

Committee: Youth Assembly

Issue: Action paper on advertising under the scope of ethics

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INTRODUCTION

I would like first to welcome you all to the Youth Assembly of the 10th Costeas-Geitonas School Model United Nations. My name is Lida Arapogianni and I will be serving as the Head of this year's Youth Assembly. Together with my Co-Heads (Manuel Finnochio and Riana Leah Byrne), we are going to help you and guide you throughout your preparation and three-day long conference. Therefore, if you have any questions do not hesitate to contact via email. My email is lidaki632@gmail.com.

The issue of "advertising under the scope of ethics" is more topical than ever in our ever changing world, which is characterized not only by scientific and technological development, but also by a rapid change and reform in ethics and in society in general.

Advertisements aim to inform people about the existence of products and services; additionally, they are sometimes created in order to communicate a message to society. It has to be clear that advertising is not only used in order to provide information about the services and goods available to the consumers, but it can be a means of communication between international/governmental/non-governmental organizations and governments and citizens. As a consequence, advertising has a huge impact on the ethics of modern society and on shaping behavior patterns. In 1937 the International Chamber of Commerce set the first advertising ethical practice and then many governments used it as a base of national advertising ethical codes in order to protect citizens from unethical advertisements and ensure that they respect the norms of each society. This study guide aims to inform you about the topic of advertising under the scope of ethics and prepare you as best as possible for the conference.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Advertising

In our globalized world, advertising appears in almost every aspect of our everyday life. Advertisements aim to persuade consumers to buy a product and the means of

achieving this is by branding (associating a product name/brand with certain characteristics). Advertisements appear on newspapers, on television, on radio and, over the last decade, also on the Internet. These are two definitions of advertising:

“The activity of making products or services known about and persuading people to buy them”¹

“Advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them, as defined by the Advertising Association of the UK. Advertising is always present, though people may not be aware of it. In today's world, advertising uses every possible media to get its message across. It does this via television, print (newspapers, magazines, journals etc.), radio, press, internet, direct selling, hoardings, mailers, contests, sponsorships, posters, clothes, events, colors, sounds, visuals and even people (endorsements).”²

Scope

“The extent of the area or subject matter that something deals with or to which it is relevant.”³

Ethics

The term ethics is difficult to define as it is not a universal term and since ethics differ from country to country and from region to region. Moreover, the ethical standards of social groups and social classes in each country could be different. As a term, it derives from the Greek word “ethos” which means habit, character and attitude. Ethics are affected by culture, religion, history and landscape. This is a possible definition of ethics:

“Ethics is two things. First, ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics, for example, refers to those standards that impose the reasonable obligations to refrain from rape, stealing, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Ethical standards also include those that enjoin virtues of honesty, compassion, and loyalty. And, ethical standards include standards relating to rights, such as the right to life, the right to freedom from injury, and the right to privacy. Such standards

¹ "Advertising Definition | Advertising Meaning - The Economic Times." *The Economic Times*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

² "Advertising Meaning in Cambridge Business English Dictionary." *Advertising Meaning in Cambridge Business English Dictionary*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

³ "Definition of Scope in English:." *Scope*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

are adequate standards of ethics because they are supported by consistent and well-founded reasons.

Secondly, ethics refers to the study and development of one's ethical standards. As mentioned above, feelings, laws and social norms can deviate from what is ethical. So it is necessary to constantly examine one's standards to ensure that they are reasonable and well-founded. Ethics also means, then, the continuous effort of studying our own moral beliefs and our moral conduct, and striving to ensure that we, and the institutions we help to shape, live up to standards that are reasonable and solidly-based.”⁴

Ethics in marketing and advertising

“Ethics in advertising means a set of well-defined principles which govern the ways of communication taking place between the seller and the buyer. Ethics is the most important feature of the advertising industry.”⁵

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The history of advertising has its roots back to the ancient years (advertisements on papyrus, rocks, bamboo flutes and walls were common in Ancient Greece, Egypt, China and Rome). “Modern” advertisements began to appear in the 19th century in England and the



“This is a tobacco advertisement of the thirties. The image of the scientist aims to reassure that smoking is not hazardous.”

well-known “father of modern advertising” was Thomas J. Baratt. As industrialization expanded, advertising flourished in the United States in the 20th century and especially in the Tobacco industry. Advertising has an impact on shaping behavior patterns and as a consequence on shaping the norms of each society. Therefore, 20th century advertisements played a major role in exchanging of traditional habits with a “modern lifestyle” (cultural assimilation was common in the USA in the 19th -20th century when American natives lost their cultural characteristics and took the characteristics of the modern American society), in the introduction of women in the workplace, in the promotion of information about diseases and infections like AIDS/HIV and in the promotion of an eco-friendlier way

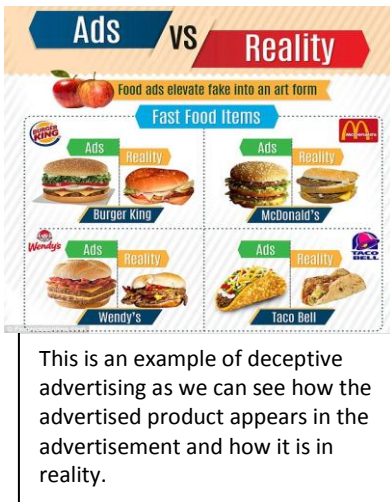
of life. Since the beginning of modern advertising, experts in marketing and sociology have been describing how advertising has an impact on the ethics of a society and therefore they have set standards about the ethics that have to be followed while advertising a product.

⁴ "What Is Ethics?" *What Is Ethics?* N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

⁵ "Ethics in Advertising." *Ethics in Advertising.* N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

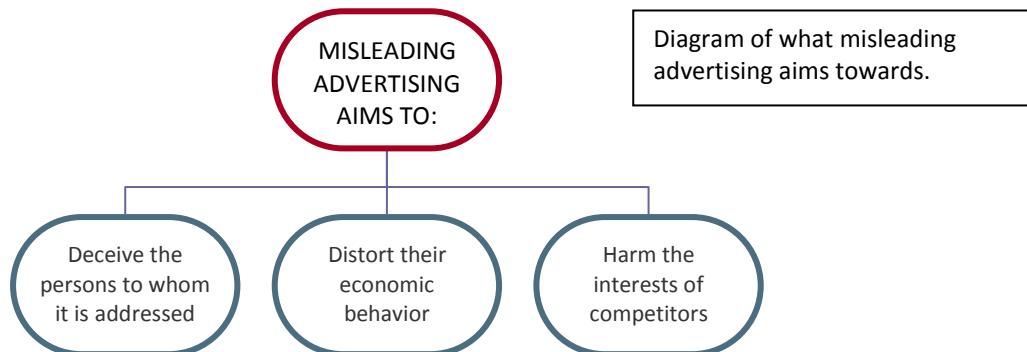
Advertising ethics and deceptive advertising

“Ethical Advertising means doing what the advertiser and advertiser’s peers believe is right, honest and follows the norms of social responsibility. Social Responsibility means doing what society views as best for the welfare of the people or specific community.”⁶



The advertising field is usually criticized for not respecting the “rules” of ethics in the process of advertisement design. A well-known example is what we call “deceptive advertising” or “false advertising”. In more detail, deceptive advertising is when the company claims through the misrepresentation of the product and misleading statements that the advertised product has characteristics that in real does not have (about the price, the nature of the product, etc.) or can do something that in real cannot. The aforementioned does not conform to the ethical standard of honesty. Many big companies have been accused of

having misleading ads and have been brought into courts. However, the issue of deceptive advertising is a controversial one as there is a grey area between the absolute truth and the absolute deception.



Sexuality and ethics in advertising

Since the beginning of modern advertising sex appeals has been part of marketing products as a means of showing that the use of the product could make the person more sexually attractive. The use of sex appeals is common in image-based products like fragrances and cosmetics, jewelry, fashion goods, cigarettes and candy. According to a study from the University of Rhode Island, in this kind of advertisements female-sex appeals are featured in 53% of the ads and, moreover, 66% of the ads that used sex appeals used some

⁶ “The Economic, Social, and Regulatory Aspects of Advertising” McGraw-Hill International Editions

form of nudity. However, forms of nudity are being showed in most of Hollywood movies and also, nowadays, nudity is not considered as something “malicious”. Therefore, the question is: Why is the use of sex appeals in advertising sometimes considered inappropriate or unethical? Through these advertisements, a role model for an ideal body is created. For example, female sex appeals are very thin and as a consequence the ideal female body is a thin one or, on the other hand, men have muscular, toned bodies. Research has shown that people and especially teens are influenced by this body ideal presented in advertisements. Their attempt to resemble these models often leads them to health problems such as anorexia nervosa.

Children and advertising

The most controversial issue concerning advertising under the scope of ethics is the issue of “children’s advertising”. Firstly, we have to divide advertising directed to young children (children’s advertising) from advertising seen by children (advertising and children). Child-oriented ads use animation, fantasy effects, magic, superheroes and special musical themes in order to appeal to children.

Children are considered by some psychologists as autonomous consumers due to the fact that, through advertising, they have access to the market. On the other hand, children lack the conceptual abilities necessary in order to be considered as autonomous consumers and, as a consequence, be able to make consumer decisions, since children (especially under the age of 8) are not mature enough to understand whether the advertisement contains fictional or real characteristics. Furthermore, psychologists claim that children know little about their own preferences and wants. Children lack critical thinking and as a consequence they are unable to compare, evaluate and assess the value of the advertised products. A very common indication of this fact is that children want many of the products they see advertised on TV. Last but not least, they cannot be considered autonomous consumers because they are not self-financed.



The well known advertisement “Lorax breakfast” uses animation.

For the aforementioned reasons, advertising directed to children can be considered unethical.

However, children do not only watch advertisements directed to them but a variety of other advertisements about cosmetics, food, investment companies etc., directed to the adult population. Research has shown that American children watch 40,000 commercials annually. Except of the fact that

children have high demands for advertised products, their whole life is affected by them. For example, junk food advertisements (such as candy commercials etc.) influence children's diet, make them believe that junk food is healthy and, as a consequence, endorse children's obesity.

Advertising and obesity

Junk food advertisements influence consumer audience's diet and, subconsciously, encourage unhealthy diets that contain high levels of fats. Although there is no research to date that shows the correlation between advertising and obesity, junk food advertisements may have impact on consumers' diets. Therefore, the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) has issued warnings to parents about the influence that junk food advertisements can have on their children's eating habits.

Political and social issues

In commercial advertising, it is important for advertisers to remain neutral in regard to social and political issues. In general, respect for different political beliefs and religions that consumers have is many companies' priority, as this is the only way to ensure the success of the product among different social groups.

Issue advocacy advertising

Ads that aim to bring a problem to light (for example children soldiers) are considered Issue Advocacy ads. These ads are very frequent in the United States and are funded and sponsored by interest advocacy groups or organizations. It is important that these ads do not promote a product but are only trying to pass a message to society and the public. Unfortunately, it has been noticed that some issue advocacy advertisements spread political propaganda and, therefore, many governments are asking organizations related to advocacy ads to state who provides their funding.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

The issue of advertising under the scope of ethics is a global issue and, therefore, all countries are involved. However, there are some countries that are more affected by the problem.

United States of America

The USA's society is considered as the number one consumer society and the number one advertising market. Therefore, advertising plays an important role in American

life and US citizens are highly influenced by it. It is estimated that, in 2012, spending on advertisements was 166 billion US dollars. Many social problems, such as high levels of obesity, may be an impact of advertising as, in the USA, advertisements of fast food are very popular.

European Union

The European Union consists of 28 member states and, as a consequence, it is a very large market (number two advertising market). The European Union, as an organ that respects the different ethics of member states, promotes ethical advertising and creates many advertisements about the protection of the consumers. The European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) regulates the European advertising standards. One of its most significant bans is that on tobacco ads.

India

Over a billion of people live within the borders of India and its emerging economy has turned the country into a huge prospective market. The “problem” with India is that, in this land, the modern coexists with the traditional and, as a consequence, there is a very fine line between ethical and unethical (by Hindi standards) advertising. Nevertheless, there are some agencies like the Advertising Standards Council of India that aims to regulate the

problem. Moreover, due to the fact that India suffers from many social and environmental problems, the government informs citizens through advertisements about these problems.



Islamic World

In Islamic countries, advertisements have to respect the norms of the religion and the society. However, advertising differs depending on the country. In

Underwear advertisement in Saudi Arabia.

more conservative countries, women do not frequently appear in advertisements and if they do, they are covered everywhere except for their eyes. Nevertheless, in less conservative countries,

advertisements are similar to advertisements in the United States or the European Union. The aforementioned shows us that advertisements must respect the ethics of every society as this is the only way to make a product successful.

American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA or 4A's)

The American Association of Advertising Agencies was created in 1917 in the United States of America and is the national trade organization of the US. The members of the

association have agreed upon an ethical code that advertising companies must follow while creating an advertisement. The ethical code states that advertisements in US should not consist of:

- a) False or misleading statements or exaggerations, visual or verbal
- b) Testimonials that do not reflect the real opinion of the individual(s) involved
- c) Price claims that are misleading
- d) Claims insufficiently supported or that distort the true meaning or practicable application of statements made by professional or scientific authority
- e) Statements, suggestions, or pictures offensive to public decency or minority segments of the population.”⁷

With the aforementioned regulations the AAAA aims to avoid the creation of advertisements that compromise the ethics and norms of American society.

European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA)

One of the main goals of the European Union is the protection of the consumers. Therefore, the EASA, in conjunction with other EU bodies, has set some ethical standards in advertising that companies have to follow. These standards state that advertisements must be “legal, descent, honest, truthful, prepared with a sense of social responsibility to the consumer as well as society as a whole, created with due respect to the rules of fair competition”⁸.

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

The ICC was created in 1919 in order to promote investment and trade and it consists of thousands of members all around the globe. The ICC informs the World Trade Organization and many UN bodies about international business and marketing and cooperates with them in issues concerning the business sector. The first advertising practice ethical code was set in 1937 and, since then, it has been amended many times. The aforementioned code aims to encourage high standards of ethics in marketing and advertising and it is considered as the base of many national ethical rules in advertising.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization has asked for the ban of tobacco advertisements in all forms worldwide in order to eliminate the number of tobacco users.

⁷ "Standards of Practice." AAAA. American Association of Advertising Agencies, n.d. Web.

<<http://www.aaaa.org/about/association/pages/standards-of-practice.aspx>>.

⁸ "About Self-regulation - EASA: The European Advertising Standards Alliance." EASA: The European Advertising Standards Alliance. EASA, n.d. Web. <<http://www.easa-alliance.org/About-SR/About-SR/page.aspx/190>>.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1789	In 1789 the first known tobacco advertisement (of P.Lorillard & Company) was published in the New York daily paper.
1919	The International Chamber of Commerce was founded.
1920s	Tobacco industry created the modern advertising industry as it is known today. Tobacco advertising was increasingly blooming.
1955	The first televised toy advertisement was shown in USA and it was Hasbro's.
January 1971	The US Congress passed the Public health Cigarette Smoking Act and banned all televised tobacco advertisements in the United States.
1984	All tobacco companies must from now on place Surgeon's General Warnings in all tobacco packs and advertisements in USA (Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act).
1985	The Advertising Standards Council of India was founded.
1991	Tobacco advertising on Television has been banned in the European Union. (Television Without Frontiers Directive). The EASA was founded.
1991	Sweden banned advertising directed to children under 12 years old.
May 2003	The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) was created and until it came into force (2005) it was signed by 168 member states. The convention asks for the ban of tobacco advertising.
2015	The new Hungarian Code of Ethics for Advertising was signed.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

As the issue of advertising under the scope of ethics concerns public and governments, United Nations' bodies such as the UN Ethics Office, UNICEF and WHO have warned about the negative effects of advertising directed to children, advertisements of unhealthy foods and tobacco advertisements.

- “The Children’s Rights and Business Principles” of UNICEF are rules that protect the rights of children. Principle 6 clearly states that advertising and marketing must respect children’s rights, support and promote them.
- WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: The Convention aims to ban Tobacco Advertising in the states that have signed the Convention.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There have been previous attempts to reduce unethical advertising and its effects. The ICC marketing code is considered as the base of all advertising standards which aim to create advertisement with respect to the ethics and the norms of each society.

Moreover, there is a ban on tobacco advertising in many countries. First, the American Congress banned tobacco advertising on Television in the United States of America in 1971. Since 1984, in the USA, all tobacco companies are obliged to place Surgeon’s General Warnings on packs in order to inform tobacco users about the unhealthy effects of smoking. The same has happened in European countries since 1991. After the “WHO Framework on Tobacco control” tobacco advertising is banned in more than 175 countries. A recent survey has shown that the ban of tobacco ads has lead to the reduction of smokers worldwide.

In 1991, Sweden banned advertising directed at children under 12 years old and recommended the European Union to do so as well. Other countries that have banned this kind of advertising are Finland and Norway.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Advertising has a huge influence on modern society and therefore it is important that advertisements respect the fundamental principles of modern society, the rights of consumers and the ethics and norms of all citizens and social groups. All countries have to ban tobacco advertisements in order to ensure that young people are not influenced by this kind of advertising and, as a consequence, start smoking at an early age. Advertising directed at children is another controversial issue concerning advertising and ethics and there have to be regulations and standards in order to ensure that children’s rights are respected by advertising. The elimination of advertisements for unhealthy food must also be highlighted. Last but not least, governments and organizations have to raise the awareness of the citizens about consumers’ rights and the protection from unethical advertising. It is

important not to demonize advertising but use our critical ability in order to be able to assess the value of the advertised product and avoid over-consumerist behaviors.

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