

Ethical Values of Advertising In Print and Electronic Media

(A Study On Fairness Products In Visakhapatnam City)

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising is one of the most powerful marketing tools which enhances communication by connecting the company with the customers. Moral and ethical standards were proposed to restrict the range of products, services and practices that can be advertised. Nevertheless, the problem still persists. One of the questions discussed while analyzing the ethical aspects of advertising is the use of fear appeals and threat to popularize a certain product, concept etc., or to boost up the sales. The idea of using fear to advertise a certain product is viewed as unethical if the solutions that are advertised cannot eliminate the threat presented. This holds true as long as advertisers show the consequences of not paying heed to the recommendations offered in the advertisement. Furthermore, using fear appeals and threats is considered unethical as they might create unnecessary anxiety among potential customers. However, some people support the idea of using fear for marketing purposes. They claim that such advertisements reflect the norms of a certain society.

This study aims at analyzing the ethical issues related to the advertising of fairness products and the fear appeals used therein. These advertisements often reflect vivid racial discrimination, which is a reason to question the ethical aspects of these advertisements.

Besides the industry background and ethical issues that are relevant, the study examines customers' perceptions of the fairness products and the impact of their opinion on the use of the product.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To observe the common issues related to ethical issues in advertising.
- 2) To examine a brief profile of the fairness products industry and identify the ethical issues that can be tracked in the advertising of these products.
- 3) To analyze customer's awareness and brand preferences of fairness products advertising.
- 4) To evaluate customer's attitudes and perceptions related to the ethical aspects of the fairness products advertising.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been conducted during the time period from January 2009 to March 2009 in Visakhapatnam city. A structured questionnaire is used to collect the primary data. A convenient random sample of 150 respondents (all females and males aged 18 to 35 years from the city of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh) that include businessmen, doctors, professors, self employed category, working women and students were asked to fill the questionnaire consisting of both open and close ended questions. Secondary data has been collected from journals, magazines, Internet and several other documented materials. The primary data was analyzed using simple percentages. The analysis is made on the collected data and the suggestions and recommendations are offered wherever necessary.

ETHICS IN ADVERTISING

It is argued that of all business practices, marketing "receives the most scrutiny, generates controversy and faces the most criticism about ethics". Indeed, ethics might turn out to be a rather tricky question as long as it is expanded not only to one domain but also to several areas. As Waller reveals a list of 15 product services, which fall into the category of "controversial advertising", which includes Alcohol, Cigarettes, Condoms, Female contraceptives, Female hygiene products, Female underwear, Funeral services, Gambling, Male underwear, Pharmaceuticals, Political parties, Racially extremist groups, Religious denominations, Sexual diseases, Weight loss programs.

As per the views of Waller, advertising of racially extremist groups was the most offensive and unethical. The most important resources for this are the fact that these advertisements are racist in form and spirit. Zinkhan emphasizes that advertising ethics could be broadly attributed to topics given as 1) Using deceptive advertising, 2) Advertising for children, 3) Alcoholic beverages advertising, 4) Negative political advertising, 5) Racial advertising and 6) Sexual stereotyping.

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Both racial and sexual stereotyping can be deciphered while viewing advertisements of fairness products as they generally emphasize the importance of being fair and mostly target women. In neither of the above-mentioned studies can one find references to the ethical aspects of using fear in advertising. Nevertheless, there are sources which have the element of fear in their focus. In the analysis of fairness products, this is very important as advertisements generally imply the fear of being unsuccessful in personal and professional lives.

A BRIEF INDUSTRY PROFILE

The Indian cosmetics and toiletries market accounts for Rs. 3000 cr., of which the skincare segment boasts of Rs.1200crs, with a gross revenue of Rs. 700cr.from fairness products only. Further, the fairness products market yields an income equal to 40% of the entire Indian cosmetics industry with an annual growth rate of 10% to 15%. The three top growing markets are reported to be Kerala, Gujarat, and Bihar. The market has to offer a variety of brands provided by both local and foreign companies. The top eight brands of fairness products available in the Indian market are 1) Fair and Lovely (HLL) 2) Fairever (Cavin Kare), 3) Fairglow (Godrej), 4) Garnier Light (Garnier), 5) No Marks (Ozone), 6) Himalaya Fairness Cream (Himalaya drug), 7) Emami Naturally (Emami) and 8) Fair and Glow (Revlon). The market shares of the main players in the industry are:

1) HLL with 53%. 2) Cavin Kare with 12%. 3) Godrej 3.5%.

Being one of the fastest growing industries, the new entrants are likely to face rather tough competition. Even the companies that are already in the field have to compete by using powerful marketing tools such as advertising.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data has been collected by distributing a questionnaire where the respondents had to choose the answer that seemed more appropriate to them. The analysis of the respondent's answers is as follows:

Table1 depicts the brand awareness of fairness products. From this table it is evident that Fair and Lovely fairness cream is the most popular cream (100%) followed by Fairever (95%). The other fairness products though existing in the market are apparently not popular with the respondents. In these circumstances it can be concluded that Fair and Lovely is the market leader and all the other fairness products are following the market leader in designing their marketing activities in general and advertisements in particular as it generally happens in any given market.

Table 1: Brand Awareness of Fairness Products

Brand Name	No. of Respondents	%
Fair and Lovely	150	100
Fairever	135	90
Himalaya Fairness Cream	38	25
Emami Natural Fair	105	70
Santoor Ever Young	83	55
Skin Fair Ozone	15	10
Grainier Light	90	60

Though all of the respondents interviewed are aware of fairness products, only a small percent used them.

Table 2: Usage of Fairness Products

Usage Status	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	108	72
No	42	28

Table 2 summarizes the respondent's usage and 72% of the respondents are using fairness products while 28% do not use any.

In turn, those who reported using a fairness product named the brand that they were using and their responses are shown in Table 3. When it comes to usage of fairness products, once again respondents (86%) preferred Fair and Lovely followed by Fairever (14%). The rest of the products, though existing in the market, were used in less quantity by the respondents.

Table 3: Brand Preferences of Fairness Products

Brand	No. of respondents	%
Fair and lovely	129	86
Fairever	21	14

Respondents were asked to comment on the satisfaction derived from the fairness product and table 4 summarized the result.

Table 4: Customer Satisfaction With The Product Used

Response	No. of respondents	%
Satisfied	122	81
Not satisfied	28	19

From the table it is concluded that most of the users (81%) are satisfied with the product while the others 19% are not. The same figure and percentage were obtained when asking the interviewers whether they have experienced any changes in their complexion. Those who did were the ones who are satisfied with the product they used.

Does the usage of a fairness product change the complexion? Are the results shown in the advertisements mere exaggerations? Can they be trusted? These are the questions everyone has in their mind and the same were asked to the respondents. The respondents using fairness products opined on the same as given in table 5. The data below clearly shows that the majority of our respondents (which constitute 83%) think that the results advertised are exaggerated while only 5% think that the results advertised can be trusted. The rest do not have an answer to the question.

Table 5: Customers' Response To The Question Whether The Results Are Exaggerated Or Not.

Response	No. of respondents	%
Yes	125	83
No	7	5
Cannot say	18	12

Do advertisements influence the purchase decision? **Table 6** summarizes the respondent's opinion. Around 55% of the respondents feel that they are being influenced by the advertisements of fairness products in some way or the other. This data is very important as long as one is interested in the ethical aspects of these advertisements in general and fear appeals in particular.

Table 6: Influence of Advertisements On Purchase Decision

Response	No. of respondents	%
Yes	82	55
No	44	29
Not always	24	16

Majority of the respondents feel that they are influenced by the advertisements. Many respondents also expressed that these advertisements are exaggerations. Nevertheless, use of color, fear of non-achievement and non-acceptance in the society that is used without hesitance by advertisements of fairness products, does invoke an ethical dilemma in everyone's mind.

The respondent's opinions on this dilemma are presented in **table 7**. The table clearly reveals the fact that 75% of the respondents view advertisements of fairness products as unethical. While 20% think that these are ethical and only 5% do not have a clear opinion on the ethical aspects.

Table 7: Customers' Response To Whether Fairness Products Ads Are Ethical Or Not.

Response	No. of Respondents	%
Ethical	30	20
Unethical	113	75
Cannot say	7	5

All of the respondents who think that fairness products advertisements are unethical reason out that these advertisements are racist as presented in **table 8**. Further, 88% of the respondents find them sexist, followed by 45% who think that the advertisements are threatening and 36% who think that they are deceptive. As many as 4% of the respondents named two other reasons. They think that these advertisements corrupt the minds of the young people and create biases in their minds against those with dark skin and they do not disclose enough information about the dangers of over use of the fairness products.

Table 8 : Response To Name Reasons As To Why These Ads Were Considered Unethical

Response	No. of respondents	%
Deceptive	54	36
Racist	150	100
Sexist	132	88
Threatening	68	45
Other reasons	6	4

On viewing the fairness products advertisements, do people experience fear of rejection due to their skin shade?

Table 9 summarizes the respondent's answers. Yes, say 87% of the respondents. The respondents reveal that they do experience the fear of being rejected because of their skin shade after viewing advertisements of fairness products. Out of the remaining 13%, 8% do not always experience fear and 5% do not experience fear at all. This data is clear indication of the fact that fairness products advertisements trigger emotions like fear and threat of being rejected in some way or the other.

Table 9 : Customers Response To Whether They Experience The Fear of Being Rejected After Viewing A Fairness Product Advertisement.

Response	No. of respondents	%
Yes	131	87
No	19	13

MAJOR FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study reveals several important findings. First, Fair and Lovely fairness cream has turned out to be the most recognizable brand. All the users of fairness products gave preference to this brand. One of the primary reasons for this is because it is the oldest brand in the market that has survived for a long time. Most of the users were satisfied with the product and have experienced a change in complexion due to the usage of the product. Nevertheless, the majority of all the respondents think that the results advertised are deceptive as the effects are exaggerated. Also, the respondents feel that fairness product advertisements influence them in making their purchase decisions.

Most of the respondents have agreed that advertising fairness products is an unethical practice. When asked to name the reasons of having such an opinion, all of the respondents have agreed that the advertisements suggested racial discrimination. The other reasons are sexual discrimination, threat of being rejected, and making deceptive claims. A very interesting finding, however, is the fact that most of the respondents react with fear after viewing advertisements of fairness products. The advertisements simply convey that one will be rejected unless the recommendations offered by the advertisements are followed. In order to respond to these findings, there are several suggestions that can be taken into consideration. To begin with, the advertisements that openly show racial or sexual discrimination should be banned, and those advertisements that threaten the customers in some way or the other should be restricted. As an alternative to these appeals, advertisers should emphasize other priorities of their products such as protecting the skin from possible damage, sunburns and other. They might also stress the health and cleanliness of the skin rather than its color.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this particular study indicate that even those who use fairness products may consider the advertisements of these products to be unethical. This fact should act as a warning for marketers and advertisers when designing their commercials. Some of the previous studies also suggest that racial and sexual discrimination, which are vivid in advertisements of fairness products, are considered by most of the customers as unethical.

Moreover, this study discovers that the advertisements of fairness products arouse feelings of fear and threat among the customers, which is again a reason why these advertisements are not considered to be ethical. The marketers should also consider this, as it is hard to say which particular factors drive individuals when making ethical judgments. It is also recommended that pre-testing of advertising campaigns, which contain threatening messages, should be done before fully launching a product. To conclude, the study gives a clear idea of the fact that such fairness products advertisement are able to trigger negative emotions. It is thus a good issue for marketers to think of while designing future advertisements campaigns.

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