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argues that
advertisements have
the power to
empower to the...

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Introduction

The Nobel Laureate economist George Stigler has famously said, 'advertising is an immensely powerful instrument for the elimination of ignorance.' Yet, the advertising process and the industry are criticized everywhere on charges of deception, visual pollution, and in the name of public activism. Activists claim that advertisements must be regulated. But what they fail to understand that imposing a ban on the entire industry is not justified. This is so because their main claims center on ads that promote unhealthy products, alcohol, and tobacco merchandize.

Empowering Consumers

The media of commercial speech give a chance to the consumers to remain updated about the best products in the market and make a wise decision according to their requirements. Advertisements prevent monopoly firms from overtaking the market and disadvantaging the consumers. Thanks to the option of promotional campaigns, consumers now know about the competing brands in a particular product segment. They also know about the unique feature of each of these products. The uninterrupted knowledge about ongoing deals and sale promotions help the consumers in saving a lot of money. The power of the consumers to decide what to buy ensures that the businesses innovate constantly, and relentlessly in order to keep them happy. Advertisements make sure that businesses realize that "‘ consumer is king' - and no one harasses a real king."

One of the biggest accusations against advertising is an attack on its universal presence. According to Gary Ruskin, the activists claim that ' the

industry takes advantage of captive audiences in schools, colleges, movie theaters, airport lounges, mass transit and at ATM's, gas pumps, and doctors' offices.' However, this omnipresence lends the medium of the commercial speech the ability to make a difference on a large scale. Advertisements are a great unifying force in that they can propagate powerful ideas across all domains over a period of time and bring about the much needed changes in society. For example, the emphasis on climate change, reducing carbon footprints, and other environment related messages in the ads have made consumers more ecologically aware. They now consider their day to day activities in context of their long term impact on the environment, both local and global (Davenport & Parker). Isn't ' environmental activism' a real and more practical cause, that advertising helps foster?

Advertising empowers businesses

Despite the claims of deception, glittery persuasion, and mind games, the prerequisite of a successful advertisement is a good and useful product that serves a real need of the consumer. If the product is not up to the mark, the consumers are not going to be impressed. At the same time, the avenue of commercial speech provides genuine businesses (which have consumer satisfaction as their goal) the much-needed mechanism to reach out to their target consumers and tell them about their product. At the same time, had it not been for advertising, the businesses would not have been able to tap into what the consumers actually need and design the products accordingly. The businesses are able to create all kinds of utilities and create healthy market

competition that ultimately brings down the prices of the products of everyday use. Entrepreneurs who have achieved market success are inspired to make a larger difference to the society by working on innovative ideas that achieve the well-being of the society.

Advertising empowers society

In addition to creating a healthy market economy where competition keeps unhealthy price rises in check, advertising funds the sources and platforms of information that build the media institution. Media - newspaper, television, radio, internet, and cinema - are important for fostering a culture of participatory politics and democracy in the world. These media outlets inform, educate, and entertain their audiences, making them knowledgeable about everything happening around them.

Advertisements are the money making wing of media, providing the valuable capital to keep the newspapers and production houses running. It is because of revenues generated through advertisements that the journalists and the publishers are able to collect, curate, compile the information, put it together in the form of news in a broadsheet, print it, and deliver to the doorstep of the readers at no cost at all. As Adam Thierer has pointed, " Advertising is proving increasingly to be the only media industry model with any real power for many media and information-producing sector."

Imposing a ban on advertising would result in an information vacuum which will isolate the communities in more devastating ways than is advertising is said to be accomplishing.

Conclusion

Considering the benefits of the advertising industry and the way it achieves a healthy communion between different parts of the society, namely media, audience, businesses, products, social needs and issues, it would be foolhardy to talk about imposing restrictive bans on advertisements. They are here to stay and steps must be taken to ensure that this medium of proliferating commercial information remains as free and unhindered as the other media institutions.

References

Davenport, Coral and Parker, Ashley. " Environment is Grabbing Big Role in Ads for Campaigns." The New York Times. Online.