

Ethics in Advertising

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Abstract

Advertisements are given by the marketers not only to give information and awareness of their product but able to promote their products and services. Ethics means doing right things in right way. Many studies have suggested that it is important for a company to indulge in ethical advertising of products and services. Globalization plays an important place in today's business environment, therefore it becomes necessary for companies to do ethical advertising of their products because ethical advertising basically looks after the interests of the society and also helps a company gain competitive advantage as competition has increased to a great level. Ethics is the most important feature of the advertising industry. Though there are many benefits of advertising but then there are some points which don't match the ethical norms of advertising. So ethics in advertisement means giving true information of their product in right way. An ethical ad is the one which doesn't lie, doesn't make or false claims and is in the limit of decency. This paper is an effort to explain the ethical issue in advertisement. This paper deals with ethical issue in advertisements of certain products and also the role of ASCI i.e. the Advertising Standard Control of India in dealing with unethical advertisements.

Keywords: - Advertisements, ethics, ethical issue, ASCI, unethical.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics or moral philosophy is basically a branch of philosophy which involves systematic, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. It basically answers the question about what is right or wrong. The term ethics derives from the Greek word "ethos" which means customs or habits. Ethics primarily investigates the questions like what is the best way for people to live. And what actions are right or wrong in a particular circumstances? The

purpose of having ethics in a society is basically to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime.

Advertising is basically an audio or visual form of marketing communication that employs an openly sponsored, no personal message to promote or sell a product, service or idea. Advertising is communicated through various mass media, including old media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, outdoor advertising or direct mail; or new media such as search results, blogs, websites or text messages.

So basically, advertising supported by the ethics that prevail in a country, helps a company in attracting the consumers to buy their products or services or anything else, like idea or a message or a person or a place. The main purpose of doing advertising ethically is basically because of the norms and rules of society in which a company operates. For example, the television commercial advertisement of “Amul Macho” (2007), which introduced an actress, who washes a male underwear, with a tagline of 'ye toh bada toing hai' was found to be ethically wrong, so in turn the Advertising Standards Council of India cleared it for public viewing.

Ethics

According to Rushworth Kidder the various definitions of ethics have usually stated the phrases as “science of the ideal human character” or “science of moral duty”. Larry Churchill said, “Ethics understood as the capacity to think critically about moral values and direct or actions in terms of such values, is a generic human capacity”. Ethics can be defined as one's own moral principles which may differ from person to person. Contradicting with the views of Rushworth Kidder, we cannot say that ethics have to have any scientific background as science is not variable. It basically follows rule of thumb whereas ethics change with perspectives of the people and they may not be same for everyone. What is right for one individual may not be the same for another. So, ethics can be called as right means to achieve the ends which may differ with the change in people's lookout.

Advertising

“Advertising is a form of nonperson communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media” (Bovee, 1992). Breaking up this definition, first of all it can be said that advertising is of non-personal nature which means that there is no direct or physical contact between the marketer and the consumer. Second, it is a paid form of promotion which is charged as an expense against the profits of the company. Third, it is persuasive or influential in nature which either motivates the consumers to like or dislike the product or service offered. Fourth, it is done by the identified sponsors i.e. either the company itself or some agency can be hired by the company. Fifth, various media options are available to advertise a product like television, newspapers, radio channels etc. “Comparison is the soul of advertisements. Problem emanates when the implied comparison becomes increasingly explicit.”(Prof. Kavita Sharma, Advertising and Planning & Decision Making) Advertising is the prime source of promotion for any company. Companies try to compete over the advertisements as it helps them in constructing their brand image which ultimately helps a company in gaining the loyalty of the consumers. But the comparison becomes competition for earning a larger market share when there is an uncensored comparison amongst various brands.

REVIEW OF LITREATURE

Consumers buying behaviour has always been given so much importance in the literature study of impact of advertising regarding its effectiveness (**Ajzen, 2002**).

It was found that most of the time consumers buying behaviour is influenced by liking or disliking of consumer towards the advertisement of the product, advertised (**Smith et al., 2002**).

Et al., (1992) argued that it is actually the emotional reaction which is developed after the advertising, for the product advertised, that influences the consumer buying behaviour.

In the words of **Gorn (1982)**, the consumer behaviour towards a product is totally dependent upon advertising, without any assessment of the quality of the product.

The impact of advertising on the consumer's buying trends and habits has always been present (**George, 1989**). It was also found that sometimes the advertisers over exaggerate the product's

description and benefits in such a tactful manner that consumer gets psychologically under the pressure of advertising persuasiveness and intentionally decides to buy the advertised product.

Brunello (2010) focused on the relationship between ethics and advertising and basically brought forward the viewpoints of various specialists and consumers regarding ethical advertising. His paper focused on three contradictory viewpoints, namely advocacy, accuracy and acquisitiveness. He also included the concepts of advertising regulations, which includes the norms and rules and most importantly ethics that advertising companies should look at the international level, European level and local level.

Hemalat (2013) stressed on the responsibilities of the advertisers, that it is their responsibility to ethically place their advertisements about various products and services. She found that puffery, graduation, unethical or deceptive advertising, offensive or ads having bad ratings are some of the unethical practices. She also found that comparative advertising is another unethical practice of advertising besides fraudulent and deceptive advertising. Advertising is not unethical if it's done in the right way. She emphasized that honesty, integrity and quality are the important features of ethical advertising. These features create value to all the stakeholders of the advertising media. Thus she concluded that strictly adhering to ethical values in advertisement will increase the market share for the advertised product which is need of the hour for the advertising media- the print and electronic.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India is still observed as an idealistic country when it comes to ethics. So, with respect of advertisement, whether ethics is followed in Indian advertisement and if it is not followed what is procedure that is followed by the regulatory bodies.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To know the unethical practices in advertisements
2. To know about the working of the Regulatory bodies of advertisements.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is purely based on the secondary data available from the various websites. It includes articles, newspaper, various research paper etc.

ETHICAL ADVERTISING

“Advertising is about norms and values, aspirations and prejudices. It is about culture” says Anil Ambani.

Advertising is a concept that is very dynamic in nature and when we add the ethics in advertising, it becomes even more complex, as both of these have a variable character and are based on perspectives of the individuals or groups of individuals. The creativity in advertising is the essence which is nothing, but a human based characteristic and may vary from person to person. Also, ethics as said before may not be same for every individual. So when the principles of righteousness and morality are added to advertising, it takes a form of ethical advertising. Though, the meaning of ethics may be different for a consumer and a marketer, because there are different economic motives underlying. The marketer running a business will always try to maximize company's profits and the consumer will always try to maximize his/her level of satisfaction. When the company resides on the principles of customer satisfaction along with the motive of earning profits, it adopts an ethical way of gaining customer loyalty and building up a strong brand image and convinces the consumers to try and retain their product. Here, the ethical advertising comes into picture. The marketers following ethical advertising basically base their advertisements on the true characteristics of the product and do not mislead the consumers by exaggerating the claims and also do not take advantage of any fear of consumers (like low confidence due to obesity, dark complexion etc.).

ISSUES IN ETHICAL ADVERTISING

- **Advertising to children:** Marketers should not target the innocence of children and utilize it to their benefit as children do not have the ability to evaluate or judge the right and wrong for themselves. So, it is important for marketers to shift their focus from the children to other people in the society that can understand well and evaluate the effectiveness of their advertising. So, we can say that it is absolutely unethical to view

children as their potential customers for products which may not favour them rather they should focus on the upper age segment.

- **Disputable products:** It is very important for consumers to identify and understand their needs and weaknesses. It is easy for the marketers to target the weaknesses like cigarettes, tobacco, gambling etc. which are not good for health, if consumed. Advertising of such products is banned in many countries including India.
- **Emotional advertising:** In a culture which encourages human behaviour and relationships, the majority of population in India is more sensitive towards emotional acts especially women. So it becomes easier for the marketers to base their advertisements on emotional values to direct a link between the consumer and the brand.
- **Materiality:** Advertisements which link success and materiality tends to mislead consumers and persuade them to buy the products which may not be affordable by them to enhance their lifestyle. This creates an image of happiness linked to material goods which is not tangent with our values.
- **Puffery:** Sometimes marketers tend to exaggerate about the products to manipulate consumer buying behaviour. It is considered to be highly unethical as the product may not possess such qualities claimed by the seller. This is known as puffery.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

By going through various articles there are various unethical practices followed in advertising. Some of them are:-

- Deceptive advertising is one form of unethical behaviour. The advertisers try to deceive the consumer with false offers, discount sales. And also giving wrong information, dishonest, etc.
- Unhealthy comparison of one product with substitute and trying to degrade other substitute available in market. Example: - Rin and Tide.
- Women are used as sex symbols in advertisement and that to for the product which are highly unrelated to them.

- Claims not proved example being Horlicks or any other such kind of drink which say that is good for growth of children, which increase mathematical intelligence but, nowhere it is either tested or proved in laboratory.
- Puffery advertising- here the advertisements and that too for the products which are highly unrelated to them.
- Using children in advertisements for some unrelated products.
- Giving false information about the product. Example- being Maggi which earlier told that is too good for health but, after complaint is lodged it was tested in laboratories and proved that it contains mono sodium glutamate and lead content which is very bad for the health.

Regulatory Body of Advertisements

The Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) is established in the year 1985 is committed to the self- regulation in Advertising, ensuring the protection of the interests of consumers. ASCI was formed with the support of all four sectors connected with Advertising i.e. Advertiser, Advertising Agencies, media and other like PR agencies, Market research Companies etc. ASCI having the Consumer Complaints Council is dedicated to the movement of self- regulation in the advertising.

ASCI elected Srinivasan K Swamy as its Chairman in September 2016. Before this, Swamy was the President of the Advertising Agencies Association of India. He is also on the Board of Audit Bureau of Circulation.

The chairman of ASCI, SK Swamy has told in one of his interview that ASCI have been a playing as advisory role in the advertising industry since its establishment and this power was questioned by the advertiser in past. But, the Supreme Court made it clear that ASCI can adjudicate on their ads and has recognized ASCI's role. So, no advertiser can question the interference of ASCI.

ASCI is having lot of MOUs like the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The department of Consumer Affairs, Food Safety and Standard Authority of India, and the Department of Ayurveda, yoga and Naturopathy and all other kinds of medical associations. These organisation will be taking actions on the advertiser who are not following ASCI code.

SOME UNETHICAL ADVERTISEMENT

➤ Dove failed to celebrate the beauty of diversity.

After posting a three-second Facebook video ad in October 2017, Dove faced a PR disaster after demonstrating a black woman turning white. As a result of one of the most unsuccessful advertising campaigns Facebook has ever known, social media users in the United States and Europe urged a boycott of Dove products and compared Dove marketing with racist 1880s posters.

➤ Hindustan Unilever Limited- Kissan Ketchup

The advertisement's claim "boring roti- sabji ko banaiye yummy kissan roll" is misleading. It was observed that while the CCC agreed with the advertiser's submission that Ketchup, like a condiment, enhances the specific tastes of the dish, thereby making it appealing to the children. However, calling out regular "roti-sabji" as boring was considered to be discrediting home cooked food and also disparaging good food practises. The advertisement also contravened the ASCI Guidelines on Advertising of Food & Beverages.

➤ Bajaj Auto Ltd (Bajaj Pulsar):

The television and YouTube advertisement's showing the following visuals were found to be objectionable 1) boy seated on a trolley and speeding in it in a supermarket store, 2) boy dressed in superman costume jumping off a diving platform into an isolated swimming pool with no lifeguard shown, 3) boys shown to be standing on a water slide and as a result slipping and tumbling in a water resort. The CCC concluded that these actions portray dangerous acts and manifest a disregard for safety. The visuals are also likely to encourage minors to emulate such acts which could cause harm or injury.

➤ Mothers Lap IVF Centre:

The print advertisement's claim "Till now, more than 4500 Childless Couples Have Been Blessed With the Happiness of Parenthood" was not substantiated with any supporting evidence or through a third-party validation nor did they provide any market

survey or comparative data versus other similar service providers to prove that their network is larger than other similar organizations or through an audited report or third-party validation. The advertiser should have provided an independent audit or a CA certificate supporting these details. The headline “har aangan aaye nanha mehmaan” (let every home have a child) was ambiguous and implied assurance of success.

CONCLUSION

Just as the media of social communication themselves have enormous influence everywhere, so advertising, using media as its vehicle, is a pervasive, powerful force shaping attitudes and behaviour in today's world. Unethical practices are followed even in advertisements as there even in other field.

Unethical practices are followed are even in advertisement as is there even in other fields. But we have a strong regulatory body like ASCI which will receive complaints regarding unethical advertisement and it can on own start finding the truthfulness of the advertisement. It gives sufficient time for the advertiser to defend it about their advertisement. But, if they fail to do so, then ASCI will instruct the advertiser to either withdraw or modify the advertisement.

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