



**Measuring the Correlation between Ethical Dimensions of Advertisement  
and Development of Society**

**Syed Karamatullah Hussainy**

Associate Professor and Dean  
Khadim Ali Shah Bukhari Institute of Technology

**Syed Luqman Hakim**

Assistant Professor  
Hamdard Institute of Management Sciences  
Hamdard University

**Muhammad Adil Khan**

Research Associate

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### Abstract

Around the world, the advertising industry has contributed many job opportunities and it creates employment for millions of people. At the same time, the messages of products, which are communicated through advertising mediums have affected the behaviors of vast number of customers. Advertisers in the contemporary world spend more than three hundred and fifty billion dollars per year and this figure is increasing by the passage of time. According to a researcher advertisers generally use advertising to communicate the merits of their specific brands in order to increase the acceptability or purchase of their promoted product although some advertising messages are designed to communicate messages through which moral or ethical behaviors are intended to be modified. Advertising serves many economic and social objectives but the flip side of advertising is that it influences behaviors of its viewers that may not be ethically appropriate. It may induce materialism and individualism among its audience. This research is an attempt to investigate the relationship of advertisement with culture values, promotion of individualism and materialistic behavior. The paper attempts to investigate into the ethical dimension of advertising. For conducting primary research a sample of 350 respondents was selected and the data was statistically tested though chi-square model.

**Keywords:** Advertising, roles of advertising, moral values, ethical values, cultural impact, social impact, materialistic culture and selfishness.

*JEL Classification:* M14, M37

## Introduction

There are thousands of commercials those are disseminated globally and billions of viewers watch those commercials in their specific social and cultural settings. The developed societies have started to infiltrate into developing societies and have raised their level of discontent with the available products in their given settings. It has become imperative to study this impact and understand whether such commercials are inducing selfishness or materialistic behavior among developing societies in order to meet their ends within the limited economic resources available to them.

Karina Wilson (2000) defined advertising as an activity that may be conducted at different mediums in order to promote advertisers' products. It shall not be considered as a medium on its own.

Building a brand image in the modern environment is becoming exceedingly complex although when advertisers try to create preference among audience on the basis of features offered in a product or the price differences between two competing products, building brand image may be a comparatively easier task to perform. Creating messages for communicating with the audience is a process that tries to build perception of a product in the minds of the target audience.

Adverting plays a pivotal role when the objective is to provide personality to a promoted product or brand. It is eminent that communication through advertising helps in molding behaviors of audience that in turn induces preference of a promoted product over other competing one or less effectively promoted product at the point of purchase (Ayse Binay, 2005). Furthermore, the study indicates that advertising helps in developing brand image among the target audience and repeated advertising helps in transforming brand into the personality or character being used for differentiating a given brand over its competing brands.

The study focuses on the communal role performed by advertising activity, its impact on society and the behavior it influences in the specific target market. Advertising informs its audiences or communities about the trend and the differences that exist between brands and product categories. It helps people know about the changing global environment, the emerging technologies, the latest fashions and other such trends that influence the lifestyle of particular communities (Wells, William, Burnett, Moriarty, 2006). The study indicates that advertising has a greater influence on communities which are more financially stable especially in product categories where demand remains below the availability of products. In such communities, advertising is not only used for informing people in fact it is used for influencing their purchase intentions.

The explanation leads to another important aspect of advertising that may have very deep and grave influence on societies that is about whether advertising only inform about contemporary products or does it also influence the purchase intention beyond accepted limits among its audience. This argument leads to inquiring about to what extent does advertising influence communities and change their social, ethical and moral norms. According to Wells, William, Burnett, & Moriarty, (2006) the young population of a given market has the deepest influence and on many occasions, this influence has crossed the acceptable boundaries and have disturbed the social and cultural norms of given society. This phenomenon has opened up another debate whether this attitude of a business community is acceptable or should we discourage such attitudes in order to gain more financial leverage towards more important societal issues.

### **Literature Review**

#### **An Overview of the Roles of Advertising**

Ayse Binay (2005) investigated in his research that advertising can be a medium among very few limited activities that can actually transform a philosophical concept into an

actual product thus create a high level of possibilities for advertisers to develop brand images without worrying too much about differentiating a product on the basis of price or functionality differences. In a study conducted by Wells, William, Burnett, & Moriarty, (2006), it is described that four basic functions performed by advertising are marketing, promotions, financial and communal.

They also indicated whether advertising has a power to mold the behavior of our society. The researchers and critics are divided on the influence of a single ad campaign but they are in agreement on the combined effects of all advertising campaigns (Wells, William, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2006).

### **Problems in Understanding a Commercial**

A theory proposed by Festinger (1957) explained that confusion of understanding a commercial only appears when the viewer has multiple choices from which a single alternative has to be selected for solving a given problem (Winsor and Hesperich 2001). It is eminent from various studies discussed by Winsor and Hesperich (2001) that the problem of confusion is faced by given audience when someone selects a single product from the range of multiple products and later on compares the products those were not purchased by an individual, their merits in comparison with the selected product demerits. This problem aggravates if the product under consideration is expensive and impacts upon the status or prestige of the purchaser.

### **Confusion in the Black Box of Audience at Pre-Purchase Stage**

Winsor and Hesperich (2001) studied the impact of advertisements targeting the market which already possesses a product but considers repurchase of the same product category by offering attractive incentives, advertisers try to confuse the audience and in turn gain a favor for the brand they are promoting. Confusing the market at post purchase stage, this method is used by the advertisers when they try to induce regret or dissatisfaction among

the audience who have purchased a specific brand in a product category. This type of approach may motivate existing customers to think about purchasing some new brands or at least would not refer the same brand among their colleagues and social group members.

Oshikawa (1969) studied the impact of post purchase dissonance among audience and established that such confusion can be reduced by creating a feeling of right decision among the buyers of a product by highlighting the advantages that a purchased product has over others. This approach may also help manufacturers of a product provide confidence among its target market for repurchasing the same brand in the future.

Further, Oshikawa study elaborated that fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) may have little impact at repurchase level when reassuring advertisements are used as the consumers may be inclined towards testing other brands and show a lower brand loyalty as compare to when same approach is used for slow moving consumer goods (SMCG) where brand loyalty among consumers is more eminent.

### **Ethical Lapses in Commercials**

Cunningham (1999) elaborated that developing a commercial to communicate with a given target audience is not only about framing the message within legal standards, in fact it goes beyond and explains even within legal framework which type of messages are permitted to be communicated among the audience. According to Hyman, Tansley and Clark (1994) consideration must be given to the ethical dimensions of a commercial and perhaps it is considered among the most pivotal pillar of advertising and few studies have been conducted on the ethical dimension of advertising.

Most of researches target the morals or ethics of a message that is at more generalized level rather than trying to examine the impact of such messages on individual or small group level (Drumwright 1993). The same findings were established by a previous research conducted by Hunt and Chonko (1987). Study of Drumwright (1993) established two basic

frameworks on which legal or constitutional aspect of advertisements are discussed. The second dimension that is established by researchers is the moral aspect of an advertised product. This facet of the morality of an advertisement was also studied by Brenkert (1998). The above findings have been discussed at length during last two to three decades by scholars, experts and consumer right representatives from all spheres of knowledge and reasoning. Current empirical researches by Gulas and McKeage (2000) described that explored the issue of morality and ethical dimensions in an advertising campaign and have identified some grey areas that need to be addressed by advertisers. These suspected dimensions are commercials that fantasize a product, heroism messages by political personnel, ads promoting hazardous products, commercials appealing to innocent minds. The above findings of Gulas and McKeage (2000) are based on the previous research work by Dunfee, Smith and Ross (1999); Latour and Henthorne (1994); Tinkham & Waver-Larisay (1994); and Triese et al. (1994).

### **Conceptualization**

Based upon the studies done by researchers, this paper attempted to explore the impact of advertising on ethical or moral behavior of individual or groups for whom the commercials are being designed to target.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

A sample of three hundred and fifty respondents is selected that includes both genders. The age bracket used is between eighteen years to twenty six years as this age bracket is at early adult stage and is more attractive towards advertised messages. The method used for selecting the sample is purposive / judgmental technique as the criterion selected is the most relevant for the said study.

### **Primary Data Collection Instrument**

The instrument used for collecting primary data is a questionnaire containing twenty questions that inquires from respondents.

### **Research Analysis**

Analysis methodology is based on chi-square test of association. For testing the association among the variables bivariate data analysis technique is applied, and further chi-square test for goodness of fit is applied to test the association.

Calculation of the chi-square statistic allows determining if the difference between the observed frequency distribution and the expected frequency distribution can be attributed to sampling variation. The distribution also provides a means for testing the statistical significance of contingency tables. It allows testing for differences in two groups' distributions across categories. Another concern is whether two or more variables are interrelated or associated.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Based upon the literature review and the data collected, following hypotheses are tested:

H<sub>A1</sub>: Contemporary advertising themes impact the cultural values of developing

societies. H<sub>A2</sub>: Advertising influences individualism in developing society.

H<sub>A3</sub>: Advertising promotes materialistic behavior in developing society.

1. To test the statement 'Derived culture is damaging domestic cultural norms'.

The questions tested for association included a question which asks the respondents that, "Advertising themes demonstrating derived culture are damaging domestic cultural norms, and are directly related to the main hypothesis".

Analysis and interpretation of the test is given

below: Null Hypothesis:



$H_{01}$ : Contemporary advertising themes do not impact the cultural values of developing societies.

Alternate Hypothesis:

$H_{A1}$ : Contemporary advertising themes impact the cultural values of developing societies. Statistical Test:

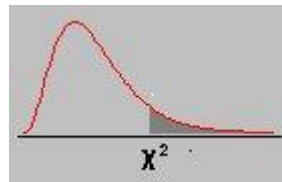
Chi-square test of association is chosen because the study involves the assessment of association among the variables.

Significance Level:

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

Critical Value:

Reject  $H_0$  if  $x_c^2 > x^2$  ( $\alpha$ , (R-1) (C-1))



Critical Value = 26.29622761

Calculated Value:

Calculated value by using the formula,

$$x_c^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$$

$$x_c^2 = 34.87329023$$

Decision: Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

2. To test the statement 'Advertising influences individualism in the society'

There were two questions asked for association between advertisement and individualism.

Analysis and interpretation of the test is given below:

Null Hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: Advertising does not influence individualism in society. Alternate Hypothesis:

H<sub>A</sub>: Advertising influences individualism in society. Statistical Test:

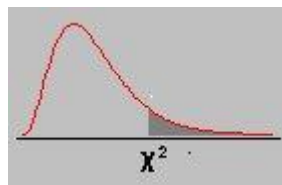
Chi-square test of association is chosen because the study involves the assessment of association among the variables.

Significance Level:

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

Critical Value:

Reject H<sub>0</sub> if  $x_c^2 > x^2 (\alpha, (R-1) (C-1))$



Critical value = 26.29623

Calculated Value:

Calculated value by using the

$$\text{formula: } x_c^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$$

$$x_c^2 = 60.71976$$

Decision: Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

3. To test the statement ‘Advertisement promotes materialistic behavior in the society’

The questions tested for association carries the statement that most advertising themes promote purchase of products that are not primarily needed ones and promote materialistic behavior in society.

Analysis and Interpretation of the test is given below:

Null Hypothesis:

H<sub>03</sub>: Advertising does not promote materialistic behavior in society. Alternate Hypothesis:

H<sub>A3</sub>: Advertising promotes materialistic behavior in society. Statistical Test:

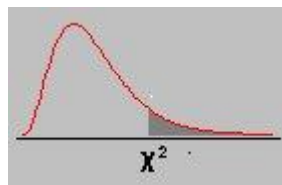
Chi-square test of association is chosen because the study involves the assessment of association among the variables.

Significance Level:

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

Critical Value:

Reject H<sub>01,2</sub>: if  $x_c^2 > x^2(\alpha, (R-1)(C-1))$



Critical value = 26.29623

Calculated Value:

Calculated value by using the

$$\text{formula: } x_c^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$$

$$x_c^2 = 69.79333$$

Decision: Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

### Conclusion

The main hypothesis drawn in this research paper is that contemporary advertising themes impact the cultural values of developing societies. To support the statement there were two more hypothesis statements to prove the statement of first hypothesis as correct or

incorrect. Those variables were put forward in the form of questions and by applying bivariate analysis to find association among the variables to be tested. In all applications null hypothesis statements were rejected. The research finding show that contemporary advertising theme has negatively impact on cultural values in the societies.

To conclude following points are essential;

- Advertising is an important tool that helps in economic, social, and moral functions.
- Electronic media especially has added value to the advertising field.
- Where there are many merits of advertising de-merits are also present.
- Most severe of those being the impact on the moral, ethical, social and cultural values.
- Specifically looking at the themes relating to human attitudes in advertisements does affect the children and youth negatively, at the same time depicting the character of certain beings with much vulnerability.
- The conceptualization of advertisements are in a sense that how can the advertiser change the attitudes of the viewers / listeners through distinct unethical, immoral themes.

Furthermore, research findings proved that advertising is has positive relationship with individualism and so on materialistic behaviors.

### **Recommendations**

Advertising itself is a very useful tool for marketers to promote and make their product(s) known to the market. But also, the moral and ethical norms should be safeguarded while doing so.

More research work is required in order to make the advertisements free of such factors that may seriously harm the values of a society, and this needs new techniques in advertisements to keep the attractiveness in ads without damaging the cultural norms, or affecting any other aspect of the society.

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