

Emerging ethical issues in advertising

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Advertising is generally defined as any form of non- personal presentation and promotion of ideas by an identified sponsor through the media. It includes both electronic and print media. Advertising offer a reason to buy and is widely used to reach out to masses of people in geographically dispersed area at a low cost per exposure. Due to this consumer tend to view advertised product & services as more legitimate. It is therefore basically one of the promotional tools used by marketers to reach out to their target audience.

Advertiser must ensure that their creative advertising does not overstep legal and social norms of society. They should communicate openly and honestly with their consumers. In modern society advertisement plays a major role in shaping peoples altitude, behavior and how people understand life, themselves and life as a whole. Apart from commercial advertising which usually dominate the market there is also political advertisement and public service advertisement for institution (Chris, 2005). Advertisement plays a major role in the society in economic, political and cultural environment.

a. economic benefit associated with advertising Due to the effect of globalization it has become very difficult for companies to use other promotional mix e. g. personal selling, therefore most companies have resulted to the use Ethical issues in advertising 2 of advertising to reach their target market since it is cheap and can reach a wider audience. Furthermore it prevents exploitation of consumers as they have sufficient information about what is available and at what cost while making purchase decision.

The competition created by advertisement force producers to cut their prices thereby making goods affordable. On part of producers advertisement play the role of persuading and informing consumers about the product. As more people buy the brand producer increase their sale thereby experiencing economies of scale.

b. benefit associated with political advertising
Advertisement helps to improve on democracy throughout the world. Free and responsible media ensure that the government is accountable to its people and in case of electing new people in government, it ensures that the right candidate is chosen.

Advertisements also create a ground on which each political party is given a chance to communicate its policies to the general public. Political advertisement have also ensured that each political class particularly the minorities is represented in government e. g. women, disabled and the youth.

c. cultural and moral benefit
Advertisements are capable of changing people attitude and behavior. They have also been able to change how people view themselves and the world. They have been used by ant human activists to advocate for abolition of female genital mutilation, fighting for the right of minority in society e.

g. children, women and disabled. Advertisements are used mostly in third world country to educate the society on issue concerning health, education and end to tribalism which has led to many clashes around the world.

Ethical issues in advertising
3 The harmful effect of advertisement can also be discussed under the above mentioned categories. Advertisement in itself is not harmful since it is a tool used to communicate feeling and ideas in an effort to inform and persuade others.

What matters is how it is used to reach the desired target group and sometimes it has been harmful to society (Michael, 1997). a. economic harms of advertising Modern advertisements seek to create need which it does not satisfy. Many fancy advertisement forces consumers to buy product out of impulse rather than need and later abandon such product since they were not really needed. Though impulse buying, through anxiety created by advertisement help to expand the economy in the long run they can be harmful as such goods are waste.

Producers on the other hand spend a huge amount of money on advertisement through the media in creating awareness while such fund could be used in other social responsibility activities and still achieve the same result (Philip & Gary, 2002). b. Harms associated with political advertisement. Though advertising help to run a democratic process where the cost of advertising is so high and out of limit to some candidates then it can limit political competition as only the wealthy will be in position to occupy office.

This may force the less privileged to compromise their independence and integrity as they rely on fund from special interest group. Most political advertisement are meant to damage the image of opponent and in spreading message in order to appeal to emotion rather than fair judgment. Most advertisement spread message which are bias and hostile to other group and at the Ethical issues in advertising 4 same time containing racial and tribal prejudice which on many occasion have led to tribal clashes like those witnessed in 1994 Rwanda genocide.

c. Harmful effect of advertisement to culture and moral values. Most modern advertisements are desired to attract attention and appeal to specific group at the expense of moral values. Women are mostly exploited in advertisement as most magazines, perfumes and media display their images barely nude thereby displaying them as a tool to please others thereby down playing their dignity and their role in society. Some advertisements also tend to stereotype certain groups in society.

Some media display messages containing pornography and violent content which corrupt moral values of young people and children who do not know that it is a marketing technique. Most of the advertisement today is directed to youth and children. Most children below the age of eight cannot comprehend televised adverts and as such they take them to be true and unbiased. Since children influence the buying decision of parent advertiser therefore lure them into buying product they do not really need. The other ethical concern relates to alcohol advertisement where drinking is associated with pleasurable moments and desirable qualities.

Taking alcohol is portrayed as a sporting event or recreational activities which have led many youth to abuse alcohol leading to unreasonable behavior and health problem. Another ethical problem arises from tobacco advertisement. These adverts contain young celebrities who emphasize youth independence and vigour. Therefore youth who want to stay 'cool' have to smoke as this celebrity acts as their role model. Most of Ethical issues in advertising 5 tobacco advertisements are directed to youth as this market segment contribute greater percentage in term of sales (tyagi & Kumar, 2005) .

The food industry is another area where ethical concern has been raised. Most adverts encourage consumption of food with high fat and sugar content leading to various health problems such as obesity in children, high blood pressure and diabetes. Such adverts have led to poor eating habits through consumption of food with high-calorie where people develop bone disease and increase rate of fracture. Advertising is therefore creating a problem which we do not foresee in the near future therefore certain measures need to be undertaken to restrict advertising.

These measures include banning any advertisement which seems to promote violence and anti-social behavior, checking the content of the advert and evaluating their influence on children and appropriateness to certain age groups or a ban on any advert that is viewed as morally and ethically wrong (Belch, 1995). The government agencies have a role to play in ensuring that consumers are not misled through deceptive advertising. Some of the areas that should be of concern to government include; comparative advertising, deception, demonstration, endorsement and reasonable basis for making claim.

The organization has social responsibility toward the society and its task is to identify the need and to deliver the desired satisfaction more efficiently and effectively more than competitors do. Therefore the norms and values upheld by this organization should be ethically correct as they are also part of the society. The media group should have self-regulation policies to ensure that the message received by the final consumer does not distort their moral values and attitudes. Ethical issues in advertising 6

Reference

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