



Distorted mirror image reflections in Social Advertising

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Introduction:

Advertising is intrusive and environmental and its effects are inescapable and profound. It has many qualities which affect the viewers' thinking abilities and life style to some extent. These qualities include reinforcement of materialism, cynicism, irrationality, selfishness, anxiety, social competitiveness, sexual preoccupation, etc.

Advertising has a formative influence on our culture and we may not be able to quantify its effects but due to its persuasive character, it definitely has an impact on society. The impact may not be positive or intended all the time. The possibility of an advertisement delivering a distorted message or persuading of distorted message cannot be ruled out completely. The impact of such a distorted message has a more devastating effect on society if the advertisement is for delivering a social message like creating awareness about the ill effects of smoking, alcohol consumption or AIDS awareness campaigns.

Social advertising helps create mass awareness on social issues such as electricity and water conservation, environment protection, polio awareness, aids awareness etc.

The central theme of the article is focused on the unintended effects of social advertisements devoted to AIDS awareness on society in general and teenagers and youngsters in particular.

The present article reviews the theories about advertising's social and cultural consequences proposed by various experts.

Unintended effects of Advertising

1. Television advertising leads to unhealthy habits in children.

WASHINGTON – Research shows that children under the age of eight are unable to critically comprehend televised advertising messages and are prone to accept advertiser messages as truthful, accurate and unbiased. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits as evidenced by today's youth obesity epidemic.

2. The impact of Mass media on children

It is estimated that the average child sees 360,000 advertisements by the age of eighteen (Harris, 1989). Due to this extensive exposure to mass media depictions, the media's influence on gender role attitudes has become an area of considerable interest and concern in the past quarter century.

3. The impact of unnaturally thin Models on Young Girls

The ads typically glamorize skinny models that do not resemble the bigger body types that are accepted, and even preferred, in Latin American countries. The underlying message for girls in most of these ads is that you have to be unnaturally thin and sexy in order to be accepted and feel normal. It is no wonder Latinas are becoming increasingly

preoccupied with their body images and weight. This preoccupation can lead to lowered self-esteem, mental health issues, and eating disorders among the fairer sex.

Literature Review

1. Regarded as a form of communication advertising has been criticized for playing on emotions simplifying real human situations into stereotypes, exploiting anxieties, and employing techniques of intensive persuasion that amount to manipulation. Many social critics have stated that advertising is essentially concerned with exalting the materialistic virtues of consumption by exploiting achievement drives emulative anxieties employing tactics of hidden manipulation, playing on emotions maximizing appeal minimizing information, trivializing, eliminating objective consideration, contriving illogical situation and generally reducing men, women and children to the rule of irrational consumer. Criticisms expressed in such a way may be overstated but it can not be entirely brushed aside (Mac Bride p-154)

2. It operates at conscious level

Creators of advertisements can claim that no one takes it all very seriously; it is all more or less in fun. The viewer can adapt a similar attitude. The viewer's self respect requires rejection of most commercials on the conscious level, along with some ridicule. Beneath the ridicule the commercial does its work (Barnouw 1978 p-83)

3. It plays subtle role in changing habits

Advertising begins to play a more subtle role in changing habits than merely stimulating wants. Though at first the changes were primarily in manners, dress, taste, and food habits, sooner or later they began to affect more basic patterns, structure of authority in the family, the role of children and young adults as independent consumers in the society, the pattern of morales, and the different meanings of achievement in the society (Bell 1976 p-69)

The need for the research

If one can justifiably say that advertising has joined the charmed circle of institutions which fix the values and standards of society then it becomes necessary to consider with special care the extent and nature of its influence – how far it extends and in what way it makes itself felt (Potter 1954 p-177). There is real need to ascertain both the direct and indirect, the intended and unintended effects of AIDS awareness advertising campaigns on different sections of society and this will provide the base for decisions that are found to be required and new policies that may result from the study to avoid /minimize the unintended effects of advertisements on targeted audiences.

Problem statement

The advertisements released to create AIDS awareness among all the sections of the society may have unwanted effects encouraging an immature viewer to go for or enhance the urge for intercourse. The advertisements released for prohibition in

visual media many a time become the point of attraction. The advertiser may over look this aspect in over enthusiasm or due to the process of falling in love with his/her own creation.

Hypothesis

H1- The advertisement released for creating aids awareness has distorted mirror reflection effect more than that of Medical or Social AIDS awareness campaigns.

H2- The advertisement released for creating aids awareness generate more curiosity about sex and generate safe sex awareness more than the Aids awareness in the young generation.

Research Methodology

Sample

The sample population we consider consists of college students and teenagers from Mumbai, Pune and Chandigarh of the age group 17 to 22 years from various colleges. These respondents are not only from different disciplines and but are also studying in different classes.

Response

Eventually, 87 respondents completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 85%. Another 20 respondents did not respond and 12 refused to co-operate.

Measures

In order to make a correct comparison between various ages, measures for advertisement effectiveness in creating awareness and as well as delivering distorted message or reflective distorted mirror images should be universally applicable. For this reason we have excluded measures that are age and gender specific. Our motivation to do so was two fold. First, because respondents are asked for actual facts and their opinions, it decreases the risk of common-method variance. Second, it makes the questionnaire easier to complete resulting in higher response rates. Telephone surveys are recognized to be less suitable for questions with multiple answers (Churchill, 1999). All measures were developed using insights from the literature. The full questionnaire is presented in the appendix.

Data Sources –

Primary data and secondary sources

Data collection tools

- Questionnaire
- Interview

Sample universe

College and school students between the age group 18 to 22 from Pune and Chandigarh

Sample size:

- Teenagers : 27
- College students : 60

Secondary Sources:

- Magazines
- Journals
- Research articles
- Websites

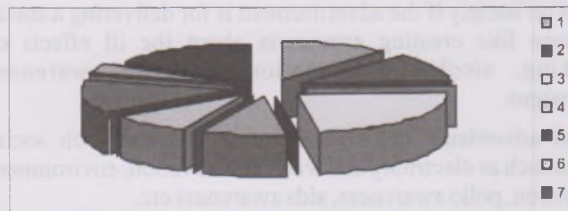
Data analysis:

Tabulation method is used to reach qualitative analysis and conclusions

Data interpretation and model building

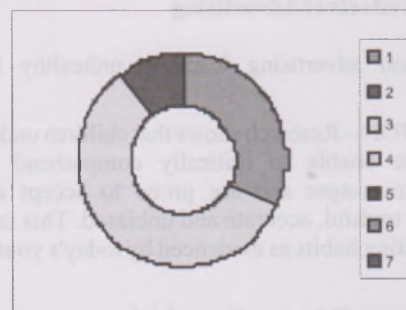
Awareness level of Aids preventive measurer among the respondents was very high with 98.4 % of the respondents being aware. The respondents who have responded with "no" may not be interested in filling the questionnaire so that response may be neglected.

Media/ campaign	Percentage
Print advertisements	39.06
Audio advertisements	39.06
Audio/visual advertisements	76.50
Social awareness campaigns	29.60
Medical awareness campaigns	28.12
Friends	45.31
Parents	15.6
Schools/Educational Institutes	51.5



The message perceived by the respondents

Sr No	Message Perceived	Percentage
1	AIDS prevention	45.3
2	Safe sex	82.8
3	Curiosity about sex	14.6



Distorted mirror reflection message perceived

Sr No	Distorted Message Perceived	Percentage
1	Yes	46.80
2	No	51.00
3	Not sure	02.20

Possibility of elimination of distorted/unintended Message



Sr No	Elimination of Message Distorted massage	Percentage
1	Yes	69.50
2	No	30.50

CONCLUSIONS

1. As high as 46.85% of the respondents reported that advertisements are creating distorted message. Even though the number is less than 50% but still it is still very high and will have devastating effects on the young minds.
2. The advertisements which are broadcasted / published for prevention of AIDS, end up giving message of safe sex .No doubt safe sex is one of the measures to prevent aids but it is not the only one. Safe sex does not signify the AIDS Prevention only but it also has some other dimensions .
3. The generation of curiosity about sex yet another unintended message perceived by these advertisements which is definitely is not the objective of the advertisement.
4. The advertisement by Celebrities have highest recall rate (45.15). It can be safely concluded that the celebrities from different fields can contribute significantly in creating AIDS

prevention awareness.

5. The common man advertisements also have an important role in creating awareness as it deals with day to day activities of HIV infected persons.
6. An audiovisual medium is the most dominating medium (76.50) in creating AIDS prevention awareness campaign.
7. The discussion with friends is another major tool for generation of awareness. It being a totally personal tool, it may not have any distorted message communication through it.
8. The audio and print media's share equal percentages.
9. The awareness created through medical and social campaigns have almost equal percentages and there are less chances of distorted message communication.

REFERENCES

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