

The issue of unethical advertising



The issue of unethical advertising is closely connected with the entire concept of business ethics. If the origin of misleading or false advertising studied, the early beginning of unethical advertising probably found in the early time of mankind, at the same time when the trade appeared. Within the history the art of selling developed greatly, and even the branches of science appeared, which studying and developing the new methods and technologies of making people to consume different goods. Sometimes these methods and solutions break the ethical and moral principles and even the existing laws. For example the infamous effect of 25th frame could be mentioned. The human eyes can precept the video stream with the frequency of frames 24 per second. If the 25th frame with the proper message like “ Drink coca-cola” is added to the video stream, audience will not notice the message but will remember it on the subconscious level and execute its order buying coca-cola.

However the recent trends in this sphere are rather optimistic. The researchers of defined the harmful kinds of advertising and the most vulnerable parts of audience and started working on the laws forbidding some kinds of advertising. In this work I will cite the definitions of different types of advertising based on the mechanism of its influence, some cases of improper advertising will be discussed and some aspects of advertising will be commented.

Unethical advertising

To define my personal relation to unethical advertising I’d like to use the classification of advertising by Tom Beauchamp. He divided all advertising on

three broad categories according to the way of influence on the audience: They are coercion, manipulation and persuasion. Beauchamp defines the level of control for every of these classes as the following:

“ 1) Coercive influences are always controlling influences; (2) manipulative influences are sometimes controlling influences; and (3) persuasive influences are never controlling influences.”(Beauchamp, 477)

Sure, it is often hard to determine manipulating advertising, especially in those cases when the producers or advertisers don't agree with the definition. Freedom of choice is rather an abstract category, not only in consumption but in daily life. Many of people's choices are closely connected with their religious, ethnical or family background. Beauchamp, however, proposes to leave the issue of ideal freedom and try to define if actions of consumers are sufficiently or adequately free. To make the detection of manipulating advertising easier, he gives the definitions of coercion, manipulation, and persuasion.

“...coercion occurs if one party deliberately and successfully uses force or a credible threat of unwanted, avoidable, and serious harm in order to compel a particular response from another person. No matter how attractive or overwhelming an offer, coercion is not involved unless a threatening sanction is presented.” (Beauchamp, 477) As the example the advertising of medical attention and food in return on human blood in starving countries could be provided. Nowadays this class of advertising is extremely rare, though it was widely spread before the industrial age.

“.. persuasion is a deliberate and successful attempt by one person to encourage another to freely accept beliefs, attitudes, values, or actions through appeals to reason. The first person offers what he or she believes to be good reasons for accepting the desired perspective. In paradigmatic cases of persuasion, these good reasons are conveyed through structured verbal facts or argument.” (Ibid)

The persuasion can use not only verbal methods, but express the good reasons through nonverbal communication. Theoretically persuasive advertising is the most ethical class; however the situation is more complicated, as it is discussed below.

“ Manipulation is a broad category that includes any successful attempt to elicit the desired response from another person by non-coercively modifying choices available to the person or by non-persuasively altering another person perception of available choices.” (Beauchamp, 479)

The main difference between manipulation and persuasion is that the last one based on deception.

The case of marketing infant formula could be the good example of manipulation. As was stated in the case study, there were two points of criticism in this marketing company: the aggressive advertising of instant formula that made new mothers believing the instant formula is equal or even better than breast milk for babies, and the use of medical workers in product promotion. As for me, the second issue should not be the object of criticism. Despite the influence of instant formula on baby's digestion was not studied sufficiently, it was the good alternative for rice water or other

artificial substitutes of breast milk. The lack of mother milk is not the new trouble, so the instant formula could be a good solution when mother has not enough milk or newborn baby has intolerance to lactose, or in some other cases. Prescribed by medical personnel, infant formula could be a kind of treatment.

However the combination of aggressive advertising with the promotion through medical personnel was rather unethical. Using the lack of knowledge about the properties of instant formula in comparison with breast milk Nestle promoted its production among the mother who really didn't need artificial feeding for their babies. The use of somebody's lack of knowledge for the profit is a deception, so the marketing company of instant formula by Nestle was the manipulation.

The result of such unethical marketing was the growths of child mortality level, though different sources evaluate differently the number of deaths from digestion malfunction. I'd not support the claim of Dr. Spoke to boycott all the production of Nestle, but the unethical behavior of this company makes me suspicious regarding its production.

Speaking about unethical advertising it could not be skipped the issue of tobacco and alcohol advertising. Alcohol and tobacco are legal drugs, and their harmful impact on people proved many years ago. So, the advertisers use so-called "lifestyle" advertising, which connects the use of tobacco and alcohol with good times, easy sex and lot of fun. In the article "Marketing and disclosure" the Kool Penguin was mentioned, the image of repositioned Kool cigarettes by Brown and Williamson tobacco. Young-

looking penguin with stylish hair dress in fashion sunglasses advertised cigarettes, and this campaign was unethical twice, in my opinion. First of all, I am sure that any advertising of drugs like alcohol and cigarettes is unethical and have to be banned. The damage from these two drugs within the history of mankind could hardly be evaluated because it is really huge. Sure, people will continue use the tobacco and alcohol, because history shows any bans and restrictions are useless. But I am sure that customers of tobacco and alcohol should have information regarding these products only on demand, and this information should include the warnings about potential harm of these drugs, not the pictures and descriptions of brilliant lifestyle.

Returning to the Kool cigarettes and Kool penguin, I'd like to emphasize the second ethical problem of this image. Its young look can raise the consumption of cigarettes between youth. It is proved that children can use the empirical experience of previous situations after they are six years old in average, but it would be mistake to think that on its sixth birthday child gets the opportunity to detect and resist manipulations. The psychic of children and adolescents is rather vulnerable, their suggestibility is great, and so the advertising can have more significant impact on their mind. That is why the use of child-oriented symbols in the advertising of drugs is, probably, the most unethical marketing policy.

The issue of women images in the advertising is another hot topic nowadays. Advertisers use images of beautiful women to promote their goods, especially food. The problem is that women who believe the advertising and consume the advertised food often loose their beauty because of excess weight and other problems with basal metabolism. Besides, the vital

standards (height, weight, volume of hair and so on) of female models working in advertising business differ from the average female vital standards. Thus, the advertisers impose the artificial standard of beauty, that can't fit to every woman. It makes many women all over the world feel discomfort regarding their appearance, use different diets that can be injurious for the health, and so on, So, the advertising that demonstrates happiness, really kills it.

Conclusion

The limit of words makes me finish my thought, but I want to summarize facts stated above: the ethical standards for advertising should be stricter, because unethical advertising brings a lot of potential harm to the society of consumers.