

Impact of Television Commercials on the Perception of Indian Viewers: An Empirical Study

*Mahajan, R., Sandhu, N., Sharma, S.

Chitkara University, India, Chandigarh-Patiala National Highway, Village-Jhansla, Tehsil-Rajpura, District-Patiala-140401

*Corresponding author E-mail: ruhani.mahajan@chitkara.edu.in

Abstract: Available literature establishes that most television commercials contain little direct information. The current monopoly of corporate houses in the choice of advertising content and pleas used has led to many negative effects on the perception of viewers. This study attempts to analyse the impact of propagation of unethical values in television commercials on the perception of Indian viewers. Data for the study was conveniently collected from two hundred and fifty respondents from three major north Indian cities. The reliability of data was established using Cronbach's coefficient Alpha. The data reduction technique of factor analysis was used for the introspection of data. Analysis revealed that commercials while generating awareness also proliferate an undesired value system among the viewers. Commercials increase materialism, consumerism and wasteful buying leading to decreased savings. Ways and means to make advertising socially responsible and enhance its acceptance among audience are suggested.

Keywords: Perception, Television Commercials, Ethics

1. INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND OBJECTIVE

Television entered the Indian market almost half a century ago and in just 50 years this market has been able to capture the position of the world's third largest television market after USA and China. With over 134 million registered television sets, television has become a household commodity in India (refer to table 1). It has today become one of the most pervasive mediums of communication transforming the way the viewers think and act.

Since, television is one of the most popular entertainment media worldwide, televised messages have become an important dispenser of ideas, beliefs and even values (Anbarasan and Pongiannan, 2012). Discourses on television play a persistent role in shaping the perception of the viewers (Pongiannan, 2011), reworking culture and ultimately modifying the behaviour of the audience (Friedman, Paul and Goldstein, 1999). They are instrumental in establishing norms, which influence the social, political and economic landscape of nations (Gupta, 2002).

With an increase in the popularity of television, commercials on television have become an important source of information. They are today considered an authority on most issues (Pollay, 1986). The widespread reach of television commercials, accompanied with the huge Indian population base and the ushering in of multinational brands has made the Indian television commercial industry extremely prosperous. Statistics reveal that the budget of the Indian television commercial industry on an average has been increasing at a rate of 21 per cent since 1995 and is currently estimated to be \$1.6 billion.¹ In 2010, the industry generated revenues worth INR 298 billion, and the growth of the advertisements spend is further expected to increase in double-digit in the coming years.²

Table 1: Media penetration in India

Source: New York Times, February 2011, CII-KPMG Report

	1976	1998	2004	2005	2010 ²
Television sets	500,000	70 million	105 million	119 million	134 million
Cable connections	-	25 million	52 million	62 million	100 million

Further, with the survival of so many industries and businesses dependent on advertising, advertisers are leaving no stone unturned to capture the attention of the viewers. They are not even shying away from using unethical appeals in advertisements. They are using advertisements as devices meant to sell not only products, but also dreams and lifestyles. Consequently, advertisements today have developed a strong hold on the thought process and actions of the viewers. On account of it previous researchers and critics have expressed grave concern over the ill contents of advertisements. They believe that the content and placement of contemporary advertisements, while being beneficial in many ways (Soni and Upadhyaya, 2007), is instrumental in promoting over splurging, wasteful spending, corrupting the value system of children

(Kunkel, 1992, Kaur and Singh, 2006), creating needs previously non-existent, violating consumer autonomy and privacy (Rotzoll, 1986), deceiving viewers, encouraging experimentation with harmful products (Dominick and Rauch, 2009), pre-marital relationships and disrespect towards women (Cohan, 2001). They further believe that the unwholesome content of advertisements contributes towards instituting standards that undermine culture and religion (Pollay, 1986, Chander and Bharna, 2003), enhance sexual preoccupation (Browne, 1998) and escalate family conflicts (Singh and Sandhu, 2011). While, there exists little consensus among researchers regarding the alleged ill-effects of advertising, the claims that we come across in previous research are serious. The present study is an attempt to examine the validity of these claims in the Indian context. An attempt has been thus made to verify empirically the impact of television commercials on the perception of the Indian viewers.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

A review of literature establishes that the content of television commercials significantly influences the perception and thought process of the viewers. While the authors came across a number of studies which conclusively establish this abroad, they did not come across any such study in the Indian context. A need was therefore felt to undertake the same in the Indian context.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 Questionnaire development

The questionnaire consisted of a scale developed by El-Adly in 2010 (El-Adly, 2010). This scale consisted of 24 statements describing the probable impact of television commercials on the perception of the viewers (refer to table 2). Responses to these statements were anchored on a five point Likert scale. The questionnaire also contained questions on the profile of the respondents.

Table 2: Statements used in the questionnaire

Statement number	Statement in the questionnaire
1.	TV ads are a reliable source of information.
2.	Products perform as promised in the TV ads.
3.	TV ads help me to know which products reflect my personality.
4.	I learn fashion from TV ads.
5.	TV ads provide me a reliable picture of the product.
6.	Information provided by TV ads helps me in buying decisions.
7.	TV ads promote undesired values.
8.	I feel embarrassed when watching TV ads with others.
9.	TV ads increase envy in society.
10.	Most TV ads distort the values of children.
11.	TV ads promote goods which harm our society.
12.	TV ads make people buy products only for prestige.
13.	TV ads encourage people to buy products they don't need.
14.	TV ads persuade consumers to buy products they should not buy.
15.	TV ads are a form of entertainment.
16.	TV ads are boring.
17.	Watching TV ads is more enjoyable than watching TV programs.
18.	I like watching TV ads.
19.	TV ads are a valuable source of information about the products and brands available in the market.
20.	TV ads give me up-to-date information.
21.	TV ads inform me about brands which suit my needs.
22.	TV ads inform me about products bought by consumers whose lifestyle is like mine.
23.	I avoid watching TV ads about intimate products (e.g. sanitary towels).
24.	I avoid watching TV ads that contain offensive scenes.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

Data for the study was collected with the help of a survey conducted in three prominent cities of north India (Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali). The survey was conducted over a seven-month period from August 2011 to February 2012. The

sampling technique used was convenience sampling. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed. However, at the end of the survey only 250 usable questionnaires were obtained.

3.3 Methodology used

The reliability of the collected data was established using Cronbach's coefficient Alpha. Its value worked out to .717, which clearly establishes the reliability of the data (Bernardi, 1994, Klassen, 2003). After establishing the reliability of the data, it was reduced by applying data factor analysis. The extraction method used was Principal Component Analysis and the rotation method used was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization (Malhotra, 2007). SPSS 20 was used to analyse the collected data.

3.4 Demographic profile

Table 3 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The three demographic variables used were gender, age and income. As can be seen, 62.5 per cent of the respondents were female and the rest were male. 43.75 per cent respondents were in the age group of 15 to 25 years, 25 per cent were in the age group of 25 to 35 years, 10 per cent were in the 35 to 45 years age group, 11.25 per cent were in the age group of 45 to 55 years and 10 per cent respondents were older than 55 years. As far as the income of the respondents was concerned 37.5 per cent of the respondents were dependent on their family, 37.5 per cent were working professionals and 15 per cent were homemakers.

Table 3: Demographic profile of the respondents (N= 250)

Gender	
Female	62.5%
Male	37.5 %
Age	
15-25 years	43.75%
25-35years	25%
35-45years	10%
45-55years	11.25%
Over 55 years	10%
Income	
Dependent on family	37.5%
Working professional	37.5%
Homemaker	15%

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The results of data analysis are shown in tables 4 and 5. Only the factors with an Eigen value of over 1.0 and variables which clearly loaded on a factor with factor loadings of .45 or above were retained (Malhotra, 2007). Three variables, 'TV ads are a form of entertainment.', 'TV ads are boring' and 'I feel embarrassed when watching TV ads with others.' did not significantly load on any factor. They were hence not considered in the final analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sample adequacy worked out to .799. The seven factor solution which emerged accounted for a total variance of 73.274 per cent.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.799
Approx. Chi-Square		648.802
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	276
	Sig.	.000

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrix

Variables	Factors							Communalities
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	
Var1	.215	.198	.102	.800	-.007	.021	.088	.764
Var2	.097	.238	.060	.785	.102	.269	.150	.812
Var3	.121	.721	-.015	.214	.254	.286	.050	.732
Var4	.210	.639	.122	-.177	.135	-.001	.024	.775
Var5	.181	.708	.069	.199	-.050	-.140	.139	.636
Var6	.204	.682	.023	.287	-.171	-.168	-.119	.717
Var7	.084	-.103	.670	.163	-.067	.241	-.137	.626
Var8	.021	.073	.069	-.016	-.063	.106	.052	.814
Var9	-.122	.162	.616	.132	-.010	.039	.181	.847
Var10	-.172	.265	.743	.000	.212	.105	.026	.745
Var11	.080	.087	.604	-.074	.277	-.215	.031	.730
Var12	.460	-.187	.486	-.071	.216	.137	-.029	.633
Var13	.103	-.022	.214	.100	.043	.834	.090	.785
Var14	-.268	.023	.094	.189	.162	.663	-.260	.762
Var15	.373	.194	-.068	.406	.037	-.462	-.395	.717
Var16	-.036	-.155	.154	-.062	-.685	-.209	-.213	.669
Var17	-.143	-.037	.201	-.284	.686	.128	.069	.712
Var18	.162	-.029	.230	.308	.740	-.150	.006	.766
Var19	.797	.201	-.049	.177	-.002	-.090	-.085	.726
Var20	.855	.208	.028	.079	-.033	-.014	.092	.803
Var21	.659	.244	-.099	.239	.133	.052	.464	.834
Var22	.166	.035	-.095	.071	.161	.032	.808	.744
Var23	-.167	.080	.183	.216	.051	-.112	.522	.583
Var24	-.112	.016	.105	.018	-.038	.045	.766	.652
Eigen value	4.459	3.051	1.935	1.725	1.573	1.316	1.087	
Cumulative variance %	18.581	31.292	39.355	46.543	53.095	64.39	68.919	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

4.1 Nomenclature of the factors

On the basis of the variables associated with each factor, names have been given to the factors. The names of the factors, along with the variables associated with them and variable loadings are given in the subsequent tables (tables 6 to 12).

Factor 1 has emerged as the most important factor of the analysis. It has an Eigen value of 4.459 and has three variables loaded on it. The variables loaded on this factor signify a considerable magnitude of awareness generated among the viewers through television commercials. These results are contrary to the claim made by previous researchers who have examined the relationship between awareness and television viewing (Resnik and Stern, 1977). The results of this study while being in sync with the results of previous studies (Mehta, 2000) clearly indicate that television commercials help the viewers keep abreast of the latest products and services in the marketplace.

Table 6: Factor 1 - TV ads create awareness

Var20	TV ads give me up-to-date information.	.855
Var19	TV ads are a valuable source of information about the products and brands available in the market	.797
Var21	TV ads inform me about brands which suit my needs.	.659

With an Eigen value of 3.051, the second factor has four variables loaded on it. This factor has been named as 'TV ads are useful'. The variables loaded on this factor clearly indicate that the information disseminated through television commercials proves helpful to the consumers and has a significant impact on their learning and cognitive behaviour. Once again this factor supports the findings of previous studies which establish that television commercials by encouraging experimentation with new products and services improve the lifestyle of viewers (Sandhu, 2011, Weilbacher, 2003). They thus are an important tool of economic and social development of economies.

Table 7: Factor 2 - TV ads are useful

Var3	TV ads help me to know which products reflect my personality.	.721
Var5	TV ads provide me a reliable picture of the product.	.708
Var6	Information provided by TV ads helps me in buying decisions.	.682
Var4	I learn fashion from TV ads.	.639

The third factor which has emerged out of the analysis has an Eigen value of 1.935 with six variables loaded on it. The variables loaded on this factor indicate how by upholding undesired values, television commercials undermine the social value system.

In this factor, the statement 'Most TV ads distort the values of children.' has attained a very high loading of .743, indicating the relative importance of this variable. This clearly establishes that children may absorb information from television commercials that may be at loggerheads with family beliefs and practices (Freedman, Paul and Goldstein, 1999). Further, this factor also establishes that television commercials propagate envy, greed, consumerism and materialism.

Table 8: Factor 3 - TV ads harm the value system of society

Var10	Most TV ads distort the values of children.	.743
Var7	TV ads promote undesired values.	.670
Var9	TV ads increase envy in society.	.616
Var11	TV ads promote goods which harm our society.	.604
Var12	TV ads make people buy products only for prestige.	.486

The next factor, which has emerged from the analysis, has been named as 'TV ads are dependable'. This factor establishes that television commercials play an important role in purchase decisions, since they are an important and reliable source of information (Zanot, 1984). From a social perspective, this boosts sales and improves the standard of living of viewers. Television commercials thus play an important role in the economy (Pollay, 1986).

Table 9: Factor 4 - TV ads are dependable

Var1	TV ads are a reliable source of information.	.800
Var2	Products perform as promised in the TV ads .	.785

The next factor (refer to table 10), establishes that TV ads in general are liked by the viewers. They are an important source of entertainment and watching them is an enjoyable activity (Speck and Elliot, 1997).

Table 10: Factor 5 - TV ads are good source of entertainment

Var18	I like watching TV ads.	.740
Var17	Watching TV ads is more enjoyable than watching TV programs.	.686

The next factor, which has emerged from the analysis indicates how by encouraging viewers to buy products they do not need and should not buy, television commercials encourage wasteful buying. The obvious side effects of this are boost to consumerism and materialism in the society (Tamburro et. al., 2004, Nuta, 2009).

Table 11: Factor 6 - TV ads perpetuate wasteful buying

Var13	TV ads encourage people to buy products that they don't need.	.834
Var14	TV ads persuade consumers to buy products they should not buy.	.663

The last factor which has emerged from the analysis points out how television commercials cause embarrassment to the viewers. The Indian culture does not encourage open discussions on personal hygiene products and broadcast of ads for these products on family channels leads to embarrassment and resentment among viewers.

Table 12: Factor 7 - TV ads are embarrassing

Var22	TV ads inform me about products bought by consumers whose lifestyle is like mine.	.808
Var24	I avoid watching TV ads that contain offensive scenes.	.766
Var23	I avoid watching TV ads about intimate products (e.g. sanitary towels).	.522

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that television commercials have societal and conduct implications, which promote a culture contrary to the belief system of India. Advertisers often use offensive and annoying content in the commercials to break the clutter and gain negative publicity irrespective of the ethical responsibilities they have towards society. The content of television commercials while being dependable, imparting useful information and raising the standard of living of the viewers, also perpetuates culture distortion. This distortion of culture manifests itself in the form of increase in materialism, envy, social competitiveness and negative impact on values of children.

6. SUGGESTIONS

The call of the hour is to identify a specific action course of professional training of advertisers and content writers, which encourages them to develop content which honours its ethical responsibility. It is important for the content writers to keep in mind the culture, belief and value system of the country for which they develop ad campaigns.

Further, a requirement for overhauling the regulatory mechanism surrounding the broadcast of advertisements is also called for. Commercials with objectionable and offensive content should be banned completely or at least should not be aired on

family channels. Also, the harmful effects of the products, if any should be displayed at the beginning of the commercial. Ads directed at children should be carefully vetted to ensure their appropriateness for the target audience. It is also suggested that a fully automated regulatory body, which works towards testing the claims made in the advertisements should be established and in the event of the tested claim turning out false, a permanent ban should be imposed on the advertisements of the company in question.

REFERENCES

- Anbarasan, N.A. and Pongiannan K. (2012), “Comparative analysis of ethics in advertisements of print and electronic media”, *Zenith International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 423-434.
- Gupta, A. (2002), “Ethics in advertising in passe”, *Indian Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 32, No. 8, pp. 10-13.
- Bernardi, R. A. (1994), “Validating research results when Cronbach’s Alpha is below .70: a methodological procedure”, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 54, Issue 3, pp. 766-775.
- Browne, B. A. (1998), “Gender stereotypes in advertising on children television in the 1990s: a cross-national analysis”, *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 9-46.
- Chander S. and Bharna R. (2003), “A perpetual study of surrogate advertising”, *The ICFAI Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. V, No. 3, pp. 26-32.
- Cohan J. (2001), “Towards a new paradigm in the ethics of women’s advertising”, *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 323-337.
- Dominick J. and Rauch G. (2009), “The image of women in network TV commercials”, *Journal of Broadcasting*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 259-265.
- El-Adly M. (2010), “The impact of advertising attitudes on the intensity of TV ads avoiding behavior”, *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1-14.
- Freedman, Paul and Goldstein (1999), “Measuring media exposure and the effects of negative campaign ads”. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 1189-1208.
- Kaur, P., and Singh, R. (2006), “Children in family purchase decision making in India and the West: A review”, *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, Vol. 8, pp.1- 30.
- Klassen, P.T. (2003), “New TTI instrument reliability studies”, available at: <http://glsworld.com/assessment-center/certification-validity/pdf/behavioral/disc-piav-validity-study-summary-tti-2003.pdf> (accessed 3 January 2011).
- Kunkel, D. (1992), “The evolution of children’s television advertising in the multichannel environment”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 134-152.
- Malhotra, N. K. (2007), *Fundamentals of Marketing Research*. Sage Publications, pp. 586-607.
- Mehta, A. (2000), “Advertising attitudes and advertising effectiveness”, *Journal of Advertising Research* Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 67–72.
- Nuta, C. (2009), “Does advertising promote excessive consumerism?” available at: http://articles.famouswhy.com/does_advertising_promote_excessive_consumeriem_/ (accessed 25 May 2010).
- Pongiannan, K. (2011), “Exploratory comparison on the impact of TV and web advertisements towards the buying behavior”, *European Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 244-257.
- Pollay, R. (1986), “The distorted mirror: reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 18-36.
- Resnik A. and Stern B. (1977), “An analysis of informative content in television advertising”, *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 50-53.
- Rotzoll, K. (1986), *Advertising in Contemporary Society*, South-Western Publishing Company.
- Sandhu, N. (2011), “The truth behind the lies – advertising and materialism”, *Advertising Express*, July, 2011.
- Singh, J. and Sandhu N. (2011), “Impact of television commercials on the social and moral behavior of Indian viewers – empirical evidence”, *Special Issue on Behavioural and Social Science*, Vol.1, No. 4, pp. 178-187.
- Soni, S. and Upadhyaya, M. (2007), “Pester power effect of advertising”, in *International Conference on Marketing and Society 2007 proceedings of the International Conference at, IIM Kozhikode, India*, pp. 313-325.
- Tamburro, R. F., Gordon, P. L., Apolito, J. P. D. and Howard, S. C. (2004), “Unsafe and violent behavior in commercials aired during televised major sporting events”, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 55-71.
- Weillbacher, W. (2003), “How advertising effects consumers”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 230-234.
- Zanot, E. (1984), “Public attitude toward advertising: The American experience”, *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 3, No.1 , pp. 3–15.