

Sustainable development goals, culture and advertising: tracing the roots to stride forward

Business Analyst
Journal

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Received 6 November 2023
Revised 10 July 2024
Accepted 22 September 2024

Abstract

Purpose – Growing concern about sustainability, which focuses on the triple bottom line, namely people, planet and profits, must integrate with local culture to ensure inclusive growth. Localized advertising themes adapted to suit a country's culture borrow from that country's culture. Global advertising themes, on the other side, influence and modify the existing culture of a nation. The present study looks at the potential of using traditional Indian sustainable themes to promote sustainability as a way of life, which can be used to craft advertising messages that contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Design/methodology/approach – A content analysis of 395 advertisements displayed on Indian television during primetime has been done. Data have been analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings – The findings reveal that 4 SDGs (achieve gender equality, ensure affordable and clean energy, ensure good health and well-being and promote industry, innovation and infrastructure) out of a total of 17 SDGs find a place in 395 advertisements. They mostly appear for beauty and personal care products and automotive. Depictions of a frugal lifestyle, natural/green surroundings and women empowerment in advertisements "together" exemplify opportunities to use culture creatively in crafting advertising messages.

Research limitations/implications – As the multinational companies embrace the trends towards globalization in advertising, they can also extend the traditional cultural values and lifestyle from a country like India, which tremendously and conspicuously contribute to sustainability to appeal "differently" to buyers. It would offer an opportunity to synergize the growth outcomes in a thoughtful manner.

Originality/value – This is an original piece of research, as no such study has already been conducted in India (to the best of researchers' knowledge).

Keywords Sustainable development goals (SDGs), Sustainability, Advertising, Culture, Television, India

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Brundtland report (WCED, 1987) defines sustainable development as the process of meeting the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Jarvie, 2016). It focuses on the harmonious relationship between socio-economic

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Business Analyst Journal
Vol. 46 No. 1, 2025
pp. 37-52
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2754-6721
p-ISSN: 0973-211X
DOI 10.1108/BAJ-11-2023-0068

progress and environmental depletion. Sustainable development also aims to minimize the conflict between the economy, environment and society. With an aim to achieve SDGs, companies seek ways to address social or economic problems and try to maximize shareholder value simultaneously (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Out of the 17 United Nations' (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) outlined, they try to contribute to achievement of those SDGs, which drive business growth and offer compatibility to a company's business model (Jones, Hillier, & Comfort, 2016; Di Vaio, Palladino, Hassan, & Escobar, 2020).

Conserving ecological resources, contributing to social inclusion and driving economic growth are debated to be diametrically opposite goals. Green marketing and green consumption (Sarkar, Sarkar, & Yadav, 2019; Anwar & El-Bassiouny, 2020), sustainable consumption (Sharma & Jha, 2017; White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019), meaningful consumption, conserving resources through technological innovations (Cantele, Moggi, & Campedelli, 2020), using renewable/modern sources of energy (Kaygusuz, 2012) and recycling and reuse of materials (Lascity & Cairns, 2020) are few ways devised to modify consumption orientation and behavior. Another argument is that aspirational growth should not be checked, but wasteful and inefficient consumption must definitely be controlled (Jayanti & Gowda, 2014). It is increasingly accepted that sustainable marketing can be used to enhance shareholder and customer value (Anwar & El-Bassiouny, 2020).

Sustainable marketing can intertwine with sustainable development as both rest upon sustainable consumption practices, an individual's lifestyle, beliefs and value systems, ethnicity, food habits, religion and language (Ting, 2013; Krsnik, Karmen, & Marija, 2022). Marketing communication is often crafted taking into account the uniqueness of national culture (Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001) and traditions (Bronner, 2011). Recognition of culture in brand communication helps build brand equity (Banerjee, 2008). Similarly, reflecting traditional, sustainable, cultural values and family norms in advertising communication can help revive focus on sustainability. Therefore, there exists a need to re-look at the role of marketing (Belk, 2020), which may change consumer ideology and promote propensity to consume in an eco-friendly way (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). Cultural affinity can also help unify the world while trying to achieve the SDGs, which are otherwise posited as a distant dream (Stafford-Smith *et al.*, 2017). Scant research has uncovered specific appeals, which are effective in promoting sustainable consumption (Lord, 1994; Han, 2019). Investigating the use of SDG themes in Indian advertisements through the lens of sustainable practices derived from distinct Indian culture will offer opportunities to amalgamate traditions with development. Therefore, this research specifically aims to examine the extent of depiction of core sustainability practices in the advertisements portraying SDG themes coupled with national culture.

SDGs and culture

Culture is identified as the fourth pillar of sustainability, along with economic, social and ecological sustainability (Hawkes, 2001). Culture is the medium for sharing value systems, beliefs, norms of behavior and ways of life in a society. It also governs the messages that are shared between humans in social set up such as a family, workplace or mass media (Qin, 2019). Advertising content is subject to cultural norms in a society and is further governed by regulations or codes to protect cultural and/or consumer interests. Culture can offer a solution to sustainable development if communities embrace the concept of sustainability into their lives (Hawkes, 2001; White *et al.*, 2019), accept to repair, reuse or recycle products (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Michel, Feori, Damhorst, Lee, & Niehm, 2019) or decide to conserve (Ting, 2013; Opoku, 2015; Soini & Dessein, 2016). Culture-specific and local ways of economic and social development can also be identified, which can lead to socially inclusive growth (Khavul & Bruton, 2013; Soini & Dessein, 2016).

Culture bears a direct relationship with the propensity to consume. Rising consumerism and similar cultural shifts in consumption patterns are brought about by advertising, as one of

the important elements of marketing (Assadourian, 2010). As the concern for people, planet and profits has emerged in a big way, this has again created the need to look at social norms, traditions and rituals as a means to emphasize sustainable life choices (Assadourian, 2010). Therefore, interventions aiming at increasing human consciousness towards sustainability must take into account the socio-cultural context through which the interventions are planned and executed (Gifford, 2014). The focus shifts again to media messages, which have the potential to alter consumer behavior by imparting information about sustainability and altering intention of individuals to shift from anti-sustainability behavior to pro-sustainability behavior (Lind, Nordfjærn, Jørgensen, & Rundmo, 2015).

Indian culture has been chosen as the case culture because it is strongly bound to its deep traditional roots on sustainability. Indian values and beliefs offer substantial insights into ways to contribute to sustainable consumption and development. Indians have been found to not only love animals and keep them as *pets* – they also believe that an animal is associated with a god(ess) (lion, bull, rat, etc. which are associated to be *vahans* or carriers of goddess Durga, Lord Shiva and Lord Ganesha worshipped by Hindus) since ages. Similarly, Indians conserve water (as Jal Devta or the lord of oceans/water), air (Pavan Devta or the lord of air) and food (Ann Devta or the lord providing food) – but also worship them (Kala & Sharma, 2010). The Indian values traditionally forbid anyone from wasting food, water or other natural resources. The Hindus perform “havan” to purify air. Besides religious sentiments, Indians traditionally prefer home-cooked food, consume fresh and local produce and source from the nearby markets (Dev, 2017). The Indians follow the philosophy of “reuse” and “recycle” through everyday activities. The old newspapers, books and utensils are sold to scrappers who help in their recycling. Packaging containers after initial use are sometimes reused for better organization. There are also great examples of native people of Rajasthan (the Bishnoi community) who protect and conserve wildlife (Hall & Chhangani, 2015). Thus, traditional culture is a key to achieve sustainable development goals (Hegde, 2024; Zheng *et al.*, 2021). According to Hegde (2024), if everyone adopts some basic principles in life such as selfless service, control over greed, non-violence for peace and conservation of biodiversity, honesty and compassion, there will be sufficient quantity of food and other things to fulfill the needs of people, and it will lead to achieve several sustainable goals. In India, tribal communities are strongly connected with their natural surroundings. Being living in the lap of nature and with limited resources, they have learned to survive in difficult situations. They have indigenous knowledge to provide sustainable solutions to various problems such as reducing agricultural productivity and soil quality, biodiversity loss, water shortages, pollution and climate change (Kumar & Sarraf, 2024).

In order to understand the extent of use of sustainable development themes in Indian advertisements, a list of SDGs was taken from the UN’s website. Traditional Indian sustainable themes have been derived from Kala and Sharma (2010), Hall and Chhangani (2015) and Dev (2017). The UN SDGs and traditional Indian sustainable themes are combined in Table 1.

The table shows that out of 17 SDGs, 10 SDGs converge with Indian sustainable themes. The table shows also that responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), ensure modern and affordable energy for all (SDG 7) and ensure good health and well-being (SDG 3) translate most of the Indian traditional sustainable themes. Achieving gender equality (SDG 5), ensuring clean water and sanitation for all (SDG 6), reduce inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), conserve life below water (SDG 14) and protect life on land (SDG 15) can also be identified in Indian culture. This brief analysis shows that Indian traditional sustainable themes are deeply rooted in Indian culture and can be used to achieve SDGs set out for the whole world. They can be successfully used in Indian advertisements to depict core Indian sustainability practices and revive interest of Indian consumers in these practices and help inch towards sustainable development. Other nations may also borrow the (relevant) sustainable practices, as they serve as examples to inculcate sustainability into one’s culture.

Table 1. UN SDGs and traditional Indian sustainable themes

S. No	UNSDGs	Indian sustainable themes
1	No poverty	
2	Zero hunger	
3	Ensure good health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchasing and consuming fresh, local and seasonal produce, plant-based foods, fresh milk, fruits and vegetables from marginal producers (this eliminates the cost of branding and packaging and food miles) • Use of yoga and Ayurveda, Unani, homeopathic medicines
4	Ensure quality education for all	
5	Achieve gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating girls as Goddesses
6	Ensure clean water and sanitation for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rainwater harvesting
7	Ensure affordable and modern energy for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sun-drying of clothes • Hand washing of clothes and dishes, bucket bath to save water and energy • Using traditional food preparation and low-energy methods of grinding, pickling, and sun-drying, using manual choppers
8	Promote decent work and economic growth	
9	Promote industry, innovation and infrastructure	
10	Reduce inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple and frugal lifestyle
11	Sustainable cities and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Surroundings • Rainwater harvesting
12	Responsible consumption and production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worshipping Ann devta and jaldevta, not wasting food and water, reuse leftover foods to reduce waste and treating them as deities • Reusing storage containers in kitchen • Recycling old newspapers, books, utensils, etc. by selling them to scrapper • Rainwater harvesting • Simple and frugal lifestyle
13	Climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not wasting water, treating them as deities
14	Conserve life below water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserving biodiversity
15	Protect life on land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worshipping animals like the sacred cow and being kind to animals • Preserving biodiversity
16	Promote peace, justice and strong institutions	
17	Global partnership for achieving SD goals	

Source(s): Authors' own creation

The table is used as a theoretical framework to analyze how sustainability from the point of view of UN SDGs and traditional Indian sustainability themes is manifested in contemporary advertising in India and how sustainable values could be better integrated in media communication to enhance sustainability.

Role of advertising

Advertising has the power to influence consumer psychographics, attitudes and consumption behavior (Rai, 2013). They mirror social development in a society and borrow from a country's culture (Padalia & Sriram, 2019). The President of American Association of Advertising Agencies, John O' Toole, has described "Advertising is something else. It is not related to

studies, but it educates. It is not a journalist but provides all information. And it is not an entertaining device but entertains everyone” (<http://www.managementstudyguide.com/social-economic-aspects-advertising.htm>). Thus, advertising is not only to sell but also to educate. Powerful images, resonant music and well-worded text can evoke feelings among viewers to promote sustainable development goals.

Advertisements use a mix of appeals to elicit a desired response from viewers (Soni and Vohra, 2014a, 2014b). These appeals are rational as well as emotional (Chandy, Tellis, MacInnis, & Thaivanich, 2001; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005; Poels & Dewitte, 2019; Septianto, Chiew, & Thai, 2020), based on nostalgia (Srivastava, Maheswarappa, & Sivakumaran, 2017), cultural values or family roles (Srikandth, 1991; Vohra, Ghuman, & Soni, 2021) or gender stereotyping and sex roles (Scharrer, Kim, Lin, & Liu, 2006; Padalia & Sriram, 2019). These may lead the consumers to believe that televised depictions are closed to reality (O’guinn & Shrum, 1997). Pollay (1985) infers that an individual commercial has limited power to convert behaviors, but the persistent themes covered in the aggregate totality of the commercials have the potential to bring about changes, just as flood, is far more important than a raindrop. As Pollay (1985) asserts and as can be seen in today’s advertising, advertisement creativity is not constrained, as advertisers are linking unique situations to the brand to seek viewers’ attention. Mass communication has the power to impart symbolic meaning to consumption, which catalyzes the preference of the audience towards an object (consumption)-driven world from a natural world (Ortuno, 2019). Advertisements need not exclusively focus on social and moral themes. A theme can be conveyed in a dialog, in a scene, in the background illustrations of the main scene or through the overall story line. For instance, the advertisement of “Ankur” salt featuring “Shilpa Shetty” (an actress in the Indian film industry) concludes giving a message in the end in a dialog by saying “Namak kam hi khaye par acha khaye” (Eat less salt, but good quality salt), which is a good message for a healthy life. Font and Villarino (2015) propose an excellent example of two advertising messages to market local foods, which can create differential sustainability impact. The first message says, “we serve local food because it tastes better,” and the second message says, “we serve local food because it saves food miles” (p. 328). They conclude that message content, structure and appeal positively arouse sustainability spirit in consumers, which benefits them as individual consumers, society and businesses.

Peattie and Belz (2010) argue that sustainable marketing communication must be specifically designed according to customer characteristics, aiming to build customer trust. It should communicate with the society about ways to promote eco-friendly and viable consumption in a socially desirable way. Few studies have looked at consumers’ willingness to consume less for the benefit of the society (Cherrier, Black, & Lee, 2011), but it is not clear as to how such effects can be realized at a societal level (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014), integrating micro-level adoption of sustainable practices with a macro-marketing perspective (Lunde, 2018). The present study dwells on the practice theory and values, beliefs and norms theory (VBN). Practice theory uses social practices as a unit of analysis (Welch & Warde, 2015) in advertisements to uncover themes, which promote sustainable consumption, using the Indian culture as context. Practice theory focuses on routine activities of people or human actions (what they do and how they do them) to understand the outcomes (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). VBN theory undermines the role of social values, beliefs and norms in promoting environmentally friendly behavior amongst consumers (Lunde, 2018).

Methods

In order to know the use of sustainable development themes in advertisements in India, a list of sustainable development goals is shown in Appendix. Content analysis of TV advertisements has been done to analyze how SDGs materialize in media communication (Kasarjian, 1977; Barker, Whittamore, Britton, & Cranwell, 2019). Kolbe and Burnett (1991, p. 243) describe content analysis as “an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate

the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communications. These communications can also be analyzed at many levels (image, word, roles etc.), thereby creating a realm of research opportunities.” In our study, communication and symbolic content were analyzed at the level of practices as stated above.

Study design and sample

Data have been gathered for four weeks by recording programs, advertisements and any other content broadcast on six popular television networks during peak viewing hours of 20:00 to 22:00. The recording was done for twelve weekdays (Monday to Friday) and six weekends (Saturday and Sunday). These channels comprise two channels each from family entertainment (*Star Plus* and *Colors*), Hindi news (*AajTak* and *India TV*) and youth-oriented channels (*MTV* and *Bindass*). These channels have been selected because at the time of the study, these were the most viewed channels in India (<http://www.barcindia.co.in/statistic.aspx>). A total recording of 39 hours for both weekdays and weekends was done. The recorded content was split into program and non-program content (advertisements) and was further analyzed. Out of the total recording of 39 hours, advertisements were found to be aired for 10 hours approximately. The data consist of 1,852 repetitive commercials, out of which 395 non-repetitive commercials have been taken for the present study. The advertisements were classified into 13 products/services categories, *namely* automotives, building and construction materials, agricultural products and methods, electronic goods, household goods, services, beauty and personal care products, clothing, food and beverages, healthcare products, footwear, websites and apps and miscellaneous. Advertisements for services comprise banking, health insurance, life insurance, general insurance, telecommunication and financial services. Data have been analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) through SPSS 19.0.

Coding procedure

Two coders independently assigned codes to advertisements recorded for the study. Definitions of sustainable development goals and traditional Indian sustainable themes were used to assign codes. Some important decision rules and coding procedures were also discussed by coders (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). The method comprises recording the presence or absence of a sustainable development theme in each sampled advertisement. Further, in order to minimize researchers' biasness, reliability of coding was assessed through intra-coder and inter-coder reliability (Kassarjian, 1977; Perreault & Leigh, 1989; Sullivan, Aikin, & Poehlman, 2019; Hornikx, van Meurs, van den Heuvel, & Janssen, 2020). For this purpose, a pilot test was performed on 463 advertisements (25% of 1852) that were collected during weekdays and weekends. Both coders viewed each advertisement carefully and then decided about the presence and absence of sustainable development theme/s or traditional sustainable goal/s in it. The inter-coder reliability was found to be 92%, while intra-coder reliability was 97%. The inter-coder and intra-coder reliability were found by applying the following formula.

$$\frac{\text{No. of agreements} \times 100}{\text{No. of agreements} + \text{No. of disagreements}}$$

Results

All advertisements have been analyzed to check the use of sustainable development themes in advertisements. Table 2 depicts that out of 17 sustainable development themes –“Promote industry, innovation and infrastructure” is the most frequently used SDG in advertisements.

Table 2. SDGs depicted in Indian TV advertisements

S. No	SDGs	Frequency	Per cent
9	Promote industry, innovation and infrastructure	54	13.67
3	Ensure good health and well-being	11	2.78
7	Ensure affordable and modern energy for all	5	1.27
5	Achieve gender equality	4	1.01
1	No poverty	2	0.51
2	Zero hunger	2	0.51
4	Ensure quality education for all	2	0.51
8	Promote decent work and economic growth	1	0.25
11	Sustainable cities and communities	1	0.25
13	Take climate action	1	0.25
15	Protect life on land	1	0.25
16	Promote peace, justice and strong institutions	1	0.25

Note(s): *Percentages have been calculated from total number of advertisements ($n = 395$)

Source(s): Authors' own creation

This is followed by SDG3 – “Ensure good health and well-being for all,” “Ensure affordable and modern energy for all” (SDG7) and “Achieve gender equality” (SDG5).

The themes that were not depicted at all include “Conserve life below water” (SDG14), “Ensure clean water and sanitation for all” (SDG6), “Responsible consumption and production” (SDG12), “Reduce inequality” (SDG10) and “Global partnership for achieving SD goals” (SDG17). SDG themes that are rarely used in advertisements comprise “Sustainable cities and communities” (SDG11), “Promote peace, justice and strong institutions” (SDG16), “Promote decent work and economic growth” (SDG8), “Protect life on land” (SDG15) and “Climate action” (SDG13). The above findings have been obtained as a part of the same study.

Use of traditional Indian sustainable values across top four SDGs

Table 3 depicts that the SDG theme “Promote industry, innovation and infrastructure” is reflected in ads depicting green and natural surroundings, simple and frugal lifestyles, conservation of resources and being kind to animals. Indian society has been an agrarian society, and therefore, traditional Indian sustainable themes do not offer examples of promoting industry. With the passage of time, however, impetus was offered by the

Table 3. Use of traditional Indian sustainable themes across top four SDGs

SDGs	Traditional Indian sustainable themes
Promote industry, innovation and infrastructure ($N = 54$)	Depiction of green and natural Surroundings (19), simple and frugal lifestyle (14), conservation of resources (3) and being kind to animals (1)
Ensure good health and well-being for all ($N = 11$)	Depiction of green and natural surroundings (5), purchasing and consuming fresh, local and seasonal produce, plant-based foods, fresh milk, fruits and vegetables from marginal producers (3), simple and frugal lifestyle (2) and love and care for animals (1)
Ensure affordable and modern energy for all ($N = 5$)	Conservation of resources (4), simple and frugal lifestyle (1) and depiction of green and natural Surroundings (1)
Achieve gender equality ($N = 4$)	Purchasing and consuming fresh, local and seasonal produce, plant-based foods, fresh milk, fruits and vegetables from marginal producers (2), simple and frugal lifestyle (2) and use of yoga and Ayurveda, Unani or homeopathic medicines (1)

Source(s): Authors' own creation

government of India to shift focus from agriculture to industry. The representation of industry also picked up in the media communication. Interestingly, they continue to blend the depictions of industrial development with rich natural Indian heritage and try to connect with the rural folks by showing simple and frugal lifestyles and love/kindness towards animals. The advertisements depicting the SDG “Ensure good health and well-being for all” also use green and natural surroundings to relate to traditional Indian sustainable themes. They also depict purchasing and consuming fresh, local and seasonal produce, plant-based foods, fresh milk, fruits and vegetables from marginal producers, leading simple and frugal lifestyles and love and care for animals.

The SDG “Ensure affordable and modern energy for all” visualizes the traditional sustainable themes revolving around conservation of resources, simple and frugal lifestyles and natural surroundings. More so, the SDG “Achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls” is embedded in traditional Indian sustainability themes, which include purchasing and consuming fresh, local and seasonal produce, plant-based foods, fresh milk, fruits and vegetables from marginal producers (2), simple and frugal lifestyles (2), use of yoga, Ayurveda, Unani or homeopathic medicines (1).

The depiction of traditional sustainable themes through sampled advertisements is shown in Figures 1–3.

Figure 1 shows an ad for a dairy brand that revolves around SDGs, namely “no poverty,” “promote gender equality,” “decent work and economic growth,” “ensure good health and well-being for all” and “sustainable cities and communities.” The ad depicts a poor family selling milk to earn money, which is used to seek education for the child and the mother achieves decent economic growth, prosperity, advancement and self-reliance. The family moves from a poverty-stricken condition to a prosperous lifestyle. The ad is set up in a rural



Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Figure 1. Gender equality



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 2. Promoting industry, innovation and infrastructure



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 3. Gender equality

setting, showing naturally green surroundings (which have been the traditional habitat of the majority of Indians), depicting simple (frugal) lifestyles. The ad depicts sustenance of rustic life through economic prosperity instead of growth achieved through urbanization.

Figure 2 depicts an advertisement of an automobile brand by focusing on SDG – promoting industry, innovation and infrastructure. While preparing this ad copy, some natural and green surroundings are taken as background; a person is performing yoga and protecting animals/trees while driving through woods, which represents being kind to animals and conservation of natural resources, traditional sustainable themes.

Figure 3 shows an ad of a health drink brand depicting the SDG – gender equality. The ad shows the use of natural Indian herbs, which provide physical strength and stamina to a woman athlete to succeed. The ad breaks the stereotype of portraying a popular and successful male Indian cricket player to show strength, hard work and achievement. Figure 3 (Kachchi Ghani) depicts SDG – gender equality and good health and well-being for all. The ad depicts a woman in the role of a powerful political leader who cooks a meal for her co-workers with a brand promoting purity. She cooks food using traditional cooking methods, uses native herbs and emphasizes the impact of pure and natural foods on health. She also exuberates dominance in relationships by emphasizing being ethical in professional relationships.

Discussion

Advertising has the power to reframe portrayals of lifestyles that are more sustainable and realistic (Craig, 2019) and imbibe them as habits and social norms in individuals (White *et al.*, 2019). While revamping the traditional marketing concepts that fail to address ecological and social concerns of the society (Peattie & Belz, 2010), advertising as a form of promotion can be oriented to achieve the SDGs by depicting core family values, positive social changes and traditional Indian sustainable development themes for the betterment of human beings, nature and all the species on this planet.

Consistent with previous literature that reports that advertising appeals vary across product category classification (Girard & Dion, 2010), as a part of the study, it has been found that SDG themes are depicted for search goods, namely, clothing, household goods, healthcare, construction material and household appliances; experience goods, namely, beauty and personal care, websites and mobile apps, automotives and credence goods, namely, services. The results reveal that depictions of SDGs pertaining to resilient infrastructure are executed through many positive social changes, family values and a few (four) traditional Indian sustainable themes. Interestingly, this SDG, which promotes industry, innovation and infrastructure, uses portrayals of green and natural surroundings, frugal lifestyles, conservation of resources and being kind to animals. Similarly, depictions for SDG3 – Ensure good health and well-being for all – is executed through a traditional practice in India to purchase and consume fresh, local and seasonal produce, plant-based foods, from marginal producers, simple lifestyle and love/care for animals, which saves food miles. SDG7 (Ensure affordable and modern energy for all) is depicted through conservation of resources, using green/natural settings in the background of the ad and leading a simple/frugal lifestyle is very relevant globally and can be used while framing communication messages in other countries also. These messages can be effective as they augur well with the self-efficacy beliefs of individuals and incite altruistic behavior.

Such behavior benefits the individual, society and ecosystem (Shahzadal & Font, 2018). Deriving communication messages from traditional (local) sustainability practices can also reduce the psychological distance of the receiver and better answer for them as to “why” and “how” they should adopt sustainable practices besides invoking self-interest (Grazzini, Rodrigo, Aiello, & Viglia, 2018). Villarino and Font (2015) suggest that sustainable communication messages need to be persuasive to be able to elicit a desired response. Framing these messages requires understanding of a country’s culture, as the response is seen to vary across individualistic versus collectivistic cultures (Shahzadal & Font, 2018).

Managerial implications

As the multinational companies embrace the trends towards globalization in advertising (Steenkamp, 2019), they can also extend the traditional cultural values and lifestyle from a country like India, which tremendously and conspicuously contribute to sustainability to appeal “differently” to buyers. This would not force advertisers to choose between materialism versus frugality, technological versus mechanical and conservative versus modernistic. Rather, it would offer an opportunity to synergize the growth outcomes in a thoughtful manner. An advertisement for a detergent brand (which did not feature in the recording) plays a message – “In India, eating with hands and also washing with hands. So, stains can be easily removed by scrubbing.” Such advertisement appeals can be created in future which promote traditional Indian sustainable practices and yet depict a modernist consumer.

Companies may also focus on their environmentally friendly methods, technologies (DiVaio *et al.*, 2020), products and innovations (El-Haddadeh, Osmani, Hindi, & Fadlalla, 2020) and report them through advertisements without indulging in greenwashing.

Business needs to focus on consumer education and awareness about using renewable sources of energy and energy conservation (Penz & Polsa, 2018) and arouse consciousness about resource consumption by linking the present actions to future outcomes (Suarez, Hernández, Gil-Gimenez, & Corral-Verdugo, 2020). This can be attained by using traditional Indian sustainability practices such as sun-drying of clothes. Sustainable advertising can create a fit between the “commercial” and the “sustainable” role of the advertiser, which can be achieved by promoting the spirit of frugal consumption (Craig, 2019), anti-consumption (reducing), reusing and recycling (Black & Cherrier, 2010) or using animism metaphors (Rout & Reid, 2020). Animism means depicting nature–culture relationships as reciprocal rather than being unidirectional. Both the goals can be achieved by harnessing “brand love” (Michel *et al.*, 2019) along with the use of traditional Indian sustainable themes, which also align with the UN’s SDGs to infuse the spirit of sustainable consumption.

Black and Cherrier (2010) also point out that consumers do not like to be viewed as conservative when they indulge in sustainable practices. They shy away from disclosing everyday practices, which may be socially embarrassing and accept those sustainable practices that allow them to preserve core self-identity. Sustainability orientation is used by consumers to join social groups such as Yahoo groups to gather more information on this issue. They interestingly found that self-interests and environmental concerns do not independently drive anti-consumption/sustainable behavior, but both act as a driving force to follow sustainable practices. They found that consumers tried to incorporate sustainability into their everyday lives without compromising on consumerist attitudes. As few advertising messages revolve around these building sustainable consumerist attitudes, marketers should create unique appeals to fulfill sustainable consumer goals.

Theoretical implications

SDGs aim to harmonize economic and growth with use of ecological resources. Theoretical linkages have been developed earlier to understand the impact of product innovations (El-Haddadeh *et al.*, 2020), use of artificial intelligence and other technologies (DiVaio *et al.*, 2020), supply chain and operations (Penz & Polsa, 2018), service orientation (Lee, Che-Ha, & Alwi, 2021) and strategic orientation (DiVaio *et al.*, 2020; Dubey, Singh, Raghubanshi, & Abhilash, 2021) on the achievement of SDGs. Little attention has been paid to sustainability marketing messages, which can arouse altruistic tendencies in consumers (Font & Villarino, 2015).

Firms’ marketing activities are strongly influenced by culture, are posited to achieve SDGs and SDGs aim to contribute to socio-cultural development. Bringing them together, the present study contributes to theory by looking at linkages where national culture leads to the achievement of SDGs through persuasive traditional sustainable themes. We have combined culture with SDG to show how traditional values can be used to trigger the achievement of

SDGs through deep cultural-level assimilation of SDGs at a deeper, societal level, which can be better integrated and ingrained into the lives of the masses. While culture and advertising have been previously connected (Padalia & Sriram, 2019; Vohra *et al.*, 2021), to the best of our knowledge, no other study has combined culture, SDGs and advertising in a bid to detect sustainability in advertising from a deep cultural perspective. We have shown that some of the SDGs emerging in modern advertising do not connect with traditional sustainable culture, as they reflect the transition of Indian society from the past to the present modern state. This contributes to the literature on culture (Hawkes *et al.*, 2001; Soini & Dessein, 2016) and advertising, as it takes a retrospective look at the cultural Indian traditional values and compares them with the contemporary ones through the lens of advertising. It also shows that sustainability is manifested in advertising without connection to the traditional sustainable culture. Using traditional sustainability themes, it is presented that advertising messages can be created using native country context, culture and practices, which can align to achieve an SDG in a simpler manner.

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Appendix

Table A1. Sustainable development themes

S No	Sustainable development themes
1	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
2	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
3	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
4	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
5	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
6	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
7	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
8	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
9	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
10	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
13	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
14	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
15	Reduce inequality within and among countries
16	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
17	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Source(s): <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

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