

A Study of Advertising Standards Council of India (Asci) and its Regulatory Role Towards Curbing Unethical Marketing Communication with Specific Reference to the Portrayal of Women by Advertisers



Management

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ABSTRACT

In the present competitive marketing trend there is a clutter of advertisements in the media. The advertiser try to make their advertisements in such a way that they will be seen, will stand out. At times, the advertiser knowingly or unknowingly, depicts women as highly indecent, dishonest and full of tall claims. In a situation like this, there has to be a regulatory body to control the content of advertisements. The study takes an in-depth look at the scenario that prevails today in the field of advertising and marketing communication. The study intends to reveal what is happening with regards to marketing communication and whether the general public is satisfied, concerned or indifferent to what is happening around them.

Introduction

What is Marketing?

There are number of definitions and a huge amount of literature available on marketing. According to Philip Kotler, world renowned marketing expert, the simplest definition states

“Marketing is managing profitable customer relationships.”

Marketing through Advertising

Advertising is explained as mass communication of information intended to persuade buyers to buy products and with a view to maximizing a company's profit. Advertising in its present form is about 200 years old.

The purpose of advertising is to persuade the customers to buy products or services. Advertising communicates information to potential customer and attempts to persuade them. Advertising has an impact on increase in sales but for it to be successful, it has to be well coordinated with the entire marketing mix. Somehow, profit maker advertisers disobey the ethical values of advertising. The author Prof. ShailaBootwala et al has listed the typical forms of untruths in the advertisements in her book titled “Advertising” which follows:

- Exaggerated facts
- Misrepresentation of facts
- Unverifiable claims in a language that is ambiguous
- Use of testimonials or endorsements
- The use of sex, specially the use of women as sex object
- Alcohol, tobacco and condom advertisements
- Totally false claim

Portrayal of Women in Indian Advertisements

We live in a time when advertisements have taken on a completely different meaning than when they were first created. The roles of women portrayed in advertisements have been the subject of much public criticism and some empirical research. Advertising is considered an influential factor in determining images of women projected in media. Advertising thus defines woman's relationship to man primarily in terms of the appeal feminine attractiveness has for man. The image of women in advertising has evolved from primarily a homemaker into the role of the liberated woman making her own way in the world. The modernization of women somewhere leads to demoralization of women. There are extreme cases of objectionable depiction of women, the general tendency of using a woman to lend glamour and visual appeal to an advertisement is quite common. Some advertisements present women in poor light in an indirect manner. In a particular after-shave lotion commercial, women are also used to sell many men's products including men's shaving cream or even men's undergarments for e.g. Akshay Kumar saying with 'Boss Baninan' fit he boss.

In order to control such advertisements The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has laid down a code of conduct. ASCI are a voluntary self-regulatory council of India.

The ASCI (Advertising Standards Council of India) Formation of ASCI

Since Independence in 1947 in the market has been growing as a result of developing economy and progress; marketing practices, advertising and marketing communication were becoming competitive and a need was felt by all those connected with advertising to ensure fair play among all the players. During 1985 major players with all aspects of advertising came together and decided to accept global best practices in the field of “Self Regulation in Advertising”. It was observed that specific bodies were in existence in developed market such as the USA, UK, German which were known as SROs-Self Regulatory Organization. In India it was formed in 1985 with an intention to control the content of advertisements formed as Advertising Standards Council of India.

Major Goal of ASCI

ASCI have one major goal that is to maintain and enhance the public's confidence in advertising. ASCI seek to ensure that advertisements conform to its Code for Self-Regulation which requires advertisements to be:

- Truthful and honest to consumers competitors.
- Within the bound of generally accepted standards of public decency and propriety.
- Not used indiscriminately for the promotion of products, hazardous or harmful to society or to individuals particularly minors, to a degree unacceptable to society at large.
- Fair in competition.

ASCI publicize its code and sense of responsibility for its observance amongst advertisers, advertising agencies and others connected with the creation of advertisements, and the media.

2 Pillars of ASCI

ASCI encourage the public to complaint against advertisement with which they may be unhappy for any reason by an impartial committee known as **Consumer Complaints Council (CCC)**.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 prohibits indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publication, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.

Objective

- To study role of ASCI in the advertisements
- To find out whether ASCI has been successful or not in curbing unethical marketing communication through portrayal of women this appears in the media.

Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant difference at the 0.05 level towards the opinion that women are portrayed as sex objects in most advertisements.

Research Methodology

The data of this study is collected through two sources, viz, primary data and secondary data. Primary data have been collected from the random sample from literate population within the Gujarat Region. A sample size of 250 respondents considered to be adequate. The gender distribution in the total sample size is 250 out of which 125 are males and 125 females which is equal proportion of total population.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 Statements	SA	Agree	NA	DA	SDA
Do you consider some advertisements as degrading to women	94	100	06	30	20
Percentage	37.6%	40%	2.4%	12%	8%
There is a need for regulation of the content and intent of advertisements	110	95	05	35	05
Percentage	44%	38%	2%	14%	2%
ASCI is widely known as a regulatory body among the general public	45	60	115	05	25
Percentage	18%	24%	46%	2%	10%
ASCI is effective in curbing unethical / indecent advertisements	15	65	70	90	20
Percentage	6%	26%	28%	36%	8%
When advertisements are found to be misleading, false, indecent or vulgar, public should complain to appropriate bodies such as ASCI	150	60	15	15	10
Percentage	60%	24%	6%	6%	4%
ASCI should conduct public awareness campaign more frequently to educate the public on what to do when they find objectionable advertisements	175	55	05	05	10
Percentage	70%	22%	2%	2%	4%
Source: Prepared by researcher					

Interpretation

The above Likert scale table includes opinion of respondents about advertisements, need of regulation and future move for ASCI. 1st statement shows that there are some advertisements which harm dignity of women, 94 respondents strongly agreed and 100 respondents agreed on it. 2nd statement shows that there is a need of regulatory body, 110 respondents strongly agreed and 95 respondents agreed on it. 3rd statements analyzes awareness of ASCI among general public, most of the respondents are undecided for the awareness of ASCI. 4th, 5th and 6th statements analyzed the need of ASCI and the need of awareness campaign among public where most of the respondents strongly agreed on it.

Table 2 Gender Cross Tabulation Analysis		Gender		Total
Male		Fe-	male	
You consider some advertisements as degrading to women	Disagree	65	64	129
	Agree	185	186	371
Total		250	250	

There is a need for regulation of the content and intent of advertisements	Disagree	57	57	114
	Agree	193	193	286
Total		250	250	
ASCI should conduct public awareness campaign more frequently to educate the public on what to do when they find objectionable advertisements	Disagree	66	63	129
	Agree	184	187	371
Total		250	250	

Source: Prepared by researcher

Interpretation

The above Cross-tabulation shows that comparatively male females are more conscious about indecent representation of women as well as indecent content of advertisements. Female respondents observed highly interested to enforce ASCI, though noticeable male respondents are observed to be agreed on same. It shows that there is strong need of regulation body to regulate advertisements which directly affects the society.

Conclusion

Awareness about ASCI, their role and effectiveness is good among the general public. ASCI have been effective in curbing unethical marketing communication. ASCI are expected to conduct public awareness enlightenment campaigns more frequently. There is a strong feeling that in most advertisements women are portrayed as sex objects. Unethical marketing communication in the advertisements portraying abuse of women has a very bad influence on children, teenagers, adolescents and adults. There is strong belief that portrayal of beautiful and glamorous women in the advertisements is not compatible to the product / service being advertised. The indecent portrayal of women in the advertisements encourages a climate of violence against women. ASCI should conduct more campaigns to educate public to react, to lodge complaints when they see dishonest, misleading or indecent advertisements. Government should make it essential for the advertisers to have their advertisements pre cleared.

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