

**THE EXISTENCE OF SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING AND THE AD INDUSTRY'S
AND PUBLIC'S REACTION TOWARDS THIS TECHNIQUE**

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ABSTRACT

One of the core reasons for common public distrust towards advertising is the use of subliminal advertising. The authors shed light on the definition of advertising, its history as well as the relationship between art and advertising. Consumers' reactions to some advertising techniques have been analyzed and common ethics and morals regarding advertising standards have been listed.

KEYWORDS: *Advertisement; Subliminal Advertising; High Culture; Popular Culture; Ethics; Regulations.*

INTRODUCTION

In every aspect of life, people are surrounded by different types of advertisements for a long time. Perhaps the emergence of this phenomenon dates back to human evolution, and since then people are immersed in the different attractive messages by businesses. Internet sources may present hundreds of definitions to interpret the term "advertisement". Scientists, novelists, journalists, linguists, and specialists from other different fields defined it based on social norms, culture, and commercial importance at the time. However, there are still no perfect definitions exist since none of them can fully define this complex phenomenon. There is no perfect definition exists since it has a complex relationship with culture, history, and economy.

According to James Laver, the advertisement can be defined as "any device which first arrests the attention of the passer-by and induces him to accept a mutually advantageous exchange." This definition is seemingly too broad to define all the aspects of an advertisement. There can be plenty of situations where people "arrest" the attention and provide an "advantageous exchange" for both parties. Nevertheless, not all of them cannot be defined as advertisements. Although it is too general, it emphasizes some crucial features of ads such as grabbing attention, exchange, and mutuality (O'Barr, 2015). All the advertisements send a message about its culture, history, and trends in its time and place.

A much narrower definition of this phenomenon was given by Raymond Williams. He stated it simply as "the official art of capitalist society". By saying this, he meant the sponsorship of art in this case by capitalist interests. Another classic definition is given by Kennedy in 1905, as he defined it as "advertising is salesmanship in print". By "salesmanship", he meant that sellers usually explain the details and quality of the product to the consumers. It can be interpreted as Advertising as the process of transforming a customized marketing message into a surplus one. Advertising seeks to achieve the same thing as salesmanship but through mass media such as a newspaper or magazine which are the only available mass media tools at the time. That is how salesmanship is defined in print.

Literature Review

2.1. Defining subliminal advertising.

The term "subliminal" is derived from Latin and means "sub"- below, "limen"- threshold. It is interpreted as the perception which occurs beneath the human consciousness and was coined in the 1970s (O'Barr, 2013). Since then, it is believed that there are hidden techniques or flashing images behind movies and advertising images. Those techniques are meant to manipulate their actions and purchases unconsciously. Some even might think that subliminal advertising works for political bodies. They can easily regulate the public's opinion and actions through subliminal advertising. Although subliminal advertising is believed to be "immoral and unethical", TV broadcasts were already filled with them according to Sponsor (James, 1957). These suspicions brought the attention of Advertising scientists and they conducted extensive research to find out whether subliminal advertising has merits to the ad makers or politics. The Application of Subliminal Perception in Advertising concluded that people can react to stimuli that are so faint in intensity, length, size, or clarity that they are not aware of them. The research is inadequate to draw any judgments regarding the benefits or even the existence of subliminal advertising. However, people are still outrageous about the existence of subliminal advertising and its effects on their actions. Neither any researchers nor ad managers claimed that they use the technique of subliminal ads nor did any of them agreed that such a technique exists or was valuable to them.

2.2. Reactions of the public to the subliminal advertising technique.

One of the most influential research "The Hidden Persuaders" (1957), brought the many psychological, motivational, and manipulative techniques used by marketers to the public attention. The author, Packard, claimed that advertisers and marketers are monitoring, managing, and manipulating us without our knowledge. He supported his hypothesis with detailed research on people's psychological reactions to pleasurable TV commercials, billboards, and newspaper ads. He warned the people about the immoral and unethical use of hidden manipulative techniques. People commonly believed that advertisers meticulously crafted advertising and examined reactions to them even more methodically. Ads were perceived as the same as manipulation by the public. Another influential book with the same message was "Subliminal Seduction" by Wilson Bryan Key (Key, 1976). Although Key (1976) presents data from study findings and other sources that provide the premise of motivational research in general and subliminal communication in particular, his books are not a thorough scientific analysis of the subject. For example, a common experiment for him is to have his pupils relax and gaze at an image before stating the first thing that comes to mind. Then they hunt for

concealed pictures like a dog's face, a phallic sign, or a human body - embedded in a pool of water, a clump of greenery, or ice cubes in a glass (O'Barr, 2005).

Regardless of this large scale of public distrust ad industry could not respond to it meaningfully because of the diversity of opinions among them. However, they all seemed to claim that subliminal ad is not a serious technique (O'Barr, 2005). Or else, they showed that they had not got the even idea of using such a technique to persuade people by making fun of suspicious public views in their ads. They most ignored and disclaimed this idea. However, O'Toole's (1981) "The Trouble with Advertising" claims that there is no such thing as subconscious marketing. I've never seen an example of it, nor have I ever heard it seriously addressed as a marketing approach. It is demoralizing to believe that the human mind is so readily manipulated that anybody may be forced to act against his will or better judgment by peremptory directives he is unaware of. Controversially, Jack (1994) believed that subliminal advertising is not an imagination, and it exists in the market although it is not often used. When it comes to psychologists' point of view on this matter, they convince that although such techniques had existed, they would not have been sufficient enough to trigger people's emotions to buy the things they do not want. There is not sufficient evidence to claim the proposition that subliminal messages influence behavior (Anthony et al 1992).

Although it is believed to be an unviable technique to advertisers, this idea is still appealing to the public. There are three main reasons why the public wants to believe in the existence of this technique. Firstly, as Haberstroh affirms consumers do not want to take responsibility for their irrational actions and overspending habits. It is easier to "displace the responsibility to ads" when they can't control their choices (Haberstroh, 1994). Secondly, mass media and Hollywood movies also depict advertisements as unethical and immoral. Thirdly, deceptive or exaggerated claims of some ads caused this massive public distrust. Mostly, ads are not regulated for their quality as a result, subliminal ads seemed to be another lying tool for advertisers. Since the concept of subliminal advertising first emerged in the 1950s, the advertising industry has mostly disregarded it, seldom discussing the subject in public and never explicitly replying to Key's allegations. Whatever one thinks of the very tiny amount of data indicating that subliminal communications have a genuine part in most advertising campaigns, there is no disputing that the concept is likely more important than the actuality. It appears that many members of the public wish to believe in it (O'Barr, 2013). This phenomenon is still relevant to this day. Public distrust and manipulation of celebrities are still commonly believed to exist by the public.

The Connection between Art and Advertising

Advertising is also a form of art. Artists have been paid for generations to paint signboards, stone walls, and other types of imagery in the interest of commercial marketing. It has some connections to the literature. However, literature is a form of high culture that has higher standards than popular culture such as, "blockbuster movies, rock concerts, comic books, and advertisements." Some famous writers were also the creators of many ads, from which they borrowed their writing style. More significantly, many famous writers have used advertising in their works to examine the function of advertising in the community.

In some instances, high art forms such as "high culture" paintings (FRENCH) have been widely used in advertng posters. According to Maurice, the widespread use of cultural paintings on walls was the devaluation of culture rather than cultural growth. Vice versa, some famous

painters including Picasso used some ads in his *Landscape with Posters* (1912) paintings. TV advertising is meant to fade, billboards to fall, and magazines and newspapers to be recycled. Yet, one of the most noticeable features of modern expressive culture is the reciprocal impact of high art and popular culture.

Movies representing the ad industry and how they are made have been produced vastly by Hollywood. However, those films were based on stereotypical views about advertisements. Not to mention, not any people who were involved in the creation of the movie might not have been familiar with how ad agencies operate. The main themes in the movies are mostly the depiction of advertising as a profession, its impact on society, and the features of ad employers. Mostly, films depict ads as a fun profession. As if ads are the product of fantasy, imagination, and momentary inspiration not taking into consideration of long-term research, and strategy (movie: *Nothing in Common*). The lavish lifestyle that surrounds the field is another part of advertising's depiction in movies. They portray advertising executives dressed well, working in gorgeous offices, attending sophisticated parties, and living in spectacular flats and houses.

In Hollywood's depiction of advertising executives' lifestyles, offices are at least as magnificent as mansions. Offices are vibrant, bright, and exciting places to work (Movie: *What Women Want*). A second subject in cinema advertising is its influence on society. The assumption is that advertising often leads to consumers purchasing goods they don't need. A third assumption in Hollywood's portrayal of advertising is that there is a specific type of individual who succeeds in advertising. This is someone prepared to do practically anything, to prioritize work above family and personal life, and to sell something they may not believe in themselves (Movie: *Sweet November*) (Kramer vs. Kramer). When consumers declare their preferences for advertisements, they frequently lack justification. Even when justifications are presented, the reactions are more emotional than intellectual. The Wall Street Journal, in an article quoting viewers' opinions:

- - *The ad broke through and was attention-grabbing.*
- - *It was so unpredictable.*
- - *The spot was very moving.*
- - *Hilarious, everyone cracked up laughing.*
- - *Didn't like it, I was waiting for a spoof.*
- - *Tons of impact and very memorable.*
- - *I'm a sucker for monkeys. [spot featuring office run by chimps]*

Unlike more intellectual cultural areas such as literature, painting, and even film, the commercial is at home in mainstream culture. It's unbridled joy and laughter for many. Keeping the advertising mysterious might be as interesting as the football match itself.

3. Ethics and Advertising

Although the ad industry has its ethics and policies, some ads are not free from deceptive content. Advertising ethics, like other areas of social life, is a complicated topic. What one person thinks is ethical may be considered unethical by another. Advertising experts must make complicated judgments every day about what may and should be expressed in commercials. Customers want to make the most powerful statements for their brands feasible, but the line between the possible and the immoral must be continuously debated.

The major goal of the FTC's consumer protection work is to prevent fraud and unfairness. According to the Commission's deception criteria, a misleading representation, omission, or practice is likely to mislead customers acting rationally under the circumstances and is "material"—that is, likely to influence consumers' actions or decisions regarding the product or service being offered. An advertiser is accountable for any substantial statements that consumers accept from advertisements, not simply the claims that the marketer is meant to make. For example, a food product ad that specifically indicates that it is low in cholesterol is likely to infer that it is also low in fat.

Each major, objective claim must be supported by substantiation, or a reasonable basis, at the time the claim is made by the marketer. The nature of the claim, the product, the negative effects of a false claim, the positive effects of a true claim, the cost of developing substantiation for the claim, and the amount of substantiation that experts in the field deem reasonable all affect what constitutes a reasonable basis for a particular claim. In general, strong scientific evidence supporting statements related to health and safety is required.

- (1) Full disclosure: According to some experts, all advertisements ought to mention both the negative effects and potentially deadly outcomes of using a product, in addition to its high quality and efficacy. These warnings are common in the case of prescription medications when the wrong usage might be harmful or lethal.
- (1) False advertising. Caveat emptor, Latin for "let the buyer beware," advised purchasers of unethical dealers in ancient Rome. Although it is far less uncommon than in the past that a salesman will expressly misrepresent a product, that is still a solid rule of thumb today. As recently as the early 1900s, advertising was fully unregulated (by both governmental and advertising industry laws), and businesses were free to make any claims they could get away with.
- (2) Misleading ads. Between the truth and lie, people think that misleading lies. The advertisements are deceptive because they deviate from actual truth and fact. They sometimes lack clear details or half facts about the product are presented.
- (3) Impression Management. This sometimes entails some alteration of literal facts to present them in a better or more favorable light.
- (4) Harmful products. Tobacco, alcohol. They have been diminished from the public view. Or else. Strictly, their harmful content is presented to people.
- (5) Community standards. Ethical standards in marketing must consider social standards. It is impossible to apply a single set of universal rules on what is excellent, poor, or merely acceptable everywhere. What is seen as valuable in one culture may be devalued or even forbidden in another. Moreover, local histories and social concerns interact with advertisements to create distinct local interpretations and meanings.
- (1) Advertising to children. Some people think that advertising to children is not ethical since children cannot differentiate the necessary and unnecessary products to them. Even worse, they can not tell whether it is just a TV program or manipulative advertising. Canada, like certain European countries, places strong limits on advertising to minors. Sweden is likely the most stringent, outlawing all advertising directed at children under the age of 12. Ads are prohibited for five minutes before, during, and after children's programming in Luxembourg and Belgium. Ads cannot run for more than four minutes in each half-hour of children's

programming in Canada. In the United States, commercials for cereals, toys, and other goods are still targeted at children.

- (2) Industry and Government Regulation of Advertising. Advertising firms hire attorneys to advise them on what may and cannot be mentioned in advertisements. These attorneys are experts in the regulation of advertising by government agencies and courts.

CONCLUSION

Advertising is a dynamic industry that must adapt to new product developments, client trends, and media changes. The development of the Internet as an advertising medium is changing business yet again. Yet, many people have expressed their dissatisfaction with this new type of advertising. The fact is that Internet advertising is intrusive and often unwanted by consumers. It is "direct" marketing. Moreover, marketers who gather information secretly to create online consumer profiles are well-known. Banners, pop-ups, and other forms of Internet advertising are just the most recent manifestations of a widespread phenomenon in modern culture. Many customers despise and actively oppose billboards that choke urban and rural landscapes, as well as the excessive number of magazine and newspaper pages devoted to advertising.

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