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THE WORLDWIDE ADVERTISING - ETHICAL ISSUES IN ADVERTISING

Abstract

World becomes more and more commercialized. That is why advertising plays more and more significant role in global businesses. There are many aspects of advertisement that are correlated with ethic: positive and negative. The majority of positives from advertising seems to be collected by companies, while the negative aspects mostly hit the societies (people). Advertisement, especially through the modern medias, has strong power of influence. Some additional regulations should be concerned at the governmental level to force the advertising agencies in order to offer better and more socially responsible product. What is more, some stronger and unified movement should arise from the agencies itself, which should care about their best practices in their environment too. Fortunately, more and more customers are aware of means and techniques that are used in commercials. Finally, the author states that making a good advertisement will be more and more hard and

demanding for advertising agencies because of these, mutually exclusive, more and more shaped tendencies.

Keywords: advertising, ethic, ethical issues, aspects of advertisement

Introduction

World becomes more and more commercialized. Advertising plays more and more significant role in global businesses. More pressure to be efficient is put to business by investors and owners. That is why there is more determination in usage of various means of communication with clients and potential clients. This regards the advertisement too. Advertising agencies make advertisements and commercials more and more creatively, using all available methods to make them more attention getting, to excite the receiver, being longer remembered and stimulate client or potential client to do the purchase. The disadvantage of too big pressure put on efficiency of advertising is increasing feeling that commercials and advertisements are not as ethic as one might expect to be. The question arises about the natural boundary of efficiency of the ethical advertisement. How intrusive the nowadays advertisement has to be in order to fulfill the expectations of companies? This paper is to systematize, analyze and evaluate various ways that advertisement can be both ethically correct and unethical. In order to fulfill this task, the author is going to go throughout the damages caused by advertisement. In the beginning, the positive aspects of advertisement will be covered and the proposals of solution will be presented in the end of this paper. The author considers these issues as important because nobody is able to avoid influence of advertisement in nowadays world. Even people living in separation from media and staying outside the strongly commercialized areas must be influenced by others who see commercials and whose

decisions are, to some extent, the outcome of advertising activities. Author perceives ethical issues of advertisement as important for the proper development of societies and countries. Many of problems regarding to ethic left to be solved in the XXI century.

1. The positive aspects of advertisement

It would be wrong to say that advertisement is the bad thing only. First of all, enormous human resources are needed in the process of advertisement creation. This demonstrates the significance of advertisement for entire economy of a modern or growing country. Advertisements enable proper functioning of economy. Company that invents new, making breakthrough products should deserve for the opportunity to inform the market about new achievement and availability of products that fulfill new needs. Otherwise many companies, where many valuable people work, they would feel no incentive to invest often very huge financial means into research and development (the nature of forecast outcomes is very fragile itself). All modern economic models assume competition as the factor that guarantees the economic growth and serves the authentic progress of human kind. Advertising, which keeps the market competition is ultimately positive thing in the economy. The last positive aspect that impacts the economy directly is positive redistribution of income gained from commercials. The good examples are television stations that pay for their ambitious productions from selling advertisement time. Second good aspect is connected with politics. Advertisement in politics is something that may bear the very positive input into the democracy. It can be also understood as one of the causes, which brings the wealth to the nation¹. Political advertisements

¹ Of course under one constraint: nation does not suffer from populism.

can inform wide range of people about proposals of parties, their ideas and candidates, as well as values believed. The importance of this role should be emphasized especially in terms of new candidates that had no opportunity to be get to known yet. Thirdly, the positive influence of advertisement on culture can be recognized. Advertisers are often great sponsors as well. Sponsors may help the production of these programs, which tend to have high quality in terms of art, moral and aesthetic attitudes as well as cognitive attributes. Advertisement can have edifying and inspiring influence on its receivers, it can motivate them to act in the way that is useful for entire society. Advertisement is able to make many people smile, feel empathy, solidarity, patriotism, altruism and love. Creative advertisement makes people to think in less linear way so that woos to reject constraints in thinking. Advertisement is not bad or good itself. It is the tool that can be used to inform the public, make people more aware of some problem or influence the behavior of larger amount of people. However, the usage of advertisement can be positive or negative. Whether this usage is positive or negative can be said after evaluating the outcome of certain advertisement.

2. Damages caused by advertisement

The negative usage is when certain damages caused by advertisement can be observed. Again, one of the negatives is related to economy. Advertisements often hide important facts about products and services in order to improve the profits of producer or service delivery company. Airline tickets, which SkyEurope or WizzAir use to offer for symbolic amounts of money but without informing about airport fares, offers of mobile networks companies called unsubstantiated 'for free' that European Parliament banned last time, no information about the battery operation time, which is twice shorter than average in industry in terms

of new, super cool mobile phone model (for example recent Nokia 6300), informing about relatively cheap product not about the contract -again, mobile operators. Moreover, advertisers try to influence the publications and shows in television and radio. Sometimes it is done in soft and ethical way through so called sponsored publications for example articles but often reader has no opportunity to educate about the level of influence of company on the actions of advertising agency. Then the function of information provider may be in danger. Additionally, such problems are very hard to prove and generally nobody decides to file a law suit in such cases. However, ethically considering the issue, the advertising agency may reject even very profitable offer when job requires disposal of certain freedom of decision. What is more, advertisement is used as a tool of persuasion not an mean of information only. This is the area of particular abuses. All of available on Polish market painkillers is advertised in the way that is expressing the state of having strong pain, the takes and sounds in commercials convince us to feel unhealthy during the broadcast of the commercial. In the opinion of the author, such intense persuasion is unethical especially, that very often simply aggravates the real problems and intimidates the potential consumer in advance. Another way of using persuasion is showing unreal, ideal world that client should suppose to be in during or right after the consumption of the product. The best example is Coca-Cola. Various advertisements of this company show that thanks its products customer will have more satisfaction from his or her life. Often products are fairly similar or fulfill exactly the same needs. Then many producers woo the consumers to do the purchase basing on the irrational motives instead of pointing the differences between quality or prices. Avoiding the example of mobile operators, author decided to mention the example of 99% of washing powders. This action, as convincing to do the

irrational choice, is unethical. Moreover, often advertisement is the tool of spreading out of mentality of consumption. The least problematic example is advertisement of toothpastes. Companies producing these products have simply no idea how to improve their profits so they promote usage of their products as often as possible. However, much more problematic are serious and very often successful attempts to change people's eating habits like these advertised by McDonald's. Many people buy things because they feel desire created by advertisers and product managers, not because they really need the products they buy. This deteriorates the quality of people's life, especially children's life, which have no molded identity and no self-protecting mechanisms shaped. McDonald's is a very negative example here. This company not only produces unhealthy food but it attracts children through small gifts (generally toys) and proximity of -built by the company of course-playground. This artificial demand created by producers thanks the advertisement leads to speeding up the consumption process and shortening the product life cycle. From the point of view of ethic, artificial steps taken in order to change the product life cycle to make it shorter are incorrect and unsubstantiated. The business of one company cannot predominate the business of many people, families and entire country (which resources are limited).The situation mentioned above is most often met in the wealthy countries. However, more and more often it happens in growing countries, what should be evaluated as even more bad and unethical because these countries try to leave the time of poverty and go into the fast growth track. Unethical actions hinder reaching this fast growth track for these countries because money they are spending are often spent in the way that is far from most reasonable. What is more, there is strong negative impact of advertisement on politics. First of all, this happens when real costs of advertising are too high for some

participants of political game. Then we see in media some politicians and selected parties only. What is also possible, some of participants of political scene may be depended from their sponsors or other ways of gaining funds and in fact have not enough autonomy. Lack of necessary autonomy may become the treat for democracy, which is as serious as potential receiver of marketing message may not be aware of this issue. The problem for democratic process may arise from the fact of unfair political advertisements. This sort of advertisement is more and more often popular. Politicians are trying to convince public that actions and behaviors of their opponents are the worst possible in a certain situation. They present their points in unfair light and idly question the reputation of an opponent. It happens when the advertisement concerns emotions, base instinct, distrust and enmity or other stereotypes for example ethnic or sexual instead of sense of justice and common good. Next, the negative impact of advertisement on culture can be observed. This issue is often connected with globalization. Content and methods of advertising that reflects methods and content from another country may strongly influence the country of receivers. Some methods may be very hard to accept from moral point of view (for example based on sex appeal or religious aspects). Sometimes, values preached in advertisements can stand opposite to traditional local values. Moreover, because of incentive to beat the competition, advertiser may resign from artistic values and decide to use more shallow transmission. Too often advertisement shows certain groups of people in the light that put them to shame. In terms of this problem, the very clear example is woman. The role of woman as wife and mother is not only undervalued but often openly mocked, emblazoned as a sort of worse male, neglecting the presence of superior intuition, skill of compassion and understanding; so important traits for many developed people. The negligence of simple

truth that in developing society each child needs good and caring mother is also unethical. Moreover, there is a bad impact of advertisement on morality and religion. An good advertisement can be full of good taste and fortify the moral values. On the other hand, it can be vulgar and unmoral too. Often openly refers to figures, for example greed and jealousy. Today, many of advertising agencies is trying to shock and excite, using unhealthy, perversive and pornographic content (for example the most popular scenes from 'Base Instinct' with Sharon Stone still have their counterparts in many commercials). The transmission is often too brutal. Advertisement uses people's emotions, their system of values, their base instincts and exploits them. Using national anthem or showing that child stops crying after consumption of the product are both very unethical. They work on consciousness and sub consciousness both, they use emotions. Unfortunately, too often advertisement expresses content that is far from truth. The information is distorted. Some important or even crucial facts can be omitted. Without full truth as the criterion of choice making consciously valuable decision about the purpose is impossible. Good, decent and responsible advertisement should always avoid instrumental manipulation. Considering the ethical issues of advertising, the problem of social responsibility. Social responsibility is a very broad subject. First of all, ecology aspect should be mentioned. Advertisement, which propagates the lifestyle basing on wasting resources and disproportional exploitation of natural environment, makes serious damages in this field too. This way of advertising woos receivers to have not to be. Getting these ideas into heads of people is really irresponsible and unfair. It must be stated that part of receivers of every advertisement transmission has not enough common sense not to want to buy anything useless and, as well, not enough strong will to stop the desire. Of course, in majority of examples

producers and advertising agencies count gains and do not consider the losses that have place from the point of view of entire society. Another problem related to advertising is exaduration in some aspects of methods used during the transmission of marketing content. In television, commercials are always transmitted louder than the rest of content. In fact, the signal of commercial is always transformed in the way that it is received as louder but apparatus in television station is often not able to recognize this in order to do automatic adjustment. Also, many commercials present things that are legally forbidden. In order to avoid the lawsuit, some explanation is written at the bottom of screen. Unfortunately, this explanation is generally to small to be read by young and healthy person. There are also examples of abuses in the Internet. Advertisements are very often intrusive, blinking, showing up and hiding entire surface of web page what is almost always very annoying, especially when using older and slower computer. Additionally, they often avoid to be closed. From time to time adverts give massage that client or visitor is a billion visitor and he or she will receive an reward what is in 99% a lie. Finally, advertisement as a entire businesses is, to some extent, unethical too. Many young people find job in marketing and advertising and after few years of intensive work they are sucked out by their employers, who need another fresh blood. This model is very common for advertising but it is also very unethical. Each person should have the opportunity to go through his or her long term career. Even if it is not possible for everybody, the track careers of each position should be designed in the way providing the ability to develop further.

3. Proposals of solution

In the end, author would like to present some proposals of action that, in his opinion, should decrease the negative part of the spectrum of advertisement outcome. First of all, the good practice codex is needed in advertising agencies, which should respect the media and the art that is the area of their work as well as final receivers of the effects of their work: society. Such codex already exist but rules presented in them are generally followed only when clients of advertising agencies accept it. The codex that is really needed should be connected with membership in certain club for best agencies. The role of society itself should be emphasized here. Society should be aware of its position in requesting demand for goods and information. Developed society is not only aware of roles of advertising but also requires respect to this values, which majority of society believes and supports. Moreover, certain role of government must be performed here. Of course, the role of government is not lying in setting more regulations to advert market than to other markets. Nevertheless, state so that government should represent the movements and opinions of society and think in advance to prevent some negative phenomena. Maybe the starting club for advertising agencies with work codex should be widened into sort of concession to work in the area of public advertisement. Law should determine the percentage share of adverts in the entire transmission, especially in the media like television and radio. Second rational point of view is that content of advertisements directed to some social groups, which are additionally malleable to manipulation like for example children and elder, should be under legal supervision. Moreover, the political advertisement seems to be covered by law too. The possible aspects of regulation could be the maximum amount of money that can be

spent on political advert, who and how could raise funds for the purposes of advertisement.

Conclusion

There are many aspects of advertisement that are correlated with ethic. Some of them can be perceived as positive, others as negative. The main fields of these impacts are: economy, politics, culture and society. In recent time, the majority of positives from advertising seems to be collected by companies, while the negative aspects mostly hit the societies (people). Advertisement, especially through the modern medias, has strong power of influence that cannot be neglected. Some additional regulations should be concerned at the governmental level to force the advertising agencies to offer better and more socially responsible product. Also, some stronger and unified movement should arise from the agencies itself, which should care about their best practices in their environment. Fortunately, more and more customers are aware of used in commercials means and techniques. More and more do not accept them. Finally, the author states that making a good advertisement will be more and more hard and demanding for advertising agencies because of these, mutually exclusive, more and more shaped tendencies.

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