

# The Philosophy of Representation and Power Play, with reference to Surrogate Advertising in India

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## Abstract

The paper will discuss the philosophy of 'representation' and 'power play' as a strategy where 'meanings' are produced and 'choices' are developed. The idea of this paper will develop with one of Marx's doctrines or propositions and that is 'the accumulation and the concentration of the capital, as a strategy of the capitalist class under which the discourses (Foucauldian notion) are woven through 'representations' where representation on social media or mass media platform performs the show and creates a deep impact on our mind frame, surpassing all the government policies, leading to the personal profit of the powerful. It will also deal with the idea of how the experiences of the subjects are organised according to the ability of belief systems to shape and govern society. An attempt will be made to understand the philosophy of 'representation' and 'power play' particularly in the context of 'surrogate advertising'. Here, surrogate advertising can be understood in the light of how the power play works to carve a niche in between the market and ethics so as to create a space for advertising banned products.

**Keywords:** Capitalist; Discourse; Policy; Power play; Representation; Subject; Surrogate advertising.

Commencing with the Marxian idea of 'universal community' of mankind or of an 'organic society', and his assumption that middle class people are more righteous than those who are wealthy and powerful, we would like to talk of the philosophy of 'representation' and 'power play' as a strategy where 'meanings' are produced and 'choices' are developed. This paper will explore a key doctrine of Marx — 'the accumulation and concentration of capital' — as a strategic tool of the capitalist class. Within this

framework, discourses, in the Foucauldian sense, are constructed through 'representations,' particularly in mass media and social media. These representations shape public perception, exerting a profound influence on our mental frameworks while often surpassing governmental policies and serving the interests of the powerful. This study will specifically examine the philosophy of 'representation' and 'power dynamics,' with a particular focus on 'surrogate advertising'.

Marx was influenced by the Hegelian philosophy and emerged as a scientific theorist and as a revolutionary leader, pronouncing a theory of historical progress and social change. Instead of the capitalist's inclination towards how economic life can be organised in an efficient way to upgrade the individual's economic status, Marxian thought focuses more on the question of how an individual can realize utter freedom in a more conducive way or how basic needs, values and individuality can be taken care of. This way we have been ingrained with an ideology that gives us a new gaze for all time and space to look from the other side of the window.

Though Foucault did not focus on mass media and was not a sociologist "yet his concern for discourses and discursive formation helped to link 'culture' to 'representation', and thus culture (and its hierarchies and relations of power) to the media text which represent the world in the 'information age'" (Hobbs 3-4). Like Marxian notion of ideology, the Foucauldian notion of discourse emerges to complicate the most accepted image of the media as a transparent window reflecting an unobstructed image of truth "... whereas Foucault believed that the traditional Marxist notion of ideology was too reductive – in that it reduced the complicated relationship between knowledge and power to merely a matter of class interest--the concept of discourses on the other hand, resists this reductionism by remaining open to the possibility of other social forces beyond the class of class interests" (Hobbs 9).

Max Weber (1978) also explored power within formal organizations, highlighting how structures of power function as systems of legitimate social control. He distinguished authority from power, emphasizing that authority is legitimized through a shared value system.

Building on the idea that "knowledge is power," Foucault focused not just on truth but on "regimes of truth" – systems of knowledge constructed through discursive formations and reinforced by discursive practices. According to him, these truth regimes are deeply embedded in power relations within all forms of knowledge production. Extending this perspec-

tive, Foucault's analysis of truth regimes, discourse, knowledge formation, and the human subject can be applied to institutional settings such as hospitals, asylums, schools, and prisons.

The paper attempts to apply it equally to other institutions of discursive formation such as media organisations, where social as well as objective truths are imparted. It is to be noted that these media images are not transparent rather they have several prism-like angles in which they are represented, and this representation influences the mass. According to the *Keyword Glossary* of 'Theories of Media' of the University of Chicago, "We can understand representation as a medium in that it stands between 'the real' and the spectator. Because of its ability to be copied or reproduced, the representation becomes more accessible to be communicated on a mass level". *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* deals with the term 'representation' at a political level and poses the question of "But what does it mean to say that one person or one group of people represents a larger group?"

Stuart Hall, in his book *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, discussing the relationship between politics, representation and the system representing both conveys the idea that representation is "...the medium or channel through which meaning production happens. He assumes that objects, people etc. don't have stable, true meanings, but rather that the meanings are produced by human beings, participants in a culture, who have the power to make things mean or signify something" (Hall 90). Like post-structuralists, Hall also focuses on the power of language and the system of knowledge production playing significant role in order to produce and circulate meanings.

Thus media images and media texts are the representation of the popular discursive practices where media (news or advertisements) "...can make only a tentative claim to truth (in the absolute sense), as truth can never be captured and represented in its pure, multi dimensional form by the limited symbolic constraints of discourse and the limited physical constraints of the medium" (Hobbs 11-12). This way, representation of media has the power to produce regimes of truth, and accordingly it moulds our free will and thought to act, as Foucault conveys the idea of the 'death of the subject'. Although Foucault does not directly address the media, his concept of "governmentality" in his later work offers a similar perspective. Governmentality explains how individuals' experiences are structured and sustained through the power of systems of thought that regulate and control society. In this way, Foucault indirectly contributes to the study of

media and culture by highlighting the influence of discourse and the effects of discursive practices in shaping audience perceptions and perspectives. At the same time, he emphasizes the power of language in shaping specific ways of thinking and understanding, demonstrating that even symbolic representations can produce tangible effects.

Foucault explores the deep interconnections between power and knowledge, examining how power functions through intricate, micro-level channels that permeate both social structures and personal existence. Extending this discussion with Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), the paper argues that the individual has now turned as a discursive construct instead of a being of free will. The individual emerges as a product of political technologies that shape and construct his/her identity, desires, body, and soul. This process results in the creation of compliant, obedient, and docile subjects through the reshaping of both minds and bodies. While individuals may perceive themselves as free and autonomous, they are, in reality, positioned within a specific social framework designed by dominant capitalist forces. This trajectory ultimately leads to the dehumanization of postmodern subjects.

Theodore Adorno too has observed that power has been dispersed and indeterminate, and believes that modern rationality is, actually, 'coercive' and works through social institutions. This can be better understood in Foucauldian sense where system of language is in line with social practices and is disseminated throughout saturating the spaces, within and outside, of everyday life.

As we transition from the modern to the postmodern world, there is an increasing obsession with our bodies, where living a "good" life is less about spiritual values and more about physical ones. The focus has shifted to how the body appears to others, with significant implications for consumption and, by extension, production. The market is flooded with body-related products, visible everywhere—on street walls, billboards, movie screens, in daily soaps, newspapers, children's books, and more. Advertisements are ubiquitous, and our shelves and cupboards are filled with lotions, perfumes, hair colors, conditioners, powders, gels, waxes, deodorants, creams, oils, mascaras, lipsticks, kohl, varnishes, and other beauty products. Body fetishism is widespread, driven by the beauty industry, while industries like fashion, diet, fitness, and clothing all contribute to this societal rush.

Focusing on such body centred products, the market culture or the con-

sumer culture is manipulated through advertisements and is under the monopoly of the powerful class. They not only manufacture products rather they interact through advertisements or other medium to manufacture individual's identities, to encourage and inculcate a system of values and preferences on the part of consumers, along with generating and changing their preferences. It is to be noticed that in contemporary, post modern culture, usually, the basic and leisure choices of a consumer go against his more fundamental choices or desires. Thus leisure choices and other useful stuffs alter our rationality or ways of judgement in a senseless way and thus, our preferences as well as choices turn social, instead of personal, under the influence of capitalist oriented cultural regime. Thus, it can be argued that the media culture that has been woven all around us has manipulated our preferences and has induced consumers to 'work and spend' culture, curtailing their leisure time. Even the leisure time has been commodified and private corporations have developed a 'leisure market' encouraging the idea that leisure is the consumption opportunity.

Hence, consumer capitalism believes that this capture of reasoning faculty and demand has a coercive effect instead of free market will and the power of manipulation is so extensive that leads to the emergence of new kind of individuals, where consumer capitalism is used to project the kind of person they want to be. It appears to be a deliberate strategy by corporate leaders to shift consumer focus from 'needs' to 'wants.' While human 'needs' can often be fulfilled, 'wants' are insatiable, meaning consumers will continually purchase products in an attempt to satisfy them. This creates a constant revenue stream for the market, as the cycle of consumption never ends.

The construct of this paper proceeds to understand how the power relationship operates through mass media culture, particularly advertisements and even with special reference to 'surrogate advertisements' where the capitalist class continues to dominate the consumer culture surpassing the government policies which are in line with health issues of the consumer population. According to Wikipedia, "Surrogate advertising is a form of advertising which is used to promote regulated products, like cigarettes and alcohol, in the guise of another product".

However, here the surrogate advertisements can be understood in the light of the above discussions of how the power play works to carve a niche between the market and ethics so as to create a space for advertising banned products by duplicating the brand image and logo of one product, extensively, to promote the other product with the same name

so as to keep their brand hit in the mind of consumers through surrogacy of another product. And in the process, a new product is launched and advertised which is not illegal or objectionable in nature. Thus, surrogate advertisements fits in the gap between the government's policy and the ethics to restore through a new trend emerging itself as a loophole challenging to the government's action.

Historically, it is to be noticed that it is for the first time in 2003 that WHO undertook a study and revealed the increasing number of smoking scenes on-screen in Indian films. Therefore as one of the signatories of *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control* (FCTC) of *World Health Organisation* (WHO), India banned public smoking, tobacco advertising, on-screen smoking and tobacco companies sponsoring any sports event.

However, this ban was much politicized by big names of the film industry. But since then, controversial products like certain pharmaceuticals, alcohols, liquors, beverages, cigarettes etc. dodge the laws of the government and a different picture all together comes from the companies that may not pose to be rule breakers but cleverly mould and interpret the laws according to their convenience. Examples of surrogate advertisements are Imperial Blue cassettes and CDs, Heyward's Soda, Bagpiper club soda and cassettes and CDs, Kingfisher and Royal Challenge mineral water, White Mischief Holidays, Royal Challenge Golf Accessories, Smirnoff cassettes and CDs etc. Apart from these advertisements, such banned products also go for advertising through sponsorship. Some examples in this category are: Red and White bravery awards, Manikchand Awards, Wills lifestyle, etc. A study has highlighted how these advertisements mislead young people and influence impressionable minds by presenting products as trendy, fashionable, and essential for consumption through peer pressure and indulgence. Such persuasive advertisements appeal and encourage youth to adopt harmful habits like smoking and drinking. These advertisements never talk of the taste or the pleasure that the product gives rather the focus is on the royalty that it would bring, and thus mislead the youths of the society. Here are a few examples mentioned on the basis of observation:

Under the category of tobacco, we have 'Rajnigandha' and 'Pan Parag' taking the surrogacy of 'Pan masala' where as 'Manikchand Pan masala' takes the surrogacy of 'Filmfare Awards'. Then, under the category of cigarettes we have 'Gold Flake' taking the surrogacy of 'sponsoring tennis tournament', 'Wills' uses fashion week magazines, sponsoring cricket matches, fashion textiles and showrooms etc. 'Red and White' cigarette

takes the surrogacy of sponsoring 'bravery award ceremony', 'Charms' takes the surrogacy of 'audio cassettes and CDs' and 'Four Square' advertise under the name of 'White water rafting and gliding'. Similarly, 'alcohol beverages' takes the surrogacy of various mineral water or soda water bottles for instance 'McDowell', 'Bag Piper' and 'Kingfisher'. Whereas 'Officer's Choice' surrogates 'social obligation towards society' and 'Royal Challenge' surrogates the 'sponsorship of golf tournament', 'Smirnoff Vodka' surrogates fruit juices and so on.

However, several steps have been taken since 2003, after the reports of WHO, after which India banned smoking in public places, and it also banned tobacco advertising on and off the screen. In an article by Rishika Singh in the Indian Express, dated June 16, 2022, it was reported that the New Delhi government had charged actor Pierce Brosnan for endorsing an advertisement for an Indian pan masala. Brosnan later claimed that he had been misled and believed the product was a mouth freshener, unaware that it was part of a surrogate advertisement. On the same day, the Indian Express reported that the government had issued new guidelines to address surrogate advertisements, which had been banned to combat misinformation and misleading ads. These guidelines, issued by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) on June 10, impose a penalty of Rs. 10 lakhs for a first-time violation, with a penalty of Rs. 50 lakhs for subsequent violations.

The purpose of these guidelines is to protect consumers and ensure they are not misled by false claims or deceptive advertising. As a result, surrogate advertisements have been completely banned. The new rules also prohibit the use of a brand's name, logo, colors, packaging, or any other elements associated with banned products in advertisements.

The guidelines were challenged by the sellers who demand as they wanted clarity regarding surrogate advertisements because it has not been defined, whereas characteristics of non misleading advertisements were clearly mentioned, for instance, those products which contain unobjectionable and honest representation and do not exaggerate benefits. While the advertising industry pretends to welcome consumer protection as a concept, the problematic clauses with lack of clarity lead to differing interpretations across the spectrum. However, it's widely believed that a superficial ban on any form of advertising always leads to seek loopholes under the guise of creativity, which often leads to misleading advertising. The loophole in the CCPA Guidelines allows use of the same brand name for banned and approved products alike causing glaring contradictions

to existing laws, such as the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, which deem liquor brand extensions to be illegal.

Live News of *India Today*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 2022, in an article titled “CCPA Rules Consumer Space” states:

*The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), which promotes, protects, and enforces consumer rights, recently, issued several notices under unfair trade practices and safety alerts to various e-commerce giants. Notwithstanding the recent aggressive consumer protection initiatives, opportunities for misuse by brands and endorsers still abound.*

Further:

Clause 6 verbatim states, “Provided that mere use of a brand name or company name which may also be applied to goods, product or service whose advertising is prohibited or restricted shall not be considered to be surrogate advertisement or indirect advertisement, if such advertisement is not otherwise objectionable as per the provisions set out in these Guidelines”.

Thus, Clause 6 of the CCPA prohibits surrogate advertising, both direct and indirect, but does not address the concept of brand extension. In contrast, the ASCI provides a clear definition of brand extension, stating in the same article that “*product/service should be registered with the concerned authority, in addition to meeting the requirements with regard to a turnover of INR 20 lacs or presence in the market for two years*” (“CCPA Rules Consumer Space”, *India Today*).

Thus the paper discusses the philosophy of ‘representation’ that is flourishing openly and widely with the power play of the class constructs, and affects the consumer population in a very subtle manner seeping from the capitalist class through the social constructs to capture and influence the mind and body of the subjects that give up their will or judgement to behave in the manner in which they are functioned to behave. Here, the paper remains open-ended for the readers to brood over the question, ‘where should the consumer population be located in the ‘power play’?’



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