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## Advertising as a Persuasive Communication

### Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed a growth and development in the economy and the political institutions. Therefore, it is uncommon to imagine any aspect of our lives without also thinking of advertising. Whether we turn on television, switch on the radio, open a magazine, or simply walk down the street, publicity in some form or other surrounds us. Many people, including advertisers themselves, claim that advertising has become one of the most important things in our lives (Dyer, 1982). They also believe that it perpetuates stereotypes, and sometimes plays on our psychology of not being socially acceptable. Leiss (1976) points out that advertising helps us create a world of choices and opportunities, driving consumers to make analogies between themselves and images of others because, psychologically speaking, individuals often have the tendency to associate the product with their identity and, as a matter of fact, use them as categories of reference.

### Defining Advertising

Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas or products by an identifiable sponsor. The definition identifies fundamental elements. First, it is a paid form of presentation, which emphasizes that advertising space or time must be purchased. It is nonpersonal, meaning that it is not a direct or personalised presentation to one individual, but to the masses. Identified sponsor refers to the identification of the brand or the advertiser that is communicating. Arens et al. (2008) define advertising as the structured and composed nonpersonal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media. The whole essence of advertising is to make customers to be loyal to the products advertised. Brand loyalty as noted by Jacoby (1971), cited by Afzal et al. (2013) suggests that brand loyalty is the

purchase response of an individual or consumer for one or more alternative brands over a time period, deciding from a set of alternative brands.

### Basic strategies for constructing Persuasive messages

The language of persuasion is very important for a successful advertising campaign. Most advertising is intended to be persuasive in order to boost patronage of idea, product or service. The goal of most advertising messages is to persuade the audience to believe or do something. *So then, what are the basic strategies available for persuasive communicator who wants either to alter personal orientation or motivate an audience to engage in a specific overt action?* The heart of advertising lies on its ability to sway buyers to buy particular product as well as ‘force’ them to maintain such patronage. It then means that it is not enough to design good advertising copy; such copy must be capable of persuading prospective buyers to make right choice in buying decisions.

Persuasive advertising refers to a persuasive type of marketing communication designed to win converts who are lured to patronise the goods, services or ideas advertised. Kruti and Alan (2009) assert that persuasive advertising is intended to induce people to buy. This becomes more important as the product grows or faces increasing competition. The advertiser now needs to give more reasons or enticements to lure consumers. The goal of most advertising messages is to persuade the audience to believe an idea or buy a product. The language of persuasion in advertising therefore, is an important media literacy skill. Aliede (2002) writes that most advertisements are persuasive in order to win converts who are lured to patronise the goods, services or ideas advertised. It could be to convince people that a particular product would benefit them. This study, therefore, attempts to discuss in clear terms, the language of persuasion that is behind every advertisement and to find out if actually persuasive advertising is easily manipulated.

Generally speaking, there are two basic **strategies** that advertising used to persuade the audience to buy certain products or services. The first is called **psychodynamic strategy** and is based on the assumption that both personal orientations and overt actions are based on individual psychological factors –either emotional or rational – that determine how a person will behave in a particular context. The second approach is to assume that people’s beliefs and their overt actions are shaped by the context of social rules and the cultural expectations of people around them. Messages are designed to convince the receiver that a particular form or belief or action is required by that context. This is called the **sociocultural strategy** for constructing the persuasive message.

Modern advertising messages often either use emotional appeals or those based on reason (cognitive approach) to purchase the product. As a case in point of the use of reason is the following. An ad for a car that stresses economy of purchase and operation-claiming that *“the*

*brand car*” is the choice of those who want the lowest initial price, the best gas mileage available, the highest trade in value, the best record of repair costs,.....Far more common is the use of appeal to the emotions, which are more likely to be based on emotional needs, desires and wants. For example, an ad may convey the idea that purchasing the product will cause others to see you as more important person. The basic formula for this approach is “learn, feel and do”.

In the sociocultural strategy, it is obvious that the culture within which an individual makes decisions about actions is profoundly important in shaping his or her behavior. Simply put, cultures shape actions and sometimes dictates it. Strongly cultural norms, role definitions, requirements of social ranking, and the existence of many forms of social control (**rewards and punishment**) are deeply understood by the majority and compliance is the routine. The ad calls attention to these cultural requirements. We refer to this approach, the sociocultural strategy.

### Impacts of Advertising: A Socio-economic Perspective

The goal of advertising is not just to sell products and services, but also, to persuade consumers to act or think in a particular way. The social impact of advertising is anchored on the premise that advertising shapes and mirrors society. Advertising takes place in the society by man and for his benefits. It then means that advertising also mirrors culture and society. Advertisements are designed to reflect culture and appeal to the sensibilities of people in a given society. The chemistry of colour in advertisements speaks volumes of a given society. Advertising’s persuasive nature makes it an influential institution of socialisation. The sociology of advertising therefore, refers to a sociological look at the role of advertising in influencing and shaping society. In shaping the society, advertising creates brand equity and generates sales, both of which lead to increased wealth. It adapts and mirrors trends in society. However; social impacts of advertising have social costs (Folkerts and Lacy, 2004). Critics of social costs of advertising argue that advertising can be manipulative and can influence news and entertainment. Advertising serves society in positive and negative ways. Certain advertisements are widely accepted in a given society while others are treated with utmost dislike and scepticism; for instance, advertising products such as tobacco has now been banned in most Western and developing countries or its advertisement censored and regulated by relevant agencies.

Personal factors such as a buyer’s demographics and psychographics, personality and self-concept affect his purchasing behaviour. The occupation of an individual plays a significant role in influencing his/her buying decisions.

Social groups such as reference groups, family members, relatives also affect consumer behaviour. Every individual has some people around who influence him/her in any way. Family also plays an important role in influencing the buying decisions of individuals.

### Persuasive Techniques in Advertising

Persuasive advertising is designed to use a variety of techniques to grab the consumer’s attention and interest to establish credibility and trust, to stimulate desire for the product and to motivate

the consumer to act positively. To understand persuasive technique in any advertisement, it is essential to consider three factors. First is to consider the advertising message and the audience. The content of the advertising message and demographic and psychographic attributes of the audience to whom the advertising messages are directed. Second is to spot the persuasive technique employed in the advertising message. The third factor is to understand the intended effects on the target audience. Below are few persuasive techniques in advertising:

1. **Emotional Appeal:** This technique of advertising is done with help of two factors - needs of consumers and fear factor. Most common appeals under need are: need for getting acceptance/need for security. Most common appeals under fear are: fear of accident/fear of death/fear of getting sick etc
2. **Promotional Advertising:** This technique involves giving away samples of the product for free to the consumers. The items are offered in the trade fairs, promotional events, and ad campaigns in order to gain the attention of the customers.
3. **Bandwagon Advertising:** This type of technique involves convincing the customers to join the group of people who have bought this product and be on the winning side. For e.g. recent Pantene shampoo ad which says "15crores women trusted Pantene, and you?"
4. **Facts and Statistics:** Here, advertisers use numbers, proofs, and real examples to show how good their product works.
5. **Unfinished Ads:** The advertisers here just play with words by saying that their product works better but don't answer how much more than the competitor.
6. **Weasel Words:** In this technique, the advertisers don't say that they are the best from the rest, but don't also deny. E.g. Sunsilk Hairfall Solution - reduces hairfall. The ad doesn't say stops hairfall.
7. **Endorsements:** The advertisers use celebrities to advertise their products. The celebrities or star endorse the product by telling their own experiences with the product.
8. **Complementing the Customers:** Here, the advertisers used punch lines which complement the consumers who buy their products. E.g. Revlon says "Because you are worth it."
9. **Ideal Family and Ideal Kids:** The advertisers using this technique show that the families or kids using their product are a happy go lucky family. The ad always has a neat and well furnished home, well mannered kids and the family is a simple and sweet kind of family.
10. **Patriotic Advertisements:** These ads show how one can support their country while he uses their product or service.
11. **Questioning the Customers:** The advertisers using this technique ask questions to the consumers to get response for their products.
12. **Bribe:** This technique is used to bribe the customers with some thing extra if they buy the product using lines like "buy one shirt and get one free", or "be the member for the club for two years and get 20% off on all services."

## Conclusion

Thus far, advertising is praised but also criticized by critics in their own ways. Advertising has many positive impacts along with its negative pictures. The advertised products are not always the best products in the market. There are some unadvertised products also present which are good enough. But advertising helps increase value for the products by showing the positive image of the product which in turn helps convincing customers to buy it..