

ADVERTISING IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA: THE DEATH OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MARKETING

The article discusses the reasons for which in electronic media advertisements the socially responsible approach is not respected. Concepts of socially responsible marketing allotted inconspicuous place in the educational process and content of training programs in universities. By the time of graduation, students often do not have solid knowledge in this area. The author concludes that for entrepreneurs engaged in the media business should be organized seminars to familiarize them with the principles of socially responsible marketing.

This measure can be assisted by academic institutions and non-governmental organizations. Media companies should develop a code of conduct in which the acceptable forms of advertising would be defined.

This would make companies understand that they must follow certain social parameters in its advertising policy rejecting criminal and sadistic themes. The government can contribute to the cooperation between the two companies. Methods of self-regulation can be applied also to the advertising agencies working in the field of advertisement production.

Keywords: media, socially responsible marketing, electronic media, media marketing, media companies, traditional culture.

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**Реклама в электронных средствах массовой информации:
смерть социально-ответственного маркетинга**

Автор обращает внимание читателя на современные средства электронной коммуникации, которые должны быть критически проанализированы с точки зрения влияния на сознание молодежи. Анализу подвергаются различные формы рекламы и объявлений в современных электронных СМИ. Некоторые из них не только подрывают местную культуру, но и оказывают неблагоприятное воздействие на молодое поколение. Благодаря им распространяются социальные практики, не связанные с местными культурными ценностями и этическими нормами.

В статье также рассматриваются причины, по которым в данном отношении не соблюдается социально-ответственный подход. Концепциям социально-ответственного маркетинга отведено малозаметное место в учебном процессе и содержании учебных программ по рекламе в университетах, из-за чего ко времени окончания университета студенты зачастую не имеют твердых знаний в данной области.

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Автор приходит к выводу о том, что для предпринимателей, занимающихся медиа-бизнесом, должны быть организованы семинары с целью их ознакомления с принципами социально-ответственного маркетинга. В этом могут оказать значительное содействие академические учреждения и неправительственные организации. Медиакомпаниям необходимо разработать кодекс поведения, в котором были бы определены приемлемые формы рекламы. Данная мера дала бы понять предпринимателям, что в своей рекламной политике они должны следовать определенным социальным параметрам, отвергая уголовные и садистские темы. Правительство при этом может содействовать налаживанию взаимодействия между компаниями. Методы саморегулирования могут быть применены также и в отношении рекламных агентств, работающих в сфере изготовления рекламы.

Ключевые слова: медиа, социально-ответственный маркетинг, электронные средства массовой информации, медиа-маркетинг, медиа-компании, традиционная культура.

Media and culture have been traditionally associated in conserving and promoting the varied dimensions of culture. Different forms of media play the role of cultural communicator. The print media paved the way of recording the oral traditions and the electronic media totally revolutionized the relationship between culture and media. With the click of a button, today one seeks information about different cultural traditions; the websites and portals store the audio visual forms that not only help in viewing the different cultures but also in providing extensive knowledge with varied interpretations. However, this knowledge explosion needs to be critically analysed as regards its impacts on the young minds, particularly in multi-cultural societies where both tradition as well as modernity co-exist. Today, we live in the age of marketing and for the marketers the sole motive is promoting their products to maximize the profits. Culture to them is both, a product and a tool to be used, exploited, twisted or distorted for their companys' gains. The authenticity of the cultural traditions, the respect for values, customs and heritage has no meaning for them. This relationship between media and culture can be studied from various angles. However, in this paper, I limit it to the advertisements in the electronic media with a case study of India. We do have surveys in relation to the effectiveness of the advertisements as regards to the increase in sales or on consumer's behaviour, etc. all from the point of view of the industry. However, there is hardly any research regarding the impacts of advertisements on the society – particularly the negative impacts. On the contrary if any negative impacts are reported or exposed, these multi-national giants either ignore them or keep defending their advertising policies. Hence, it is essential to bring to fore the negative social and cultural aspects in order to check the damages.

This paper seeks to examine such advertisements/commercials in the electronic media, which not only undermine the local cultures but also have negative impacts on the young minds and encourage such social practices that are devoid of any local cultural values and ethics. They also negate in a significant way

the possession of positive values which the youngsters might be taught at schools or homes. We have taken some such advertisements that regularly appear on the India TV channels as case study. Further the paper goes on to analyse the reasons behind ignoring the socially responsible attitudes in this regard. The paper also examines that why the concept of socially responsible marketing gets meagre place in management and advertising curriculums in the universities and by the time these students become managers, they even forget what little had been taught in this regard.

For many years now the issue of ethics for the electronic media is being debated among the intellectuals and the elite. The Government of India is unable to take a decision on whether to create a separate Media Council, to convert the Press Council of India into a Press and Media Council or to bring the electronic media under the purview of the Press Council itself. Increasing debates lead to more complexities making it an exercise in intellectual divergence as no solution has emerged. With everything getting transformed into a market economy and market as the determining factor no easy solutions are likely to emerge also. This is because the market has a price tag for everyone intellectuals, politicians, bureaucrats, planners, regulators or financiers and so on. While the elite debate that, the profit motivated market continuously uses thievery, superstition and racialism, etc. as advertising tools treating women as a commodity. There is absolute silence as regards the social impacts of such advertising. Surprisingly, even the women organisations, the feminist movement, the social activists and progressives, all stand as mute spectators to the unethical marketing practices in advertising. The News Broadcasters Association, a private body of broadcasters formed recently, does talk of maintaining standards but is yet to prove its effectiveness in this matter. Since advertisements bring money the emphasis for corrective measures is more on news items and other features than advertisements.

Socially Responsible Marketing is defined thus by Philip Kotler:

“Social Marketing differs from other areas of marketing only with respect to the objectives of the marketer and his or her organisation. Social Marketing seeks to influence social behaviours not to benefit the marketers, but to benefit the target audience and the general society... It’s sponsors simply wish to make the society a better place, not merely benefit themselves or their organisation.” [1]

He further stresses that the marketing mix of the organisations should not only “preserve or enhance the consumers” but also “the society’s well-being”. The stress according to him here is “to balance three considerations in setting their marketing policies, namely, company profits, consumer want satisfaction, and public interest”. Suggesting a three-pronged attack for enhancing the levels of socially responsible marketing, Kotler suggested that (a) “society must use the law to define, as clearly as possible, those practices which are illegal, antisocial, or

anticompetitive” (b) “companies must adopt and disseminate a written code of ethics, build a company tradition of ethical behaviour, and hold their people fully responsible for observing the ethical and legal guidelines” (c) “individual marketers must practice a “social conscience” in their specific dealings with customers and various stakeholders.” [2]

Kotler’s observations are of great relevance as regards the responsibilities of the industry as well as the society and law makers roles. Unfortunately, profiteering and consumerism have over shadowed the suggestions made by this Marketing Guru of Management education. Such a vital theme does not form an independent course in any of the curriculum in Management Schools or the University system. Even themes like corporate ethics or business ethics are treated as periphery subjects. In spite of having learnt such concepts, once the students are out as managers, they conveniently forget these concepts. This is not merely an assumption because the decision makers and the operational personnel of advertising are all specialists in their field and not amateurs. Respect for cultural values, ethics, etc. are conveniently sidetracked particularly with women being treated as an advertising commodity only. Let us analyse some advertisements that have regularly appeared on the electronic media:

Crime: Well you need only Rs.500.00 to open a mutual fund with the State Bank of India. How do you raise these Rs.500.00? The bank has a simple solution to it. Park your motorcycle on the roadside and join a marriage procession, start dancing, approach the bridegroom, steal six hundred rupee notes from his garland, give him one as a gift and the rest Rs.500.00 are there for you to invest in the State Bank of India – the Government’s Bank.

If one analyses this advertisement from the principles of marketing and advertising the target audience is the modern youth, message is to open a mutual fund account in SBI with Rs.500.00 and the aim is to increase the investments in the fund. However, the effectiveness of the advertisement can be there only if the youth has the money to invest. So how to get this money is an essential component in the advertisement and the easiest method is to steal where you can’t be suspected or caught. Is this not abetment to theft? Fortunately for the SBI, under the Indian Penal Code abetment to crime can be applied only if the crime has taken place and inciting to theft is no crime. Hence, incite the youth to commit a crime. If this trend continues you never know that in future another SBI advertisement may show a dacoit keeping his loot in SBI lockers because it will remain there safe from the police as well as his own fellow dacoits.

Similarly, we have the Tata Indicom Wireless phone advertisement where the kidnappers are told by the abducted girl the benefits of the wireless phone. One can give multiple examples in this regard.

Racial: Beauty is not what you perceive as beautiful. It is only if you have a fair skin. All those with darkish or wheatish complexions can be considered beautiful only if they are fair complexioned so says the advertisements of Fair and

Lovely or Garnier, etc. the producers of beauty creams. A legacy of colonialism, racialism per se where one's skin colour is viewed as inferior, hence imitating the fair skinned is the only way to get recognition. There is not a voice of protest and the non-fair skinned boys and girls keep rubbing their faces with these creams with no results and develop complexes, but who bothers. Another aspect that gets related to this is the issue of self-esteem and self-perception where one ranks one's self-worthiness and ability on the colour of someone's skin. A dark-skinned or unattractive person could begin to feel what the psychologists call a "self-fulfilling prophecy" [3], [4] of believing that one may never do well or be successful and very often this concept gets fully internalised in the individual. So, telling someone to use fairness creams or bleaches, etc. without the aim of simply reducing blemishes, but because a lighter complexion means a happier life, is really saying to them that its not enough to be accomplished internally, you have to look a specific way externally. It also adds another yardstick by which women are again measured – from size and shape to colour of skin. Women even today in a more globalised, seemingly progressive society, continue to be bombarded by condemnatory voices.

We look at not just how their skin colour is rated since most of these commercials are geared towards females but how the females at the end always look a particular way. These types of commercials lead into self-depreciation and therefore the public seeks a cure. It demonstrates that every single aspect of one's being from your perception of the value of education, to hard-earned money to respect for women, to your self-esteem is judged and shaped by others. These elements lead to psychological ailments like low self-esteem, low confidence levels, under-achievements and poor performance in education, jobs and relationships, self-depreciation, self-loathing and body dysmorphia (where one believes one's body or physical appearance is always imperfect, i.e. a skewed mindset of one's physical appearance). Hence, these commercials are to a large extent responsible for perpetuating many psychological and societal ailments. It is high time that such perceptions be altered and solutions be sought through mass awareness, education, counselling and of course, stricter laws by the society.

Nationalism: The youth can be nationalists and be jingoistic about the Indian cricket victory only if they drink the Pepsi. Will the match be a draw if both teams and their countrymen have consumed Pepsi? Can the Pepsi bottle hit a century or ball a bouncer? Can it stop the wickets from falling or in what way can it increase the batting or balling skills of the players? The most senseless advertisement making use of the national flag and the national sentiments and interestingly used in both the countries pleading one's victory in one market and the other's in the other country's market.

Superstition: Unless it is shown that the young boy remembers someone from his previous birth and recognises the house and tables, shouts for Savitri

who is still alive waiting for the swami to come after rebirth, the everlasting Greenply cannot be everlasting. So in a world of science, reason and logic, you market superstition to sell the durability of your product.

Discord in the Family: All the women in a joint family can afford to fight each other, throw dishes, spoil each other's clothes with curries; so long they have the Nirma washing powder in the house to remove the stains. So destroy the family harmony and encourage the women to fight amongst themselves and use Nirma washing powder to clean up.

Degrading Women and Eve Teasing: Anything can happen (Kuch bhi ho sakta hai) so long you keep sipping soda of a particular brand. Obviously the message is for whisky of that brand as liquor advertisements are banned in India. With every sip one piece of cloth is gone in the attire of the women when you look at her again and again. No doubt increasing brawls in bars. The message is aimed at deriving physical pleasure by imagining undressing a woman sip after sip of soda (whisky).

If you want to get playfully assaulted by a group of women wear Jockey underwear and enter a men's toilet. These women follow you there and you come out to demonstrate the lipstick marks. Personally speaking I have stopped wearing them not because of the fear of getting assaulted but because of the vulgarity of the advertisement.

There is no dearth of such sadistic advertisements that treat women as an object of deriving leisure for the male.

Eat a particular brand of chewing gum and you can put your hand around the waist of any girl who is waiting for you and move on. I don't have to analyse its impacts on the youth as they are self-explanatory, particularly on the boys who eve-tease and many among these are the first timers to cities having no exposure to a co-ed environment. Multiple examples can be given of such irresponsible advertisements. The worst among them was an advertisement last year when practically all the TV channels were condemning and carrying debates on the gruesome rape in New Delhi. In the midst of the debate, the anchor will say "rest after a 2-minute break" and the first advertisement in this break was: "Virat Kohli, the leading Indian cricketer, advising for a mobile company saying I have learned 2 tricks to trickfully lure a girl." This was followed by another hair growing advertisement of a company (Livon) where the rogue boy teases a girl in the bus by repeating Uncle Uncle in a loud voice what she had addressed to a person respectfully to have a seat. Incidentally, that brutal gang rape and murder had taken place in the bus itself. And again after these advertisements, the discussions will continue demanding death penalty for the rapists whereas the advertisements encourage eve-teasing.

There is another advertisement where the working girl is harassed in office, teased on the roadside while returning from work and then she takes a shower with a particular brand of soap which makes her forget all the tensions, thereby

giving a message that the girl should not protest or complain against molestation but take a bath with that soap and relax.

It is most unfortunate that the women are portrayed not only as objects of sex but also as easy targets for men to comment upon. More dangerous is the fact that these advertisements are scripted, directed and shot by the most educated professionals. Leave aside the respect for womanhood they even degrade the relevance of education.

It is more important to roam around in a Maruti car than giving an explanation of non-performance in your maths paper. This was the Maruti advertisement a few years back, wherein the school going child requests his father to go for another drive when asked about his results in maths. Distracting children from studies is a common theme in many other advertisements also. They encourage not only crime but also a lifestyle where you need money. How this money is earned is not important and it does not matter. This is a criterion that psychologists sometimes use in assessing patients – are you willing to be persistent in achieving your goals? Do you need instant results? The hard work and years of patience that parents or grandparents demonstrated to achieve financial stability or success are disregarded in favour of quick schemes to earn money. The negative ramification of this is that it teaches young people and even children that wealth is a standard of success – not other qualities and certainly not how that wealth was achieved.

The aim of contribution to positive changes, basing advertisements on rationality to have an emotional appeal, etc. are things that are not only missing in most of the advertisements but are being intentionally weeded out to demonstrate what I would call vulgarism in the name of creativity. This is like a Director now showing a rape scene in a movie to make it more the way it happened in the name of creativity. Gone are the days where the same would be cut. People must have the sensibility to question the erosion of morals or do we assume that in modern societies morality is outdated and morals have no place. It also raises the question who determines the morals and how much morphing they receive without the very cultural identity of a society being lost. The aim here is not to condemn all advertisements in the electronic media, as there are well meaning and logical advertisements also. But if we fail to check irrationality, humiliation of women and use of children, etc. by the market forces what kind of societal development we are heading for? And again back to square one as to how to check it? Regulations, punishments, fines, self-regulatory or awareness? Once again Kotler suggests to the companies that they should go in for best practices, “evaluate whether they are truly practising ethical and social marketing” as “the most admired companies in the world abide by a code of serving people’s interest, not their own”. As stated earlier, most of the companies have failed to realise this truth of marketing by adopting unethical methods of

advertising. Regulations are missing or where they exist, they are virtually defunct. This is more so because in the name of liberalisation, globalisation, and free market economy, the vested interests are creating a psyche against regulations. This is equally true for the print media as the regulators may be conveniently ignored by the big players. It was no coincidence that during my tenure as a member of the Press Council of India, there was not a single meeting during which the issue of the Council having no teeth was not discussed. Often the PCI has been asking for more but its resolutions and appeals have had no impact with successive governments. The government has to realise that the policy of liberalisation has to be matched with social responsibilities or else the very foundations of the nation-state and society will be endangered.

The following suggestions may be of some assistance in this regard. Orientation workshops should be organised for the owners and managers of the media companies for enlightening them on the relevance of socially responsible marketing. In this regard, assistance from academic institutions and NGOs can be taken; the media companies should themselves, decide upon a code of conduct as to what type of advertisements they are going to accept on their channels. If this happens, this in itself will be a very effective measure giving a clear message to the companies that they can advertise within certain social parameters rather than picking up on the criminal or sadistic themes. The government can provide a helping hand in creating a congenial environment to enable the channel owners agree upon the issues. The same self-regulatory methods can be applied by the advertising agencies that offer their consultancy or services for making the advertisements. Based on these codes the regulatory mechanisms can be created wherein the Press Council of India should be expanded to have electronic media representation also. The PCI's powers ought to be re-looked to make the organisation more effective and meaningful and if necessary it should be empowered like the criminal courts to punish the offenders. In my view, the kind of examples of advertisements cited above are much more criminal acts than that of an individual as this is not individualistic crime committed by one against the other but a crime committed by a profit-lusted company against the whole society. It is also time that institutions like the National Commission for Women, National Commission for Consumer Protection, National Human Rights Commission and Film Censor Board wake up to these issues before it is too late. Though there are many other aspects also related to media like the trial by media, untrained and unqualified media reporters, reporting without any evidence, etc., I have touched upon a limited theme only, but a theme which needs immediate attention for societal development and feel that similar issues may be there in the Russian Society. So please wake up and act before it is too late and the least that can be done is to provide due emphasis on socially responsible marketing, business ethics, corporate ethics and related aspects of cultural values in the

curriculums of the business schools with continuing education in management development programmes.

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