



ETHICS AND FEAR APPEAL IN ADVERTISING

Babal preet Kaur

Assistant professor in commerce department, S.K.R.M College, Bhagoo majra, Kharar, Punjab, India

ABSTRACT

Post liberalization period in the Indian economy has brought many challenges and opportunities. This makes all enterprises to understand the complexities and essentials of markets and to improve and sustain competitiveness. Response to such complexities and opportunities can be met by formulating appropriate strategies. The marketing process is used to attract consumer's behavior in desired manner of producer. Consequently, deciding on messages, principles of communication and persuasion are debatably more important in marketing. There is a variety of persuasive mechanisms. Advertising appeals are designed in a way so as to create a positive image about the product. Fear appeals are commonly used in many types of marketing communications. However, fear appeals have been criticized as being unethical and manipulative. The purpose of this article is to review and examine the ethical use of fear appeals with the aim of making suggestions on how to improve the ethics of fear appeals.

KEYWORDS : ethical, promotional, manipulate, persuade

INTRODUCTION

Global Competition, technological advancements and varying needs of consumers are continuously changing. It is possible that such environment may affect enterprises of different size and different sectors and regions differently. This makes all enterprises to understand the complexities and requisites of markets for competition. Advertising is an integral part of our social and economic system. As a powerful technique of promotion, it has been doing wonders in the domain of distribution because; it diversifies distribution, influences the course of consumption and affects the process of production. It is an important element of a company's marketing plan. It involves the development and delivery of paid advertisements through mass media, which attempt to persuade customers to behave in a certain way. Objectives of ads vary, but the overall intent is to attract and retain loyal customers. Customers are to be reminded about the product. Under competitive conditions, advertisement helps to build up brand image and brand loyalty. When competitors are adopting intensive advertising as their promotional strategy, it is reasonable to follow similar practices to neutralize their effects. Advertisement appeal refers to the approach used to attract the attention of consumers and to influence their feelings toward the product, service or cause. Advertising appeals aim to influence the way of consumers to view themselves and how buying certain products can prove to be beneficial for them. These are designed to create a positive image and mindset about the product. Companies put a lot of efforts into their creative advertising strategies and use various types of appeals to influence purchasing decisions.

FEAR APPRAISAL IN ADVERTISING

In advertising a fear appraisal, or fear appeal, uses consumer's fear to motivate them to purchase a product or contribute to a cause. The consumer appraises the product in light of their fear of the consequences of not buying. For example, an ad campaign may appeal to people's fear of body odor to convince them to buy deodorant. Consumers who are afraid of sweat stains or odor are more likely to respond and buy. Fear appeals can be used in convincing people to appraise and change their behavior, such as quitting smoking or not drinking and driving. Anti smoking ads may be very scary and may offer a clear way to eliminate the fear, but it can be very difficult for people to stop smoking. However an ad convincing people to buy deodorant as a remedy for body odor may convince large number of people, as buying deodorant is very easy. These types of behavioral appraisal ads are also used in the nonprofit sector, encouraging people to help save the environment or help eliminate poverty by giving money to charities. The use of fear appeals in advertising is not universally accepted and can backfire or have unintended negative ethical effects on consumers. Fear appeals are also most effective when they come from a trusted

source. The literature conventionally agrees that more effective fear appeals result from a higher fear arousal followed by consequences and recommendations to reduce the negativity.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN FEAR APPEAL

A number of ethical concerns regarding the use of fear appeals have been raised, leading to wide spread debate regarding the acceptability of their use. It has been questioned whether it is ethical to expose large number of people to potentially distressing messages without their consent. First, the use of threatening messages can create unnecessary anxiety among audience members. This issue reflects a large variety of personally subjective and culturally based values and attitudes, making it somewhat difficult to define. Second, many critics consider the use of fear appeals unethical if the advertised solution does not eliminate the threat. Furthermore, critics argue that the use of threatening messages shows a lack of social responsibility from advertisers as advertisements contribute to the development of social norms. Hence, advertising using fear may cause the emergence of previously unknown problems. Fear ads may have little long term effect. Fear appeals with too strong a message may be ineffective and inaccurate if they cause consumers to tune out the threat does not apply to them. This can also lead consumers to lose trust in the advertiser. Fear appeals easily can raise ethical issues.

It degrades the rival's product or a substitute product. Comparative advertisements that thrive on inflicting vitriolic attacks on rivals are an example of this category. Copying of ideas in the ad world is another such menace.

It is untruthful. It gives misleading information/false information which induces people to buy inferior or even worthless products. It is, generally, said that a good advertisement can sell anything. Thus people are encouraged to buy even those goods which are harmful to their health such as cigarettes, wine etc.

It conceals information that vitally affects human life (side effects of drugs). This refers to the information content of advertisements. Those advertisements which suggest the usage of preserved food items without even the slightest mention of the fact that many of the preservatives used have been proved to have carcinogenic effects are part of this category.

It makes exaggerated claims of products superiority. It offers scope for fraud and it deceit people by misleading names and brands and testimonial of famous stars or sportsmen even through such persons may not have even used such products.

It is immoral or is against the broad national interest. It creates and

breeds monopolies. It kills free competition as it becomes difficult for new firms to sell their products. With its excessive stress on creation of brand preferences, advertising makes customers sheer slaves of such brands. This creates monopolies and enables manufacturers to exploit the consumers. It leads to concentration of wealth in the hands of new people.

It adds to the price of the products. The costs of advertisement forms the part of product cost along with other costs and thus increases the cost of goods sold or services rendered. This, in turn, increases the selling price of the commodities.

It targets the vulnerability of the adolescents and the children result in the creation of role models whom these kids are expected to emulate. This in turn shapes their dreams and aspiration in a truly unbecoming way.

Subliminal advertising registers below the level of the conscious human mind. The brain perceives all the information in theory however the mind does not interpret the information for a meaning. It involves an attempt to manipulate the thinking of a person, without the person even realizing it.

Advertising tempts people to buy luxury goods which they cannot afford. It multiplies the needs of the people, encourages extravagance and creates dissatisfaction and frustration among people. They become extravagant and many do not hesitate to cheat others and to adopt even corrupt practices to earn more.

HOW IS EMOTIONAL APPEAL USED TO PERSUADE

However, fear appeals have been criticized as being unethical, manipulative, exploitative, eliciting negative and unhealthy responses from viewers, and exposing viewers to offensive images against their will. As such; the ethical use of a fear appeal can and should be improved.

An appeal is said to be persuasive if it is able to arrest the attention of people and ultimately influence their attitude in favour of the advertiser by impelling them to buy the product or service advertised. Listed below are various techniques that may improve the advertisers' persuasive yet ethical effect when using a fear appeal.

Clarity and comprehension are the products of simplicity. Lack of clarity in design would complicate and confuse the reader as it hinders the flow of message. Complicated message may be misunderstood by the reader. Most readers are interested in shorter advertisements. Being brief is not dropping words or chopping sentences. It is the meticulous work of eliminating and substituting the words without jeopardizing the meaning. It is to the point to cover all.

Credibility or believability of an advertisement message is decided by the extent of honesty. It involves communication of information rather than promotion of products. Misleading facts made in the copy only damage the reputation of selling house. Advertising appeal should be Informative, Easy to understand and Enthusiastic, and complete. Unity is oneness providing cohesiveness to the advertisement. Union of all the elements in the appeal to produce the effects of homogenous whole and each part support and reinforces another.

Advertisers should be aware of positive and negative reactions from their target audience toward the use of unethical ad stimuli. Increased levels of fear are generally associated with changes in behavior, attitude and intention. Too much fear can trigger anxiety that causes individuals to avoid the ads. The fear appeal should not overstate or be misleading. A fear appeal that over-stimulates or over-promises can lead to dissatisfaction.

Codes of conduct can guide the use of fear appeals. Ads should not lead children to believe that they will be inferior in some way if they

do not buy the product. Laws need to be honored with regard to fear appeals whereas codes of conduct need to be followed. The long-term use of fear appeals may condition audiences to expect that all advertising on that issue should use fear. Repeated use of fear appeals may damage the source of the message.

CONCLUSION

Advertising provides positive effects to producers as well as consumers. The producers are in a position to bring to the notice of the consumers the products or services they are producing, the consumers get quality goods on competitive prices. Fear appeals have been used successfully to increase advertising's effect on consumer. However, the inner workings of a fear appeal have not been fully agreed upon or understood. In addition, the ethicality of fear appeals has been questioned. The managerial responsibility in the area of advertising does not come to an end with the execution of an advertising program. Any sound managerial effort is finally interested in goal attainment, and therefore, always ready to evaluate the results. Evaluation of advertising effectiveness aimed at relating the advertising results to the established standards of performance and objectives so as to assess the real value of advertising.

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