ABSTRACT

It's inarguable that Mass Media disseminates elements of popular culture. In turn, popular culture deeply influences mass media. The current digital age ensures the required momentum of information flow in every possible direction. The linear narratives are playing second fiddle to highly volatile methods of communication in high voltage advertisements that is academically challenging to discern in Screen studies. Exploring how the production and proliferation of desire, which is collective in nature, is naively but surely augmented by the sponsored Advertisements on New media to re territorialize the capitalist would be both poetic and political. If Elizabethan Age had had any global marketing channels, Shakespeare might have given catchy one-liner subtitles to all his tragedies, for example, to Macbeth, ‘Aesthetizing the Dark Sides of human nature in the Age of Enlightenment’ to make his plays blockbusters! However, the changing dynamics of cultural practices in digital territory has redefined the commodified everything that can be sold for quicker consumption. Advertisements as a peculiarly interesting genre in New Media play a promotional role of endorsing commodity, service or concept. Visual narratives in Advertisements, which are largely commercial enterprises, do subtly reflect and sponsor the ideologies and vested interests of the stakeholders. The scholar here attempts to explore the symbiotic relationship between the popular culture and mass media to unmask the politics of visual narratives that virtually schizophrenize the consumers.

Today’s society is marked by the unprecedented development of communication and information resources. It is thus often termed as an Age of information and Mass media. In the last few decades we have branded our society with various terms – information society, knowledge society, networked society – thus highlighting the significance that information patterns and communication configurations have in our daily lives. Computer culture, virtual culture, cyber culture, e-culture, Internet culture, new media, convergence culture, digital culture are all relatively new terms that are being widely used in scientific and popular literature. Scholars from various disciplines have examined the impact of this new media on various social aspects of virtual space and its impact on the real sphere and they have changed their views on digital culture many times over a relatively short period of time.

The changes in media technology and its usage have to a large extent predisposed the conceptualization of media users and the communication modes that subsequently emerge. One of the undesirable effects of social media or network is that it leads to a sort of addiction. Spending countless hours on the social sites can divert the focus and attention from a particular task. It is likely to lower the motivational level of the people, especially of the teenagers and students. They mainly rely on technology and the internet instead of learning the practical knowledge and expertise of the everyday life. Children can be seriously affected by these social networking sites if they excessively use them. Another downside of the social media is that the user shares too much information which may pose threats to them. Even with the tight security settings your personal information may leak on the social sites. Privacy has become an illusion in such a context.

Pyramidal hierarchy of various social institutions is troubled with the advent of hi speed internet access. Cultural edifice of a society is under constant flux and quicker transformation than ever before. Thanks to the universal media that has already made inroads into our nervous system. The study of Mass culture in this sense can be seen as a part of ideological conflict. A steady growth of academic interest in Mass Culture in particular and Cultural Studies in general is seen in the syllabi of various universities. Textual and visual consumption of mass culture has led to the moments of willing addiction to commercial memes which are circulating with a vengeance amidst us. This paper attempts to explore the obvious symbiotic relationship between mass media and popular culture by analysing a futuristic movie called, Idiocracy while depicting how the movie profusely disseminate the elements of popular culture.

Digital culture is a new-fangled complex notion: today digital trends are increasingly interloping with the world of culture and arts, involving different aspects of convergence of cultures, media and information technologies, and influencing new forms of communication. The new possibilities created by ICT – global connectivity and the rise of networks – challenge our traditional ways of understanding culture, extending it to digital culture as well. Culture should be understood as an open and dynamic process that is based on interactive communication, and we cannot think of it as an enclosed system which makes up a ‘cultural mosaic’ with other similar or diverse cultural systems. The ICT and especially the Internet, has given these interrelations a new dimension, by changing our relation towards knowledge and knowledge society, by intensifying the flow of cultural goods and services. In contemporary society, the media have a crucial, rather
conclusive role in forming and shaping the public opinions about virtually everything.

The social responsibility approach is a normative theory that stresses the role of the media in fostering citizens' participation in the definition of the public good and in creating a space where society uses deliberative processes to mediate between diverse interests. The social responsibility approach also corresponds to German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' vision of a public sphere where participants overcome their subjectively based views in favor of rationally motivated agreement. The media are increasingly marketing themselves to a particular audience. To some degree, this specialization is driven by advertising. Advertising media specialists have sharpened their ability through survey research to identify particular target audiences. One of the embodiments of this idea has been the development of the public service media model. Following this model, the media should be a factor for social cohesion and the integration of individuals, groups and communities without discrimination and social segregation. To this end, public service media should provide a forum for public discussion in which a broad spectrum of news and opinions is presented: They should be reflecting diverse ideologies and beliefs while remaining impartial and independent and should not sacrifice quality for political or commercial reasons.

The implementation of normative ideals becomes more challenging in media environments where competition for audiences and revenue is growing as the number of digital media actors grows. However, finding new implementation models becomes increasingly important as network insularity and social fragmentation flourish along with digital communications. In line with 17th century thinker John Milton's conceptualization of a free "marketplace of ideas", a plurality of media outlets is necessary to give voice to different interests from which citizens can make 'informed' choices. The liberal perspective also emphasizes the need to protect the independence of the media from state interference, as well as the watchdog function of the media vis-à-vis those who govern.

The study of Popular culture, which is being academized in recent years, has included media studies more seriously than ever before. In an act of familiarizing the product, the ads are also involved in subtly sustaining and strengthening the desirable quotient of the consumers which are likely to result in the production of certain cultural traits. However, with less academically refined reading techniques, the scholar attempts to explore few such popular ads which are alleged to have involved in narrating the popular culture. Upper-case for words like Narrative, Popular and Culture is often used as signifiers of Complex notions in academia. Advertisements do commodify and marketize certain saleable concepts and commercialize products creating compulsive consumers.

Advertising has become a kind of socialization, subtly conditioning us to think, react and feel in specific ways. For instance, what's trendy or what's outdated and what's normal or what's not are being established through sponsored channels. The worst part is obviously to make us think what problems we should to worry about: like the requirement of the latest product or gadget to show off your loyal adherence to the happening contemporary stuff, desperate need for perfect white teeth to give a close up smile or the failure to attract the opposite sex in the absence of a single spray of deodorant.

Advertisement has come of age ever since the commercial ventures of businessmen are diversified and complicated. Even a cursory glance at older advertisements do reveal a great deal about the persisting stereotypes, vested interests of industrialists and the spirit of specific culture complex. Even aesthetic tastes seem to be vulnerable to alteration. For example, an avantgarde technique such as surrealism of early 20th century is now effortlessly accepted in a mainstream advertisement. This can be seen in how few advertisements have become less verbal and more visual. However, another reason for this trend is the presence of mute button in remote which has apparently led to an increase amount of written language in TV ads.

Advertisements do popularize culture and popular culture finds a significant of mileage in the form of advertisements. Stereotypes of cultural constructions do find a creative space in advertisements. Fragrances are gendered. How ridiculous it is to believe that smells have different gender identities. Consumers do accept such notions without even questioning such typecasts. Icons of the given age facilitate in imparting such messages. One worrisome dimension of few ads is the usage of sexist images and remarks. Inaccurately portrayed ads have the dangers of misleading the viewers. Kids are the soft target for ads. Kids are likely to be subjected to commercial pressures in schools if they fail to buy/adhere to any in-thing/new concept in the market. Certain cultural traits and ideological elements are also sold besides the products.

If a product is to be commercially successful and socially acceptable, it must go well with the cultural milieu in which it is advertised. It is like the textual context, the sign must be a correct social construction of the customer/buyer. Furthermore, the machismo of the sign does not exist on its own, or simply within itself. Indeed, it is the same masculine, heterosexual overtones of the text itself, which also contribute to the reader's general perception of the advertisement and therefore the product. Back in 2014, the soft drink industry funded a study that, coincidentally, concluded that diet soda is better for weight loss than water. These same companies are at it again, not only providing the backing for another study extolling the virtues of diet drinks, but also according to new reports directly paying money to the researchers involved. The study does disclose that it was funded, in part, by the International Life Sciences Institute — Europe, a group whose board of directors features not just a bunch of heavily credentialed academics, but also executives from Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Mars, and Unilever. In fact, while there are some 19 people on the ILSI Europe board, three out of five of its officers are representing the food industry. Results are predictable in favor of Private companies.

Every once in a while, a really smart movie comes along that shows us just how stupid modern society is becoming. "Idiocracy" is precisely such a film. Filled with purposeful profanity, the movie actually drives the storyline. It is a brilliant
parody. Idiocracy manages to depict around 90 minutes of entertaining commentary on just how stupid modern society has become today. The storyline of Idiocracy goes like this. A career military desk jockey of average intelligence is cocooned in an experimental hibernation machine for 500 years. When he awakens, he finds himself in a world populated and run by complete idiots - the result of 500 years of reverse natural selection, where the stupid people fornicate the most, and the smart people stop having children. A tabloid quality, corporate-controlled world of idiot consumers whose thought processes are limited to the three-word phrases pounded into their heads by relentless advertising campaigns. Phrases like, "Money is good" or "Plants need electrolytes."

What's so interesting about Idiocracy is not merely how funny it is, but rather how accurate it is at constructing a future society extrapolated from the real trends of modern-day America. Today, for example, corporations have largely taken over control of the Food and Drug Administration. In Idiocracy, a Sports drink company simply buys the FDA and replaced the entire Food Guide Pyramid with sports drink ads. Water is no longer consumed at all in the Idiocracy world -- consumers have been taught that water is only for toilets -- and sports drink liquid is used to water the crops (which are mysteriously dying). This is much like modern medicine today, where doctors, sunscreen manufacturers and even the American Cancer Society insists that sunlight is bad for your health, and that what you really need are expensive prescription medications to solve your health problems. Or they think that "Restless Legs Syndrome" is some mysterious musculoskeletal disorder rather than simply a deficiency in dietary magnesium.

But the best part about Idiocracy is the creative use of language. It's loaded with profanity, but it's not gratuitous profanity. It actually has a purpose: it describes the linguistic framework into which all communication and thought processes have devolved. The most popular TV show, for example, is on the "Violence Channel." The court system operates as a name-calling contest where people are deemed guilty because they, "talk like fags" by using intelligent-sounding words.

This is actually not that far from the state of affairs today in the United States. Political elections are won on rehearsed sound bites and acting skills, TV news has devolved into a violence-dominated ratings game hosted by supermodels with surgically-enhanced lips, and the population is so drugged up on medication that they can't think straight, drive straight or even vote straight. In fact, Idiocracy is quite optimistic about the future of western culture: it will only take a hundred years, not five hundred, to reach the level of extensive stupidity depicted in the film. We are almost a half-way there already. The zombie-like consumerism depicted in Idiocracy is only a slight exaggeration of the behavior of consumers today who actually consume gallons of Gatorade, thinking it's good for them because it contains "electrolytes." (Gatorade is mostly just salt water with artificial coloring additives). Today's Sports drink should ring a bell of warning.

In fact, all one has to do is walk into any Wal-Greens store and get a full preview of the world shown in Idiocracy: The products are junk, most of the food is loaded with harmful additives and the medications are anchored at the back of the store to encourage consumers to buy more candy bars and soda while they pick up their medications for diabetes and heart disease. So who's stupid in society today? People who think vitamins are too expensive but pharmaceuticals are a bargain because they get a ten percent discount on some hare-brained Medicare plan. People who spend more on their credit cards to get more "miles" or "cash rewards," not realizing that the interest they pay on those cards far outweighs any such benefits. People who refinance their homes to pay their credit card debt, and then rack up new credit card debt, thinking their home is some kind of limitless cash-dispensing machines. Mike Judge has shown us the way our world really is by depicting a future world that might actually come to pass. Terry Crews, who gives an energetic and appropriately outrageous performance as President, warns of future disasters while the script of entire movie is shrewd and tight. Idiocracy, with a far more ambitious message may not be a movie for everyone, but critical thinkers who also have a sense of humour would undeniably cherish to watch it for critical insights. Therefore, we certainly see how mass media and popular culture share a symbiotic relationship to take a given society in a certain direction.

Reference

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