

## **Building Ethical Considerations into Advertising Practices – An Indian Study**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the current study is to suggest measures for building ethical considerations into contemporary advertising practices. After an empirical analysis of the views of 520 respondents collected from the state of Punjab, India it was revealed that law and religion effectively combined can make advertising ethical. Where law is concerned stricter regulations and greater autonomy to controlling and monitoring bodies is recommended. Where religion is concerned its use in ads is advocated to reacquaint the masses with basic values.*

**Keywords:** Advertising, ethics, society, values

### **1. Introduction**

As a medium of communication advertising is all-encompassing and ubiquitous. It is every where and assails all our senses – sight, hearing, touch and even smell in some cases (Paymal, 2007). Modern generations and contemporary society have become advertising savvy and make use of it to legitimize issues (Olien, Tichenor and Donohue, 1989) and confer status on things of importance (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1975). It is further believed by critics that advertising because of its status and reach, wields a great power over us (Pollay, 1986). Its influence can be seen in every sphere of our lives – thoughts, actions, decisions, beliefs, values and also behavior. An extensive debate on the intended or unintended influences of advertising has been on since its dawn. Most of this debate focuses on the variety of social ills perpetuated by it. Although there exists no unanimous opinion about these ill effects, the concerns and protests that we come across in previous research are very serious. Let us discuss some of the ethical breaches with which it is charged.

### **All-Invasive and Coercive Nature of Advertising**

Advertising today is a huge business and the existence of many industries (like the cable TV industry, newspapers, magazines etc.) is dependent on the inflow of money that it brings. As a result, advertisers try all types of tricks to get attention, and in certain cases this leads to the invasion of privacy of the individual (Rotzoll, 1986, p. 138). Although, in most cases exposure to an ad can be avoided if an individual so desires (by changing the channel or not reading an ad in a newspaper/magazine), but there are instances where this avoidance may not be easy. To cite an example: it is not easy to avoid exposure to ads in public places and public transport vehicles. Thus, there arises a strong ethical concern, because exposure to advertising is not entirely voluntary. Further, it can be said that ethical concerns also arise where the individual exposed to an ad is not aware of the exposure, as in the case of press releases in which the sponsor is unidentified, or in case of disguised advertising which is not perceived as being sponsored (Nabenzahl and Jaffe, 1998, p.808). Taking this argument ahead, it can be said that previous research is indicative of advertising's interference with the purchase decision. In many consumers, desire to buy the product is induced by advertising and that too against the consumer's will (Crisp, 1987). This takes away the freedom of choice from the consumer and violates his autonomy, coercing him to buy the advertised products.

### **Deception and Misinformation**

There arises a big question mark where the honesty and truthfulness of the representations and claims made in the ads are concerned. Although ads might avoid outright lies, the claims made therein mislead and deceive the viewers. In certain cases this leads to wrong actions, but in acute cases it might also end up causing injury. To cite an example, the case of ads for weight loss products can be discussed. The claims made in such ads in most cases are unsubstantiated and injure the interest of the parties who consume these products believing that they are taking due treatment for obesity/overweight (Cleland, Koss and Muoio, 2002).

There is thus an ethical issue involved where deceptive advertising is concerned, because the way it can be interpreted has the potential to harm the viewers.

### **Advertisements Targeting Children**

When discussing the impact of advertising on children, it can be said that advertising has the potential to influence children and teenagers and thus the exposure of children to a vast number of televised advertising messages has raised many concerns about ads aimed at children. The most common of these concerns are promotion of harmful products among children like sweets, early awareness of sexuality among children and teenagers, disagreement with parents over the purchase/use of advertised products and finally the circumvention of parental authority (Conna, Garrison, Treise and Weigold, 1994). A basic ethical issue is involved here, as children cannot assess commercial manipulation and easily get swayed by advertisements.

### **Women and Advertising**

Criticism has been leveled against many advertisers for the way they depict women in ads. Frequently cited issues are underrepresentation of women, their representation in stereotypical roles and the excessive focus on them as sex objects (Conna *et al.*, 1994). Of all these issues particularly troublesome is the undue focus on women as sex objects. Scantly clad women can be seen in many ads irrespective of their relation with the product advertised. This excessive sexuality in cases is a threat to accepted standards of decency (Pollay, 1986) and deeply wounds the integrity and dignity of women. A natural corollary to this is rise in crime and violence against women.

Another way in which advertising puts an already disadvantaged segment of the society to a greater disadvantage is when women are exposed to perfect advertising images. Exposure to idealized advertising images raises comparison standards for attractiveness and lowers satisfaction with one's own attractiveness (Richins, 1991). Its consequences manifest themselves in the form of dissatisfaction with the self, loss of self respect, feelings of inadequacy, sexual preoccupation etc. (Lavine, Sweeny and Wagner, 1999).

### **Materialism and Financial Stress**

Past research has also pointed out another very disturbing impact of advertising on modern life- promotion of materialism, consumerism and thus financial stress. Nuta (2009, p. 1) is of the opinion that advertisements are so effective that their "effectiveness brain washes us into unnecessary spending, creates materialism and causes people to place too much importance on material goods. The fact that people are prepared to work long hours, or even turn to crime in order to gain the goods on offer, shows that advertising persuades people to go to great lengths to keep the same standard of living as that they see in advertisements." Other critics like Arrington (2004) and Richins (1995) also hold advertisements responsible for enhancing materialistic desires of the viewers and forcing them to buy advertised products whether or not they have the buying capacity. This encourages people to take loans and buy products they really can not afford. Having established the consequences of unethical advertising on the society, the need is to develop mechanisms to prevent the harm that such advertising is causing.

## **2. Literature Review**

Many studies have been carried out to find out how advertising damages the society and what can be done to build ethical considerations into advertising practices. A review of some relevant studies done over the past two decades was attempted to comprehend the same. Based on the data that was investigated, it can be inferred that researchers are mainly concerned about the ethical problems of advertisements directed at children (Haefner, 1991; Conna *et al.*, 1994; Childs and Maher, 2003; Tamburro, Gordon, Apolito and Howard, 2004), advertisements using sex appeals (Pollay, 1986; Henthorne and LaTour, 1994), stereotypical advertising (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000; Chatterji, 2005; Schaffter, 2006), negative psychological effects of advertisements (Richins, 1991; Lavine *et al.*, 1999; Fay and Price, 1994), alcohol/tobacco advertising (Pechmann and Shih, 1999; Luke, Esmundo and Bloom, 2000; Saffer and Dave, 2003; Bansal, John and Ling, 2005; Sinha, 2005), advertisements promoting materialism (Richins, 1995; Roy 2006) and deceptive advertising (Burns, Ferrell and Orrick, 2005; Drumwright and Murphy, 2009).

Haefner (1991) conducted a study which addressed the values of those advertisers who purposely or inadvertently target children with their messages. The study found that the effects of advertisements on children were critical, involved a modification in their behavior and views, and led to adoption of values depicted in ads. As a means of introducing ethical values and theories into corporate decision-making policies regarding advertising and children,

Robin and Reidenbach's model proposed in 1987 was recommended. In a similar study conducted by Conna *et al.* (1994), strong concerns about advertising to children were expressed and it was concluded that the content of advertisements directed at children was in serious need of regulation. Further, some researchers have dealt with certain specific issues related to ads directed at children. Childs and Maher (2003) examined the use of gender in food advertising to children and found that gender preference was significantly present in ads. The findings contributed to a general gender dominance where boys were dominant figures and role models. The study also suggested that this dominance indicated that girls were inappropriate consumers for food, which in some way may have contributed to the existence of several eating disorders that affect young women with greater prevalence than young men. Tamburro *et al.* (2004) studied the depiction of violence and other unsafe behavior in ads directed at children and found out that children viewed a significant amount of violent and unsafe behavior, which negatively influenced their behavior and value system.

In past research, ethical concerns have been also been raised on the use of sexual appeals in advertising. In a study conducted by Pollay in 1986, it was found that the effects of excessive use of sexual appeals in ads, manifested themselves in the form of sexual preoccupation and rise in crime against women, both of which were damaging to morality and society. Likewise, in a study conducted by Henthorne and LaTour in 1994, it was pointed out that undesirable consequences and reactions may result from the use of strong overt sexual appeals in advertising. It was suggested that advertisers needed to recognize the moral/ethical complexity involved in the use of sexual appeals and incorporate that understanding within their strategic thought. Stereotypes in advertising is yet another reason for which ads have been heavily criticized. In a study conducted in 2000 by Coltrane and Messineo, stereotypes of race and gender in advertising were studied. It was found that characters in television commercials (hence forth TVCs) enjoyed more prominence if they were white or men. Five years later, Chatterji (2005) pointed out that extreme stereotypes of gender were presented in ads, which perpetuated a lifestyle oppressive to women. A study with a similar conclusion was conducted by Schaffter (2006), which revealed that representation of women in ads was not just stereotypical, but unethical and offensive too, worked to the deterrent of women and perpetuated gender hierarchy.

Building on the same, past research has also been concerned with the cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal consequences of gender stereotypical advertising. Richins (1991) pointed out that comparison with the idealized images in advertising raised comparison standards for attractiveness in case of young women and lowered their satisfaction with their own attractiveness. In a similar study conducted by Fay and Price (1994), it was found that it was normal for adolescent girls and young women to compare their bodies with media images and to a greater extent than non-sufferers, anorexics were influenced and their self image diminished by advertising images. Lavine *et al.* (1999) showed by way of a study that TV ads that portray women as sex objects led to increased body dissatisfaction in women. For many women, such ads were found to lead to a loss of confidence/self-respect (Pollay, 1986).

Furthermore, alcohol and tobacco advertisements have also been severely criticized in past research. It is believed by critics that they serve to glamorize the use of alcohol and tobacco and enhance their consumption among the target audience (Sinha, 2005). In a study conducted by Pechmann and Shih (1999), it was pointed out that smoking scenes in ads aroused the curiosity of the young viewers, positively enhanced their intention to smoke and in their perception enhanced the social stature of the smoker. It was suggested that these effects could be nullified by anti-smoking ads. Tobacco ads have also been criticized on grounds of targeting the poor and minority communities (Luke *et al.*, 2000) and for influencing females greater than males (Saffer and Dave, 2003). Past data is also indicative of the circumvention of the tobacco advertising ban by many cigarette companies (Bansal *et al.*, 2005).

Researchers have also been particularly interested in the influence of advertisements on materialism and consumerism. Richins (1995) pointed out that the repeated exposure to idealized images in advertisements raised consumer's expectations and influenced their perceptions of how their lives ought to be particularly in terms of their material possessions. The result of both these processes, for some consumers, was consumer discontent and an increased desire for more. Other researchers have also provided evidence on how ads boost materialism and consumerism in the society (Rumbo, 2002; Roy, 2006; Chan and Cia, 2009). It has also been pointed out in previous research that misleading consumers was not beyond the scope of advertising (Burns *et al.* 2005). In a recent study conducted by Drumwright and Murphy (2009), the current state of advertising ethics was studied and it was found that deceptive advertising was openly allowed.

Evidence is also available on the strong reluctance on the part of the ad agencies to institute policies that proscribe unethical conduct (Pratt and James, 1994). It is thus time for the advertising industry to embrace its responsibilities and develop ethical campaigns to prevent the waning of community values and check the other harmful effects of advertising.

### **3. Need of the Study**

A large body of research has investigated the ill-effects of advertising on society; however there are visible gaps in the literature available on how to prevent these ill effects. It has already been established that TVCs are eroding the culture of communities/societies across the world (Conna *et al.*, 1994; Fay and Price, 1994; Pollay, 1986) and the efforts made to fight this erosion have not been able to yield the desired results. Advertisers/ Advertising agencies day in and day out are faced with very crucial ethical choices, wherein they are required to balance two disagreeing criteria – profit motive and social responsibility. The call of the hour is thus to undertake research on how to protect the society from the harmful effects of advertising, as it can be of help to ad controlling agencies, policy makers and advertisers. It can assist them in making advertising ethical and ‘humanistic.’

### **4. Objective of the Study**

Via this study an attempt has been made to suggest measures to build ethical considerations into contemporary advertising, so as to ensure that it is just and fair to the society in which it is aired.

### **5. Research Strategy, Questionnaire Development, Sampling and Data Collection**

Since the aim of this study is to find ways to make advertising ethical from the point of view of the public, the research strategy which was considered suitable for collecting the data from the public was a survey. Survey is a technique in which information is collected from a sample of people through a questionnaire (Zikmund, 1994).

The questionnaire used in the current study contained a set of 16 statements, which were proposed as probable means of building ethical considerations into advertising practices. These statements were drafted keeping in mind the shortcomings of the regulatory framework surrounding advertising control in India. Table 1 enlists the statements which were used in the questionnaire.

#### **Insert Table (1) about here**

A five point Likert scale was used to anchor the responses of the respondents to these statements. The responses ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a strong disagreement and 5 indicating a strong agreement with the statement. Apart from this, the questionnaire also had questions which were used to gather demographic information about the respondents (gender, age and marital status). After the questionnaire was developed, a pilot study was conducted by selecting respondents from the relevant population. This ensured that the questionnaire was appropriate, error free and the statements were generally understandable. The sampling technique which was used for the current study was convenience sampling. The current study was conducted in the state of Punjab, India and data was collected from 28 cities/towns between October 2009 and April 2010.

### **6. Data Analysis Technique**

The technique used to analyze the perceptions of the respondents regarding the measures proposed to make ads ethical was Factor Analysis. The extraction method was Principal Component Analysis. It was followed by Varimax with Kaiser Normalization (Malhotra, 2007, p. 592, 596).

### **7. Descriptive Statistics of Respondents**

The profile of the respondents is presented in table 2. Out of the 520 respondents surveyed, 279 (53.65 percent) were male and 241 (46.35 percent) were female. 60 (11.54 percent) respondents were below the age of 20 years, 264 (50.77 percent respondents) were between the age of 20 and 35 years, 137 (26.35 percent) respondents were between the age of 35 and 50 years, 41 (7.00 percent) respondents were between 50 and 60 years of age and only 18 (3.46 percent) respondents were older than 60 years. As far as the marital status of the respondents was concerned, 191 (36.73 percent) respondents were unmarried, 295 (56.73 percent) respondents were married, 12 (2.31 percent) respondents were divorced and 22 (4.23 percent) respondents were widowed.

#### **Insert Table (2) about here**

### **8. Data Analysis and Discussion**

The data reduction technique of Factor Analysis was used to analyze the perceptions of the respondents regarding the measures proposed to make advertising ethical. The extraction method was Principal Component Analysis and the rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

As suggested by the Kaiser criterion, only those factors with Eigen values higher than one were retained. Also, only those variables which loaded clearly on one factor and had loadings of greater than 0.45 were retained (Malhotra, 2007, p. 598). To conduct the analysis, SPSS 16.0 was used. The five factor solution that emerged had a total variance of 55.682 percent. The results of the analysis are as follows (table 3 and table 4):

**Insert Table (3) about here**

**Insert Table (4) about here**

### ***Naming the Factors***

On the basis of the variables that have loaded on to each factor, the factors have been given names. Table 5 gives a glimpse of these factors along with their names.

**Insert Table (5) about here**

Each factor and the variables that define it have been discussed one by one in detail.

F1: Upholding value system and weeding out social ills.

This is the most important factor that has emerged out of the analysis. It has an Eigen value of 3.251 and has four factors loaded on it. A list of the variables loaded on this factor along with their loadings is given in table 6.

The first variable that has loaded on this factor, 'TVCs must be used to increase awareness and discourage social ills like female foeticide.' has a loading of .711. This high loading indicates that the respondents attach a lot of importance to this variable. This variable is followed by the second variable, 'TVCs can be used to discourage the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and fight other drug problems.', and has a loading of .698. The third variable to be loaded on this factor is, 'TVCs must be designed keeping in mind the cultural and traditional context of the country.' and has a loading of .666. The last variable loaded on this factor, 'TVCs must glorify moral and religious values.' has a loading of .629. All the variables loaded on this factor have high loadings indicative of a high level of association with the factor.

**Insert Table (6) about here**

Past studies have established that advertising serves as a mould that shapes the social and moral values of the viewer (Pease, 1980; Foley, 1997) and hence due care must be taken to ensure that their content is wholesome, positively influences the viewer and the values a viewer draws from them improve the ethical health of the society. To achieve this end, the values depicted in the Indian TVCs must be in line with the tradition and culture of India and must uphold the basic religious and moral values, which India has been famous for worldwide. Furthering this point, it can be said that TVCs must also be developed keeping in the mind their suitability for the target society. To cite an example, the ad for Levis jeans aired in India, originally developed for the American market uses a very strong overt sexual appeal which renders the ad inappropriate for India. There are a number of other instances too where TVCs not originally designed for the Indian market are being aired in India. Their content in a number of cases is not only at loggerheads with the basic Indian values, but also causes embarrassment when watched with the entire family in the traditional Indian joint family system.

In this time of waning community values, the public is expecting TVCs to be designed keeping in mind the culture and tradition of the country in which they are aired and look up to them to uphold the fundamental moral and religious values. Furthermore, because of their widespread reach, it would be appropriate if TVCs are used to enhance general awareness and discourage the common social ills. In the past, a number of such campaigns have run and have been very successful. A classic example of the very successful VDIS (Voluntary Disclosure of Income Scheme) campaign can be quoted from as back as 1998. Because of the public awareness generated under this campaign, over 3,50,000 people had disclosed their income and approximately 7800 crore rupees were credited to the government exchequer. Other relevant examples could be the pulse polio campaign, anti-smoking campaigns, drug deaddiction campaigns, campaigns against female foeticide, child marriage and dowry, campaigns generating awareness related to AIDS, campaigns highlighting rights of the consumer etc.

The respondents thus advocate TVCs as an effective medium of upholding basic values and fighting the prevailing ills in the society.

F2: Empowering ad controlling agencies and barring ads for unhealthy products.

The second factor that has emerged out of the analysis has been named as, 'Empowering ad controlling agencies and barring ads for unhealthy products.'

This factor has an Eigen value of 1.855 and has four variables loaded on it. A glimpse of the variables loaded on this factor along with their loadings is given in table 7.

The first variable loaded on this factor ‘It should be mandatory to boldly highlight the negative effects of the products being advertised.’, has a loading of .680 and is followed by the variable, ‘TVCs for products which have been declared unfit for human consumption (e.g. coke, pepsi etc) should be discontinued.’, which has a loading of .603. The next variable to be loaded on this factor is, ‘TVCs for cigarettes and alcohol should be banned.’ It has a loading of .587. With a loading of .521, that last variable loaded on this factor is, ‘Judicial powers should be given to ad controlling agencies.’

#### **Insert Table (7) about here**

Ad controlling agencies play a pivotal role in sterilizing the economy from the negative effects of TVCs and hence they must be made powerful. Towards this end, the respondents feel that judicial powers must be given to these bodies as enhancement of power vested in ad controlling agencies can suitably equip them to discharge their responsibility. In this context, let us take a look at the situation at hand. The only industry body responsible for regulating advertisements in India is The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), which has not been able to honor its obligation towards the society in the past. It may be apt to point out here that there are more than 100 prominent advertisers that are not even a part of ASCI (Singh, R. Jagdish and Sevak, 2010). The situation is worrisome and calls for suitable remedies to rectify the current situation. It is thus strongly recommended that controlling and monitoring agencies in India should be duly empowered as this can be helpful in enforcing laws pertaining to regulation and control of advertising.

Further this factor also advocates that the TVCs for products which are harmful like cigarettes, alcohol, tobacco etc. and for products which have been declared unfit for human consumption, like coke, pepsi etc. must be banned. TVCs for such products encourage the masses to experiment with them and enhances their consumption, thereby harming the individual particularly and the society as a whole. Although, there already exists a ban on the ads for tobacco and cigarettes, previous research has indicated that some companies have been successful in circumventing this ban (Bansal *et al.*, 2005). Greater attention must be thus paid to ensure that this ban is observed in letter and spirit.

Lastly, the respondents are also in favor of boldly highlighting the negative effects of the products advertised so that the viewers are not duped and they take informed decisions. One of the basic guidelines of the code for self-regulation in advertising is to ensure that the claims made in the ads are honest. This would be a step in that direction. Also this would ensure that consumer autonomy is not violated and individuals determine their own choices free of external persuasive control.

F3: Content editing by authorities.

With an Eigen value of 1.497, the third factor that has emerged out of the analysis has been named as, ‘Content editing by authorities.’ This factor has three variables loaded on it and tests whether the Indian viewers accept violation of ethics and sexuality in advertisements. This in turn judges the perception of the respondents regarding the efficiency of Indian ad controlling agencies. The three variables loaded on this factor along with their loadings are shown in table 8. ‘Ad controlling agencies in India are effective.’ is the first variable loaded on this factor. It has a loading of .742, making it an important variable. The other two variables loaded on this factor, ‘Violation of ethical values in TVCs should be permitted.’ and ‘Sexually suggestive TVCs are appropriate for general interest and should not be prohibited.’ have loadings of .689 and .663.

#### **Insert Table (8) about here**

Advertisers have a strong belief in the expression ‘sex sells’ and hence this theme is grossly exploited to sell just about everything. Although sexy ads generate more interest than the other ads, the inferences drawn from them are not in the favor of the society. Melissa Caldwell (2005), Research Director for the Parents Television Council, classifies an overt use of this theme in TVCs as soft-core porn and considers it inappropriate for television. The findings of the current study support this contention and express the reservations that the respondents have regarding an excessive use of sex in ads. Although the government of India has already taken measures in the form of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, to address this concern of the respondents, its effectiveness is questionable. The very fact that the respondents have this concern reflects the ineffectiveness of the act in discharging its purpose.

It is thus suggested that this act should be amended in a way that makes it serve its objective. Further, the respondents have also expressed concern about the violation of ethics in TVCs. They strongly feel that TVCs must not violate ethics and only then would they be appropriate for being aired on television. As one can see, both these issues can be addressed if ad controlling agencies are effective. This thus draws our attention to basically the doubts that the respondents have regarding the effectiveness of the Indian ad controlling agencies.

#### F4: Enhancing self-control.

This is the fourth factor that has emerged out of the analysis. It has an Eigen value of 1.256. This factor has three variables loaded on it. The variables loaded on this factor along with their loadings are given in table 9. The first variable loaded on this factor, 'If a TVC is improper for the audience of that society/target audience, a warning note must be displayed at the start of the commercial.' has a loading of .677. The second variable loaded on this factor is, 'Counter ad campaigns can be started to nullify the unfavorable effects of some of the ad campaigns.' and has a loading of .535. The last factor that has been loaded on this factor is, 'Parents and not the government should regulate what children are exposed to on TV (parents can be made a part of the censor board).' It has a loading of .515.

#### **Insert Table (9) about here**

This factor suggests some means by virtue of which advertising can be made apt and even beneficial for the society. Firstly, it is suggested by the respondents that if an ad is improper for the audience, a warning message must be displayed at the start of the ad. To some extent this practice is already in place in India. It must be further strengthened as it proves to be very effective in making advertising ethical. Secondly, respondents are also in favor of starting counter ad campaigns to reverse the effects of some harmful campaigns. For example: the negative effects of ads promoting the use of tobacco and cigarettes can be nullified by effective anti smoking campaigns. Lastly, it was proposed that where advertising to children is concerned, parents should be made a part of the censor board. No one knows the pulse of children and the way they think and contemplate issues, better than parents and hence they are the best judge of what meanings children can draw from ads targeted at them. Their inclusion in the censor boards can go a long way in making the content of TVCs fit for being viewed by children.

#### F5: Reprimanding social irresponsibility.

The last factor that has emerged out of the analysis has been named as, 'Reprimanding social irresponsibility.' This factor has an Eigen value of 1.050 with two variables loaded on it. The two variables loaded on this factor along with their loadings are represented in table 10. As we can see from table 10, the first variable loaded on this factor is, 'Certain TVCs, e.g. those for female hygiene products cannot be watched with the entire family and hence should be banned.' It has a loading of .807. It is the highest loading that any variable has achieved in the current research and indicates a very strong association with the factor. The other variable loaded on this factor, 'TVCs targeted at children below the age of twelve should be banned.' has a loading of .528.

#### **Insert Table (10) about here**

This factor points to the non acceptance of TVCs which can not be watched with the entire family by the respondents. A large part of the Indian population still lives in joint families and finds ads for female hygiene products, contraceptives, ads with overt sexual appeals, ads with scantily clad models etc. as inappropriate for being watched with the elders and children. Such issues are not discussed openly in Indian families and hence the respondents have raised objections to their being aired on television. Apart from this, previous research has also indicated that a premature exposure of children to such issues unnecessarily enhances their curiosity and encourages experimentation with them (Kunkel, 1992).

This factor further shows the concern that the respondents have expressed over the ads targeted at children. Children are more vulnerable to advertising and "purportedly are less able to evaluate commercial persuasion" (Kunkel, 1988, p. 387) and hence advertising targeted at children has profound consequences. As has already been discussed, mostly it encourages children to defy their parents and creates conflicts over the purchase of the advertised products (Conna *et al.*, 1994). Advertising to children also promotes among them unsafe behavior and the use of unsafe products. Hence, the respondents are not in favor of TVCs targeted at children who are below the age of 12. To conclude, it can be said that in order to protect the society from the harmful effects of advertising, the respondents have recommended some very apt measures. These measures focus on making advertising socially responsible and even beneficial for the society.

The respondents feel that law and religion effectively combined can do the job. Where law is concerned they are in favor of stricter regulations and greater autonomy to controlling and monitoring bodies, and where religion is concerned they advocate the use of ads for reacquainting the masses with basic values. They also counsel that after having harmed the society immensely, ads must now embrace the role of a benefactor by creating awareness among the masses and fighting various social ills.

### **9. Conclusion and Suggestions**

Advertising harms the society and this certainly poses a moral dilemma. “When making difficult moral choices, there are many places to turn for guidance, including: personal conscience, company policy, industry standards, governmental law or regulation, and organized religion” (Zinkhan, 1994, p. 14). Most of these approaches have been studied in the current research and have been offered as solutions to the current problem. To start with, self-regulation by advertisers is suggested as the most lucrative means to ensure ethicality of ads. But since so far, corporate houses and advertisers have shown an acute lack of enthusiasm in self-regulation (Singh *et al.*, 2010; Pratt and James, 1994), it is time to turn to the regulatory mechanism for the same. It is recommended that the regulatory framework and industry standards be seriously reexamined and suitably amended to develop a new standard of ethics. Towards that end it is proposed that ads for harmful products like coke, pepsi, tobacco etc., ads which can not be watched with children and elders due to their objectionable content, overt use of sex/sexual appeals in ads and ads aimed at children be completely banned. Further, to ensure greater consumer autonomy and protection, it must be made mandatory to display the negative effects of the products advertised as warning messages before the start of TVCs. Also, it is suggested that the participation of the parents in the censor board be solicited while reviewing the content of ads aimed at children.

However, none of the above mentioned suggestions will yield the desired results if the ad controlling agencies are not given the requisite autonomy. It is thus suggested that they be given judicial powers. Since these are the bodies that monitor the content of TVCs, greater power vested in them can help them to discharge their duty better. Going a step ahead, the universal appeal of advertisements can also be exploited for the betterment of the society. They can be used for educating the masses and seeking their cooperation in combating social problems like female foeticide, dowry, child marriage, consumption of alcohol, drugs, tobacco etc. Last but not the least; they can also be used to reintroduce the Indian audience to basic values which seem to have some how lost their charm today. But all said and done, the rectification of the given situation wholly depends on the extent to which the advertising industry is ready to make the necessary compromises. In response to the expectations of the public, is it ready to put its social responsibility before its commercial responsibility?

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**Table 1: Statements used in the questionnaire**

1. Certain TVCs, e.g. those for female hygiene products cannot be watched with the entire family and hence should be banned.
2. TVCs must be designed keeping in mind the cultural and traditional context of the country.
3. TVCs must glorify moral and religious values.
4. TVCs must be used to increase awareness and discourage social ills like female foeticide.
5. TVCs can be used to discourage the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and fight other drug problems.
6. Counter ad campaigns can be started to nullify the unfavorable effects of some of the ad campaigns.
7. Parents and not the government should regulate what children are exposed to on TV (parents can be made a part of the censor board).
8. Sexually suggestive TVCs are appropriate for general interest and should not be prohibited.
9. If a TVC is improper for the audience of that society/target audience, a warning note must be displayed at the start of the commercial.
10. Ad controlling agencies in India are effective.
11. TVCs targeted at children below the age of twelve should be banned.
12. Judicial powers should be given to ad controlling agencies.
13. It should be mandatory to boldly highlight the negative effects of the products being advertised.
14. Violation of ethical values in TVCs should be permitted.
15. TVCs for products which have been declared unfit for human consumption (e.g. coke, pepsi etc.) should be discontinued.
16. TVCs for cigarettes and alcohol should be banned.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the respondents**

Variable	Classification of Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	279	53.65
	Female	241	46.35
Age	Less than 20 years	60	11.54
	20 – 35 years	264	50.77
	35 – 50 years	137	26.35
	50 – 60 years	41	7.88
	Above 60 years	18	3.46
Marital status	Unmarried	191	36.73
	Married	295	56.73
	Divorced	12	2.31
	Widowed	22	4.23

**Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Adequacy.	Measure of Sampling	.747
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1343.112
	Df	120
	Sig.	.000

**Table 4: Rotated component matrix**

Variable Number	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
V1	.092	.050	.106	.108	<b>.807</b>
V2	<b>.666</b>	-.033	-.015	.071	.193
V3	<b>.629</b>	.213	-.027	-.109	.230
V4	<b>.711</b>	-.055	.078	.283	-.083
V5	<b>.698</b>	.079	-.051	.147	-.113
V6	.041	.131	.125	<b>.535</b>	.021
V7	-.058	.248	.212	<b>.515</b>	.014
V8	-.066	-.033	<b>.663</b>	.168	-.107
V9	.174	.196	-.150	<b>.677</b>	.073
V10	.141	.013	<b>.742</b>	.014	-.015
V11	-.007	.162	.002	.232	<b>.528</b>
V12	-.106	<b>.521</b>	.005	.114	-.079
V13	.078	<b>.680</b>	-.136	.285	-.157
V14	-.054	.075	<b>.689</b>	-.129	.259
V15	.132	<b>.603</b>	-.092	.068	.262
V16	.153	<b>.587</b>	.207	-.168	-.015
Eigen Value	3.251	1.855	1.497	1.256	1.050
Cumulative Variance %	14.108	26.002	36.824	46.553	55.682

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

**Table 5: The factors**

Factor Number	Factor Name
F1	Upholding value system and weeding out social ills.
F2	Empowering ad controlling agencies and barring unhealthy products.
F3	Content editing by authorities.
F4	Enhancing self-control.
F5	Reprimanding social irresponsibility.

**Table 6: Upholding value system and weeding out social ills.**

Variable Number	Variable	Loadings
V4	TVCs must be used to increase awareness and discourage social ills like female foeticide.	.711
V5	TVCs can be used to discourage the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and fight other drug problems.	.698
V2	TVCs must be designed keeping in mind the cultural and traditional context of the country.	.666
V3	TVCs must glorify moral and religious values.	.629

**Table 7: Empowering ad controlling agencies and barring ads for unhealthy products.**

Variable Number	Variable	Loadings
V13	It should be mandatory to boldly highlight the negative effects of the products being advertised.	.680
V15	TVCs for products which have been declared unfit for human consumption (e.g. coke, pepsi etc) should be discontinued.	.603
V16	TVCs for cigarettes and alcohol should be banned.	.587
V12	Judicial powers should be given to ad controlling agencies.	.521

**Table 8: Content editing by authorities.**

Variable Number	Variable	Loadings
V10	Ad controlling agencies in India are effective.	.742
V14	Violation of ethical values in TVCs should be permitted.	.689
V8	Sexually suggestive TVCs are appropriate for general interest and should not be prohibited.	.663

**Table 9: Enhancing self-control.**

Variable Number	Variable	Loadings
V9	If a TVC is improper for the audience of that society/target audience, a warning note must be displayed at the start of the commercial.	.677
V6	Counter ad campaigns can be started to nullify the unfavorable effects of some of the ad campaigns.	.535
V7	Parents and not the government should regulate what children are exposed to on TV (parents can be made a part of the censor board).	.515

**Table 10: Reprimanding social irresponsibility.**

Variable Number	Variable	Loadings
V1	Certain TVCs, e.g. those for female hygiene products cannot be watched with the entire family and hence should be banned.	.807
V11	TVCs targeted at children below the age of twelve should be banned.	.528