

Advertising: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Advertising is a major element of promotion tool of a company. Most of the companies spend considerable amounts of money on advertising approximately 25% of the total budget. Advertising is very crucial for increasing the revenue of an organization. But recently, some advertising makes false promises to attract the new customers to buy the product which is extremely prohibited in Islam. In this current paper, we tried to set some advertisement dimensions that are supported by Islam and also tried to judge some popular Ad of some recognized organization based on Islamic scale. In Islam, it is permitted to do business maintaining the doctrine given by Shariah. There should not be any deceptive practices, fraudulence, misrepresentation, coercion and injustice in measurement; and there should not be anything unfair. In this article the authors tried to find out the Islamic view points of advertising where the society will find advertising works the way it supposed to.

Key Words: Advertising, Islamic Perspective, Promotional Mix

1. Introduction

In the new millennium, the amazing growth of trade and commerce approaches both the profit and non-profit organization to the demand for huge promotion and communication as the people want to get the necessary information about goods and services they use.

Proponents of advertising argue that it is the lifeblood of business. It provides consumers with information about products or services and encourages them to improve their standard of living. It is also important to make marketing effective in the present highly competitive market. Advertising is defined as any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience. The definition contains six elements; **first**, advertising is a paid form of communication, although some forms of advertising, such as public service announcement (PSAs), use donated space and time. **Second**, not only is the message paid for, but also the sponsor is identified. **Third**, most advertisers try to persuade or influence the consumer to do something, although in some cases the point of the message is simply to make consumers

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aware of the product or company. **Fourth**, the message is conveyed through many different kinds of mass media, and **fifth**, advertising reaches a large audience of potential consumers. **Finally**, because advertising is a form of mass communication, it is also non-personal.

Advertising is a complex phenomenon as so many different advertisers try to reach so many different types of audience and contains three goals that are basically to inform, persuade and remind. The traditional conceptual model for creating any advertising or marketing communications message is the AIDA model; get attention, hold interest, arouse desire and obtain action. John Caples, the greatest copy writer extended the traditional concepts of marketing communication with the following principles that is, get attention, hold attention, create desire, make it believable, prove it is a bargain, make it easy to buy and give a reason to buy now. Advertising also can be explained in terms of the four roles it plays in business and in society:

The marketing Role: The marketing role of advertising is to carry persuasive messages to actual and potential customers. **The communication role:** Advertising is a form of mass communication. It transmits different types of market information to buyers and sellers in the marketplace. Advertising both informs and transforms the product by creating an image that goes beyond straightforward facts. **The economic role:** there are two points of view about how advertising affects an economy. In the first, advertising is so persuasive that it decreases the likelihood that a consumer will switch to an alternative product, regardless of the price charged. The second approach views advertising as a vehicle for helping consumers to assess value, through price as well as other elements such as quality, location and reputation. **The societal role:** advertising also has a number of social roles. It informs us about new and improved products and helps us to compare products and features and make informed consumer decisions whenever the ad of Islamic view is concern.

It is said in the Holy Qur'an,

“Allah has legalized trade and commerce and has prohibited interest” (source: Surah Baqarah)
The Holy Qur'an says, “And when the prayer is finished, then may you disperse through the land, and seek of the bounty of Allah.” (Surah Jumua).

Prophet Muhammad (Sm) said, “Nine-tenth of earning lie in trade and commerce.”

Islam is a complete code of life. It has its own directives to make a nation politically strong, socially sound, culturally unalloyed and economically prosperous.

From the very dawn of Islam, the followers of the Prophet (Sm) were encouraged in honest trade and commerce. Islam says that trading should not be mere profit oriented, rather through trading people must serve the needy people and therefore, the Almighty Allah. It means that trade should have two objectives

- i) to make reasonable profit in order to maintain one's family and

- ii) to supply the necessities to the people in exchange of money and thereby to meet their needs.

Trade and business, from Islamic viewpoint, must be done for the welfare of mankind.

Since, advertising is a part of business that provides information about the products or services hence it is also permitted in Islam. At the primary stage of Islam, the advertisement was basically the words of mouth communication. People used to visit different cities and when they were experienced with some types of goods/services; they spread the information to their neighbors after coming back to native place. In the present world, we find advertising in different ways by using some media, tools and techniques. The media can be radio, television, newspaper, magazine and internet. Tools may be some machinery and people whereas technique may be different types of messages or expressions. Hence, the advertising strategy is playing a significant role for earning healthy revenue, attracting the customers and as a distinctive competency of some organizations. Some organizations also believe in the slogan "Ads for expansion". In the present paper, we tried to determine a set of advertisement dimensions that are supported by Islam and also tried to judge some popular ads of some recognized organization with the help of Islamic view and concept.

2. Literature Review

Little work has been done so far to judge advertisement with Islamic perspective. Haque and Khan (2006) studied on advertising in Islamic perspective and developed a model for promotional mixes in marketing. They come out with some result based on the respondents' response. They also found that 97% people watch advertising. 40% of them watch always and 60% watch sometimes. 93% pay due attention to ads 7% do not. Ads make effect on purchasing decision of 83% people. As a media, Television has got the first priority to being the most effective media; Newspaper received the second priority, radio third and magazine fourth based on sample size of 30. Even though the sample size is very small but very significant as the study can show us the important of different media for sales promotion. Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi: India, pointed out that the majority functions of mobile phones are basically allowed in Islam, except some of which are related to photography or music, they are partly disallowed. From an Islamic point of view, e-business is accepted for individuals business transactions provided it is conducted according to the Shariah.---**Source:** arraydev.com

A study by Banwari Mittal found that consumers felt that less than one-quarter of TV commercials are honest and believable. Sharon Shavitt, Pamela Lowery, and James Haefner conducted a major national survey of over 1,000 adult consumers to determine the general public's current attitudes toward and confidence in advertising. They found that Americans generally do not trust advertising. Although they tend to feel more confidence in advertising claims when focused on their actual purchase decisions.

3. Methodology

For the purpose of the study, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. But, maximum concentration was given on secondary sources of data which had been collected from different sources like radio, television, from the body of the product, print media and from the sign boards situated in the different places of all over the country. The study uses ads collected from different sources to justify them by our determined set of advertisement dimensions. Some verses of Holy Quran and Hadith are used to judge the advertisement whether it is accepted or not in Islam. We have also analyzed the contents of current advertising.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1 Dimensions of Advertisement in Islamic View Point

Rafe Ibn Khadiz narrated, when asked to the Prophet (Sm), which income is the best?

“He replied who earned by his own hand and by doing the Halal way of trading.”

(Miskat Sharif)

“The businessmen who are truthful, upright and trustworthy will be accorded the status of great men like Ambia, Siddique and Shahid (Martyrs).” (Al-Hadith, Tirmizi).

Being a communication tool, advertising contains music, message, song, voice, sender, receiver, media, words, and sounds. Print ads contain headline, sub-headline, body copy, visual illustrations, layout etc. The majority of these things are basically allowed in Islam, except some of which are related to photography or music, they are partly disallowed. Islam has permitted the things that are useful for the community and forbade the things that are harmful. So, on the basis of its positive points it will be termed as allowed for those who use them in the right way. But, if anyone uses advertising for an anti-social, immoral or wrong way it will be regarded as sinful and forbidden. It is noteworthy that the advertising involves some dangerous stuff that is principally not liked in Islam. Most important of these are music, which arouses carnal desires and inflames sensual passions, is prohibited in Islam. Thus, the songs that contain such attributes are disliked. The advertisements that are based on songs or that indicate to songs fall in the same category and hence are disallowed.

The Glorious Qur'an and Hadith have categorically dismissed music. The Quran says: “And of mankind is he who purchases idle talks (i.e. music, singing, etc.) to mislead (men) from the Path of Allah without knowledge, and takes it (the Path of Allah, the Verses of the Qur'an) by way of mockery. For such there will be a humiliating torment”.

While in a number of traditions the Prophet (Sm) warned us against music. He counted spread of dance and musical instruments', among many things, a sign of Qiyamah (Doomsday).

Hazrat Ali (Raz.) reports that the Prophet (Sm) said: "When people start taking 'spoils of war' unduly, occupying trust, considering Zakat as tax, seeking the knowledge of religion for the

sake of the worldly gain, obeying wife other than mother, approaching friend and distancing father, making noise in mosques, when the sinner ones rule people and the leader is the lowest one, when a man is honored due to his mischief, when singer women and music is common, when wine is drunk and when the following people start cursing their predecessors then wait for red wind, earthquake etc.”

The Prophet (Sm) said that Allah has sent him as mercy and guide for mankind and He commanded him to destroy all the musical instruments, idols, crosses and all the trappings of ignorance. Recently, songs and dances are used in advertising as like as film styles; it is absolutely prohibited by Islam.

The Qur'an, the holy scriptures of Islam and complete code of human being does not prohibit advertising per se. In North Africa, the Levant (the countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean sea) and the Golf states, one sees posters, bill boards, print media displays and messages on the electronic media that in the variety of ways promote the Islamic faith. In the post-revolutionary Iran and other conservative middle east states, specific aspect of faith are promoted by a variety of print and electronic means. Five times per day in the Muslim world, loudspeakers on mosques call the faithful to prayer (Haque and Khan, 2006). Therefore Islam has no objection to use media, objects and messages. But ad in Islamic perspective has significant different than the general advertisement. In Islamic view ad must have certain spiritual value, safe, sound and obviously not to harm the social value, not to destroy the moral base of the people, but to ensure all sorts of welfare (Khairyah) and should have objective to be benefited in the life of the earth and life hereafter. According to our analysis, we could able to find out few dimensions (see table-1) that must be present in Ads in Islamic perspective even though the list of dimensions is not exhaustive.

Table-1: Dimensions of Ads in Islamic Perspective

Precise Statement	Transparent
Prohibited elements as a promotional tool	Avoid Nudity
Persuasive	

4.2 Precise Statement

Advertising objective is a specific statement about a planned advertising execution in terms of what that particular advertisement is intended to accomplish. But unfortunately, a number of studies have shown a general mistrust of advertising among customers. Banwari Mittal found that consumer felt that less than one -fourth of TV commercials are honest and believable.

Advertising in general exaggerate their offerings.

Number of respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
200	146	-	4	37	-

Sources: Field survey, 2010

In our study, 73.043% respondents were agreed that advertisement in general exaggerate their offerings. That means in many cases, advertising makes false promises which is absolutely prohibited by Islam. In some cases, advertisers amplify their messages more than what they actually have, to attract the attention of the respondents.

You should not promise to do something which is beyond your limit.

Good advertising should never promise more than it can deliver (Belch & Belch, 2004)

4.3 Transparent

In the present study, it is found a very less number of respondents (10.43%) think that the advertising provides all accurate information regarding products or services. Most of the respondents (81.74%) felt that advertising provides wrong information regarding something which makes the ad unacceptable by Islam.

The advertising provides all accurate information regarding products or services.

Number of respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
200		21	15	164	

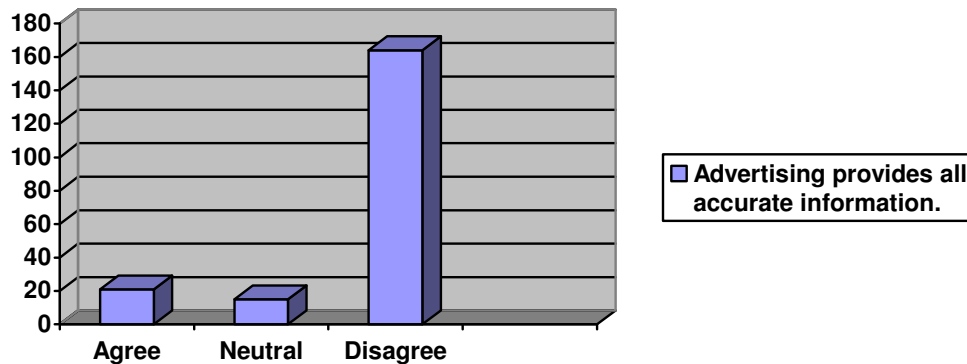


Figure: advertising provides all accurate information

Hence, there is only one option to satisfy the objectives of the advertisement; media should be very much transparent and honest. In Quran, it is mentioned-

“And our duty is only to proclaim the clear message” (Yassin: 17)

“Allah sees well all that they do.” (Al-Baqarah: 96)

“And O my people! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are due. Commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief.” (Al-Quran 11:85)

“The person who performs job in a complete, ideal, qualitative and sound way will earn manifold blessings of Allah.” (Al-Hadith).

Therefore, Muslims must think twice before conveying any message to the others through ads. We have always given priority to life after death than the worldly life. It will not be wise decision to demonstrate the worldly materials to seem superior to the hereafter. There is a warning from the almighty Allah “Always be transparent and honest about the message”.

4.4 Prohibited elements as a promotional tool

Actually, tobacco, alcohol and gambling are absolutely prohibited in Islam. Allah said that if a man took even a mouthful of wine, He would make him drink the same quantity of pus of the wounds of the people in Hell. In another verse in Quran, it is mentioned;

“Do not use prohibited elements as a promotional tool: And they learned what harmed them not what profited them and they know that the buyers of magic would have no share in the happiness of the hereafter and vile was the price for which they did sell their souls if they but knew”. (Al-Baqarah: 102). Most of the respondents (78.26%) think it is an appropriate to advertise product like tobacco, alcohol, wine and gambling etc.

Actually, it is appropriate to advertise product like Tobacco, alcohol, wine and gambling etc.

Number of respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
200	-	31	13	156	-

Sources: field survey, 2010

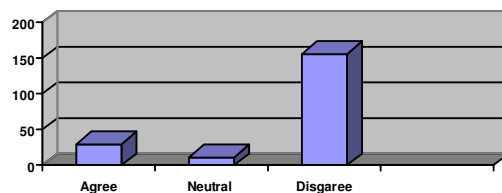


Figure: It is not an appropriate to advertise product like Tobacco, alcohol, wine and gambling etc.

Nudity: Advertising is often accused of creating and perpetuating stereotypes through its portrayal of women, ethical minorities and other groups. The portrayal of women in

advertising is an issue that has received a great deal of attention through the years. Critics have argued that advertising often depicts women as preoccupied with beauty, household duties and motherhood or shows them as decorative objects or sexually provocative figures.

Actually, openness of women is prohibited in Islam. Since, maximum people watch TV organizations spent more money for product or sales promotion through different ads in TV. Recently, in all most, all types of ads use women as celebrator whether these products are related to the women or not. In fact, maximum ads give concentration on too much bodily function in their ads which is unacceptable in Islam.

A woman in advertisement is acceptable in all cases.

Number of respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
200	-	31	13	100	56

Sources: Field survey, 2010

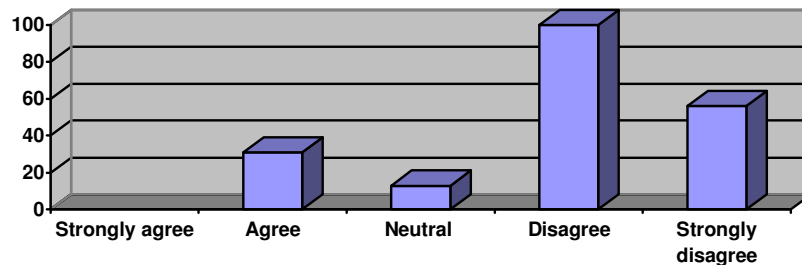


Figure: A woman in advertisement is acceptable in all cases.

In our study, 69.6% were disagreed to involve women in ads. A similar study done by Md. Shariful Haque and Md. Moazzam Hossain Khan (2006) also found 77% people don't like the openness of women in advertisements. Allah (SWT) declares in the Holy Quran:

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty.....And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms.....” (24:30, 31.)

“O prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their bodies (when abroad) so that they should be known and not molested” (33:59.)

We must remember that as acts like telling a lie, deceiving, backbiting, abusing, hurting etc are unlawful in general conditions, these things are unlawful on advertising too.

Persuasive

Effective advertising is persuasive. Persuasion usually occurs when there is a benefit for the consumer in addition to the marketer. A common criticism of advertising is that it manipulates consumers into buying things they do not need. Critics say that advertising exploits consumers and persuades them to buy things they do not need. In Qur'an, there is a warning. ***“Eat and drink but waste not by excess” (Qur'an- 7:31)***

Advertising makes people buy things They Don't Need A common criticism of advertising is that it manipulates consumers into buying things they do not need. Many critics say advertising should just provide information useful in making purchase decisions and should not persuade. They view information advertising (which reports price, performance, and other objective criteria) as desirable but persuasive advertising (which plays on consumers' emotions, anxieties, and psychological needs and desires such as status, self-esteem, and attractiveness) as unacceptable. Persuasive advertising is criticized for fostering discontent among consumers and encouraging them to purchase products and services to solve deeper problems. Critics say advertising exploits consumers and persuade them to buy things they don't need. Defenders of advertising offer a number of rebuttals to these criticisms.

The above mentioned dimensioned must be follow for allowing ads permissible in Islam. In the latter part, we have tried to analyze some advertisements (see table 2) given by various companies across the country.

Table: The advertisement should be straight forward.

No. of respondent	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
200		107	23	70	

Sources: Field survey, 2010

In some cases, the companies use advertising making too many claims to convince the customers and deceive people and do not disclose the defects of goods and always disclose the benefits of the products and services. In another Hadith the Prophet (Sm) said, “The seller, who sells his products without disclosing the defects of goods, earns the hatred of Allah and Angels curse him all the time”.

In another Hadith, Prophet (Sm) said, He, who deceives people, is not my follower”.

Before selling product, the seller must make the buyer aware of the defects in the product that means they should provide straightforward and accurate information through advertising.

Prophet Muhammad (sm) said, “before selling goods, the seller must make the buyer aware of the defects (if any) in the product. Without doing so, sale becomes “Na-Jayez’ (unlawful).

By analyzing these ads we found that there are immorality practices among these advertisements. Some advertisers use women in their ads that are not related to women. Some ads focus on beautification of women and bodily function of model that are absolutely prohibited by Islam. Some advertisers make false and over promise to attract the attention of the customers. Some advertisers hide some information about the products and services and do not disclose in front of the people. The ads which are analyzed for the study are;

Table-2: Analyzing ads in Islamic scale

Advertisements	Name of the advertisers	Comments
“Banking for the poor”	GRAMEEN BANK	Grameen Bank exploits the poor with high interest rate hiding the information of actual rate of interest. In fact, Interest is extremely prohibited in Islam
It’s time to fly Travel Loan	BRAC BANK	This ad encourages the people to travel from one place to another, although they do not have capacity to afford. That means it is to create need for travel that they do not need. This is fallen under the dimension of persuasive. More than that loan is highly discouraged in Islam
“Deshi Amer Besi Moja”	Pran Juice	There are some chemical that is used to produce Juice, but this company does not disclose this information. Fallen under exaggerated dimension.
Fair & Lovely is such kind of product that makes people complexion fair than they ever had before and just in four weeks.	Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.	Although it is very attractive advertisement to attract the audiences. But in some cases, it creates complexity in the skin. Fallen under exaggerated dimension.

5. Conclusion

From the above verses of the Holly Qur’an and the Al-Hadith, we can confirm that the trade or commerce is allowed in Islam but Riba or any unjust transaction is haram. The Holly Prophet (SAW) maintained those forms of transactions which were based on justice and fair play for all and prohibited all those forms of business transactions which were either unjust or

were likely to lead to quarrels and litigation, or resembled gambling or contained an element of Riba or deceit, or where profit of one was based on loss of another. Business is a great way of life that is supported by Islam. But Islam does not support any fraud, deception, sin in business. It is not allowed to trade those products that are not supported by Islam. We have found some unfair advertising¹, some of them called deceptive advertising². Generally, three categories of deception: i) unconscionable lies, in which completely false claims are made intentionally; 2) claims/fact discrepancies; in which some relevant qualifications of a claim are omitted, resulting in misrepresentation; and 3) claim/ belief discrepancies, in which no deceptive claim is made explicitly, but a deceptive belief is created. Some criticisms are like these that ads containing almost nude appearance of female doing a great harm to the society. These are being done under the banner of freedom of expression. But we should not forget that the freedom must have a boundary. Freedom should be controlled to ensure discipline. Prophet Muhammad (Sm) said, “The truthful, just and reliable businessmen will be honored like those of honest and martyrs” Al-Hadith.

So, factors to be considered in advertising from Islamic perspective are given below;

- Be honest; there is a proverb that Honesty is the best policy.
- Avoid false descriptions
- Do not mix the prohibited goods
- Do not use women as a model in advertising etc.

And our recommendations regarding the factors to be considered in advertising in Islamic perspective are as follows;

One: Be honest and, avoid false descriptions **second:** do not mix the prohibited goods **Third:** do not use women as a model in advertising **Fourth:** ads should carry the real information about the product. **Fifth:** product itself can be shown in the ads **Sixth:** consumer rights association should come forward with a much campaign for ethical advertising **Seventh:** advertising shall reveal the truth, and shall reveal significant facts, the omission of which would mislead the public **Eighth:** advertising claims shall be substantiated by evidence in possession of the advertiser and the advertising agency prior to making such claims **Ninth:** advertising shall refrain from making false, misleading, or unsubstantiated statements or claims about a competitor or his products or service. **Tenth:** advertising shall not offer products or services for sale unless such offer constitutes a bona fide effort to sell the advertised products or services and is not a device to switch consumers to other goods or services, usually higher priced. **Eleventh:** advertising of guarantees and warranties shall be explicit, with sufficient information to apprise consumers of their principal terms and

¹. An unfair ad is one in which the advertiser withholds information that, when not disclosed, could result in injuries to consumers

². A deceptive ad contains explicit or implicit claims or omissions that are likely to mislead a consumer acting reasonably under the circumstances.

limitations or, when space or time restrictions preclude such disclosures, the advertisement shall clearly reveal where the full text of the guarantee or warranty can be examined before purchase **Twelfth:** advertising shall avoid price claims that are false or misleading, or savings claims that do not offer provable savings etc.

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