

## **Advertising: Through the other end of the mirror**

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All of us today might be familiar with what the term 'advertising' is, if not the technical definition and attributes. Not just us, the management students, everyone- from a child to an elderly person in our society- is not just familiar with advertising, but is also subjected to the 'phenomenon' of advertising that revolves around our daily lives. How authentic does it make our thoughts? Every form of communication has an impact on our thoughts and actions. Homo sapiens as a species have a very important possession, apart from an evolved brain which sets them apart from other species, and that is communicating effectively.

I would not be exaggerating if I said that advertising is the next step of evolution in the existence of communication. We can inspect the effects of advertising both from a marketer's and a consumer's perspective. In the following article, the role of advertisements shall be discussed, along with its positive and negative repercussions. Advertisements hold a huge power, but its negatives overshadow its positives, which we will look at carefully.

The first form of advertisement appeared in Egypt in 2500 B.C. and still exists. This is why with the help of constantly updated technology, advertisements have become a means of mass communication to address its reach to the increasing population. Today the number of markets is growing at a rapid pace, and along with it the increasing number of players in each market. With the ever increasing human population, a firm in any field has more chances of gaining a customer and losing it than before. To successfully reach the customer, the brands are banking heavily on advertising. Advertising helps in gaining an edge in the competitive market, catering to consumers, and to carry out general awareness and information by government/non-

government agencies. In addition to this, newspapers, independent magazines, and T.V. channels earn almost all their revenue from the advertisements which are screened or published in them. Today, not the quality of the product, but the advertisement is the monolith of a brand's identification & image and the perception of product quality.

But, these positive aspects of advertisements should not deter us from analyzing the harm that these advertisements do to us, which leave a deep negative impact across various aspects, which we knowingly or unknowingly overlook.

Advertisement as a form of communication is a very strong one as one simply cannot escape or ignore it. We are not alone anywhere. There is an ongoing war of brands, which is unwantedly witnessed by masses 24X7 in the rectangle spaces of our television screens. Our daily dose of news in our newspapers and articles in magazines come with an intrusion of products/services which might make our lives better. While we are listening to songs while driving our cars, the music is followed by tedious efforts at consumer attraction. We leave our home and billboards and public spaces are waiting to make us feel insecure and incomplete. Even the films we watch will have product placements. We go to a hypermarket, and the brands will not miss an opportunity to catch our attention at the point of purchase. But how does this omnipresence of advertisements affects us? Advertisements play a major role in altering the psychology of an individual and masses, especially children. Ads help in implanting the seeds of trends, stereotyping, creating unwanted needs and wants, and inculcating expectations in the viewer from himself/herself and from the society. This persuasive method comes to a vicious circle where the consumers end up imbibing these things and try to see their expectations from the reality of this telescope.

Advertising is a mixed study of marketing, economics and psychology. John B Watson and Walter D. Scott were among the primary psychologists to recognize the relevance of applied psychology in advertising. This changed advertisements completely by inducing an emotional

response and converting it into an information which would not only persuade but also influence. This was succeeded by extensive use of subliminal messages in advertisements, which is still used today. These are visual or audial cues which escape the conscious mind, but end up impacting our subconscious and unconscious mind, which would affect our behavior and gravitate towards buying a particular product or service.

Advertising also has certain restrictions, like in many countries, inappropriate advertisements are not supported, and certain countries restrict advertising themes of alcohol, tobacco, racism, body shaming etc. These are done keeping in mind the best intentions of the masses. However, the authorities fail to see how certain advertisements affect the society in other ways. Like how the advertisements use children in their ads and target children, them being the prime target for advertisers. There are two main reasons for this: heavy influence of children over family and growing disposable income at younger ages for children. Advertising tries to sell harmful products like junk food and carbonated drinks through this approach. Children up to an age find no difference between entertainment and reality, and consume these commercials as a concept of truth. And by the time they grow up, they are dependent on information by commercials and more often than not, try to impersonate what they see. But not just children, advertising has a heavy impact on adults as well.

There have been many voices against unsuitable methods in commercials from various people, one distinctly being of Jean Kilbourne, an author and film maker whose works over a long time have criticized advertisements for the way they objectify women. In her words, she explains how advertisements not only sell the products but along with it, the values, images, concepts of romance, happiness, beauty, sex, and success. To mention one of her arguments as an example, the usage and portrayal of photoshopped blemish free faces on unrealistically edited bodies have sadly led to a widespread conceptual belief of setting up such standards in the real world. And any deviation from such standards is seen as through an eye of scrutiny and criticism. This is not

just limited to women, but even men are subject to similar male-centric commercials. This conditions the minds of consumers into striving for what they should not be instead of what they are, and often ends in chronic disappointment, anxiety etc. in many users. Another issue is that companies may be able to successfully persuade and influence customer into buying their mediocre product, through effective advertising by portraying their product/service as extraordinary. But actual product might not be of that value. This makes buyers concerned less with advertisements, thus nullifying the very relevance that commercials hold.

Another criticism of advertisements is the introduction of fear. Although the fear factor can also be used in a productive way by trying to stop drug abuse, unhealthy eating or the information about epidemic etc, more often than not it is used in wrong ways. Some psychological tactics which are used marketers are running emotional ideas, highlighting consumers' flaws, promoting exclusivity and introduction of fear and/or uncertainty. Fear, which used in extensively advertisements is the one that involves actual thoughts and reasoning. Fear gives birth to many feelings, such as uncertainty, confusion, curiosity, embarrassment, anxiety etc. One instance of using fear was when in the 1970's in U.S.A. bottled water was to be introduced. This was done by promoting campaigns which stated that tap water was harmful, which was not the case.

So given the possible problems, what might be an effective solution to dilute the dark repercussions of advertisements? Should we set up a stricter reviewing committee for it? Or clear our public spaces of advertisements? Or simply tax them?

I believe that the answer would be none of the above suggestions. We should not forget that advertising now is a huge field. India's digital advertising market alone has grown at a pace of 33 percent p.a. between 2010 and 2015. It has led to a plethora of opportunities, wide use of creativity for a company, employment through creative agencies and introduction of advertisements through new mediums such as in video games, thus fostering competition in the market. But what would be an apt solution to end its cons is, communication literacy and

selective advertisements exposure to children. Like all forms of education, information must be carried out to consumers that advertising is a form of selling and action driving tool, such things should not be taken personally and should be thought of from a mature mindset. This should be explained to adults and children alike. Another solution that comes to my mind is that child-targeting should stop and channels which air child centric commercials should not exploit their naivety into believing wrong things. These, in turn, may move advertisers to look for less harmful ways to advertise.

***Walter D. Scott wrote “Man has been called the reasoning animal but he could, with greater truthfulness, be called the creature of suggestion. He is reasonable, but he is to a greater extent suggestible.”***

I hope that the resonation of these words is limited to the benefits of economy and doesn't damage the societal or mental structure of our society. I hope things will be better. I hope the light will be brighter. I know that I will have to contribute to the better and brighter.