

AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON THE IMPACT OF ETHICAL ADVERTISING ON BUILDING A POSITIVE BRAND IMAGE (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY)

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ABSTRACT

In the field of marketing, branding has been around for centuries as a means to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another. In building brands, there are many factors which contribute. Integrated communication plays a key role among them in this regard. Advertising is the main component of the integrated force which falls into criticisms always. Why it falls into criticisms always? Because, in the present context, public is more concerned about how business activities are done. Public do concern about the ethical aspects of the business activities. Therefore, this empirical research study attempted to search the impact of ethical advertising on building a positive brand image for food and beverages (With special reference to food and beverage in Sri Lanka).

For the research study 08 objectives and 06 hypotheses were formulated. All hypotheses were proved and they say that there are positive relationships between Legality, decency, Honesty, Truthfulness and Social Responsibility of an advertisement and positive brand image of food and beverage. And further, the research proved that there is a positive relationship between occupation and legality of an advertisement and there is positive relationship between occupation and decency of an advertisement. Further, results indicated that there is a strong positive perception regarding ethical advertising. Further to state, it could be concluded that respondents who are the viewers of advertisements are highly concerned about ethics of advertising though there is no proper framework to monitor ethics in advertising in the country.

Keywords: Ethical advertising, brand, food & beverage industry

Introduction:

Human beings are world creators. One of the worlds that human beings have created is the world of money, commodities, trade, and exchange. In this business arena, the world of buyers and sellers, bosses and workers, producers and consumers and world of money is highly concerned and highlighted. Every component of this business arena has relationships. Every component is related to each other. There are fundamentals which underlie these relationships too.

In building relationships in businesses, communication takes a prominent role. Among many prominent roles, communication strategy carries all the messages with regard to positioning of the product to the public including the target group. So it is apparent that communication has a major impact on building a positive brand image in consumers' mind among many other aspects. The communication mix consists of five elements namely, advertising, publicity, personal selling, sales promotion and direct marketing. Out of which advertising is always fallen under criticisms. "Advertising is the non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media" (Bovee, 1992).

Apart from brand building, maximize sales, create awareness, persuade buyers, introduction of new product, enable market leadership, face the competition, inform changes, counteract to competitors advertisement, enhance goodwill are some of the functions and advantages of advertising. Advertising has become a ubiquitous world surrounding us, virtually all the time and everywhere. If the number of advertisements which is encountered each day is counted, the number might reach an astonishing figure.

Hence, the importance of advertising is steadily increasing in modern society. In the highly competitive arena, the measure of advertising's success is the extent to which it increases demand. Competition or declining profits can blow good intention out of the board room. Under such circumstances, the perspective shifts from what is the best in the long run for the society to what is the best in the short run for the company. In such situations, ethics, which is one of the fundamentals of social relationships could be questionable. Advertising ethics affects the practice of our lives and also the practice of business, in subtle and prominent ways. A philosophy for a business could be a supportive arm in defining these ethics and integrating such into business decision making.

It is evidenced that degree of intensity of the competition hits sky limits day by day and players in the market place become more aggressive in winning the customer mind. In a phenomenon of such, the tendency of breaking ground rules has a high possibility. Especially, all sorts of business communication is in this danger. Advertising is one form of communicating with public. Adherence to ethics is very much crucial in this point. Because at large public consists of all diversified groups and any form of advertising influences their lives in various ways. Advertise to children; use women and other celebrities in advertisements; alcohol, tobacco and pharmaceutical advertising; use appeals like sex, fear and various types of music in advertisements, truthfulness and honesty of advertisements are some of the concerns with regard to Ethical Advertising. Once Bill Bernbach, co-founder of DDB Worldwide Communication Group stated that "All of us who professionally use the mass media are the shapers of the society. We can vulgarize that society. We can brutalize it. Or we can help lift it into a higher level."

Since this phenomenon exists questions are raised moreover with regard to ethical advertising and its impact to the society at large. Internationally, many researches have been carried out to find out the impact and the components of ethical advertising. But such researches reveal that defining ethics is too hard since the term Ethics is a subjective term. What is ethical to one person may not be to another. Moreover the concept of what is ethical is not fixed in stone. It is said that the word Ethics acquired a specific meaning over the recent past. The rationale behind this is, in the 21st century, the demand for more ethical business processes and actions is increasing rapidly and businesses are supposed to deliver what is demanded by the society.

But in the local content the term ethical advertising is hardly questioned and regularized. It is evidenced that there is no single local authority to control advertising in terms of ethics where as there are many authorities and acts in active internationally to protect consumers' rights against unethical advertising. The statistical reports of Advertising Standard Bureau (2007) describe about the complaints received against various types of advertising issues. Out of which food and beverages product category and sex, sexuality and nudity issues attracts more complains among many complains.

Literature Review:

Though many researchers, writers, psychologists, academics, socialists searches and talks about business ethics, communication ethics and other behavioral ethics, a fixed definition could not be found for ethics. The term ethics is subjective in nature. Something which is ethical to someone may not ethical to other person. Hence, researches carried out revealed various aspects and components of ethical advertising. Some studied about sex appeal in advertising, some studied about advertising to children and minorities, some explored about advertising about harmful products and so forth.

Waller (2004) in his study about controversial advertising, he found that subjects (respondents) claimed various offences to controversial advertising, for example cigarettes, alcohol, condoms or feminine hygiene products (Schuster and Powell 1987; Wilson and West 1995). Previous studies in this area have mainly looked at these products in terms of the products being "unmentionables" (Wilson and West 1981; Alter 1982; Katsanis 1994; Wilson and West 1995), "decent products" (Shao 1993) "socially sensitive products" (Shao and Hill 1994a; Shao and Hill 1994b; Fahy, Smart, Pride and Ferrell 1995), and "controversial products" (Rehman and Brooks 1987). Wilson and West (1981) defined "unmentionables" as: "... products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offence, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented". This definition has since been supported by Triff, Benningfield and Murphy (1987), Fahy, Smart, Pride and Ferrell (1995) and Waller (1999). Katsanis (1994) also added that "unmentionables" were "offensive, embarrassing, harmful, socially unacceptable or controversial to some significant segment of the population".

Among claimed offences racist image, sexist image, violence, stereotyping of people, subject too personal, indecent language and nudity, violence, hard sell, concern for children, and anti-social behavior were there.

Though many research studies have been carried out with respect to various components of ethical advertising hardly any research study could be found in relation to components of ethical advertising and its relationships to demographic factors of consumers. Wells and Spinks (1996) had talked about truthfulness, morality, honesty and legality about ethical corporate communication. But merging some research findings and considering Ethical Advertising Standards set internationally, the following discussion was organized. It looked into five perspectives of ethical advertising, namely:

- 1) Legality
- 2) Decency
- 3) Honesty
- 4) Truthfulness
- 5) Social Responsibility

Legality of an advertisement:

As stated by Wells and Spinks, become ethical means complying to rules and regulations stated by the law automatically. Hence, in ethical advertising, legality becomes an essential component. The principle of legality is the legal ideal that requires all law to be clear, ascertainable and non-retrospective. ...

Whenever legality of an advertisement is being ascertained, comparative advertising takes the first place among various issues. Comparative advertising takes place when one trader's business is compared to another trader's business with reference to their trade mark or trade name. The advertisement usually presents comparisons of price and particular qualities of goods, intended to inform consumers that the second trader's goods or services are somehow superior. The comparisons are most frequently made to the products or services of a leader in the market.

There are various ways in which a trader can undertake comparative advertising, including:

1. referring to a competitor by name;
2. referring to a competitor's trade mark;
3. not referring specifically to the competitor by name, but referring to 'the leading brand' where consumers will know what that leading brand is; or
4. stating which products are compatible with those of a competitor and issuing a table listing the serial numbers of each party.

For years there have been a number of questions raised in relation to the legality of comparative advertising and whether it should be permitted. Fair and honest advertisements do not cause any harm are therefore lawful.

Decency of an advertisement:

Decency criteria are also very heterogeneous. People who are very liberal about editorial and artistic expression-including the show of nudity and sex in films as well as the publication of erotic materials may blanch when they see an advertisement for contraceptives, sanitary napkins, and toilet paper. Moreover, criteria and their application are and will remain subjective, outside of specific interdictions such as various strictures in Moslem countries against showing female bodies in advertisements, the prohibition of branded contraceptive commercials in most countries, and media acceptance rules that exclude various products and services (feminine-hygiene products and funeral homes).

The use of sexuality in advertising rests on the assumption that "sex sells"-at least in some cases. Since few men or women will deny that they are interested in the other gender, the use of sexuality can be successful because perfume, lingerie, and designer jeans are often bought for the very purpose of attracting the opposite sex. Besides the obvious moral concerns about promoting promiscuity, there are the more practical problems for advertisers of distracting potential consumers from the real advantages of their product or service, and of offending some of their targets. Sexy advertisements can also degenerate into objectification and violence.

Despite of sexuality of an advertisement, some other factors like discrimination, showing violence, showing personal hygiene products would determine the decency of an advertisement. Some studies showed that, Several Moslem countries (such as Iran and Saudi Arabia) are strongly resisting the invasion of Western advertising themes and approaches. Besides, a vocal minority of women are increasingly objecting to the deprecation of their sex (in Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden). They oppose advertisements that belittle women, insult their intelligence, depict them in an offending manner, imply sex inequalities, or display violence against them. Some people, including men, oppose commercials about personal-hygiene products (in Canada and the United States).

Having considered everything, the principle of "Decency" could be defined in many ways but yet the implications or meanings are same.

".....the quality of conforming to standards of propriety and morality"

"Decency is conformity to socio-cultural standards of conduct and speech."

“decent - showing integrity, fairness, or other characteristics associated with moral rightness; fair; good enough; okay; significant; substantial; sufficiently clothed or dressed to be seen” (Robert Reed)

Honesty of an advertisement:

Honesty and simply being truthful seem, on the surface, to be one and the same concept. However, though they are closely related in definition and are in fact listed as synonyms, there are fundamental differences between the two. Truthfulness is defined as "consistently telling the truth" in The American Heritage Dictionary, which also defines honesty as "the capacity or condition of being honest; integrity; trustworthiness." Honest means "not lying, cheating or taking unfair advantage." So what does that mean? The definitions are nearly identical, so one must turn to the connotations.

Honesty is the value of speaking truth and creating trust in minds of others. This includes all varieties of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Honesty implies a lack of deceit. A statement can be strictly true and still be dishonest if the intention of the statement is to deceive its audience. Similarly, a falsehood can be spoken honestly if the speaker actually believes it to be true. Further, Bukhari (2009) stated that honesty is a blanket term that covers a wide range of traits. It covers telling the truth, sincerity in work, carrying out duties, fulfilling one's word, objective judgments, and objective decisions. Honesty is the opposite of lying, the opposite of bluffing, the opposite of hypocrisy, the opposite of favoritism, and the opposite of deceit.

Truthfulness of an advertisement:

Truthfulness simply refers to the act of giving true information or facts (in exact manner) about something (Kehende, 2005). Therefore, true statement is based on fact and not imagination or invention. In a broader sense, truthfulness in the world of Ifemesia “indicates a correspondence between one’s exterior conduct and internal convictions”; that it is agreement between a person’s words or signs and his inner persuasion (Ifemesia 1985:207). A person whose words tallies with his inner persuasion is a truthful person.

Truthfulness is a moral obligation.. An obligation is a moral duty, which is enforced by a moral conscience and law. An obligation as Dzurgha has put it is governed by a principle of compulsion (Dzurgha 2000:19). This means it is an act, which must be carried out compulsorily and unavoidably. Truthfulness is an objective societal value. It is objective because the act is good in itself. The society too benefits from it because every social relation is built on trust. Trust here refers to mandate, which is shown when assignments to very important jobs (like advertising) or appointments to position of power are made. There are many situations in real life that illustrate the concept of trust: oath taking, oath-giving, statement on oath, promising oath, bond, covenant contract, marriage vow, sacred pledge, and solemn declaration. When likened to advertising, an honest and truthful advertisement is devoid of exaggeration, manipulation and coercion.

Social Responsibility of advertisement:

What constitutes the “social responsibility” (SR) of enterprises and other organizations is difficult to define. But, simply it could be defined as “Acting with concern and sensitivity, aware of the impact of your actions on others, particularly the disadvantaged.”

Advertising is part of the economic socialization process as it educates children as to the meanings associated with consumption. There is, however, a strong social concern about the effects of advertising upon children, yet there is confusion about exactly what it is that constitutes the problem.

Marketers and advertising practitioners keep their knowledge of children’s interaction with marketing messages to themselves for competitive reasons. No manufacturer or advertiser wishes to publicly portray that they study children’s minds, and utilize that knowledge to sell them things, even when that is what they do as a matter of course.

Children do not have an interest in advertising because of its role in their economic socialization (Preston, 2005). They use it to find out what brands mean, (sometimes, when an explanation is necessary, what they do, or what they are for)

Conceptual Framework

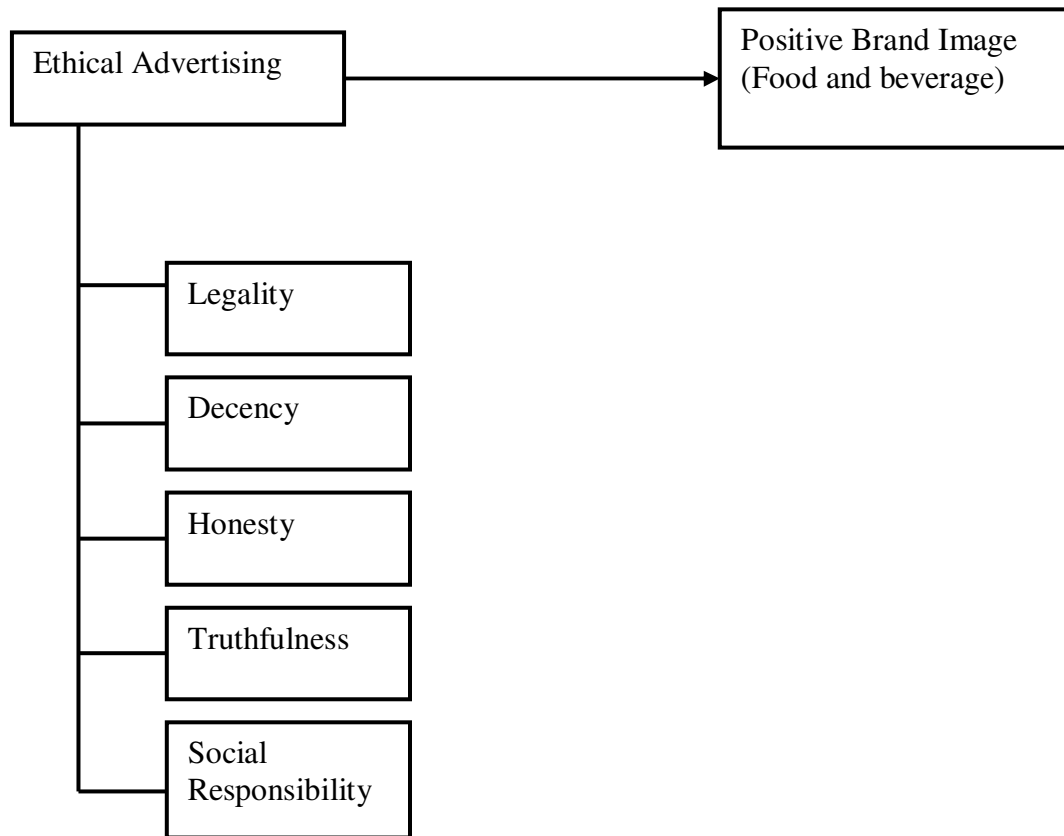


Figure: 1.1 Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses:

Hypotheses were formulated to search the relationships between demographic factors namely, age, occupation, education level and marital status and ethical advertising. Twenty hypotheses were formulated altogether. Following is one of the hypotheses formulated.

- 1) **H₁** : There is a relationship between Ethical advertising and a positive brand image of food and beverage
- 2) **H₁** : There is a relationship between Legality of an advertisement and a positive brand image of food and beverage
- 3) **H₁** : There is a relationship between Decency of an advertisement and a positive brand image of food and beverage

- 4) **H₁** : There is a relationship between Honesty of an advertisement and a positive brand image of food and beverage
- 5) **H₁** : There is a relationship between Truthfulness of an advertisement and a positive brand image of food and beverage
- 6) **H₁** : There is a relationship between Social Responsibility of an advertisement and a positive brand image of food and beverage

Methodology:

The population, which was the base for the selected sample consisted of general public (consumers) of three districts namely Colombo, Galle and Kandy. The research was designed as a consumer based study. Sampling technique is purposive and sample size is the 150 consumers from three districts. Consumers were picked in a way that they cover the all age ranges, occupation categories, education levels and marital status considered in the research study. Specially, consumers above age 9 years were taken into account.

The questionnaire is a structured questionnaire with 74 questions. Before collecting data, the questionnaire was tested in a pilot survey with 30 respondents to determine whether questionnaire is reliable or not. Scoring alpha values more than 0.70, the test proved that questionnaire is reliable for the research study. Following are the reliability test results.

Legality alpha = .7120, Decency alpha = .9093, Honesty alpha = .8557, Truthfulness alpha = .8558 and Social Responsibility alpha = .8877

To measure consumers’ perceptions five point likert scale was utilized. As mentioned in the conceptual framework ethical component was divided in to five dimensions namely Legality, Decency, Honesty, Truthfulness and Social Responsibility. To measure each dimension, set of questions were developed as follows.

- Legality of an advertisement - 07 questions
- Decency of an advertisement - 11 questions
- Honesty of an advertisement - 07 questions
- Truthfulness of an advertisement - 06 questions
- Social responsibility of an advertisement - 08 questions

Five point likert scale questions were formulated as follows.

Question item	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Completely agree
Comparison of two competitive products in an advertisement is illegal					

The questionnaire was consisted of 04 sections which were devoted to specific areas as follows.

- Section A – Demographics of subjects
- Section B – General information about advertising and its ethics
- Section C – Very specific information about five dimensions of ethical advertising
- Section D – Information about ethical perspective of advertising in branding

For the data analysis, mean scores, grand mean scores, standard deviations, Pearson’s correlation and Kruskal Wallis test was used.

Results:

Overall perspective of ethical advertising:

Dimension	Grand Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Legality	3.86	0.61
Decency	4.10	0.66
Honesty	4.07	0.60
Truthfulness	3.97	0.67
Social Responsibility	3.81	0.76

Table 1: Grand means scored by each dimension

Table 1 shows the all grand mean values obtained by each dimension. Grand means scored by each dimension was used to determine the impact of ethical advertng on building a positive brand image. The grand mean obtained by the indicators is 3.86 (which is higher than the midpoint, 3.0) and the standard deviation is 0.61(lesser than 1.0). The grand mean value obtained by all the indicators of decency dimension is 4.10 and standard deviation is 0.66. The mean value higher is than the midpoint 3.0, declares that all the indicators contribute to measure decency aspect of an advertisement. 4.07 is the grand mean acquired by indicators and 0.60 is the standard deviation. The mean which is much higher than the midpoint 3.0 says that these indicators measure honesty of an advertisement. Truthfulness of an advertisement obtained a grand mean of 3.97 and standard deviation of 0.67. A grand mean value of 3.81 which is higher than 3.0, the midpoint was acquired by social responsibility of an advertisement and the standard deviation is 0.76. All these values simply say that ethical advertising has an impact of building a positive brand image for food and beverage.

The necessity of advertising ethics:

	Agree	Highly agree	Total
Legality is needed	56.0%	31.3%	87.3%
Decency is needed	53.3%	38.0%	91.3%
Honesty is needed	45.3%	42%	87.3%
Truthfulness is needed	49.3%	36.7%	86.0%
Social Responsibility is needed	50.0%	35.3%	85.3%

Table 2: Consumers’ perception about necessity of advertising ethics

Table 2 indicates how consumers see the necessity of advertising ethics. 87.3% of the sample agreed in total that advertisement must be legal. 91.3% declared that decency is needed in advertisements. 87.3% of the total subjects disclosed that honesty component is needed in advertisement if it is to be treated as an ethical advertisement. Further, 86.0% of the sample claimed that truthfulness is too needed in advertising. Finally, 85.3% stated that social responsibility is needed in advertising.

The assessment of preferred brands’ advertisements in terms of ethics:

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Legality of the preferred brands’ advertisements (BRALEG)	3.61	0.88
Decency of the preferred brands’ advertisements (BRADEC)	3.50	0.90
Honesty of the preferred brands’ advertisements (BRAHON)	3.44	0.84
Truthfulness of the preferred brands’ advertisements (BRATRU)	3.44	0.75
Social Responsibility of the preferred brands’ advertisements (BRASOC)	3.62	0.96

Table 3: Assessment of preferred brands’ advertisements

According to table 3, grand mean scores of all question items which were constructed to measure ethical perspective of advertisements in building brands are just above the mid-point 3.0. And standard deviations for every dimension take values less than 1.0. Hence, when these scores are considered, it could be concluded that preferred brands’ advertisements are ethical. And, such advertisements carry legality, decency, honesty, truthfulness and social responsibility aspects.

Hypotheses testing:

	Coefficient of Correlation	Significance
Brand image and Ethical Advertising	0.351 **	0.000
Brand Image and Legality	0.295**	0.000
Brand Image and Decency	0.371**	0.000
Brand Image and Honesty	0.235**	0.002
Brand Image and Truthfulness	0.272**	0.000
Brand Image and Social Responsibility	0.214**	0.004

Table 4: Coefficient of Correlations

To prove the relationship between ethical advertising and brand image, the following results supported. The correlation coefficient is 0.351 and the significant level (P- value) is 0.000. It is evident that null hypothesis, which says there is no positive relationship between ethical advertising and positive brand image of food and beverage is rejected as per the results. Therefore, the results support to conclude that there is a positive relationship between ethical advertising and brand image of food and beverage.

Next, the coefficient of correlation is 0.295 and the significant level is 0.000 ($< 0.001 <$). Since results support to reject the null hypothesis, it is concluded that there is a positive relationship between legality of an advertisement and the positive brand image of food and beverage.

The coefficient of correlation, 0.371 and the significant level 0.000 is the evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a positive relationship between decency of an advertisement and positive brand image of food and beverage.

The coefficient of correlation is 0.235 which is at the significant level of 0.002 of the 1-tailed test. These figures are the evidence to reject the null hypothesis which says that there is no positive relationship between honesty of an advertisement and the positive brand image of food and beverage. Therefore, with the above evidence it is concluded that there is a positive relationship between honesty of an advertisement and positive brand image of food and beverage.

0.272, coefficient of correlation was obtained at the significant level of 0.000 (1-tailed) to test the hypothesis. Obtained statistics clearly rejects the null hypothesis, there is no positive relationship between truthfulness of an advertisement and positive brand image of food and beverage. Again, it is very precisely concluded that there is a positive relationship between truthfulness of an advertisement and positive brand image of food and beverages.

Coefficient of correlation is 0.214 which is in the significant level of 0.004 in the 1-tailed test. With clear evidence, it is proved that there is a positive relationship between social responsibility of an advertisement and positive brand image of food and beverage.

Discussion:

The ethical advertising was measured via five dimensions namely, Legality, Decency, Honesty, Truthfulness and Social Responsibility of an advertisement. Respondents were asked to rate their preferred brands' advertisements using these five dimensions in a five point likert scale. The impact of ethical advertising on building brand image was measured considering means values and their standard deviations. The following values were obtained with respect to legality, decency, honesty, truthfulness and social responsibility of advertisements of respondents' preferred brands.

- a) Legality of an advertisement scored a mean value of 3.86. It says that there is an impact of legality of an advertisement on building a positive brand image for food and beverage. The mean value is above the mid-point (3.0) and it implies that rating is powerful.
- b) Mean value of 4.10 was scored by Decency of an advertisements with a standard deviation of 0.66 which is lesser than 1.0. These values also clearly indicate that there is an impact of decency of an advertisement on building a positive brand image for food and beverage.
- c) Honesty aspect of an advertisements scored a mean value of 4.07 and standard deviation of 0.60 which is lesser than 1.0. The mean value which is higher than the mid-point 3.0 shows that there is an impact of honest of an advertisement on building a positive brand image for food and beverage.
- d) Truthfulness of advertisement took the mean value of 3.97. It has a standard deviation of 0.67 which is lesser than 1.0. Again these ratings declare that, there is an impact of truthfulness of an advertisement on building a positive brand image
- e) The Social Responsibility of an advertisement got a mean value of 3.81 and standard deviation of 0.86. These ratings claim that there is an impact of social responsibility of an advertisement in building a positive brand image for food and beverage.

Conclusion:

53.85% of the respondents who like to watch advertisements (39 respondents of the total sample) say that they watch advertisements to know about new and old products. This simply means that, they expect the informative role from advertisements, which should be the main role of an advertisement.

41.02% of the respondents say that they watch advertisements for a change, where they consider advertisements as one kind of entertainment tool.

Out of 52 subjects who do not like to watch advertisements, 46.15% say that there are too many advertisements to watch. This simply implies that there is a information overload to public which drives the public into a dilemma in watching and using advertisements.

25.0% of the respondents say that they do not watch advertisements because they do not have enough time to devote for that. Next, 23.08% of the subjects reveal that they do not watch advertisements since there are no good quality advertisements. This is an implication which says that number of good quality advertisements is decreasing.

Majority of the sample, 77.3% reveals that they are aware about local legal provisions regarding advertisements, which is a fairly good indication. Yet, another 22.7% is not aware about legal provisions.

87.3% of the total sample agrees with that legality of advertisement is needed. And, 86.0% respondents say that legal provisions are needed with regard to advertising. 76.0% of the total respondents say that every product must be covered by legal provisions. Majority of sample which is 91.3% agrees that decency of an advertisement is needed. 87.3% of the sample reveals that honesty of an advertisement is needed. 86.0% of the respondents agree that truthfulness of an advertisement is needed. 85.3% of the subjects consider that the social responsibility of an advertisement is needed.

The mean score is 3.01 and standard deviation is 0.47, which is acquired by ethical advertising. Legality of an advertisement has a grand mean score of 3.86 which is beyond the mid-point and standard deviation of 0.61. Grand mean value which is scored by the Decency of an advertisement is 4.10 and standard deviation is 0.66. The Honesty of an advertisement takes the grand mean score of 4.07 and standard deviation 0.60. The Truthfulness of an advertisement acquires grand mean value of 3.97 and standard deviation of 0.67. Grand mean value scored by the Social Responsibility of an advertisement is 3.81 and standard deviation is 0.76.

The study carries many heavy implications for various parties. As identified communication managers and practitioners, advertisers, consumers and very especially policy makers are the parties. The research findings are clear and show a way forward to think about business ethics and formulate guidelines, legislations, policies to govern business ethics specifically advertising ethics.

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