

Influence of Public Service Advertising on Youth

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Abstract

Public service announcements are advertisements on public service messages to educate, inform people on a particular social issue. Many resources in terms of infrastructure and finance are used for developing these PSAs but the actual affect is not noticed much. There are limited criteria on what can influence people and since not much research is done on this, it's important to understand what motivates people in general and specially youth as they are the future of tomorrow. This study explores if the youth is encouraged enough to bring some changes in their life and what attracts them towards these socially relevant advertisements. It explores the influence of social ads on youth, on their behaviours and attitude and their motivation to take action. Focus group discussion methodology was taken to get the responses from youth directly. Questions were moderated to see their awareness and motivating factors through discussion and data was analysed through qualitative analysis. This also gives an insight to the makers of social advertising as to what kind of strategy they can use to attract youth and also helps to understand the advertisements better. People do notice these ads and do get influenced, but how much they implement it in their lives is still an area of further research.

Keywords: PSA, social advertising, youth, effect of PSA/social ads, research on PSA

Introduction

Advertising has played a big role in building many brands all across the world. It has been used again and again by big companies to promote their products in the market among the desired TG (Target Group). Different forms of advertising have been in use since time immemorial. Modern Advertising originated with tobacco advertising in the 1920s. Advertising has been used for commercial purposes to help companies sell their products in large scale and to earn profits for the organisation. It uses various forms of media depending on the TG (Target Group), area, location, product specifications and category. An Advertisement is very important for marketing as it persuades, convinces and encourage consumers to change their buying behaviours. Companies pay for their ads and use different media like newspapers, magazines, outdoor, radio, TV, online, digital etc...to make people aware and sell their products. Emotional bonds are created with consumers (Heidi Cohen) to promote the products and services. Awan and Arif (2015) say that the use of celebrity to endorse products in media attracts the customers.

Public service advertisement (PSA) is made to address public welfare and provide unbiased information (Mandell, 1974). This is done to help educate and motivate the public to respond to several public issues like education, health, environment, women empowerment etc. PSAs also called as Social Advertisements are different from mainstream commercial ads as they are made to make people aware of a social problem existing in society and try to encourage

public to take action and do something for the cause. They are usually done by government, NGOs and other organizations which are involved in social work.

In an article by Suggett, (2016) – “What exactly is Public Service Advertising”, he describes that Public Service Advertisements (PSAs) unlike other mainstream commercials, work at educating public rather than convincing them to buy a product. He said that the intention of a PSA was to create awareness among public and convince them to accept an issue in society and bring a behaviour change in themselves resulting in a better society at large. A research article on Public Service Advertising by William (2006), states that, PSA’s have become very popular in American mass media than before. They are being used not only for specific issues, but also help American Society to adapt, be flexible and is used to change social behaviour in a positive way.

Growth of social Advertising is not recent. Social ads are being used in the whole world to find solutions to many social problems existing in society. We in India talk more about health, sanitation, environment and hygiene. Many social ads have been created by advertising agencies in collaboration with NGOs and government. It has been seen that consistent and long term advertising helps to make people aware of the issue and also instils a feeling of positive action for the cause. Violence and slavery are being advertised in the Arab media, as these issues are prominent. African countries advertise more on wild life conservation and AIDS awareness as these are major problem areas there. America usually sees ads on drugs abuse as youth there is falling prey to this pattern. They harm their life and have no concern for family and society, once they start taking drugs. To address this, many ads were seen on this issue. European countries are seen taking out more of ads on racism as it is a concern there. So all the countries, regions use social advertising to educate, bring awareness on the subjects concerning their society and try to bring a positive behaviour change. Public Service Ads need specialists to design and strategise the communication strategy for giving the messages. It is not similar to the consumer products as sensitivities of issue have to be kept in mind. One has to research on what makes the public turn towards these social issues and what are the aspects the society hides or doesn’t talk about while consuming products like cigarettes and alcohol. They have to be dealt little more sensitively than the commercial product ads. The core issues of society and mind sets are addressed more in these. Advertisement and consumer’s buying behavior seem to have strong relationship in main stream advertising. Mitchell (2000) say that usage of mobiles and laptops, tabs are changing the behaviour of consumer. Oh & Xu (2003) say that advertising through mass media have important influence on the lives, thoughts of consumer.

Another important sector which has seen the growth of PSAs is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), where all companies try to do something for society and take on projects to help the public in some way through various NGOs, other social work organisations. Usually PSAs are funded by non-profit organisations, govts, private companies or other organisations working in the social sector. These PSAs are made to communicate the existing social issues in society. Various stakeholders invest in CSR and try to find new opportunities. It’s become necessary for the companies to build their brand image differently.

The top brands use this communication to connect with the TG emotionally and to give them a feel that they are doing something for the society. It's more for creating the goodwill now and to be able to set the image of the brand as a socially welfare brand rather than only a commercial profit making company. It is usually done by creating their position as a sensitive brand working towards social issues in society. TG sees that and in turn ends up buying the product from the company sometimes for its own use, sometimes to do good to society. Human values in all the cultures are complex and brands try to address these by making groups and connecting people through that like---cancer support groups, girl child education society, cleanliness programs etc. Corporates use this to promote their products for example- for every piece of product the consumers buy they will give 1 rupee for a social cause. Social Advertising is not only in India but has been used extensively in other parts of world also. Example big American NGOs with revenues more than \$10 million spend at least \$7.6 billion annually on marketing and public relations (Watson, 2006). These figures don't show the exact estimates of that year as many social ads are also run with very low cost or sometimes no cost by media outlets itself. As the whole world is facing many issues in their society, PSAs are used extensively to bring a change in the perception of people's attitude towards these issues and make them see these in a different light and take action bring a positive change.

Often social advertising was confused with advertising on the internet and trying to reach out to the TG using social media, so public service advertising was being used instead of social advertising more. Also social messaging started with public service announcements and as more companies and brands used public welfare messages, it turned into public service advertising.

PSAs are watched by people of all classes and age groups. This study shows the influence of PSA on youth that is the current younger generation. Youth has its own measures to see things and perceives them differently. They judge issues according to their own experiences and are less likely to sometimes follow what elders say to them. Thus the effect of PSAs vary in different sectors of society.

Objective

The objective of the study was set as-

- To find awareness of issues and PSAs among youth, age group (18yrs- 26yrs).
- To explore if the PSAs could lead to behaviour change.
- To find if youth considered the issue shown in PSA as a serious problem and what attracted them.

The objective of this study is to see the influence of Public Service Advertising on the younger generation in the age group of 18-26 years. The youth is very active and also has a less attention span on any issue exposed to them. They are the future of tomorrow and have to lead their lives as well as take care of their near and dear ones. So it's important to see the

effect of these social messages on this generation where they make choices of accepting or rejecting the message. The whole generation has TV and mobile as things they can't live without. When younger they are exposed to TV very early in life as it is in every house hold now. After some time they just mobiles in their hands which become an integral part of their lives. The entire marketing people are finding innovative ways to influence youth and persuade them to buy the products. The youth is also quite confused at times and it distrustful of most of the things shown in media (Morton, 2002). Brands are constantly trying to see how do reach to the desired TG and youth specially. They cannot just satisfy themselves by placing ads in one media, but they have to see in different media outlets. The youth becoming very choosy and selective of the products they pick, its becoming more difficult to convey messages on social issues. In the age where they don't listen to parents, they don't want any lecture from the public service advertising. So what can hold them and pay attention to these PSAs in this world of distraction and no preachings is a matter of research. How is liking of a PSA playing a role in the seriousness perceived by the youth on that particular issue. Gen Y likes "loud graphics, rapid edits, and moving cameras" Blatant and obvious means nothing to them." (Morton, 2002, p. 47). It has also been observed that the youth really gets interested in the social issues at times and feels for many problems like cruelty on animals, girl child, sexual discrimination etc. but how far they are willing to go for it is another area of research. They are constantly raising their voices and wish to do something or the other for any cause they feel. Sometimes they don't want to listen to their parents and fall prey to many other objectionable activities and behaviours. Therefore it's important to see the behaviour patterns of this youth.

Public service advertising has been used for many years in the best interest of the society, but whether it actually resonates with the people or youth and motivates them enough to bring a change is still a matter of research. Public service advertising also works on previous knowledge and perceptions. People remember PSAs if they have been exposed to the issue before. If they have personally been through those problems or have seen issues closely with others, can affect the way in which PSAs are perceived by them. Its important to deliver the message but also is important its design and style in order to hit the youth.

Methodology

There is still lot of scope in evaluating impact of PSAs in terms of motivating action and behaviour change. Youth has not been a part of most researches.

Here focus group discussions were conducted through qualitative research and data was recorded and analysed with guided questions asked by them. The groups were moderated by a moderator and for more reliability another reviewer also analysed the content.

4 focus groups were taken with about 8 to 9 students each with age group 18 to 26yrs. The TG as per our research area was students of media colleges doing their graduation or post graduation in Mass Communication, Journalism, Advertising, PR, Digital Marketing.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework considered Patrick Jacksons model on behaviour change and the questions were based keeping in mind the steps needed for changing beliefs.

According to Patrick Jackson (1990), Behavioral Public Relations Model, building awareness is the first step in Behavioral Change. On the basis of awareness, an individual acquires attitude. Attitudes are beliefs on an issue that determine behaviour.

According to Patrick process of changing the public's behaviour occurs in five steps: (1) building awareness, (2) developing a latent readiness (3) a triggering event, (4) engaging in intermediate behavior, and (5) making behavioral change. The interaction within the focus group had kept the steps in mind.

Analysis

The discussion in the focus group also considered assessing effectiveness of PSA using SMCRE (Source- Message-Channel-Receiver-Effect) derived by Lasswell, 1948 (16). Also called as linear model of communication.



Source: <https://www.toolshero.com/communication-skills/lasswell-communication-model/>

A research on the effect of PSA on Cardiovascular disease in Korea also considered Lasswell’s model as primary source of analysis. The article was published in Iran J Public Health 2016 Aug; 45(8): 1029–1037.

Thematic analysis was explored to analyse data collected through focus group interviews. Thematic analysis is widely used methods of qualitative analysis (Braun &Clarke, 2006) and has been used to identify themes within therapy sessions (MacIntosh & Johnson, 2008). This approach has been used extensively to analyse qualitative data.

Latent approach-- *“ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations — and ideologies — that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data”* – was taken to interpret data.

Focus group 1.

G1	Codes	Themes
	Have seen somewhere Noticed on television Are aware of problem Recognise celebrity Seen in newspaper Saw but didn’t understand	Aware –of issue and media

	We can think about it Should be considered Something should be done	Recognition of need for change
	Uncertain Don't know what to do We Can do Situation should change Environment should be better	Action for change
	Govts action Big companies' role Example of sick dog Knowing of issue	Know the authorities behind
	Example of dirty streets Can take action if guided Not knowing what to do Understand issues	Readiness to take action
	Solutions not clear Not attractive enough Depressing visuals Not connecting	Need for attractive visuals
	Desire to do Encouraged to find solution Example of switching off lights Need Behaviour changing	Motivated for change
	Remembering celebrities Relating issue with celeb Appealing visuals attract Good creative copy attracts	Attracted by visuals and copy

Similar analysis was done for all focus groups with defining themes.

Conclusion

Analysis showed the target audience had seen messages and advertisements on social issues in different media at different times. Some were quite aware of the process as to who are the authorities behind it, what is the message given and what is the expectation from society, but some were still not very sure of the action they are required to take. Interaction in focus groups brought out the awareness on public service advertising and all viewed the issues as disturbing serious issues. Study showed signs of taking action and clarity that something must be done in terms of change in lifestyle, behaviour and perceptions. During the discussion the visual appeal of the ads was noticed and a clear attraction was seen towards it for having the interest to understand the issue further. It was also analysed that some really felt disturbed

after watching these ads and didn't want to do anything. However there are few limitations to this research as the methodology of focus group can give insights in a closed environment. The target audience can also be broadened for more study and research.

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