

# **Ethics in Advertising: An Endless Dilemma**

**Prof. Dr. Sarwade Walmik Kachru**  
**Dean, Faculty of Management Science**  
**Dr. B.A. Marathwada University, India**  
**Walmik\_sarwade@hotmail.com**

## **Introduction**

In today's challenging market economy, advertising has become an important element of the society. Moreover, advertisements play a powerful constructive role in the economic growth of a country. On the contrary, they can often play a negative role in hurting the sentiments of an individual or the society. Hence, it is important that advertising professionals observe high ethical standards in regard to truthfulness, human dignity and social responsibilities.

Advertising is a small word but it is a whole world in itself. May be a marketer or a consumer, nobody can escape from the influence of advertising. Advertising has affected and is still affecting the life of all of us. In simple terms, advertising is defined as a paid, mediated presentation of information about services, products, or ideas with the specific Aurangabad of informing, persuading and reminding the target market about the company's offerings. In this materialistic world, we are surrounded with a number of products/brands. Each company is battling for consumer mind space and this has increased the scope of advertising. We can find advertising everywhere i.e., in our homes, in the shopping malls, on the street, in the subways, on public transport vehicles and even in office buildings. This proves that advertising is all pervasive and is becoming a powerful force, shaping attitudes and behaviors in today's world.

In the current fragmented market, the marketers are facing tough competition from their competitors. Each marketer has to prove himself to be better than his competitors. The cut-throat competitive market environment has made the advertising field very experimental and hence advertisers are adopting different measures to attract the attention of their target customers. They try to structure their advertisements in such a way that

catches instant customer attention. For this, they try to use a blend of message appeals like rational, emotional, ethical, etc. to make a positive impact on the target audience. Aspirations, comfort, convenience, economy, efficiency, fear, love, nostalgia, pride, health, luxury, patriotism, sex and safety are some of the ideas that engage the minds and touch the hearts of the target audience, and ultimately motivate a response.

Being business entities, sometimes companies are carried away with their profit motives. They forget that as they are a part of the society, they have a responsibility towards the society, as well. Any activity of the company should not have an adverse effect on the society. The same stands true in respect of advertising also. With the growth in the reach and frequency of mass media, the advertising industry has also grown by leaps and bounds. It implies that the persons exposed to advertising are also growing with the growth of mass media and the advertising industry. On the one hand, it is a good sign for the marketers as they can now reach a larger audience by using mass media but on the other hand, it has increased their role towards the society. Now marketers have to be more socially responsible while making and presenting their advertisements as the presentation of advertisements can have a positive as well as a negative impact on the society.

In this ad-mad world, the viewers are exposed to thousands of ads. It is almost impossible for them to pay attention to all those ads. Only those ads are able to catch their attention, which are different in some way or another from the other bouquet of ads. To break this monotony and to make advertising catchy marketers are dishing out a wide variety of advertisements. They try to give a different touch to make it look appealing. Sometimes they succeed in their experiments, at other times their efforts raise the eyebrows of the viewers. It is often seen that in the name of experimentation and in the desire to win the market game, marketers every now and then are involved in making ads, which cannot be termed as 'ethical'.

**SAGA OF THE ADVERTISING:** Journey of the advertising in the chronological order is depicted below –

## JOURNEY OF THE ADVERTISING

Era	Description
<b>Back to 4000 BC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• History depicts that Out-of-home advertising and billboards are the oldest forms of advertising.</li><li>• It has been with us as the Egyptians used papyrus to make sales messages and wall posters along with the tradition of wall painting can be traced back to Indian rock art paintings that date back to 4000 BC.</li></ul>
<b>In the late 19th and early 20th centuries.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modern advertising developed with the rise of mass production in the late 19th and early 20th centuries because of the industrial revolution.</li><li>• In June 1836, French newspaper La Presse was the first to include paid advertising in its pages gave the birth of the print advertising.</li><li>• In the early 1920s, the first radio stations were established by radio equipment manufacturers and retailers who offered programs in order to sell more radios to consumers and in the early 1950s, the DuMont Television Network began the modern practice of selling advertisement time to multiple sponsors, gave the birth of the telecast/broadcast form of advertising.</li></ul>
<b>Late 20 centuries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With the advent of the ad server, marketing through the Internet opened new frontiers for advertisers and contributed to the "dot-com" boom of the 1990s.</li></ul>

**Source :** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advertising>

### Ethical Issues in Advertising

Even today, some advertising is simply and deliberately untrue. The problem of truth in advertising is somewhat more subtle: it is not that advertising says what is explicitly false, but that it can distort the truth by implying things that are not so or withholding

relevant facts. There are numerous such examples of advertisements related to cosmetics, bathing soaps, detergent soaps, health drinks, etc. claiming brand supremacy over their competitor's brands on debatable grounds. Most of the advertisements of 'Fair & Lovely' beauty cream (a product of Hindustan Unilever Ltd.) focused on a "fairer girl gets the boy" (Graham and Cateora, 2007). In one of the advertisements, they have portrayed the young woman who, after using Fair & Lovely becomes attractive and therefore gets a good job. This implies that the main qualification for a woman to get a job is the way she looks. Many people in India thought that Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) had violated Indian advertisement ethics by openly insulting a majority of dark skinned Indian women.

Use of children in advertising is also arguable. Advertisers will have to use children to promote products meant especially for children but apart from this, there are many commercial ads where marketers are using children to promote the products, which are not meant for children. The advertisers are using children in their advertisements as they know that children nowadays are playing the role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process. Sometimes, it is also seen that children force their parents to buy those products, which they can't afford to buy.

Advertisers are also charged of making false claims in their advertisements just to prove that their product is superior over that of their competitor's and to deceive the customers.

In one of the commercials of Videocon Washing Machine, the company claimed that their washing machines are eco-friendly and they are designed to not just care for your clothes, but also to conserve water, save energy. The claim was made without giving proper technical details which proves that the machine helps in conserving water as well as it is energy saving. The company later on withdrew this ad.

Advertisers are also resorting to comparative advertising to catch the eye of the market. HUL introduced its new toothpaste 'New Pepsodent', claiming to be 102% better than the leading toothpaste. Advertisement showed New Pepsodent superior in killing germs than any other toothpaste. Lip movement in the ad indicated Colgate as the other toothpaste

referred, although voice muted. Also, same jingle as used in the Colgate ad was played. The court held that direct reference about inferiority need not be shown and such reference amounted to disparagement. This kind of advertisement is likely to leave doubt in minds of the viewers and cannot be termed as ethical.

In the latest Rin ad, the company claims that *Tide se kahin behatar safedi de Rin* (Rin gives better whiteness than Tide), without getting into specific, feature-to-feature comparison. It is also very difficult to measure whiteness, so companies like HUL should try to act in a more ethical manner. Comparative advertising are not unethical but the intention of the companies going for comparative advertising should be crystal clear. Whatever they are claiming in the advertisement should be supported with proper facts and figures. Abstract claims should be avoided.

Advertisers are also using the element of nudity in the advertisements to promote their products. One of the Levis commercial ads shows a bare chested young man with his jeans unbuttoned revealing partly his innerwear, and says "My girlfriend's sister turns me on." The ad states that, "Bare what's inside, live unbuttoned". The statement itself cannot be termed as decent and culture-sensitive. This types of advertisements can cause severe offence.

We can find numerous examples where the advertisements are not according to the prevailing ethical standards. A study was conducted by the authors in the city of Aurangabad to collect opinion of different people about various advertisements. The study shows that companies are presenting their products without considering viewers' sentiments.

Various groups of people like students, housewives, businessmen and employees were questioned regarding their views on the level of ethics in television advertisements and social responsibility of the advertisers, about the factual information in these advertisements, and what kind of issues they find unethical in a given set of advertisements.

Researchers said that about 51% of the viewers are of the opinion that the level of ethics in television advertising is average and about 19% feel that it is low.

The major purpose of advertising is to enlighten the customers about the products or services. Since there are too many products in the market and competition is tough for marketers to attract customers, they give a false picture of their products which is far away from reality. The study shows a balanced opinion with more or equal number of people agreeing and disagreeing on this issue.

There is a strong agreement on the issue regarding ad-makers social responsibility. Majority of the respondents agree that ad-makers should act with utmost responsibility while promoting the products through mass media.

When asked about advertising of which product out of a given set of products would they consider more unethical, the opinion poll pointed towards tobacco and cigarettes followed by ads on contraceptive products or family planning. Obviously, it is an endorsement by the consumers on the ban of tobacco advertisements on television.

The marketing mix has been the key concept to advertising as it mixes was suggested by Professor E. Jerome McCarthy in the 1960s, which consists four basic elements called the four P's. Product, Price, Place and promotion as the last P, is the process of reaching the target market and convincing them to go out and buy the offerings of the identified sponsor. As it is "A paid form of external communication which is generally used for the encouragement of awareness or the persuasion of the target audience". Most commonly it is the developmental of the desired result which may drive the consumer's behavior with respect to the commercial offering. As the Commercial advertisers always tries to increase the usages of their products via branding and by generating a positive image of their offerings with the depiction of the messages in the mind of consumers.

**THE INTENT-** As the Intent of the advertising is to inform, to persuade and to remind the target audience for the intended result for changing the human behaviors like the

creation of AIDA form (**Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action**) has been the same and will be same in the years to come .

**THE CONTENT** -Despite the changing world and the way it attributed to the adoption of new marketing practices involving the changes in the activities of advertising i.e. the content of advertising.

<b>CONTENT- 5 M,s OF ADVERTISING</b>	
<b>ASPECTS</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>MISSION</b>	The mission will be as usual as informing, persuading, and reminding to the target audience for affecting their AIDA stage.
<b>MESSAGE</b>	The way message is formulated and narrated (verbally) or exhibited (visually) to the target audience.
<b>MEDIA</b>	The selection of the medium through which the message will be circulated in the target audience for the intended mission and effectiveness.
<b>MONEY</b>	Calculations of the amount to be spend for the achievement of the desired Aurangabad
<b>MEASUREMENT</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness in terms of impact and retentions.

Despite the changing world and the way it attributed to the adoption of new marketing practices involving the changes in the activities of advertising i.e. the content of advertising.

"Advertising justifies its existence when used in the public interest—it is much too

powerful a tool to use solely for commercial purposes." Attributed to Howard Gossage by David Ogilvy.

Usually advertising messages are created by the in house or the outhouse advertising agencies which is paid by sponsored and viewed to the target audience via various media vehicle including newspaper, magazines, television commercial, radio advertisement, outdoor advertising or direct mail ; blogs and websites. These messages are depicted through the different kinds of tone with an aim of obtaining the above mentioned intent. They are the major area of concerns for the creation of ethical issues in advertising as the young generation are in huge numbers and play an important role in influencing the buying behavior of their kith and kins but at the same time some of the wrong steps was also taken by them and this create a question marks on the ethical issues of advertising based on the advertising contents. Let's see the some of the question mentioned below without any biasness and this question- Was this the intent of an advertisement where we find the content in this fashion-

- Very uncommon examples by a common kid who endangered his life while imitating the stunt shown in the advertising?
- Why the depictions of the message always include the heroic efforts of the presenter along with the fictitious background?
- Why the kids are being provoked to act and behave like adolescence?
- Why the vulgarity requires in inducing the audience?
- Why the social evil like the ragging is shown at the background of the ad?
- Why the important messages forbidding the imitation of these statements are always broadcast or telecast in hurry or in unreadable manner?
- Why the content of the advertising prevent us to watch it with the family?

Is this not the ethical issues? As it is rightly pointed out that the "Advertising justifies its existence when used in the public interest—it is much too powerful a tool to use solely for commercial purposes." Attributed to Howard Gossage by David Ogilvy. Then what it should be and how should it be interpreted. ? This is a matter of great concerns which required a complete and clear

explanation and understanding of the advertising intent as well as the content for the advertisers.

## **Conclusion**

India is a free country and all the citizens have a freedom of expression. In this scenario, it is up to advertisers to ensure ethically responsible practices while making commercial ads. In this extensive market economy, advertising has become an important element of the society. Advertisements have the power to play a constructive role in the economic growth of a country. Yet it also can do, and often does, severe harm to individuals and to the common good.

Being ethical and unethical is purely a subjective aspect and it largely depends on the nature of the viewers. Since television is a form of mass media, which is treated as a family entertainer, people of all age group and sex fall under the gamut of this media. Hence, any kind of advertisement, which is acceptable to male viewers, may not be acceptable to female audience. In the same way, that which is acceptable to both may not be recommended for children.

Therefore, it can be said that advertising professionals should always try to eliminate its socially harmful aspects and observe high ethical standards in regard to truthfulness, human dignity and social responsibility. In this way, they will make an exceptional and important contribution to human progress and to the common good.

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