

A Survey: Unethical Issues in Advertising

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Abstract - In 21st century, the role of advertising in marketing and society has become a controversial issue. Consumers reckon that advertising often violates ethics. Hence, in competitive world, advertisers are adopting unethical practices to compete with the competition. The purpose of this paper is to know the ethics in advertising and various unethical cases relating advertising in India. An empirical study is taken to understand the ethics in advertising. The data is collected by various research papers and various cases by ASCI. We have analyzed with the help of examples of different unethical practices used by advertisers in India. This clearly depicts that there is the lack of implementation of rules and regulations to control these measures.

Keywords: ASCI, Competitive World, Unethical advertisement, Marketing Communication, Ethical Issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's scenario, majority of situations that business community face the judgments regarding what is "right" or ethical and "wrong" or unethical. It is one of the tasks of ethics to distinguish between ethical and unethical business practices [1]. It is hard nut to crack to determine what is ethical or unethical. As Peter Drucker has observed, ethical concerns in business have become very important tool. Advertising, personal selling, pricing, marketing research and international marketing are all the matters of ethical issues. There are numerous issues relating to marketing ethics and present scholars and practitioners continue conflicting and challenging with the value of a socially responsible towards marketing activities. Judgment regarding various commodities deals with good or bad option [2]. Advertising has a significant impact on consumers' lives. India is an emerging economy, characterized by a large consumer base and diversity and improving consumer awareness. India due to a large consumer base, it is important to understand the right and wrong in advertising. So this study is taken to understand the ethics in advertising, to deal with various ways of ethical advertisements and to find various unethical cases in India.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Littlechild [1] Indian economy is on a boom platform. The glimpse of this boom can be seen in market sector. Indian market has been expanded. Thus, this expansion has been possible due to the advertising. But the obstacle that comes in the way of advertising is ethics. Sometimes advertising brings the information about brands which often misguides the consumers. Many studies have been conducted in different countries on unethical issues towards advertising. When we study unethical advertisements and how they affect, then it is most important to understand the ethics in advertising. It was concluded that ethics in

business decision making depends upon the assumptions that good ethics is good business.

Singhapakdi & Vitell [2] Market has always opened to criticisms about unethical practices regarding advertising. It was also argued that advertising was a western concept which slowly crept into all parts of the world and brought various effects on lifestyles and the values of the people.

Gupta Anand [3] in his research on "ethics in Advertising" indicated that the success of advertising depends upon public confidence and advertisers should fulfill their obligations towards society. It was found that unethical advertisements create negative impact on society. Also majority of people think that advertising creates negative effect on advertised products.

Subash Chander and Rishi Raj [4] In study of "Attitudes towards Advertising", it concludes that positive attitude towards advertising is more prevalent amongst women, middle and social class. For these reasons, moral issues in marketing are important.

Devi, Kanchana and Sebastina [5] It has been seen that advertisements are telecasted to persuade large gathering by numerous means of media. There are more companies that neglect their ethical responsibility by unethical advertisements. Advertising is most important of all business organization. There are more efforts being done by companies to protect the public interest.

Anbarasan and Pongianan [6] conducted a study on comparative analysis on ethics in advertisements. The study reveals that there are three important features including honesty, integrity and quality which generate value to stakeholders of the advertising. The study also indicates that in recent times ethical advertisements are adopted by many companies to increase the goodwill for the products.

Githui Donatus Mathenge[7] concluded that it is very difficult to know that advertising is ethical or not. In today market most advertisers understand the trust and confidence of the consumers which is very necessary. Even the code of ethics are drawn up by the advertising standards council of India (ASCI) has also much impact.

III. ETHICS

Ethics can be viewed as “good” and “bad”. Ethics are based upon system of moral principles which direct a person’s behavior. Ethics is concerned with what is good and wrong for individuals and society. Ethics deals with questions of what should be done, or what should not be done from the perspective of legal environment (Cunningham 1999).

Business ethics is the study of proper decisions of policies and practices[3]. It is a set of moral obligations that deal how businesses operate, how business decisions are made and how people are treated. It is knowledge where human behavior is learnt. It has been observed that ethics means a set of moral values which govern a person behavior. According to Michael J. Meyer, Ethics deals standards of behavior that our society accepts. The early theories studied ethics as a normative perspective, which means that they were concerned with "constructing and justifying the moral standards and codes that are adopted. (Vitell, 1986). Barry (1979) defines ethics as "the study of good and bad human conduct which includes various actions and values[4]."

A. Ethics in Advertising

Advertising is a major element of a business plan. Today, Advertisement plays vital role for the economic growth of a country. Advertising denotes to create popularity of specific product to public. It is the act to attract the public attention and persuade those regarding products[5].

Ethics in advertising deals with several moral issues towards advertising. Ethics in advertising means a set of well-defined principles which govern the ways of communication. In today’s challenging world, advertisements should be depicted honest representations and directly related to the purpose of advertising. Advertising ethics affects the practice of our lives and also the practice of business. (Michael, Tansey, Clark, 1994). In relation to the individual, the ethics of advertising is reflected in such principles as honesty, fairness, concern for personal development, kindness, respect for rule of "do no harm", etc. In relation to society – the ethics of advertising is expressed as social responsibility, objectivity and impartiality, tolerance of ideas statement, statement of principles of non-violence.

Advertising imposes not only consumer goods and services, which need not exist, but the system of values. Advertising has been charged with a number of ethical breaches, most of which focus on its apparent lack of societal responsibility. (Debbie Treise, Michael F. Weigold, Jenneane Conna and Heather Garrison, 1994).

B. Issues arising in Ethics

Ethical issue in advertising has become debatable question. Ethical advertising uses the truth to deceive the public. Today advertising industry has been facing criticism as the advertisement which is being telecasted does not follow norms of ethics. Some people describe it as false, unlawful, and untrue. Today, an advertisement industry faces lot of criticism which does not follow norms of ethics[6].

C. Unethical Advertisements

There are following types of unethical advertisement which lead to unethical advertisements:

- **Vulgarity:** Advertisements that are specifically pinned pointed for being inappropriate by almost all audiences. In the new era of television the commercials of televisions have also changed, certain companies often show vulgar ads regarding their products to attract more consumers and thus do a cheap promotion of their products. Some advertisements are related to deodorants and toothpastes[7].
- **Deception:** It is a false advertisement which uses misleading, false or unproven information to advertise products to consumers. Duracell ultra-power batteries are a form of deceptive advertisement.
- **Puffery:** It includes promotional material that makes boastful statements about a product or service. It is basically used by the business in order to rise up the image of the products.
- **Red Bull:** The famous energy drink Red bull shows in advertisement that after drinking it gives you wings but we actually know that it does not grow wings on your back after drinking it. Axe Deodorant: Axe deodorant (chocolate fragrant) ad which shows that after spraying it that person’s whole body turns to chocolate which is practically not at all possible.
- **Stereotypes:** It is a readymade image of a person or relationship that is easily recognizable. The famous washing powders like Rin, Tide, Wheel etc. and Wild stone fragrance do always use a woman in order to promote their brands. When characters have been shown in occupational roles, men generally work outside the home, and women are in domestic roles such as parent, spouse, or homemaker (McArthur and Eisen 1976). These ads promote stereotypes of women and girls as softer, weaker, and more passive by means of a less active pace, more fades and resolves, and softer background music (Welch et al. 1979). In addition, boys and girls typically represent different personal and social characteristics, with boys being more autonomous, and aggressive (Sternglanz and Serbin 1974).

- **Controversial advertising :** Controversial advertising are those which violates norms for social value and personal ideals. It is designed to break through the advertising cluster to capture attention and create buzz and also to attract an audience. Controversial cases can be seen in Amul Macho TV commercial (2007), Idea TV commercial (2011).
- **Surrogate advertising:** It is form of advertising which is used to promote banned products like cigarettes and alcohol, in the disguise of another product. IPL was one of the greatest brands which used kingfishers to promote initiatives.
- **Comparative advertising:** Comparative ads are those which involve names of competitors in an ads and comparing one and more attributes by an advertising. The famous controversial advertisements were Cherry blossom Vs kiwi, Colgate Vs Pepsodent. One of the famous controversial comparative advertisements was Rin and Tide Natural where in the ad of Rin it directly showed the competitor product Tide and committed that it is a better and superior washing powder than that. Another controversial comparative advertisements were Colgate and Pepsodent where Pepsodent claimed directly that Pepsodent now better than Colgate strong teeth delivers 130% germ attack power.
- **Uses Children In advertising:** In Market, Children are becoming prominent part for advertisement. Marketers are using children in their advertisements to increase sales. This is done because Indian children are allowed to watch each & every advertisement in the television, so marketers are taking advantages of it. There are many commercial ads where marketers use children even the products are not for children like, Super Nirma, Surf Excel etc. which is irrelevant for marketing point of view. These types of ads are basically to win emotion of the customers. Using children in advertisements particularly in India where many people can't afford the products but children force them to buy those products which affect their economic levels, so marketers should go for children advertisement for their relevant products only.

IV. ADVERTISING COUNCIL OF INDIA (ASCI)

The advertising council of India (ASCI) 1985 has adopted a code for self-regulation in advertising [8]. ASCI seek to ensure that advertisements conform to its code for self-regulation, which requires advertisements to be legal, decent, honest and truthful. It is registered as a not-for-profit Company under section 25 of companies act, it has goal to maintain the public confidence. It requires advertisements to be:

- Honest representations

- Fair in competition
- Non offensive to public
- Against harmful products/situations
- ASCI are not a government body, nor does it formulate rules for public or the relevant industries.

V. CASE STUDY

It is commonly asserted that qualitative research in the organizational sciences lacks the rigor and objectivity of the quantitative approach. Case studies, while commonly used for educational purposes, have been viewed in a less favorable light in terms of research. This paper suggests that case studies represent an important research track in organizational science, not only as a method of generating hypotheses for quantitative studies, but for generating and testing theory.

- **Fairness Cream (Fair and Lovely):** Fair & Lovely has been considerable ethical criticism of their activity (Karnani, 2007). Fair & Lovely was created by Unilever's HLL Indian subsidiary (Hindustan Lever Limited); the subsidiary name was changed in 2007 to HUL (Hindustan Unilever Limited). Fair & Lovely is the largest skin whitening cream on the market, holding more than 50% of the market in India, a market valued at over US\$200 million in 2006, with a 10 – 15% growth rate per annum. It is also marketed in other Asian countries, for example, Malaysia, and in some Arabic countries such as Egypt. The central product benefit claimed for Fair & Lovely is dramatic skin whitening within six weeks. HLL claims the product fulfills a social need, given that fair skin is valued in the country, even though dark skin is less vulnerable to skin diseases. It is not marketed as a pharmaceutical product and therefore does not have to prove efficacy which is disputed by on the basis of the ingredients contained in many products [9]. Advertisements in all the countries in which Fair & Lovely is sold show product users getting better jobs, getting married or having a brighter future (and being noticeably happier) as a result of their lighter skin.
- **Energy Drinks (Horlicks and Complan):** According to advertisements on Indian television, children who drink the energy drink "complan" twice a day soon become ready for exams. It asked from parents in ad if their children 'forget things they learn for their exams?' and suggests two cups of complan will change your children's brain and improve their ability to retain what they learn.' Horlicks, which is made with supplements and vitamins, claims it builds up attention, concentration and makes children stronger by making both the brain and body ready for exams'.

GlaxoSmithKline, the British company which makes Horlicks says it claims are backed by tests carried out at India's National institute of nutrition in Hyderabad which are upheld the college's Scientific Advisory Committee. Critics however said the tests were carried out on a small size of sample and that the claims would not be allowed to be made in developed countries. Leading advertising film maker Artee Surenda Nath said that these commercials are manipulative and called for them to be banned.

- **Ice Cream:** The advertisement talks about amul ice cream being made from "real milk" as opposed to "frozen desserts" which are made from "vegetable oil". The debate was on which is healthier – milk fat based ice creams or vegetable fat based frozen desserts. HUL, which markets "Kwality Walls", has filed a case in the Bombay high court against GCMMF, terming the latter's recently launched TV advertisement as "Misleading". Vadilal industries and Vadilal dairy international have common interest in the matter and are supporting HUL in the suit. HUL has sought immediate removal of the advertisements which, according to GCMMF, was launched to "educate consumers to identify and differentiate between ice-cream and frozen desserts".
- **Deodorant:** Axe deodorant (chocolate fragrance) ad shows that after spraying it, person's whole body turns to chocolate practically not at all possible. CCC said that it is a kind of vulgarity. Ad also shows that girls are licking and biting the boy [10]. The visuals were obscene and likely to cause widespread outrage. In these types of advertisements women are represented as sex objects. These sexually explicit ads portray negative image of women.

VI. CONCLUSION

The world of advertising has been introduced in market since a long period of time. We have seen various types of advertising that fall under the purview of unethical advertisements. But, today advertising is passing through lots of criticism. Among of them is relating to unethical issues. Ethics is a great tool that carries honesty and understanding for what is wrong or right. In recent times, there is a cut throat competition. To survive in competition, companies are adopting some unethical, practices. Today numbers of unethical advertisements are increasing instead of decreasing. This clearly shows the lack of implementations of rules and regulations. Hence it is urgent need for proper implementations of the laws in our country.

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