

Advertising and society

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



Advertising and Society Introduction: Advertising is said to be like glue that holds cultures together. It allows us to share a common experience incorporated by brands, images, logos, and even silly jingles. We define who we are by what we buy and wear because we know that others judge us by what we buy and wear. And advertising influences those judgments. Today because of advertisements conditioning and trendsetting, judgments are made on what clothes people wear, what shampoo and kitchen cleaner they use, not on whom we really are.

This leads to a certain degree of social discrimination and emotional insecurity especially in younger population. In advertising, socio-cultural dimensions came in 1920's. Agencies and publicists no longer sought only to convey objective facts about the products but they also link products with a lifestyle, permeate them with glamour and prestige, and persuade consumers that purchasing an item could be, as historian Alan Brinkley describes it, " a personally fulfilling and enriching experience. "(Alan Brinkley, 1991; 648.)

Historical background:

If we recall the history of advertising the first thing that came into our mind is the old papyrus from Thebes dating back about 3000 years ago. History of English society showed that the spread of information in an organized way began with the development of newspaper. Newspaper started carrying advertisement in mid 1600's. The industrial revolution in 19th century resulted in great commercial growth and provided a great support to advertising. With the development of the technology after the Second World War many changes took place in advertising.

As more and more advanced systems got introduced, they changed the whole scenario of the society. Although these developments in advertising are of great value but on the other hand they also generated huge criticism. The aim of advertising in society is to sell the goods in a particular kind of economy. It is because of advertising which is a major form of modern social communication that one can understand his society in new ways. Overview: In this chapter on advertising and society, the author aimed to examine different critiques and key concepts related to advertising and its impact on society. To support his argument author used different theories and researches that supports or negates advertising's impact in relation to society. The main approaches that the author discussed in the chapter are pluralistic positions, Neo Marxist positions and cultural critiques. According to author the pluralistic positions focused on the usefulness of consumptions and options available for the consumers and the economy.

Neo-Marxist views argued that advertising flatters to deceive. It undermines use value into exchange value. Its representations incorporate the meanings of the dominant ideology. On the other hand cultural approach emphasized on the harmful effects of commodifications. To discuss about the main critiques that he took in order to fulfill his objective the author examined studies by different researchers about these approaches. The first study mentioned was by Sinclair who saw the critiques in terms of an opposition between optimistic and pessimistic views.

According to Optimistic view advertising is used as a tool for functioning of economy while pessimistic saw the advertising in relation to economy as a destruction of social and cultural values. To further support his argument two

more important perspectives were discussed in the chapter i. e. , Capitalist pluralism and political economy Theory. Capitalist pluralism argued that advertising is an optimistic tool for providing information about goods and services where as Political economist regard advertising as working tool under the power of media institution or in other words media monopoly.

These perspectives of capitalistic pluralism and political economy were further discussed by Doyle in 2002 who pointed out that there exist a strong relationship between the advertising expenditure and economic wealth by arguing that although advertising contributes to economic growth it doesn't mean that it also contributes to the well-being of the society. Then he discussed about the role of advertising in developing ideas about the imaginary world. To elaborate his point the author added the analysis by Cronin in 2000. who argued about the imagination of audience and their relationship and said that they cannot be discovered.

Moreover he discussed the post modern and cultural critiques of advertising which were based on the modes of consumption. Then he put studies by Matterlart in 1991 and Kenway and Bullen in 2001 which emphasized on the domination of public space and consumption of advertising where as Jameson in 1991 and Baudrillard in 1988 argued about post-modern ways of criticizing advertising. They said that there is a lack of distinction between the real and imaginary world. The main crux of their studies was that advertising creates hyper reality.

In order to relate advertising with other different phenomenon's he discussed about discourse, ideology, myths and representations. According to author there is an interrelationship between discourses, ideologies myths and

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representations. For discourses he took the example of car advertisement that how they used technology as a discourse in relation to different environments. Moreover he added myths as false ideas about consciousness of ideology as in advertisements of beauty products. According to him advertising not only affects our consciousness but also alter our perceptions about the social world.

Fantasy is also an important factor in advertising which is all about idealization and mythmaking. In view of author female representation is an important factor in advertising. To highlight he took the example discussed by Goldman and Papson in 1998 on women representation in advertisements of Nike. They argued that most of the advertising comprised of the representation of women as a sexual object or product. In Advertising stereotyping of genders are also found. At last author has put a light on the children advertisements when there is gendered representation.

According to different studies particularly by Johnson and Young (2002) in this chapter argued that gender differentiations increased market targeting. Analysis: Ever since the dawn of advertising, many complaints and concerns have been spreading everywhere and cannot be controlled. Several questions arise in the minds of the people regarding the influence of advertising. For instance does advertising has have a strong impact on society? Does it obviously influence the millions of people? The information related to the birth and growth of the media, have provoked society to think about the consequences of new technology.

The emergence of media has given us great power and knowledge even then we see its consequences in our lives and in whole society. However, many

people feel that advertising has had great negative consequence. The present chapter which is on advertising and society provided in depth analysis on role of advertisements in relation to society. The literature provided in the chapter revolves around the various studies and approaches which linked with the different aspects of advertising and its consumption effects over society.

Moreover we came to know about the changing historical perspective of the advertising. The main critiques regarding advertising and society which were included in whole section (Neo Marxist positions, pluralist positions and cultural critiques) formed the base for rest of the researchers who further worked on it. Although these positions were very authentic to describe his argument about pessimist and optimistic views. It would be more clarified if the author put more different perspectives like Modernization theory.

Modernization theory is more related in the sense that it deals with mass media that plays a very important role in transforming of the societies. As advertising “ contact with the media helped the process of transition from ‘ traditional’ to a ‘ modernized’ state, characterizing the mass media as a mobility multiplier which enabled individuals to experience events in far off places forcing them to reassess their traditional way of life. Exposure to the media made traditional societies less bound by traditions and made them aspire to a new and modern way of life”. Daniel Lerner, 1958; 56) When ones discussed about the different perspectives regarding advertising and its impact on society one has to take into consideration gradual changes in its culture. This can be explained in a way that culture of advertising has switched from information to a more abstract way to communicate with

consumers. Previously in 1970s more informative advertisements were shown to the consumers which helped them in making decisions by identifying the positives and the negatives of competitors and their products. Then in 1990s focused was on emotional advertisements and in 2000 with the emergence of internet advertising industry experienced a boom. With the internet traditional informative advertising got changed by encouraging interaction with consumers by clicking on various sites and links. Eventually these methods of advertising offered a new way for consumers to become more interactive in the process of marketing. This was the lacking point of author, he should have to mention about this changing shift in advertising in relation to society after discussing the main critiques.

In his studies there was a lack of link between the pessimist and optimistic views. All of them were presented in such a perplexed way that one can't comprehend what the author actually wanted to communicate. The major studies he took to support his argument depicted that advertising has got an adverse effects on our society as he related the terms like monopoly, deceive, imagination and commodification and mentioned that advertising is playing key role in diminishing our social and cultural values etc.

On the other hand some of the studies were showing advertising as a positive tool towards the information and education of the society as mentioned in the capitalistic pluralism that saw advertising as an information provider. Although the author has provided many good theories to explain what actually advertising is and what role it is playing in society but it failed to provide a strong link between advertising and norms of the society.

To support this argument we can take the example from social communication in Advertising which provides a clear` debate on advertising and society” where a survey of the controversies on advertising. Here the authors viewed advertising as an influential form of social communication. Another important contribution that author should have mentioned in order to explain the positive role of advertising in society is by “ Leiss/Kline/ Jhally” who worked on role of social communication in advertising (1978), described the origin of consumer culture and how the shift from industrial to consumer took place.

Moreover they clearly pointed out that advertising agencies played a vital role in modern advertising industry and advertising is the central institution for the market-industrial economy. One of the shortcomings of this literature was not to highlight media monopoly while discussing about political economy and the power of media institutions because the concept of media monopoly by Bagdikian’s played a very vital role in history even till now dominating the advertising.

Critical researches play a very important role to study effects of advertising in relation to society as they address the social and cultural effects of communications and its role in propagating unfair social order. In the previous discussion author failed to mentioned the importance of persuasion of consumers regarding advertising in relation to society. Another missing point while discussing about the consumer behavior is related to the buying behavior because most of the advertisements aim to affect the purchasing decision of the consumer in the market.

Moreover it is proven that advertising has become a powerful force in terms of persuading society to support the product, service, or idea. So, consumers tend to buy it to make them feel good and beautiful. Two most important contributions in critical researches are by Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements and Ideology in advertising* (1986). They have examined the content and structure of advertisements for their distorted communications and ideological Impact. Employing of semiotics played an important role in examining how advertising persuade consumers.

At one point author discussed discourses, myths, ideologies and representation. There he failed to mention about semiology and content analysis because these four are basically the derivation from semiotic and content. Because semiology is all about the study and importance of language for the communication of message. To support this point a study was done on "The Theatre of Consumption" by Jhally in 1987, in which the researcher examined the structure and content of advertisement using semiotics and their social and cultural impact using Content Analysis.

The conclusion drawn from study clearly showed that advertisers use different codes and strategies to appeal different audiences. The codes are beauty, female relations, romance and fraternity for both males and females. Both the studies on social communication and advertising and on codes by Jhally are very important studies that provide a very useful analysis of how advertising play a vital role in producing consumers and how the consumers reshaped themselves in the society.

If author included such studies in his chapter, it would provide a strong argument regarding discourse, ideology, myths and representations. As far

as discussion by author regarding gendered representation in advertisements is concerned he did a tremendous job by describing the huge effect which is related to a person's dissatisfaction of the body by stereotyping women and men, that if ladies wanted to be beautiful they have to show such qualities like fair color, long and beautiful hair, skin tone, etc. , and for men if they want to be handsome they have to hold the worked-out body, etc.

Also, portrayal of women as sex objects in most of the commercials changes the perception of people on women as homemakers. Some major points that author should include in his literature are related to various advertising trends. Most of the important trends of advertising related to consumers need to be mentioned when one is discussing about economy, markets and their relationship to customers. As we know that advertising costs a lot of money and that money comes from the consumer. For example hidden costs, lying to customers and censorship etc.

Almost all advertising companies bend and curve the truth for their personal benefit and for promotion and advertising of their product. Even the companies exaggerate certain features of their products. One of the true purposes of advertising is to set trends that the customers will follow. One of the draw back of advertising is not to focus on censorship even the author didn't mention any positive suggestions regarding this. Because element of censorship played a very important role in the inception and elimination of any phenomenon.

Conclusion: Although the author has been successful in highlighting the changes in society caused by advertising but on the other hand his study

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was highly abstract and failed to provide deep insight into the actual phenomena of the society because most of the researches taken by author were not analyzed in detail. Moreover he didn't mention any useful suggestions regarding how a society can be organized with the meaningful use of advertising and reduction of the unnecessary exaggeration of the products.

Finally, it is being concluded that advertising has got a positive as well as negative impacts over society. There is a need to focus on the balance that what should be necessary and what should be not. On the other hand advertisements can create contentment and discontentment simultaneously. The marketing of products and our society depend so highly on advertising that even its negative effects on society cannot offset its positive socio-economic impacts.