are an expressive, over-the-top people. Why should our flavour of patriotism differ? We are like that only, yaar!"

**MONT BLANC**

**Exclusive Boutiques**  
 The Taj Mahal Hotel, One Mansingh Road, New Delhi  
 Tel: 2302 6131 / 2302 6132  
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