

ETHICS OF ADVERTISING: CHILDREN AS ACTORS AND RECIPIENTS OF ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Advertising in the system of free market has become a common occurrence today. It represents a tool with an overall ethical value regarded as neutral. The ethical value of individual advertisements is assessed through analysis of whether an advertisement as a tool was used for good or bad purposes. There are a variety of undeserved opinions about advertising, though.

This happens because of the widespread opinions about using techniques and organizational solutions which make the recipient helpless with respect to the messages oriented at them or they do not offer recipients the opportunities for verification of the usefulness of the product. These cases, however, are only of marginal character, since they are combated even in the advertising sector. In order to eliminate them entirely, one should familiarize with their structure and character. It turns out that the phenomenon which is attributed the characteristics of a serious threat is not actually a threat or represents only a narrow aspect of a danger. (Budzyński, 2001, p. 137.)

Advertisers use different actors in advertisements (children, men, women and older people), which often raises controversy. (Nowacki, 2006, 35-37.) (These problems have been widely discussed by the author in the paper following the international conference "BUSINESS MANAGEMENT- PRACTICE AND THEORY IN THE 21 st CENTURY", Slovakia 2013.) Nudity on the verge of pornography, isolation of others on the verge of discrimination, vulgarity, offensive gestures, offending national feelings, profanity: does this not strike the actors themselves?

KEY WORDS: ethics, advertising, children

INTRODUCTION

The value of advertising is often assessed from the viewpoint of a product it advertises. The advertisements have been criticized for encouraging people to buy useless products which do not actually meet the customers' needs. Such criticism, however, seems to be undeserved, since creators of advertisements are unable to verify the thesis they present in an advertisement.

According to J. Altkorn and T. Kramerem, the concept of advertising can be considered as "... a fundamental instrument of communication between the enterprise and the market, which is a mass, paid and impersonal form of presentation of the offer of products by a particular advertiser". (Altkorn, Kramer, 2003, p. 209.)

The attempts to combat advertising and eliminate it from social life is doomed to failure since advertising is advantageous to the economy, politics, social relations and culture and even to religious life. Even the people who avoid contacts with advertising remain affected by this phenomenon as they participate in the life of neighbourhood, culture and society. Advertising is a factor which stabilizes economic systems. It marks out the canons for the quality of communication, raises awareness of technological advances and stimulates demand in the market. It also represents a useful tool for maintaining an honest and responsible competition. Advertising is regarded to be a driving force, not only in enterprises but in the entire economy. Advertising causes that valuable products win with those poorer (it is unprofitable

to advertise poor products since the customer, after first experiences with the product will not continue shopping), increases production size while operation of the enterprise becomes more effective, profitability rises and the enterprise offer new job opportunities. (Grzegorzcyk, 2010, p. 136.)

Persuasion in advertising is the effect which is aimed at changing attitudes towards products and brands. The attitudes encompass components which are rational, knowledge-based, emotional, sentiment- and mood-based, and the components of readiness for action, connected with consumer's involvement. Attitudes are a source of consumer's preferences towards products. (Budzyński, 2001, p. 122.)

Each effect, even the most rational, creates, in the consumer's mind, some emotional associations. Emotions might be a direct source of preferences towards products or a factor which promotes other components of attitudes. The feelings contained in the advertising message have effect on the character and scope of the thought process. Positive feelings are followed by positive associations, whereas consumers assimilate the presented attributes of the brand more willingly than in the case of neutrality or unwillingness, which would make them more susceptible to the influence of competitors. The people with positive attitudes limit the scope of their thought process since thinking disturbs a good mood. Feelings provoked by advertising are followed by experiences when using products. The recipients understand and associate actors and elements of campaigns presented in an advertisement so close to their own experiences that they become convinced that it is their own experience. If recipients have opportunities for using the product, the memory status and the associated feelings are usually recalled. (Budzyński, 2001, pp. 122-123.)

Advertising raises much controversy among both recipients and creators.

A particular type of controversy is raised by advertising when using children as actors. Advertising agencies utilize particular type of traits and characteristics which are typical of children: shape of their head, which is round and bigger than other body parts, short facial part (with respect to the forehead), rounded cheeks, lack of sharp features or a snub nose.

These features are supposed to raise a number of feelings in the advertisement's recipients, such as affection, fondness, tenderness, protectiveness and the need for hugging.

This helps advertisement detract the attention necessary for evaluation of the legitimacy of arguments. At the same time, these positive emotions are transferred from the advertising message into the object of the message i.e. a product or a brand. (Grzegorzcyk, 2010, p. 122.)

Advertisements present children in different situations and social roles since the advertisers want to make use of an image of a child while they do this in three types of advertisements: advertisement of a product for children, advertisement of a product in the context of a dialogue of a child with adult and advertisement oriented at adult people in order to affect their emotions (presence of a child as an actor without any reason from the viewpoint of a product, e.g. a child in a car suggests that it is safe).

The motif of a child is a recurrent theme in a number of advertisements. This happens because people are willing to make any sacrifice for the youngest. For this reason the products advertised are presented so that they leave an impression that using them should ensure a particular comfort and safety for the youngest. Presence of a child is no surprise in advertising of diapers or cosmetics dedicated to caring for children. However, the youngest also play in the advertising spots that encourage people to buy sweets or even cars. All the children playing in advertisements are joyful and they smile at the sight of the products offered. They usually look very healthy. They are also beautiful or have a specific attractive looks. Watching them on the screens we call them cute, which means that their facial expressions or behaviours are dear to our hearts. Although often subconsciously, people want their children to be similar to the actors they see and decide to buy the products or services advertised. They

believe that the purchase will make their children healthy and joyful. However, it should be noted that children are not only the actors but also (much more often) the recipients of advertising. The criticism of the advertising oriented at the youngest is usually focused on expressing the following concerns:

1. advertising instils materialism in children and creates artificial needs, which are often impossible to be satisfied by parents;
2. advertisements utilize natural gullibility and sense of loyalty typical of children;
3. advertising promotes bad eating habits and affects children's health.

The supporters of children-oriented advertising respond to this criticism in the following manner:

1. - impact of many factors: peer groups, adults in general, adults and schools;
2. - protection of children by means of codes of procedures for transgressions in advertisements;
 - educational argument: it is better to teach children the messages contained in the advertisements i.e. when they still have a low purchasing power and are controlled by parents;
3. - who is supposed to decide whether a product X is more harmful than a product Y. Any food is harmful if consumed in excessive amounts (parental control is of key importance).

Therefore, it can be noted that there is no consensus about what and how should be advertised for children.

A general principle which protects children in advertising is human dignity and the principle which in Poland is used by KER [Komisja Etyki Reklamy (Commission for Ethics of Advertising) in Poland], an counterpart of the UK's ASA [Advertising Standards Authority (in the UK's)], which is the significance for the product. Therefore, naked children are allowed to advertise swimming pools, soaps or shampoos for children (i.e. the items which are used when a child in real world is naked). Consequently, the child's nudity is forbidden when advertising such products as e.g. bicycles, toy cars, food, toys etc.

Komisja Etyki Reklamy (KER, the Commission for Ethics of Advertising), is in Poland a body which determines the legitimacy of advertising messages oriented to children and young people according to the Code of Ethics of Advertising which contains the following articles which are aimed at protecting children as recipients of advertisements:

„Art. 22 Value of the products offered in an advertisement oriented at children or young people cannot be named in a manner which causes wrong perception of their real value e.g. through using terms and phrases with improper context such as "only" or "little". Advertising cannot suggest that the product is available for any family budget.

Art. 23 Advertising oriented at children or young people cannot include the contents which generate threat to health or life.

Art. 24 According to the provisions of the Art. 8 and Art. 10, advertising oriented at children or young people cannot misguide them through exploitation their natural trust and lack of experience.

Art. 25 Advertisements oriented at children or young people must take into consideration level of their development and cannot pose threats to their physical, psychical or moral development.

Art. 26 Advertisements oriented at children or young people cannot convey a message that having or using a product should ensure their social or psychological advantage over others or that not having this product will produce the opposite effects.

Art. 27 Advertisements oriented at children or young people cannot distort the authority of parents or other people who care for children, challenge their responsibility, opinions, tastes

or inclinations. The above limitation does not concern the cases of combating social pathologies.

Art. 28 1. Advertising oriented at children or young people should ensure that the advertisements do not misguide them in terms of actual dimensions, values, nature, durability, looks and technical specifications of the advertised products.

a) if additional accessories (e.g. batteries) or additional material (e.g. paint) are necessary to use the product, this fact has to be clearly stated.

b) if an advertisement concerns the products sold separately, this fact has to be unequivocally defined.

c) an advertisement cannot diminish the degree of skills necessary for using the product;

Art. 29 Advertisements cannot contain the encouragement to persuade adults to purchase the products or instructions of how to persuade the adults to purchase the advertised products oriented at children or young people.

Art. 30 Both advertisements and products for children and young people have to, if safety reasons require such measures to be taken, contain clear information of the age group the product is dedicated to.

Art. 31 Promotional campaigns oriented at children or young people, direct marketing and event included in sponsoring must be consistent with particular principles defined in the Code, with particular focus on the provisions of the present chapter.

Art. 32 The provisions of the Art. 22-31 are used respectively for the advertisements which are not oriented directly at children or young people but children or young people are their recipients due to the place and form of presentation of the advertisements. This concerns in particular the advertisements broadcast in television channels at the time close to programs for children and advertisements presented in cinemas before film shows and outdoor advertising.” (Internet, <http://www.radareklamy.org/kodeks-etyki-reklamy.htm>, lecture on 18 April 2013)

Apart from KER, the children's rights in Poland are also protected by Polish judiciary (Act of 29th December 1992.) and organizations which operate based on the following codes of ethics: the Code of Ethics of Advertising, Media Ethics Charter, Code of Ethics of the Polish Public Relations Association, Code of Ethics of the Polish Advertising Chamber.

"The children's safety is also protected by the European Union, which prepared a directive which stipulates that television advertisements cannot do any moral or physical harm in young people Therefore, all the EU member countries should meet the following criteria to protect young people:

- advertising should not persuade young people directly to purchase products and exploit their lack of experience and gullibility;
- advertising should not encourage young people to persuade their parents and other people to purchase the products or services advertised;
- advertising should not exploit the specific trust the young people feel for their parents, teachers and other people they feel close to;
- advertising should not show, without specific reasons, young people in dangerous situations".(Council Directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989.)

CONCLUSION

In summary, it should be emphasized that the companies which compete in the free market would often not restrain themselves from any practices that would increase sales figures. Confronted with such attitudes of adults, children would not have opportunities for psychical and even physical health and, unhealthy children inevitably translate into unhealthy society.

On the other hand, if deprived of images of children, the world of advertising would become artificial and unreal. Therefore, societies should not strive for forbidding children to take part

in advertising campaigns. Rather, the emphasis should be on supporting and promotion of vigilance and sensitivity of organizations which protect children from advertising and in advertising that might do any harm to them.

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