

Islamic Concept of Advertising; Exploring the Advertising According to Islam

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary advertisement practices have created many social and ethical problems due to their materialistic focus. The effect of these problems can also be seen in many Muslim countries including Pakistan in terms of diversion from their cultural and religious values. This paper attempts to integrate the Islamic business ethics in contemporary advertisement practices to find the solution of the ethical dilemma which is created by these materialistic advertisement practices. The focus of Islamic way of business is not just to earn profit but to serve the society. The human welfare is the gist of Islamic business ethics. This paper attempts to evaluate advertisement in terms of Quran and Hadiths of the Holy Prophet (PBUM) and discuss unethical aspects of the contemporary advertisement practices.

Key Words:

Advertisement; Islamic Business ethics; Quran; Hadith

INTRODUCTION

The advent of capitalism promotes the free economical system where decisions are made by the individuals and where the focus of all business activities is just to earn more

and more profit without the separation of what is ethical and what is unethical (Rice, G. 1998). This form of market economy creates many social and ethical problems. In Muslim countries this effect is more visible in form of diverting from religious obligations and cultural preferences (Chachula, G. *et al.*, 2009). In many Muslim countries including Pakistan, advertisement campaigns have no linkage with culture or religion. These advertisement practices under the broad umbrella of capitalism, fulfilling the purpose of earning more and more profit by exaggerating the product features and by using sex appealing and emotional elements. This paper attempts to integrate the Islamic business ethics in contemporary advertisement practices in the Pakistani context. Currently, individuals face many ethical issues in doing business for example Stealing, lying, fraud, deceit and they don't know how to tackle these problems (Cherrington, J.O & Charrington, D.J, 1993) Solution of Social and ethical problems that are created by the contemporary advertisement practices is embedded in Islamic way of business (Saeed, M *el al.* 2001). This paper revolves around Islamic ethical system and evaluates advertisement practices in the light of Quran

and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUM).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The epistemology of this paper is Constructionism and arguments are constructed in the light of Quran and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUM). Constructionism is inspired by constructivist approach and it argues that individuals can only learn by connecting their tangible objective experiences with their cognitive interpretation (Piaget, 1967). Constructionism rejects the objective knowledge without human interpretation. Crotty (1998) further explains that there is no meaning of anything without mind. Saeed, *et al.* (2001), uses the same epistemology, states that there is a need to integrate Islamic ethical system while designing an advertisement for Muslim world, to better understand the behavior of Muslim consumers.

This paper critically analyzed the contemporary advertisement practices in the light of Quran and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUM). This paper is written in Pakistan context where 98 % of the total population is Muslim. Advertisements practices are critically analyzed for their compatibility with Islam business ethics. Rogers *et al.*, (1995) pointed out that ignoring the Islamic perspective while advertising in Muslim countries can indulge MNCs not only in risk of conflict with the local consumers but also in risk of alienation with a remarkable proportion of their target audience. By keeping Quran and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUM) as a source of knowledge, Advertisement practices are critically analyzed and arguments are

constructed on the basis of this critical analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Need for Ethics in Business:

By its definition Advertisement is a unidirectional and paid form of communication that is used to disseminate the product or services information, (Wells, *et al.* 2007). Companies invest heavily on advertisement campaigns. An estimate of spending on advertisement in 2005 around the world is \$ 300 Billion (Laczniak, 2008). The primary focus of advertisement is to enhance the business profitability therefore companies ignore many social aspects while designing an advertisement campaign. In contemporary marketing practices, Advertisement means to create a need of the product in the mind of the consumers to influence its mind in a way that he feels thrust for that product whether he really needs that product or not (Singh, 1998).

Due to that heavy investment and negligence of social aspects in advertisement, there is a need to integrate an ethical conduct in advertisement. Singh, 1998 pointed out that the main problem in the contemporary advertisement is the absence of any acceptable code of ethics. Many postmodern managers are in search of finding the answer that how ethics can integrate in business practices across the borders. These managers are trying to have an acceptable code of conduct throughout the world (Al-Khatib *et al.*, 1995).

Ethics can be defines as the moral principles that distinguish between right and wrong and between good and bad (Beekun, 1997: P 2). Beekun further explain that in case of business, ethics means what is right and

what is wrong in doing a business. In Islamic context the Quranic World Khuluq is very near to the definition of ethics (Quran, 3:104). Also Quran uses different words to explain ethics e.g. Khayr (goodness), birr (righteousness), qist (equality), adal (equilibrium and justice), haqq (truth and right), m'aruf (known and approved) and taqwa (Piety) (Majid, 1991: PP 12-13). Companies use advertisement to expand their business and in doing so there is a crucial need to understand the ethical aspect as well. The need for integrating ethics in business feels because many times laws are not worthy enough to cover a problem and left some areas where there is a need of attention (Weiss, 2003). For example telling a lie is not considered a crime or an illegal act in Law but considered an unethical act that can create many social problems. In many Muslim countries the advertisement campaigns are not based on Islamic business practices and hence create a social dilemma. The roots of Islamic Business ethics can be traced from Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) (Darwish, 2000).

Contemporary Advertisement & Islamic Ethical System:

The success of any organization in today's competitive era is depending, up to much extent, on effectiveness of its advertising strategy (Akhtar et al., 2011). The reason of a great deal of investment on advertisement by both local and multinational companies is the same. To grasp the attention of the audience and to capture the maximum market share, many advertisement agencies, used controversial images of film stars, adventures pictures and these kinds of other tactics (Rice, G 1999; Saeed, M et al.,

2001). This act of advertisement is considered unethical in Islam because of its deceptive nature. Prophet Muhammad said, "He who cheats is not one of us" (Keller, 1994). And selling the product by cheating is against the Islamic business ethics.

In contemporary advertisement, the exaggerated features of the product are advertised and through this bluff customers are motivated to spend money on a product, which they don't need (Singh, 1998). This is unethical and deceptive way of selling a product that leads towards misallocation of economical resources. Toynbee (1961) stated "A considerable part of our ability, energy time and material resources is being spend today on inducing us to do head labor in order to find the money for buying material goods that we should never have dreamed of wanting if we had been left to ourselves." These advertisement practices are also being used in many Islamic countries including Pakistan (Akhtar et al, 2011). Islam on the other hand does not tolerate this act of deception as it is clearly mentioned in the book of Allah "Give just measures and cause no loss. And weigh with scales true and upright and withhold not things justly due to men" (Quran, 26:181). In Islamic business ethics honesty is the key to all business practices. Once a Bedouin questioned to the Messenger of Allah that when the dooms day take place, The Prophet replied that "When honesty is lost, then wait for the doomsday"(Beekun, 1997). In many Television advertisements of Pakistani media, this problem can be seen. For example in Motorcycle adds, it is frequently claimed that this motorcycle can run 70 to 80 KM in one letter but in actual it runs only 50 KM. This is the example of the

exaggeration in the product, which is not acceptable in the Islamic way of business.

The fairness of the advertisement is also an important thing in the Islamic ethical system. By fairness it means that the features and quality that is being advertised and perceived by the people, should be there in the product. Islam believes in equality of rights where justice has a key importance, misleading the people by showing them the overrated features are considered as injustice. Islam doesn't tolerate to do injustice with the people even if there is a risk of loss in the business. It is clearly mentioned in the book of Allah that, "Standout firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourself, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor...." (Quran, 4:135). Selling a product by telling a lie is totally against the Islamic way of doing business. The prophet of Allah said "The sign of a hypocrite are three 1. Whenever he speaks he tells a lie. 2. Whenever he promise, He always break it. 3. If you trust him, he proves to be dishonest" (Al-Bukhari, 1.32)

This ethical way of advertisement leads to another crucial issue of women involvement in the advertisement. In many western influenced countries like Pakistan, the role of women in an advertisement campaign is just to enhance the glamour by exposing their body parts. On the contrary it is mentioned in the Quran " Say to the believing men that they restrain their looks and guard their private parts. That is purer for them, And to say the believing women to restrain their looks and to guard their private parts. (Quran, 24:31,32).

Islam doesn't restrain women to participate in business activities, but the purpose behind

should not deceive people by emotional stimulation. For a woman in Islam is not allowed to show any part of the body except face, hands and feet (Karande and Kiran, 2000). Showing any part except the mentioned is considered as a sexual stimulant and thus inappropriate for the public presentation (Chachula, G. et al., 2009)

Nudity of body parts in the advertisements is a critical issue that currently dominated the whole world including Muslim countries. However its intensity is varying within the Muslim countries. In Saudi Arabia the whole advertisement campaign has to be changed as it is strictly prohibited to show body parts except face and hands, While in Dubai, UAE the same version of advertising campaign as designed for the USA or Europe is used due to the more liberal nature (Kiran and Karande, 2000).

This ethical dilemma leads towards the issue of advertising controversial products is Muslim countries like Pakistan. Controversial products are those products that have a sense of aversion in the mind of the customer while advertise them publicly (Waller, D.S. and K.S. Fam, 2000). They are also called " Un-Mentionable" and socially sensitive products (Usmani, 2006). For example the customers because of the social as well as Islamic norms of the society do not like the free advertisement of condoms on television and print media.

Currently many companies in Muslim countries advertise such product that appeals the sexuality. Waller et al. (2005) categorizes controversial products in three types, Products, Services and Concepts. Alcohol, cigarettes, female contraceptives, male and female under garments are in the

product category in Waller's categorization. The services category includes the ads of sex diseases such as STD and AIDS. In the concept category there are such ideas that are not compatible with the social norm such as unconventional sexual practices.

Contrary to Islamic ethical system, currently in many Islamic countries including Pakistan, sexual appeals are used in advertisement to promote the products (Akhtar et al., 2011). These sexual appeals are used in different ways for example by the use of good-looking models and by depicting a level of nudity in the advertisement (Severn, Belch, and Belch 1990). Severn et al. also pointed out that these appeals might also be included suggestive verbal sentences. For example the use of such words on TV that are undiscussable publicly will create a social problem. Islam, on the other hand, does not allow selling the product by using unethical means that harms the social norms of the society. In Islam everyone is accountable to Allah for his actions, Individuals are not at all free in their will rather they are bound to do everything including business by keeping themselves in the limits of Sharia'h (Rice, G. 1999). Islam does not tolerate to sell a product by using sexual appeals or undiscussable concepts. Prophet Muhammad (PBUM) said, "God likes that when someone does something; it must be done perfectly well" (Rice, G. et al., 2002)

Islam strictly forbade exaggerating in the product features. Islam considers this exaggeration as bluff and cheating. The gist of Islamic business ethics is Honesty. Islam does not allow cheating the customer even if there is a fear of loss in the business. Anas Bin Malik (R.A) reported, "Prophet

Muhammad (PBUM) forbade the sale of fruits till they are almost ripe. Anas was asked what is meant by "are almost ripe" He replied, "Till they become red" Allah's Messenger (PBUM) further said, " If Allah spoiled the fruits, what right one would have to take the money of one's brother." (Al-Bukhari, 3.403)

With the split of secular and sacred, religion becomes a private matter and in this so-called "value-free society" the focus is exclusively on development of economic mechanisms (Rice, 1999). There are two main economical systems that currently dominated the whole world, Capitalism and socialism. Rice, G. (1998) argues that capitalism encourages the free market economy, which is governed by individuals. The gist of capitalistic system is profit maximization that becomes the life goal of individuals in that system. On the other hand communistic system encourages the buorocacy that leads the imbalanced allocation of resources (Akhtar et al, 2011).

Country to these economical systems, profit maximization is not the only and ultimate goal of Islamic way of business. It is mentioned in Quran, "Wealth and sons are attractiveness of the life of this world; but the things that endure, good deeds, are the best in the sight of Allah, as rewards, and best as the foundation for hopes." (Quran, 18:46). Islamic ethical system demands from its followers to do the right and forbade the wrong. Quran says, "You are the best people, evolved for mankind, enjoying what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah" (Quran 3:116)

COMMENTARY AND CONCLUSION

In contemporary advertisement, different methods are used to sell the product. The

focus of all marketing and advertisement activities is just to maximize the profit and that's way they ignore many ethical issues that are associated with these marketing and advertisement practices. Companies promote their products by exaggerating their features and by showing a hyper picture of the real product to the customer. Also many advertisers use emotional and sexual simulative tactics to sell their products.

These advertisement practices currently dominated the whole world including Muslim countries. Pakistan is also one of those countries where these advertisement practices have influenced the huge population. Local as well as multinational companies use young star models with a degree of nudity in advertisements to attract their customers. Also a shiny picture of the product has been shown to the customer, which is an exaggerated form of the actual product.

Islamic business ethics does not allow anyone to sell a product by showing such features that are not possessed by the product. Islamic business ethics encourage a fair communication, which is based on truth and justice. Cheating in selling a product is not allowed even if there is a fear of loses in the business. Islamic business ethics has embedded solution for those social problems, which are created by the contemporary advertisement. These social problems can be seen in Pakistan in the form of losing the cultural and religious values. Free intermixing of opposite sexes, which is not allowed in Islam, create countless social problems, which is promoting through advertisement media. Confusion is created between the new generation about what is Islamic and what is non Islamic and this

ethical dilemma leads the generation towards identity crises. Many local and multinational companies in Pakistan use young models in their advertisements that wear such dresses that is not up to the mark of social conduct. The concepts used in these advertisements are not openly discussable and dresses are also not socially compatible. For example the concept use in advertisement of women contraceptives is not like to be discussed publicly because it is against the social value of the society. These advertisements may have no issue in western culture but in Pakistan, it is considered unethical. Also in many beauty soap and shampoo advertisements, the dresses of models are not socially or religiously compatible.

The problem begins when the people in the society have considered these shiny stars as their ideals are try to be like them. In doing so they ignore their religion and cultural and loss their identity. Ultimately these courses of action produced confuse and depress generation.

Pakistan, which is created by the name of Islam, practices the capitalistic system pf market economy. Companies are in the race of getting more and more profit and ignoring all the aspects of Islamic ethical system. There is a need of re-evaluation of educational system in Pakistan. Business education bust be integrated with the Islamic code of ethics and Government should make such policies that are compatible with Islamic way of business. From the basic level to higher level, Islamic education must be integrated in syllabus as a compulsory subject. Government should restrict such advertisements that include such elements, which is against the culture or religion.

FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Islam has a complete socioeconomic system in itself. This paper only attempts to evaluate advertisement practices from Islamic business ethics. Further research can be done to understand the Islamic way of financial management, Human Resource Management, Trading and other business practices. Islam provides a complete way of doing business by focusing on the central idea of human welfare. A complete guide of trading can be found in the life of Holy Prophet (PBUH). In future, there is a need to evaluate current trading practices in the light of Quran and Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and implement it to overcome the ethical and social problems.

LIMITATIONS

There are so many social cultural and religious problems are associated with unethical advertisement practices. This paper pointed out only few of them that become a limitation for this paper. Also the Literature review is not sufficient to cover this broad topic. A detailed and deep study of Quran and Hadiths are required to cover all the areas of this topic. This paper limits many other dimensions that can be picked from the same topic.

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