



Advertisement and Morality: A Philosophical Observation

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Abstract

Advertisement has become a household word in present time and even a child knows its magic. But what is the origin of this concept and what is the basic target of this marketing tool! We will discuss these in detail and the transformation of advertisement with time will be our focus too. Though advertisement is important part of our society but it has some unethical practices too that are affecting the masses. These advertisements are misleading sometimes, or it have baseless or fake commitments also in many cases. Apart from these, advertisement allegedly portrays women as products in most of the time. Nudity or vulgar picturisation have been going on in advertisements for long time to attract maximum people and increase business. On the whole we can say that a good marketing weapon is being used in wrong manner that is harming people's mental health and affecting personal life also, specially with many modern medical tools that are helping marketers worldwide to skyrocket their business.

Keywords: Advertisement. Promotions. Branding. Ethical values. Neuroscience. Corporate houses.

Introduction: Advertisement, the word has been derived from its Latin root "advertere" that means "to turn one's attention to (something)". Advertisement is a marketing tool in a business to promote its products or services to its particular target group. Importance of advertisement in today's business world is priceless. It is an inevitable separate industry itself. Initially advertisement had only one platform, print media. With time advertisement got more wings that include electronics media and another stronger and the most active one is digital media. Digitalization of advertisement has opened limitless opportunities before it. Apart from these developments, advertisement has got more advanced tools in present time like help of psychological experiments, neurological experiments, social surveys and many more. Advertisement has been transformed a lot from its initial days. It is not anymore a way of promoting own products or services, presently this tool is used in business to control customers' buying

pattern. Advertisement is a remote controller now and the whole market place is under its invisible control.

Advertisement has some typical characteristics -

1. It is published or broadcast on multiple platforms as discussed before to get success in business and there is a monetary transaction in the whole procedure.
2. Advertisement is not done with the help of any individual human being generally but newspapers, radio stations, TV channels, digital platforms etc. meet the purpose. But it is also true that the best advertisement is done by “words of mouth” that happens by individual human being when they get a wonderful experience.
3. Advertisement is conducted to ensure quality supply of products or services to the masses and the whole supply units like - vendors, whole sellers, retailers etc.

Renowned marketer Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong pointed out five points that have to be considered strictly before planning an advertisement campaign.

I) The “Why”: This is a vital point in advertising. An organization or any individual must know why do they want to start a particular advertisement campaign - to establish own brand or to promote own offers or to create brand trust factor among prospects or to run any awareness campaign etc.

II) Budgeting: Advertising budget must be clear. Every business size has different budget capacity, so the amount must be fixed and planned properly before starting the campaign.

III) Uniqueness: Uniqueness plays the main role in success. An advertisement must carry products’ or services’ unique selling proposition (USP) that keeps that particular product or service out of the rest alike products or services. An organization has to create own blue ocean (separate market with almost no competition) to grow fast risk free.

IV) Platform selection: There must be a clear planning and research on target group, their demography, consumer psychology, consumer behaviour, their financial status that defines their buying capacity etc and these factors that in which platform an advertisement must go on or in what frequency the advertisement must run.

V) Evaluation: The organization or any individual must evaluate the effects of their advertisements. Is there any impact on the target group as per plan and expectations or not - this query should be there always. But one thing to remember, one should not calculate return on investment (ROI) from advertisement in terms of money as it is not an straight business investment, it is like a country’s defence budget that doesn’t give any monetary return to the country but protects the country from its enemies, in business this advertisement budget protects the organization from its competitors.

Responsibility & Motto:

The initial motto or target of advertisement is to convey the organization's presence or its products' and services' presence in market to register the brand name or products' features, advantages and benefits (FAB) in prospects' minds. At the same time the organization conveys the message of own presence to supply chain also to ensure its market presence properly. But it is not the single responsibility and motto of an advertisement, there some more to add here -

1. A published advertisement generates income of media houses and they pay tax to the Government on that particular income.
2. Advertisement generates employment too. It needs content creators, designers, camera persons, editors, models, directors etc. So, it has a deep constructive impact on society too.
3. Advertisement can be an effective tool to increase sell even during recession by provoking people with triggering advertisement content. It helps to keep the market running and a country's economy doesn't get stuck.
4. Advertisement can target a time zone where sell has gone down and can take required measures to bring back the sell amount on its previous track.
5. An advertisement has the biggest power to feed required information to the masses to grow a business. It is a positive part when the product or service has proper quality and effectiveness as per advertisement claims.
6. On the other hand, an advertisement can clarify or rectify any product or service related misunderstanding or previously provided unwanted misleading information too.
7. Advertisement can create new need or desire among the masses when actually there is no need in reality. This act gives a boost to market and obviously to the overall economy as well.

Required aim of advertisement:

Advertisement is not only a supporting tool for marketing anymore but it has turned to a separate industry all together. It has immense power now all over the world. Any media house can't survive without the presence of advertisement. Advertisement, in other word the gigantic corporate houses are oxygen to media houses. For example a single newspaper printing cost is far higher than the amount we pay as its exchange value. So what meets this massive gap? Yes, advertisements. That's how the market runs. This same financial grammar formula applies to other media platforms too. But it is also true and reality that in many cases, organizations promote misleading information and make fake promises related to its products or services. Organizations suppress few features of its products also to grab larger market too. But by seeing these malpractices of some organizations or companies, we can not demand abolition of advertisement tool at any stage in modern time but we need to keep vigil on its acts minutely. It should be monitored strictly that if there is any misleading information or claim or from another point whether the product or the service is solving purposes accurately as per its claims in advertisement.

The whole society is interconnected and as a result of it, any single act here affects every corner of the society and when that particular act is negative, everyone faces its consequences. A society must have some basic ethics to keep it intact and a quality place to live appropriately. In our discussion as we witness that advertisement has a huge impact on our daily lives, buying patterns, decisions, thought processes, belief systems etc, advertisement industry must abide by some elementary ethical values too.

1. Honesty: Like any other spectrum of our life, honesty should be the base of advertisement industry too. If a brand is providing any information to the masses through its advertising, that particular advertisement should be correct and not a misleading one. The information should be in descriptive instead of unclear short one, specially when a brand deals with health products/ services or baby products/ services etc, all its claims and descriptions must be loud and clear. If any brand does the opposite practice, it is clearly an unethical act. In many cases, brands take advantages of optical illusions or impulsive nature of prospects to trigger buying sensation but it should be considered unethical too as in this kind of situation a buyer is not taking buying decision rationally, he/ she is driven emotionally in this state.

2. Forcing: As we discussed in earlier point that brands play emotional games many times (the most common practice right now) to attract its target group. It is considered as an act of forcing someone instead of attracting them by providing product/ service related information in straight way. Actually in this way organizations control minds of impulsive people who don't take decisions rationally. Some modern technologies have enhanced the power of mind control like - eye movement gazing process, fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) etc. These advanced tools have given more power to marketers to target the masses more explicitly. These tools have been facing many moral and ethical objections and criticisms around the world for this reason. Critics are concerned that these tools will control whole life of an individual gradually and the complete society will be in their control with time.

3. Subject: There was a time when products like alcohol and cigarettes had permission to run their advertisement but there has been imposed ban later on but brands have found alternative ways to promote their brand name through advertisement. Many alcohol brands release limited edition of any rare music album with their brand name to continue hammering the brand name and leave a long term impression on prospects' minds. It may sound absurd to consider it as an unethical act but in reality it is. The science behind it is targeting human's subconscious mind. It is called subliminal message. Subliminal message is actually not vividly clear and loud but it has effects on our subconscious mind without our knowledge so whenever we take a decision to buy something and consider it as our own choice, in reality it is not. Our those decisions are actually effects of subliminal messages that entered into our brain without our awareness and obviously without our consent. These acts must be termed unethical. Subject of an advertisement should get permission in very regulated manner

4. Messages: The message that is conveyed in any advertisement should not be provocative. Specially in a too much diverse country like India, advertisement copy/ script must be created carefully because words have deep impact on our mind. This is another big opportunity to marketer to influence the masses without their consciousness. Apart from that, many brands use some created phrases with dual meaning, specially the unclear second meaning provokes sexual interest or desire. Our brain responds spontaneously in this kind of advertisement as the sense of pleasure is triggered by these advertisements.

The main concern is at the surface level only, there is a deeper part too. When a brand is promoting itself using subliminal messages or trying to attack our subconscious, we must awake and think twice about that brand's actual intentions. Advertisements are long term investments from corporate houses and in some cases, brands plan to capture its market even before the birth of a person and these marketers ensure a fixed market by following this kind of marketing strategy.

Let's discuss about a strange and shocking marketing strategy by a candy brand. It will force us to think deeply in our everyday life at each step. The Philippine's one of the leading candy brands, Kopiko, had taken a shocking marketing strategy to program future prospects biologically. Kopiko's distributors supplied these candies to major pediatricians and gynecologists to give these to pregnant women who used to visit them. Around that time period, Kopiko was about to launch coffee with same taste of Kopiko candies. With time this strategy yielded expected results for the brand as in near future young children started to drink that coffee that gave them deep satisfaction. It happened as the brand had ensured this future market even before the birth of that generation. Even mothers and children started feeling nostalgic by having Kopiko coffee together. There was a more surprising biological and psychological impact on that generation. Whenever children of that generation felt angry, impatient or they cried, this Kopiko flavour made them calm instantly. This is a brutal face of advertising or branding industry.

Advertisement and women:

It has been probably the most controversial and discussed topic in advertisement industry and specially to critics. Women are used in advertisement as a product or sexual stimuli to attract maximum prospects. Even women are used in such a product's promotion that is not associated to women from any angle. Sometimes the main product seems secondary thing and sizzling female model grabs the main attention.

Apart from this unethical campaigning pattern, women are used in advertisements in a stereotyped manner like - women are associated to only baby products or kitchen related products etc and male are shown in masculine products like - motorcycle or anything that is believed to be bold. This is a plain example of social and gender discrimination and this kind of audio-visual promotions have deep negative impact on the masses.

Conclusion:

We can't deny the importance and relevance of advertisement today but at the same time it must be considered also that an advertisement is made for conveying messages to the masses and to business circle but nowadays this limitation is obsolete. Advertisement has become the most powerful controlling tool to the marketers. It is not expected that a corporate house will determine masses' lifestyle, psychology, buying pattern, belief system, personal choices, priorities in life, ideology, philosophy etc but these are happening gradually and leading towards more alarming situation. Internet world has more dangerous impact on us as there is less or on some platforms, zero censorship on content so internet platforms are most vulnerable. Internet allows advertisement of an adult product on a minor content too. The whole system seems to be out of control and that is going to make our society more unstable. This is the prime time to take strict initiatives to control limitless unethical advertising practice. Advertisement should keep us informed about every newly introduced products or services and we will purchase or avail those respectively as per our requirements and their actual utility but advertisement should not be misleading, disrespectful to anyone and it must not get the authority to control our personal lives.

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