

Principles of Advertising

Week 5

Advertising and Society

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Intended Learning Outcomes



At the end of this class the student should be able to explain and discuss:

- I. Advertising's Social Role
- II. Review and Regulation of Advertising
- III. Advertising's Regulatory Environment
- IV. Media Review of Advertising
- V. Self-Regulation
- VI. Advertising Ethics
- VII. Determining What is Ethical

Advertising's Societal Role

According to Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2012), advertising and other forms of marketing communication are used effectively for social marketing, as well as for selling stuff, which also can be a good thing. Advertising can be used to counter bad behaviors and promote good behavior. Advertising sometimes draws criticism for its social impact and much of the discussion that follows is focused on advertising because it is so highly visible. Check out www.AdBusters.org for a look inside the world of advertising criticism. Three topics generate debate about advertising and marketing communication's role in society. They focus on demand creation, shaping versus mirroring of social trends, and the overcommercialization of society.

Do you think advertising is inherently good or bad for society?

Critics of advertising tend to believe that advertising has the power to shape social trends and the way people think and act. However Advertising professionals tend to believe that advertising has limited power to shape social trends and the way people think and act.

1. Demand Creation Debate

- *Does advertising create a materialistic culture or does it simply reflect it? Does advertising create demand for products people don't need?*

- Critics believe that advertising has the power to shape social trends and the way people think and act. Although some doctors appreciate that the advertising has caused consumers to become more active in managing their own health and more informed about their drug options, some claim that they are being pressured to write inappropriate prescriptions because their patients are influenced by the drug ad claims. Demand creation means using an external message to drive people to feel a need or want. Demand creation becomes a question of ethics when social critics charge that the demand is artificial and the products really aren't needed—that people's wants are being manipulated unnecessarily.
 - Companies invest much money on research to find out what consumers want before they launch new products. Advertising may convince people to buy a product, even a bad one but may be once. If they try the product and do not like it, they will probably stop buying it. So to some extent advertising creates demand but the audience may refuse to purchase the product if they don't feel a need for it (Moriarty et al., 2009).
- **Principle**
 - If people do not want the products being marketed, they do not buy them.

2. Shape-versus-Mirror Debate

At what point does advertising cross the line between reflecting social values and creating them? Critics argue that advertising has repeatedly crossed this line, influencing vulnerable groups, such as children and young teenagers, too strongly. For example, do ultra-thin models in advertising cause young women and girls to have eating disorders, as some have claimed? Advertising professionals tend to believe that to some extent it is possible for advertising to contribute to this problem but it is difficult to say that these images directly and solely cause the problems as many factors in their environment potentially influence their eating choices.

Can advertising manipulate people's choices? Critics believe that even if a single ad cannot control our behavior, the cumulative effects of nonstop television, radio, print, internet, and outdoor ads can be overwhelming.

- Advertising professionals believe advertising both mirrors and shapes values rather than sets them
- Advertising can potentially shape and mirror values. Advertising planners spend huge amount of money and time trying to identify people's motivations before they develop message strategies. They must, then, be searching for something deeper than the impact of a previous ad.
- One example of using advertising to try to change society and improve the world while still selling products is the RED campaign, instigated by U2 singer Bono in conjunction with major companies like Apple, Gap, and Hallmark. The purpose of the campaign is to sell RED-branded products to help fight AIDS and HIV in Africa. Does Product RED advertising mirror a societal concern for Africans' welfare or does it shape how we think about the problem, or both?



- Source: <https://senatus.net/article/gap-product-red/>
(Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells., 2012).

This shaping-versus-mirroring debate is the most central issue we address in considering advertising's role in society. What drives consumers to behave or believe as they do? Is it advertising, or is it other forces? Why do women buy cosmetics, for example? Are they satisfying a deep cultural need for beauty, or were they manipulated by advertising to believe in the hope that cosmetics offer? Or have their families and friends socialized them to believe they look better with cosmetics than without? Advertising and society's

values are probably interactive, so the answer to the debate may simply be that advertising both mirrors and shapes values.

3. The Over commercialization debate

Does advertising lead people to be too materialistic? The world we live in is driven by a materialistic consumer culture. Did advertising create this culture, or does it simply reflect it? Some argue that advertising heightens expectations and primes the audience to believe that the answer is always a product. If you have a headache, what do you do? You take a pill. What is left unsaid by an advertisement is that you might get rid of the headache just as easily by taking a nap, drinking less alcohol or more water, or taking a walk to relieve stress. Nobody pays for ads to tell you about alter-natives. Consumers, however, are not always passively doing what advertisers tell them. As we have said, they have the power to refuse to buy what is being sold.

Another debate is about advertising getting intertwined with news and entertainment. How will the audience know whether the news stories are free from editorial pressure from the sponsors who control what is said about their brands? As a product placement becomes increasingly prevalent, how does that affect entertainment? Think about the local television news and programs that are full of ads! Does it bother you that Coke has more than 2,000 product placements in *American Idol*, especially when a lot of viewers are under 16 years? (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

4. Other Social Responsibility issues

- a. *Taste and offensive advertising*: ads containing sensitive information, timing of the ad for example dinner time, and whether the person targeted are alone or with other for example an adult ad viewed by the whole family including children. Guidelines for good taste in advertising are difficult to establish, because different things offend different people. In addition taste changes over time. An ad can be offensive to the general public even if the targeted audience accepts it. Brand communicators would be wise to conduct research to gauge the standards of taste

for the general population as well as the specific target audience. If they fail to do so, advertisers risk alienating potential consumers. Such was the case with Abercrombie and Fitch's sexually explicit ads aimed at young teens that spawned a grassroots campaign to stop the company's marketing tactics. Some might argue that any publicity is good publicity, and offensive advertising calls attention to your product in a memorable way. (Moriarty et al., 2012).

- b. *Sex Appeals and Body Image*: Sex in advertising is becoming more blatant. Advertising that portrays women or men as sex objects is considered demeaning and sexist, particularly if sex is not relevant to the product. How sexy is too sexy? Some ads for cosmetics and lingerie fall into a grey area because sex appeal for these products are usually relevant. Explicitly using sex appeals to sell may not always be appropriate.
 - i. Playing on consumers' insecurities about their appearance presents advertisers with a classic ethical dilemma because self-image advertising can be seen as contributing to self-improvement, but sometimes, such advertising is questionable because it leads to dangerous practices. Some critics charge that women place their health at risk in order to cultivate an unrealistic or even unhealthy physical appearance. Supermodels don't always project healthy portrayals of women. Critic and author Jean Kilbourne claimed, "ads are aimed at the very heart of girls' insecurities' because of the ideal image of beauty that they portray: 'an absolutely perfect-looking young woman who's incredibly thin'."
 - ii. The same problem of physical appearance exists for men, particularly young men, although the muscular ideal body may not lead to the same health-threatening reactions that young women face, unless men resort to steroids to attain this image. The standard of attractiveness is a socio-cultural phenomenon that both mirrors and shapes our ideals. Responsible advertisers, therefore, have begun using models of more normal size and weight as a way to reduce the pressure on young people. (Moriarty et al., 2012).

c. *Reinforcing Stereotypes*: a stereotype is a representation of a cultural group that emphasizes a trait or group of traits that may or may not communicate an accurate representation of the group. Stereotype is negative when it reduces a group of people to a caricature. Athletic blacks, feeble seniors, sexy Italians, smart Asians. You're probably familiar with these and other examples of stereotypes.

- Sometimes the stereotype is useful (athletes are fit) and aids communication by using easily understood symbolic meanings, but sometimes the stereotype re-lies on a characteristic that is negative or exaggerated and, in so doing, reduces the group to a caricature. This is the problem with portraying older adults as all being absentminded or feeble, for instance.
- The issue of stereotyping also raises the shaping-versus-mirroring question. For example, stereotyping women as sex objects is a practice that is deeply embedded in our culture, however negatively some might see that value. Using such strategies also makes advertising a participant in shaping and reinforcing that cultural value.

d. *Diversity Issues*, advertisers are struggling to target, as well as portray, people outside the white, straight mainstream market. It is essential that advertisers become aware of how they portray different groups, and they have a responsibility to ensure that what is portrayed is accurate and representative.

e. *Gender Roles*, in most ads men are usually shown as strong, independent, and achievement oriented; women are shown as nurturing and empathetic, but softer and more dependent, they are told that the products being advertised will make their lives less stressful and more manageable. Men are sometimes negatively stereotyped as well. Female stereotype may range from simple house wife to superwomen to sexual objects.

- A study of gender representation in 1,300 prime-time commercials found that although women make most purchases of goods and services, they are underrepresented as primary characters during most prime-time commercials, except for health and beauty products.
- Women are cast as younger, supportive counterparts to men, and older women remain the most underrepresented group. However, many marketers are recognizing the diversity of women's roles.

- In the 1990s, advertisers did a better job of depicting women—and men—in roles that were more than one dimensional. They functioned in multiple roles, not just as career women or supermoms, and men even appeared as house-husbands and nurturing father.
 - A few adventurous companies have even begun to show images of gays in advertising to general audiences. Such images have appeared fairly extensively in mainstream fashion advertising for brands such as Calvin Klein, Benetton, and Banana Republic (Moriarty et al., 2012).
- *Body and Self Image*, do you think that that super models project healthy portrayal of women? Advertising has been criticized for glorifying glamorous men and women. However, self-image advertising can contribute to self-improvement. These ads can also to dangerous practices for example young men using steroids to attain the image of V- shaped body with well developed chest, arm muscles and wide shoulders. Advertising mirrors and shapes the standard of attractiveness
 - *Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes* in the United States advertisers have been criticized for reducing the Native Americans to caricature for example sports teams Washington Redskins, Kansas City Chiefs, or Cleveland Indians. Blacks, Asians, Hispanic/Latino all have suffered in the hands of advertisers through underrepresentation, exaggeration of their physical features and so on. Should we permit the media to profit from all the unflattering and nasty stereotypes about blacks, Jews, Asians, Muslims, Irish, and Latinos?
 - *Cultural differences in Global advertising*. In the global economy advertisers seek worldwide audiences for their products. As they do so, advertisers sometimes make mistakes of overlaying their worldview on that of another culture without thinking about the impact of their advertising. Many people oppose the move to a global perspective because of concerns about the homogenization of cultural differences. *Marketing imperialism* or *cultural imperialism* is a term used to describe what happens when Western culture is imposed on others, particularly the Middle East, Asian, and African cultures. (Moriarty et al., 2012).
 - *Senior Citizens or age-related stereotype* critics object to the use of older people in roles that portray them negatively. The needs of maturing consumers, depending on mental and physical acuity as well as life-stage factors, are often different from one another. Whether a consumer is an empty-nester whose

children have grown up and left home, a grandparent, a retiree, a widow, or in need of assisted living, for example, will greatly affect how, when, and why goods and services are purchased.

- *Children Marketing* to children and especially youth is one of the most controversial topics in the industry. Children are seen as vulnerable. Children are unable to evaluate advertising messages and make purchasing decisions. Children do not always know what is good for them and what is not. Concerned adults want to make sure that they protect impressionable minds from exploitation marketers. They want to help children learn to make good choices. A current issue that's being addressed relates to selling soft drinks, candy, and food with high fat and sugar content to children, as such, obesity among youth is a major health problem. Marketing alcohol to black teens is another important issue because of the use of rappers like Ice-T to promote malt liquors and the dozens of pages of alcohol ads that appear in black youth–culture magazines such as *Vibe*. (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

a. *Message related issues*

- *Misleading Claims* Advertising claims are unethical if they are false, misleading, or deceptive. Other ways ads can mislead is through *puffery* which is advertising that praise item to be sold with subjective opinions, superlatives, or exaggerations, vaguely and generally stating no specific facts. *Comparative advertising* should not mislead consumers by lying against their competitors. It is permitted in the US but the ads must compare similar products and follow other laid guidelines. *Endorsements* or *testimonials* are any advertising message that consumer believes reflects the opinions, beliefs, or experiences of an individual, group, or institution. However, if consumer can reasonably ascertain that a message does not reflect the announcer's opinion, the message is not an endorsement and may even be misleading.

Principle

- Advertising claims are unethical if they are false, misleading, or deceptive
- ***Principle***

- Puffery may be legal, but if it turns off the target audience nothing is gained by using such a strategy.

b. Product related issues

- *Controversial Products, unhealthy or dangerous products and prescription drugs*, though it is acceptable to advertise these products, it is still offensive to some for example gambling, sex related products, fire arms, feminine hygiene products, effects of eating heavily processed foods, beer, alcohol and spirits, use of less expensive generic drugs without doctor's prescription etc. However it all depends on the culture or country.
- Before an agency can create an ad for a client, it must consider the nature of the client company and its mission, marketing objectives, reputation, available resources, competition, and, most importantly, product line. Can the agency and its staff honestly promote the products being advertised? What would you do if you were a copywriter for an agency that has a political client you don't support? Several agencies have resigned from profitable tobacco advertising accounts because of the medical evidence about the harm cigarettes cause. In cases where the agency works on a controversial account, there are still ethical ways to approach the business.
- In recognition of the growing public concerns about cigarette marketing, tobacco companies have voluntarily curbed their advertising and pulled ads from magazines with high levels of youth readership and from most outdoor billboards. Most major tobacco companies also run anti-smoking ads aimed at teenagers. (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

International Laws and Regulations

As advertisers, agencies, and media become more global, it will be imperative for the players to understand local laws in the countries in

which they operate. Marketing practices, such as pricing and price advertising, vary in their legal and regulatory restrictions.

- Some product categories, such as over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, are particularly difficult to work with because regulations about their marketing and advertising are different in every country. Advertising for certain types of products is banned. Thailand prohibits tobacco ads, as does Hungary. In Hong Kong, outdoor display advertising of tobacco products is banned. Malaysia has banned most forms of tobacco advertising, including print, TV, radio, and billboards. However, these restrictions are fairly ineffective as a result of **indirect advertising** that features a product other than the primary (controversial) product. Examples of these techniques in Malaysia are quite plentiful. Billboards with the Salem, Benson & Hedges, and Winston names dot the landscape, but they're not advertising cigarettes. They're advertising the companies' travel, clothing, and restaurant businesses.
- There also are differences in the legal use of various marketing communication tools. A contest or promotion might be successful in one country and illegal in another. Different laws and self-regulatory codes about direct marketing exist in different European Union countries. For example, France requires an opt-in clause to a mailing or questionnaire asking permission to add the customer's name to a mailing list.³³ Germany prohibits companies from making unsolicited telephone calls and faxes to consumers. Because of the difficulty in complying with widely varying laws, international advertisers often work with either local agencies or with international agencies that have local affiliates and experts who know the local laws and can identify potential legal problems.
- NOTE: Most countries have their own advertising regulations; however, in our core text book they use United States as an example.

Media Review of Advertising

- The media attempts to regulate advertising by screening and rejecting ads that violate their standards of truth and good taste. Most networks have a

Standards and Practices Department that screens every ad and gives approval before the ad can run. Each individual medium has the discretion to accept or reject a particular ad. For example, *Reader's Digest* does not accept tobacco and liquor ads, and many magazines and television stations do not show condom ads. The major television networks craft their own standards and guidelines.

Self-Regulation

- Rather than wait for laws and regulatory actions, responsible advertisers take the initiative and establish individual ethical standards that anticipate and even go beyond possible complaints. Such a proactive stance helps the creative process and avoids the kinds of disasters that result from violating the law or offending members of society.
- Advertisers practice three types of self-regulation: self-discipline, industry self-regulation, and self-regulation by public and community groups.
- *Self-Discipline* An organization such as an advertising agency exercises self-discipline when it develops, uses, and enforces norms within its own practices.
- *Industry Self-Regulation* When the development, use, and enforcement of norms come from the industry, the term used is *industry self-regulation*.
- *Self-Regulation by Public and Community Groups* The advertising industry voluntarily involves nonindustrial representatives, such as the Better Business Bureau or the media, in the development, application, and enforcement of norms. Local and consumer activist groups represent two ways in which self-regulation occurs in this manner

Determining what is Ethical

Ethics are the “should” and “oughts” of behavior. Ethics are the “right thing to do”. Ethics and morals are closely related but are not synonymous. Unlike morals ethics are not so much about what is right and wrong, but about making choices from equally compelling options, for example, how should you behave when an answer is unclear? Individual have the potential to make ethical choices. That is true in advertising as in all other areas of life (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

Determining what constitutes ethical behavior happens on many levels. Individually, advertisers call upon their own moral upbringing. The advertising industry provides codes of ethics and standards of self-regulation. The government helps regulate advertising practices through legal means. (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

- *The social ethic*

- The “Golden Rule”

The Social Ethic—The Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.). Social responsibility motivates a business to perform a useful function within society and to make its impact on society positive rather than negative—and that includes its advertising as well as other business practices.

- Social responsibility motivates a business to make a positive impact on society

- *The professional ethic*

- What would be viewed as proper by an objective panel of my professional colleagues? Professional ethics are often expressed in a code of standards that identifies how professionals in the industry should respond when faced with ethical standards

- Industry standards help with a decision about what is ethically correct

- *The personal ethic*

- Would I feel comfortable explaining this action to the general public on TV? to my mother? Personal judgment and moral reasoning rest on an intuitive sense of right and wrong.
- Personal judgment and moral reasoning rests on an intuitive sense of right and wrong
- Advertising professionals must be aware of industry standards as well as ethical questions (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

SUMMARY

What is the social impact of brand communication? To some extent advertising does create demand for products; however, the power of advertising to do this is hard to measure. The shape-versus-mirror debate is a central issue in considering advertising’s role in society. Critics of advertising tend to believe that it has the power to shape social trends and the way people think and act; advertising professionals tend to believe that it mirrors values rather than sets them. In fact, advertising and society’s values are probably interactive so the answer may simply be that advertising both mirrors and shapes values. Whether or not

advertising causes society to become over-commercialized relates to the criticism that buying products appears to be the solution to every problem. Counterarguments emerge from the position that consumers can make intelligent choices about what they need.

What ethical and social responsibilities do communicators bear? Advertisers have a social responsibility to make good ethical choices. At the root of ethical behavior is the individual decision maker's set of moral values. When faced with a dilemma of equally compelling choices, advertisers can consult their personal values, professional codes of ethics, and international standards of ethical behavior to guide their moral decision making.

Why and how is advertising regulated? In a complex society there is usually not one answer to what constitutes "right" behavior. Regulatory agencies help enforce advertising standards. Several governmental bodies help regulate advertising:

The FTC is the agency primarily concerned with identifying and eliminating deceptive advertising.

The FDA oversees advertising related to food and drugs.

The FCC monitors advertising broadcast by radio and television stations.

Other regulatory bodies with some advertising oversight include the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the U.S. Postal Service, the Patent and Trademark Office, the Library of Congress, and the states' attorneys general offices.

In addition to governmental oversight, advertising is also self-regulated. Individuals working in the field need to act responsibly to make ethical and legal choices. Advertising agencies have in-house ad review procedures and legal staff that monitor the creation of advertising. The industry has a number of bodies that review advertising, such as the National Advertising Review Council, the National Advertising Division of the Better Business Bureau, and the National Advertising Review Board. Other bodies include the various media review boards, competitors who are concerned about unfair advertising that might harm their brands, and public and community groups that represent either local or special-interest groups. (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells, 2012).

FURTHER READING

This article is by Arens, William, and Arens (2011).

Social criticisms of advertising may be short-term manipulative arguments or long-term macro arguments. While the economic aspect of advertising focuses on the free enterprise principles of self-interest and many buyers and sellers, the social aspect typically involves the concepts of complete information and externalities.

Critics say advertising is deceptive; it manipulates people into buying unneeded products, it makes our society too materialistic, and there's just too much of it. Further, they say, advertising perpetuates stereotypes, and all too frequently, it is offensive and in bad taste.

Proponents admit that advertising is sometimes misused. However, they point out that despite its problems, advertising offers many social benefits. It encourages the development of new products and speeds their acceptance. It fosters employment, gives consumers and businesses a wider variety of product choices, and helps keep prices down by encouraging mass production. It stimulates healthy competition among companies and raises the overall standard of living. Moreover, sophisticated marketers know the best way to sell their products is to appeal to genuine consumer needs and be honest in their advertising claims (Arens, William, and Arens, 2011).

In short, while advertising can be criticized for giving less than complete information and for creating some unwanted externalities, it also contributes to the free enterprise system by encouraging many buyers and sellers to participate in the process, thereby serving the self-interest of all.

Under growing pressure from consumers, special-interest groups, and government regulation, advertisers have developed higher standards of ethical conduct and social responsibility. Advertisers confront three levels of ethical consideration: the primary rules of ethical behavior in society, their personal value systems, and their personal philosophies of singular ethical concepts.

The federal and state courts are involved in several advertising issues, including First Amendment protection of commercial speech, and infringements on the right to privacy. Advertising is regulated by federal, state, and local government agencies, business-monitoring organizations, the media, consumer groups, and the advertising industry itself. All of these groups encourage advertisers to give more complete information to consumers and eliminate any externalities in the process.

The Federal Trade Commission, the major federal regulator of advertising in the United States, is responsible for protecting consumers and competitors from deceptive and unfair business practices. If the FTC finds an ad deceptive or unfair, it may issue a cease-and-desist order or require corrective advertising (Arens, William, and Arens, 2011).

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitors advertising for food and drugs and regulates product labels and packaging. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has jurisdiction over the radio and TV industries, although deregulation has severely limited its control over advertising in these media. The Patent and Trademark Office governs ownership of U.S. trade-marks, trade names, house marks, and similar distinctive features of companies and brands. The Library of Congress registers and protects copyrighted materials.

State and local governments also enact consumer protection laws that regulate advertising. Nongovernment regulators include the Council of Better Business Bureaus and its National Advertising Division. The NAD, the most effective U.S. nongovernment regulatory body, investigates complaints from consumers, brand competitors, or local Better Business Bureaus and suggests corrective measures. Advertisers that refuse to comply are referred to the National Advertising Review Board (NARB), which may uphold, modify, or reverse the NAD's findings.

Other sources of regulation include the codes and policies of the print media and broadcast media. Consumer organizations and advocates also control advertising by investigating and filing complaints against advertisers and by providing information to consumers. Finally, advertisers and agencies regulate themselves. (Arens, William, and Arens, 2011).

REFERENCES

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- 2) *Contemporary Advertising and integrated marketing communications.* Arens, William. F., Weigold, Michael. F., and Arens, Christian. 13th Ed. McGraw Hill Higher Education. 2011.
- 3) VIDEO to Watch: **Ethical Issues in Advertising - Advertising and Ethics.**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9AEtFdb1_4
- 4) Read this article: '**A grave lack of respect': When Benetton whipped up a storm with 'Unhate'** <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/a-grave-lack-respect-when-benetton-whipped-storm-unhate/1591036>