

Social, Ethical and Legal Aspects of Advertising

Learning Outcomes

- Social Impact of Advertising
- Ethics in Advertising
- Economic Effects of Advertising
- Legal Issues of Advertising
- Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)
- Conclusion

"There is a great deal of advertising that is much better than the product. When that happens, all that the good advertising will do is put you out of business faster."

Introduction

Advertising has an impact on the socio-economic environment of a country. The advertising by a company increases demand for a product, educates consumers about new products, increases competition and improves standards of living by helping to bring new products to the consumer thereby aiding the economic environment. It not only stimulates the product distribution but also builds brand preferences and loyalty. Advertising is influenced by the society and vice-a-versa.

13.1 Social Impact of Advertising

Advertising is a social process. Advertising contributes to have both negative & positive influence on society. It is criticized for encouraging materialism, manipulating consumer to buy things they don't need, stereotyping, fraudulent & so on. Advertising is a product of culture. Advertising is an art of persuasion, but still people buy only those goods and services which they need. What they purchase is the outcome of the cultural values. The consumer's behaviour is influenced by their family status, income, age, family life cycle, social relations, opinion leaders, reference groups etc. The value system is ever changing with the passage of time. With these changes on value system, the role of advertising keeps pace with the changing times. Once a set of values have been accepted by a society, the advertising as a social and business process tries to bring all those goods and services which are made to respect the value system. While advertising has been criticised for many reasons yet there are many points in favour of social impact of advertising.

The following are some of the positive social effects of advertisements:

1. **Informed Society:** Through advertisements, the society is informed of various products, their uses, best bargains, safe handling of dangerous goods, effective use of scarce resources like petroleum and electricity, technological advances, etc. But for advertising, the society would have remained a less informed one.
2. **Health and Hygiene Awareness:** The advertisements on health drinks, toiletry products, sanitary ware and their installation, etc., make the people become aware of health and hygiene. Also, advertisements on protected drinking water, effluent treatment, etc., help people live better.
3. **Rights of Consumers:** The rights of consumers are made aware through advertisements only. The spread of consumerism and awareness of consumer rights are also due to advertisements.
4. **Preventive Course for Dreaded Diseases:** Dreaded diseases like AIDS are informed to the people as to their cause, spread and preventive measures against them.
5. **New Ideas:** Consumers need to be informed of the development of latest technology. Creative advertisements render an effective service here.
6. **Advertisements Contributes to Creativity of People:** The advertisements are presented in a creative manner beyond the imagination of the consumers.
7. **Environmental Protection:** Environmental protection is the need of the hour. The brutal onslaught on nature by indiscriminate felling of trees, letting off untreated industrial effluents into the open, growing urbanization and consequent burgeoning urban slums, etc., are brought to the knowledge of people and an awareness is created against environmental degradation. For example, the Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board launched an effective campaign highlighting against the indiscriminate use and burning of plastics. Such messages are brought to the notice of people through advertising.
8. **Social Changes:** Social changes like accepting women as equals, empowerment of women, concern for the girl child and curbs on female infanticide, developing public opinion against child labor, etc., are created through advertisements only.

9. **Quality Consciousness:** Concern for quality of a product, process, or even life, work, education and, investment etc., is promoted through advertisements.
10. **Promotion of National Interest:** National interest is promoted through advertisements as well. Complying with tax laws, complimenting export achievement, promotion of tourism, protection of monuments, creating political awareness of citizens, etc., are pursued through advertisements.

13.2 Ethics in Advertising

Advertising has ethical value. In today's competitive and buyer's market, advertisements must be truthful and ethical. If an advertisement is misleading, the credibility of the organization is lost. The advertising is criticized for putting out misleading or exaggerated claims in respect of product, goods and services advertised. However, it is very difficult to demarcate a clear line of difference between what is true and what is untrue. The product must fulfil its advertised claims. Advertisements should be decent and not be obscene. It must be truthful. Sometimes, celebrities endorsing the product and spreading falsehood is also criticized.

Ethics means "Good Conduct" or "Conduct which is right in view of the society and the time period", we can say that Ethics are moral principles and values that govern the actions and decisions of an individual group. Ethics is a choice between good and bad, between right and wrong. It is governed by a set of principles of morality at a given time and at a given place and in a given society.

Ethics covers various aspects. These range from the truthfulness of validity of claims to the mode of presentation of the advertisement. The advertising of products like cigarettes, alcohol and other injurious materials must be dealt carefully. Advertising should:

- (i) Be truthful: It should reveal the true and significant facts.
- (ii) Be substantiated: The claims should be substantiated with proofs.
- (iii) Be non-comparative: It should not compare the products of two different manufacturers.
- (iv) Give real and true guarantees.
- (v) Avoid false claims.
- (vi) Adhere to taste and decency.

Ethics, as a tool of communication, plays a significant role both in business as well as in the profession of advertising, norms or ideals, that are accepted and upheld by the society as essential to good life should be followed while advertising any products or service, or, idea.

1. Ethics in advertising means that the advertisers should do only good advertising, meaning thereby honest advertising. It means that only true facts, no exaggeration and no lies, about the product, service, idea or institution should be stated.
2. The right products, services and ideas should be advertised and that too to the right consumers. Advertising for products like cigarettes, alcoholic products, tobacco, other harmful products should be avoided.
3. Ads showing testimonials should be restricted to competent persons, who must express honest views and choices.