Advertising Critique Essay, Research Paper

A critique on the impact of advertising in our society. Consider visuals and verbal or written language. (1000 words)

The impact of advertising on our society is a fiercely debated topic, and has been ever since the conception of advertising in its most basic form. There are negative and positive social and economic impacts upon society from advertising in its various forms. For instance, advertising promoting public welfare has a positive social impact upon society, whereas advertising portraying women as sex objects has negative social impacts. There are also positive economic impacts on society such as providing funding for the media and stimulating an active, competitive economy.

There are a number of proven ways to persuade the consumer that he or she needs the product being advertised. These methods of persuasion, instead of concentrating on the actual product, usually concentrate on the benefits that will be brought to the consumer. These benefits may include the hope of more money and better jobs, popularity and personal prestige, praise from others, more comfort, social advancement, improved appearance, or better health. For example, an automobile advertisement, as well as mentioning the mechanical attributes of the car, would most likely focus on the excitement, prestige and social advancement it may bring the buyer. This social advancement is very often sexual, or involving attraction of the other sex so the car advertisement may also mention the glamorous women/men that the consumer will attract with his/her fancy car.

Advertising has been blamed for a great variety of negative social impacts. One of the major criticisms received by advertising is that it forces people to buy things they don t really need, often by projecting negative emotions such as fear, anxiety or guilt upon the consumer. It is claimed that advertising plays with our basic human emotions and takes advantage of them, using them as merely another technique to sell goods or services. Advertising also encourages people to buy products by making them think that purchasing and consuming are the major activities of their lives. It is said to also evoke fears of inferiority upon the consumer by depicting the normal person as young, attractive, wealthy and successful. This may encourage a person to act on his or her desire for success and, for instance, go out and purchase that particular brand of make-up or deodorant hoping to emulate the seeming success of the person depicted in the advertisement.

In opposition, advertisers state that the public is intelligent enough to, and quite capable of, making up its own mind and will definitely not buy anything they don t want or need. People are not inclined to be swayed by false claims that they need a particular product, and will usually be very discriminating in what they take as being true, when it comes to advertising. In fact, advertisers would say that there are many positive social impacts on our society from advertising. Advertising can be used to increase awareness in society about particular issues, and in so doing, becomes a form of education. Anti drug advertising such as “It s OK to say NO”, and drink driving campaigns are just two examples of how society uses the advertising industry as a means to promote public welfare. Other forms of socially positive advertising include those advocating safe sex, thereby considerably slowing the spread of deadly STDs throughout the community.

As well as social benefits outlined in the previous paragraph, there are economic benefits experienced by society, as a result of advertising. Without advertising, the media, including newspaper, television, radio, etc, would be much less vigorous. Advertising provides revenue for commercial mediums which would otherwise need to be funded by the actual consumer of these mediums. For example, a newspaper would cost up to three times as much money (since advertising provides two thirds of the revenue of the print media), or all television, bar government funded networks, would be pay-TV (since nearly ALL revenue for television is provided by advertising, while the consumer provides no financial support except for providing the service of watching the advertising messages). So we can see a major economic infrastructure based around advertising, in which the big companies fund and subsidise the commercial media by way of advertising. The price a consumer may have to pay to receive very cheap, or even free news and entertainment may include sitting through a 30 second advertisement break while watching a prime-time television program, or flicking a couple of extra pages in a magazine to move through the advertisements to get to the articles. The Internet is based very heavily around advertising, and this is one of the major incentives for individuals and institutions to provide content online. Advertising is so important because it is extremely difficult and impractical to attempt to bill the consumer directly. Security issues involving credit card fraud and the sheer inconvenience and hassle surrounding minor financial transactions over the Internet have made it very undesirable for companies to charge the consumer for content.

Some may argue that the economic drawback of advertising in our society is that it raises the price of goods and services. The basis of this argument is that, while companies subsidise the mass media with advertising, we, the consumer, subsidise advertising by paying a grossly increased price for heavily advertised goods and services. For instance, a box of Omo washing powder costs around two or three dollars to produce, but the consumer might pay around seven or eight dollars. A large proportion of the difference obviously supports the heavy advertising television and print media campaigns. In response to this argument, it can be said that advertising stimulates a much more active economy, with vigorous competition between institutions, and higher buying rates of products which leads to lower product costs for the consumer anyway.

The effects upon society brought about by advertising come in mixed forms, depending on the purpose and execution of various campaigns. However, society as we know it is based very heavily upon advertising, and the negative social and economic impacts are not serious enough to outweigh the many positive social and economic effects on our society.