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ADVERTISEMENT AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SOCIAL CAUSE ADVERTISEMENTS

Ziauddin Siddiqui, Research Scholar
Tanveer Ahemad, Associate Professor
Zainab Khan, Assistant Professor
MGM University, College of Communication, Culture and Media
Aurangabad, Maharashtra (India)

ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to analyze the content of social cause advertisements for social empowerment. The Government of India and Non Governmental organizations and corporates take various initiatives for spreading awareness, changing perception and attitude regarding specific issues for social change. Advertisement is a means of communication or exchange of ideas or information with the consumer/ customer of a product and services. In other words, we can say advertisements are the paid form of publicity. It is non- personal presentation. According to Wheeler, "Advertising" is any shape or sort of paid or premium non-individual presentation of merchandise, administrations and thoughts with the end goal of drafting individuals to purchase". Social Advertising is not for the most part utilized for business showcasing purposes, yet rather for social advantage. Social Advertising has become a direct and appealing format for addressing social issues and suggesting appropriate solutions. The study deals with content analysis and strategies of five social cause advertisements (commercials) that have addressed social issues to empower the masses. The parameters used for analyzing are

1. issue/cause addressed,
2. relevance to society,
3. portrayal of issue or strategy applied,
4. perspectives challenged in advertisement

The paper also highlights the strategies applied in the ads to appeal the masses and send the message across. The study concludes that advertisement can be an excellent medium for bringing about social empowerment in various fields.

KEYWORDS: advertisement, social empowerment, social advertisement, perception.

INTRODUCTION:

Advertisement is a means of communication or exchange of ideas or information with the consumer/customer of a product and services. In other words, we can say advertisements are the paid form of publicity. It is non- non-personal presentation.

According to Wheeler, "Advertising" is any shape or sort of paid or premium non-individual presentation of merchandise, administrations and thoughts with the end goal of drafting individuals to purchase" Advertising is the messages paid for by the individuals who need to advance, convince, or advise the recipient about the items or administrations. The mediums utilized are television, print media (daily paper, diaries, magazines et cetera), radio, squeeze, net, coordinate offering, boards,mailers, challenges, sponsorships, crusades, individuals, articles of clothing, tints, sounds and visuals.

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Social Advertising is not for the most part utilized for business showcasing purposes, yet rather for social advantage. Social advertising has two parent hypotheses to bolster itself with the end goal that – "a social parent" where sociology and social strategy methodologies is stressed upon and the second is "Showcasing guardian" that incorporates business and open part promoting approaches.

The intersection of advertisement and social empowerment has garnered significant attention in recent academic discourse, particularly in the context of gender representation and consumer behavior. One notable study is Edmondson's (2011) exploration of the Title Nine mail-order catalog, which employs symbolic convergence theory to analyze how the catalog serves as a rhetorical tool for empowerment among women. By invoking themes of strength and versatility, such as "I am superwoman" and "I can be anything," Title Nine not only markets athletic apparel but also fosters a sense of identity and empowerment among its readers, thus contributing to a broader narrative of third-wave feminism.

Empowerment itself is a multifaceted concept, encompassing psychological, resource, and community dimensions. Psychological empowerment involves an individual's sense of self-determination, competence, meaning, and impact. Resource empowerment relates to access to financial resources, tools, and information, while community empowerment focuses on cohesion, support, and advocacy within a social group. These dimensions are crucial for individuals and communities to gain control over their lives and make informed decisions, which is the essence of social empowerment.

Social empowerment extends beyond advertising to various sectors, including health, environment, and economic development. For instance, in the context of menopause, empowerment involves shared decision-making, access to realistic and balanced information, decision-making tools, and supportive clinicians 10. It also necessitates creating menopause-friendly work environments and challenging societal stigma and gender-based ageism.

The paper attempts to analyze the content of social cause advertisement for social empowerment. The Government of India and Non Governmental organizations and corporates take various initiatives for spreading awareness, changing perception and attitude regarding specific issues for social change.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the social cause advertisements
- To decipher the issues addressed by the social cause advertisements
- To discover the relevance of social cause advertisements with society
- To analyze the strategy applied for portrayal of the issue

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The increasing prevalence of social cause advertisements has drawn considerable attention in recent years, particularly regarding their ethical implications and societal impact. Advertising, fundamentally aimed at persuading consumers to purchase products and services, often treads a fine line between informative and manipulative practices. Zinkhan (1994) highlights the potential for advertising to transition from mere information dissemination to manipulation through deception and seduction, which can ultimately harm consumers. This concern is particularly pertinent in the

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context of social media advertising, where the manipulative features can exacerbate issues such as discrimination and social inequality, as well as contribute to over-consumption, which poses risks to both consumer health and the environment.

Critics of advertising have long argued that it fosters negative social trends, including the prioritization of consumption over other values, the use of goods to fulfill social needs, and increasing consumer dissatisfaction. Phillips (1997) contends that these trends are not solely the result of advertising practices but are instead rooted in broader social factors, particularly capitalism. This perspective suggests that while advertising can play a role in perpetuating these issues, it is essential to address the underlying capitalistic structures that drive consumer behavior and societal values. Therefore, social cause advertisements must navigate these complex dynamics to promote positive change without inadvertently reinforcing harmful consumption patterns.

The impact of advertising extends beyond consumer goods to public health issues, particularly in the realm of tobacco use. Lange et al. (2015) provide compelling evidence linking tobacco advertising to adolescent smoking initiation, emphasizing the vulnerability of young audiences to targeted marketing strategies. The study underscores the necessity for regulatory measures to mitigate the harmful effects of tobacco advertising, particularly in retail environments where exposure is prevalent. This highlights the critical role that social cause advertisements can play in public health campaigns, as they can counteract the detrimental narratives perpetuated by harmful advertising practices.

In the political arena, social cause advertisements have also gained traction, particularly through the use of microtargeting techniques on social media platforms. Dobber and Vreese (2022) examine how political campaigns utilize online advertisements to communicate policy information and pledges, revealing a tendency to target small subsegments of society. This raises concerns about the obfuscation of political pledges and the potential for voter manipulation, suggesting that social cause advertisements in this context must be carefully crafted to ensure transparency and accountability.

Moreover, the psychological mechanisms underlying advertising effectiveness cannot be overlooked. Biegler (2015) discusses the concept of priming in Direct to Consumer Advertising (DTCA) of prescription pharmaceuticals, arguing that such advertisements can unduly influence consumer perceptions and choices. The subtle cues embedded in DTCA can lead viewers to develop favorable yet inaccurate beliefs about the safety and efficacy of advertised drugs, thereby undermining their autonomy in making informed health decisions. This highlights the ethical implications of social cause advertisements, as they must strive to empower consumers rather than manipulate them.

In conclusion, the literature reveals a complex interplay between advertising practices, societal values, and consumer behavior. Social cause advertisements have the potential to drive positive change, but they must be approached with caution to avoid perpetuating harmful trends or undermining consumer autonomy. Addressing the ethical dimensions of advertising, particularly in relation to social causes, is crucial for fostering a more equitable and informed society. As

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researchers continue to explore this field, it is imperative to consider the broader social contexts and psychological mechanisms at play in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

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In contrast, Vemuri (2021) critiques the Abused Goddesses campaign, which utilized the imagery of Hindu goddesses to raise awareness about domestic violence. While the campaign achieved viral status, Vemuri argues that it ultimately perpetuated patriarchal and orientalist discourses surrounding gender violence in India. The representation of goddesses as victims of abuse, rather than as symbols of empowerment, highlights the complexities and potential pitfalls of using advertising as a vehicle for social change. This underscores the necessity of critically evaluating the narratives constructed through advertisements, as they can sometimes reinforce existing societal issues rather than challenge them.

The role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors is further examined by Knoll and Schramm (2015), who investigate the influence of user-generated content on online advertising. Their research reveals that collective influence—where users feel a sense of group membership with the content creators—can significantly impact responses to advertisements. This finding suggests that advertisements that foster a sense of community may enhance social empowerment by encouraging collective action and shared values among consumers, thereby amplifying the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

Conversely, Phillips (1997) provides a critical perspective on the ethical implications of advertising within capitalist societies. He argues that the negative social trends attributed to advertising—such as the elevation of consumption over social values—are rooted in broader capitalist structures rather than the advertising industry itself. This perspective invites a reevaluation of how advertisements can be harnessed to promote social empowerment, suggesting that the focus should not solely be on the content of advertisements but also on the underlying economic systems that shape consumer behavior and societal values.

Lastly, Holvoet et al. (2022) delve into the processing of social advertising among young adolescents, highlighting the role of brand trust in shaping attitudes towards brands. Their findings indicate that social advertising is particularly effective for unfamiliar brands, as endorsements from friends can enhance trust and reduce uncertainty. This suggests that advertisements leveraging social connections can empower young consumers by fostering a sense of belonging and validation, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.

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In summary, the literature reveals a multifaceted relationship between advertisement and social empowerment. While some studies highlight the potential of advertisements to foster empowerment and community, others caution against the risks of reinforcing harmful stereotypes and societal norms. As researchers continue to explore this dynamic, it is crucial to consider both the content of advertisements and the broader social and economic contexts in which they operate. This comprehensive understanding will enable the development of advertising strategies that genuinely promote social empowerment and contribute to positive societal change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

Qualitative design is used to analyze the samples of social cause advertisements for understanding of the social issue addressed, relevance to the society and portrayal of issue in visual media. The content analysis of the selected advertisements aids in understanding and exploring diverse dimensions of the ads with respect to the issues addressed in the audio-visual presentation.

Data Collection:

The popular five audio-visual social cause advertisements on digital media (youtube.com) that have managed to initiate a dialogue and challenged societal taboos are selected for analysis. The purposive sampling is done for analysing the diverse issue addressed in the advertisements. The following ads were selected for analysis:

Dove - #StopTheBeautyTest
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3kWzRB6Yy8&t=132s
Red Label - challenge transgender stereotypes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYwmoiCUZPE&t=60s
Gillette - #ManEnough
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pKHqWxgMAg&t=155s
All Out - Tough parenting
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBAqly7WGWs&t=210s
Vivo - #SwitchOff Time
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPmqWRZpgxg&t=148s

Data Analysis Techniques:

Content Analysis

A case study, or an in-depth study of the selected advertisements can be a useful research tool. The detailed study of the existing phenomena is helpful for looking at unique situations and allow researchers to gather a lot of information about the selected advertisements.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Dove - #StopTheBeautyTest

Dove ad has stories of women who had to battle criticism for their complexion and body structure during the matchmaking process, and the impact this has on their self-esteem. As these are real stories, they send out a very strong message that women shouldn't be subjected to such societal taboos.

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issue/cause addressed - women who had to battle criticism for their complexion and body structure during the matchmaking process, and the impact this has on their self-esteem.
relevance to society – women are subjected to various beauty tests.
portrayal of issue – the issue of plus size, colour, short height, curly hairs, and birth marks are portrayed through various characters
perspectives challenged in advertisement - very strong message that women shouldn't be subjected to such societal taboos. Beauty should be a source of confidence, not anxiety.

Red Label - challenge stereotypes

As a society, we always have trouble accepting transgenders as equals. The ad of Red Label has touched this very topic and has shown how the transgender community is always subjected to prejudice. They are already treated differently and through this ad, the makers are trying to tell that we have to change our attitude and be more accepting towards them.
issue/cause addressed – Prejudice against the transgender community
relevance to society – Inclusivity; Transgender are part of society and can also contribute positively
portrayal of issue - cup of tea can help us challenge stereotypes and bring people closer
perspectives challenged in advertisement - transgender community is always subjected to prejudice

Gillette - #ManEnough

Gillette, as a leading male brand and advocate for men, ignited conversations that raise and inspire the future generation of men. With #ManEnough, the ad breaks free of notions that crying makes men weaker and that it takes courage to show your vulnerability.
issue/cause addressed - men should embrace their vulnerability by challenging all the notions of masculinity
Relevance to society – Unwanted psychological stress and burden can be removed to lead a normal and pleasant life.
portrayal of issue – Real life example to counter the masculinity notions
perspectives challenged in advertisement - notions that crying makes men weaker

All Out

In joint families, there have been instances wherein a mother is not even allowed to scold their children even after their wrongdoings because some relatives will always have issues with her tough nature and will land up ridiculing the mother for being harsh.
issue/cause addressed – Joint Family and parenting issues
relevance to society - ad is trying to change that mindset and shed light on the correct parenting.
portrayal of issue – A tough mom protects her children at any cost
perspectives challenged in advertisement – Joint family ridiculing the mother for being harsh

Vivo: #SwitchOff Time

Smartphones are not destroying the person's physical and mental health but is also acting as a barrier in relationships.
Issue/cause addressed - excessive usage of smartphones
Relevance to society - technology is joyful when it brings people closer.
Portrayal of issue - hurting spousal relationships

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Perspectives challenged in advertisement – Scheduled use of smartphones

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research deals with the ads that have managed to initiate a dialogue and challenged societal taboos which many have been following as age-old customs.

Dove

In a country of 631 million women, it is unfortunate that there is such intense pressure to adhere to one definition of beauty. The ad challenges the beauty test methods that are very prevalent in Indian society.

Red Label

The purpose of the Red Label ad is to make India more inclusive. The ad portrays that a cup of tea can help us challenge stereotypes and bring people closer. It is an attempt to celebrate diversity and encourage people to embrace it.

Gillette

Gillette ad urges men to embrace their vulnerabilities. From shedding tears to accepting that men can be vulnerable, the new ad is challenging all the notions of masculinity we all carry within us.

All Out

The campaign initiates conversations within families and encourage support for raising happy, healthy children. This ad is trying to change that mindset and shed light on the correct parenting.

Vivo

The ad highlights the complexities that have been developed in relationships with the excess of smartphone usage.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that advertising can function as an effective means for social empowerment, moving beyond its traditional function as a commercial medium. By moving away from the promotion of the product to the promotion of the social benefit, these advertisements have been able to spark a dialogue and break through traditional societal taboos. Ultimately, advertisements for social causes function as a means to spark societal change by creating awareness and influencing the way people think. By creating these advertisements, the masses can be encouraged to think, feel, and act, leading to an empowered society.

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