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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### A STUDY ON ETHICS IN ADVERTISING AND SELF CONTROL

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# A Study On Ethics in Advertising And Self Control

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## INTRODUCTION

Advertising is explained as mass communication of information intended to persuade buyers to buy products and with a view to maximizing a company's profits. Communication achieves the purpose of getting one's ideas across to the other party. But, more important purpose of communication is to draw the desired response from the target audience.

Advertising in its present form is about 200 years old. But, advertising has been in use in some form or the other in the history of the mankind, even in the ancient times till 5th century and then in the dark age, middle age and till 19th century. The 20th century presented the means like radio, television and satellite communication which increased the reach of the advertiser all over the world. The purpose of advertising is to induce the customers to buy products. Advertising communicates information to potential customers and attempts to persuade them. Advertising has an impact on increase in sales but for it to be successful, it has to be well coordinated with the entire marketing mix. There is a tendency among the general public to look at the advertisements with some amount of distrust. This poses a challenge to the advertisers. If one advertisement among the several advertisements seen regularly is not truthful, the public tends to feel that all advertisements are like that i.e., dishonest.

Media such as newspapers, radio, television, outdoor board, and websites are used for advertising. Through these media marketing communication takes place. The study in this research focuses on unethical marketing communication with specific reference to the portrayal of women. An advertiser has to be conscious of his moral and social responsibility. A false or misleading advertisement will certainly be harmful to the reputation of the company and the product being advertised. Hence the advertiser has to be mindful of ethics involved in advertising. Ethics is a choice between good and bad, between right and wrong with reference to a particular culture at a given point of time.

According to one market survey, referred to by the book "Advertising" authored by Shaila Bootwala et al, unethical advertising will have following situations:

- i. It degrades the rival's product or substitute product.
- ii. It gives misleading information
- iii. It gives false information.
- iv. It conceals information that vitally effect human life (e.g. side effects of drugs)
- v. It makes exaggerated claims.
- vi. It is obscene or immoral
- vii. It is against national and public interest.
- viii. Endorsements of products by celebrities who are opinion leader is also sometimes criticized for spreading falsehood.

## MARKETING SCENARIO IN INDIA AT PRESENT

India became independent in 1947. Since then, till 1991, the closed door economy and policies of quotas, controlled production and distribution were described as the "License Raj". One needed several permits before setting up a manufacturing facility. The quantity to be produced was dictated by the Government. One could not increase the production even if there was a shortage in the market and demand exceeded supply. As a result, what was witnessed was "Sellers' Market".

There were long waiting periods for two wheelers like scooters and motorcycles, cars. The numbers of manufacturers were limited and the available brands and models were also limited. Imports of such items and consumer products, FMCG products were very much restricted. Cell Phones, laptops were not

available. There was a long waiting period even to get land line phone connection.

However, the situation changed dramatically since opening up the economy in 1991. India adopted the policies of globalization, foreign investments and imports of products were increasing. Soon the scenario changed from “Sellers’ Market” to “Buyers’ Market”. The manufacturers and marketers realized the importance of marketing and realized that the customer was king. Competition increased, availability of competing brands, products, makes, models continued to increase across a wide range of products like automobiles, two wheelers, telephones, cell phones, office equipment, consumer products, consumer durables, FMCG products and so on and so forth. Scenario completely changed in the market since 1991.

The days of allocation, rationing, shortages were over. Need to reach out to the market, to customers was felt strongly. Customers became aware that they had multiple choices and the marketers had to actively compete among themselves to attract the customer’s attention and ultimately to make the customer buy the product which was being marketed.

General public is exposed to advertisements in media such as newspapers, television, outdoor, cinema and cyber media. The advertisers, i.e., the manufacturers of products and the providers of services try to communicate the superiority and advantages of their products or services through the advertisements. In a highly competitive market scenario, the advertisers have to compete for the attention of the public. For grabbing the attention of the public when there is so much clutter of advertisements, the advertisement has to stand out. It has to be attractive, catchy, beautiful, and colorful. The caption, the message, the layout, the visuals have to create the desired impact and effect intended by the advertiser. In the process of capturing public attention, the advertisers compete with each other to make their advertisements stand out or noticed among the several other advertisements. While attempting to catch the public’s attention and mindshare, there is a lot of one-upmanship among the advertisers. Everyone wants to be the best, wants his message communicated effectively so that the product/service being advertised gets maximum market share.

During this one-upmanship, the advertisers and the agencies which handle the communication through the advertisements sometimes tend to go overboard. As a result one or all of the following happens:

- The claim in the advertisement become tall, inflated, unsubstantiated
- The claim becomes untruthful or misleading
- The communication becomes unethical

- The visuals or depiction of women in advertisements become indecent. The advertisers tend to use more glamorous, sexually attractive models. Women are depicted more as sex objects. Such depiction is resorted to even if it is not relevant to the product or service being advertised.

In a situation as stated above the consumer gets mislead and is derived from the correct information which will enable him to decide in favor or against purchase of certain product or service. In case the advertisement depicts models in an indecent or vulgar manner it is likely to cause grave or widespread offence to the general public.

As per the information available with ASCI, the present volume of the advertising Industry in India is estimated to be approximately Rs 30,000 crores. The support marketing products and services are worth Rs 400,000 crores. The advertising industry in India is growing at a compound growth rate of 15 % per annum since the year 2000.

In India there is no pre-censorship or pre-clearance of advertisements and commercials appearing in the media. Only in exceptional cases Government (state or central) puts a ban on advertisements which may be found to be highly indecent. Hence, the industry thought that “Self-Regulation” will work in the best interest of the industry as well as general public.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the above background/introduction, the aims and objectives of the present study are as follows:

- The study aims at finding out the level of awareness among the general public about the following aspects that will be covered under this study :
  - The existence of ASCI
  - Role of ASCI
- Further, the study aims at finding out to what extent ASCI has been successful or otherwise in curbing unethical marketing communication which appears in media such as newspapers, TV, outdoor etc.
- Next objective of the study is to find out more about the portrayal of women in advertisements.
- The study aims at finding out the general perception on the relevance of attractive and glamorous models shown in many advertisements to the product, service and the message in the advertisement.

## SIGNIFICANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The study takes an in-depth look at the scenario that prevails today in the field of advertising and marketing communication. The study intends to reveal what is happening with regards to marketing communication and whether the general public is satisfied, concerned or indifferent to what is happening around them. The study aims at finding out to what extent the public is aware or not of the very existence of a self-regulatory body like ASCI (Advertising Standards Council of India) which has been in existence for over 25 years. One of the outcomes of the study is an assessment of the extent to which ASCI has been effective in curbing unethical marketing communication that takes place through the media advertisements.

Findings and recommendation from the study will enable the organization like ASCI to know whether the public awareness campaign they have been carrying out have been noticed by the public and to what extent they have been effective. It will enable ASCI to decide on whether there is a need for them to regularly undertake public awareness campaigns.

The advertisers have a social responsibility to be honest, truthful while communicating through the advertisements. The study aims at finding out whether the claims made by the advertisers have any unjustified or unsubstantiated or misleading claims. The visuals, particularly the depiction of women in such communication should be decent. A family with children should not become uncomfortable while seeing some commercials on TV or in newspapers or on outdoor media or in cyberspace. The study will be relevant from the point of advertisers' obligation towards social responsibility.

## DEFINITIONS:

### Advertising

Any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor.

### Advertising Agency

A marketing services firm that assists companies in planning, preparing, implementing and evaluating all or portions of their advertising programs.

### Brand

A name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of these intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.

## COMMUNICATION:

Marketing communication is a function performed by marketing intermediaries. For the exchange of goods and services to occur, the providers of these must be able to send and receive information. The seller wants to find efficient ways of informing potential buyers about his products.

### Channels of communication Include

Newspapers, magazines, television, radio stations, billboards and cyber media.

### Advertising Agencies, Public Relations firms and Sales Promotion Firms

Assist sellers in using the communication channels effectively.

### Communication Model

The **communicator** is the sender or the source of the message.

The **message** is the set of meanings being sent or received by the audience. The **channels** are the ways in which message can be carried or delivered to the audience.

The **audience** is the receiver or the destination of the message.

### Demography

The study of human population in terms of size, density, location, age, gender, race, occupation and other statistics.

## Assumptions of the study

Following assumptions have been made while conducting study:

- Advertisement campaigns by the advertisers with portrayal of women have reach all over India.
- All respondents will give reliable and accurate information.
- Information or any data from any source used for this study is believed to be reliable. Only the information that specifically pertains to the study has been used.
- Information and all possible secondary data covering literature areas of the study as well as the organization involved in the study

have been utilized as per researcher's ability to obtain it.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited specifically to the regulatory role of The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) towards curbing unethical marketing communication through the media by the advertisers.
- Primary and secondary data used in the study is limited only to the extent of the specific sample covered in the study to the observed, analyzed limited regulatory role of The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).

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