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Ethical and Social Issues in Advertising

Ethical customer do no forget bad quality untruthful advertising and being bored with uninteresting advertisement.

Many advertisements mislead the customer. This chapter appeals to the advertiser to consider the ethical and social issues as well.

Ethical and Social Issues in Advertising

■ 13.1 Ethical Advertising

Advertising must follow certain moral principles certain rules and should not degrade or adversely comment on the other products and brands. It should highlight the positive points of its own products and be of good standard. It should not be offensive and in bad taste. It should not predict the sex of an unborn child and keep away from the unwanted practices adopted by the advertisers.

Advertising should not be untruthful, deceptive and should not misguide the consumers. Some companies advertising about their two wheelers and four wheelers vehicle advertise that they will cover X amount of kms per litre when in practice the kms. covered are much less. These advertisement deceive the customer; sometimes advertisers have made false claims or failed to award prizes promised in sweepstakes or contests.

The problem of untruthful advertising and promotion exists at the local level and in specific areas such as mail order, telemarketing and other forms of direct marketing.

Ethics in advertising must be given its place. Ethics cover various aspects. These range from the truthfulness of validity of claims to the mode of presentation of the advertisement. The advertising of products like cigarettes, alcohol and other injurious materials have to be dealt carefully. The authorities as well as the advertisers and the agencies should make a set of rules and regulations. It should adhere to certain values and give satisfaction to the consumers. Another issue is the advertising directed on children. The children are exposed to adult advertisements and those advertisements that are not made for children. The adult advertisement may be showing a lot of indecency and sex, which may not be good for children.

Therefore: Advertising should:

- (i) Be truthful, should reveal the truth and significant facts.
- (ii) Be *substantiative* should substantiate with proofs *e.g.*, Kapil Dev professes that “Boost is the secret of my energy”.
- (iii) Be non-comparative.
- (iv) Give real and true guarantees.
- (v) Avoid false claims.
- (vi) Adhere to taste and decency. Should keep away from offensive and untrue publicity.

Ethical Advertising

Advertising communicates the message some of which may not be acceptable to the society. These immoral and unethical values are controlled by self-control, control of consumers and by the government. Some say that some Ads degrades the ethical values of the society. For instance some advertisers project their medicine as giving immediate relief like magic is not acceptable. There are a number of unrealistic situation. The fairness of presentation is essential for any Ad. Value system is also getting eroded. Obscene and nudity are example of these. Gambling and lotteries should not be promoted. The names of celebrities should be used without their permission. The advertisements should be in line with the traditions and customs of the society.

The media should also play an important role and should be able to reject advertisements which are misleading and incorrect. This should be the case with Newspaper, Magazines, Radio and T.V. Media. Consumers should also boycott the advertisements and products advertised which are not ethical this can be done through consumer groups and opinion leaders. The government can also play a vital role in curbing the unethical advertisement by making appropriate rules and regulation.

■ 13.2 Social Issues in Advertising

While advertising has been criticised for many reasons yet there are many points in favour of social advertising. Its benefits are as under:

- It improves the social and cultural behaviour of people.
- It is a tool which can be used for the welfare of the society.
- It improves the economic well-being of the people.
- It exposes them to opportunities for employment and for making their lives better.
- It gives them new ways of satisfaction.
- Socially acceptable advertising is good for the people.
- Advertising should change with the change in social values. The advertisement of today would not be acceptable two decades back but now the society has become more liberal and more open, advertising is acceptable.
- It informs the housewives of the products available which can reduce their drudgery. Such products advertised are the cooking gas, washing machine, mixers, grinders etc.
- It propagates family planning—a great need of the nation.
- It makes people aware of various diseases like Cancer and AIDS.
- It makes them aware of the treatment for these ailments.

Stressing on the negative aspects of advertising we have:

Deception Advertising

Many people find the advertisements not credible enough or untruthful which deceives the consumer. The advertiser must have available data to support their claims. Mis-representation or ambiguous statements are considered as deception.

Harmful Effects

It may have adverse effects on culture and social values. Nudity and sex has bad influence on people and they want sex in real life. They run after things that they should not have.

Thus, advertising may create “bad taste”. The woman in fashion shows are stunning, glamorous exposed in many parts, sizzling high voltage glamour is shown which may lead to bad taste.

Appeal

Appeal to sex and drugs, appeal to obscenity, nudity etc. have been criticised by people. The cumulative affect of these appeals are very dangerous and can change the behaviour of human beings towards indulgence in these things. Sometimes, audience is repelled rather than be attracted by repetitive advertisements, sometimes it irritates the audience, creates a clutter, and also information overload that confuse the audience. It also has an adverse effect on children. Children are vulnerable to sex, nudity and violence Ads. It leads them to adopt different kinds of behaviour and they became disinterested in other activities like studies, sports and presuming their career. They dream of the sexual objects day and night may spoil their lives. Many people specially women’s organisations have objected to sexy advertisement and too much exposure of women in the Ads.

Advertising has encouraged the proliferation of brands although there are no significant differences in the products. Symbolic differences are created by advertisers. This confess the customer. Then there is the desire to buy products which their neighbour or relatives have bought. This leads to envy and the advertiser exploits these desires. Advertising also tries to create a “status symbol”. It tries to create desire to satisfy their ego.

The Neo Riche in India try to emulate the higher-income group and buy products that are used by them.

It reduces interpersonal relationship and develops groups relationship. Advertising also creates unnecessary comparison between two products some are in favour of comparative advertising others speak against it.

All the multiple aspects of advertising confuses the consumers. This also leads the advertiser to adopt unethical and non-social aspects of advertising. Although advertising is criticized on many grounds but it gives a boost to the economy and maintains its ground and is becoming bigger and an important tool of marketing.

Social Issues in Advertising

1. Since advertisement is directed at the society, it affects the society in many ways, Society is concerned with how the advertising is done and its effects on it. Advertising is criticized on the grounds of the deception, manipulation, bad taste and manipulating consumers against their will. It is believed that the persuasiveness of the Ad has an impact on the value system of the society. The consumer is deceived when the benefits he perceives are far below his expectations. This could be due to miscommunication or improper emphasis on attributes. Advertisement as a whole should not be misleading. It should not conceal material facts and give a true picture of the benefits, the cost and the offer. For example:

“Buy X brand of batteries with a trip to U.S.A.

The Ad is misleading it should be written as,

“Buy X brand of batteries with a chance of a trip to U.S.A.

2. Advertising is criticized of manipulating the buyers to make a decision against their will or interest. Playing on the sub-conscious mind, motives and various form of appeals. The

appeals generated by the advertisements are sometimes so strong that the consumer fully believe in them and does not apply his/her mind to make a decision and buys it without much thought.

3. Advertising has also been criticized to be in bad taste because of:

- Moral concerns about advertising of harmful products—Tobacco, Alcohol etc.
- Objection to over emphasis on sex—sex appeals.
- Objection to occasion of exposure when children are present with the adults.
- Objection to advertising strategy of excessive repetition of the Ad.
- It is accused of attaching too much importance to the material aspects of life.
- It promotes certain individuals as stereotypes. Women are always shown in the role of a mother or a housewife, instead of business executives except in few cases. Similarly, business executives are shown with a cigar. Women are shown to create a romantic situation.
- Too much advertising on children is considered a matter of great concern.
- Advertising provides sensitivity to price. It shows differentiation among closely resembling brands.
- Advertising causes insecurity by making people worry about tooth decay, body odours, lack of self-confidence. It creates fear in the mind of the consumer *e.g.*,

L.I.C. “Get your selfinsured for the future is not known”.

“We will all get old one day—Let us help each other”.

In spite of the above criticism, the advertisement has come to stay in the system. It communicates and makes goods available. It promotes purchases and stimulates consumption. It is an essential part of marketing strategy. It promotes a number of social issues and brings awareness in the masses. The subject of family planning, health care, prevention of accidents are the major themes. If certain codes, rules and regulations are followed advertising benefits overweigh those of criticism. The Ad must be legal, honest, truthful and decent. This will ensure the expansion of the advertising both in India and abroad.