

An Analysis of Subliminal Messages in Commercials

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Abstract

Advertisements are not only significant for advertisers but for the companies as well. The major purpose of the ads is to create motivation and appeal in people to buy the products. The advertisers display the ads as per the specification of the company against consideration. To get the desirable result advertisers are free to use the customer's conscious minds. However, the unconscious mind is far more powerful as compared to the conscious mind. To make a long-lasting impact, advertisers try to make motivation and appeal in the unconscious minds of people as well. In this research article, 17 Pakistani ads will be considered, which has created an impact on the conscious and unconscious mind. This research used a deductive approach, while secondary research in the scenario of subliminal messages will be explained, and last but not least, the thematic analysis will be done in this respect.

Keywords: electronic media, Advertising, Messages, products, customer, attitude, subliminal message, subliminal message, hidden messages, Pakistani commercials, Pakistani advertisements.

Introduction

This research article is about the impact of subliminal message in commercials. In this article, the background of the significance of advertising and the impact of its persuading power will be evaluated. Moreover, the influential nature of advertising, the impact of advertisements on a mass audience will be explained. The power of the subliminal message and its direct and indirect impact will be focused on. In addition, the impact of advertising on decision-making will be investigated.

Research background

Advertising is used to create an impact on people in order to influence, inform and aware then regarding the brand, product, and services. The information in the advertisement is about the qualities of the product, Availability, and reasonability (Reissis, Shiatis, & Nikkhah, 2016). The first and last aim of the advertisements is to do decision making of the consumers. The advertisements are beneficial for all the party (buyer, seller, and advertiser) (Wojdynski & Golan, 2016). However, advertisers have much responsibility to put forward an influential advertisement. In modern time, the internet has created a huge impact on people. Almost before the half a century, people only had three medium, and transferring the idea was extremely easy that is why people were used to be easily manipulated (Wells, 2014). Due to the lack of knowledge regarding the direct/indirect impact on conscious and unconscious mind was the positive point for the companies and advertisers. The deployment of the subliminal message in the minds of people was essential for the companies to create long-lasting impact regarding product and services, and these impacts lead to the brand image and goodwill of the company (Vokey & Read, 1985). The famous example of creating a brand image by an advertisement are Coca-Cola, Pepsi, etc.

Research significance

In the modern times where globalized content is influencing people, marketers, companies, and preferences of people regarding decision making, advertisers need to understand any aspect of ads, and their impact so that they can easily build goodwill and idea or inspiration in people to do decision-making (Aberystwyth University, 2014). This research article helps in identifying the factors, which creates a direct and indirect impact on people. Moreover, this research article helps the advertiser, marketers, and students to analyze the commercial market scenario and strategies.

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this research article are

- To identify the importance of the message in commercials.
- To investigate the current advertising scenario in Pakistan.
- To observe the ideas that are being transmitted in people of Pakistan for many years.
- The impact of subliminal message in advertising.

Research questions

The research questions are:

- *What are the impacts of subliminal messages in commercials?*
- *Do subliminal messages influence the people in decision - making?*
- *Do Pakistani commercials create direct impact on people?*

Definitions

Advertisement:

The advertisement refers to the paid announcement of informing by any medium against consideration. The major medium for advertising is television, newspaper, radio and social media (Wojdynski & Golan, 2016).

Advertising message:

The advertising message refers to the transformation of an idea that is conveyed to the audience. The target audience can be the specific group such as, as per locality, gender, age, etc. The main idea of the advertising message is to make the targeted audience to purchase the product. The message can be conveyed by television, radio, newspaper, magazine, internet, etc. (Wells, 2014).

Conscious mind:

The conscious mind is the state of mind in which awareness is necessary. Watching to, listening radio or doing any activity in the presence of mind is called conscious mind. In addition, observing and decoding knowledge in a rational way is also an example of a conscious mind (Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & Smith, 2000).

Unconscious mind:

The unconscious mind is the state of mind in which information is decoded without awareness. In addition, the perceiver of information has no feelings, emotions, though for the message (Merikle, 1998).

Transmission of the message:

Transmission of the message refers to the diffusing of information without moral (Media and Communication Studies, 2014).

Transmission of the hidden message:

The transmission of the hidden message refers to the diffusing of information with moral and indirect message (Aberystwyth University, 2014).

Literature review

The subliminal messages are widely used for influencing people and groups (Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & Smith, 2000). The major element, which creates a huge impact on people, is technology. Due to globalization, people all around the world have become united. The social media platforms where they perform the same method of persuading audience are leaving a great impact on people (Aberystwyth University, 2014). However, in conventional media, advertising must be qualified so that people lead to decision-making. The major purpose of advertising in any media is to trigger people to purchase the products or services, and for that, marketing and advertising is the essential tool for an accumulated consumer or potential consumers (Wells, 2014). Motivation, appeal, and psychology create a subliminal message. Consequently, in the advertisement, it the duty of the advertiser to fulfill the demand of the client, and as per their requirements, advertisements are made (Merikle, 1998). There are many aspects of advertisement as per the process of decoding the message. Although, the main idea of ads is to transfer the knowledge by ad along with the ads, stories, ideas, imagination is transmitted in the minds of people (Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & Smith, 2000). The transmitted knowledge creates subliminal messages in the minds of people directly and indirectly. The biggest example of conveying a subliminal message is the experiment on the audience at New Jersey. The audience were influenced to buy more popcorn and Coca-Cola, and they did (Vokey & Read, 1985).

Subliminal advertising is counterproductive for marketers and professionals. Although it is beneficial for the companies or advertisers keeping it secret is the most significant part in

conveying a subliminal message (Merikle, 1998). The marketers think that if the audiences get to know the truth behind the ads, they would not prefer to select the alternative products or would have dissatisfaction regarding it. Moreover, if the reality of the advertising were disclosed, it would be the biggest disaster for the public relation of the organization (Nvblog-business, 2007). There are many misconception and misunderstanding regarding the marketing campaigns, such as, if the audience knows the reality of subliminal message, the idea and information will be ineffective (Smith, 2005).

In 2000, a campaign was promoted about Republican in which, George W Bush was the guest of the event. When he was declaring the speech, the screenplay mistakenly misplaced the word Bureaucrats misrepresented as the rats. Democrats took the action against this act. And asked FCC to do investigation in this regard. This incident created a huge impact on the political scenario of America. Consequently, the Republicans had to face many criticisms, ridicule, the backlash for the lack of professionalism and attention (Strahan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2002).

There are two major reasons for boosting the progress of subliminal message commercial in building perception are; first is focus on general behavior, and the second reason is creating subliminal persuasion (Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & Smith, 2000). The focus on general/functioning behavior can be explained as, “The notion that human behavior can be influenced by perceptions which do not lead to consciousness but merely remain in the organism has always been associated with considerable fear (It-maribor Blogspot, 2012).” However, subliminal persuasion means to focus on the stimulus of people. The conditioning regarding certain action helps the subliminal persuasion more effectively. Moreover, the cognitive approach also helps in selecting the best option, such as, what to perceive and what to ignore (Merikle, 1998). The cognitive approach assumes that individuals are active decision makers who use the information to make rational and effective decisions. Behavioral advertising appeals directly to

emotions and the images people have of themselves. It also assumes that the environment plays a primary role in people's action (Vokey & Read, 1985).

The decision-making is a significant part of advertising. The companies pay the advertising to influence consumers to buy the products and to attract potential consumers. Consumer behavior is the study of how advertising affects the consumer. There are two perspectives of consumer behavior cognitive and behavioral (Merikle, 1998). The cognitive view concerns the effects of the mental process such as perception and knowledge on people behavior. The behavioral approach concentrates on how people's action are reinforced by other people and media (Rodrik, 2013).

In the advertisement, it the duty of the advertiser to fulfill the demand of the client, and as per their requirements, the commercials are made (Rizvi, 2011). Consequently, to get the desirable result advertisers are free to use the customer's conscious minds. However, the unconscious mind is far more powerful as compared to the conscious mind. The unconscious mind is the state of mind in which information is decoded without awareness (Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & Smith, 2000). In addition, the perceiver of information has no feelings, emotions, though for the message. The subliminal messages are widely used for influencing people and groups. The major element, which creates a huge impact on people, is technology. Due to globalization, people all around the world become united (Wojdyski & Golan, 2016). Although the phenomena of subliminal messages are effective and supportive but due to awareness in people and globalization, it creates a limited effect. Following are the consequence of subliminal message in commercials and subliminal stimulation (Smith, 2005). Following are the sample of 17-television commercial of Pakistan, which will explain the categories, belonging, time duration and target audience.

Sample Ads

S.#	Brand	Category	Belonging	Time Duration	Target Audience
01	McDonald's	Product	International	55 sec	Youth
02	Slice	Product	Local	40 sec	Youth
03	Lux	Product	International	17 sec	Women
04	Ariel	Product	International	39 sec	Women
05	Safeguard Soap	Product	International	31 sec	Children
06	Head n Shoulders	Product	International	30 sec	Youth
07	Blue Band	Product	International	30 sec	Children
08	Habib cooking oil	Product	National	50 sec	Family
09	Cadbury Dairy Milk	Product	International	51 sec	All
10	Pepsi	Product	International	1min	Youth
11	Kenwood	Product	International	57 Sec	Family
12	Surf Excel	Product	International	41sec	Children
13	Coca Cola Ramadan	Product	International	45 Sec	Families
14	Ufone	Service	National	31 Sec	Youth
15	Lipton	Product	International	31Sec	Family
16	QMobile	Product	International	50Sec	Youth
17	Olpers Milk	Product	National	1min 5Sec	Families

(Brand synario, 2016; Global Samosa, 2016; Adage, 2012; The wire, 2016)

Methodology

The methodology of research clarifies the process of conducting research (Clarke, 2005). In this research article, the deductive

approach is used. Deductive approach refers to reasoning, logical understanding, and investigating of aims and objectives as per the information of secondary data (Clarke, 2005). The deductive approach will help in the analysis and conclusion of this research. For this research article, the data collection is done from the websites, previous journal articles, article, and reports. Moreover, in this research article, the thematic analysis will be done. The thematic analysis is the most common type of analysis in qualitative research. This type of analysis helps in examining the patterns of previous data. Moreover, it creates links in proving aims and objective and identifying the research question.

Analysis of products

In most of the Pakistani ads, the relationship between husband and wife are always conflicting relation (Mubeena & Khairunnisa, 2013).

In the advertisement of McDonalds, chitchat of husband and wife on their wedding night is about food. This advertisement has hidden message. Food is the first face of the card while money is the other. If your spouse is not in a state of providing you Junk Food or Expensive Food and if you find it elsewhere you must switch to the other (brand synario, 2014). Simply you can do anything and everything for food because "It is your First Love! (PehlaPyar)". "Even the Logo of McDonald's is really controversial and has been in the limelight since past few years. Faisal Islam, CEO of Karachi-based Advertising Agency, commented about subliminal messages in McDonald's advertisements. He stated,

It is a clear subliminal message in this advertisement. It says love for food is greater than for human beings. The priority in Love is given to food than relations.

In the advertisement of Slice juice, the element of Seduction in the body language and Dialogues of “Katrina Kaif” is seen. However, if the audience observes, they will find a clear subliminal connection and interpretation of this Ad. Reconsider this ad without the bottle of the mango and slice bottle in Katrina's hands. You will find the dialogues and her body language in a complete paradigm of seducing someone intentionally and make others feel arose. Implanting the ways and body language required to seduce others (Singh, 2011). Teaching the youth about the feelings and scenarios of seduction like seashore, as it is the background visual in this Ad. The scene of drinking slice juice by Katrina, it is almost similar to the way of seducing and drinking alcohol in the movies or in funny alcohol-based ads. The concept is if you do not drink alcohol, still you can pursue the attention of your target.

In the advertisement of Ariel, the emphasis to make clothes clean, which results to wash them twice or more. It will consume more time, money, electricity and energy. Time: In the time, consumer wash clothes twice from other washing powder, they can wash twice of that in the same time from Ariel. Money: they have to use more washing powder for two rounds rather than one. The same goes for Electricity and Energy (Brand synario, 2016).

The audience denoted the wide acceptance of Ariel in the majority. If they are not in this majority, the audience is simply out of Fashion because "Majority is Authority!"

The huge cast of Doctors shown in the advertisement for safeguard soap. It shows that all the doctors recommended and in favor of Safeguard Soap. It is very rarely seen in real life that doctors recommend soap or other commercial products rather they prescribed medicines. Is it legal for any professional especially doctors to be the ambassador of any commercial product in real life? If the doctor is not recommending safeguard then he/she is not at all updated, people must change the doctor or change the soap (Sachwani, 2016).

The hidden message is if a child is having a cough or other hygienic problem before taking them to the doctor people must change their soap.

In this advertisement of Head and Shoulders Cool Menthol, a "fear appeal" is used. Everyone wants to achieve their goal in life and want to win the race of life; if they want to win, they have to use Cool Menthol. If they do not, they would probably fail (Adage, 2012).

In the context, they subliminally described how the scorching summer and hot weather make your mood lost, also cause lack of concentration and focus.

The overall theme of the advertisement for Blueband is very catchy and attractive. It includes all the naughtiness of a child in his growing age but if it is observed, it will be obvious that hidden message in the visuals of this advertisement is given that is about the Diet and Breakfast (Hasnain, 2016). As we all know that the morning meal nowadays in our culture is turning rapidly from "Paratha" towards Bread. The showing of Paratha instead of Bread needs to be studying there must be two things, 1. To generate the new market and 2. To turn the Bread and Butter culture again into Paratha.

If we consider the first clause to be the subliminal message, it will be decoded as the butter is widely in use with Bread and the target is to capture the market where Paratha is a necessity in Breakfast. If the second concept is considered, it says, if people want to see your kid growing faster and smarter you must maintain a healthy diet, which is Paratha, Bread just, cannot fulfill the nutrition requirement of your child.

The main idea of any advertisement is to promote the product but on the other end sometimes, these are subliminal messages, which can change the patterns of our life unnoticeably.

For a healthy life, Habib Cooking Oil is best for maintaining a diet plan, and that is fair enough. The people who are diet conscious do not strictly need to follow a diet plan they can simply use this oil.

In this advertisement of Cadbury Dairy Milk, the love of Husband and Wife and the romantic side of their relationship is portrayed. However, unnoticeably somewhere it is changing the practice of cultures such as proposing a girl with a Flower or Flower bouquet (ukessays, 2016). If the dialogue is focused, the subliminal messages are observed such as, “Bhai Larki manage kia?” and he replied, “Har bar hi maanjati ha”. Means he used to propose her by giving her Chocolate instead of Flowers and she cannot refuse.

If the subliminal message is, if a girl is not accepting marriage proposal then boys must propose her with Chocolate instead of Flower, and she will never refuse the proposal.

The main subliminal message of this ad of Pepsi is to “Disobey”. It means disobeying for the Pepsi it is legal. The tricks of the cricketers to escape from the hotel room are catchy, funny and attractive but not ethical (Global Samosa, 2016). “The existence of Pepsi is always been in the light because of its roots are from Israel, their advertisements are also been controversial in the history and until now as well they thought to be made Subliminally. So, they can achieve that height in the society for which they are struggling for”, Narrated by Ms. Madiha Shah, an Advertiser working in Orient Ad Agency.

The slogan of Pepsi in this Advertisement is subliminally showing the disobedience itself stating, “Ye Dil Mange Abhi!” it means the desire of having Pepsi is not to desire it must turn into craving and if you are craving for Pepsi then you must get it. Do not wait for anyone or anything. If you want it now you should get it now.

In the advertisement of lux, the class system has shown. These ads create appeal in people to have skin like an actor (Keim, 2016). The new trend or fashion in the Model class is of Fragrance and

you can smell like the models by selecting any fragrance from the “New Lux Star Collection”. The picturization and the storyline of this advertisement are very impressive in the sense that its subliminal message is highly needed to be demonstrated or elaborated to the masses in our society.

In the advertisement of Kenwood, the character of the father is shown most prominent. For every Parent, both the Father and Mother is important to spend time with their upbringing of children (The wire, 2016). Fathers are especially focused because they normally have the most hectic and busy life in their family, so they must spend some time with children. Instead of the usual compulsory jingle or the mandatory celebrity endorsement, this and has opted to find their own road. Noticing the surplus of fake and cosmetic communication in the market, they’ve bravely differentiated their product by going the emotional route (Strahan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2002). The subliminal message is simple,

People are not perfect; do not expect them to be. If people want qualified performance, use our machines.

Aside from the strategy, the execution is spot on, the actors used are just like any husband or wife in our society, there is no music, throughout the ad, to manipulate the audience, the music is there to add effect and not to cover up a weak concept. Women have been decrying the use of immaculate and robotic homemakers. They voiced their desire to be shown in a better light. This ad does not focus on mistakes of wives but considering qualified work form husband, which is unprecedented for our males dominated the market.

Coca-Cola Pakistan has introduced an entirely different concept in the country via Share A coke Ad Campaign this Ramadan with the tag line ‘Jab Kahiankahitoukhulikhushian’. The TVC invites you to express your love with 20 of your most loved relationship, terms, and titles, by sharing a customized bottle of Coke with

them. The concept is sharing feelings with loved ones by sharing a coke is very touchy (Jan, 2015).

The message is clear, concise and the idea is simple yet effective. The overacting could have been toned down a bit.

The subliminal message of this ad is to express love with anyone who is close to them.

Coke has always been about spreading happiness and peace and this Ramadan also they spread happiness by encouraging loved ones to come closer. There are no brand ambassadors so no comparison there.

In the advertisement of Surf excel, the tagline was criticized too much, which was “daagh to achy hoty hain”. It means stains are good. In addition, Surf Excel is so good at cleaning, I do not mean people do not need to worry about getting dirty, this tagline created a huge impact on people many feedback was receive. Although this advertisement was about the growth, up bring, and self-learning of the child but it does not mean that making themselves dirty is the last option. The awareness regarding the cleanliness and habit to be clean should have been the first aim of the detergent powder. The overall scenario of the ad projected the promotion of filthy habits. However, the criticism and acceptance of this campaign had gone successful. Consequently, after receiving much criticism, the marketers changed the strategies and tagline if the Surf Excel.

In the advertisement of Coca-Cola, the emotional appeal is created by providing celebrity endorsement of Abdul Sattar Edhi. Moreover, the Ramadan campaigns of 1714 in which Fawad Khan was the main lead, created a huge impact on people. The subliminal message of this ad is to promote, charity, peace and fancy poetry (Jan, 2015). Since last year Coca-Cola has broken away from its traditional high-budget Ramadan Television commercial (TVCs) shot in Turkey which featured *naats*. It seems

that some brands are tired of being a symbol of sophistication and class. They are ready to compromise on their brand essence to achieve recall.

In the advertisement for Lipton, humor is created. The typical Pakistani journalism is highlighted where the news was about critical this such as inflation and an increase in the price of fuel. It was an entertaining advertisement and it creates appeal and motivation regarding the product just because of humor by kings of humor (Shoaib Qureshy, 2016). This advertisement reduces the stress level of people whenever it is telecasted on TV. However, the product type and storyline did not match. This resulted in dissatisfaction in people and true fans of Lipton.

The subliminal message of that advertisement was looking like doing irony and sarcasm of political and economic condition.

In the advertisement of Qmobile, Indian actor Kareena Kapoor was starred. It was an expensive commercial in the history of Pakistan. This particular ad portrayed Kareena Kapoor in such a way that if a celebrity like Kareena Kapoor is using this smartphone then for sure it might have some unique qualities in it. In addition, it tried to target the high class of society.

Tarang is Pakistan's first milk that is only for tea whitening. It changes the thinking system of the consumer with its hilarious advertisement. They always make ads based on Lollywood filmi style use the star power of Lollywood celebs, and with this formula, Tarang creates a massive consumer for them (Shaikh, 2015). **The central idea of this commercial is wrong. If men come back home after 8 hours long duty and go upstairs drink tea in the hot summer season then start dancing with someone's wife, this concept is absurd. However, the subliminal message is cultivating dance, entertainment, and absurdity in culture.**

In the advertisement of Ufone, humor is the basic tool to target youth (Mankani, 2012). Ufone again presents a new theme, which is "Donkey on Bed" instead of a mattress. The owner asks his servant to bring soft mattress "Gadda" but the servant brings a donkey "gadha" instead of a mattress. Ufonewanna shows that they are the only one in Pakistan who provide soft and clear voice services on call no one else can provide it.

The subliminal messages are many such as showing Pathan as a stupid person or a person, who does not have common sense; clarity is a voice is essential in dealing in call etc.

Conclusion

This research article was about the impact of subliminal message in commercials. In this article, the background of the significance of advertising and the impact of its persuading power were discussed. Moreover, the influential nature of advertising, the impact of advertisements on a mass audience were explained. The power of the subliminal message and its direct and indirect impact were focused. In addition, the impact of advertising on decision-making was investigated. With the help, this research article it was concluded that advertising plays a vital and essential role in the development of brand image in the minds of the audience the advertising helps is selling service, goods, and ideas. In addition, advertising is used to create an impact on people in order to influence, inform and aware then regarding the brand, product, and services. They need to understand any aspects of ads, and their impact so that they can easily build goodwill and idea or inspiration in people to do decision-making. The information in the advertisement is about the qualities of the product, Availability, and reasonability.

Subliminal advertising is beneficial for marketers and specialists. Although it is constructive for the companies or advertisers keeping, it hidden is the most significant part in transmitting a subliminal message or subliminal message. The Pakistani

commercials are doing a great job in conveying the subliminal message. Almost every advertisement is about creating appeal, and after analysis of the Pakistani commercials, it is estimated that the trend of subliminal messages in advertising will remain the same. However, it is an effective source of attracting people but also it can destroy the essence of advertisements. The purpose of the advertisement is providing information but the trend of the subliminal message may fail to transmit the purpose of the products.

Hence, this research proved that subliminal message influence the people in decision-making. Pakistani commercials do creates direct impact on people, and last but not the least the subliminal message is far more influencing than a direct message.

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