

ADVERTISING: IS IT A NECESSARY EVIL OR A FLAWED BLESSING?

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Abstract

Advertising clutter and consumer apathy has been discussed at length in many research papers. The inspiration for the present research paper has come from the innovative and strategic use of advertisement money by Virgin Group (USA) for better promotion and placement of their products; against giant international competitors well entrenched in their own markets. This success must inspire companies to fight temptation to add to the clutter and waste a lot of corporate and mostly public funds with no tangible evidence of increasing their company sales and profitability. If we can dispassionately look at some of the recent TV commercials; For example tooth paste products; some brands claim different benefits for their own marginally different versions and others invent newer benefits and previously unheard of virtues and health benefits: the point of concern is – does the advertisement really pays off? OR can such big money be used for better products or customer service? This paper attempts to critically evaluate the efficacy of advertisements in the present crowded environment of advertisement space. Still some companies pursue an aggressive advertising plan – is it really paying? These questions will be increasingly relevant where corporate profits are continuously under pressure and global organizations are trying to figure a way out of this unhealthy and unprofitable advertisement race.

Key words: *advertising clutter, consumer apathy, corporate pressures, pay-off, efficacy and relevance.*

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a useful thing to the businesses that use it, and that's all of them if they expect to have any customers. It's a means of informing choice, and it's vital to new entrants in any market. When it comes to society however, and the big picture effects of advertising in general, it's not pretty. Advertising promotes values that are sometimes directly opposed to human wellbeing, environmental sustainability and a fair society. It ought to be considered a possible detrimental influence, and regulated accordingly. That's not how advertisers see it, of course. As far as they're concerned, they simply redistribute consumption, directing spending from this brand to that one. They promote choice, and simply reflect existing cultural values. In reality, advertising doesn't just expand market share, it expands the size of the market. "It seems," says the report, "that advertising may be encouraging society to save less, borrow more, work harder and consume greater quantities of material goods."

Advertising also impact values. While it reflects society to a certain degree, it also has the effect of 'normalizing' values or behaviors. With the average citizen exposed to between 500 and 1,000 commercial messages a day, it wields considerable power over what we consider normal. An example that came to mind for me was the idea of cosmetics for men. Only a few years ago, the idea that men might want to use moisturizers would have been laughable to most British men. A sustained advertising campaign from Nivea later, including prominent billboards at football stadiums, and there's nothing unusual at all about men using hand cream. Research by Frederick Grouzet and Tim Kasser shows how advertising tends to promote 'extrinsic' values rather than 'intrinsic' values. The former are those that rely on external factors for validation – the opinions and admiration of others. The latter meanwhile, are rewarding in themselves, such as a sense of family belonging, rewarding work, or self-development. This matters because "placing greater importance on extrinsic values is associated with higher levels of prejudice, less concern about the environment and weak (or absent) concern about human rights." That's bad for society, but it's not great for the individual concerned either: "People who attach greater importance to extrinsic values are also likely to report lower levels of personal wellbeing." (See figure 1 below for details.)



Figure 1

Finally, advertising might not even promote choice after all. By subtly manipulating its audience, it may in fact stifle choice. Much advertising is subliminal, drip-feed, all about creating positive associations without prompting conscious thought. If we consciously sat down and decided to objectively analyze whether we preferred Coke or Pepsi, we'd probably conclude that we didn't care and that it doesn't matter. An active choice, in this instance, is bad for the brand. Instead, advertising "operates darkly, beyond the light of consciousness", in the words of Agnes Nairn and Cordelia Fine. "Intuitive brand judgments are made instantaneously and with little or no apparent conscious effort on the part of consumers" says one ad agency. "Intuition is now well accepted as a powerful driver of brand choice and brand affiliation."

So if advertising circumvents our thought processes and subtly encourages further debt, selfishness, and a cavalier attitude to the environment, then maybe we do need to think of it as evil. Or if that seems a little dramatic, at least we ought to be aware of advertising, have more

clarity about where the limits lie. And we certainly need more public debate about the ethics of advertising, which is ultimately what this paper is calling for.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Every time you switch on the TV and you will see some products being pushed on you with some assurance. This is advertising. Your mind is being sold to these advertisers. Advertising is the promotion of product or services. This gives companies a way to expose their products to people and hence maximize their sales. Advertising is the mostly debated topic now. Like every other thing it has also some positive as well some negative points. If it has some positive aspect of social and economic impact on society then it does have some negative impact also. Advertising a public welfare program has positive social impact whereas exposing woman in an advertisement has negative impact on society.

Advertising is a mass marketing technique. Assorted techniques are used for advertising which persuades the consumers that why they need the product which is being advertised. They focus more on the benefits, which consumer will get from that product, rather than the product itself. Through advertising, products can be known to public easily. They can decide which product they need and why. Thus increasing the consumption and as a result also increasing the demand for the product. Advertising can also be used to generate awareness among public that which product they use and to which product they can say no. It can also be used to educate people about certain diseases or danger (example: - AIDS, TB, viral diseases, etc.). Even the backward people are now aware of many diseases and their problems. And all these credits goes to proper advertising. Diseases like Polio could never been controlled if the timings for polio drops aren't advertised regularly. Advertising can also be used to inform public about social events like concerts and performances. Charities can use media to advertise about the illnesses and encourage people for donations. Social organizations and NGOs can use the medium of advertisement for promoting their campaigns. Seeking help through advertisement during epidemics or natural calamities can help a lot.

There are also blames that advertising is causing negative social impact on lives. Even if advertising has a vast good impacts on society, it cannot be ruled out that is has no bad impact also. It plays with the emotions of general public and encourages them to think that buying and depleting are the activities of life. Advertising posters of modern films, where sexuality is shown much more than the actual theme of the movie, can divert the society a lot. Materialism is being much glorified through advertisements, which can again have dangerous consequences Society is becoming ignorant towards social or world issues because we are too obsessed to satisfy our newly created needs. We want to earn more and more money so that we can buy happiness in forms of products, being advertised as they promise to bring all the happiness in our lives. We are craving for material goals, because we always just want to have more.

Products which are heavily advertised are expensive due to the cost spent on advertising. It is true that advertising increases consumption, but it is also true that the more we consume, the more we tend to destroy the environment by conspicuous consumption, because if demand increases production also increases. Thus the need of raw materials also increases. So, we can say that advertising has positive as well as negative impact on society. The balance, of what is necessary and what is really not needed should be focused more. Advertisement can create contentment but can also simultaneously create discontentment through craving for more. Our society and the marketing of products depend so badly on advertisement that even its negative impact on society can't outweigh the many positive social and economic benefits.

The plunging newspaper circulation numbers and widespread reporter layoffs that have come with the spread of the World Wide Web, stirring angst in newsrooms and crippling once-mighty media groups across the globe, are a distant concern for India's many newspapermen. A story from The Wall Street Journal Wednesday, September 9, 2015 explains in depth why India has been spared from the slaughter as the Internet has radically changed how news and advertisements are

produced, distributed and consumed. India has been a safe harbor for old-school, physical papers because it has a growing middle class that has yet to discover the Internet and a growing group of consumer goods companies that want to reach them. The growth and popularity of Indian newspapers also demonstrates the vitality of the country's smaller towns and rural areas. Companies want to reach a new world of consumers that lives outside the megacities like Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata and newspapers are the best way to reach them.

WAYS THAT ADVERTISING NEGATIVELY AFFECTS US

Advertising is constantly demanding your attention everywhere you go, unless you live in the ad-free city of Sao Paulo. You probably haven't thought about the negative effects of ads that much. Why should you, it's just a part of life right? Indeed, it is and we're so used to having it around that it has desensitized us. We as a society barely notice the billboards next to parks, building walls covered with flyers, and the school buses driving by with ads.

Here are some reasons why you should be more aware of what advertising can do:

When images from religion, art and other parts of culture are used in advertising, it not only belittling and disrespectful to the noncommercial organizations, but it also diminishes the value of those images. In the ad below (Fig.2) Jesus is being used to peddle cell phones, but even that doesn't receive a lot of attention anymore. Only 98 complaints? Maybe the site that posted this ad doesn't get a lot of traffic, but of course that is not the case.



Figure 2

The economic value of a person becomes more important than the real relationships between humans. Humans' worth is related to their buying power and people are segmented into consumer demographics, defining human interactions only in relation to the goods and services they will consume. (See figure 3)



Figure 3

The advertising entities inevitably influence and to some extent control the media that they fund. If a news station is supported by corporate advertisers, you can be sure that you won't see any negative stories about those companies because that would negatively affect the bottom line, causing them to pull advertising. No advertising, no money to put on programming. This relationship most certainly degrades both the artistic and moral quality of the media. (Figure 4)



Figure 4

Companies feel the need to continuously “innovate” to capture sales away from existing products and services. These innovations are then pushed into the market via ads, which generate sales and lead to the disposal of older products that the new ones replace. This is a recurring cycle that will go on forever creating more and more waste. However, we can't sustain that kind of waste forever. (Figure 5)



Figure 5

Companies promote messages with market value, and when paired with effective advertising, these messages can slowly change democracy into consumer democracy. The dairy industry's influence on the American diet and the food pyramid, the widely accepted guide for an ideal diet, is just one example how powerful an advertising campaign can be. They have changed laws and regulations to increase revenues by getting people to drink more milk (See Fig 6). Food products take a lion's share of TV Commercials. This example shows how control can be taken away from the people and transferred to the advertisers.



Figure 6

Political campaigns have now become massive marketing contests that use tactics that are often indistinguishable from advertising. The most expensive and creative persuasion methods in the form of political ads greatly influence the outcome of elections now. (The examples cited above are from USA: drawn from web pages and other published literature). "The Social & Cultural Effects of Advertising" - provides a very in-depth analysis of advertising. The author shares the view that advertising has had an overall negative affect on our society: "Advertising selectively uses only parts of culture, linking values and symbols to commercial products. Advertising is so all-encompassing that this clearly faulty mirror has become an authority on what the culture "should" be. The mirror tells us about an ideal life, toward which we all should strive using the products recommended."

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The broad Objective of this paper is to make a critical review of all clutter that is available on advertisement. There are research papers and text books proclaiming the benefits of advertisement and an equally number of papers in text and on the web criticizing the role of advertisements and even painting a gloomy future for it. So, the author was provoked to consider as the title says: 'Is Advertisement a flawed blessing or a necessary evil'?

Following are the specific Objectives identified:

- To critically evaluate the benefits of advertising as it is today.
- To examine the content and context of Advertising.
- To examine the media trends in current advertising and their impact on society.
- To make an overall assessment of Advertisement relevance to society and to answer the Question posed by the caption.

Since a large amount of literature is available on the topic it is only necessary to compile the available information through desk research in a logical and cogent manner for arriving at the inescapable Conclusions. Extensive survey of available literature in text and web pages and the internet has been made use of. The author would specifically like to acknowledge the contribution of all the authors mentioned in the bibliography and also those who are inadvertently omitted and do not find a specific mention.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Some of the Literature surveyed indicate a growing disillusionment with print and electronic advertisement particularly TV Commercials. Online advertising is hitting its first rough patch in more than five years, creating troubles for many of the startups that count on ads for their revenues. In anticipation of reduced online ad spending, video sharing service Seesmic, adult-content startup Zivity, ad network AdBrite, which connects Web sites with advertisers, and others have started laying off staff. The coming ad slowdown is spurring new interest in once-spurned Web business models. "A lot of startups are scrambling to look beyond advertising," says Reid Hoffman, chairman of the business networking site LinkedIn and an early investor in more than 50 Web companies, including Facebook and Digg.

None of these revenue models is entirely new. But Google's runaway success with modest text ads alongside search results made any strategy but advertising passé for much of the latest Web startup generation. And even beyond the effects of the economy, startups have learned the hard way that free sites, which must use ads to pay the bills, don't always work well. Web startups such as Gaia and Smug Mug—and big guns like Facebook—are turning to sales of virtual goods and subscriptions. Unlike so many Web startups that until recently saw ads as an easy ticket to riches, Gaia gets most of more than \$1 million in monthly revenues from sales—in this case, virtual items: clothes, jewelry, and other accessories to dress up one's avatar, or online character. Gaia's gross profit margins on sales of virtual goods, which are up tenfold from two years ago, top 95%. After all, they're just endlessly reproducible bits and bytes. Gaia is just one of dozens of Web companies increasingly mining revenue sources beyond ads. Virtual goods are now a more than \$1 billion business worldwide.

Impending ad slowdown

Three years ago, for instance, the photo site Smug Mug tried offering free photo-sharing accounts as a hook to get more subscribers, who pay \$39.95 to \$149.95 a year to store, share, and sell photos. But even before Smug Mug started considering whether to run ads, it found the free accounts attracted porn, driving away other users, says CEO Don MacAskill. Now, with 200,000 subscribers, sales have doubled each year for the past two years, to more than \$10 million last year. While consumers often balk at paying subscription fees for online content, corporations are far more willing to subscribe for a service they value. Salesforce.com, for one, is expected to gross \$1 billion for the year ending in January by selling online customer tracking and management services, starting at \$9 a month per user. The most surprising model for reaching masses of consumers, though, is virtual goods. They've been most common in online worlds such as Second Life, where people create avatars to play and collaborate in a game-like setting, and in hard-core online games including World of Warcraft, where people acquire tools, trinkets, or magical potions. For years virtual goods have been the key business model on popular sites in Asia. Two-thirds of the \$523 million in sales by China's Ten cent social sites comes from virtual goods such as pets; only 13% is from advertising.

How to boost your Advertising success?

To begin with don't assume spending more money on advertising will result in greater sales, since in today's market some of the least expensive tactics can bring about the best returns. Consider viral videos, for example. They reach millions of people, and some of the most popular videos were made by amateurs with simple point and shoot cameras — no production company or expensive time slots needed. As long as the entertainment value is there, consumers will spread the word for you. Still, even switching to alternative promotional methods won't guarantee success. To truly get the most out of your advertising dollars, you have to invest in

strategies that connect with your target audience, and the only way to do that is by *knowing* your audience inside and out.

No matter what you determine, understanding your customers means you can save money by operating a more efficient campaign designed especially for those with the greatest potential for conversion. As you're thinking about what might make the best impression on your audience, consider some of these relatively inexpensive, alternative strategies, which may breathe new life into your promotional efforts:

- **Vehicle Advertisements** – Connecting with on-the-go (who buy food parcels) customers is a challenge, so why not meet them where they spend a lot of their time- on the road. Vehicle ads (especially wrapped vehicles) can make a bold statement and are hard to miss. 'Meals on wheels' is a concept started by 2 MBAs from IIM Ahmedabad which has caught the fancy of many entrepreneurs in India!
- **Sponsor a Restaurant** - If you believe the statistics, most Americans eat out 2 to 5 times per week. That presents a great opportunity to advertise your brand on napkin holders, coasters, placemats, etc. Ask around to local restaurants and see how much they charge for sponsorship.(Same can be tried out in several countries like India)
- **Social Media Ads** – At this point, social media isn't exactly alternative advertising, but many businesses still haven't taken advantage of social ads. With Facebook's recent algorithm changes, you may find a paid ad is just what you need to attract more followers.
- **Restroom Advertisements** - Restroom advertisements have the unique ability to reach consumers in an undistracted environment, which means they are more likely to notice and remember your message. Determine what types of establishments your audience frequents and place ads in those locations.
- **Giveaways** – Everyone loves free stuff, and while freebies are a tried-and-true marketing tactic, there are many new ways to promote your giveaways. Hold a raffle on your website, launch a contest on your Facebook or Twitter page, or give an eBook to those who join your email list — the possibilities are endless.
- **Sponsor Local Events/Organizations** – Show consumers you care about the community by sponsoring a school athletic team, a public concert, or festival. Not only does it help others out but it generally offers quick exposure to large numbers of people.

These are only a few ideas which will hopefully spark your own creativity. The most important thing to remember is, with some imagination and planning, you don't need a pricey 30-second TV or radio ad or a small blurb tucked in the corner of a magazine. Instead, focus on messages that grab consumers' attention, make an impact, and are memorable. Also, keep in mind that an alternative to advertising is inherently always changing, because what is new today will soon become stale when the masses catch on. So, always keep one eye looking forward and planning for another way to surprise your customers.

Social media platform advertising programs

Let's consider the advertising options that the major social media platforms have developed to generate revenue from their business models. Facebook has led the pack for social media advertising, but has fallen out of favor with many businesses who cannot afford the rising advertising rates and restrictions. Facebook is also falling out of favor with some of its own crowd because of said advertising. Some innovative businesses have found unique ways to still be able to use Facebook without paying significant rates. This tactic includes the planning of events for a business by using the event invitation feature.

Using this event invitation feature gets attention among followers who want to attend the event, and these devoted fans will often share details of the event with friends. As a result of this

sharing, the attention is garnered by others on the site who will hopefully see the information and join the event themselves. The only cost involved is to actually host the live event, which can be online or in person, but this creates a way to offer incentives and rewards through the event without paying for the actual advertising. Even if people cannot make it to the event, they have still seen your company and may look up information about it anyway, out of curiosity. (See figure 7)

The image shows a 'Create Public Event' form on Facebook. The form has a title bar with a close button. Below the title bar are four input fields: 'Name' with the text 'Catalina Wine Mixer', 'Details' with the placeholder 'Add more info', 'Where' with the placeholder 'Add a place?' and a location pin icon, and 'When' with a date picker showing '20/7/2015' and a calendar icon, and a text input field for 'Add a time?'. Below these fields is a warning message with a cartoon owl icon: 'You're creating a public event. You won't be able to change this to a private event later. Anyone on or off Facebook can see this event.' At the bottom right are two buttons: 'Cancel' and 'Create'.

Figure 7

Pay attention to the social media platforms where the greatest engagement is now occurring with your potential target audience. If you have any type of marketing budget as a startup, focus it on the sources where you are likely to get the most attention, including a group of followers who will easily share their adoration with others in a convincing, credible way. Research will tell you where your audience spends most of their time on social media, whether that is Instagram, LinkedIn, or Facebook, make room and a budget to create small campaigns and test their effectiveness on these traditional channels.

Another low-cost idea to your lower budget/higher yield advertising plan is to apply for business awards. If you are chosen for one of these business awards, you can then market this news on your social media sites, and you can be sure the award organizations' sites will be spreading this news as well. These awards include competitions like Entrepreneur of the Year, Red Herring's Top 100 in North America, and watch for local competitions within your region that are tied to a business publication ('Business man of the year' in India etc.). These are either free advertising or may have a minimal fee attached, but this attention will deliver big returns in the promotional value of being recognized by a large organization for your innovation and growth potential.

Final Thought

Our current "network society" is a product of the digital revolution and some major sociocultural changes. One of these is the rise of the "Me-centered society," marked by an increased focus on individual growth and a decline in community understanding in terms of space, work, and family in general. But individuation does not mean isolation, or the end of community. Instead, social relationships are being reconstructed on the basis of individual interests, values, and projects. The Internet and the Web constitute the technological infrastructure of the global network society, and the understanding of their logic is a key field of research. It is only scholarly research that will enable us to cut through the myths surrounding

this digital communication technology that is already a second skin for young people, yet continues to feed the fears of those who are still in charge of a society.

CONCLUSION:

The idea is not to pick on advertisers themselves, whether the agencies or the businesses. The problem is the cumulative effect of advertising – another case of reaping as a society what we did not choose as individuals. So we can't do away with advertising, but we can examine it, ask more questions, regulate it better, and minimize its harmful effects on society. The findings have important implications for advertisers. First, to increase effectiveness, advertisers should modify content more than increasing weight or frequency. Second, advertisers need to test and typically vary the content of their advertising within the life cycle of the product. Advertisers should try and find out alternative modes (as explained for startups) for maximizing the benefits of advertising spend!.

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