

Ambient Advertising : Analyzing its Effectiveness Using an Anti - Smoking Advertisement

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Abstract

Ambient advertising is uniquely positioned and builds greater involvement . The current study sheds light on the use of ambient advertising and its successful transmission of an anti - smoking message. The study involved the development of an anti-smoking ambient advertisement and understanding its effectiveness among the youth using a questionnaire, interviews, and observations. The results revealed that the youth were ready to change their intent of getting fascinated by smoking.

Keywords: ambient advertising, anti smoking, emotional message, unique advertising

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Each day, consumers are exposed to so many advertisements that has resulted in immunization of consumers to promotions. They fail to get the kind of attention as thought by organizations. This has led to trial of other effective ways to connect with consumers and to the emergence of ambient advertising, which is nothing but uniquely positioned advertising (Jurka, 2010). However, unlike other traditional advertising, its effectiveness is still to be researched in the Indian context. Moreover, advertisers are of the opinion that both positive and negative emotional messages stimulate product usage or non usage by using different routes. However, the extent to which a negative emotional message does so along with its impact on the basis of customer segment and product type has been a question of discussion (Sjahah, 2010). Governments and institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) have started resorting to traditional advertising which aims to discourage smoking. It is seen that such anti - smoking advertising efforts adopted by the Indian government and some of the non-profit organizations have proven to be of no use. This research focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of ambient advertising used in the context of anti - smoking advertising using negative emotions.

Literature Review

Marketing communication is changing due to the advent of mega agencies, specialist niche service providers, changing structure of agency structures, and media convergence (Eppes, 1999). It is furthered by the growth of 'Integrated Marketing Communication' (Schultz, 1991). Advertisers have been using different media simultaneously in order to be more effective and are continuously trying to make traditional advertising media more interactive to maximize the effectiveness of advertising. Message appeal and media are an important constituent for success of advertisements. Puranik (2011) studied humour appeal in advertisements and highlighted the importance of novelty.

Ambient advertising is the placing of advertisements using non- traditional methods at unusual locations. Sandra and Drummond (2000) mentioned about unusual mediums used for ambient advertising. Ambient advertising is very effective as it has an element of surprise, humour, and creativity, which consequently builds

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greater audience involvement of the targeted audience. The selective perception of such advertisements is not applicable, and thus, such advertisements are more engaging.

Sandra and Drummond (2000) mentioned that it is as difficult to measure effectiveness of ambient advertising as of other traditional media. Sales response, recalling the advertisement, and recognition may be used as few ways to measure effectiveness. Walsh, Hassan, Shiu, Andrews, and Hastings (2010) highlighted that smokers, non smokers, and ex - smokers reacted differently to advertising messages.

Tobacco Consumption in India

According to a WHO Report (2008), among the preventable causes of death, tobacco results in death of more than 5 million people each year among 1 billion consumers of tobacco worldwide. Tobacco consumption in developing countries continues to increase, which is a matter of huge concern.

According to Resource Centre for Tobacco free India (n.d.) and its role in tobacco control, tobacco consumption will result in the death of more than 10 million people per year by 2030, with low and middle-income countries being the frontrunners. In India, it is estimated that people in the age group of 15-24 years are most susceptible for starting tobacco consumption. There are around 4 million people under 15 years who consume tobacco regularly, and almost 5500 adolescents join them each day. Deaths due to tobacco consumption have been steadily increasing - from 1.4% of all deaths in 1990, the number of deaths due to tobacco consumption is expected to touch 13.3% in 2020.

Objectives of the Study

- ✚ To develop an ambient prototype for effective anti - smoking advertising,
- ✚ To study the youth's awareness about ambient advertising,
- ✚ To study people's emotional response to an ambient message,
- ✚ To study the recall value of a specific ambient message.

Methodology

✚ **Research Design :** The research was initially exploratory in nature, whereby secondary and non-participant observation data was analyzed to develop the basic prototype of the anti - smoking advertisement. After incorporating user responses observed during pilot testing and the feedbacks given by creative personnels, another prototype (Appendix Figure 1) was developed to be tested on the sample. Finally, a descriptive research was undertaken, which involved observational method, interviews, and a survey to gather necessary information about the effectiveness of the above - mentioned ambient advertisement. The duration of the research was for four months - from March to April 2014. An additional survey was also done to check whether the respondents were able to actually incorporate different attitudes into their behaviour - what they realized after viewing the advertisement.

✚ **Pilot Study :** The basic prototype was created and tested among 25 respondents by using an online questionnaire to come up with future recommendations for the final prototype.

✚ **Sampling Design :** For the purpose of the research, a random sample of 90 respondents for the survey (65 face to face and 25 telephonic interviews), 50 for observation of students & corporate employees in the age group of 17-35 years were chosen. The respondents were chosen from professional institutions, universities, and corporates in Delhi & NCR.

↳ **Sources of Data Collection :** Secondary data were collected through various books on advertising & behavioural responses, advertising journals, magazines, newspapers, websites, and so forth.

Primary data collection was done using a well structured questionnaire, observations, and interviews. Initially, an online pilot study was executed testing the reliability, validity, and sensitivity of the questionnaire. For this study, the respondents were first exposed to the ad content of the anti - smoking social advertisement, and were later on invited to respond to questions to measure the recall and attitude towards the advertisement and their intentions to spread the anti-smoking message. Finally, the data was collected by the survey method, whereby face to face interactions with the respondents (who were students and employees of corporates) was conducted. The advertisement was pasted above the urinals of their respective workplaces. Only male respondents participated in this study.

↳ **Data Analysis :** Data collected through the questionnaire, observations, and interviews were edited and coded for reducing the response and non response error. Finally, the data was analyzed by using pie charts.

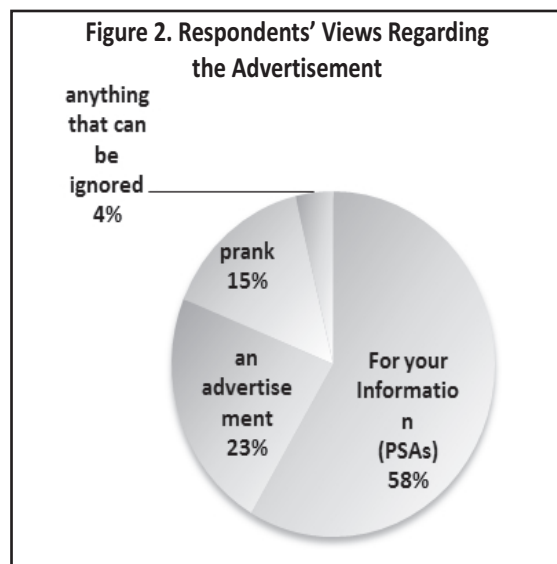
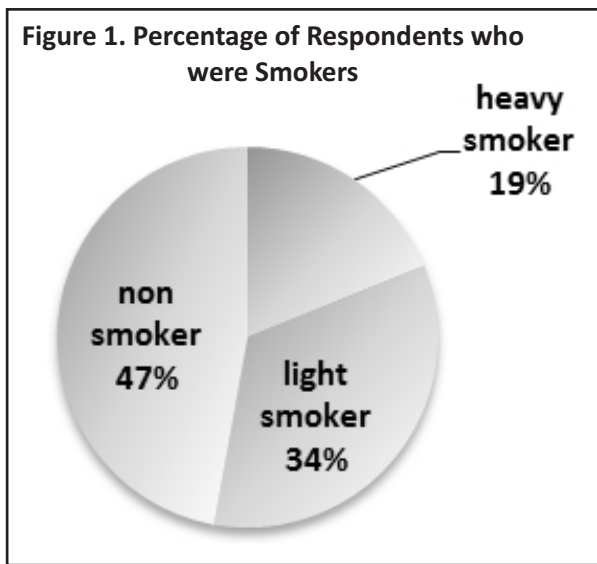
Prototype Development

As per the recommendations given by the advertisement professionals, the proposed ambient anti - smoking advertisement needed to have a unique visual appeal that attracted people's attention in a very short time frame, because in a country like India, public service announcements (PSAs) are entertained neither by advertising firms nor by the viewers. As the advertisement was intended to entertain potential smokers and to capture their attention, particular colour schemes and fonts were used to design an eye-catching ad. Since humour helps to capture and hold the attention of the viewers too, it was discussed among the target youth what interested them the most, and a few elements of humour were incorporated into the advertisement to make it engaging and interesting.

In order to be effective, an advertisement has to be memorable for the viewer. With an effective advertisement, the viewer should be able to clearly recall the message that is being communicated. Amongst the above-mentioned points, defining a target audience is the most important part of any advertising campaign. In the present case, it was the corporate youth and the college hostel youth who were more likely to be in the beginning of their “smoker-ship” or so-called potential smokers. When the target is defined, it is easy to figure out the possible environmental aspects of their daily routine. In this process, the places that were majorly frequented by this target audience a number of times each day, and where it was almost impossible to ignore the ad were identified. Next, it was easy to create an ad which represented the best connected message between the audience and the advertiser. After incorporating the creative feedback and emotional responses to the ad presented during the pilot study, a final ad (Appendix Figure 1) was created on which further responses of this research were taken. Dimensions of this sticker ad were 12 x 18 sq inches, and these were pasted just above the urinals (Appendix Figure 2), at the eyelevel, for the duration of four weeks (from April 2 to April 23, 2014).

Analysis and Results

One hundred and forty respondents in the age bracket of 17 to 35 years participated in the study. Out of this, 50 respondents were for the participant observation within the toilet premises of their respective places, and another 90 respondents (63 students and 27 corporate employees) were interviewed, out of which 65 were face to face and 25 were telephonic interviews. An observational study was conducted to analyze the expressions of the respondents after seeing the ad (Appendix Figure 2) for the very first time, or moreover, to notice the way they reacted to the advertisement. Open-ended interviews were conducted (after a couple of weeks to review the implementation of the advertisement) in order to find out various aspects like - were they able to recall the advertisement automatically when they felt like smoking or saw someone smoking (in case the respondents were non-smokers)?



The questionnaire based research was conducted because some of the student respondents were not quite comfortable talking about the anti - smoking ad face to face. It was also observed that the corporate youth was not quite comfortable in giving interviews while being around their workplace, and they were suggested to give their feedback anonymously at the time that was convenient to them.

↳ **Smoking Behavioural Profile of the Respondents :** Out of the total 90 respondents interviewed on phone or face to face, 47% of the respondents were non-smokers, 34% were light smokers, and 19% were heavy smokers (Figure 1).

↳ **Awareness Regarding Ambient Advertising :** It was found that the respondents were not so sure about this form of advertising. After seeing the ad (Appendix Figure 2) a number of times, out of the 90 respondents, 23% said that it was an advertisement, and 58% of the respondents found it to be a public service announcement. About 15% of the total respondents claimed that its message was not true and said that it was a prank. On keen observation of individual responses, it was found that those who claimed it to be a prank were more likely to be smokers between the ages of 25 to 30 years. Another observation in this context was that 4% of the respondents claimed that they were neutral towards the message (Figure 2).

↳ **Design Appeal as Compared to Other Traditional Advertisements :** It has been observed that to attract the viewer's attention, location as well as design elements play an important role in successfully transmitting the message. While conducting the interviews, about 62% of the respondents admitted it to be the most appealing advertisement in their surroundings , however, 38% of the respondents found it to be non-appealing. These respondents were the ones who did not show their interest in spreading the message (Figure 3).

↳ **Understanding the First Hand Emotional Stimuli :** It was observed that 28% of the respondents felt joy after seeing the ad (Appendix Figure 2) ; 14% of the respondents said that they felt relaxed ; 28% said that it was a bit awkward for them to view such an ad ; 22% of the respondents felt shocked after seeing the ad. However, none of the respondents admitted to feeling strong negative emotions for the advertisement ; 3% of the respondents said that they felt bored after seeing the ad. Other than this, 5% of the total respondents revealed that they experienced feelings of confusion, being in a dilemma, and so forth after seeing the ad (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Does the Ad Appeal to you More than Any Other Ad Pasted in Your Surroundings ?

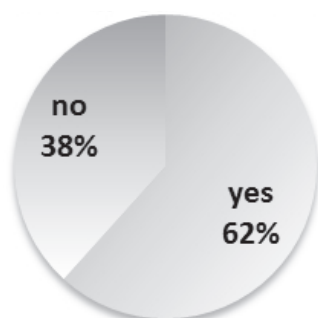


Figure 4. What Emotion Came to Your Mind When you first saw it?

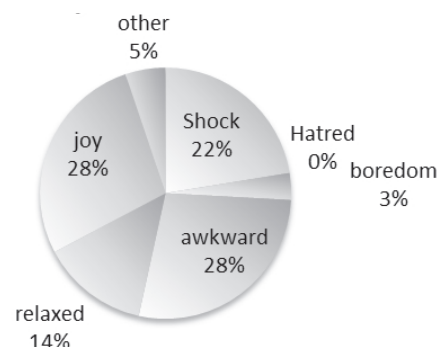


Figure 5. Do you Think it will Come in Your Mind When you Smoke or see Someone Smoking?

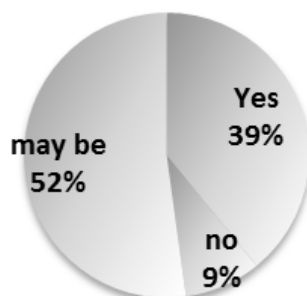
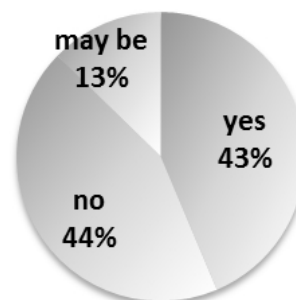


Figure 6. Does it Fascinate you Enough to Spread the Message Across When you Smoke or see Someone Smoking?



↳ **Extent of Overall Effectiveness of the Ad** : Thirty nine percent (39%) of the total respondents said that they would recall the ad message and the advertisement when they are going to smoke or see someone smoking (including the responses of the non-smokers). About 52% of the total respondents said that the message might strike their brain when they are likely to smoke or see someone smoking. On the contrary, there were some 9% of the respondents who said that the message would not cross their minds (Figure 5).

↳ **Effectiveness of the Ad - Whether it can be Publicized Through Word of Mouth** : It was observed during interviews that 44% of the respondents admitted that the message was not quite easy to be communicated through word of mouth. There were some 43% of the respondents who said that they did not have any problem in propagating the message through word to mouth or any other possible way ; however, 13% of the respondents said that they might propagate the message, but it depended upon the situation (Figure 6).

Discussion

(1) Analysis 1 : After analyzing the responses of 140 respondents through observations and open ended interviews, it was observed that 75% of the respondents immediately noticed the ad due to its appealing design. The remaining 25% of the respondents were shown the ad by their colleagues and roommates. Those who automatically saw the ad were either using the washroom to relieve themselves or were using the basin to wash their face ; these respondents noticed the unusual appearance of the sticker through the mirror they were looking at or were going towards the bathrooms (in hostels).

This analysis confirms that 75% of the total respondents were either directly or indirectly influenced by the advertisement. Even if any respondent wanted to ignore the ad, it attracted or influenced him psychologically.

(2) Analysis 2: While judging the authenticity of the ambient advertising, it was found that there were 58% of the respondents who agreed with the ad's content because they took it as a PSA (Public Service Announcement). Also, 15% of the total respondents were not satisfied with the information given in the sticker. They suspected the statement to be another form of hyperbole. Except this, another point of consideration can be that they also believed that the information already existed around them (smoking causes cancer, etc.). When they were told that the statement included in the sticker was a fact, they replied that they won't believe it to be true until any authenticated reference was placed in the ad.

Other than that, 23% of the respondents assumed it to be a designed promotional ad to be publicized by any private organization. They assumed that the PSAs that are circulated by government & social NGOs are not that much professionally designed in terms of font and colour scheme. Generally, a sense of warning and sincerity is found in PSAs that can have a grave impact on people's health. Also, any govt. related mark was not present anywhere on the body of the advertisement.

By this analysis, we can conclude that the respondents gave a mixed response to the ambient advertisement. This is also due to the excessiveness of traditional interruptive advertisements. Furthermore, people rarely get influenced by traditional advertisements, which they ignore because of their omnipresence.

(3) Analysis 3 : To evaluate the design appeal incorporated while creating and implementing the advertisement, analysis was done of the data collected through open ended interviews. It was found that out of 90 respondents, 62% said that the ad was more appealing than any other ad pasted in their surroundings. The reason for its appeal was the space where it was pasted. The typeface selected and the size of sticker - 12 x 18 sq inches - was large enough to catch the attention of the viewers and the ad was pasted on an average eye level.

(4) Analysis 4 : To ascertain the emotional response triggered inside the brains of the respondents, data collection tools which were used were open ended interviews and non participant observations. In the first two days of implementation of the advertisement (Appendix Figure 2), non-participant observation was done to get the first hand emotional response to the advertisement. When the respondents were appealed by the ad, above 70% (alone inside the toilet) of the respondents were seen to be smiling ; 20% of the respondents were seen discussing a bit about the advertisement with other respondents (known to them) inside the toilet. The remaining 10% of the total respondents saw the sticker and remained expressionless.

Twenty eight percent (28%) of the interviewees who felt joy were those who were non-smokers, and they got an excuse to tease their smoker friends, and somewhere, they were relaxed that they were not smokers and not in danger ; 28% were those who had started smoking since the past 2 to 3 years and had never thought about quitting smoking. These respondents also felt awkward upon seeing the ad pasted in their hostel premises. The reason for their irritation and awkwardness was because they found the ad to be chiding them for smoking and, in a way, it was raising questions regarding their personal desires and freedom ; 22% of the respondents were regular smokers since the past 5 to 7 years, and were planning to quit smoking in the near future. They were shocked upon seeing the ad and what consequence it could have for them ; 3% of the total interviewed respondents were least interested and just ignored the ad as they were heavy smokers and such ads hardly influenced them to quit smoking. The remaining 5% were in a dilemma and confusion because they were non smokers but were concerned about their relatives and closed ones who were smokers.

I observed a positive response from the respondents after the survey and also observed that nobody was offended by the ad content and its placement. When I questioned the respondents whether they experienced any strong negative feelings towards the advertisement, I was surprised to know that nobody felt so ; majority of the respondents supported the intention of the ad and the message delivered, even when the advertisement was sporting a negative message.

(5) Analysis 5 : Since the recall value is directly proportional to the overall effectiveness, the respondents were asked, “Will you be able to recall this ad?” Thirty nine (39%) of the respondents admitted that it would come in their brain when they are likely to smoke or see someone smoking ; 52% of the respondents said that it might strike them unconsciously, depending upon the situation they are into. Also, the respondents revealed that sometimes, when they feel like smoking, they are into some kind of discussion or are already thinking over something ; 9% of the total respondents revealed that the advertisement would not come into their minds because they were not into smoking in anyway or were not really interested in knowing about the consequences of smoking.

(6) Analysis 6 : To gain insights into the effectiveness of the ambient ad - whether the ad could be publicized through word of mouth also, the respondents were asked whether they would like to (or not like to) publicize the message. Forty four percent (44 %) of the respondents admitted that the message was not quite easy to be communicated through word of mouth, though they agreed with the fact that they were influenced by the sticker at that specific location ; 43% of the respondents said that they did not have any problem in propagating the message through word to mouth or any other possible way just because it was a social message and was quite interesting to share ; 13% of the respondents said that they might propagate the message, but it depended upon the situation.

↳ **Effective Evaluation - Final Observations After About Three Weeks of Implementation of the Advertisement :** To finally evaluate the effectiveness of the ambient ad (Appendix Figure 1), a question was posed to about 70% of all 90 interviewee respondents - “Are you able to recall the ad when you felt like smoking or saw someone smoking?”

Various responses were collected as the respondents had different experiences with their smoker friends and peers. Around 65% of the mild smoker respondents admitted that they had actually cut the number of cigarettes consumed per day to half and claimed that the initiative had supported them in their decision to quit smoking. Interestingly enough, it was found that irrespective of whether they were smokers or not, 73% of the respondents either checked the fact (mentioned in the ad) on the Internet or discussed it with their friends/colleagues. The attitude of the respondents indicates a positive attitude toward the anti - smoking ad among smokers and non - smokers. As a result, the anti - smoking ambient advertising targeting the youth smokers surely reached its target audience and warned them about the severe health risk and social costs of smoking. This is clearly in contrast with the earlier findings that the Internet is the most effective medium for anti-smoking advertisements (Hong, Soh, Khan, Abdullah, & Teh, 2013).

Managerial Implications

This research will help government and policy makers regarding effective themes while designing public service announcements. The study has demonstrated that the youth is receptive to anti - smoking advertisements. Moreover, it clearly highlights the effectiveness of negative emotions, and thus, would help advertisers to focus on the threats of smoking rather than focusing on the benefits of non-smoking. It would further help advertisers in their media planning as it provides them an effective medium to have better connect with the target audience.

Conclusion

This study sheds some light on the use of ambient advertising in successful transmission of the social anti - smoking message. The results show that the youth were ready to change their intent of getting fascinated by smoking. To some extent, the study results also reflect the decrease in per day consumption of cigarettes. The findings of this study have implications not only for public policies and advertising organizations, but opens an interesting area for researchers for further research on the applicability of ambient advertising to other social areas and ways and means to measure effectiveness. Nevertheless, the findings should be analyzed keeping in mind the

limitations. A longitudinal study and more extensive survey would have helped in gaining better insights about the effectiveness of ambient advertising.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The research has some limitations. First, the sample is not nationally representative as the respondents were from Delhi and NCR. Secondly, the smokers generally do not accept their smoking behaviour and thus, the respondents may not have responded accurately. Thirdly, the study relies on participants' responses to the questions. However, surveillance could have been a better option to understand their initial expressions. Fourthly, only men acted as the respondents, and thus, the results cannot be generalized for both genders. Lastly, the research was conducted during the duration of four months. Hence, a longitudinal research could have been better to actually understand the effect of ambient advertising. Therefore, future research studies can conduct a longitudinal analysis so that the effect of ambient advertising over a period of time could be evaluated. Moreover, future research could focus on other areas beyond metros as this could be a cost-effective way to reach the audience and may also focus on identifying a different medium for more effective reach. Future research could also focus on covering both sexes using surveillance rather than using a questionnaire where a respondent may give a socially acceptable response.

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APPENDIX

Appendix Figure 1



Appendix Figure 2. Implemented Ad Photos (Self Clicked)

