

COMMERCIALS IMPACT ON CONSUMERISM AMONG YOUTH

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Abstract

This research paper explores how people satisfy the desires instilled due to television advertising viewing and its implications for their financial health. Commercials impact consumerism more in the youth than the middle aged and old. Television advertisements also play a vital role in purchase decisions and a large proportion of the population buys products based entirely on them. Where reliance on television advertisements for purchase decisions is heavy, people spend greater proportions of their income on the repayment of borrowed money. The Internet provides advertisers access to this market in a whole new way. Children and youth can be directly reached through games, advertisements, and brand pages on social networking sites. And, children and youth are attracted to the Internet in general, and some of these corporate pages in particular, because they are fun and engaging. Youth play online in worlds that are sponsored by a variety of corporations and may or may not be explicitly commercial. For example, many corporate sites use cartoon mascots or words such as “clubhouse” or “village” to create an inclusive, personalized environment rather than seeming like a commercial or an advertisement. Online word games or printable coloring pages may include logos or names of trademarked words or branded characters, attempting to build brand awareness from an early age. Another way in which corporate pages generate information and target advertising is by gaining access to user’s social networks. When a user likes a brand or a corporate page, they are giving that corporation complete access to their personal information and social network, providing valuable information about demographics and connections.

Key Words: advertisements, attract, commercial, financial, online, spend, television, youth

Introduction

Advertising in contemporary society is designed to attract attention, influence attitudes and modify behavior (Singh and Sandhu, 2011a). It has facilitated a change in societal virtues that has invited a lot of criticism (Muncy and Eastman, 1998). It has been accused of promoting undesirable value schemes in the society that see the hitherto unaccepted principles as commonplace (Pollay, 1986). One such principle is consumerism. A significant and positive relationship between consumerism and advertising has been established by a number of studies (Richins, 1995; Chan and Cai, 2009; Sandhu, 2013).

Critics opine that advertising considerably influences our choice of products, shopping behavior, the way we use the shopped products and in turn the society and culture (Pollay, 1986). It is believed that comparison with the idealized images in advertising influences the perceptions of the viewer’s regarding how their lives ought to be, particularly in terms of their material possessions. This leads to consumer discontent and an enhanced desire for more (Richins, 1995). Advertisements, thus lead to need creation where it does not exist or where the consumer does not even have the buying capacity.

The viewers of advertisements are susceptible to its charms and find it difficult to resist the temptations it leads them into (Sandhu, 2011). The refined techniques and the right placement of words and images are used artfully to instill desires and evoke the requisite response among the viewers: purchase of the product. With these tendencies on the rise, more and more consumers are taking loans and getting drawn deep into them. Savings are getting downplayed and the new generations are living on the edge. The obvious consequences are financial stress and frustration. What needs to be understood is that the modern

day commercials are spreading a culture, which in its fancy is unachievable for the common man, encourages him to buy products beyond his capacity and coerces him to take loans that he cannot afford. Some critics are also of the view that in order to buy the advertised products, people are even ready to commit crimes and resort to corruption (Sangkawasi and Johri, 2007; Nuta, 2009).

Having established the role of television commercials in harming the society through the promotion of consumerism and materialism, a further insight into their impact on the financial health of the consumers is required. Therefore, within this context the current study aims to examine the means that people resort to in order to satisfy the enhanced desires due to television advertising viewing and its implications for their financial health.

The next section examines the relevant literature surrounding the research problem. Subsequent sections highlight the methodology and data analysis. The last section of the article presents the findings of the study, suggestions, study limitations and the scope for future research.

Review of Literature

Many investigations, which are relevant to the current research, have been done over the past years across many countries. Based on these investigations, it is reasonable to assume that consumerism and materialism are natural consequences of exposure to advertisements. Scrase (2002), based on ethnographic fieldwork showed a direct and positive correlation between advertising and consumerism.

Ciochetto (2004) explored the profile of contemporary advertising in India, with the help of secondary data. The author Pollay (1986) reviewed the work of significant social science and humanities scholars for their thoughts and theories about the supposed effects of advertising. The study found advertising damaging to morality and society and among its other consequences saw it as reinforcing materialism and social competitiveness. With the help of theories originating in social psychology, Richins (1995) attempted to demonstrate the impact of advertising on consumer's perceptions of their lives, specifically with respect to their material possessions. The findings of the study indicated that repeated exposure to advertisements enhances the expectations and desires of the consumers, and leads to dissatisfaction with current material possessions.

In another study, conducted in New Delhi, India, Kavoori and Chadha (2001) found that advertisements create a culture of consumption. They referred to it as 'consumerist culture'. The authors reached this conclusion by conducting a textual analysis of advertisements in a mass circulated newspaper and magazine. In line with this study, Rumbo (2002) examined the pervasive influence of advertising on consumer culture, and unveiled that it was 'difficult to resist consumerism, given the control of advertising over cultural spaces'. Further established that advertising undermined traditional habits and behaviour and led to the creation of new wants and desires, generally for harmful products. It was pointed out in the study that this was achieved with the help of strategies that reworked cultural values and beliefs. The study concluded that advertising was accelerating India into a culture and ideology of consumerism. Roy (2006) conducted a study with similar findings. With the help of survey method using a questionnaire, it was established that advertising promoted materialism, used manipulation to promote products and in general sent the whole value system down the chute.

It is of interest however to note that in a bold departure from the norm, Arrington (2004) sided with advertisers in the ethical debate and cited in his study that since consumers had the ability to avoid exposure to advertisements, advertisers did not have the ability to control the desires and actions of the consumers, especially where purchase of products was concerned. Further, some researchers, during the later part of the last decade, tried to focus on certain specific aspects of advertising and materialism. Chan and Cia (2009), based on a survey conducted in 2006, tried to explore whether there existed a relationship between materialistic values and number of hours of television viewing. The study found that heavy television advertising viewers were more materialistic than light advertising television viewers. Similarly, Pegoraro et

al. (2010) after a content analysis of 144 unique advertisements found that there was a significant correlation between length of the ad and the use of materialism tactics.

Singh and Sandhu (2011b) found that advertising viewing made the viewer's more materialistic. Sandhu (2015) conducted a primary survey that examined the impact of rise in materialism due to television advertising viewing on the quality of life of the viewers. The study established that repeated exposure to television commercials negatively impacted the psychological, social and physical health of viewers.

Although, there has been some substantive research, which establishes a positive correlation between materialistic values and advertisements, very limited research has been done on how these enhanced desires are satisfied by the consumers. The current study is timely as it explores the same, along with its financial implications for the viewers.

Response on Watching Television Advertisements

The study also investigated the response of the respondents on watching a television commercial. The response is depicted in table 3 (response in absolute figures). Chi-square analysis affirmed the statistical significance of the categorical difference in responses ($p = .000$). From the responses of the respondents, it is evident that the majority (56.73 percent) watches television commercials carefully, 23.46 percent ignore them, only 4.42 percent believe them, and 15.38 percent change the channel when they come across them.

As against the common belief that viewers ignore television commercials or change the channel on coming across them, this study indicates that the majority watches them carefully. Another point that is highlighted by the study is that though the majority watches television commercials carefully, only very few people actually believe them. Previous research has indicated that the reason for the low believability of television commercials is the false and untrue claims made in them (Sandhu, 2013). Thus, in order to make advertisements socially responsible, advertisers should respond to the need of the hour and impart information that is truthful and honest. This would go a long way in ensuring the interest of both parties: the consumers by helping them take informed decisions and the advertisers by enhancing the credibility of their claim Product Categories and Influence of Television Commercials.

The current research also tried to find the categories of products for the purchase of which people rely on television commercials. Three categories of products: luxury products, shopping products and convenience products were considered. The respondents had the option of checking one, two or all the categories. This is the reason why the total percentage is greater than 100 percent. Table 4 represents the findings. Chi-square established that the difference in the responses for different categories of products were statistically significant ($p = .000$). As can be seen from the figure, the category of products for the purchase of which there is a maximum reliance on television commercials is shopping products, followed by convenience products.

Basis of Purchase Decision

The focus of the current research was also on finding the factors that influence the purchase decision of the respondents. It was found that 52 percent of the respondents base their purchase decision entirely on television commercials, as against 48 percent of the respondents who take into consideration other factors also. These statistics very clearly show that advertisements are a very important factor that influences purchase decisions. Further, an attempt was also made to find how the 52 percent respondents who base their purchase decision entirely on television commercials, were impacted by it. The results were alarming as it was found that 61 percent of the relevant respondents felt that they had exceeded their budget and 39 percent of them felt financially stressed.

Television commercials persuade people to go to great lengths to replicate the standard of living they project. All sorts of measures are resorted to, to achieve it. People are ready to work long hours to earn more, they are ready to borrow money and in acute cases even commit crimes (Sangkhawasi and Johri, 2007; Nuta, 2009). The society is brainwashed into unnecessary spending and a culture is created where by

too much importance is placed on materialistic goods (Nuta, 2009). The results of this are manifested in the form of exceeded budgets, too many loans and financial stress, as can be seen from the statistics of the current study. We can thus conclude that, people are living on the edge and meeting their enhanced financial obligations because of television commercials is creating stress in their lives.

Conclusion, Suggestions and Limitations

It was found from the current study that more often than not, viewers are enticed by television commercials to buy products they do not need and cannot afford, and thus are encouraged to resort to loans. It was further found that advertisements play a very vital role in purchase decisions and a very large proportion of the population buys products based entirely on them. Where the reliance on television commercials is heavy, it people spend greater proportions of their income on the repayment of borrowed money. It can thus be said that the last laugh is with the advertisers who persuade us to spend huge sums of money on goods and services, which we really do not need (Mayne, 2000) and in the bargain create financial stress in our lives.

The findings of the current study, while being in tune with the findings of some of the earlier studies are clearly in disagreement with the findings of some others. Richins (1995) in a study conducted to examine the impact of advertising on materialism, found that exposure to advertisements led to need creation among the viewers. The findings of the current study support this argument and empirically establish that more often than not, viewers are lured by television commercials to buy products they do not need. However, it may be of interest to point here, that this finding is contrary to the findings of the study conducted by Arrington (2004). Arrington (2004) in his study clearly concluded that the advertisers do not have the ability to control the desires and actions of the consumers.

Further, the current study supports the findings of a recent study conducted by Nuta (2009). Both the studies conclude that television commercials persuade the viewers to spend money on products they do not need, and thus create a consumerist society. This is a classic case of violation of ethics since television advertisements take away the freedom of choice from the consumers and vest it in the hands of advertising agencies, which have been overlooking implications of their actions for a long time now. While being on the right side of law, advertisements are in many cases on the wrong side of ethics. Unfortunately ethics are generally interpreted in conjunction with law, but now ethics must also be studied separately from law. Glamorous images, depiction of unaffordable lifestyles, inappropriate comments etc. while meeting the legal standards leave much to be desired on the ethical front. There do not exist laws against it, but as can be seen from the current research, they go a long way in promoting undesirable values in the society. These values are in conflict with the basic Indian maxim of 'simple living'. Advertisers must thus take a detailed look at the symbolic meanings of ads and their influence on public virtues. They must build moral affirmations into their communication strategies and try to connect with the consumer on an ethical level.

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