

# Online Advertising: Guiding or Misguiding Customers?

## Outline

### 1. Introduction:

Thesis-statement: Online advertisements, which have changed marketing, are linked to guiding and misguiding customers. The majority of online ads misguide consumers through inconspicuous tactics. While some online campaigns do guide people, they are not entirely truthful.

### 2. Overview of the working of online advertisements

### 3. Online advertisement is misguiding customers

- a) Companies are using 'green-ad' campaigns to cover up their environmentally harmful businesses
- b) Brands use advertising puffery to project the benefits of their products.
- c) Businesses are misguiding the youth by targeted online marketing.
- d) Products presented as beneficial for health have hidden health costs.
- e) Through online ads, companies misguide about the running cost of their goods.

### 4. However, some online ads do guide the customers

- a) There are companies which are promoting environment friendly practices through online ads.
- b) Reputable brands are delivering the promises they make in online advertisement.

- c) Targeted advertisement by NGOs and TGBs is aimed at increasing awareness.
- d) Online ads by the government departments are used to prevent harms to health.
- e) Particular companies truly depict the cost-effectiveness of their products and services through online ads.

## 5- Nevertheless, guidance provided by online ads is not entirely truthful

- a) Online ads do not show the environmentally destructive process for making environment friendly products.
- b) Online advertisements hide the humanitarian cost of apparently reliable products.
- c) Targeted online marketing aimed at raising awareness often has hidden agendas.
- d) Online ads by the government departments often have political goals.
- e) In the long run, online advertisement about cost effectiveness turns out to be a lie.

## 6- Conclusion:

# Essay

Humans are susceptible to deception through misguidance veiled as guidance. Adam and Eve ate the Forbidden Fruit and were exiled from paradise. They were misguided into eating that fruit by Satan. Today, online advertisements have taken up the role of misguiding people. Companies use inconspicuous marketing tactics to deceive customers. 'Green-ad' campaigns are used to cover up the environmentally harmful businesses. Advertising puffery exaggerates the benefits of a product. Targeted online marketing is a tool to misguide the youth. Alarmingly, the products presented as beneficial for health have hidden health costs. Similarly, apparently cheap products have a high running cost. However, some online ads do guide their customers. There are companies which are actually promoting environmentally feasible practices. Reputable brands use online ads to truly guide people. Non governmental organizations (NGOs) and, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and the state departments use online advertisement for public awareness. Also, particular companies back the claims which they make in online advertisements. Nonetheless, guidance provided by online ads is not entirely truthful. Information regarding environment destruction and humanitarian cost are often concealed. There are hidden agendas and political goals in these ads. In the long run, false claims

Lies propagated through online advertisements reveal themselves.

Online advertisement works through internet. Since, the emergence of social media platforms, online ads have become the major tool of marketing. Companies use images or short videos of their products in online ads. Users of social media and internet encounter several ads on daily basis. An important example, in this respect, is YouTube's ads policy. Any person can use this platform to promote his products by paying in dollars. Depending upon the amount, YouTube shows ads to its users. This shows how online advertisement works.

In the contemporary era, online advertisement is misleading customers. First and foremost, companies use 'green-ads' campaign to cover up their environmentally harmful businesses. Due to increase in public awareness about climate change, 'green-ads' are increasingly being incorporated in advertisements. Over-all, people prefer products or services from companies which are not harming environment. To ~~sell~~ appear appealing to public, various companies falsely project themselves to be environmentally friendly. In June 2023, Shell's green-ad campaign was banned in UK, as reported by the Guardian, due to

deliberately misguiding people. Hence, companies are ~~misgu~~ using online ads to cover-up their environment unfriendly practices.

Apart from ~~covering~~ hiding environment damage through online ads, brands use advertising puffery to exaggerate the benefits of their products. Puffery refers to the harmful exaggeration of advantages of a product. This creates false perception in the mind of customers. They are enticed into making a purchase. According to Larry Seigel in his book "Criminology," puffery is a criminal practice which is deliberately designed to misguide people. He considers sentences such as "the world's best" to show how companies use this tactic. Therefore, online ads using puffery are misguiding people.

Along with advertising puffery, targeted online advertisement is misguiding the youth. Targeted advertisement involves precision based sharing of ads. A specific population is targeted for which the product is produced for. This misguides people as they are repeatedly showered with ads which eventually result in consent generation. As per Alcohol and Drug Foundation, "Alcohol ads on social media target teens and young people." It further states that ease of online buying

complement such ads by quick purchasing of alcohol. This shows how targeted ads misguide customers.

Besides targeted marketing, products presented as beneficial for health in online ads have hidden health costs. It is often seen observed that various products are presented as healthy food items. They provide an alternative to people who are health conscious. However, this is a mere tactic by processed food manufacturers. For example, "Diet Coke" by Coca Cola Company is depicted as fit for consumption owing to no sugars in it. An artificial sweetener Aspartame is used for ~~sure~~ taste in Diet Coke. In 2023, World Health Organization declared Aspartame as "a carcinogen". Hence, online ads misguide people by hiding the negative health impacts of certain products.

In addition to misguiding about health benefits of a product, companies misguide about the running cost of their goods. People are inclined towards products that offer value for money. Many companies exploit this dispensation of people by claiming their products to be cost effective. However, the running cost of such goods ~~prove to~~ is becomes a burden. An important example is Tesla Cars. Apparently they appear to offer

an alternative to fossil fuel based cars. Although expensive, Tesla cars are appealing for buyers. However, according to Wall Street Journal in June 2021, running cost of Tesla cars is 50 fold greater than the usual gasoline consuming cars. This also points towards the misleading role of online advertisement.

However, some online ads do guide the customers. There are companies which are promoting environment friendly practices through online advertisement. Recently, competition between various manufacturers has increased as far as environment friendly production is concerned. Companies are trying to guide people towards the right choice by asking them to buy their products. Online advertisement is the main channel for this. In October 2023, World Economic Forum displayed ad of RoRo Vessel. This vessel runs on Ammonium Fuel and is considered a zero-carbon emission cargo ship. Therefore, it can be stated that online ads are being used to guide people for environment friendly practices.

Promotion of environmentally friendly practices is followed by delivering the promises being made in online ads. Reputable brands showcase true quality and quantity of their goods in online

online advertisements. The reason is because they want to safeguard their reputation which is the main factor for sales. Customers also trust these brands and believe the words of their online ads. An important example is Mercedes, a German car manufacturing company. According to **Top Gear**, an acclaimed car-review-show of BBC, Mercedes deliver the promises which they make in the advertisements of their vehicles. Hence, reputable brands seek to guide people about their products.

From the guiding role of reputable brands flows the case of targeted marketing of by NGOs and IGOs for the sake of awareness. Non governmental and intergovernmental organizations used online advertisement for public services. They use it to educate people about a particular issue. The sole purpose of such ads is to guide people towards a solution. Since the beginning of 2023, World Food Programme is continuously running online advertisement to guide people for helping food crises in the African countries. This shows the guiding role of online advertising.

Foot steps of NGOs and IGOs awareness campaign through online ads



are followed by the government departments. All around the globe, governments are guiding people about the prevention of harms to health. They are using online advertisement for this purpose. The main factor behind this approach is the wide spread internet access. For example, time and time again, the government of Pakistan, in collaboration with World Health Organization, has run Polio Prevention Campaign through online ads. Therefore, online advertising is a source of guidance for the people.

Apart from being used as an awareness channel by the government departments, ~~per~~ online advertisement is used by companies to truly depict the cost effectiveness of their services and products. Such companies use online advertising as a means to win public trust. Therefore, these companies try to be as truthful as possible. In turn, customers, who are looking for cost effective services and products, prefer such manufacturers. Solar panel manufacturers manufacturing by China warrants attention in this regard. As per the Guardian in October 2023, Chinese solar panel companies are taking the international market by storm owing to their cost effectiveness. Hence, cost effectiveness is depicted in online ads by various companies.

Nonetheless, guidance provided by online ads is not entirely truthful. These ads do not show the environmental destruction for making of environment friendly products. Such products have flooded the domestic and the international markets. However, it is important to note that the process involved in manufacturing of 'green-products' are destroying ecosystems. For raw materials are acquired by ~~uprooting~~<sup>uprooting</sup> the habitats of various species. According to D.W documentary, a German news agency, excessive deforestation and mining in South Africa is being carried out to obtain Lithium for Lithium-Batteries required for the storage of renewable energy. Therefore, online ads are misleading by showing the complete picture.

Online advertising not only ~~covers~~ conceals the environmentally destructive process of manufacturing, but also hides the humanitarian cost of apparently reliable products. Most of the manufacturing of products by big brands involves human rights violations. The reason behind it is that the manufacturing of takes place in the third world countries, because of cheap labour. Sweatshop in China are case in point here. In March 2020, Forbes ~~established~~ published a study which

linked "Nike, Adidas and Apple" to "forced Uighur Labour" in China. Such humanitarian crises are not shown in online ads.

Along with the hiding of humanitarian cost, online ads aimed at raising awareness have hidden agendas. Online advertisement, especially targeted marketing, is carefully engineered agenda machine. Often, selling of product is its secondary goal. The primary aim is to ~~promote~~ change the ideology of laymen. It is done by gathering information which is then weaponized to change other one's views. That is exactly what Cambridge Analytica did in ~~March 2018~~ ~~the 2018~~ ~~the~~ US presidential elections. It ran online ads of personality quiz and collected data to use it to ~~for~~ ex-President Donald Trump's advantage. Hence, online ads misguide people.

Similar to hidden agendas in online advertising, is its political weaponization for achieving specific goals. Political parties often use online ads to ~~achieve~~ further their interests. These ads contain information about the governments projects for public welfare. However,

in reality, these ads are designed to promote a political party. During Barack Obama's presidency, "Get Covered" online ads and social media campaign was launched to promote Obamacare act. Under the cover of health care, it was designed to win congressional elections, as reported by The New York Times. This also depicts the misguidance spread by online advertising.

Other than promotion of political goals, online advertisements about cost effectiveness turn out to be a lie in the long run. Companies ~~mostly~~ make promote their product through online advertisement by bragging about the cost-effectiveness. Although, purchasing part is inexpensive, replacement part is far more costly. The information about the latter is deliberately omitted by companies. According to Harvard Business Review, July 2021, short life of solar panel make them far ~~costly~~ more expensive than the traditional sources of electricity. Moreover, the solar panel waste ~~is also~~ costly management is also costly. This is another illustration of misguidance by online ads.

In conclusion, online advertising is the mainstream marketing tool in the contemporary times. Its widespread usage is associated with misleading people. Companies use exaggerated claims in online ads to misguide people. Products projected as beneficial for customers often prove to be harmful. However, some online ads do guide the customers. Reputable brands, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations use online advertisement to guide people. The government departments often frequently use online ads for public service messages. Nonetheless, guidance provided by online ads is not entirely truthful. Companies omit information regarding humanitarian crises and environment destruction. At times, online advertising became an agenda machine. All of this ascertain the misleading role of online advertising.