

## WOMEN IN ONLINE ADVERTISEMENTS: A STUDY OF YOUTUBE

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### Abstract

Mass media are essential not only in promotion and propagation of innovative ideas but also in transformation of the society. It has been observed that with rapid growth of online users in the world, Internet has become one of the fastest growing mediums. India is world's third largest Internet user having 31 per cent increase over March 2012, (Hindu, 2013). The evolution of YouTube from a non-advertising supported to an advertising supported online media shows the impact of advertising on media content sites in today's world. This increasing dependency on online advertising can also alter the nature of online media from a non-commercial interest to social networks based on commercial interest (Ha, 2008). As a result the study focuses on YouTube's top ten most viewed advertisements of 2013 while trying to establish its relation to and portrayal of women as well as also raising questions about the nature of these advertising regarding social causes and welfare.

### Introduction

We live in the world of multimedia and we are surrounded by a number of mediated products. In the present era, Internet is becoming a major global e-entertainer and e-news provider. It has been observed that with rapid growth of online users in the world, Internet has become one of the fastest growing mediums. India is world's third largest Internet user after China and the United States having nearly 74 million Internet users, a 31 per cent increase over March 2012, as per global digital measurement and analytics firm comScore. Also The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) pegged the number of Internet subscribers in India at 164.81 million as of March 31, 2013 (Hindu, 2013). As reported by the Economic Times, emerging markets like India has probably driven growth for the \$ 464-billion global advertising market in 2012 (ET, 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2011).

YouTube is a video sharing website and the site has many channels within it. It is a virtual place where people upload and broadcast their videos. Not only that but People in general can also freely adjust and manage their uploaded videos. Going back in history, YouTube was born on February 14, 2005 but it was officially launched on December 2005. Due to its potential and speedy growth from 8 million videos watched per day to 15 million videos watched all over the world by 2006, YouTube joined hands with Google. Since then there has been no looking back. General people from all over the world easily uploaded videos and view them in YouTube based on various topics such as; politically and socially inspired protest, festivals and celebrations, various human emotions, animals and pets etc. YouTube has provided a platform to every individual who uses Internet around the world to be heard i.e. giving voice to the voiceless through the medium of video broadcast. By July 2009 YouTube started to provide HD videos and by 2011, YouTube gained 800 million viewers every month from around the world. It has come to notice that during special occasions such as the royal wedding of Prince William in April 2011, YouTube broke all its past record by making 72 million streams in 182 countries. By 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012, 30 billion videos were viewed in one day, thus making it a global achiever. (youtube.com)

The evolution of YouTube from a non-advertising supported to an advertising supported online media shows the impact of advertising on media content sites in today's world. This increasing dependency on online advertising can also alter the nature of online media from a non-commercial interest to social networks based on commercial interest. (Ha, 2008)

Online advertising is deliberate messages placed on third party websites including search engines and directories available through Internet sources (Ha, 2008). It is a form of selling and it urges people to buy goods or services or to accept a viewpoint (Sultana, 1999). According to Rani (2007), Advertisers can better be known as 'idea merchants'

than sellers or propagandist, because advertisers strive for acceptance of an idea by the people. The change in our Indian economy has now opened new doors for advertising. Advertising whether it is online or via any media has helped in marketing of the product and creating competition, which directly helps in quality improvement leading to expanding markets and sales.

According to Santosh Desai, managing director and CEO of Future Brands while speaking in an interview said, advertising is the marketer's view of what they want us to use or see. For instance, earlier, any advertisements would have a housewife but now, more women are shown out of home and therefore their physical appearance is becoming more important. It obsesses with Youth. Four years ago, it was more about achievement, now it is more about appearance. That says something about the society. As a result, advertising is a fantastic place to look at as a reflection of society.

According to Rani (2007) although the advertising content in recent years has changed slightly in portraying progressive ideas, even then the commodification of women has not changed. Almost all men's products, ranging from underwear to shaving-creams are advertised by beautiful female models. Some advertisements have still continued to show the stereotypical portrayal of women. While others are revolutionary as they try to portray the new working, independent, aggressive, intelligent and assertive women (e.g. Tata Tea 'Taaza Hole').

The study done by Joshi (2013) reveals that not many women use Internet, which is due to the fact that many do not have access to it at home. Those lucky to have it, use it mainly for educational purposes spending at the maximum half-an-hour only. They receive fewer e-mails and other variety of information thereby, leading to under exploitation or exposure of the limitless potential of the Internet in this era. Importantly it is found that most of the women respondents have learned the new media on their own, thus getting less scope and encouragement for formal computer literacy.

It has been found in many studies conducted in the past that women have been widely used to advertise commercial products, rather than non-commercial ones. Sadly, the study mostly concluded that very less percentage of advertisements (1.3%) portrayed women development of which majority 90% advertisements portraying women development were of commercial category.

The success of advertisements like 'thanda matlab Coca-Cola', 'do boondh zindagi ki' indicates that program contents and their presentation are also equally important. Thus, advertising is a very effective tool of communication to sensitise the people especially in a developing country like India. Therefore, advertisers have to realize this responsibility and help in women development particularly regarding their rights, privileges and other facilities. It has been observed that a number of advertisements uploaded on YouTube are related to women and among these advertisements some have the sole aim of social welfare and public concern including women development and welfare.

**Sexual Content based Advertisement:** It was in 1992 that Alyque Padamsee created controversy with his Kamasutra condom advertisement campaign. Lintas launched the USP- safe and good sex. Also the Tuff shoes campaign in 1995 had Milind Soman and Madhu Sapre pose nude. All these advertisements created a lot of controversies. But today advertisements have become very creative, credible and informative e.g. Deluxe Nirodh 'Muqaddar ka Sikandar', Amul Macho 'Yeah toh bada toing hai'. (Rani: 2007)

**Social Responsibility Advertisements:** The foremost aim of an advertisement should be, to sell products with a sense of responsibility towards society. Some e.g. are: Frooti had a campaign to give away less fortunate a chance to experience mango moments through the initiative called 'Aam Batne se Badhta hai'. It was with collaboration with radio one where in a caller called and shared his/her most memorable mango moments. For every experience that was shared, Frooti foundation donated a cartoon of Frooti to an orphanage. Another example is Jaago Grahak Jaago campaign of Tata Tea, which was very successful in creating social awareness. (Yadav, 2009). Idea cellular

advertisement to save paper and stop cutting trees, Aircel advertisements about saving tigers etc. are some advertisement with social cause as well as brand awareness.

### **Objective of the Study:**

1. To study the relationship between advertisements and women.
2. To find out the relationship between online advertisements and women.
3. To examine the degree of commodification of women in online advertisements with reference to YouTube.

### **Methodology:**

The study is based on discourse analysis of advertisements in terms of descriptive explanation and through quantified patterns of commodification of women based on top ten advertisements appeared in YouTube. YouTube is also the largest online video library growing at a superfast pace and accessible to all Internet users all over the world. It shows the popular demand of the Internet users regarding online advertising.

The evaluation is based on certain questions framed by Jerry Kirkpatrick in his book, *In Defense of Advertising*, Arguments from Reason, Ethical Egoism and Laissez-Faire Capitalism. The questions are: 1. What does the advertiser wants the audience to know, feel or do? 2. Who is the target audience? 3. What is the selling message? 4. And most importantly what is the execution? Execution is the concrete sense means by which the selling message is presented to the audience. Therefore, it includes the overall presentation, visual elements of the advertisement, the photography, and the choice of models or actors, jingles and any other sounds, the movement of people and objects that take place on screen.

There are various kinds of appeals that the advertisers use. It touches the emotions, speaks to the viewer's minds and excites their behavior. Emotional, Fear, humor, Social welfare, Personal appeal, Psychological, Cool, Fantasy. Besides these there are rational and sex and appeals used in advertisements. Also two approaches are used in advertising and they are hard sell and soft sell. All of these are described below:

1. Emotional appeal connects human emotions and feelings. Almost all the advertisements use emotional appeal to maximize impact on consumers. It utilizes various human emotions like friendship, care, family bonds, love, passion, anger, security, happiness and fun.
2. A fear appeal is also connected to emotional appeal and gives a negative vibe to the consumers making them believe that if they do not use the product they might be missing on something. Fear appeal is used with beauty and health related products e.g. insurance.
3. Humor appeal too is an emotional appeal as it makes people laugh as well as recall immediately. Humor appeal connects as well as persuades consumers to buy the product or at least try it once.
4. Social welfare appeal is an excellent emotional appeal as it highlights as well as scratches the consumers by trying to make them feel responsible to certain causes. It shows caring for themselves and others comprising of the society as a whole. Also its recall value is fast as it directly connects to one's senses just like humor appeal.
5. Also Personal emotions are used extensively to highlight the product and bring to notice of the consumers.
6. Psychological: to communicate hidden or non-provable benefits of having/using the product. For example, you'll be more popular, more confident, taller, stronger and sharper etc. (Dixit, 2008)
7. Cool: fashion or attitude followed by youth.
8. Fantasy: an un-realistic world or feeling.

9. Safety: a feeling of security or being free from mental or physical danger.
10. Rational: it focuses on consumer's practical, functional or utilitarian need for the product or service. It motivates consumers by means of logical information and arguments (Woochang & Franke, 1999). Rational appeals deal with practical, realistic, logical, utilitarian or functional output of the product. Sex: nudity and sensuality to sell the product or achieve commercial success.
11. Sex appeal uses sexual, erotic, suggestive and seductive expressions of both, male and female (mostly female) to sell a product or service.
12. **Hard sell and Soft Sell approach:** There are two types of selling approaches and they are hard sell and soft sell approach. Unlike hard sell, soft sell approach utilizes an indirect way to convince target audiences rather than directly telling them to buy the product. E.g. use of pets and toys in the advertisement.

### Women in Online Advertisements:

The Internet is a spectacular mass medium attracting unlimited attention producing words, pictures, video but also animated sequences. The study is based on the top 10 most-viewed YouTube India advertisements during 2013, released by Campaign India Team in December, 2013. They are described as follows considering the parameters of discourse analysis:

1. **Dove Real Beauty Sketches:** A male FBI trained forensic artist named Zil Zamora makes individual portraits of 6 women as described by themselves. These women and the artist do not visually see each other and once the sketch is over the artist tells them to leave. But all the 6 women were advised before making the sketch to become friendly with another woman and man one of them named Cloe. Then the artist calls Cloe and others one-by-one and asks them general questions regarding the women's face they met earlier and makes a new portrait as described by her. Then the artist calls each woman individually and both the two portraits of her are shown; one described by her and other described by another woman/man. The women are individually shocked as they find that they imagined themselves as imperfect and ugly while the other woman/man found her to be beautiful. Lastly a young couple is shown hugging each other. Thus a simple technique shown in the advertisement opens eyes of many women and highlights that beauty lies within oneself and what one thinks of oneself. So women should not look down upon themselves. Dove ends by words: you are more beautiful than you think you are. The advertisement is targeted to young women and presents gender role of women who thinks too much about her external beauty. The portrayal of lifestyle and costumes are modern and also the treatment is westernized. The language of the advertisement is English and the ambience is urban as well in studio. It has emotional and psychological appeal. The overall composition of frame includes mostly extreme close up, close-up, medium close up, mid shots, long shots, extreme long shot, zoom in, cut in shots and two shots as well as slight camera movements. The overall music of used in the advertisement is light and soothing to ears. YouTube published this advertisement on 14th April 2013 and its total time is 3 minutes and 1 second.
2. **Lifebuoy Help a Child reach 5:** the advertisement starts with a child seeing hand prints on the ground. He follows it to find his father walking with the help of his hands and his legs facing sky. He calls for his father and they walk together, in the process people in the village start noticing it and they call each other to join him. He passes through the village, and then through the paddy field where women throw flowers in his way. The man makes sure that he does not even hurt an ant in his way. People beat the traditional drums and continue the journey. Seeing this crowd a girl from a bus gets down and joins the crowd. At one point he reaches the temple and prays. The girl is surprised and enquires why such dedication, to which an elderly man replies that this is the first boy of the man (Gundappa) who had survived and reached five years of age. The screen scrolls and the words start to appear that every year many children in India below five years of age die due to diarrhea and pneumonia which can be prevented by the simple healthy hand washing habits. The brand promises to take this mission to a village named Thesgora, which is one of the highest rate of diarrhea and to

help them celebrate every fifth birthday of a child. The background music of the advertisement is very soothing to ears with beautiful south Indian traditional music as well as chorus. The target audiences of the advertisement are general people but most importantly children and their parents. It represents a social role status of having a male child (one son) based in traditional lifestyle and in rural setting. The advertisement highlights paternal symbolism and its language is Hindi and English. The appeals used are emotional, fear, social welfare, personal, safety and rational appeal. The advertisement portrays social development message. The girl here is shown as alien not accustomed to the village traditions, rituals and customs although she seems to be educated as progressive lady. This advertisement has soft sell approach and all types of photography shots, angles as well as camera movements have been used. YouTube published this advertisement on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and its total time is 3 minutes and 16 seconds.

3. **Kit Kat dancing babies:** A pediatric MBBS student gets the chance and eats the product. He realizes and is surprised to find small cuddly babies barely able to stand on feet dancing as he eats the product. As soon as the product finishes everything looks back to normal. He then leaves the room and runs back to join his friends. It is a kind of general advertisement, which shows normally attitudes of people when in strange situations. This advertisement has used hyperbole and its target audience is not clear, although the researcher can guess that it is targeted to all in general. It represents gender social role as male being the main doctors. Values presented are modern, treatment is youth oriented, language is Hindi and English. The appeal used is humor, psychological, cool and fantasy and the approach is hard sell. The photography uses various shots sizes and the music is dominant as it adds to the humor. YouTube published this advertisement on 17th January 2013 and its total time is 46 seconds.
4. **Old Spice India, Mantastic Man:** Model and Actor Miland Soman speaks about how to become man in a very seductive way in a beautiful mansion. At last he ends with a seductive women and the product with him. Lastly he reminds that he is a busy and very important man. This advertisements uses metaphor, hyperbole and targets men in general. Uses celebrity Miland Soman extensively as an eye candy supported by a female model. It portrays gender role by highlighting man as superior than female as the female model obeys to his commands and sits on his lap also promoting sex appeal and commodification to sell products by using both male and female bodies. The language of the advertisement is both Hindi and English. Besides sex appeal, the advertisement also has psychological, cool and fantasy appeal and uses hard sell approach. The background music is mild and melodious. The overall photography uses close up, medium close up, medium shot, long shot, extreme long shot, two shot and zoom-in. YouTube published this advertisement on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and its total time is 1 minutes and 16 seconds.
5. **Baby & Me, Evian Drinking Water:** People belonging to various races, gender and age groups are shown in a big city with big mirrors. Here everyone starts to see himself/herself in the mirror as babies imitating themselves thriving with the slogan 'live young'. It is a kind of general advertisement, which shows normally attitudes of people when in strange situations but with an interesting approach. This advertisement uses hyperbole, targeting all age groups, portrayal of lifestyle and costumes are modern, treatment is westernized, English language and urban ambience. The appeals used are humor and fantasy and the approach is soft sell. It shows interesting visual graphics appealing to eyes and also uses various shot sizes, low angles has been used. The music is a blend of sound effects and is rhythmic. YouTube published this advertisement on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and its total time is 1 minutes and 17 seconds.
6. **Kajol reaction to Lifebuoy Help a Child Reach 5 campaign:** Actor and mother Kajol gives her opinion regarding diarrhea. She says that since we love our children too much, that even if they get a scratch or a sneeze we get worried. When she calls the doctor regarding her child the doctor says that its ok, its just diarrhea. But it not only diarrhea as she gives the example of the Gundappa (Lifebuoy advertisement) which she saw in Youtube and how he lost all his children because of it. She is moved by him and wants a solution to this problem by most importantly developing hygienic and healthier habit of washing hands before eating food and after coming back from bathroom. She then requests all to go and type in YouTube 'help a child



reach 5' and see as well as show the story of Gundappa. Even people can donate if they want to and Lifebuoy will give the exact same amount. She informs that around 20 lakhs children in India die every year due to diarrhea and again requests everyone to help a child reach 5. This advertisement/video is different from conventional ones as it is more interactive. It is shown as if one-to-one talk is going on which is realistic. The advertisement in general targets all but more importantly to parents and children. The depiction of lifestyle and costumes are modern, shows maternal symbolism and is in Hindi language and Kajol represents workingwomen. This advertisement has social development message and has various appeals, i.e. emotional, fear, social welfare, personal, safety and rational. Its approach is soft sell and there is no background music till the time Kajol speaks. Once she is gone a mild music follows showing on screen the YouTube link and Lifebuoy. The shots mainly comprise of medium close up, medium shot and long shot. YouTube published this advertisement on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2013 and its total time is 1 minute and 28 seconds reacts in a very emotional and practical way.

7. **5 Star, Suresh and Ramesh at home:** A general comedy genre advertisement based on 1960s style statement, where two grown men (brothers) having slow brain development cut off their father pants as per their father wishes. But they cut it too short and the father imagines being laughed at by his wife after seeing him wear that and thus the father slaps the boys hard on the face. The boys are then shown in hospital covered with bandages in head and are advised only liquid diet by the nurse. They are sad, as they won't be able to eat the product. The voice of god says that the product has become softer now. The advertisement shows paternal symbolism, family comprises of only sons, language is Hindi and English, appeal is humor and cool and has soft sell approach. The background music also includes sound effects and adds to the humor in the advertisement. The overall composition of frames includes medium close up, medium shot, over the shoulder, two shot, low angel and zoom in. The slogan of the advertisement is 'Jo Khaye Ko Jaye'. YouTube published this advertisement on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2013 and its total time is 46 seconds.
8. **Sony Xperia-Z Smart Phone:** the advertisement shows all the features of the smart phone and also includes human touch to it by showing relationships; couples, group friends, happy men and women etc. It is mostly explained by the voice of god which says about the expertise of Sony and how it fulfills imagination and desire to go further in life even though in a cramped crowd with one simple touch like magic. This advertisement mostly tells about the features of the product. Target audiences are well-educated and professional people. A variety of young male and female models have been used, lifestyle depicted is modern, treatment is westernized, women are shown as independent and equal to men and language of the advertisement is English. The costumes worn by women are modern and sometimes revealing. This advertisement has rational and fantasy appeal and a hard sell approach. The background music is blending with the pictures and adds to the story telling of the advertisement. Various shots and camera movements have been used. YouTube published this advertisement on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and its total time is 2 minutes and 8 seconds.
9. **Samsung Galaxy S4 Smart Phone:** All the features of the phone is shown using only graphics and music. It focuses on the product specifically. YouTube published this advertisement on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013 and its total time is 4 minutes and 24 seconds.
10. **Reunion via Google search:** the advertisement starts with prayers from the mosque and birds flying away from it. A grandfather introduces an old photo of his and his childhood best friend named Yusuf to his granddaughter who listens to him carefully. He tells her that in Lahore (Pakistan) they had a big park in front of their house and the gate was of the time Baba Hazrat. Every evening they both used to fly kites in the park and then steel Jhajariya from Yusuf's sweets shop and eat it. As the granddaughter enquires about Jhajariya sitting in their shop, an old customer cum friend arrives. The grandfather introduces his granddaughter to him to which she smiles and says Namaste. Later at home while having tea she thinks about it (the background music includes the voices of boys calling for each other and playing), sees the photo again and sits on her laptop to find Google. She types 'Park with ancient gate in Lahore' finds various options and then ends on

'Mochi Gate' via Wikipedia, she again types 'what is Jhajaria' in Google and finds that it is a delicacy of India origin made with corn, milk, ghee, sugar and garnished with raisins and nuts again via Wikipedia. She again types 'Oldest sweet shop near Mochi gate Lahore' to which she finds Fazal Sweets, Mochi Darwaza Lahore. She enters the website of Fazal sweets, types the phone number and makes the call. The grandson of Yusuf in the sweets shop in Lahore receives her phone call. They both talk and the grandson gives the phone to Yusuf, saying somebody has called from Delhi. When enquired, Suman tells that she had called from Delhi and she is the granddaughter of his childhood friend Baldev by reminding him of they stealing Jhajariya when they were boys. Yusuf remembers and smiles and his eyes become emotional and expressive. The background music becomes louder as they talk. After the conversation, Yusuf looks at his grandson who types 'Indian visa requirement' in Google from his mobile phone and gets the information. He looks back at his grandfather who is still touched by the phone call made by Suman. Here in India, Baldev tells his granddaughter sitting near India Gate that after Indo-Pak Partition, they immediately came to India (becomes emotional) and that he always remembers Yusuf. On the other side, Yusuf's grandson packs the Luggage bag and surfs Google to find out about the weather in Delhi through his mobile phone. The forecast says it will be rainy and he packs the umbrella in the bag. They leave home, and Suman too. On her way in the taxi she types the flight number in Google via her mobile phone to find out flight status and instructs the taxi driver to ride faster. The doorbell rings, Baldev opens the door and enquired about the stranger standing outside his door. Yusuf takes a good look at him and wishes him happy birthday. Baldev's granddaughter comes ahead and Baldev realizes and becomes emotional as the name of his childhood friend comes out trembling from his mouth. Both friends hug each other and both grand-children become emotional too. Then comes Google to take all the credit and the advertisement ends with both Yusuf and Baldev sitting on the veranda and enjoying rain together. A beautiful advertisement where Google search engine is shown to have helped in getting the required information, which is very true in real sense if utilized. This advertisement tells about the social relationship and human touch, which is core element of the Indian culture. This advertisement by Google targets all and presents a balance in gender roles, portrayal of lifestyle is traditional as well as modern, treatment is youth oriented, costumes are traditional, paternal symbolism, family members includes both son and daughter, language is Hindi and English, urban ambience and has social, educational, economic and gender development messages. It has a very emotional, personal and rational appeal and soft sell approach. The advertisement uses sound effects to further enhance music, which is used to communicate when vocal is not used. Thus music is very expressive and rhythmic. The camera utilizes various shot sizes, angles as well as camera movements. YouTube published this advertisement on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and its total time is 3 minutes 33 seconds.

### Findings of the study:

The findings of the study led the researcher to an interesting revelation and i.e. advertisements are not only meant to give information about the product but are potential enough to change the lifestyles, likings, expressions and behavioural patterns. In addition to that, the advertisements increase the knowledge and boost confidence regarding advertised products and services. Their content is also very important from the point of view of the viewers that the advertisements need to be creative, socially motivated, information related, interesting, humorous and fresh in idea.

Also advertisements in the past have mostly portrayed women in stereotype positions, as superficial, only physical, sometimes ornamental, passive, subordinate, degraded, seductive characteristics etc and this is not true even today for all kind of advertisements. But there are some advertisements who do portray women in positive light. It also motivates and inspires women for independent decision-making and promotes women development such as Reunion via Google search and Kajol reaction to Lifebuoy Help a Child Reach 5 campaign.

### Summary and Conclusion:

On the basis of above discussion the study reveals that from the list of top 10 advertisements people viewed in YouTube India 2013 as mentioned above, the researcher feels that it is true that people do watch advertisements where women are commodified but now there is a shift in this kind of advertisements as people independently like to see

content and concept related advertisements. Commodification can be effective in the short run to establish a brand but in the long run a social obligation is the new mantra in the advertising world for a brand advertised to succeed.

It has also been realized in the advertising corporate world that advertising is no more about women commodification. According to S. Subramanyeswar, Lowe Lintas in an interview said that brands that advertise need to have a bigger, higher order purpose and every brand needs to have a social proposition. **“People tend to relegate it to some sort of Corporate Social Responsibility, but it's not that.** Once upon a time, government and religious institutions used to codify things for us and tell us what's good and bad. In a post-modern world, brands have taken on that role”. Brands should try and replace the question 'What do we do?' with 'Why do we exist?'. (afaqs.com)

In the study it has been found that there is less commodification of women in the advertising mentioned above and showed on YouTube but it is not true in general media as such. On the basis of the study, it has been found that only one advertisement is based on commodification and sex appeal while majority of the advertisements are based on social causes. To make the advertisements more attractive, informative and realistic, animation and graphical representation is also extensively used. Proposed study also reveals that children are now the focal points for advertisements and are properly used to maximize impact. The researcher feels that the advertiser should also choose the other mediums of communication in order to make it more viewed as well as acceptable.

The study also gives a particular message that if the advertisers choose the ideas mentioned above especially the ones with social welfare appeal then their advertisements may become popular among the masses and help in the long run not only to establish their brand but also assist in social causes.

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