

Ethics In Advertisements & Its Impact On Consumer Psychology-A Study Of Patiala Region

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising is an important tool of promotion which makes people aware regarding products, services and ideas. Advertising may be defined as a paid form of non- personal communication of products, services and ideas in which the sponsor is identified and the message is controlled.

The success of advertising depends on public confidence. Hence no practice should be permitted which tends to impair this confidence. The standards laid down by the Advertising Standard Council of India should be taken as minimum standards of acceptability, which would be liable to be reviewed from time to time in relation to the prevailing norms of viewer's susceptibilities.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Ethics is a set of moral principles, norms or values. Ethics are those moral principles that govern the actions and decisions of the individual or group. In other words, ethics are concerned with those values that determine the moral conduct in a given group or community. Moral principles are the rules or the standards of what is right or wrong. According to Compton's encyclopedia, "The field of ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with human actions from moral point of view- as right or wrong, good or bad, its field is character and conduct and the moral judgment which are passed upon them".

Let's have a look at few advertisements coming in the various media's these days.

1. In the Kwality walls advertisement, a girl is shown making sexually suggestive moves to a person to sell ice creams.
2. In the recently launched virgin mobile advertisement, a nurse is shown doing unsuggestive action on a patient.
3. In the axe perfume ad, a female teacher is shown getting aroused by the fragrance of the perfume while delivering a lecture.
4. In a soft drink advertisement, an employee asks his boss that "tu Sita dene ki nai dene" (you want to handover Sita or not) which is against the religious sentiments.
5. Models prescribing medicines such as crocin, dispirin directly to the people instead of people from medical profession prescribing them to the consumers.
6. In the wild stone perfume advertisement, a female is shown fantasizing about her experience with a male that is very bad in taste.

From these advertisements, it is clear that companies are trying to hook customers by adopting unethical practices. Such use of unethical practices in advertising is increasing day by day. This study makes an attempt to find out the effect of unethical advertisements and its impact on consumer buying behavior.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are

- 1) To get an insight on people's awareness regarding the type of advertisements coming these days.
- 2) To study the perception of the people regarding the impact of unethical advertisements.
- 3) To analyse the effects of unethical advertising on consumer buying behaviour.
- 4) To give a few suggestions as to how to deal with unethical advertisements.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Advertising is an important promotional tool adopted by organizations to make people aware about its products and services. Companies make it sure that its advertisement do not include any unethical element but still, in

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today's era when competition is very stiff, companies sometimes cross the boundaries and include some elements in their advertisements which may seem unethical to the people. So this study makes an attempt to analyze the impact of ethics in advertisements on consumer's psychology and its effect on consumer buying behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN:

In this study, the research design is exploratory in nature. Data is obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

SOURCES OF DATA:

Primary Source consists of structured questionnaire which was filled from the respondents of Patiala city to know their preferences. Secondary data is collected from books, magazines, newspapers, journals and internet.

SAMPLING AREA

The scope of the study is limited to Patiala region only.

SIZE OF SAMPLE:

The sample size selected is 100 which includes heterogeneous respondents from Patiala city.

SAMPLING METHOD

A simple random sampling method was used. 100 respondents were selected. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents followed by probing questions.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Only 100 respondents were studied in the study so the findings cannot be generalized for the general population.
2. Time constraint was another limitation.
3. Unethical advertisements also include use of sensual appeals, so the respondents might not have been comfortable giving their views on that aspect.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Percentage Analysis:

A simple percentage analysis is performed to obtain the opinion of respondents regarding various issues concerning ethics in advertising.

Table 1 : Showing the Age Category of Respondents

S. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Under 20 years	22	22%
2	20-40 years	32	32%
3	40-60 years	28	28%
4	Above 60 years	18	18%

From the above table, it's clear that people from all age groups are considered for the study.

Table 2 Showing the Type of Media Followed By The Respondents.

S.No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Newspapers	28	28%
2	Radio	4	4%
3	Television	40	40%
4	Magazines	22	22%
5	Internet	6	6%

From the above table it is clear that most of the respondents watch television (40%) and then others follow newspapers and magazines. These three are the main media's in which advertisements are shown. It also shows that advertising is an important platform through which customers get information regarding the products and the services.

Table 3 : Shows Whether People Feel That Use of Advertisements Has Become Very Important Regarding Awareness of Products and Services.

S.No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	95	95%
2	No	4	4%
3	Cant say	1	1%

From the above table it is clear that most of the people (95%) really feel that advertising of products is a must these days.

Table 4 : Shows Whether Advertisements Shows the Actual Picture of the Products and Services

S.No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	70	70%
2	No	21	21%
3	Cant say anything	9	9%

From the above table it is clear that majority of the people (70%) think that whatever is shown in the advertisements is generally true. The people (21%) who were not in favor of it were of the opinion that often advertising is misleading and makes false promises to customers.

Table 5 : Are These Advertisements Ethical In Nature?

S.No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	32	32%
2	No	65	65%
3	Can't say	3	3%

From the above table it's clear that majority of the people feel apprehensive about advertisements as far as the ethical aspect is concerned.

Table 6 : Showing Age Wise Perception of Advertisements.

	Age			
	Under 20 yrs	20-40 yrs	40-60 yrs	Above 60 yrs
Ads are ethical	17	5	4	6
Ads are unethical	5	27	22	11
Indifferent	0	0	2	1
Total	22	32	28	18

The above table makes it clear that majority of the people in the age group of 20-40 years and 40-60 years feel that ads are unethical in nature. Another thing to be noticed is that only 5 respondents in the age group under 20 years feel that these advertisements are unethical in nature. This shows the youngsters mindset. They don't feel the unethical aspect of ads coming these days. On the other side, people in the other age categories also feel that these are ethical in nature. It may be because at such an age, people become more mature and rational.

Table 7 : If no, then do you think that these ads are affecting you and your family in a negative way?

S.No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	59	91%
2	No	6	9%

From the above table it is clear that out of the 65% people who feel that ads are unethical, majority (91%) feel that these unethical advertisements affect their family and children in a negative way.

Table 8 : What kind of advertisements do you think are mostly unethical?

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Ads hurting religious sentiments	1	1%
2	Ads portraying violence	5	8%
3	Ads having sexual appeal	36	55%
4	Ads related to products such as contraceptives, perfumes, sanitary napkins etc.	12	18%
5	Pharmaceutical Ads	3	5%
6	Surrogate advertising of Liquor/cigarette/Tobacco	8	13%

From the above table it is observed that majority of the people feel that use of sexual appeals in the advertisements is the biggest factor that prompts them to perceive the advertisement as unethical. Other people felt that advertisements of products such as contraceptives, sanitary napkins, undergarments etc are also bad in taste and makes these ads unethical. When asked to cite few examples of such advertisements, they referred to Amul macho adv, Axe effect adv, Wildstone deo adv and advertisements on condoms which makes children ponder about these products.

Table 9 : Will you buy those products that use unethical advertisements?

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	52	80%
2	No	10	15%
3	Indifferent	3	5%

From the above table it is clear that out of the 65 respondents who feels that advertisements are unethical in nature, majority(80%) will not consider this thing while buying the product. This means that the respondents don't attach their buying behavior with the unethical content of the advertisement, provided that the product is worth buying.

Table 10 : How use of unethical ads can be controlled

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Advertisement should be banned	42	65%
2	Product should be banned	10	15%
3	Should face the court	9	14%
4	Huge fine should be imposed	4	6%

Majority of the respondents feel that use of unethical elements in advertisements can be controlled if such advertisements are banned. Few people also felt that banning the product altogether will serve the purpose. Others felt that such companies should face the court or heavy fine should be imposed on them.

Table 11 : showing consumers preference for products in case of unethical advertisement

	Age			
	Under 20 yrs	20-40 yrs	40-60 yrs	Above 60 yrs
Will buy the product	5	23	18	6
Will not buy the product	0	2	3	5
Indifferent	0	2	1	0
Total	5	27	22	11

Of the 65 respondents who felt that advertisements are unethical, age wise buying behavior vis-a-vis unethical ads is shown in the above table. It is clear from the above table that most of the respondents in all the age categories agree that they will buy the product irrespective of the fact that its ads are unethical in nature.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. Majority of the people are aware regarding the advertisements of various products broadcasted in different media's.
2. Majority of the people follow television and magazines as per perception of advertisements is concerned.
3. Majority of the respondents (65%) feel that advertisements are unethical in nature and hence unsuitable for viewing. Further, out of the respondents who felt that ads are unethical in nature, majority were from the age group of 20-40 yrs (42%) and 40-60 yrs (34%). Only 8% respondents in the age group under 20 yrs think so. It shows that youngsters don't feel that advertisements show anything against the morals and are of bad taste for the society. When asked specifically, they said that people need to be progressive and should shed off orthodox thinking.
4. From this study, it is evident that ethics in advertising don't affect the consumer buying behavior that much. 80% of respondents feel that unethical advertisements don't make them unfavorable towards such products. Hence we can say that although people don't like seeing unethical ads but they will go ahead and buy the product and services provided it's worth buying.
5. Majority of the people (55%) feel that those advertisements that use sexual appeal in their ads are unethical in nature. This is followed by those ads that are related with products such as lingerie, contraceptives, sanitary napkins; etc. This shows the traditional thinking of the respondents. Only 13% respondents felt that ads of liquor/cigarettes/Tobacco are unethical in content.
6. Majority of the respondents (65%) feel that banning the advertisement is the remedy of the problem. This was followed by those who felt that the product should be banned but I think that it is not a realistic option.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Most of the adult products require tasteful advertising and marketing programs. Hence feminine hygiene, contraceptives and other personal adult products may be featured in selective medias that are appropriate and do not seem offensive.
2. Use of sexual innuendos in advertising should be controlled. Instead of giving such advertisements in television

which is a medium of mass media, companies should adopt niche marketing strategy and advertise them in selective target magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Femina, Health, Women's Era etc.

3. Advertisements based on adult products should be beamed at late night hours as these are meant for adult people and not for children who don't watch television at such timings.
4. Use of violence in advertisements should not be there as these prompt people, especially children, to imitate them. On the other hand, pharmaceutical products should be referred by medical professionals in the advertisement.
5. The government needs to exercise tight control over these issues so that such advertisements don't come in the media in the first place. The companies should not be allowed to manipulate the rules and play with the sentiments of the people.

CONCLUSION

It's a well known fact that advertising is an important tool of promotion in the marketing mix. Organisations are taking advantage of this fact by showing attractive and appealing ads on the various medias. Sometimes they do forget that these advertisements have to adhere to some norms and regulations and ensure that these are not of bad taste to the viewers. Sometimes these advertisements cross the limits and become a source of bad taste for the society. From this study, it has been found that most people living in Patiala feel that the advertisements on air these days are unethical in nature. The advertising standard council of India needs to play an active role in ensuring that these advertisements don't play with the emotions of the people. Just banning an odd advertisement will not serve the purpose. The government needs to chalk down few strict measures so as to curb this practice. Finally it can be said that advertising is a phenomenon that requires creativity which can make an ordinary product sell like hot cakes. But if the companies will continue to play with the moral principles of the people, then they might struggle in finding the target audience. So they should adhere to the laws and regulations and let the people enjoy the creative world of advertising.

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