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## **Ethical Values in Advertising Industry-A Study of Consumer's Perception (In context to Delhi-NCR)**

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### **Abstract**

*Advertising is the means by which on party attempts to convince or entice another into purchasing a particular product or services. It means advertising play a very crucial role in shaping the attitude of consumers and framing public opinion and it is a well know fact that the public opinion is always influenced the social-ethical aspects of advertising, the marketers and the public policy makers should take different stances on how advertising should be treated. The study has analyzed in detail the public response to the issues like: 'Children behavioural changes in Advertising', 'Use of Sex in Advertisements', 'Promotion of Materialism through Advertising', 'Use of Comparative Advertising', 'Ethics in Adver-tising' and 'Public Policy on Advertising'. The population for the study comprised a sample of 250 respondents from Delhi-NCR (including 100 from the NCR region of Delhi), Based upon the opinions and beliefs of the public, as revealed by the study; suggestions have been made to the advertisers and the public policy makers. The methodology used in the research work is convenience sampling. The data has been collected personally with the help of a well structured and non-disguised questionnaire.*

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**I. Introduction:** The term 'Ethics' has a variety of different meanings. One of the meanings given to it is "the principles to conduct governing an individual or groups". It can also be defined as the study of the 'ought'. There is a continuous argument in ethics between the 'is' and the 'ought'. However, ethics is a study of moral standard and how these apply to the systems and society, and ethics is very important for the advertisement as the Advertising play an important role in shaping the kind of mass media and it pays the media to disseminate its messages and without advertising, our newspaper, magazines and electronic media would be far different. One of the basic ingredients of today's popular culture is consumption and it is the advertising industry that makes mass consumption possible. Advertising is an important element of our culture because it reflects and attempts to changes our life styles. No doubt advertising, like the media of social communications in general, does act as a mirror. But, also like media in general, it is a mirror that helps shape the reality it reflects, and sometimes it presents a distorted image of reality. Advertisers are

selective about the values and attitudes to be fostered and encouraged, promoting some while ignoring others. This selectivity gives the lie to the notion that advertising does no more than reflect the surrounding culture. For example, the absence from advertising of certain racial and ethnic groups in some multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies can help to create problems of image and identity, especially among those neglected, and the almost inevitable impression in commercial advertising that an abundance of possessions leads to happiness and fulfillment can be both misleading and frustrating. Advertising also has an indirect but powerful impact on society through its influence on media. Many publications and broadcasting operations depend on advertising revenue for survival. This often is true of religious media as well as commercial media. For their part, advertisers naturally seek to reach audiences; and the media, striving to deliver audiences to advertisers, must shape their content so to attract audiences of the size and demographic composition sought. This economic dependency of media and the power it confers upon advertisers carries with it serious responsibilities for both. However, all agree to one aspect that while considering the question of unethical practices, the focus must be to safeguard the interest of buyers at the micro level and the society at the macro level as their satisfaction is the key to the marketing success. The criticism has been related not only to its intended effects on society, but also to its unintended effects. Most of the criticism has come from "elite" observers of society. In contrast, the general public has historically viewed advertising in a more positive way.

**II. Objectives:** The study aimed to fulfil the following objective:

- To explore the perception of Consumers regarding Social-Ethical aspects of Advertising.

**III. Participants and Procedure:** The population for the study comprised the general public from Delhi- NCR. A sample of 250 respondents comprising 100 from NCR was selected on the basis of convenience sampling. The data has been collected personally with the help of a well structured and non-disguised questionnaire. The perception of the respondents regarding 50 belief statements concerning socio-economic and ethical aspects of advertising has been measured. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with each statement on five point Liker scale .After scrutiny of the filled questionnaires, 217 were found to be fit for analysis; others were incomplete or lacked seriousness in response and hence weeded out. People from all strata of society were included in the study to make the sample more representative. The data has been analyzed with respect to sex and age of the respondents.

**IV. Analysis and Discussion:**

This section provides the detailed analysis and interpretation of the public responses to the issues as given below:

- 1) Children and Advertising
- 2) Sex in Advertisements
- 3) Promotion of Material through Advertising

- 4) Use of Comparative Advertising
- 5) Code of Moral in Advertising
- 6) Use of Celebrities in Advertising
- 7) Public Policy on Advertising On all of the above issues, the various responses (sex-wise and age-wise) have been presented in a different level i.e. strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree' & strongly disagree'.

The concerns weight given to these levels of agreement/disagreement are 5,4,3,2 & 1. Hence, a higher score indicates greater agreement with a statement than a lower score. Following discussion elaborates the predisposition of the respondents toward these specific aspects relating to socioeconomic and ethical criticism of advertising.

**1. Children and Advertising:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to targeting of children in advertising. It is clear that 36.7 per cent of respondents agree and 12.8 per cent strongly agree with the statement (Most advertising distorts the values of our youth). About one third of respondents are neutral about this statement. Majority of the respondents agree with statement (Advertising stifles the creativity in children). Only 10.3 per cent respondents disagree with this statement. 63.9 per cent of the respondents agree with statement (Advertising plays an important role in educating children about what products are good for them). Overall, 52.3 per cent of the respondents agree with statement (Targeting children through advertising is highly objectionable). 82.6 per cent of the respondents agree with statement. (Advertising leads children to make unreasonable purchase demands on parents). About half of the respondents agree with statement. (Most parents are not concerned about the advertising directed at their children). 81.2 per cent agree with statement (There should be a law to control the advertisements targeting children). Thus, the analysis shows that advertising provokes children to make unreasonable purchase demands on parents. Though advertising helps in educating children about products, yet most advertising distorts the values and stifles the creativity of children. Some parents are not concerned about advertising directed at their children. However, many agree that targeting children through advertising is objectionable and overwhelming majority of respondents feel that there should be a law to control the advertisements targeted at children.

**2. Sex in Advertisements:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to use of sex in advertisements. Analysis reveals that 74.5 per cent of respondents agree with statement (There is too much sex in advertising today). A large majority (68.2%) agrees with statement (It is wrong for advertisers to use sex in advertisements). Only 45 per cent of respondents agree with statement (Scantly clad women make advertisements attractive). Majority of the respondents (85.5%) agree with statement (Advertisements should always show women in a respectful manner). 72.5 per cent of public agree with statement (Law should prohibit sexually suggestive advertisements). Thus, the majority of the public does not think that scantily clad women make advertisement attractive. The public agrees that there is excessive sex in advertising nowadays. They condemn the advertisers for using sex in advertisements and suggest that advertisements should show women in a

respectful manner. There is strong support for legal prohibition of sexually suggestive advertisements.

**3. Promotion of Materialism through Advertising:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to promotion of materialism through advertising. The analysis reveals that 62.5 per cent respondents agree with the statement (Advertising persuades people to buy things they should not buy). 59.8 per cent respondents agree with statement (Advertising is making us a materialistic society, overly interested in buying and owning things). 65.9 per cent public agree with statement (Advertising makes people buy unaffordable products just to show off). 68.3 per cent of respondents agree with statement (Advertising makes people live in a world of fantasy). Majority of respondents (75.9%) agree with statement (Because of advertising, people buy a lot of things they do not really need). Only 68.2 per cent of public agree with the statement (Advertising leads to a waste of natural resources by creating desires for unnecessary goods). Thus, respondents are moderately negative about the promotion of materialism through advertising. They blame advertising for making people buy a lot of things they do not really need. Majority of respondents feel that advertising makes people live in a world of fantasy and it is making us materialistic society, thus, interested in buying and owning things.

**4. Use of Comparative Advertising:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to use of comparative advertising. The analysis reveals that 59.1 per cent of the respondents agree with statement (Advertisements depicting comparisons with competitor's brands are more useful). Only 44.1 per cent public agrees with statement (In general, comparative advertising presents a true picture of the product advertised). 27.1 per cent of them disagree and 28.8 per cent are neutral about it. 49.7 per cent of the respondents agree with the statement (Advertising one brand against another is offensive and objectionable). Age-wise analysis shows that respondents in age group greater than 50 years have a relatively higher level of agreement with statement as compared to other age groups. From the above analysis, it can be concluded that majority of the public is not averse to use of comparative advertising and they feel that advertisements depicting comparisons with the competitors' brand are more useful.

**5. Code of Moral in Advertising:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to moral values in advertising. The analysis depicts that only 58.1 per cent of the respondents agree with statement (In general, advertising is misleading). 67.7 per cent public agrees with statement (Some products/services promoted in advertising are bad for our society). 51.3 per cent of the respondents agree with statement (Most of the advertisements appearing in mass media are unethical and deceptive). A large majority (71.8%) agrees with statement (A judicial regulatory body should be there to enforce ethics in advertising). Only 25.1 per cent respondents agree with statement (Advertising portrays people the way they really are). Approximately same percentage (22.9%) of the respondents disagrees with it. On the basis of this analysis, it can be inferred that public does not agree much that advertising portrays the people the way they really are. There is moderate agreement that advertising is misleading, deceptive, unethical and bad for our society. But

there is a high degree of consensus among the respondents that a judicial regulatory body should be there to enforce ethics in advertising.

**6. Use of Celebrities in Advertising:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to use of celebrities in advertising. Analysis reveals that 63.8 per cent of respondents agree with the statement (Celebrities should be used in advertisements). 63.2 per cent respondents agree with statement (Endorsement by celebrities in advertising increases the cost of the products). About half of the respondents (55.2%) agree with statement (Celebrities are used in advertising to mislead the consumer). Thus, it can be concluded that majority of the public agrees that celebrity endorsement increases the cost of the product. Though they agree that sometimes celebrities are used to mislead the consumer yet most of them want that celebrities be used in advertising.

**7. Public Policy on Advertising:** The responses of the respondents regarding statements relating to public policy on advertising. The analysis reveals that 74.5 per cent of the respondents agree with the statement (A judicial regulatory body should be there to enforce ethics in advertising). 72.1 per cent of the respondents agree with statement (A legal limit should be placed on the amount of money a company can spend on advertising). 59.5 per cent of the respondents agree with the statement (Law should prohibit sexually suggestive advertisements). 87.4 per cent of the respondents agree with the statement (There should be a law to control the advertisements targeting children). Thus, there is high degree of consensus among the respondents regarding the issues related to public policy about advertising. Majority of the respondents are in favor of a judicial regulatory body to enforce ethics in advertising. They are in favor of legal restrictions on sexually suggestive advertisements and advertisements targeting children. So much so that they also favor a legal limit on the amount of money a company can spend on advertising.

**V. Conclusions and Suggestions:** Lastly, it may be concluded that Advertising has played a major role in consumer marketing, and has enabled companies to meet communication and other marketing objectives and consumers is highly influenced by socio-ethical dimensions of advertising industry. It is well known fact that advertisement influences the public life with great intensity and manipulates the mental space of social capitals. In this research, researcher analyzed many factors related with the socio- ethical aspect of life. However, an overwhelming majority of respondents wants legal restrictions to be imposed upon the way advertisements are presented and public policy makers should take a cue from it while framing the media laws in India. Depending upon the public opinion about the social- ethical aspects of advertising, the marketers and the public policy makers should take different stances on how advertising should be treated. Majority of the respondents are in favor of a judicial regulatory body to enforce ethics in advertising. They are in favor of legal restrictions on sexually suggestive advertisements and advertisements targeting children. So much so that they also favor a legal limit on the amount of money a company can spend on advertising. There is a strong case for stringent public policy initiatives regarding socially sensitive issues in advertising. Though the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) 'Self Regulatory Code' for television advertisements has been made

mandatory for the cable T.V. channels; and some isolated provisions in different Acts regulating the advertisements relating to tobacco, liquor and targeting of children are there, these are not sufficient. Secondly, public is least aware about these isolated provisions. Unscrupulous advertisers blatantly violate these provisions through surrogate advertisements and other means. Therefore, it is recommended that a comprehensive 'Indian Advertising Regulation Act', applicable to all media; should be passed by the Parliament and a judicial regulatory body 'Advertising Regulatory Authority' should be established to 'enforce the provisions' of this Act and to 'spread the awareness' among the consumers about the provisions of the proposed Act. An important implication of public beliefs about socio-economic and ethical effects of advertising is that consumers' predisposition (positive or negative) is determined by these belief factors. Research has proven beyond doubt that 'attitude-toward-advertising-in general' is one of the important antecedents of 'attitude-toward-the-brand', which, in turn, affects the purchase decision of the consumer. So, it is suggested that marketers should remain in touch with the expectations, perceptions, and opinions of the public for presenting socially acceptable advertisements before them. It is the task of the industry to help people to like advertising. Industry should alleviate the reservations in the minds of consumers about the cultural consequences of advertising. Therefore, advertisers should integrate diverse needs and values into the planning and execution of their advertising campaigns. An examination of the results presented in this study by the industry may lead to a better understanding of the general opinion of the Indian consumers about the social-ethical aspects of advertising.

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