

Ethics and Marketing Policy. Aggressive Advertising

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Abstract: *Both ethics and advertising are two key elements of a business, whether small or large. Without ethics in a company, there would be no honesty, fairness and positive image of it; without advertising, the market duration of a company would be impossible. I decided to address this particular topic mainly due to the special significance of ethics in today's business world. The paper consists of a theoretical and a practical part. The former provides information about ethics and marketing, with a focus on the reasons why the use of aggressive advertising can be considered unethical. The latter presents the findings I arrived at by analysing instances of aggressive advertising encountered in the online environment. The case study was based on a questionnaire and a content analysis as research methods, in an attempt to find out how aggressive advertising is perceived and why it may be considered unethical.*

Keywords: *advertising, aggressive advertising, business, company, ethics.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, when most people spend time on the Internet for one reason or another, it is understandable that more and more companies choose to promote themselves online. But what happens when the online environment is overwhelmed by advertising?

Out of the desire to make their products or services known and to attract customers, and this way, to have continuity and a long duration on the market, many companies resort to promotion through aggressive advertising. From an ethical point of view, this type of advertising can be questioned for various reasons. It is well known that ethics deals with the principles and moral issues that may appear in a company. "At first glance, it is easy to understand that 'business ethics' is an area that seeks to clarify issues of a moral nature that currently arise in the work of economic agents." (Crăciun, 2005, p. 24; my translation)

Repeating messages at too short intervals, creating a false image of the product, using superlatives such as "the best", assaulting personal space and the like, can result in a negative public attitude towards the product or company presented. Therefore, companies must highlight the needs of customers and respect their personal space, their desires and their expectations from the company.

However, even though a large number of Internet users find repetitive ads aggressive, annoying and even unethical because the time they appear on device screens is short, this type of paid advertising is absolutely necessary when it comes to the free access of users to various platforms such as Youtube, as it provides an important source of sponsorship.

The topic of this paper is highly relevant as ethics and advertising play special roles in any business. What is more, the virtual environment is very accessible today, making possible the contact between the public and various companies or new products. The public's attitude towards the

aggressive advertising present in the online environment is also important in the company-customer relationship.

The main goal of this study was to find out what people think about this type of aggressive online advertising, whether it is of interest to them, whether they consider it ethical or not, and why.

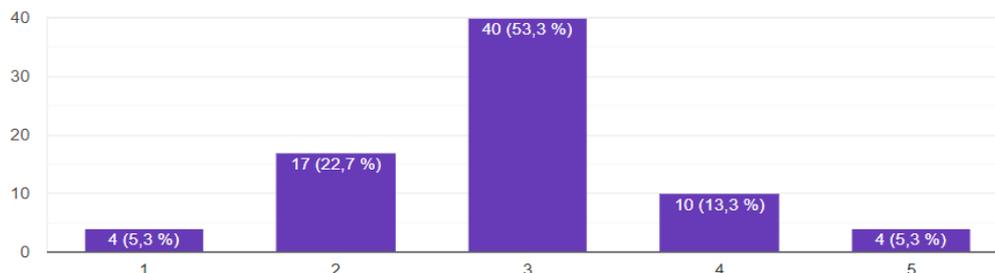
2. Research methods

The questionnaire was the primary research method used in the case study. It was distributed to 75 internet users. I chose this research method to find out the respondents' opinion about aggressive online advertising, people's interest in this type of advertising, and their ethical perception of aggressive advertising.

The questionnaire included questions regarding people's opinion about companies using aggressive advertising as a method of promotion, the reasons why aggressive advertising is not considered ethical, as well as other questions regarding this type of online advertising. Some of the most relevant results are presented in what follows.

For instance, Figure 1 below shows the results for question 16, which asked respondents to rank the extent to which aggressive advertising in the online environment was ethical, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 - not at all ethical, 5 - very ethical).

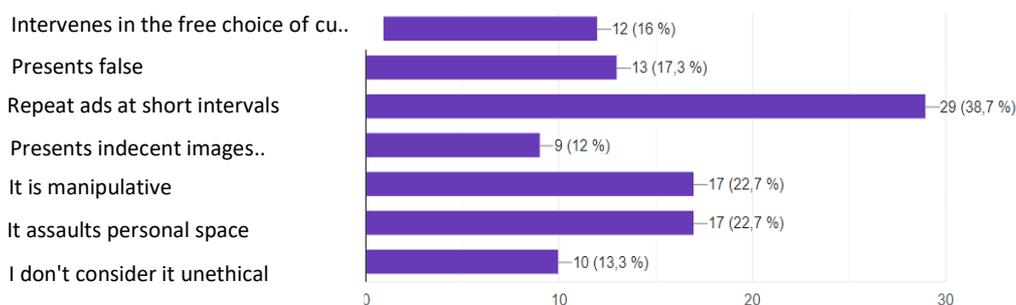
Fig. 1 How ethical is aggressive online advertising?



Number 3 on the scale gathered the most answers (40), followed by number 2 (17 answers), number 4 (10 answers), and numbers 1 and 5 (4 answers each). This means that there are certain reasons why aggressive advertising is considered unethical by most respondents.

Question 17 in the survey asked the respondents to select the reasons why they did not consider this type of advertising ethical. As shown in Figure 2, most respondents (38.7%) believe that aggressive online advertising is unethical because the ads are repeated too often at short intervals. Alternatively, 22.7% of the respondents think that this type of advertising is manipulative and invades one's personal space. Other reasons why aggressive advertising can be considered unethical are: it presents false information/characteristics of the product (17.3%), it intervenes in the free choice of the customer (16%), it shows indecent content (12%). Only 13.3% of the respondents do not consider it unethical.

Fig. 2 Why might aggressive online advertising be unethical?



Content analysis (paid ads)

The fact that the ad frequency ranks as the main reason for online advertising to be perceived as aggressive among the respondents in the survey aroused my interest in choosing a second research method,

namely, the content analysis of paid advertisements. Noticing that paid ads are repeated especially on the audio-video platform Youtube, I decided to spend 2 hours a day on this platform, between June 8 and 11, to examine and analyze some ads in terms of content.

I watched music videos (about 3-4 minutes) and various tutorials, which lasted about 10 minutes. Some of the recurring commercials that I noticed were for the trading company EToro and for the telecommunications brand Telekom. Another company that promotes itself through paid, repetitive ads, is Betano, an online casino. All these companies had several distinct advertisements broadcast during the analysed period, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 1 Number of distinct ads and total number of ads

Company	Number of distinct ads broadcasted on the platform	Total number of ads that appeared in the analyzed interval
EToro	5	32
Telekom	2	16
Betano	3	14

The following table shows the content analysis of the advertisements mentioned above.

Table 2 Content of advertisements

	EToro	Telekom	Betano
Style of expression			
Formal			
Colloquially	x	x	x
Colors	Use the colors of the brand, green (which is considered the color most easily perceived by the eyes) and white. Green expresses <u>calm</u> , and white purity.	Uses bright colors (magenta, which expresses harmony and change/ emancipation, which transmits to the receiver the idea of transformation).	The advertisement uses predominantly orange and white (orange conveys harmony and happiness).
The recorded images presents			
Real people	x	x	x
Animations			
Animals		x	x
Call to action (CTA)			
Verbal	x	x	x
Physical	x	x	x
Words that catch the public's attention	Repeating the idea "0 <u>commission</u> ".	"Everyone is here (expression that shows the public that EVERYONE uses Telekom services)". "Telekom has the biggest increase in mobile subscribers"	"The best mobile platform."

In contrast to the paid ads that appear on Google or Facebook based on our previous Internet searches and on our interests, these Youtube ads seem not to have a well-defined target audience or be related to our previous searches on this platform.

It is noteworthy that the Skip button appears only after 5 seconds of viewing the ads. Therefore, they can be closed only after the viewer has already been "acquainted" with the product/company presented. In terms of duration, all the ads lasted about 1-2 minutes. The paid ads appeared at the beginning of the music videos I watched, whereas in the case of the tutorials, which lasted about 10 minutes, the ads appeared along the way.

The respondents in the survey said that such advertisements, which are part of aggressive advertising, were misleading, even manipulative. As can be seen in the table above, the words most often used in the analysed advertisements are superlatives such as "best" and "largest", in order to induce the idea that the product/service presented is worth trying, guaranteeing benefits from calling the company.

Conclusion

Both ethics and advertising are two basic elements of any business. Any company, small or large, must pay attention to both elements, in order to have a long life on the market today.

The desires of the public, the expectations of customers towards companies as well as their personal space must be respected. The results of the questionnaire show that most respondents feel that aggressive, repetitive or insistent advertisements invade their personal space, which makes them develop a negative attitude towards them.

Another reason why aggressive advertising is considered unethical by respondents is the fact that it presents false information, and that it is

misleading because it induces the idea of a total benefit from the use of the service or product presented. The advertisements I analysed also played on this idea, by using superlatives like "the best".

Although nowadays companies choose to repeat ads very often to promote themselves, which may become annoying or be perceived as unethical, these paid ads are absolutely necessary for us to have free access to Youtube or other platforms and social networks. Paid ads are an important source of sponsorship for various social networks or frequently used platforms. Consequently, whether we choose to pay attention to them or just ignore them, they offer us, in one way or another, free access to the networks we use most often.

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