

# A STUDY ON ETHICAL ISSUES IN SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES IN ADVERTISING: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

Advertising industry experts always view for methods through which to develop effective advertising strategies and to persuade consumer's choices. In new techniques, there has been a growing body of subliminal influence research that has demonstrated that subliminal priming has an influence on a consumer's choices and behaviours. Subliminal advertising can play a critical role in attracting the customer to the product or service is examined. Subliminal messaging might raise ethical issues and whether these issues can lead to moral corruption in society. In this study, the examination revolves around three main issues which include: ethics, subliminal advertising and media effects. Ethics basically refers to moral principles which control an individual behaviour with respect to activities carried out. Alternatively, advertising refers to method by which sellers communicate to buyers in the market. This study will look at ethics in subliminal advertising as a way to govern communication between buyers and sellers. In addition, the study examines the effects of media on ethics in subliminal advertising.

**Key words:** Subliminal message, advertising, sales promotion, etc.

## 1. Introduction

Advertising is key tool to reach the consumer, through the image and trade mark capital, is credited. Due to that, immediate answers cannot be expected, since it can only be evaluated by the consumer in the long-term as to the solidity and the attractiveness with which it has built a mental product. People possess subliminal knowledge, For example, when they show part of something, some letters of a word, insinuation in certain shapes, special sounds, etc. it is when imagination takes charge of overcoming the conscience threshold and carries out transmission. Subliminal advertising conveys hidden messages of which viewers are not consciously aware. This advertising strategy poses serious ethical issues, particularly because subliminal ads can manipulate consumer behaviour even when consumers aren't making a conscious choice and aren't aware of what they have seen. Advertisers intentionally use subliminal messages may experience a consumer backlash and even could land in legal trouble.

## 2. Review of literature

Indian economy is on a boom and the market is on a continuous series of expansion with these market expansions, Indian advertising has every season to celebrate. Businesses are looking up to advertising, as a tool to include in lucrative business opportunities. Growth in business has lead to a consecutive growth in the advertising as well. In today's competitive market, most advertisers and media recognize the importance of maintaining consumer trust and confidence which is very important to gain. The circle of self-regulation in advertising is widening day by day. Even the code of ethics drawn up by the Advertising Standards Council of India has not had much impact. They do not provide solutions to every ethical dilemma.

## 3. Concept of ethics

Ethics means "Good Conduct" or "Conduct which is light in view of the society and the time period". By common consent, various modes of behaviour and conduct are viewed as "good or bad". In other words, we can say that ethics are the guideline principles and values that govern the actions, behaviour and the decision of an individual or group. Ethics is a choice between good and bad or between right and wrong. It is governed by a set of principles or morality at a given time and at a given place and in a given society.

## 4. Ethical issues

Messages are generally seen heard consciously but consumers also get motivated by stimuli below their level of conscious awareness. These kinds of messages are not consciously aware of receiving the messages. There are many arguments in the favour of subliminal advertisement as well but the fact is that playing with the conscious receptor cells of consumer mind is unethical which is why the practice of subliminal advertisement is banned in many countries.

## 5. Concept of ethics in advertising

Ethics in advertising is defined as a set of well started principles which rules the ways of communication take place between seller and the buyer. In today's global market, ethics has become one of the most important attribute of the advertising world. Since there are lot of benefits of advertising but as the coin has two sides there are some things which don't match or satisfies the ethical criterion of advertising.

## 6. Subliminal messages in advertising

Advertisers often try to create an association between a product and happiness, better health or more financial ability. However, true subliminal advertising attempts to create an association that the consumer doesn't notice. For example, an advertiser might insert a single frame into a cartoon that contains a message or could use an image that triggers embedded thoughts without the consumer being consciously aware of such thoughts. It is extremely difficult to prove that the ad is affecting their behaviour. The world of advertising has come a long way from mission to profession to industry. Some people describe it as false, untrue, misleading and absence. Today advertising industry has been facing a lot of criticism as the advertisement which is being telecasted does not follow the norms of ethics. Subliminal advertisements should be socially culturally, and morally ethical.

## 7. Significance of the study

The focus of the paper is on studying the ethical practices of the various subliminal messages in advertisements in India at present and their relative effects. However, it is very difficult to distinguish a clear line of difference between what is true and what is untrue. Over the years advertising and marketing communication messages have created debatable ethical issues due to the public, belief, advertisements deeply affect the world surrounding them, including crucial actions and behaviour.

## 8. Objectives of the paper

1. To understand the ethics in subliminal messages in advertising.
2. To analyse different unethical subliminal advertisements in India.

## 9. Analysis of surrogate subliminal advertisements

The advertisements for such new products are called or placed under the category of "surrogate advertisements".

**Kingfisher:** It is basically beer brand; without doubt, this is one of the most successful examples of surrogate advertising. The Kingfisher brand has been successfully extended to other categories such as mineral water and club soda.

**Puffery:** Puffery is an exaggerate statements made by tele companies for the purpose of attaching buyers to a particular product or service. Puffery contains broad, general claims as in the motto "The Best Burger in the West", no one can prove the burger is really the best but no one can prove it is not.

## 10. Analysis of unverified claims

These are those kind of advertisements in which the company who is advertising its particular product makes a false statement or commitment about its product. Horlicks claims that it makes your body taller, stronger and sharper but practically a boy cannot be taller, stronger and sharper just by drinking milk with mixed with this product, Horlicks.

## 11. Analysis of women stereotype

Television remains of the most predominant medium that promote stereotype about the gender roles with the help of advertisements. The famous washing powder like Rin, Tide, Wheel, etc. always uses women in order to promote their brand as well as their product.

## 12. Analysis of comparative advertisements

According to academic literature, comparative ads are those ads which involve directly or indirectly naming competitors in an ad and comparing one or more attributes in an advertising medium. Another controversial comparative advertisement was Colgate and Pepsodent, where Pepsodent claimed directly that Pepsodent now better than Colgate strong teeth delivers 130% germ attack power.

## 13. Analysis of children advertisements

Now a day's market is very highly influenced with children's entering into advertisements. Marketers are using children in their commercial advertisements to push their sales. Mc Donald's is advertising the McAlooTikki burger and fries in what has become a popular and controversial advertising.

## 14. Conclusion

Thus, we have seen the various types of subliminal advertisements that fall under the preview of unethical advertising, and have also seen the far reaching effects of the circumvention of ethics and morals on the society at large. Wherever freedom of speech and the advertisers themselves in order to ensure that ethically responsible practices are being conducted in their professions. Subliminal advertising is an integral element in modern day society, especially with regards to the functioning of a market economy, which is becoming more and more widespread. The ethical aspects of subliminal advertisements are extremely important for restoration of our Indian cultural and heritage. Indian culture is getting diluted by the influences our country to great extent. To save our culture, norms and ethics regulations of such unethical subliminal messages in advertising are extremely essential. But, today the number of unethical and obscene advertisements is increasing in numbers instead of decreasing.

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