Advertising Ethics: Towards a Stakeholder Approach

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Abstract

Advertising ethics is a perineal issue which has been addressed in many different ways in the earlier studies published in leading research outlets. However, a comprehensive stakeholder-based view of advertising is the need of the hour. In this paper, the authors revisit the existing literature of advertising ethics that addresses the multiple issues such as advertising to vulnerable population, stereotyping, deception, ethical issues in online advertising, etc. "A conceptual framework for stakeholder approach to advertising has been proposed by the authors which can be a starting point for future research in advertising ethics that addresses the multiple stakeholders of the business of advertising (e.g. advertising professional, client, agency, regulatory bodies, etc.), the target audience of advertising, and the society.

Keywords: Ethics, Advertising, Stakeholder approach

Introduction

"Art aims to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance."

- 				Aristotle

Advertising is a piece of art. Marketers have always tried to find creative ways to express and communicate the value of a product through persuasive advertisements. However, many a time this piece of art highlights the outward and the inward significance is meaning. The technique of advertising can be so deceitful at times that the outside materialistic features are presented as having an internal meaning, leading people to view brands as extensions of their own identities. Advertising may obfuscate the line between the rational and the emotional in this situation, leading to customers who may indulge rather than consider the effects of their decision.

In the last 30 years, research has focused on the various ways through which marketers can persuade customers, attract customers, create customer loyalty and make advertisements more effective through a better understanding of

consumer psychology. Despite the emergence of new ways of advertising, media, branding, and marketing in the current era of Industry 4.0, the focus on the ethical issues of advertising and the research around specific issues of advertising ethics remains limited (Moraes & Michaelidou, 2017). Responsibility is a tricky word in the world of branding and advertising. It can be seen either as a moral obligation or legal compliance. It is at the heart of the ever-existent confusion between law and ethics: the debate between what is lawfully right and what is considered to be morally acceptable, which has always created complex situations for contemporary managers. Marketing is not an exception to this development.

According to Drucker (1974): "*Marketing aims to make selling superfluous.*" An often-quoted phrase by the various marketing practitioners and the end which every marketer ultimately pursues over the

long term can be achieved, as argued by various scholars, through either continuous value creation or by creating a consistent image of the brand. However, in recent times, marketing has increasingly come under the scanner of various critics and social activists who have viewed it as the reason for manipulations or malpractices in the market. The earliest types of criticisms were broadly classified by Kotler and Murray (1975). According to them –

"A frequent criticism of marketing activities is that they add the expense to the organization's operations…. ...another criticism of marketing activity is that it often pries into personal affairs…. a third criticism is that organizations will use marketing to manipulate the target market…"

The relevance of ethics has been continuously argued by many scholars over the years and the issue has been approached through philosophical underpinnings (eg. Robin, 1980; McMahon, 1968; etc); from a decision-making perspective both at an individual or organizational level (eg. Bartels, 1967; Pruden, 1971; etc) or towards the development of a general theory of marketing ethics (eg. Hunt & Vittel, 1967).

However, the book "No Logo" by Naomi Klein introduced one more dimension which was often overlooked in the earlier studies on marketing ethics; the power of global brands and a critical perspective of the various branding activities of marketers. Brands suddenly became a focal point and a target for the frustrations of the many who have been adversely affected by global economics: the small stores and minor brands forced out of business by big-box retailers and multinational brands, the displaced and underemployed workers of affluent economies, the sweatshop, and child-laborers of non-affluent economies, and the desirous consumers of less affluent economies who must sacrifice mightly to afford the glittering global brands or else make do with counterfeits

(Belk, 2010). A counterculture is forming around the idea that the branding efforts of global consumer companies have spawned a socially destructive consumer culture (Holt, 2002).

Simply maximizing profits is no longer considered responsible business behavior. Although businesses have statutory obligations to shareholders, they also have a wider range of stakeholders for which they are accountable. In other words, companies need to operate profitably while adhering to what society perceives as moral behavior (Miles and Manilla 2004). Therefore, businesses must balance a thorough triple bottom line that considers financial, environmental, and social performance (Clarke 2001). Relationship marketing naturally expands into stakeholder theory (Polonsky, Schupisser, and Beldona 2002). Marketers are responsible for managing interconnected networks of exchanges with several stakeholders who play distinct roles in various organizational operations (Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005; Sirgy 2002). Failure to take into account all pertinent stakeholders can both (1) enhance the likelihood and severity of unsuccessful actions and (2) be perceived as irresponsible due to the omission of some groups' interests. Advertising is a component of a larger process of communication involving numerous participants (Schlegelmilch and Pollach, 2005). Companies commonly use the aid of an advertising agency to design their message and their tactics for reaching a target demographic. Presuming accurate message encoding and decoding, the audience comprehends the message and responds appropriately. Noise can alter information flows, resulting in a difference between the message's encoded and decoded versions. Different parties, including rivals or intermediaries, have the potential to make noise—intentionally or accidentally. Consumer perception of brands based on prior experiences also affect how the message is received and perceived. Due to the interdependence of stakeholders and the necessity of accurate information for effective communication, noise

may lead stakeholders to behave recklessly. Therefore, responsible advertising calls for all parties to uphold their commitments to one another.

Advertising Ethics So Far

Some of the important works on advertising ethics published in prominent research outlets (e.g. Journal of Advertising, Journal of Business Ethics, etc.) between the years 1994 to 2021 were reviewed and the important themes identified (see Table 1) such as deception in advertising, advertising to vulnerable population, ethical issues in online advertising, etc. have been further reviewed to develop a detailed understanding about them.

Table 1: Advertising Ethics in Literature

S.No	Author	Year	Journal	Contribution	Theme of Ad-Ethics
1	George M. Zinkhan	1994	Journal of Advertising	Geoffrey Warnock (1971), lists four principles which seem to be particularly appropriate for advertising: beneficence, nonmaleficence (don't harm), nondeception, and nondiscrimination. At times, questions have arisen as to whether such principles are followed and whether societal well-being is, indeed, enhanced by the actions of advertisers.	Following the arguments proposed by various authors in this special issue, promising (and neglected) topics for future ethics research include: 1) alcohol advertising, 2) sexual-stereotyping, 3) AIDS-awareness ads, 4) the effect of ads on editorial content, and 5) the effect of ads on the values of society.
2	Michael R. Hyman, Richard Tansey and James W. Clark	1994	Journal of Advertising	Research on advertising ethics, as revealed by a search of the ABIlnform database, shows that advertising ethics has been, and continues to be, a mainstream topic in advertising research.	Promising research topics: use of deception, advertising to children, ads for legal vices, negative political ads, and stereotyping in ads.
3	Minette E. Drumwright and Patrick E. Murphy	2004	Journal of Advertising	Informants exhibited "moral myopia," a distortion of moral vision that prevents moral issues from coming into focus, and "moral muteness," meaning that they rarely talk about ethical issues. We find that the reasons for moral muteness and moral myopia are categorizable. There were, however, "seeing/talking" advertising practitioners who demonstrated "moral imagination" when responding to ethical problems. Authors compared the manner in which the ethically sensitive practitioners contemplate and respond to ethical issues with those characterized as having moral muteness and moral myopia.	Moral Myopia of practioners and Moral Muteness.

4	Minette E. Drumwright and Patrick E. Murphy	2009	Journal of Advertising	The authors distinguish the ethics of the advertising message from the ethics of the advertising agency business. New and perplexing ethical issues related to advertising messages have emerged with the advent and growth of new and nontraditional media. Because of the more complex organizational structures of global communication agency networks, the temptations, risks, and rewards of unethical behavior in the business of advertising are greater than ever. We recommend that both industry and academia become more proactive, individually and in consultation with one another, in dealing with ethical problems and in setting norms.	Normative view on Ad-Ethics in ad agency and ad messages.
5	Desirée Schmuck, Jörg Matthes & Brigitte Naderer	2018	Journal of Advertising	Drawing from the affect–reason–involvement model, authors examined how misleading advertising about the environmental features of products, or greenwashing, affects how consumers perceive ads and brands. Authors compared nondeceptive claims with two types of claims often used in greenwashing: vague claims and false claims. The authors also identified the presence of pleasant nature-evoking images and test for interaction effects with two types of environmental involvement: environmental concern and environmental knowledge. Results indicated that while vague claims do not enhance consumers' perceived greenwashing regardless of their environmental knowledge or concern, false claims do, which consequently harms consumers' attitudes toward those ads and brands.	Vague claims, False claims, Green-washings, Harm to consumer attitude to ads and brands.

6	Daniel Belanche	2019	Journal of Marketing Communications	This work explains that highly annoying ads should not only be banned for practical reasons but for overpassing ethical limits in terms of respect for the persuade, equity of the persuasive appeal and social responsibility for the common good.	Ad intrusiveness, Marketing to vulnerable audiences, Ad-standards for intrusiveness.
7	Grougiou et al.	2019	Journal of Business Ethics	The study examined whether advertising strategies which use female-disparaging themes are perceived as ethical, and what effect this has on ad and brand attitudes. It also examined whether or not humour assuages ethical evaluations of female-disparaging ads.	Humour in Ads, Female-Disparaging, Sexism in Ads.
8	Haseeb Ahmed Shabbir, Hala Maalouf, Michele Griessmair, Nazan Colmekcioglu, Pervaiz Akhtar	2019	Journal of Business Ethics	Whilst considerable research exists on determining consumer responses to pre-determined statements within numerous ad ethics contexts, our understanding of consumer thoughts regarding ad ethics in general remains lacking. The purpose of the study was to provide a first illustration of an emic and informant-based derivation of perceived ad ethics. The authors used multi-dimensional scaling as an approach enabling the emic, or locally derived deconstruction of perceived ad ethics.	Bipolar themes exist. Stakeholder Theory, Lack of concern for ad-standards, Deception-Diversity, Moral Myopia-Sexuality, Political Ads-CSR, Harmful effects-Cultural Self-identity.
9	Feenstra, Ramón A., and Elsa González Esteban.	2020	Journal of Business Ethics	This article aims to examine in depth the functioning of the Spanish advertising self-regulation (ASR) system, with special emphasis on the Advertising Jury, and explore to what extent some of the normative requirements of rigour, independence, and participation can be considered to have been met.	Types of Legal complain about advertising: Misleading ads, Non-compliance with law and regulation, Discriminatory ads, Lack of coherence between main message and secondary message, Denigration of other company's products or services, Undue exposure of children and adolescents to inappropriate material.

10	Erin Schauster, Patrick Ferrucci, Edson Tandoc, Tara Walker	2020	Journal of Business Ethics	Moral reasoning among media professionals varies. Historically, advertising professionals score lower on the Defining Issues Test (DIT) than their media colleagues in journalism and public relations. While professional identity was not a significant predictor of moral reasoning, an interaction effect between gender and identity priming occurred. This finding suggests that we reconsider moral psychology theory's explanatory power for media practitioners and consider how the complexity of professional identities in concert with gender and professional training, among other variables, interact to affect moral reasoning.	Professional Identity of Ad Professional impact their Moral reasoning.
11	David López Jiménez, Eduardo Carlos Dittmar, Jenny Patricia Vargas Portillo	2020	Journal of Business Ethics	Advertising is a booming activity both in the physical realm and on the Internet. Online advertising is growing and is subject to legal standards, although some self-imposed ethical standards for the industry are needed. This has been called self-regulation. This article examines the important role that self-regulation (in the form of ethical standards) can play in addressing advertising that uses degrading and discriminatory images of women that compromise their dignity. Sexist advertising is a reification of women—stereotypes and sexist social models—that do not convey a realistic image of a woman's abilities and potential.	Sexist advertising, Online ad-ethics, regulations and ethical standards.
12	Sangeeta Sharma, Arpan Bumb	2021	Journal of International Woman's studies	This research paper studied how women's role portrayal impacts consumers' willingness to buy and to identify the difference in views of Indian men and women when it comes to the stereotypical role portrayal of women in advertisements.	Four Roles identified that portray women in ads such as: Sexual orientation, Domestic Portrayal, Submissive/Subservient nature, and Weak Behavior.

Deception in Advertising

"The consumer isn't a moron; she is your wife. You insult her intelligence if you assume that a mere slogan and a few vapid adjectives will persuade her to buy anything. She wants all the information you can give her." (David Ogilvy, 1985)

Deception has been the focus of many researchers in different disciplines (Ekman and Friesen, 1969). Deception is considered one of the major ethical issues to be raised in advertising (Hyman, Tansey, and Clarc, 1994). Today, consumers are increasingly warned against such practices, especially by consumer protection agencies, which leave them less vulnerable and increase their perception of deception. Therefore, even if companies and advertisers may obtain some benefits from deception, their losses can be enormous. Consumers may suffer physical, financial, or emotional harm because of these practices, and advertisers may experience negative publicity that jeopardizes their long-term sustainability. The creation of precise communications that the intended audience can understand is a requirement for taking responsibility. It is deceptive and fraudulent to claim that a product is "good for them" when it is not. It may be irresponsible to promote product features that consumers are unable to evaluate, due to either the product's credibility or the consumers' lack of technical knowledge. Therefore, deception plays an important role in the world of advertising.

The conceptualization of deception in advertising has been the subject of disagreement (Gao, 2008). In the United States, where the majority of works on deception have grown, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) defines deception as any "representation, omission or practice that is likely to mislead the consumer acting reasonably in the circumstances, to the consumer's detriment.

Previous studies have distinguished between two categories of advertising deception. Explicit deceit is a type of deception where the message deliberately contains false information. Comparing the message's content to the actual characteristics of the product reveals dishonesty in this case. The claim in an advertisement from cab aggregator Uber India that you may "save Rs 500 on your next 10 Uber rides and ride Uber and the discount will auto apply" was deemed misleading by ASCI (2021).

While implicit deception occurs when a marketing communication contains information that is factual yet misleads the consumer regarding the features of the commodity or service. The five categories that were identified were source-based inference, semantic fuzziness, intra-attribute misleadingness, inter-attribute misleadingness, and omission of critical information (Chaouachi & Rached, 2012). This kind of deception is more difficult to detect since it requires a comparison between customer notions formed from the message and the actual features of the product or service. Although the advertisement did not intend to deceive in this instance, implied deceit poses a more interesting challenge for the advertiser because consumers can come to the wrong conclusion. Thus, deception is a subjective concept, yet it nevertheless presents a significant obstacle to advertising.

Academicians have been researching ways to gauge deception levels for quite some time. Chaouachi and Rached (2012) provided the first multi-dimensional measurement scale of perceived deceit in advertising on the dimensions of perceived veracity and ethics. From a managerial standpoint, this scale might be helpful for marketing professionals. It serves as a barometer for the degree of deceit that buyers deem tolerable. Additionally, it helps managers to identify the message components that are assumed to be misleading and make the necessary changes. However, disregarding the receiver makes it difficult to understand deceit effectively. Consumers may not understand misleading messages that are making incorrect claims and vice versa. Therefore, advertisers must comprehend the degree to which commercials deceive customers based on their actions. Individuals have varying expectations regarding the reliability of various

forms of advertising. They now have a variety of opinions and expertise about the goods or companies that are being advertised. To ensure that the recipient of their advertisement respond appropriately to an object to which s/he is sensitive, the advertiser is also concerned that any distortion of the stimuli will be to their benefit.

Advertising to Vulnerable Populations

Earlier studies have defined vulnerable consumers are those who fail to understand their own preferences and/or lack the knowledge, skills, or freedom to act on them, their vulnerability being a result being more gullible and trusting to deceptive or persuasive marketing tactics, and so they are adversely affected by advertising as compared to the remainder of the population (ref. Ringold, 2005; Langenderfer and Shimp, 2001; Minton, 2019; Tsai & Honka, 2021; etc.). Studies have also highlighted the cognitive factors that hinder a firm's relationship with economically vulnerable consumers. For instance, a study by de la Cuesta-González et al. (2022) has identified the cognitive factors of distrust and shame due to which economically vulnerable consumers find it difficult to engage in a financial relationship with a bank.

Regardless of whether a vulnerable consumer is actually harmed, if they are being sold goods through the weaknesses that characterize their vulnerabilities, they have been taken advantage of (Brenkert, 1998). They have little or no control over these features of their behavior. The fact that they may take fun or pleasure in being targeted by marketers is, then, irrelevant since they do not qualify, as market clients. And it is this situation which has been cited as one of the criteria for determining unfairness in advertising, i.e., advertising (or marketing) makes unfair claims when those claims ". . . cause especially vulnerable groups to engage in conduct deleterious to themselves" (e.g. Cohen 1974; Brenkert, 1998; Arnold & Valentin, 2013; Hill & Sharma, 2020). Hence, according to Hill & Sharma (2020), consumer vulnerability is a state in which consumers are subject to harm because their access to and control over resources is restricted in ways that significantly inhibit their abilities to function in the marketplace.

Finally, some of the studies have argued the failure of public policy makers to counter deceptive marketing practices targeted to consumers with varying degrees of vulnerability because the way vulnerability is being perceived is different for different people. For instance, a study by Jones & Middleton (2007) suggests that ethical concerns are more often raised by perceived product harm rather than perceived target vulnerability and target characteristics. The study suggested that target vulnerability may only be an issue with products considered to be the most harmful or generally immoral. Thus, products considered to be legitimate when targeting one group may continue to be perceived as legitimate when targeting other more sensitive groups. And so there is a general lack of public concern about certain targeting strategies.

Ethical Issues in Online Advertising

Though fake or distorted news and information is not exactly anything new and has been a part of media history long before the creation of the Web and social media. The Web and social media, however, enable the unprecedentedly quick circulation of unverified and unconfirmed information, rumors, and conspiracy theories, which frequently elicit massive but uninformed social reactions. As a result, fake news stories spread more quickly than real news items (Del Vicario et al., 2016). The authors found through analysis of a Twitter data set that fake news was more likely to be retweeted and spread to between 1,000 and 100,000 Twitter followers (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Even though inaccurate or misleading information can be accidentally conveyed in some circumstances, false information is typically purposefully prepared and disseminated to influence public opinion or hide the truth. Ultimately, fake information is created and manufactured to deceive and influence users, whether it is to sway people's ideas or just for financial advantage (Kirby, 2016). The deception's success may also depend on the social media

platform. For instance, increased security can reduce online fraud by thwarting or averting attacks. However, it might also have the reverse result by giving the target users a false sense of security. Similar to offline deception, online deception can either be increased or decreased by low security by making potential targets warier. Because of the incorporation of numerous media modalities made available by the World Wide Web, paid advertising has become more diverse in both form and identification. Due to the multi-media nature of the Web, advertisers may reach customers using seemingly endless combinations of advertising formats that are increasingly tailored to the specific consumer. Consumers, in turn, learn how to spot persuasive online attempts and craft counterarguments or outright reject them (Fransen, Verleg, Kirmani, & Smit, 2015; Cho & Cheon, 2005). Therefore, companies began utilizing native advertising to boost engagement. "Native advertising" refers to the practice of displaying advertisements to online content consumers that are similar in structure and content to the other content that is produced on the same platform but is not sponsored. Although incorporating advertisements into content has been a practice for many years, two aspects of native advertising make it an appealing topic for both advertisers and academics: the variety of formats in which advertisers and publishers can produce native advertising content; and the current ambiguity surrounding what constitutes dishonest, morally and legally acceptable online content presentation. Native advertising is thought to be beneficial for online advertising. Concerns regarding the ethics of the practice and its impacts on how consumers view advertisers and content publishers have grown in tandem with the emergence of native advertising as a potential solution to the difficulties with digital advertising revenue. Regulators have also talked about native advertising since they believe it has a great potential to deceive consumers.

Since the debut of the first banner in October 1994, digital advertising has evolved dramatically to transform the entire advertising industry. In its

nascent stage was referred to as interactive advertising over the traditional one due to its nature. This then led to the development of Programmatic advertising representing a new phase, where digital advertising can be sold and bought automatically using software, data, and algorithms (IAB 2014). The use of AI in advertising has helped advertisers assess the preferences of consumers using algorithms. For example, TikTok, a short video platform that was released in 2017, uses AI technologies to assess users' preferences through their interactions with the content and provide a personalized content feed to each user (Jennings 2019). As TikTok's parent company Byte Dance (2019) states on its website, there is no need to input individual preferences or identify topics of interest when using any Byte Dance content platform. By using large-scale machine learning and deep learning algorithms, its platforms learn about each user's interests and preferences through interactions with the content, including taps, swipes, time spent on each article, time of day content is consumed, pauses, comments, dislikes, favorites, and so forth. This result in a personalized content feed customized specifically for each user. So this information enables the advertisers to feed the consumers with advertisements for products that fit their interests. Though the use of AI has resulted in intrusion into consumer privacy, this will also help morph into an imaginative intelligent ad shortly. For example, when a user remembers that tomorrow is her son's or daughter's birthday, her favorite AI-powered app may have already recommended a few trendy birthday gifts based on all of the data the app has about her and her family—including her son or daughter—waiting for her to view, select, and order by clicking on a tag or by using a voice command. These gifts may be in virtual reality or augmented reality, which allows them to be experienced virtually (Li, Daugherty, and Biocca 2003).

Subliminal messages in advertising were another sort of deceit that was taken into consideration. These messages were said to affect consumer behavior by subtly changing preferences or attitudes about consumer goods. Subliminal

advertising continues to be used or employed by advertisers despite its morality and effectiveness of it being debatable (Charles, 1996; Kathryn, 1994; Block & Bruce, 1985; Klass, B, 1958), particularly in "product placement," where products are "seen" as an essential component of films or TV dramas without being specifically mentioned as such by the actors in the films or dramas. Silverman's hypothesis makes it evident that the connection between a subliminal stimulus and unconscious wish must be extremely precise by describing a reasonable model of subliminal impact. Although marketers have used subliminal messages for decades, there is no evidence that it has had an impact on customer views. High-awareness brands may benefit from subliminal advertising, according to studies.

Stereotypes in Advertising

Even though advertising is a common type of communication by marketers, it is one of the many factors that contribute to the socialization of gender roles. These are presentations of idealized, stereotypical depictions of people used to create advertising messages. Stereotypes thus become a crucial shorthand via which advertising may quickly communicate a product category and suggest for whom the product is intended by using simplistic visuals that neglect the nuances of modern lives. The "ideologies" of advertising, as they have been referred to, are built on stereotypes. For example, the "ideal of domesticity" and the "beauty ideal" offer normative standards for how men and women should be portrayed and how they should behave. A huge gamut of work reflects the stereotypical portrayal of women that is only apparent in circumstances and roles relating to the house (Matthes et al,2016). Advertisements in traditional media have limited women's responsibilities to matters of sexual orientation, such as the Amul Macho commercial, which, despite being targeted at men, exhibits chauvinism towards women. While gender stereotyping is prevalent in every country but its absorption varies in nations determined specifically by the social culture of that country. These stereotypes through

ads depicting a particular trait as normative have had a huge impact on the social built-up. In addition, advertisements frequently portrayed women as being obedient and performing decorative tasks. These stereotypical issues exposed viewers' inaccurate views about women. Most of the time, the unrealistic images portrayed in advertisements were to blame for low self-esteem, physical dissatisfaction, and limited self-development. (Eisend, 2010). Furthermore, well-known companies like Tanishq, Fair and Lovely, and others dealt with women's images to demonstrate the patriarchal mindset of Indian consumers. Since prejudices about women have persisted for millennia, even if there has been some progress done in this area, it is still taking a long time to complete annihilation (Sylvendahl, 2017). Gender stereotyping is abruptly prevalent in industries like cosmetics. Since the cosmetics, industry has long been associated with femininity, many of the companies that operate their gender products are based on accepted sexual dualism. Gender neutrality, particularly in many Western countries, is not only a tool for empowerment but also a bigger cultural transformation as gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are vanishing at an increasing rate. Even if the societal roles of the two sexes have drastically changed over the past several years, many advertisements for cosmetics still feature men and women in conventional settings to sell brands and goods. The cosmetics business must alter the way that products are marketed to contemporary consumers in light of the recent shift towards a less gendered society.

The woman is featured prominently in the Gucci perfume advertisement when drawing female clients (selling and marketing the Gucci Guilty for Her), and the person is featured prominently when luring male customers (selling and targeting the Gucci Guilty pour Homme). While it might be argued that both of the characters in the POUR HOMME advertisement are stereotypically portrayed, the FOR HER advertisement can be seen as non-stereotypical.

Therefore, suggesting the drift in gender stereotype

concepts prevalent over the years. One of the many programs to reduce gender stereotypes was feminizing advertising (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Femvertising is advertising that gives women more influence. The practice is spreading more widely because of changing gender norms, societal breakthroughs, and improvements for women. Even if powerful female role models are still present, femvertising—which only promotes household and cosmetic goods—is not well-liked by female viewers. Even though it contradicts the core tenants of commodity feminism and is motivated by a patriarchal attitude, feminizing advertising supports a false mental advancement in society.

**Towards a Stakeholder Approach to Advertising**

Over the last few decades, we have seen marketing being focused more on issues of sustainability and striving to address the expectations of multiple stakeholders. Understanding customers and how the enterprise fits into their value-creating processes and communicating that understanding to the other resource-providing stakeholders becomes the primary role of marketing (Lusch & Webster, 2011). The current era of marketing requires that it must have clear organizational linkages to facilitate two-way information flow with all stakeholders. In other words, marketing is now transitioning from a purely customer-centric approach to a more stakeholder centric approach. Hence, advertising or branding communication activities should be no exception to this transition and hence, should be more stakeholder-centric.

The field of advertising needs a stakeholder approach towards the way the content is created, value is communicated and claims are being made. Advertising can be more responsible to the stakeholders of a business if their claims are not misleading, message is not deceptive and it is socially responsible by not promoting the prevailing negative stereotypes in the society. Moreover, advertising needs to be careful about how it communicates with the vulnerable populations (e.g. people with physical disability, aged-population, children, etc.).

For advertising to adopt a stakeholder approach, it should be able to address the important ethical issues pertaining to the business of advertising, the target audience of advertising, and the society. (refer to the Figure 1).

Figure 1: Stakeholder Approach to Advertising
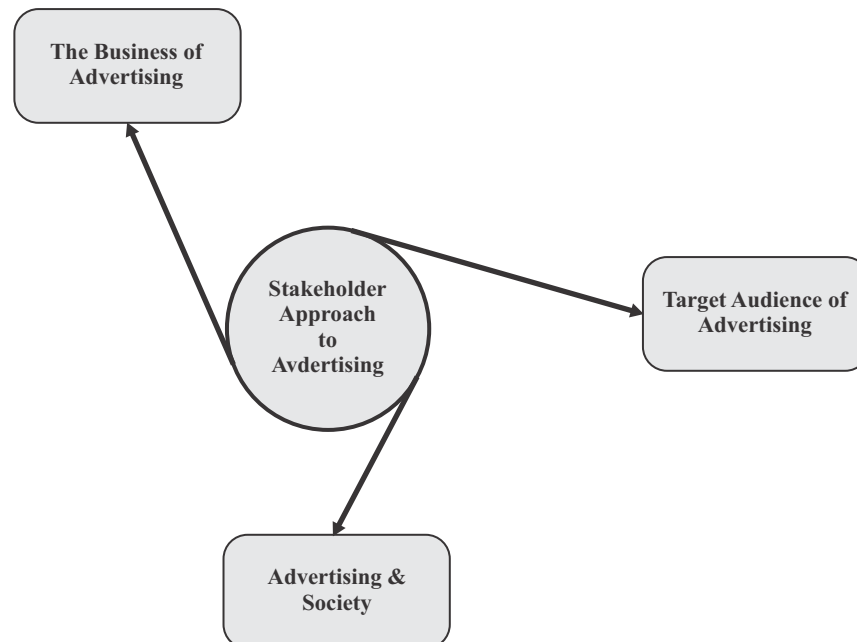
1. The Business of Advertising

The business of advertising has various stakeholders such as the advertising agency, the client, the advertising professionals (e.g. account executives, creative directors, etc.), the government and the regulatory bodies (e.g. ASCI in India).

The Advertising Agency & The Client

Ethical issues pertaining to advertising agency-client relationship are not new but predominate the business of advertising. Earlier studies conducted on advertising agencies (e.g. Hunt & Chonko, 1987; Drumwright, 2019; etc.) have shown the prevalence of ethical problems in the advertising agency executives. Ethical issues related to billing of clients, balancing client's needs against the agency needs, treating clients in a fair and equitable manner, etc. are some of the important themes that underline the issue of ethics in the client-agency relationship. To understand the ethical issues in the advertsing business and to effectively address them, we need to identify the "bad-apples" (unethical advertisng practitioners) who eventually create a bad culture in the advertising organizations (e.g. agencies, media outlets, etc.), in other words, a "bad barrel." According to Drumwright (2019): "The 'bad apple' approach puts emphasis on the ethical character of individuals and their personal decision making, while the 'bad barrel' approach takes a structural view that emphasizes organizational environments and the characteristics that can contribute to unethical practices. Advertising ethics research has been characterized having a "micro-macro focus (micro is individual level, macro is society level) that largely neglects the meso level" (i.e. the level of the advertising organizations that constitutes the business of advertising.

Moreover, many of the conflicts that arise in the relationship between agency and the client do not involve balancing the interests of the client versus the interests of the agency. Rather, they involve balancing the "true" interests of the client against the clients' own perceptions of their best interests (e.g. Hunt & Chonko, 1987). Finally, advertising agencies are afflicted with a kind of marketing myopia in which they focus only on their clients excluding the other important stakeholders and so a stakeholder perspective in advertising is important to create more economic and social responsibility in the business of advertising (e.g. Smith et al. 2010; Drumwright, 2019; etc.).

Advertising professional

Every profession requires a code of conduct and advertising over the years has also developed as a profession with its own code-of-conduct that guides the advertising professionals to self-regulate their conduct and take a moral approach to both the creative and business side of advertising. For instance, according to Cohn (2005), a taxonomy can be developed around the ethical concerns of advertising professionals into five categories: societal impact, industry norms and rules, ethical dilemmas, other's behaviors, and industry responses.

Advertising professionals are concerned about the impact that the creative representation of their ads have on the society and its well-being. For instance, an ad can creatively promote the consumption of items that could have long-term negative impact of the consumers. Moreover, advertising professionals are also concerned about issues related to the ethical dilemma around content and target audience, agency-client relationship, and media channels. However, the study on ad-professionals conducted by Cunningham (2005) indicates that while advertising professionals are capable of reasoning at a higher stage of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984), but they still choose to suspend their moral judgment for pursuing financial objectives.

The Government/Lawmakers

Given the variety of media outlets available to consumers, which results in multiple exposures, the Government of India recently issued guidelines aimed at protecting consumer rights, prohibiting surrogate advertising, and laying down requirements for bait and free claims advertising, as well as those that regulate celebrity endorsements and advertisements that target children. The rules place more responsibility on celebrities endorsing products. They must perform due diligence on any false statements and reveal any significant ties to the maker or advertiser of the endorsed product. Celebrities may become hesitant about the products they choose to endorse as a result of this. Governments all across the world have become more cautious as a result of exposure to various media, and they now penalize large multinationals. Ford Motor Company paid $19.2 million to settle claims that it had made deceptive advertising about real-world fuel economy and payload capacity for some hybrids and pickup trucks.

A recent initiative in India asked the Consumer Affairs Ministry to develop a structure for regulating deceptive and false advertising. Options offered by the group included stiff fines and a prohibition on the publication of such advertisements in the future. This comes after the government became aware of deceptive marketing claims made by several well-known businesses, including Sairam, Asian Paints, Lifebuoy, Kent Ro, and Berger Paints that their products were "more than 99 percent effective" against the covid-19 virus but lacked "scientific credibility." To safeguard consumers' rights to knowledge, states around the world are strongly contemplating the use of deception in advertising.

Advertising continues to use dubious tactics. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the US released guidelines for digital advertising in 2013 to promote open disclosure and boost transparency. In 2015, the FTC amended these guidelines and made it mandatory to identify native advertising as "advertising" (Kelly, 2015). There is no unified law governing advertising in India; instead, a non-statutory organization called ASCI generally controls or regulates the advertising business (Advertising Standards Council of India). In addition to this code, several laws control all media in particular ways.

Consumers have had some respite with the introduction of the Consumer Protection Act 2019, which attempts to address certain new difficulties brought on by the digital age and replaces the nearly 40-year-old Consumer Protection Act 1986. E-commerce was not covered by the prior Act (Section 2(7) of the 2019 Act). Following Section 21 of the Act, the Central Authority may issue directives and impose penalties against false or misleading advertisements if it determines that there are misleading commercials. The new law also encourages consumers to report misleading marketing. These revisions are in line with the customers' right to be free from fraud.

The Regulatory bodies

Different self-regulating bodies and consortiums of advertising agencies engage in dialogue with stakeholders and create industry norms and rules for what is considered acceptable and ethical, and what is not considered ethical or acceptable. For instance, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), has created a code for self-regulation of advertising content in India. The code is drawn up by the people in the profession of advertising. The various chapters of this code are drawn around the following themes (ASCI, 2021):

- Truthful & Honest Respresentation - To ensure the truthfulness and honesty of representations and claims made by advertisements and to safeguard against

misleading advertisements.

· Non-Offensive to Public - To ensure that advertisements are not offensive to generally accepted standards of public decency.

· Against Harmful Products and Situations - To safeguard against the indiscriminate use of advertising for the promotion of products which are regarded as hazardous to society or to individuals to a degree or of a type which is unacceptable to society at large.

· Fair in Competition - To ensure that advertisements observe fairness in competition so that the consumer's need to be informed of choices in the marketplace and the canons of generally accepted competitive behavior in business is both served.

The ASCI persuades all advertising professional to take the pledge – "To Advertise with Conscience."

The Target Audience of Advertising

Advertising should be decent and sensitive to its target audience. Advertising of products to inappropriate audiences should be avoided. It is unjust to target vulnerable populations through ad-campaigns that take advantage of their vulnerabilities (Klein, 2008). Klein (2008) argues that though consumer vigilance may be best defense against deceptive or misleading ad-campaigns, however, the reality is that segments of the population (e.g. children, elderly consumers, etc.) are unable to defend themselves against such tactics.

In recent times, advertisng is taking a more empowering role by addressing audiences which have in the past mostly been ondemned or avoided. Even in India, we are witnessing advertisements that are targeted to the sensitive issues and stereotypes such as LGBT or inter-community marriage (e.g. Close Up ads) or consumers with physical disability (e.g. Samsung ad on empowering blind people). These advertisements are adopting the road less taken by highlighting the role that brands can play in empowering and giving hope to its various stakeholders around sensitive social issues. For instance, although audience's attitude towards ads targeted to LGBT are moderated by their attitudes towards homosexuality, the portrayal of homosexuality in advertising can influence consumers to think about others, leading to consumer-perceived social connectedness and empathy (A˚kestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017). Such ads also create an opportunity for greater stakeholder engagement with the company or brands. As has been pointed out by Palmer & Hedberg (2013) in their counterposition to the skepticism of Brenkert (1998) over marketing to vulnerable populations: "Brenkert and others who endorse his position are seriously mistaken regarding how one can permissibly market products to vulnerable populations, and, in addition, they have improperly categorized certain morally permissible marketing practices as being immoral."

Advertising can be socially responsible and stakeholder centric while addressing the vulnerable or sensitive audiences through the right content which is clear, empowering and non-deceptive.

3.Advertising and Society (Content and Context)

A study conducted by McDonald et al. (2020) suggests that marketers' ethical obligation drives them to take a stakeholders perspective, particularly in advertising, resulting in messages that are more representative of society and at times attempt to influence society. Advertising messages should be clear and avoid any form by deception. Snyder (2003) suggests that ethics in advertising has three components:

- Truth - Ads must be truthful, claims should be fully substantiated without and should not mislead consumers by misrepresentation. For instance, ASCI Code proposes that – "Advertisements must be truthful. All descriptions, claims and comparisons which relate to matters of objectively ascertainable fact should be capable of substantiation. Advertisers and advertising agencies are required to produce such substantiation as and when called upon to do so by The Advertising Standards Council of India." (ASCI Code, Chapter 1, Code 1.1)

- Fairness - Ad-ethics requires treating the consumers fairly and not marketing to audiences inappropriately such as not targeting children for adult products. For instance, ASCI Code states that – "Advertisements addressed to children shall not contain anything, whether in illustration or otherwise, which might result in their physical, mental or moral harm or which exploits their vulnerability." (Chapter III, Code 3.2).

- Taste and Decency – Advertising should not be used to communicate in ways that are offensive to good taste or decency. They should not promote negative gender stereotypes, materialism, and in-decent representation of gender (Male, Female, LGBTQ), race, children or elderly in advertisements. Moreover, according to ASCI Code –

"Advertisements should contain nothing indecent, vulgar, especially in the depiction of women, or nothing repulsive which is likely, in the light of generally prevailing standards of decency and propriety, to cause grave and widespread offence." (ASCI, Chapter II)

Conclusion

In advertising study and practise, the function of advertising in society is a recurring and significant topic. With discussions of "purpose" and "social impact" more common than ever before in the industry, social change is now clearly on the advertising agenda. This is evidenced by the emergence of a "fourth sector" that is dedicated to enhancing society and resolving social issues. Growing criticisms regarding inequalities and sustainability have put social change firmly on the agenda (LaVoi and Haley 2021). Additionally, the COVID-19 epidemic has expedited societal shifts that have prompted reflective calls for a paradigm shift in advertising.Therefore, advertising should be sensitive to the varied expectations of the stakeholders in a multicultural context where both major and minority communities co-exist. Advertising should be inclusive and transcend the differences of race, religion, caste and social class. Advertising myopia will result from using deception in adverts to entice customers. In the age of instant communication, misleading customers with false information, exaggerations, and stereotypes will result in a loss of credibility. Every purchase that consumers make is carefully considered. Expectations are created through advertising. Therefore, marketer becomes ardent in matching these expectations which leads to neglecting other stakeholders. Hence, advertisers should be very careful in choosing the contents of advertisements and the media. Media do not just become omnipresent in our lives because we use them a lot; media beget media. Given these facts, industry experts, academics, and pundits have been speculating about the impacts of media everywhere. Generally speaking, they have suggested increased automation because advertising and brand messages are anticipated to flow more-or-less seamlessly across a global network of connected devices. Therefore, the modern issues present an opportunity for advertising to adopt a more critical, ethical, and socially responsible role in this environment. It is obvious that its historical function as a cultural bridge has mostly lost relevance.

Kevin Roberts, the executive chairman of Saatchi

and Saatchi, declared that - "Marketing is gone. Strategy is obsolete. Management is extinct." Instead, Roberts is reported as saying that building a movement of people with similar values—people who genuinely love their brands—is what the advertising industry is now all about. Reading advertising experts wax lyrical about newly empowered customers is anything but inspiring. Business executives are taking on a more moral, creative, and socially conscious role in today's society. Advertisers are becoming more prudent in adopting a stakeholder approach for advertising. Therefore, utilising a multistakeholder approach is essential for the future of advertising. This will embrace the notion of inclusivity in society and thereby improve the brand's reputation. The cornerstone of the contemporary advertising industry is social and cultural diversity, combined with responsibility to society.

Advertising is a strong ideological force in society and deserves careful consideration. As a result, scholars can utilise our framework to help them explore the transformative potential in the intersections and interactions between the many stakeholders and the outcomes for people's well-being. Importantly, we can go beyond the idea of audiences as logical information processors and start to comprehend the richness of their embedded lives with more understanding of a "cultural turn" (Maclaran, Otnes, and Zayer 2017) and identification of people as socially connected beings. The framework will also assist practitioners in comprehending the code of conduct with regard to each industry stakeholder.

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