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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Murthy, J. S.</td>
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AMIC-CAEJAC CONFERENCE

ON

"FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MASS MEDIA"

HELD AT

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

PAPER

ON

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN ADVERTISING MEDIA IN INDIA

PRESENTED BY

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MAY 16-18, 1996
FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN ADVERTISING MEDIA IN INDIA*

Dr. J.S. MURTHY**

In this paper I propose to discuss the issue of "Freedom and Responsibility in Advertising Media in India" with reference to the present scenario of Advertising Agencies and their use of mass media. A few case studies are incorporated here to highlight the present trends in advertisements to promote a product, in the mega-market environment of rural-urban divide India.

Only last week, I was attracted by a headline, 'Dangerous Biscuits' in a local newspaper. I became curious and read the news item. It turned out that these biscuits are made out of stale 'chapatis' (Indian bread baked on hot pan). Beggars collect these stale 'chapatis' from all over the city and sell them to a biscuit manufacturer who pays them a meagre amount of money. The machine grinds these 'chapatis' into powder and later baked into biscuits. These biscuits with an ad slogan "Enriched with milk and vitamin - D" Glucose Biscuits on the wrapper are sold in the market. I am glad that the Reporter also gave the moral of the story that said : keep away from cheap brands of Biscuits!

Another ad said :

We entertain your wife
When you are away

BELTEK TV

Indeed a provocative ad not viewed kindly by married men.

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A poster said:

This is not an advertising for Sunil Gavaskar
Nor do we hold any brief to Sunil the Ace Cricketer
After all smoking and scoring centuries don't together.

DO NOT SMOKE

Just a few examples of how 'ads' have hit upon ideas: some good and some bad.

We are living in momentous, exciting and 'ad' times. Not only diseases like 'aids', cancer, et cetera have become international but also 'ads', have gone international. The era of high sustained and strategic competition is in and monopolies and staid products is on the way out. What the prophet of Electronic Revolution Professor Marshall McLuhan foretold has come true. The world has shrunk to a "global village". Thanks to the technological revolution. In terms of advertising it is 'global village market'.

Advertising - a research-oriented sphere of mass communication has been quick to realise the importance of the message related to global demand and supply of consumer products and has embarked on ambitious global advertisements to reach consumer society. Advertising has adapted its creativity to suit the ubiquitous TV format with supermarket fantasies and has entered consumers' living rooms now renamed 'TV rooms'. Advertising, known for its persuasive feature can also affect responses of its receivers leading them to want a product for reasons that they may not be consciously aware of.

With the ever expanding media reach the advertisements get into homes and have an effect on the life-styles of peoples around the world. The developing countries are no exception. With 52 per cent of literacy rate, some 36,000 newspapers and periodicals, 800 films produced annually, catering to more than 15 million people
everyday, 183 radio broadcasting stations, 745 TV centres besides multi-channel satellite TV networks like Murdoch's STAR TV, Turner's CNN, Zee TV, ATN to name only a few, the Indian subcontinent has become a 'gold mine' for advertising conglomerates to reach their potential target consumer groups. The media are able to invade the innerself using the key of religion and create pseudo needs and artificial desires.

The 'god consumption' is bulldozing through many traditional values forcing the traditional societies to turn materialistic as advertising turns their needs into necessities. Muggeridge believed that materialistic values in advertising have led to a 'cult of consumption'. Advertising has also portrayed women as subordinate and stereo typed sex-objects in the garb of lending aesthetic touch. Even little babies and children are frequently featured in adverts linked to a variety of products totally unrelated to baby necessities. "Indeed, consumer advertisements more than other types conjure up a fantasy world where it neither rains nor blows, where the women exude charm, the man are macho, and children little cherubs - all eager for goodies of life. Thus they are extremely low on information but high on wit, rhetoric and style". The advertisement of liquor is prohibited in India but shrewd 'adman' makes the passage to a booze party easily with 'Club Soda' through handsome models. Advertising agencies are the backbones of ad business. In India there are more than 600 ad agencies whose business turn over is around ₹ 8000 crores and it is likely to touch ₹10,000 crore mark by the year 2000.

Today advertising is a buzz word and occupies an indispensable time slot of any TV programme to the extent of incurring the displeasure of especially viewers. In this respect the consumer is king. TV commercials, radio spots, and ad copies are no more technical jargon. Advertising is a vital marketing tool which facilitates the selling of
products, services and even effect the attitudinal changes of potential consumers. By itself advertising does not sell products. It only informs and persuades the consumer with an effective message about the products. For this reason advertising can be called a persuasive communication. The principle that any advertising operates is known by the acronym AIDCA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Credibility and Action).

With this vast freedom to influence and motivate the psychological phenomena in a potential consumer, advertising media does need to exercise restraint over its campaign and have a responsibility to behave ethically while promoting purchase.

Tara Sinha, a well-known advertising executive, states that 'there are several dimensions involved in considering this responsibility'. These range from content and form to use of media for certain types of products or services and ultimately to the question of who is to be held accountable for lapses—the advertiser, or the agency or the media or all three'. She answers the question thus, "In most cases it must and should be all three". This makes for a case in countries where there is strong consumer movement, greater public awareness, legislation, regulation and codes of conduct. In a developing country like ours, public awareness and consumer protection movements are now catching up.

Let us consider the two elements which go into making of a piece of advertising - what is featured i.e. the product promise - and how it is presented, the words and pictures. Both aspects involve creativity.

The first concerns with the benefit that a consumer will derive from using the product or service. If the
promise is fulfilled then the customer testifies to good quality of product. In case it turns out to be a false promise the frustrated customer can create a strong word-of-mouth campaign against the product or service that has let the customer down.

The second aspect of how the advertisement looks—what it says, shows and suggested in an area where ethical issues are perhaps easier to identify but more difficult to control. This is where the question of quality of creativity, judgement, decency, self-discipline and control being exercised by advertisers, agencies and media needs to be raised. There are many cases where ads of obscene illustrations and bad taste are reflected and these are released in all kinds of media particularly in press and outdoor signs. Perhaps Arthur Brisbane did not intend such unbridled wild imagination and creativity involving obscenity and indecency when he exhorted the copywriters to follow the 'Five musts':-

(i) You must make people SEE it
(ii) You must make people READ it
(iii) You must make people UNDERSTAND it
(iv) You must make people BELIEVE it.
(v) You must make people WANT it.

All these elements can be fused for an aesthetic impact if only the copywriters' sensibilities are ethically sound.

David M. Potter compared advertising with such longstanding institutions as the school and the church in the magnitude of its social influence and goes on to state that advertising dominates media, .. has vast powers in the shaping of popular standards.
The chief concern today in reference to advertising is whether along with its function to inform and persuade potential consumers about a product, the advertising does so by adhering to ethical principles.

Today we live in a world of advertising bombardment on every conceivable medium of communication viz. print, film, radio, television, video, oral, face-to-face, and traditional. The blandish blurb to sell consumer products, the persuasive advertisers do not spare either a saint or satan - in the garb of creativity - from embellishing their ad copy. Ram, Krishna, Mary and Baby Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi are featured in the copy in support of the catchy slogans and Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Not only from sacred realm are the noble characters portrayed but even the infamous personalities like Nazi monster Adolf Hitler the most dreaded fascist the world has known are featured to promote a product. In a recent ad 'Reincarnation' Hitler was featured extolling the virtues along with a product 'PUNWIRE PAGER'. It compared the qualities of both in power and effectiveness of small size. Indeed a betrayal of the acme of creativity presented to prove the good qualities! Another case in point is the recent full page ad depicting the nude couple with a python draped around their bodies, to suggest the toughness of the 'Tuff shoes'. This particular advertisement incurred the indignation of all sections of our society for crossing the limits of decency of our traditional values in the name of creativity. The bodies like the Advertising Council of India and MRTPC have taken necessary action against such obscene advertisements. These have been withdrawn since.

A questionnaire designed for the study was administered to randomly selected respondents. A total of 115 respondents were selected from all walks of life. The average age of the respondents was in the range of 18-50.
years and the educational qualification of the respondents varied from undergraduates to post-graduates.

Jabalpur is one of the developed cities of Madhya Pradesh. With one HPT and All India Radio relay centres and nearly 24 newspapers the city offers a high rate of mass exposure to its population.

The present study aimed to elicit the respondents' views on various aspects of advertisements such as their exposure to media advertisements, purpose of advertisements, effectiveness of different media advertisements, on matters of culture, religious sentiments, spiritualism and materialism female models, obscenity, censorship and role of consumer protection movement in India.

Table 1: Table shows the exposure of respondents to different mass media advertisements.

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<tr>
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed that there was a high rate of exposure to advertisements. 100 percent of the respondents watched ads' on TV whereas 50 percent listened to radio ads' and surprisingly a high 95 percentage read newspaper advertisements.

It is clear that the audio medium (radio) has less impact when compared to audio visual medium of TV & Video.
Table 2: The respondents' responses with regard to the purpose of advertisements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Guidance</th>
<th>Curiosity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 35 years</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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Among all age groups between 18-35 years and above the respondents agreed that they get information from the 'ads', while only average of 25 percent of respondents in the age group of 26-35 years relied on ads for guidance to buy a product and 28 percent in the age group of 35 years and above. But only 12 percent agreed that they watched 'ads' on different media out of curiosity.

Table 3: Table showing the respondents' opinions on featuring Female models, obscenity censorship and Role of consumer protection movement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>35</td>
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</table>

A - Female models not necessary.
B - Obscene ads effect our social and ethical values.
C - Censorship on advertisements must
D - Consumer Protection Movements.
It was found that generally a high percent of the respondents of all the media favour 'D' while 'A', 'B', 'C' are supported again by most of the respondents, of the except the radio for its inherent drawback of having only the audio which renders it less harmful.

The study highlights the importance of powerful visuals to get the message across than the mere sound.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion it may be said, that ethical issues have in one way or another influenced public expression of communication. Ethical issues of freedom and responsibility take centre-stage only when the media have breached the bounds of acceptable representation of people and events. But as the technology advances further offering opportunities to advertisers' mastermind to harness the marketing of consumer products across the globe, it becomes imperative to place the normative issues once again at the top of global communications. The strand of human dignity that binds the universal understanding must be protected from snapping caused by advertisements of unethical nature.