



(1) Janata Bank ad (January 20, 1972) (2) Lux ad in 1980s modeled by a Bengali origin Bollywood actress, Rakhi Gulzar. (3) A contraceptive ad, Raja Condom, on a sailing boat, 1980s. (4) Bata ad (March 26, 1972)

50 Years of Bangladeshi Advertising

Bangladeshi advertising got in a good shape after the advent of color television in the early 1980s. Telope ads continued on BTM throughout the 80s though print media was still the dominant medium. It was about that time when competition between brands, such as Peps Gel vs Close-Up, began and it reflected on television commercials, which was an eye-opener for Bangladeshi marketers.

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1. The history of advertising in Bengal is as old as the history of modern print media in Asia. The first Asian newspaper – The Calcutta General Advertiser – was published from the British Bengal in 1780. The first advertising agency in Bengal, B Datram and Company, came in 1905, followed by the India-Advertising Company in 1907, and the Calcutta Advertising agency in 1909. The functions of those agencies were to collect advertisements from business organisations and to get them published in the press. The first multinational agency, J Walter Thompson, was launched in India in 1926 to serve the General Motors company. Subsequently, a few more multinational agencies started working in India – SH Benson in 1928, a British agency that was later renamed as Ogilvy & Mather; Hindustan Thompson Associates in 1929; and Lintas India Limited in 1939.

Advertising before 1947 was based in Calcutta initially, and later in Bombay. East Bengal had been left out of colonial India's development process. It was basically a monsoon dominated rice-jute economy with no major industrial background before the Partition. It was throughout a hinterland during the British period for building up the wealth and prosperity of Calcutta. East Bengal occupied only 12 per cent of the total industrial enterprises of undivided Bengal in 1947.

2. During the Pakistan period, advertisements were mostly made in West Pakistan but released in East Pakistan for creating a market for West Pakistani enterprises. The first advertising agency in Dhaka was Green Ways Publicity which was established by Gulam Mohiuddin in 1948. Dhaka-based advertising practice started in the mid-1950s when the first full-fledged local agency, Eastland Advertising Company, was established by Salam Kabir.

By the mid-1960s, two multinational companies came to Dhaka, one is Lever International Advertising Services (LINTAS) and another one is the Karachi-based DJ Keymer & Co Asiatic Advertising Ltd which opened its branch in Dhaka under the name of East Asiatic

Advertising Ltd in 1967 and changed its name to Asiatic Marketing Communications Ltd in 1994.

Two other big agencies – Bitopi and Interspan (now Interspeed) – came in the market simultaneously in the year 1967. It was a time when television just came to East Pakistan. Advertisements were mostly appearing in newspapers, radio and cinema halls. The first television advertisement in East Pakistan was a 30-minute weekly family drama named "Ghoroa", where different consumer items were publicised. At the beginning of 1968, telope ads (looks like a PowerPoint presentation) and movie advertisements arrived gradually. The backgrounds of those ads were gray in color, and the written text was in black and white. One slide comes after another with a voiceover like a silent movie. Before telope ads, there were only black and white print advertisements based on the features of the products and a tagline for sales. During that time, Lever Brothers introduced both toilet and washing soap by launching Lifebuoy and Lux.

The 1969 mass uprising against Ayub Khan

4. Bangladesh advertising got in a good shape after the advent of color television in the early 1980s. Telope ads continued on BTM throughout the 80s though print media was still the dominant medium. It was about that time when competition between brands, such as Peps Gel vs Close-Up, began and it reflected on television commercials, which was an eye-opener for Bangladeshi marketers. Besides, different international companies started coming to Bangladesh from the early 1980s, and some local companies (e.g. Mala sharee, Anwar spoon, AP hair oil, Geco touch soap, Glory baby cloth, Nabisco biscuit, Haque biscuit, etc.) also began investing.

Lever Brothers was the key multinational player that played a significant role in Bangladesh advertising throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It set the tone for Bangladesh advertising and remained the largest spender until 2000. However, multinational companies did not consider existing local ad agencies professional and thus, there was a lack of

through satellite channels. Local clients started expressing many interests and advertising practitioners also tried to understand their demands, which previously did not get much attention. Bangladesh advertising started what can be called "scientific advertising" in this period. Two large agencies – Bitopi and Adcomm – started using desktop publishing in 1994-96. New graphical technologies – Glayva, flexography and offset printing – brought a revolution in Bangladesh advertising at that time. The mid-nineties were a time when local agencies came into maturity. Choudhury (2008) writes, "International advertising agencies compelled by their worldwide multinational clients were tying up with Bangladeshi advertising agencies. JWT, Ogilvy, DDB, Bates, McCann, Leo Burnett all signed up affiliation agreements with the local big guns. Overnight we saw our billings hit previously unimaginable figures".

6. Telco companies have become major players in the Bangladesh advertising industry from 2004-05, which set the trend for the last two decades. Bangladesh ads started to reach international standards in terms of the quality of production during this time. Since the multinational telephone companies like Grameenphone, Banglalink, Airtel Bangladesh, Robi Axiata Ltd, among others, are the largest corporate groups in Bangladesh, they also dominate the country's advertising industry.

Besides telco companies, some other major advertisers of this period include the real estate, private university, toiletries industries, home appliances, government and private banks, and beverage makers.

There are some local brands – RC Cola, Keya, Mojo, Apex and Pran – which came during this period. If telco commercials are considered as local advertising as they regulate everything from Bangladesh, then 70 per cent of the current Bangladesh ads are now national, including that of local food, fast-moving consumer goods, clothing accessories, leather shoes, and others.

Currently, the advertising market in Bangladesh is worth about \$1.8 billion, and the market is growing in volume by 10 per cent a year (Rahman, 2016). As of 2020, there are about 500 advertising agencies in the country and this sector employs more than ten thousand people. About 70 per cent of the advertisement market is dominated by some ten advertising agencies, i.e., Asiatic JWT, AdComm Ltd, Grey Advertising Bangladesh Ltd, Bitopi Advertising, Expressions, Mediocom Ltd, Ogilvy Bangladesh, Sun Communications, Unitrend Ltd and Interspeed.

Advertisements were more jingle-based until 2000, then it focused on storytelling in the following one-and-a-half decades, and currently it has moved into a problem-solution strategy.

7. From 2000, local satellite channels became available for Bangladeshi audiences, and that gave them an opportunity to watch local content on local channels. Bangladesh advertising gained maturity and professionalism during this period. The industry is now in transition as it heads toward digital advertising for meeting the demand of an emerging consumer class.

The demand for consumer goods was higher than the supply in the first decade, where one or two large companies dominated the market and could sell whatever they wanted to sell. Therefore, advertising had almost no progress in the first decade of independent Bangladesh. In the second stage, during the 1980s and mid-1990s, some big multinational companies, particularly Unilever, dominated Bangladesh advertising which was dependent on external resources, mostly India and Thailand, for making its content. In the third stage, from the late 1990s to present, Bangladesh advertising has come of age, with the presence of local companies as well as some giant multinational companies. Unilever and telco have dominated Bangladesh's advertising industry. Unilever was the key player for nearly three decades (1971-2000) and is still considered one of the biggest spenders. Telco has taken over Unilever's position since 2000.

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A telco ad (2013)

had an impact on advertisements and then after March 26, 1971, it became evident that the people of East Pakistan had decided not to use any West Pakistani products. They started to use Peva Toothpaste instead of Tibbet and Collins. The telope ad of Peva Toothpaste, accompanied by an attractive jingle, was very popular at that time. East Asiatic, according to Aly Zaker, produced an ad on March 26, 1971 by writing Joy Bangla for the Crescent Jute Mill.

3. At the time of independence, only 19 per cent of the local entrepreneurs were Bangladeshis. The exploitation of Bangladesh's economic resources by West Pakistan created a deep sense of frustration in the minds of the then political leadership. Consequently, the first Bangladeshi government nationalised 92 per cent of all manufacturing industries in 1972. Private investment, both national and international, was discouraged, and the participation of the private sector was restricted to cottage, small and medium industries. Khan and Hossain (1989) indicate that "the nationalisations of 1972 were widely interpreted as a major step towards effecting a socialist transformation of Bangladesh" (p. 84). Therefore, we see the ad of Janata Bank, a state-owned bank, in 1972 pledging that it works for socialism.

As industrial and manufacturing activities became nationalised during 1972-75, the advertising practice was very much limited and mostly nationalised. Most ads usually appeared in print media, particularly national newspapers, while some appeared on national radio and television. Advertisements of different national banks, such as Sonali Bank and Janata Bank, Meril Petroleum and cigarette brands were very common in the newspapers. Telope advertising was common in cinema halls at that time. Except for Lever Brothers, no multinational company was active in the 1970s. Until 1980, Lever Brothers' toiletries had competition with local products of Kohinor Chemical, namely Tibet soap, Tibet powder etc.

trust between multinational companies and local ad agencies that kept Bangladeshi ad professionals in a vulnerable situation. This acted as an obstacle in developing confidence and professionalism among Bangladeshi professionals. Multinational companies used to go outside the country, particularly to India and Thailand, to ensure quality.

The advertisements of multinational companies, particularly cold drinks and soaps, became visible on BTM from the early 1980s. For drawing the attention of urban people, the payoff line of Lux was "chitro tarokader shondorjo shaban". Women in the Indian sub-continent have had a fascination towards film stars, so the advertisers tried to target the women by saying that if they use Lux, they will be as beautiful as film stars like Rakhi Gulzar. Besides, for Lifebuoy commercials, they picked football players as models because footballers were popular in the 1980s and 1990s Bangladesh. However, they have been replaced by cricketers now.

It may be mentioned that Bangladesh achieved significant progress in family planning from the 1980s. Advertising played a notable role in family planning campaigns. Here is an example of utilising the geographical uniqueness of Bangladesh as a riverine country, where boat was the principle means of transportation back then. Adcomm made an ad of a contraceptive, Raja Condom, on a sailing boat.

5. From the 1990s, Bangladesh's economy experienced a significant transformation from an agriculture-based economy to a service-based economy. Within a decade of the private television channel boom, the number of viewers in Bangladesh increased by up to 33 per cent. Since the satellite channels were airing programs of superior quality, BTM, with its mediocre production quality, was finding it difficult to compete with new private channels.

Advertising became professional at that point. The changes were revolutionary as audiences were able to watch the rest of the world



Coca-Cola ad (1960s)