

Ethics in Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Marketers use advertisements to not only raise awareness of their goods and services but also to provide information about them. Ethics is the practice of doing morally right actions. Numerous studies have indicated that a company's engagement in ethical promotion of goods and services. Today's business environment is heavily influenced by globalization, which makes it imperative for businesses to ethically advertise their goods. Ethical advertising not only promotes a company's interests but also gives it a competitive edge in an era of intense competition.

The most crucial aspect of the advertising industry is ethics. While advertising has many advantages, there are also certain aspects that go against the moral standards of the industry. Hence, being ethical in advertising entails providing accurate and appropriate product information.

An advertisement that stays within the bounds of decency and refrains from lying or making false claims is considered ethical. This essay aims to clarify the moral dilemma surrounding advertisements. This essay addresses the moral dilemmas raised by certain product advertisements as well as the function of ASCI, or the Advertising Standard Control of India, in addressing such issues.

Keywords: Advertising, ethics, unethical advertising, age.

Introduction

Every firm depends heavily on advertising to stay in operation. In the current competitive landscape, any business that wants to reach its target audience must recognize the value of advertising. In addition to helping marketers connect with their target audience, advertising helps consumers in a number of ways, including raising awareness, educating consumers about the good or service, and fostering a liking for it. With its range of appeals and execution strategies, it occasionally entertains the audience in addition to informing them. Despite having such beneficial responsibilities in society, advertising has

frequently come under fire for a number of reasons. The public has responded negatively to it, citing violations of moral, ethical, and social norms of behavior.

In the modern world, advertising has a significant influence on people's perceptions of other people, themselves, and the environment around them. The impact of some advertising produced by local, national, and international businesses to society is seriously doubtful during a time when reports of violence against women are on the rise throughout the nation. Some prevalent difficulties in modern advertising are erotic advertisements that feature men and women in inadequate clothing, the use of filthy language, and the representation of women as commodities or sex objects.

Companies continually approach even young children in an effort to sell them their products. Ads that are careless and immoral and that are common in the consumer environment can have terrible effects on society. This article aims to investigate how consumers across a range of age groups view four ethical issues in advertising that have frequently agitated the public. These concerns include surrogate advertising, child-targeted advertising, product placement that raises eyebrows, and the use of strong sexual overtones in commercials.

Literature Review

Ethics in advertising is an area of controversy that has attracted a great deal of research. Advertising is devoid of a moral approach to featured campaigns for products, services or even ideas due to a narrow ethical understanding – Arruda and Arruda (1999).

Advertising practices and ethics, J. J. Boddewyn (1994) in his article defended about the growing indecent advertisements in the range of countries. He studied the “size of the problem in a global scale” and also helped the advertising people on how to tackle the problem.

Globalization seems difficult to accept by the consumers from different cultural and social

backgrounds when it comes to ad campaigns, Chan K. et al. (2007) underline that.

Empirical evidence has also shown that advertisers while designing the adverts to be targeted at consumers should take into account the social customs and culture of the targeted consumers (Waller and Fam 2000, Fam and Waller 2003, Waller et al. 2005).

Ethical issues considered for the study:

Advertising to children: The American Psychological Association in issued statements condemning marketing confined to children as responsible for potential harmful physical issues including childhood cyberspace addiction whenever children are exposed to advertisements that i.e. promote junk foods, candies, sugary cereals and soft drinks, Bakir and Vitell, 2010.

Nairn and Fine (2008) addressed the issue – “When is it fair to advertise to children?”. Their research aimed on investigating the age at which children orient themselves towards the persuasive purpose of the marketers and analyse the advertisements. As their research indicates, the children of any age, young or old, are equally prone to the advertisements’ alluring messages and can be easily swayed.

Advertising of controversial products: Belch and Belch (1996) comment that the advertising of products like contraceptives and personal hygiene products are offensive.

Fam and Waller (2003) conducted their study on students of four different Asian countries. Through the study of the value system of Asian countries the authors have put forth that considering the Asians are surrounded by foreign advertising and media and a culture which adheres to annoying advertising quite easily; they are rather lucky to be exposed to offensive advertising.

Aaker and Bruzzone (1985) in their study found that the commercials of feminine hygiene products and women’s undergarments caused maximum

irritation among the viewers due to the nature of the product.

Use of sex appeal in advertising: Cohan (2001) points out that advertisers use the female body to attract the attention of viewers to a product or service and thus induce them to make a purchase and boost company sales.

The study by **Henthorne and LaTour (1995)** indicated that the use of high levels of erotic contents in advertisements is not culturally tolerable to the viewers and they do not consider them as morally correct. The viewers develop negative feelings towards the advertisement and the brand.

Surrogate advertising: Since tobacco and Alcohol products are harmful to a person’s health, they do something more serious. These advertisements are therefore banned by the law. Rather than using the advertisements which are much easier, the manufacturers use surrogate advertisement to woo the consumers to their products. There is also controversy concerning surrogate advertising because such advertisements tend to target products that are harmful to the health of people even though they are not being advertised²³⁴⁶⁹²⁶⁷. Singh and Sandhu (2011) further note in their study that surrogate advertising for such products “makes it easier for the population to try them and fosters their use.”

Objective of study

The aim of the research is to evaluate whether some divergence of opinion on certain ethical issues pertaining to advertising exists depending on the age of the consumers, especially advertising to children, advertising of sex-related products, advertising of controversial products, and surrogate advertising.

Research Methodology

The research was realized through a field survey oriented primary study which involved the use of a structured questionnaire. Published sources did not give the major information but supplemented what was already established. The study is a cross

sectional and hypothesis testing study. Questionnaires were provided to the respondents through the hand delivery and mail12 addressing the convenience sampling method. 60 filled-in questionnaires were selected for the study. Ethic scaling which was relevant in this study was 1being. A five Point Likert Scale used on respondents ranged between Number one representing "strongly disagree" to Number five which meant "strongly agree" regarding the ethical perception of the respondents as to the ethical concerns. This is done with the help of Cross-tabulation and Chi-square test which will be illustrated in further sections.

Hypothesis

Table 1 presents the gender and age group of the respondents considered for the study.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of respondents		
Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18-30	41	38.50%
31-45	32	30.10%
46-60	19	18.20%
Above 60	14	13.20%
Total	107	100%
Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	48	44.90%
Female	59	55.10%
Total	107	100%

Tests of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Null Hypotheses: There is no significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that the way controversial products are advertised in public media is unethical

Alternate Hypotheses: There is significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that the way controversial products are advertised in public media is unethical

Table 2: Cross Tabulation for 'The manner in which controversial products are advertised in public media is unethical' by Age					
The manner in which controversial products are advertised in public media is unethical.	Age Groups				Total
	18-30	31-45	46-60	Above 60	
Strongly Disagree	7.80%	8.10%	2.00%	0.00%	5.80%
Disagree	24%	21.90%	15.50%	5.70%	19.50%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31.20%	23.10%	26.80%	12.90%	25.60%
Agree	31.20%	36.30%	39.20%	38.60%	35.20%
Strongly Agree	5.40%	10.60%	16.50%	42.80%	14.00%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 2 shows that 86.5% of respondents in the age group "above 60" and 36.6% of respondents in the age group "18-30," 46.9% of respondents in the age group "31-45," and 55.7% of respondents in the age group "46-60" agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 2.1: Test of Significance of Association of 'The manner in which controversial products are advertised in public media is unethical' with Age			
	Value	Df	pValue
Pearson Chi-Square	83.535	12	<0.001

The p-value indicated in **Table 2.1** is less than the level of significance (0.05). So, the null hypothesis is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is accepted. Respondents of different age groups significantly differ in their opinion on the statement.

Hypothesis 2

Null Hypotheses: There is no significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that advertising to children is unethical, as they may not fully understand the company's intent to sell.

Alternate Hypotheses: There is significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that advertising to children is unethical, as they may not fully understand the company's intent to sell.

Table 3: Cross Tabulation for 'Advertising to children is unethical as children are unable to understand the company's intention to sell' by Age					
Advertising to children is unethical as children are unable to understand the company's intention to sell	Age Groups				Total
	18-30	31-45	46-60	Above 60	
Strongly Disagree	3.90%	1.30%	1.00%	2.90%	2.40%
Disagree	21%	19.40%	12.40%	4.30%	16.70%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15.60%	11.90%	10.30%	8.60%	12.60%
Agree	42.40%	43.10%	44.30%	38.60%	42.50%
Strongly Agree	17.10%	24.40%	32%	45.70%	25.80%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 3 shows that 59.5 % of the respondents belonging to the age group 18 – 30, 67.5% of the

respondents belonging to the age group 31 – 45, 76.3% of the respondents belonging to the age group 46 – 60, and 84.3 % of the respondents in the 'above 60' age group agreed or strongly agreed that advertising to children is unethical as children are unable to understand the company's intention to sell.

Table 3.1: Test of Significance of Association of 'Advertising to children is unethical as children are unable to understand the company's intention to sell' with Age			
	Value	Df	pValue
Pearson Chi-Square	35.609	12	<0.001

The p-value indicated in **Table 3.1** is less than the level of significance (0.05), so the null hypothesis is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is accepted. Thus, it can be said that there is significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups regarding the statement.

Hypothesis 3

Null Hypotheses: There is no significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups it is unethical to use strong sexual appeals in advertisements.

Alternate Hypotheses: There is significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups it is unethical to use strong sexual appeals in advertisements.

Table 4: Cross Tabulation for 'It is unethical to use strong sexual appeals in advertisements' by Age					
It is unethical to use strong sexual appeals in advertisements.	Age Groups				
	18-30	31-45	46-60	Above 60	Total
Strongly Disagree	4.90%	3.10%	3.10%	0.00%	3.40%
Disagree	11%	8.80%	4.10%	7.10%	8.60%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20.00%	10.00%	10.30%	4.30%	13.20%
Agree	33.70%	38.10%	36.10%	31.40%	35.20%
Strongly Agree	30.20%	40.00%	46%	57.20%	39.70%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 4 shows that 63.9 % of the respondents belonging to the age group 18 – 30, 78.1% of the respondents belonging to the age group 31 – 45, 82.5% of the respondents belonging to the age group 46 – 60, and 88.5 % of the respondents in the 'above 60' age group agreed or strongly agreed to the statement.

Table 4.1: Test of Significance of Association of 'It is unethical to use strong sexual appeals in advertisements' with Age			
	Value	Df	pValue
Pearson Chi-Square	33.042	12	0.001

The p-value indicated in **Table 4.1** is less than the level of significance (0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is accepted. There is significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that it is unethical to use strong sexual appeals in advertisements.

Hypothesis 4

Null Hypotheses: There is no significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that surrogate advertising is an unethical practice.

Alternate Hypotheses: There is significant difference in opinion among the respondents of different age groups that surrogate advertising is an unethical practice.

Table 5: Cross Tabulation for 'Surrogate advertising is an unethical practice' by Age					
Surrogate advertising is an unethical practice.	Age Groups				Total
	18-30	31-45	46-60	Above 60	
Strongly Disagree	5.40%	1.90%	5.20%	4.30%	4.10%
Disagree	29%	21.90%	12.40%	12.90%	21.60%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27.80%	29.40%	23.60%	17.00%	26.10%
Agree	24.80%	28.80%	32.00%	42.90%	29.80%
Strongly Agree	13.20%	18.00%	26.80%	22.90%	18.50%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 5 shows that 38.1 % of the respondents belonging to the age group 18 – 30, 46.9% of the respondents belonging to the age group 31 – 45, 58.8 % of the respondents belonging to the age group 46 – 60, and 65.8 % of the respondents in the 'above 60' age group agreed or strongly agreed to the statement.

Table 5.1: Test of Significance of Association of 'Surrogate advertising is an unethical practice' with Age			
	Value	Df	pValue
Pearson Chi-Square	30.837	12	0.002

The p-value indicated in **Table 5.1** is less than the level of significance (0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and an alternative hypothesis is accepted. Respondents of different age groups significantly differ in their opinion on the statement.

Findings

The research indicates that individuals in the 60 and over category exhibit more concern for ethical issues as compared to people within the 18 to 30 age category. The traditional beliefs are still held in high esteem in Indian society, but the forces of modernization are beginning to set in. This means that people included in the current study between the ages of 18 and 30 appear to be less critical of the ethical issues in advertising addressed in this paper than people from other age groups.

Some reasonable percentages of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that companies should not advertise controversial products. The controversy on such advertisement differed with respondents of different ages. 95.7 percent of respondents who were 'above 60' agreed or strongly agreed with it, 89.7 of 18-30, 85.1 of 31-45, 91.7 of 46-60.

The advertisements that target children were met with differing opinions from the respondents' age group on whether they are acceptable or not. Many of the respondents from different age ranges claimed that such targeting is immoral because kids cannot understand what the advertisement is trying to sell.

84.3 percent of respondents aged "above 60" agreed or strongly agreed that such advertising practice is a breach of ethics. As did respondents aged 70.9 percent, 18 to 30 encompassing 59.5 percent, 67.5 percent in the age group 31 to 45, and 76.3 percent in the age group 46 to 60 also agreed to this issue. This was about three-quarters of them making aging decision.

Satisfying the strong sexual appeal commercial requirement is where significant difference justified the age group's opinion. Sex-related advertisements are regarded as immoral in the view of 83.5% of participants of ages 46-60, 78.1% of people ages 31-45, 83.9% of people ages 18-30, and 88.5% of people of 'above 60' ages. Some notable age differences were found.

Some young respondents in Russia seem to be more in favor of imitating the "surrogate advertising" practice. Among the respondents, 58.8% belonged to the age group of 46-60, while 65.8% aged above 60 while 38.1% and 46.9% aged between 18-30 and 31-45 respectively so all of our respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

Issues in ethical advertising

Marketing to children: Children should never be subjected to marketing as it attempts to prey on their innocence when children are too naïve to distinguish right from wrong. Thus, it is necessary for marketers to diversify and channel their marketing efforts to others in the community that can appreciate the fruits of their marketing efforts. For that reason, it's quite wrong to have children as their potential customers for every product which in normal circumstances children can't make use of and even overweight the upper age member.

- **Controversial products:** Consumers in such nations require assistance even in realizing what their needs and what their deficiencies are. Business targets those vices such as smoking and homosexuality which are bad and destructive. Some countries such as India have even out banned advertising of similar products on their territories.

- **Advertising taking advantage of people's emotions:** India remaining a culture which encourages human behavior and relationships, most women, a good percentage of the population are being a form of advertising that appeals emotionally. Hence, it makes it easier for marketers to hollow out the emotional values from their advertisements and make them reliant on reasons and facts to balance the connection between the consumer and the brand.

Materiality: It appears that announcements that are concerned with the matter and success targets are misleading for consumers and turn them into people who normally purchase things that, in all probability, are out of their reach in order to improve their lifestyle. Such marketing creates an idea of happiness associated with material objects which is not in accordance with our principles.

- **Publicity:** sometimes the enthusiasm of marketers goes so far that somehow they need to overstate about the products in order to control on the consumer purchase. Its even considered to be misconduct as depicted goods are not likely to be

having the same advertising, purchase and price rates. This is known as publicity.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

It is the remarks of participants, who possess the relevant experience which is central to this study. In this way, the opinion of the less educated part of the society remains unaquired. However, the survey was also narrow, probing the respondents' stance on specific ethical issues'. Numerous others aspects of advertising are considered unethical, but these topics are not within the limits of this investigation.

Conclusion

By employing a sample of the Mumbai citizens, the research compared the age group differences in consumers' perceptions of four ethical issues in advertising. The results obtained indicate that people do not favor advertising to children at any age. More than 60% of respondents in different age groups disapproved their children being reasons of ad targeting with the majority of them being seniors. In spite of Western cultural encroachment, Mumbai's however, remain appreciative of Indian culture across all age parents with more than 63 percent of respondents across all the age groups vowing strong ads with sexual content on which the culture was abused.

While investigating the above-mentioned attitudes the majority of the older respondents 88.5% were most dissatisfied with the use of such an appeal. The content and presentation of these products in the media attracted the most discontent. Among this group, the highest level of irritation with such advertisements was found in respondents of the "above 60" age group. Over 95% of them were very negative about the advertisement of controversial products. The present attitudes towards such advertisements were equally prevalent among the younger age groups. It was however interesting to note that such adments were not equally received in the same age group.

In comparison to the other age groups studied, it can be said that there was more of an older population who considered such a practice unethical. The investigation stresses that it is crucial for the managers to consider these results while designing advertising messages for the target market. It can be

utilized by the companies intending to place advertisements in the city to understand various contentious advertising matters, how people of different age groups, in their case, perceive them. The present study will help the marketers to create advertising messages that will appeal more to the target audience.

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