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Ethics In Advertising-Discourse of Moral & Financial Etiquettes

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‘Advertising is the science of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money from it.’

Stephen Leacock, Economist¹

Describing advertisements as a short dream sequence will not be a cliché. Advertisements are created to construct a brief, catchy, thought provoking dream sequence by filling it with multiple creative elements. While we believe in these advertisements, the advertisements are busy in building their own space in our desired world, building strong connection with our real, practical world. How these products are useful and how they soon become our necessity is a commercial phenomenon! Advertisements capture our thoughts and desires and channelise them in a particular direction. This creative manufacturing of dream sequence is based on our unfulfilled desires and then is soon connected to our practical needs. Stephen Leacock has also considered advertising as a superior dream world when compared to real world.

While each and every product is manufactured keeping in mind its target customer, it still holds attention of all those who are not direct customers but they develop a conscious liking for the dream world constructed by these advertisements. Now these non-customers soon fall in the line of becoming future target customers. The responsibility of the advertisers increases as they have to very soon remove that thin line between the dream sequence and the real world, where practical usage of the product is highlighted. And here these advertisers become responsible for showing what they are selling in reality.

This responsibility or moral responsibility of the advertisements falls under various ethics and principles. Why these advertisements are needed? And How they benefit the maker and user of the product both? Questions are immense which need response, Arguments are put across to consider moral importance of virtue ethics in the world of market. Though it is very difficult to arrange a mechanical business system where actions are controlled on the basis of ethics, still, this market world is somehow controlled by certain enforced ethics. This helps in maintaining lawful trust in this make-believe world, so that producers and advertisers both are aware of their moral conduct and benefits. Going into detail of these ethics diverts us towards the origin of ethics and for whom do we need these.

Ethics – historical significance

Ethics are about being good and following well- being. A good well -being is to finally attain a healthy pleasurable life. The earlier definition of ethics is born out of the Greek word ‘ethikos’.

Gisela Striker, German Classical scholar, has analyzed the Greek theories and various debates about ethics and resolves that, ‘the Greek philosophers tended to be concerned with virtues of character, the traits that underlie to explain a disposition to act in the way, more than with the principles of right action.’²

She analysed that Greeks have explained good life as a life that gives pleasure. And to reach to that happiness they consider virtue of character above than virtue of action. This analysis of Gisela marks the essence of Ethics for Greeks while they were setting laws for being ethical. Keeping character above action relates with the importance of conduct in the real life.

Understanding ultimate desire to be happy and extract happiness through continuous actions which are full of virtue can- not be argued as the ultimate happiness. When Striker draws a comparative analysis of various Greek theories, ancient to contemporary, she is arguing that all these theories had their own significance in their own times.

She laid down table of ethics according to significant Greek philosophers. The discussion was to simply analyse what should be considered ethical? Is it happiness of individual or happiness of others, based on doing right action? She describes definition by Antiphon, Greek philosopher that justice is the hindrance to happiness. So, philosophers after that kept on arguing about being just as path of happiness. Aristotle in his theoretical analysis has described ‘eudaimonia’ meaning happiness as the moral end. He theorizes that harmonious cooperation of many activities lead to the moral happiness.

Aristotle describes that

‘Moral knowledge is unlike mathematical knowledge, cannot be acquired merely by attending lectures and is not characteristically to be found in people too young to have much experience of life.’³

Now what Aristotle is emphasising in Book II, on Moral virtue, that if happiness is coming from doing good and pain is a fruit of doing good then, moral teaching in young age teaches us to control our actions from going into good, even if it is painful.

Plato also agrees with Aristotle’s analysis of moral excellence and pleasure, pain, and says,

‘to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education.’⁴

Ethics are laid on the basic explanation that a positive action categorized on the basis of action which is good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral works as ethics. But more explanation and theories help to understand how good and bad can also be ethically correct when analysed as an action that is ought to be done or ought not to be done.

Ethics have been analysed through various social and psychological theories. While these philosophers have created their own arguments about setting up need of ethics as a self-developed conduct of desires for happiness, they also provide us with some

rational thinking. Locke, in *Concerning Human Understanding*, describes that human beings though have been created by God, they have been left with moral learning to be taken by various philosophers like Aristotle. ()

Ethics can also be understood on the basis of various desires and tendencies. Desire which is the outcome of some mental process. There are also set of unconscious mental tendencies, such as, hunger. These tendencies are combined with virtue leading to the moral responsibility. The desire to eat but then the hunger needs to be satisfied within moral boundaries. Another analysis for ethics is a suggested sense of duty, which is also named as conscience. This conscience also helps in following ethical responsibility for every action performed. McDougall, a Social Psychologist, has established that we function on instincts. These instincts are also described as impulse or desire. Impulse is defined as conscious tendency to do some activity. Impulse, mostly functions in isolation and usually leads towards the good action. These good actions later on purposefully satisfy desire or group of desires. Within this group of desires, there is a chain of connected desires which lead to further satisfaction. It finally concludes that even impulse takes us towards good action, which is ethically correct.

We have to understand that how important it is to create our own happiness by creating happiness for others. Another theory by Mackenzie, a modern psychologist describes unconscious motives and unconscious intentions. These intentions being unconscious, leads to good or virtuous action unknowingly and what comes out as a result of these conflicting intentions and desires is 'wish'. Here, ethics become intentional unconscious desire for general well-being of everyone.

All these theories lead to the purpose of pleasure sold in the conscious way. What one sells, one displays it with the purpose of giving happiness to the user. The potential user will buy the product for pleasure. The ultimate enclosure of desire into ethical pleasure is extracted in the advertisements. The buyers are looking for the happiness which is the psychological hedonism, is fulfilled by the manufacturers and ad makers. In this Psychological hedonism shows that all men in all their actions desire and seek the ultimate pleasure and only pleasure.

Why do we need Ethics for public benevolence

Ethics in advertisements control the conduct of what you can show and what you can not and this responsibility constructs the moral conduct of the advertiser. The way moral and ethics go hand in hand it will be easier to understand how this word is born out of the benefits of many, with the purpose of having benevolence for all.

It can be argued that ethics are laws created for maintaining moral virtue. If benefit of others is done with the purpose of increasing pleasure in their life then ethics are present. But are absent in case of not doing so. This pleasure for others is also created for rising in our own self and finally leading to increase in the level of self-esteem.

Scottish philosopher Hutcheson argued that

'the basic moral phenomenon is a distinctively moral esteem for benevolence, the desire to benefit others and make them happy'⁵

Here, Hutcheson is arguing to establish how important it is to create our happiness by being morally virtuous and increasing happiness for others. He is emphasising that we should create our own happiness by creating happiness for all. This is moreover like leading to ultimate happiness by working towards leading people towards ultimate happiness. This benevolence for others is a superior happiness in comparison to having happiness only for self or individual. This analysis also indicates towards desire to create happiness for larger number of people. This can happen only when individual will rise above selfish desires and work for human beings in general.

Stephen Nathanson, philosopher, has analyzed ethics based on end result. He argues that the outcome of every action makes it ethical or unethical. Few theories that he discussed in his argument are-

Deontology- an action should be based on whether that action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules; rather based on the consequences of the action.

Pluralists- believed that there are many important goods like being healthy or being honest or being able to have knowledge and these are intrinsic goods. They create deep happiness and can not be compared to sensations like pleasure and pain.

Utilitarianism- whether actions are morally right or wrong depends upon their effects. They believe in making life better by increasing the number of good things, such as, pleasure and happiness in the world and decreasing the bad things such as pain and unhappiness.

A famous Utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham adopted the view of **hedonism**. Another significant term in the philosophical understanding of virtue and ethics. According to this, the only thing that is good in itself is pleasure or happiness. Hedonists do not deny that many different kinds of things can be good., including food, friend and freedom and many other things. But then hedonists see these things as instrumental goods, valuable otherwise but then they become reason for producing reasonable happiness and pleasure. Bentham says-

'the greatest happiness is for the greatest number.'⁶

Utilitarian's give the most evaluative principal by focusing on actions which give us the best results.

In the two concepts of virtue ethics, Utilitarianism defines that Rights in terms of Good and Deontology defines Good in terms of Right. After these two concepts, Rosalind Hursthouse, another theorist, lays emphasis on being good in individual character and she considers it as righteous, she concludes by describing that what one would do at individual level in a particular circumstance makes his action ethically correct or wrong.

These various theories on ethics and virtue are indicative of ethics being born out of actions that we take in a social atmosphere and moreover, we remain responsible for actions which are not done, while keeping in mind happiness of a larger number. We also learn to engage ourselves in actions which are ethical, because they are good and create happiness. The commercial world, where money matters and individual benefits come first, it is pertinent to create ethical laws for well being of larger human beings.

How advertisements have changed their shapes

Advertisements are made to mainly catch attention of the potential buyers. Every product is made to be sold. These products should reach the users. Then as per the need of users these advertisements showcase the strength of the product and how these products can be used by the rightful users.

Now the responsibility of these advertisements increases because the advertisements also help to create future customers/buyers. In the first category, potential users are the buyers. These users will search for these products through various categories of advertisements, as the need for these products is born.

In the second category, these advertisements are created to target those customers who may not be the users at present but can be made potential buyers and users in the future days. Now the advertisements are made by the ad agencies while keeping in mind future buyers.

Another category of buyers is the one who will become buyers for the sake of lifestyle level or if they have received a raise in income. These buyers not only look at the utility of the product but they also feel attracted by the color design uniqueness and latest technology update in these products.

Gender, Race and Apartheid used for financial benefits is common for increasing sale of products. Advertisers manipulate human emotions by using one gender stronger than other. Car will always be driven by father and mother and children will sleep during smooth drive. Even after shave creams for men make them slightly fairer. This discriminates and lowers down people with slightly darker skin. There are advertisements in the form of buying jewelry specially for the weddings where even the groom is gifted with some jewelry. This also promotes customs like dowry.

Puffery is another most frequently used device to increase sale. Exaggerated description of the product shown in the advertisement falls under puffery. Many advertisements use technical tricks and also taglines like, 'Dar k aagey jeet hai!' or Maggie to be healthy! These advertisements are misleading.

Advertisements are creations of ideas and utility. These art works are most of the time working on a particular concept keeping in mind few requirements-

1. To whom it should be sold? A product is manufactured according to the target buyer and at the same time the one who is its actual user. These products will be sold easily if they are required.

2. Who is going to earn? From producer to the delivery person, everyone gets profit from this system of sale-purchase. Advertisements, from the birth of an idea to the final sale of the product, go in a series.

Idea--Product--Need--Financial benefit--production--usefulness--Buyers--Future benefits--Future Buyers

3. How advertisements help in sale? These advertisements are planned and constructed as per the need of the producer and manufacturer.

4. Why can't we separate advertisements from the business world? Advertisements create and stage details of presentation of any product.

5. Ad agencies then plan according to the benefit of the producer. This is ethically correct in the world of business.

6. Profit making works in business ethics. Hence, creating a space for its product in the mind of buyers is not unethical.

Advertisements and standards of ethics and law

Market always works on the relationship of supply and demand. These two things go hand in hand. As much the demand increases, supply will increase accordingly. Advertisements function in between these two so that demand should keep on increasing with increase in supply.

German Philosopher Kant distinguished three kinds of normative laws which he considered as universal laws to be abided by all men. According to him,

First law is *Hypothetical imperative*- this law is applicable on group of people who believe in end result. For eg, Architectures.

Second law is *Assertorial Imperative*- this law is applicable on all who naturally seek happiness at the end and assert on working towards attainment of that happiness.

Third law is *Categorical imperative* - this law works towards unconditional and universal benefit without seeking happiness as end result. And moral law is the only law that falls under this.⁶

Within normal rational behavior morals and ethics become law for anyone if that person from within decides to abide by that moral virtue or ethic. Still, market functions on profit and self-centered attitude. Understanding the nature of market

Advertising Standards Council of India established in 1985 has created some ethical laws for advertisement industry considered as The Code for Self-Regulation of Advertising content in India-

Honest Representation – Non-offensive to Public – Against harmful Products/Situations – Fair in Competition⁷

Moral responsibility in Global and Local advertising

According to American Psychological Association, the ad agencies are making huge amount of money by targeting youth and children as their primary viewers. With television being a major device for advertisements, the market of ad agencies is growing huge. It also mentions that a majority of all U.S. children have televisions in their bedrooms and are watching ads without parental supervision. They conclude that the two trends- the growth in advertising channels reaching children and privatization of children's media use – have increased dramatically in the channels and ads made for these young and little buyers.⁸

A Brown and Williamson -tobacco Company Executive once said, 'Nobody is stupid enough to put it in writing or even in words, but there is always the presumption that your marketing approach should contain some element as market expansion in this industry means two things—kids and women.'⁹

Ad agencies work to promote the products and its utility and for this strongly recommend the product in their ads. While doing so, they play with the sentiments involved in orthodox cultural and social constructs. They use a particular mindset to very smartly tell people what they should buy-

- A Complan drinking boy will grow taller indicating that being short is a failure or embarrassment.
- Buying fairness cream is requirement because all girls should be fair. Later they also introduced fairness cream for boys, to grow slightly fairer but they made a point that dark skinned people are not accepted well in the society.
- Surf, Nirma, or Vim Bar will always show women doing washing and cleaning utensils and they need to buy these products to be better cleaner, at times they also competed to clean better utensils.
- Even in the ad of Harpic the boy would bring toilet cleaner and will teach the woman of the house to clean toilet properly.
- Though the scooty Pleasure was sold with tagline, “Why should boys have all the fun,” similarly, Pulsar ad wrote tagline, “Definitely Male!” Now these bikes were not driven by a particular sex, still these ads worked as fixing some engines especially made for boys.
- Children facing bully in the school for being short or for being obese were some commonly used issues while portraying children in bad taste.
- Advertisements like LIC that promote to save money for the marriage of their daughters instead of their education.
- Maggie and burgers which can be health hazards have been sold in huge amount because of the tempting visuals and taglines where emotional and trustworthy relations like parents and their children have been manipulated.

Five M's of advertisement

Five M's

Mission – Message - Money - Media – Measurement

Mission – Advertisements are made with a mission statement which can also be considered as targets. It begins with working on basic purpose of making advertisements, it is to first of all inform people about the product. It is also important to tell them benefits of the product so that they are persuaded to buy that product. Advertisements also emphasize and reinforce the benefits of the product.

Message – Advertisements should clearly deliver the message to the users. It should be able to construct the scale of the product by keeping users in mind. It's also important that the language of the advertisement should be delivering the idea and message of the usage of the product.

Money – While the advertisements follow the target of making their users happy, economic benefit to all is also significant. The manufacturer invests a lot of money. The advertiser also uses a lot of money in creating these advertisements. On one side, different channels of media earns profit by showing these advertisements, the potential user also needs full benefit of the money he/she spends.

Media -- Media is the platform and medium in different forms that is used to advertise product to the potential user. Various mediums like print media, visual media, digital platforms, posters, and billboards are used to send advertisements.

Measurements – Every advertisement, according to the mission, has a target audience. Advertisements are sent according to these audiences. Money spent on sending these advertisements in different platforms is also an important stage of advertising. Advertisements are created with the benefit that functions in all directions. Where the manufacturer, advertiser and user, all extract their own set of benefits. Ethics come in picture when they start working for the happiness and benefit of each other. They have to be ethical while manufacturing products and also while creating the advertisements to sell these products. Basically, these advertisements are mission based. What needs to be produced, how it has to be sold and who will buy it? All three categories work with goals, for long term happiness and short-term happiness.

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