

Ethical Dilemmas of Advertising

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Abstract

Advertising is a form of communication with your audience and telling them about your product and its features. Advertisements have great effect on the consumers as they get to know about the products firstly from these. The unpleasant behavior of people towards these advertisements, towards the controversial products, their perception and opinions should be kept in mind. But some companies don't consider their ethical responsibility and go against the market ethics by making and airing unethical advertisement. An attempt should be measured to make religiously and ethically approved advertisements and the society should be kept safe from the harmful effects of advertisements. There should be a legal outline or rules and regulations set and implemented which the companies should follow during the advertising so that if there is any problem it can be solved according to law.

Keywords: Advertising, Ethical problems, Market ethics, Unethical advertisement, Legal outline.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world of unscrupulous race the organizations are advertising in heavy manner to increase the sales of their product. Advertising has become a necessary part for the sales of a product which the organizations use as a promotional or communication tool. It plays major role for the sales of different brands product.

The Ethics are defined rather more narrowly, as state of affairs in which, on moral grounds, persons ought both to do and not to do something. Such a definition implies that issues of vacillation and choice are central to ethical dilemmas.

A problem or situation that requires a person or organization to choose between mutually exclusives that must be pondered as right (ethical) or wrong (unethical). An ethical issue necessitates requires a lot of content and provisioning to figure out a solution.

The advertising purpose should be guiding people to choose the best out of so many with true facts and attributes of the product but it has gone beyond that and marketers have crossed their ethical limits in many advertisements. This needs to be controlled, so that the ethical issues of advertising can be overcome. Over the

decades, the marketers or advertising agencies have brought up many questionable ethical issues, as people have found their advertisements unpleasant to them and it has affected their behaviors (Foley 1999; Fam and Grohs, 2007).

You should always make sure you perturb any ethical issue and be on the right side of the dissonance. It is not necessary that the companies should always deceive people or make controversial ads to gain importance for their product; there are many companies that provide fair information and earn profit by providing value to customers and avoiding any ethical issues.

The ethical issues are important so that the companies by remaining in their ethical limits fulfill the customer needs and satisfy them in a decent manner (Carrigan et al, 2005).

The Morals are defined as the faith, trust, religious values that people set aside to decide what is wrong and right. The organizations use these to draw rules and regulations what is ethical and unethical in business practices. (Clow & Baack, 2007). The problem arises when the marketers don't fulfill their societal obligation and cross their line by making unethical advertisements that are socially unaccepted. Some marketers or

advertising agencies that go against the market ethics and make unethical advertisements have forced the regulating authorities to make a legal outline for their conduct (Clow & Baack, 2007).

The concerned authorities should keep an eye on the ethical issues that arise because of advertising and anyone

found guilty of doing anything wrong should be dealt with law. The ethical problems ascend because there are no proper rules or regulations formulated to bring advertising in legal circle and it allows marketers to take advantage of this (Belch and Belch, 2007).When reckoning this problem, lawyers may do well to disregard the letter of the law and realize that it is, at its heart, an ethical issue.

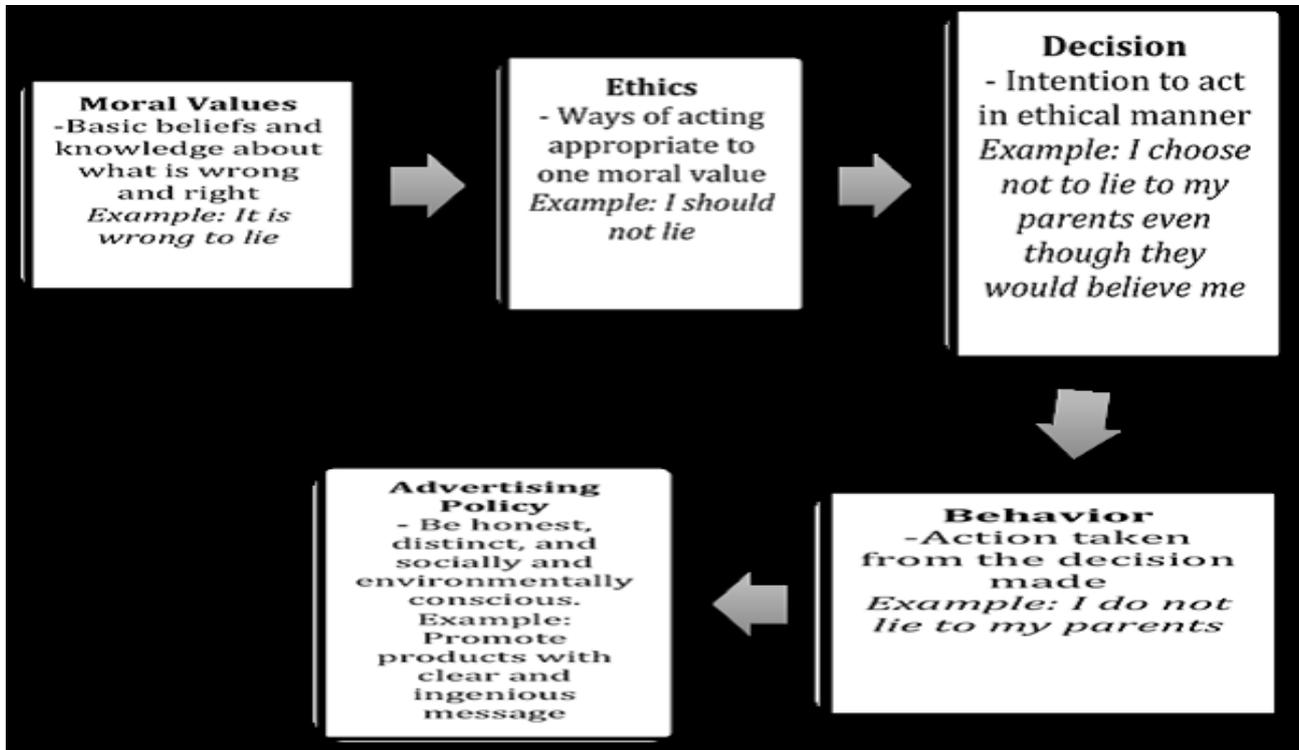


Figure 1: Moral Values and Ethics Applied to Advertising.

Source: Greenberg Jerald, 2005

It is essential that the organization understands their ethical responsibility while doing their advertisements promotion and should make advertisements that don't hurt anyone feelings, religious values, gender and race etc. Though, there are many organizations and advertising agencies that don't bother about the market ethics and continue to make unethical advertisements which should not be done in order to avoid any ethical issues. (Polonsky and Hyman, 2007).

Advertising has effects on its whole surroundings from economy, race, and religion to culture and people living in a society. The advertising plays a role like a candle in the dark as it is the only major source of company's communication with its customers which are in great number (Coyne and Traflet, 2008).

The question arises how and when it will be stopped, an answer to this question can be that there should be benchmarks set legally for advertisers and marketers who plan their advertisements to keep them in an ethical limit and avoid any ethical issues.

Advertising is a zone where a slight mistake or ignorance can have unpredictable terrible results for the organization as well as for the society (Githui, 2012).

1.1 Research Objectives

- The main intent of this research is to address the major ethical issues of advertising in detail.
- This research paper attempts to explain the factors like (Advertising message, product or services, deceptive advertising, Advertising to children, Negative content) which are useful when constructing an advertisement and does not create any ethical issues

1.2 Significance of the Study

- There is a great need to carry out a research to ensure that ethical issues are important and we need to highlight them to make public aware of the major issues they often faced. It aims to help the policymakers to realize their ethical responsibility and keep in mind these issues when planning and executing an advertisement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have been conceded to find the factors that affect the people and society due to ethical issues of advertising and what is ethically right and wrong.

Many marked authors had done research on this in past to find out the major ethical issues in advertising.

Haefner (1991) stated that there are some marketers or advertising agencies that target the children with their advertisements and it has terrible effects on them and suggested that ethical policies should be adopted while planning and executing an advertisement targeting children or others and they must be provided with reliable information.

Conna et al. (1994), study raised many questions on the advertisers intentions who target the children’s with their advertisements whether it was to inform them about their product or to take benefit from their inability to make right decisions.

Pechmann and Shih (1999) pointed out in his study that the smoking ads has negative effect on children’s as they developed habit of smoking through these smoking advertisements and suggested that it can be controlled or minimized by anti-smoking campaigns or by making them aware of its deathly effects on their health.

Waheed (2011), attempted to find out in his study the important ethical issues of advertising according to sharia’s perspective in Pakistan. His study clearly shows that the factors like religion, gender and advertising appeals were associated with the consumers and they create ethical issues for them as well.

Salvador (2012) stated that the research project has explored and critically examined the intersections between the use of concepts, principles and codes of ethics by advertising practitioners and marketing executives and the standards of practice for mass mediated and integrated marketing communications in the Dominican Republic. A qualitative inquiry approach was considered appropriate for answering the investigation queries.

A multi-methods research strategy was utilized. In this qualitative inquiry, data were gathered and triangulated using participant observation and in depth, semi structured interviews, supplemented by the review of documents and archival records. Twenty industries leaders were interviewed individually in two cities of the country, Santo Domingo and Santiago. These sites account for 98% of the nation-state’s advertising industry.

Girthui (2013) states that there are some factors those hindrances to efficient marketing and product management in Kenya because of the ethical issues associated with them. The study further stated that the variables like stakeholder satisfaction, lack of value observance, harm prevalence and privacy enhancement are the major variables that hinder the efficient marketing. It was found that the organizations don’t value much the interests of different stakeholders and provide them with value that results in ethical problems for the organizations.

3. MAJOR ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF ADVERTISING

The major ethical issues that arise because of advertising are deceptive advertising, advertising to children, advertising message and negative advertising. The advertising agencies or marketers should plan and execute their advertisement in a way that it does not arise any ethical issue and is socially accepted as well. These issues need to be addressed in detail in order to avoid problems in future and help marketers to realize their ethical responsibility and do things more rightly in future.

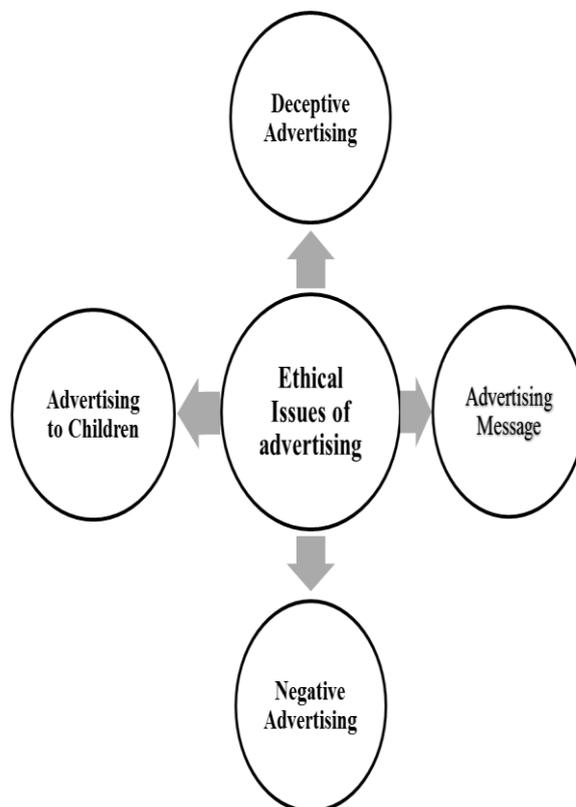


Figure 2: Major Ethical issues of Advertising.

3.1 Advertising to Children

The children have not enough maturity or experience of making right decisions or choice and are easily molded by what they see, listen and taught. But some marketers take advantage of this by making certain ads targeting them to earn profit without taking their ethical responsibility. It could have ruthless effects on the children mentally as well as physically and this may lead them to develop bad habits. When marketers make advertisements they don’t keep market ethics in mind that what would be effect of these on the children and due to this reason children exposed to these types of advertisements develop excessive eating of junk food and they try products which are not meant to be for them like cigarette and alcohol which is not good for their health and have inferior effects on them.

The children are the ones in the family that spend most of their time in watching the television and are most exposed to different commercials that are not for them and have negative effect on them. It causes major ethical issue because children are not the ones who should be exposed to these commercials which have nothing to with them and marketers should take their ethical responsibility to ensure that they are kept safe from this Children are deemed to need more protection from the persuasively black art of the advertiser (Stan brook, 2002).

According to many statistical studies it had been seen that the marketers find children an easy target as their watch the most television in family and because of their inability to make right choices. Advertisers for earning profit target them which ethically unacceptable and it's of concern for parents as well because the children are defenseless (Preston, 2004).

The Scandalous products like (alcohol, tobacco, obesity and gambling) are dangerous for children when advertised and its results can be terrible. Many children develop habit of eating junk food by watching different advertisement's and thus results in being getting fat which causes health issues. The children are not mature that they can make right decisions they make decisions on the things they see not by rationally thinking. Many games companies target the children through attractive gaming ads without telling them the hazards of playing too much game that results in weakening of their eye sight and also affects their growth rate according to recent scientist's research. The social and demographic groups should be protected; for instance, children are should not be targeted with advertising messages meant for adults. Packaging of alcohol should not demean non-drinkers or show disrespect for individuals who chose not to drink.

The misrepresentation of nutrition facts in different advertisements has adversely affected children's food consumption behavior. (Schmitt et al, 2007).

3.2 Deceptive Advertising

In today's world we cannot trust on anyone and so do on some organizations whose purpose is to only earn profit or increase their sales either by telling truth or by providing false facts about the products. Many companies forget while earning profit that the product they are advertising fulfills what's been promise about it or not or it's just a way to take advantage of people problems or needs and mislead them through their deceptive advertising' 'for example" people go through different problems like being fat, having unfair skin color etc. But many marketers try to exploit these issues and try to take benefit of it by advertising the product to them which does not in reality solve their problems and fulfills its promises. The assertions or promises made in different advertisements about obesity are mostly misleading to customers as they don't found it much useful (Cleland et al, 2002).

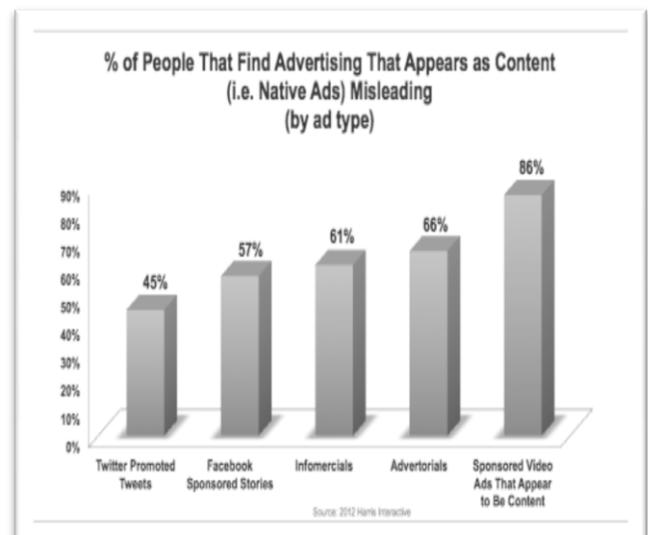
The markets should stop deceiving people and taking benefits of children and women inability to make right decisions. The deceptive advertising is morally questionable and exposed as it misrepresents the facts to people which are ethically wrong (Carson et al, 1985).

It is unethical to take advantage of customer's problems and mislead them by providing products or by making promises about products that are not fulfilled. The markets should not turn a blind eye on this and should inform the people about its product correctly in order to avoid any ethical issue because at the end goodwill of the company is everything that matters.

Advertisements are measured as deceptive only when the actual facts are fabricated or wrong information is provided to the targeted people and as a result people will developed negative perspective about it (Attas, 1999). Due to deceptive advertising people lost trust on the companies and are discouraged to buy anything next time even if it is good for them.

Deceptive advertising is seen mostly seen during the celebratory seasons where marketers offer various discounts on ads and bargains which are not always provided to them. As a result it affects the honest marketers who try to provide extra value to their customers on special occasions but they hesitate to trust them again (Agee, 2006).

Not all the marketers mislead about the products but majority of them they do and this affect the good ones who are not lying about their product because the customers are reluctant to buy something like that again because they knows once they had been deceived and that can happen again.



Source: MediaBrix survey on native adds

Figure 3: Percentage of People find advertising misleading.

In the above figure a survey was conducted in November 2012 by MediaBrix to discover which native ads people find the most misleading.

According to this survey people find twitter promoted tweets as least misleading which is 45 % and then Facebook sponsored stories which is 57 %, infomercials as 61 %, advertorials 66 % and sponsored video ads that appear to be content the most which is 86 %. The advertorials has a significant percentage value which is 66 % which means a lot of people find the advertorials as misleading to them.

3.3 Advertising Message

The content of advertisement as opposed to the appeal or theme is more important. The impact of message on people not only depends on what is said, but more importantly on how the message is said. People must follow its style, format, tone, words and all those execution methods which the advertiser uses for executing the advertisement. So it has become very important to consider the effects of advertising message on people especially children. The controversial ads versus ads with educational content that will educate customer with rational state of mind, should children's be taken into consideration when making the advertisement as children are directly and indirectly exposed as they are part of every family.

The controversial ads versus ads with educational content that will educate customer with rational state of mind, should children's be taken into consideration when making the advertisement as children are directly and indirectly exposed as they are part of every family. Advertising is unique and most fruitful method of communication in the world (Reichert, 2003).

Now a days, advertisers use different themes in the messages to make the advertisement more powerful and attractive. Themes include status, style, luxury, fashion, rituals, beauty, success and happiness which belong to different cultures. So that it should consider that social contradictions, class and religion difference and workplace conflicts are not shown in the advertisement message themes. The advertising is debated to build a 'consumer-media culture' where it can grasp an influential and honored position in the culture, economy and as well as in society (Brookes & Kelly, 2009).

The today's children found themselves more independent and rational. Due to this they don't consider anyone advice from parents or others when buying a product. The advertisers should keep this thing in mind when planning or airing an advertisement as it has direct impact on them. The children ageing from 6 to 11 years are still the development process of physical, intellectual and social skills (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Lacking cognitive and intellectual skills the children are at menace of learning bad things and social ethics due to continuous acquaintance to advertisements (Macklin, 2003). The advertising message has great effect on the people because of its ability of being very influential and persuasive (Treise & Weigold, 1994).

Advertising message has become an importance part for the organizations to communicate and create their image in the public eye. And they use it to target adults and children as they are not approachable to traditional direct advertising (Goodman & Dretzin, 1999).

3.4 Negative Advertising

Negative advertising depicts competitors in a negative light in an effort to make the advertiser look better. This type of advertising is used in the political arena as well as the business world. To create a morally responsible advertising campaign, do not deviate from the truth. A negative advertising deceives people and build a bad impression in mind. For example, a company may purposely lie about a rival company's products or services to make its own look better. An ethical approach to this same situation would be to simply point out the obvious flaws in the competitor's products as you compare them to your own. The negative advertising about different products and brands are found of fabricating the truth and damage the brands perception in the peoples mind (Tybout et al. 1981, Wyatt and Badger 1984).

Although you're still depicting your rival in a negative light, you're making fair comparisons so it's considered ethical negative advertising. Another aspect of ethical negative advertising involves respecting the dignity of each individual. This becomes a controversial issue as it often involves advertisements that are considered racist or offensive to a particular group of people. For an advertising campaign to be considered ethically responsible, it must not discriminate against one group. In reality, this is hard to accomplish because it's difficult to keep everyone appeased. The negative advertising alters high mental activity and results in different behavior and purchase intentions (Barrio-Garcia and Luque Martinez, 2003).

The negative advertising is increasingly used by advertisers to sometimes exploit other brands and sometimes triggering different purchase actions because of negative advertisements. The message advertised is not acceptable socially and has bad impact on the people. Negative advertising has led to many problems as it is thought as unlawful and deceitful way of promotion (Jamieson, 2000).

The negative advertising should be discouraged as it mislead and exploits people and facts. There should be a fair competition for marketing and advertising a product rather than finding shortcuts to get at the top.

Positive Effects of Advertising	Negative Effects of Advertising
Awareness	Misrepresentation
Economic Benefits	Negative advertisement content
Social Benefits	Controversial Products
Choice	Children

Figure 4: Comparison of Positive and negative advertising

The figure above shows the comparison of positive and negative advertising which can be useful when advertising adds either negative advertising is more effective and yield the desire results or positive. It can be seen clearly that the positive way of advertising is more effective as provides freedom, social benefits and economic benefits as well.

4 CONCLUSION

Our study has highlighted the major issues of advertising in detail that cause ethical issues. This secondary research focuses on the dependent and independent variables of ethical issues in advertising that are ethical problems in advertising such as in content and message of advertisements, advertising to children, harmful products, deceptive advertising and negative advertising. This has been seen that the companies have turned a blind eye on the market ethics just to advertise their products without caring that they are doing it in a right way or not. The companies or advertising agencies should think in the best interest of its customers or for the people that the advertisement they are advertising is truly educating them not misleading and is socially accepted. There’s a thin line between ethical and unethical which the marketers do not see while advertising their products just for the sake of profit and go against the market ethics. Ethical issues differ from country to country as every country has its own culture and values.

The issues ascends because there are no benchmarks for advertising, there should be standards set in legal terms so that if anyone go against the advertising ethics has to face legal problems in doing so. The public should be aware of this black art of advertising and should be alarm in protecting themselves from these unethical practices of advertising. The findings of this research are of prime importance for the organizations and advertising agencies that make advertisements for their customers in different part of the world.

4.1 Research Limitations

In order to highlight the ethical issues in advertising, secondary research was directed which further helps to get more information and to check its accuracy. The work was done with inescapable limitations. But the stout limitation was money and time. Although being the graduation

students we conducted secondary research due to shortage of time and limited resources and made efforts to illustrate the major ethical issues in detail faced in advertising.

4.2 Future Directions

There is lot of work that can be done on this field in different countries. There is very less research carried out on this topic and more research can help to revealed more ethical issues that are not yet discovered. The future researches can start with qualitative interviews of consumers and managers and can work by adding more different variables for accurate results, so that researchers can better know the opinion and perspective of both buyers and sellers.

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