

Study on Controversial advertising in India

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Abstract

in the era of globalization, everyone is in competition with others. the world of advertising is also not an exception. controversy in marketing is nothing new. at any cost, advertisers want to attract the attention of the viewers towards their product. they are always looking for ways to do that. some also get tangled into controversial issues either intentionally or not, which can harm their brand image. the goal is just one and single - to sell the product by hook or by crook.

while some advertisers have undertaken controversial advertising campaigns which have been very successful, some have been damaging to the company. overtly or covertly, the advertisers break ethical guidelines, challenge the norms set up by the supervisory bodies.

when protest erupts, either the advertisers drop those advertisements from being broadcast for a temporary period or move up to the court to fight for their reasons.

this research paper focuses on the violation of the advertising ethics in Indian advertising being practiced since many years and its effects on the audience and also finds out the

loopholes in the controversial advertisements.

Keywords: Controversial Advertising, Ethics, Violation, Brand, Product.

Introduction

Every day we are exposed to up to five thousand advertisements. They are everywhere - on our phone, televisions, newspapers, radios, emails.... the list is endless. The world is changing fast, including the way businesses advertise their brands. A brand is a name, term, design, symbol or other feature that distinguishes an organization or product from its rivals in the eyes of the customers.

Advertisers since time immemorial take bold steps to promote their products. Whether the brand is advertised on TV, on radio or in the newspaper, methods of advertising are changing. As the amount of advertising increases, it would appear that there has been an increase in the amount of controversial advertising shown in various media. Brand promotion are the key concepts of advertising. Therefore, to promote the brand, advertisers have to take some steps which sometimes

appear as controversial, where they shock people in order to grab their attention. shock advertising uses different techniques, some of them include advertising that include sexual references or even makes people feel bad about themselves. some of the reasons for this include that society has become more complex, increased awareness of the harmful effects of some products and as agencies try to become more creative to "cut through the clutter" to gain attention and brand awareness.

but in a country like India, where moral values and ethical values are still most important in society, advertisements with controversial messages create disagreement in public beliefs. many of these advertisements pass by our conscious awareness, with endorsements and hidden messages peppered across social media. the cleverest thing an advertiser can do is the opposite of what everyone else is doing. sometimes its risky yes, but it's better to be talked about than not talked about.

for advertisers the problem can be that a controversial advertising campaign can be very successful or very damaging, depending on what ultimately happens in the marketplace. there's no doubt that controversial advertisements can create debate and gather an enormous amount of attention for a brand.

globally, businesses want to maximize their profits and get their name out there by using different methods of

advertising. some businesses have particularly focused on controversial advertising methods, although it might not be for the 'right' reason, it puts the brand in the spotlight - after all, it is said that 'any publicity is good publicity'. although critics might not always agree with the message of an advertisement, there's no doubt that it can make the brand stick in people's minds.

the result of controversial advertising campaign can, therefore be offence that can lead to a number of actions like negative publicity, attracting complaints to advertising regulatory bodies, damage to brands reputation, triggering people's emotions, falling sales and product boycotts.

controversial advertising is a very brave method of advertising as it goes against traditional ways and aims to stand out in the crowd of other advertisements as well as to create noise.

some advertisements seemingly take the moral high-ground, through appearing to support equality, and overtly demonstrating their opposition to negative themes in current society. big businesses know that to connect with the audience they need to touch a chord - triggering a discussion of the advertisement and subsequently, the brand. when a brand is called out on a controversial campaign, they often apologies, stating they meant no harm. it's hard to tell if these are sincere apologies or not.

communication and legal guidelines are inextricably linked to each other.

though there is a huge difference between laws and ethics, still ethical values are necessary to be maintained while communicating something to the society as a whole. advertising is a type of communication that is non-personal in nature, promotional in type and must maintain ethical guidelines as they will be public after being broadcast or printed. controversial advertising should be applied carefully, with proper guidelines, as there is a big failure risk in terms of loss of a business reputation. in spite of all the risks, recent trends suggest there are plenty of successful examples of controversial advertising.

in India, the Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) has set up its moral and ethical guidelines, advertisers are found ignoring, violating or breaking very often as it does not invite any penalty spontaneously.

Objective

this research paper attempts to find out the violation of advertising ethical guidelines mentioned by the ASCI in the Indian advertisements and its effects on society through its content. controversial advertising can be quiet risky and costly to the reputation of the brand if not implemented carefully. the study will also help managers to have a better understanding of what they should be looking for when appraising the implementation of the strategies adapted for controversial advertising methods and to make sure all guidelines are followed correctly.

the main goal of this research is to understand controversial methods of advertising and the consequences of using these methods.

Review of Literature

The industrial revolution brought about an enormous increase in man's ability to produce material goods. it became possible to manufacture both necessities and luxuries in large quantities. this increase in production, made it necessary to find new customers and new methods of selling goods. advertising was developed to help industry to solve this problem of distributing its products throughout the population.

advertising has been considered as a mean of information about brands which confuses consumer and often misguide. the aim of the advertisers behind the controversial advertising is to gain prompt awareness in market place. therefore, controversial images, posters, slogans and messages are deliberately used in advertisements. in the last twenty years, such practices have increased.

advertising is important to the success of a brand. advertising has evolved into a vital communication system for both consumers and business. advertising has many strengths like reaching mass audiences, creating awareness, building preference, etc., as well as it has major weakness like targeting individual consumers, making them believe a message, and pushing

them to action. when consumers perceive advertising to be controversial this can have a negative effect on the brand. controversial advertising also known as shock advertising may insult audiences by violating their norms or use argumentative or rude language. controversial advertising may include the advertising of products found as shocking and the use of advertising appeals such as fear and sex.

controversial advertising not only arise from the advertisements but also from the products advertised. consumers are literally consumes by social media these days, which also means they are exposed to a number of different screens on a daily basis. controversial advertisements are a tool used to gain consumers attention. advertising agencies are now a day's forced to create innovative and new ways of advertising in order to navigate through the clutter of today's advertising, in the process of doing this advertising agencies find themselves using more and more controversial advertising methods.

many advertisements that suddenly get our attention due to the presence of nudity, violation of society norms, disgusting images, sexual references, vulgarity or moral offensiveness and turns a normal advertisement into controversial/shock advertisement. controversial advertising creates huge impact on consumer purchases and brand image but this

impact may be positive or negative. Indian society have not seen much gory, sexual and absence material in advertisement so, it is easy to shock an Indian audience when they are exposed to controversial advertising. many brands and government organizations are using controversial advertising in India for getting attention of viewers.

these advertisements are far more effective amongst younger audiences than older audiences because older people are more likely to be strongly offended by advertisements that include vulgar and absence material. controversial advertisements create curiosity in youth and become useful in raising awareness. shocking advertisements evokes stronger feelings among the consumers and shocking content in an advertisement significantly increases attention, benefits memory and positively influences behavior

advertising effectiveness can be defined as the extent to which advertising generates desired effects. it is important to note that people live in a fast changing world where news is delivered in a completely different way than 10 years ago. advertising agencies in order to gain consumers attention are forced to create innovative and new ways of advertising and hence find themselves using more and more controversial/shocking advertising methods.

controversial advertising has become more dangerous for advertis-

ing agencies and companies as it is likely to jeopardize or offend customers, resulting in losses for companies or damage their reputation. the need to gain, keep and act on attention of consumers has driven the concept of advertising into controversy. in recent years, the appeal and utilization of controversial advertising has multiplied.

the fear advertising strategy is used to persuade people to buy a product, pay for a service, donate to a cause, or otherwise be persuaded. this type of advertising convinces people to feel that they are assuming a risk if they do or do not purchase a certain product. advertisers using fear/tension in their advertisements should do so minimally and by enforcing ethical guidelines, because all people react differently, and that there might be some anxiety crated among people, which may lead to negative feedback. the use of disconcerting images that often border on the offensive, to draw the consumers attention, is a well known marketing ploy. cleverly executed shock ads, used once in a while, do tend to improve the sales of the company, but use it too often and the novelty of it fades. more often than not, the insensitive ones get banned and consumers may even boycott the brand. as the Indian consumer gets more and more jaded, there is always a chance that companies, indigenous or otherwise, might take to using provocative images to enhance its sales and to stand out from the crowd.

in current comparative world of business success depends on how effective the advertisement is, due to the said reason most multinational companies as well as local companies heavily invest in promoting its products. most of the companies use various kinds of advertising appeal to attract target customer. the different types of appeal that are normally used include sex appeal, humor, romance and adventure.,etc. to lure clients and to grab greatest market share. among all the type of appeal in advertising most of the time marketers used sex appeal advertisement in luring customers. when designing advertising campaign marketers need to take into account the cultural beliefs, customs, norms and religious values in society, as these play a critical role in forming the social behavior of customers, if not that may lead to consequences for organization such as boycott of their product. in other instances, the use of sexual appeal in advertising might fail to appear controversial because of its creative execution. that is why certain products and services are considered sexual but not controversial and vice-versa.

the use of controversial advertising has increased in recent years, usually in the form of visual content rather than verbal content. the visual approach reinforces the shock agenda as it results in controversies and ensures dialogue is created over the content of the advertisement. society offers strict rules on what is accept-

able in a public and/or private setting. shock advertising or shock advertising is a type of advertising that deliberately, rather than inadvertently, startles and offends its audience by violating norms for social values and personal ideals.

Advertisements for products like condoms clearly push the limits by nature of the product itself and deodorant ads are becoming predictable with their sexual innuendo. Even though the Indian censor board is quick to clamp down on inappropriate content, Indian brands will try to score that extra mileage if possible because when it comes to advertising, no publicity

Data description and analysis:

The advertisements were first observed and then analyzed as per its scenes, shots and words used.

Indian advertisements have spanned the gamut of being funny, sensitive, intelligent and silly. But a few ads from the industry raised everybody's eyebrows and made people uncomfortable. Here are a few of those that didn't quite sit well with us.

Jawed Habib controversial add

Hairstylist Jawed Habib, known for his line of hair salons across the country, recently had an ad put out in his company's name for the upcoming Durga Puja, which did not go down well with some people.

Renowned hair stylist Jawed Habib, who owns a chain of hair salons

across the country, found himself in hot waters when a pre-Durga Puja ad featuring the Hindu gods was released in Kolkata. The print ad showed gods and goddesses lounging around in a Jawed Habib salon, getting their hair fixed, applying make-up and counting money, with the tag line, "Gods too visit JH salon".

The ad did not go down well with people, with many taking to Twitter and other social media platforms to express themselves. While some said that Habib should not have toyed with the sentiments of the people by portraying the deities in this fashion, others lashed out at him for disrespecting the Hindu religion; some even urged people to boycott Habib's salons for the insensitive ad.

Though, amid the huge backlash, there were some dissenting voices who stood up for Habib, saying that they found nothing objectionable about the ad and that putting Durga and other deities in modern settings ahead of Durga Puja has been done before as well.

Responding the uproar that was generated on social media, Habib himself posted a series of tweets explaining the situation and even posted a video on Twitter apologising for the ad. He said that he had only one religion, which is that of the scissors, and that the ad was printed by a Kolkata franchise without his permission, and it should not have. He ended the video with an apology, clarifying that he had no intention of hurting anyone.

Zomato 'offensive' outdoor ad

To break through the clutter, brands sometimes choose to communicate in a style that borders on the unusual. Online restaurant guide and food ordering app Zomato found itself in a soup when its new outdoor campaign was attacked on social media platforms for being offensive and sexist. The controversial ad, written by Zomato's art director Akshar Pathak, has bold white letters MC.BC. (mac n' cheese, butter chicken) written against a bright red background. The ad, with letters that are short for Hindi language expletives, started going viral on Twitter and Facebook with people calling it sexist, cheap and crass.

Apart from the controversial ad, the campaign takes inspiration from elements from pop culture using quirky lines like "Acche din are finally here, Bol Baby Bol, Malai Tikka Roll!" These outdoor ads, executed by Madison and Outdoor Advertising Professionals (OAP), an outdoor agency, have been put up across multiple cities, including in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata, among others. The billboards, which went live this week, are a part of an above-the-line (ATL) campaign that started for television, radio and digital platforms.

Advertising and brand experts unanimously agree that the creative in question was done in bad taste and can tarnish the goodwill and image of brand Zomato.

Advertising expert Colvyn Harris, founder at ad agency Harris-Mint, says the letters MC and BC are not positive attributes which should have not been associated with the brand in the first place. "If this was supposed to be taken as a pun then it's a terrible one and in a bad taste. It treats the customer and the brand in such a shoddy manner," he added.

Kalyan Jewellers

This advertisement featuring Aishwarya Rai for a jewellery brand caused a stir because it featured a dark-skinned child struggling to hold an umbrella over her. This ad was considered racist and the makers of the ad had to finally issue an apology. Kalyan Jewellers have announced they are withdrawing the controversial ad featuring Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. The ad, draw huge flak after an open letter described it as 'insidiously racist'. for showing Aishwarya reclining under a parasol held over her head by a 'a dark-skinned slave-boy' (as described in the open letter).

This statement from Kalyan Jewellers was posted on Facebook: "With regard to the item Open letter to Aishwarya Rai Bachchan: This ad you figure in is insidiously racist, the creative was intended to present the royalty, timeless beauty and elegance. However, if we have inadvertently hurt the sentiments of any individual or organization, we deeply regret the

same. We have started the process of withdrawing this creative from our campaign."

Earlier, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan's publicist issued a statement on behalf of the actress saying the "final layout is the prerogative of the creative team of a brand".

The actress' publicist on Wednesday issued an image from the original shoot, saying the "final layout is the prerogative of the creative team of a brand".

AMUL -Har Ghar, Amul Ghar

This was a digital ad launched by Amul. The story line was about a dad bringing home a baby brother and removing all the dolls that the sister had lovingly decorated the crib with. The little girl is upset about this and the father then proceeds to teach the girl how to play cricket so that she can play with her brother. This ad was looked down as reinforcing archaic stereotypes of boys and girls preferring only certain things to play with.

Motorola C550

This ad for the Motorola C550 phone almost could have had the tagline "Be a pervert". The ad shows people taking inappropriate pictures easily with the Motorola phone. Made in really poor taste, this ad was pulled off by the censors.

Ford Figo India

Ford Figo ran this print ad portraying

women bound and gagged in the trunk of a car with the caption "Leave your worries behind". It was supposed to refer to the spacious trunk of the Ford Figo. However, this ad which came out in 3 versions, featuring the caricatures of the Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, Paris Hilton and Michael Schumacher met with severe opposition. The ads were not perceived as humorous at all especially in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya incident and were pulled off with Ford issuing an apology for them.

Research methodology

to obtain the point of view towards advertising of controversial products, an opinion poll was distributed to the available sample of people. A total of 77 people of different age groups were sampled (34 male and 43 female) with ages ranging from 18 to 55 years of age. For ease of analysis the respondents were categorized into three age groups: 18 to 22 years, 23 to 35 years and 36 to 55 years. The sample is made up of college going, office going and senior people and the questionnaire took approximately 4-5 minutes to complete.

Data collection

The data collected for this paper is completely secondary in nature as all the advertisements taken as samples for the study have been viewed in YouTube. The advertisements of jawed habib, kalyan jewellers, ford

the people were asked the following questions:

Question No:	Question
1	do you watch video advertisements ?
2	do you follow print advertisements ?
3	do you find certain advertisements offensive/shocking?
4	what factors make an advertisement controversial? a. foul language b. nudity c. picturization of alcohol/tobacco d. violence e. concern for children f. health and safety issue
5	do you think these types of advertisements be banned?
6	have we become more tolerant towards the controversial advertising?
7	do you think companies create false controversies around their products to stand out in the crowd?
8	should certain ethical guidelines be set so as to curb the offensiveness/shocking nature of the advertisements now-a-days?

figo india, motorola c550, amul, levis jeans and tuff shoes were viewed in YouTube.

The links have been mentioned at the end.

Suggestions and conclusion

It's difficult to use controversial marketing without offending at least a portion of your audience. Some entities have been successful in finding the happy medium between being intriguing and being plain offensive, but for most, it is a struggle. India's diversity makes it hard to implement controversial marketing techniques without being shot down by one group of people or another. Thus,

most companies or people who shock their audience understand and accept that they can't be everyone's friends; the profit benefits outweigh the enemies made.

Brands can benefit greatly from what is often referred to as "shock marketing." Keep in mind that even with the benefit, you will have some negativity. You may gain new customers, but you will lose some old customers too. Public reactions need to be predicted from all angles before a campaign is implemented. It is better to prepare for what will happen than try to deal with it after it blows up.

On a positive note, a well-placed marketing campaign that shocks people will set you apart from the competi-

tion and get your name known. However, it can also be similar to playing with fireworks without taking proper safety precautions. Using controversy in marketing campaigns is something that is becoming more and more acceptable by brands. If done correctly, it can be a great way to get your brand noticed. If it backfires, it can do more harm than good to your brand. Be wise about any type of controversial campaign you run. You need to predict all possible reactions to the campaign before introducing it so you can determine if it is worth the time and money you are spending.

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