

The Impact of Navarasas on Modern Indian Advertising: A Comparative Study

¹Prof. Sanjay Singh Baghel, ²Prof. Rama

¹Atma Ram Sanatan Dharam College

South Campus, University of Delhi, Delhi-110021

E-mail: ssbaghel@arsd.du.ac.in

(Corresponding Author)

²Principal

Hansraj College, University of Delhi

Delhi-110007

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ABSTRACT

Today, Indian advertising is increasingly dominated by rational products, emotional stories, cultural symbols, and identity-based appeals. To understand this emotional appeal, we must understand the nine rasas of the Natyashastra, propounded by Bharat Muni, which provide a conceptual framework for Indian advertising. The Indian Natyashastra describes nine aesthetic traditions. These include Shringar (love/beauty), Hasya (humor), Karuna (compassion/pity), Raudra (anger), Veer (heroism), Bhayanak (fear), Bibhatsa (disgust), Adbhut (surprise), and Shanta (peace/tranquillity). Modern Indian advertising often uses many such emotional appeals, which are often denounced by those in the advertising world. This research paper presents a comparative study by examining selected appeals from television, print, and digital/social media advertisements, highlighting the relevance and relevance of appeals already found in Indian scriptures in Indian advertising. The study explores how Indian Navrasa attempts to give modern advertising a cultural context, emotional connection, attention, brand association, and a connection with consumers, thereby establishing the authenticity of an emotional appeal alongside logic. In other words, a Navrasa is an analytical, indigenous perspective, where the bridges of stories, cultural identity, and emotional connections remain ever-present.

Keywords: Indian Advertising, Navarasa, Rasa Theory, Advertising Appeals, Emotional Advertising, Consumer Behaviour, Digital Advertising, Indian Aesthetics

Introduction:

Advertising is not merely a means of informing consumers about a product or service. Rather, it is a persuasive communication through which a brand builds an emotional connection, identity, and relationship with its customers. This shift is clearly visible in Indian advertising today. Family ties, humour, patriotism, past ties, longing, social responsibility, fear, celebration, and cultural symbols are increasingly being used in advertising to reach consumers emotionally.

This emotional aspect of Indian communication can be viewed through the lens of the indigenous concept of rasa. Traditionally associated with Indian aesthetics, and especially dramaturgy, rasa refers to an artistic representation that allows a viewer or consumer to experience aesthetic empathy and experience an emotional flavour or rasa. This same concept later became recognized in Indian literature as a performing art.

The concept of navarasa, or nine main rasas, provides a useful perspective for analysing advertising. Advertisements attempt to evoke love through romantic or family stories, humour through comical situations, compassion through social campaigns, heroism through achievement stories, wonder through technological visuals, and peace through health and lifestyle themes.

While it would be easy to say that every emotional advertisement is directly derived from the Rasa theory, it would be incorrect. Modern advertising, however, is shaped by a blend of marketing strategy, consumer psychology, popular culture, technology, and global advertising practices. Therefore, this study presents Navarasa primarily as an analytical and cultural component, rather than drawing direct historical connections between classical aesthetics and contemporary advertising.

Background of the Study:

Since the growth of television, satellite transmission, liberalization, the internet, and social media, Indian advertising has experienced significant change. The relationship between brands and viewers has further changed as a result of the expansion of digital platforms. Customers may now engage with, discuss, comment on, and replicate brand communication; they are no longer just recipients of advertising messaging.

The significance of emotional storytelling has grown as a result of this change. While both a 30-second TV advertisements and a brief social media video aim to convey a product's benefits, they increasingly try to evoke strong emotions in the viewer.

Rasa theory is very intriguing for advertising studies because of this emotional component.

For example:

Rasa	Emotional orientation	Possible advertising expression
Śṛīṅgāra	Love, attraction, beauty	Relationships, beauty, romance
Hāsyā	Humour, amusement	Comedy and memorable situations
Karuṇā	Compassion, empathy	Social causes and emotional narratives
Raudra	Anger, intensity	Social injustice, protest-oriented campaigns
Vīra	Courage, heroism	Achievement, patriotism, resilience
Bhayānaka	Fear, anxiety	Safety, insurance, health and risk appeals
Bībhatsa	Aversion/disgust	Hygiene, pollution and anti-social behaviour campaigns
Adbhuta	Wonder, amazement	Technology, innovation and extraordinary experiences
Śānta	Peace, tranquillity	Wellness, nature, spirituality and mindfulness

This mapping reveals that modern advertising frequently blends many emotional states rather than using a single Rasa, while also demonstrating the potential analytical value of Navarasa.

Literature Review:

The theoretical foundation of rasa is traditionally associated with Bharat Muni Natyashastra. Later scholars of Indian aesthetics, including Abhinavagupta, presented new interpretations of rasa theory and contributed significantly to its development.

The core of the research is how artistic performance combines a simple emotional appeal with an aesthetic experience, and how a consumer begins to see their own image in it.

When using any form of rasa in advertising, it is essential to ensure that rasa is present throughout. Sometimes, it can also be used commercially. However, the primary objective is to effectively reach the consumer by creating an emotional construct through rasa.

Research Gap:

While consumer psychology, emotional advertising, and Indian advertising appeals have all been extensively studied, Navarasa as an indigenous analytical framework for modern advertising has received relatively little attention.

Thus, there are three levels at which the research gap can be identified:

1. Navarasa's systematic mapping onto modern advertising appeals is limited.
2. There is little contrast between traditional advertising appeals and Rasa-based emotional appeals.
3. Limited empirical analysis of the ways in which various Rasas affect audience participation and brand-related reactions.

Through a comparative conceptual and empirical framework, the current study fills in these gaps.

Objectives of the Study:

The following are the goals of the study:

1. To investigate how Navarasa is portrayed in modern Indian advertising.
2. To determine which Rasas are more frequently used in particular Indian ads.
3. To contrast Rasa-based emotional appeals in digital and conventional advertising.
4. To investigate the connection between customer engagement and emotional attractiveness.

Methodology:

The study adopts a mixed-method comparative research design with combining qualitative content analysis and audience perception. Comparative Analysis of Navarasa in Advertising

1. Śṛṅgāra Rasa: Love and Attraction

If we analyse the market, it's well known that the largest consumer segment of the global market is the youth, aged between 18 and 50. This is a segment that is self-reliant and has a financial income. Once they have money, they begin to imagine a world filled with mystery and romance. Therefore, most advertisements are targeted at these young people, who seek to satisfy new desires with the power of money and are full of elements of love, romance, and attraction.

This is why the fantasy incorporated in this advertisement creates a romantic thrill in the mind of the average Indian consumer, which makes them feel immersed in it when they become customers of this product. For example: Fragrances & Deodorants related products Brands like Engage, and Fogg use romantic tension, lingering glances, and sensory attraction etc.

2 Hasya Rasa: (Humour, Laughter): -

In the history of Hindi literature, the poetic expression of humour is so vividly depicted in Surdas's poems that it is rarely seen anywhere else. Reading each line of Surdas's description of Krishna's childhood pranks brings a smile to one's lips. His depiction of Krishna's childlike playfulness and mischief with the Gopis in Gokul is the soul of Surdas's poetry. Sulking, coaxing, boasting, lying, and teasing, all these childlike activities were part of Krishna's childhood pranks. Seeing this, the Gopis and the people of Gokul not only smiled softly but also became increasingly attracted to Krishna. It is rightly said about humour that where there is laughter and smiles, there can be no sorrow. People all over the world yearn for these same smiles. Sorrows and troubles are present at every step of life, but laughter is not easily attained. There's a psychological concept that humour can alleviate even the greatest sorrows and stresses in life. One never knows when or how the darkness of life vanishes with laughter and smiles. It's not without reason that comedy clubs are being established everywhere. Hundreds of humour-based laughter challenge programs are being broadcast on television. Numerous meditation and spiritual gurus are giving sermons on the usefulness of humour. Print and electronic media are filled with humorous jokes, satirical poems, and other programs.

Therefore, understanding the importance of humour, market analysts and advertisers also use humour in their advertisements. Their goal is to evoke a sense of humour in the minds of their viewers through their advertisements,

but their main objective is to use this laughter and happiness to subtly attract their consumers to their product, for which they create all the hype. Their primary objective is to sell their product by any means necessary, and humour is used extensively.

Advertising guru Alyque Padamsee says that the Indian consumer connects with any product more through emotion than through reason. Therefore, Indian advertising agencies strive to incorporate this emotional element in their advertisements in some way or another, with humour being the most prominent. Humour is a key component of the advertising world and is used for almost all types of products. Be it food items, cosmetics or household items, this humour is seen in advertisements everywhere. Like: Mentos, Happy dent, Close Up, Centre Fresh etc.

3. Karuṇā Rasa: (Compassion, care, concern):-

There's a feeling that arises in the heart when witnessing another's suffering. Compassion is the self-expression of deeply feeling the suffering of others. It bridges the gap between loved ones and strangers, creating a platform for empathy where both can sit together and share joys and sorrows. Furthermore, there's a feeling of compassion that arises from a sense of safety and responsibility for loved ones, helping to keep relationships healthy and alive for the long term. Compassion is a feeling that expresses kindness and affection, a feeling that can only be felt without words. It manifests spontaneously after the loss of a loved one or someone you love deeply, or when you see them in pain.

Compassion is the emotional communication that expresses the depth of love, affection, and passion for someone. For example, the love between a mother and son, the love of friendship, and the love between relatives. If something happens to one of them, the tears that spontaneously well up in your eyes are called compassion. Because this compassion is deeply connected to human emotions, advertisers exploit it effectively to sell their products in the market and capitalize on it. Therefore, they create advertisements that instantly touch the hearts of consumers. To this end, they also create various catchphrases and slogans. For example, advertisements for Bourn Vita, Horlicks, Huggies, and Maggi are all similar.

4. Raudra Rasa: (Anger):

The permanent emotion of Raudra Rasa is anger, meaning it contains all the elements of anger. For example, when someone commits a wrong or immoral act and an honest and moral person witnesses it, the anger that arises in their mind is called Raudra Rasa. Of all the Rasas, it is the most violent and potent Rasa because it embodies the desire for revenge, retribution, and justice. It has also been extensively discussed in Indian Puranas and scriptures. In the Mahabharata, it is said through Krishna:

“Yada yada hi dharmasya, glanir bhavati bharatah,
abbhudhaanam adharmashy, sam bhavani yuge yuge”

(This means that whenever there is unrighteousness on earth, injustice and immorality increase, and dishonesty increases, Krishna will incarnate on earth to end this injustice and establish truth). Similarly, there is a similar belief regarding Lord Shiva: once humanity, due to its demonic nature, began to spread unrest in all three worlds, evil tendencies began to increase, and life became difficult, Lord Shiva became enraged and assumed his fierce form and began performing the Tandava dance (a violent dance). This caused the world to tremble, causing an earthquake in all three worlds. People began to cry out in distress. As a result, the gods of all three worlds stood before Lord Shiva with folded hands and pleaded, "Lord, please send your anger. This mistake will not happen again. Please forgive us."

It is noteworthy that Lord Shiva is considered the god who removes evil and strife. Whenever any kind of wrongdoing in the world becomes excessive, Lord Shiva assumes this fierce form. Because Lord Shiva is considered the Destroyer of the world. It can be said that anger is an emotion found in all human beings. It's used in so many products and services that, despite its seemingly contradictory nature, it leaves a happy and pleasant feeling in your mind. It can easily turn anger into laughter. A prime example is Center Fresh Chewing Gum – it controls the tongue, not the hand, making anyone who eats it as friend.

5. Vīra Rasa: (Heroism, Valour, Courage):

The underlying emotion of Veer Rasa is enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is considered a symbol of heroism. It is said that heroes win half the battle on the battlefield simply through their enthusiasm. Defeat is certain for those lacking enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is considered a symbol of bravery and self-confidence. Masculinity and valour are the trademarks of a brave man or fearless hero. A fearless man, with his courage and fearlessness, is capable of undertaking any task, no matter how difficult. When going to fight on the battlefield, a hero accepts the challenge of death, which demonstrates his courage. In the Ramayana, the way Ram, seemingly an ordinary man, slays the ten-headed Ravana and conquers Lanka is the ultimate example of Veer Rasa. Therefore, in Indian mythology, Ram has been honoured with the titles of God, Maryada Purushottam, and Hero. Valor is not a miraculous term, nor is it measured by a

person's physical strength. Rather, bravery is a symbol of a person's single-mindedness, unaffected by any circumstances. Spiritual integrity and enthusiasm are considered the epitome of a person's bravery. Arjuna and Abhimanyu of the Mahabharata are historical examples of individuals who established their identities through their bravery.

For example, a person who faces adversity without fear and boldly is considered brave and courageous. This rasa has been important since ancient times. The Vedas and Puranas are replete with accounts of the bravery of kings. Over time, this bravery has also been depicted in poetry, where Charans and Bhats have extensively extolled the bravery of kings in their poems. The early period of Hindi literature is a literary period filled with this kind of bravery. Therefore, the entire Raso literature has been recognized as heroic literature. Prithviraj Raso, Bisaldev Raso, and Parmal Raso, among other ancient books, are examples of Raso poetry, which extol the bravery of kings.

This emotional attachment to heroism is well understood by marketers, and therefore, marketers have exploited it extensively for products through advertising. Advertisers create specific features in products that instil a sense of heroism. For example, a person using a particular product automatically becomes a hero. These products become an inspiration for others. Such advertisements are common for bikes, cold drinks, sports products, underwear, beer, and cigarettes. For example, Mountain Dew cold drink, Lux Cozy vests and underwear, Pulsar bikes, Hayward 5000 beer, etc.

6. Bhayānaka Rasa: (Fear):

The underlying emotion of bhayanak rasa is fear. Bhayanak rasa results when a person experiences a sense of dread about an unexpected event, a supernatural force, or the fear of death. This fear, which arises in human beings for their own safety and that of their loved ones, has existed forever. This is nothing new. Fear often arises from excessive emotionality and thoughts of helplessness. Cowardice, anxiety, panic, irritability, and trembling are some of the symptoms that express fear.

Fear not only renders us mentally helpless but also gives rise to many negative thoughts. Fear impacts a person's behavioural processes, driving even a good person mentally disturbed and insane. Due to the negative impact on the mind caused by fear, a person becomes so weak that they begin to fear crowds and seek solitude.

The effects of this fear are sometimes so dangerous that even ordinary people become afraid of ordinary darkness. An unknown force takes up residence in their soul, altering their entire life-style. A constant feeling of insecurity lingers in their mind. In a way, fear causes personality disorders, leading them to engage in various unusual behaviours that a normal person would not normally engage in.

Advertisers do not hesitate to capitalize on this unusual tendency of human beings. This fear has long been used as a successful appeal in advertising. Through advertising, advertisers have been creating a fear in consumers about products and services, instilling in them the fear that they may face trouble if they do not purchase them. Advertisers use emotional appeals to convey that not following these guidelines could lead to serious problems for you and your family. These advertisements often focus on life insurance, accident protection, safety locks, hair oil, shampoo, facial beauty products, and other related products. Consumers often fear that not using these products could damage their facial features. For example:

- Beauty will be lost.
- People will stop liking Mustaches.
- People will make fun of me.

These advertisements are intended to instil a social fear in consumers that not using these products will lead to social disapproval. While many advertisements created for social welfare also emphasize that driving under the influence of alcohol can lead to accidents. Usually, such advertisements are issued by the Central and State Governments in public interest.

7. Bībhatsa Rasa: (Disgust):

The underlying emotion of the vibhatsa rasa is disgust. When a human mind is filled with apprehensions about the possibility of something unexpected happening, and the realization that if something is not prevented, the consequences could be disastrous, it is in such circumstances that the vibhatsa rasa is born. In a way, vibhatsa is a premonition of a terrible and disgusting tragedy. When Prince Siddhartha witnessed a man first falling ill, then growing

old, and finally dying before his eyes, he was filled not only with intense pity and compassion but also with a disgust for life itself. A feeling of disgust filled his heart.

Disgust is a word that constantly reminds a person that if we commit a wrong act, the consequences will be disastrous and horrific. Considering some of the characteristics of the vibhatsa rasa, it might seem that it is a sibling of the bhayanak rasa, but that is not the case. While the horrific rasa (fearful emotion) constantly makes us feel fearful of harm, the vibhatsa rasa (vicious emotion) constantly warns us to be cautious and not to commit any wrongdoing. It states that if we do not heed the warning, we may become victims of hatred and people will begin to despise us. While the fear of material and financial loss is more prevalent in the horrific rasa, the vibhatsa rasa (vicious emotion) is more likely to cause physical and mental harm. The primary function of the vibhatsa rasa is to repeatedly warn us of unexpected danger and keep us alert. This warning pattern is similar to the signboards and messages you see on expressways, reminding us to pay attention to the speed limit and not exceed 80 kilometres per hour. This rasa is often used in advertisements that convey social messages. For example: don't drink and drive; smoking cigarettes is harmful to health. But now this phrase is also being used extensively to sell products and to advise caution. For example, in advertisements for All Out and Harpic, among others.

8. Adbhuta Rasa: (Curiosity, Awe, Wonder): -

The Amazing - Curiosity, Fear, and Wonder Among the many other human traits, one is that while on the one hand, one always desires to experience new things and wonder, on the other hand, one also fears new things. Embracing new experiences and living happily is the essence of life. Therefore, humans are inherently considered risk-taking and experience-seeking creatures. The psychological force or appeal that motivates them to do so is curiosity. The desire to see and hear something completely new. When a person, after seeing tour and travel advertisements, wants to visit Goa, Thailand, or Egypt, their curiosity is the driving force behind it.

What is described in poetics as the amazing, the essence of wonder, takes the form of curiosity and fear in the advertising world. The desire to see and experience the amazing, the extraordinary, the unique, the unimaginable, and the unimaginable creates a desire and longing in a person. In advertising parlance, we call it a need. When this need becomes impossible for a consumer, they become a customer for that product. For example, the desire to see the Egyptian pyramids or the desire to visit Switzerland creates an appeal in the mind, and this appeal is the driving force behind advertising.

While life on the one hand creates joy and excitement, providing comfort and convenience, it also creates a fear that constantly warns us to stay safe. Two other types of products can be included in this category: tours and travels, skating, safety equipment, car insurance, etc.

9. Śānta Rasa: (Peace, Pleasure, Recreation):

The permanent emotion of Shanta Rasa is Nirved. It is believed that a person can enjoy life only when they control all desires in a formless and unchangeable manner. In other words, Shanta Rasa emerges during the stage of creation. It is believed that when all the Rasas are incorporated into it, then Shanta Rasa is born. According to Bharatmuni, the author of Natyashastra, Brahma was the proponent of the eight other Rasas. While the ninth Rasa is considered to be Shanta Rasa, which is the supporting Rasa of all these Rasas. The energy generated by Shanta Rasa contains the qualities of peace and tolerance. It does not require any activity. It is a self-active process that holds the essence of living experience, which can be felt anytime, anywhere. It contains the qualities of patience along with non-violence and truth. Patience is also the basis of discretion and freedom.

Critical Discussion:

The application of Navarasa to advertising has considerable analytical potential, but it also requires theoretical caution.

First, Rasa should not be reduced to a simple list of nine emotions. Classical Indian aesthetics presents a sophisticated account of aesthetic experience involving relationships among determinants, consequent expressions and transitory emotional states.

Second, advertising is fundamentally persuasive and commercial. The aesthetic experience generated by a commercial is therefore different from the aesthetic experience of classical artistic performance.

Third, contemporary advertisements often combine several Rasas. A single advertisement may begin with Karuṇā, develop into Vīra and conclude with Śānta. Therefore, categorising advertisements into one Rasa alone may oversimplify their emotional structure.

Fourth, audience responses are culturally and individually variable. The same advertisement may evoke different emotional experiences among different consumers.

Finally, globalisation has resulted in hybrid advertising practices. Indian advertisements often combine indigenous cultural symbolism with global marketing conventions. Navarasa should therefore be regarded as a complementary analytical framework rather than an exclusive explanation of Indian advertising.

Findings:

Based on the theoretical framework, the study expects to find that:

1. Hāsyā, Śṛṅgāra, Vīra and Karuṇā are likely to be among the most frequently identifiable Rasas in mainstream Indian advertising.
2. Digital advertising is likely to demonstrate greater use of Hāsyā and Adbhuta because of the importance of entertainment and visual novelty.
3. Karuṇā and Vīra may be particularly visible in social-purpose and cause-related advertising.
4. Rasa-rich advertisements are likely to demonstrate stronger emotional engagement than purely informational advertisements.
5. The relationship between Rasa and purchase intention is likely to be mediated by brand attitude, emotional involvement and brand recall.
6. Indian audiences may respond particularly strongly to advertisements that combine emotional appeal with culturally familiar narratives.

Conclusion:

The Navarasa framework offers a valuable indigenous perspective for understanding the emotional architecture of modern Indian advertising. Contemporary advertisements do not necessarily reproduce classical Indian aesthetics in a direct or intentional manner; nevertheless, their use of love, humour, compassion, courage, fear, wonder, tranquillity and other emotional experiences can be meaningfully analysed through the conceptual vocabulary of Rasa.

The comparative perspective suggests that the fundamental emotional dimensions of advertising remain relevant across traditional and digital media, while the modes of expression, audience participation and measurement have changed significantly. Digital platforms have intensified the importance of immediacy, entertainment, visual spectacle and shareability.

The significance of Navarasa therefore lies not in replacing established advertising theories but in complementing them with an Indian cultural and aesthetic perspective. Such an approach can contribute to the development of more context-sensitive theories of Indian advertising, particularly at a time when brands increasingly seek to combine commerce, culture, emotion and identity.

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