

Deception in advertising: volvo's "bear foot" misstep essay sample



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Deception in Advertising: Volvo's " Bear Foot" Misstep Essay Sample

When making ethical decisions, I usually use the Virtue Approach. Before making any ethical decision, this approach requires you to first ask what kind of person should you be (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer, 2005b). This method assumes that there are particular ideals that we should strive towards.

One question I believe should be asked when talking about deception is, ' Is the company, in question, practicing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)?' In this paper, I will provide some examples of CSRs.

I will also discuss what I see as false claims made by Volvo in its monster truck ads. I will reflect on findings from my research on this ad and Volvo's stacked vehicles ads.

Lastly, I will thrash out Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer's (2005a) critical thinking framework for making ethical decisions. In the end, I will tell what I thought Volvo's intentions were and if they were ethical or unethical.

Deception in Advertising:

Volvo's " Bear Foot" Misstep

Ethical Decision-Making Approach

The ethical decision-making approach that best matches the manner in which I make ethical decisions is the Virtue Approach. This kind of approach assumes that there are particular ideals that we should strive towards.

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Virtues are character traits that allow us to be and act in ways that help us develop to our highest potential (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer, 2005b). Virtues are attitudes such as self-control, fairness, generosity, compassion, honesty, and courage. Virtues are similar to habits; they become someone's personal characteristics. When faced with an ethical dilemma, I use the Virtue Approach by first asking what kind of person should I be (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer, 2005b).

What is Deception in Advertising?

Deception in marketing is a fuzzy subject. Many think that ethics is an oxymoron. Most companies try to enlarge their market as much as possible. Naturally, every company is driven to escalate consumption of its products. Kotler (2004) reports that a high-level executive for Coca-Cola in Sweden once said that her goal was to get people to stop drinking orange juice and start drinking her company's soda for breakfast. Kotler (2004) also says that the marketing executives at McDonald's encourage their customers to always choose the largest sodas, fries, and hamburgers from their menus. Coca-Cola and McDonald's have some of the world's best marketers within their organizations (Kotler, 2004). This just proves that most good marketers will do everything possible to sell their products to the public.

One question that I believe should be asked when talking about deception in advertising is, 'Is the company, in question, using corporate social responsibility?' Some of the examples of corporate social responsibility are (Kotler, 2004):

- Treating customers fairly with quick responses to inquiries and complaints
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- Treating employees and vendors with fairness
- Not only stating, but living out the company's values
- Always acting in an ethical fashion

False claims in advertising can harm consumers by persuading them to buy inferior products. Consumers waste billions of dollars a year on misleading marketed products ("Fraudulent health," 2005). Marketers usually rely on success stories to promote their products; sometimes these stories are fictitious ("Fraudulent health," 2005). It harms consumers the most by hurting companies who market and advertise fairly and honestly. Consumers begin to distrust all advertising because of deceptive marketing by some, which hurts these honest companies with loss of revenue. A consumer's trust in a company's intentions is the most significant foundation of loyalty for their product.

In regards to Volvo's monster truck ad, the false claims are that they demonstrated an event that could not have happened without the vehicles being manipulated. This is deceptive, but I don't think that it hurt anyone. After all of my research on this ad, I never once read of anyone actually being harmed by the creation or showing of this commercial.

I believe Volvo could have easily avoided being charged with deceptive advertising by creating a commercial that was a bit more realistic. They could have produced an advertisement that highlighted the company's statistics on safety. Maybe they could have given the statistical numbers on reported accidents, injuries suffered from those accidents, and the outcomes

of the condition of the vehicles after those accidents; to show how robustness of Volvos.

In the end, it is up to the individual marketer if they are to use their marketing tools to push products that could be harmful to consumers. Some are independent enough to tell companies that they will not work for them to sell more of what hurts people (Kotler, 2004,).

Volvo's Stacked Vehicle Ads.

In regards to Volvo's stacked vehicle advertisements, I truly believe that they intended to show the roof's strength and not the strength of the tires and suspension system. I came to this conclusion after reading an article about the company. The article ("Fraudulent health," 2004) stated that going back to 1967, Volvo has been making the strength of their vehicles' roofs top priority. At that time, it started reinforcing the roof support pillars in its 140 Series sedan ("Fraudulent health," 2004).

The commercials in question show cars stacked on top of a Volvo sedan and it asked the question, 'Are you in the market for a hardtop?' In another ad in 2002, Volvo contends that the roof exceeds the legal US requirements by more than 100 percent ("Fraudulent health," 2004).

It seems that Volvo has an extensive history of promoting strong rooftops in their vehicles and never intended to make claim about the strength of their tires or suspension systems.

Critical Thinking Framework.

As stated earlier, the ethical decision-making method I normally use is the Virtue Approach. In analyzing Volvo's monster truck advertisement and using this approach, the first thought should be if this commercial does or does not portray honesty. By using Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer's (2005a) framework, I should first recognize a moral issue. Is there a personal, interpersonal, or social problem? Could this be damaging to people, animals, or society? The answer to these questions, in my opinion, is no. I see nothing wrong with an obvious dramatization of Volvo's illustration of its roof's sturdiness.

Next, I should get the facts. The relevant facts to the case are pretty simple; Volvo is trying to promote its vehicles as safe and well built. Both Volvo (company) and its consumers have a stake in the outcome of this promotion. The company is a stakeholder because it has to live up to the standards of the advertisement. Maybe not by being pounded on by a monster truck, but in its safety and sturdiness during accidents. Consumers are at stake because, if they buy the vehicle, they are investing a large sum of money for a product that may or may not withstand such abuse.

I should, next, evaluate alternative actions from many moral perspectives (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer, 2005a). There are many options that could produce more good than harm. One that would respect the rights and dignity of both stakeholders would have been to not run the monster truck ad if the vehicles had to be rigged to perform the way they wanted them to. Volvo's reputation could have been forever damaged because of this trickery.

Following Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., & Meyer's (2005a) framework, I would next have to make a decision. Which is the right thing to do? I believe it would have been to not have run this ad. At the very least, they should have stating that the advertisement was a dramatization to showcase the strength of the vehicle's roof. I believe that the outcome of not showing this particular ad would have the best consequences for everyone involved.

Even though I do not believe that Volvo's intentions were to be unethical, I do believe that their actions were proved to be foolish. In my opinion, if Volvo had the choice of creating that ad again, they would choose not to.

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