

PHILOSOPHY

The axiology of advertising

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Abstract. The article demonstrates one of the attempts of understanding the advertising as a multiple-vector phenomenon of the socio-moral system of modern society. The author of the article examines the spiritual and moral issues of the ratio of good, benefit, and beauty as the scale of values of modern promotional products on the basis of the wide scientific research.

Keywords: *advertising, promotional product, value, value priorities, needs, glamour, good, benefit*

The experience of philosophical comprehension of advertising in the field of social life and culture represents one of the latest trends in modern socio-philosophical science, which is focused on socio-cultural, transcultural, ethical and aesthetic issues, defining cross-cultural tendencies of society's attitude to the promotional product and its value-assessment priorities in nowadays cross-cultural space. All this contributes to the transfer of advertisement issues from the field of scientific knowledge (economics, psychology, sociology) to the field of social philosophy, and due to this modern philosophical theory actively operates with the concept advertising. Axiological analysis of the advertising phenomenon involves the study of spiritual and moral issues, where the correlation of good and profit in advertising occurs when these values, which replace the good with utility, are combined, and logic of moral thinking is replaced by the logic of discretion and expediency.

The purpose of this article is the socio-philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of advertising as a modern value-oriented paradigm in socio-cultural space.

Before proceeding to the socio-philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of advertising in socio-moral coordinates, let's examine the content of such philosophical category as "value".

The presence of values can be seen in any human activity, since exactly values constitute the deep basis of the individual's relation to the world, society and himself - because a person, who didn't lose the opportunity of choice, has not lost his or her essence, the subjective ability to choose and decide. Of course, in the process of perception of any information a person (buyer) influences on the system of sociological dialogism in the spiritual sense, but acceptance or rejection of anything always remains up to an individual. Values can be expressed in ideas as a definite way, a lifestyle or a certain way of human existence in the world or the way of relating to the world, which can be determinative in daily activities, actions, relationships, things, thoughts and language.

The fundamental definition of the notion "value", on which our further investigation of axiological aspect of advertising is based, sounds in the following way: "values – the phenomena of the external or internal world of people, interpreted by them from the standpoint of good or evil," [11, p. 53].

The author of "The Philosophy of advertising" B. Uchenova is convinced that in the basis of value axiology problem lies the study of the processes of "emotional experienc-

es" associated with negative or positive attitude to perceived objects, and can be positive, negative or neutral, which determines positiveness and negativeness of value.

It is well known that values are based on the foundation of needs, and their hierarchy depends on satisfying the needs of the base level [8, p. 153]. "Values are of particular importance for the creation of demands in the consumer's decision-making process and, moreover, they affect the way he or she defines the evaluation criteria, wondering whether this brand is assigned for him or her or not" [4, p. 343]. Basic values, such as the preservation of life, youth, and health, take first places in the list of preferences. It is not surprising that advertising of the vast majority of consumer products creates a seductive "shell" around the factual informational core, appealing to the satisfaction of basic needs and values of the audience.

No matter what is popularized by commercial advertising, ultimately, its purpose is to obtain additional income from increased sales. And in this striving for more profits the main contingent of advertisers does not hesitate before rising quite ordinary objects to the rank of super wanted as well as the profanation of really high values. Values such as love, truth, holiness, motherhood, are the basis of culture and are eroded under the pressure of market expansion. This attitude towards advertising is supported by German philosophers of the Frankfurt School M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, the North American philosopher E. Fromm, and British sociologist J. Keane.

Values may be a gaining of a person, as well as they can be created by the people themselves. Only people can determine a certain value for themselves and present themselves to the course of events, circumstances. Often something people choose for themselves as the value or see the meaning of their lives appears to be not something high and noble because the choice depends on the subjective human's perception. "If the main sense of the human existence in the world was to satisfy organic and cultural needs in the articles of consumption, the production of such articles would not take the character of the increasing race.... The demands of people in the so-called consumer societies have exceeded the limits of natural and reasonable needs. The main requirement is often the demand "to have and to have" [1, p. 140]. Of course, the quality of products is an important component of the quality of life, but not the only one. As an exception from general rule one part of the society, living mostly with spiritual interests (writers, artists, scientists, people with passion for creativity), very indirect-

ly depends on the quality of surrounding objects, as they are guided by the principle: "What you can do is more important than what you have". These people are well aware that advertising as such, being one of the derivatives of "glamor", is an element of commercial culture ("I spend, therefore I exist"). It actively produces and broadcasts a variety of images that seduce and charm not for the sake of charm itself, but to obtain public approval, acceptance and commercial benefits, in other words, we can observe the degradation of the content for the benefit of crystallization of everything external and placing of idealized content in a beautiful socially attractive shape.

Today axiological aspects play a fundamental role in the advertising process, both at the stage of creation of the product and at the stage of its circulation in society. Qualification, mastery, and efficiency of creative participants of advertising process are directly correlated with their abilities to recognize the hierarchy of values of different public groups and to build creative strategies in accordance to that.

Among the famous Ukrainian philosophers who pay attention to the phenomenon of advertising socio-moral problems O.P. Protsenko can be marked out, she interprets the advertising as "a unique ultimately phenomenon of modern social activity, an essential attribute of culture and civilization" [9, p. 55], states that only "genuine advertising" belongs to the assemblers of spiritual values of people, which allows to enrich them with the practical techniques of good deed associated with care, support, and attention. This kind of advertising communication represents the spiritual component through the system of real actions, emphasizing the involvement of the person to someone or something, giving a kind of grotesque touching to the process of accomplishment of good intentions or actions. This is a set of stable ideas about good and bad, unacceptable and compulsory, approved and condemned with the social norms, which, for example, in the A. Maslow's concept is referred to the skills that are realized in behavior. Their role from the author's point of view is dual as "the skills are at the same time necessary and dangerous, helpful and harmful. They, definitely, help us to save some time and energy, but what is the cost! They serve as the main means of adaptation and at the same time make it more difficult. A certain skill gives us a prepared solution of the problem but ultimately prevents a clear, creative thinking, in other words, hinder to find a solution of a new problem. Helping us to adapt, the skill at the same time limits the ingenuity and creativity of thinking, in other words, does not allow us to adapt the world to ourselves" [8, p. 297].

In the line with the proposed argumentation it is important not to lose sight of the essence of advertising, which is synthetic by its nature, i.e. it contains both the large share of the truth, and the elements of masking its (the truth's) excessive nudity. At the moment when the advertisement reaches the recipient's perception appears something, which is noted for the sign of the spiritual phenomenon, and it is commonly called an illusion. This is an emotional experience of certain opportunities, the concentration of hopes and fantasies of the individuals or community regarding the improvement of the elements of the world or themselves. Concerning this subject, Z. Freud wrote that the illusion is the "realization of the oldest, most persistent, and the strongest desires of mankind. The secret of their

strength lies in the strength of these desires" [13, p. 146]. The illusion is subjective; it is formed in the inner world of the person by mobilizing the reserves of imagination and "warming" of the emotional state of the person. The illusion is often called the imaginary satisfaction of desire, the result of ignorance, wrong beliefs, and explained with the lack of sober rationality and criticism in this or that person. But there is another, positive, side of the illusion. This is a temporary or long-term maintenance of the peace of mind; sometimes it is a powerful stimulus to the productive activity, the results of which may be useful. This is an activation of imagination, fantasy. The illusion, as we see, can be considered as a preventive softener in the collision of people coming into their lives with brutality and often with the cruel life circumstances.

While discovering the socio-moral question regarding the impact of the power of advertising on the spiritual life of society the attention should be paid to some special features, which the studied phenomenon has. In this regard, many acute and controversial issues of advertising are closely related to the nature of the concepts of decent and indecent, permissible and impermissible, moral and immoral in the broadcast of advertised products. Today a repulsive effect often takes place, quite sophisticated consumers can feel a sense of "constraint" and discomfort when viewing the finished products of promotional activities, which cross the border and the measure of what is permitted, for example, advertising of personal hygiene products, certain drugs, and so on. Some creators of advertising projects (mostly with low-threshold social responsibility), being in a constant search of productive-eccentric moves, shift the borders of decent to the obsessive disallowability, and even complete immorality and the "aspiration which goes too far and, so to speak, pours over the edge in the wishes or deviations from the straight path are not enough kept in mind, of course, cross the borders and the measures" [15, p. 186]. It must be added that it is always possible to find the products and goods that belong to the promising and at the same time frightening field of advertising (for example advertising of toilet paper, tampons, contraceptives, etc.). On one hand, they are really designed to meet the important needs of people, but on the other hand – they have a nature of social "taboo". However, we should recall that the meaning of the term "taboo" has received an expanded interpretation and is used as a synonym for the word "prohibition". Probably this is not entirely true, as the taboo is not just a ban, but a traditional, ritual ban, which arises out of the rationally inexplicable experience of any association. Strictly speaking, the taboo is a traditional ban imposed on a certain object, action, word, the violation of which is punishable by inexplicable, supernatural powers. Taboo is one of the mechanisms of self-preservation of the kind. It is necessary in the case of the removal of consequence from its causes when the life experience of the person is not able to prevent the dangerous consequences of the performed action. The temptation to break the taboo may occur, but the consequences of violating the taboo inevitable, terrible and irreversible. Taboos are deeply rooted in the mentality of people, are transmitted through the generations and have inertia, calculated for decades, if not centuries.

Today, the culture of advertising largely loses its sacral aura and under the pressure of the market demonstrates the

transparency of its borders, the traditional limits of unexplored "secret", which always existed, but was a kind of veil of everyday human life, concealing everything indecent and ugly, are violated. "Everything that is natural cannot be vulgar," - these words are programmatic in the advertising activity of O. Toscani, the head of the advertising service at Benetton company, thanks to his activity the company logo has become one of the most famous in the world. O. Toscani is called the emperor of the world of provocations because his works are deliberately flamboyant and provocative. His principle lies in the total disregard for proper consumer qualities of the advertised item, and his technique of work lies in the creation of an extraordinary graphic ground and its attachment to the logo Benetton. There is no doubt in the fact that the advertised "secret" products are in constant demand since they lead to comfort and simplification of existence. There has always been a need in such goods and people will need them in the future, but the main problem is what funds will be used for positioning. In the case of reckless demonstration of "the secret goods" the borders of decent are shifted, its internal appeal and demand can be lost, as the products get into the tyranny of the mockery and conjectures field.

It is well known that each qualitatively peculiar object has certain quantitative characteristics. This statement is to a degree inherent in the advertising activity, which, by cultivating the quantitative factor, cleaves the quality of perception of "taboo" products. A countless advertising stream of sanitary pads can serve an illustration to this statement. Besides the fact that every society individual able to perceive an information knows everything about their structure, material supplies, and stable strength characteristics, due to not understanding the sense of proportion and the boundaries of permissible this advertising eradicates a kind of sacrament, the veiling of feminine nature, in a certain sense vulgarizing and simplifying life foundations of the society. There is a way out of this situation on the advertising market, and it does not appear in the total eradication of a certain product, but only the necessity to clarify its demonstration place (from the point of view of common sense the advertising should be clearly separated: according to sex and consumption range), broadcast time, a verbal line and graphic apparatus. The peculiarities and independence of advertising field should lie not only in that it has its own laws, but in the fact that due to the special attitude it represents a unique original arena for the application of a single moral law, connected to the nature of virtue.

The philosophical work by Adam Smith "The Theory of Moral Sentiments" is of particular importance for the understanding of social and moral regulation and evaluation of the advertising objects, in this work the author holistically explores the concept of virtue. The author believes that the virtue can be defined as the state of mind, which is not determined by special feelings, but by the guidance and the right direction of all these feelings. They can be virtuous or vicious, depending on the kind of object, which is meant, and the forces with which they aspire to this object, "virtue, therefore, is what is decent" [12, p. 261]. Adam Smith says that as soon the person realizes the essence of the decency, under the influence of which he should reject certain items, order, charm, and beauty appear in the different light for him. At the same time "obedience or resistance of decency, according to which one or another item should be chosen or

rejected, is the source of people's happiness and glory, or misery and humiliation they experience" [12, p. 271].

Projecting everything aforesaid for the advertising activities, we should note that advertising (and, first of all, its products) does not always introduce to life only a virtuous nature, but often purposefully crosses the boundaries of permitted decency. Recently in real practice started the process of the development of codices and the setup of rules and laws of the information presentation, but, nevertheless, until the society accepts the unspoken moral laws that have always existed and will exist in the spiritual and value guiding lines of every individual, advertising communication is condemned to the assimilation with immoral, vulgarized forms of its manifestation.

Quite interesting is the accent on the issues concerning the advertising creators' social responsibility, which was made by American psychologist L. Kohlberg. In his theoretical construction, he refers to the analysis of the concept of "the highest levels of personal development". He believes that at the highest stage of moral development people are able to logically ground their moral principles, by which their actions are guided, on their own. The object of morality is aware of the moral law and operates according to this law, not because he expects a reward or punishment, and not because other people say that he should follow it, but because he understands why the law of morality is obligatory for him. People acknowledge the moral principles as their own principles, but not like the principles of outer compulsion imposed to them by others. It is well known that the driving forces of human behavior are not the knowledge directly, but the needs, interests, desires, and aspirations, a collision of which creates a complex struggle of motives. Although the morality is the relatively independent determinant of behavior, it can actively influence the person, just relying on the vital needs and interests of the individual. Spiritual and moral standards and requirements are usually fixed in general terms, which prescribe not some specific actions, but only a certain type of actions. There are no absolute and tough moral principles that could dictate people, how to deal with the endless variety of life situations. The very mechanism of the moral action presupposes the people's ability to self-selection of goals and the means of their behavior and substantiation of the legality and moral propriety of this choice.

Another important question should be raised when considering the moral and spiritual side of advertising; this question is associated with its appeal to the concepts of "good" and "benefit." We should agree with the position of the Russian philosopher R. Apresyan, who has studied in details the question of good and affirmed that the concept of benefit relates to the value consciousness, it reflects the positive value of social phenomena in their attitude to anyone's interests [3, p. 42]. In a specific sense, the benefit is a characteristic of means suitable for the achievement of the adjusted goal. "Benefit" (usefulness) characterizes the tools that lead to the necessary, required result. The first who perceived the idea of the unity of good and benefit was N. Chernyshevsky, he discovered the difference between pleasure, benefit, and good in the extent and duration. A great pleasure is called a benefit; a constant benefit is a good [16, p. 452].

Advertising activities generate a lot of questions of moral nature - social envy, which removes the moral brakes in

the race for material goods, or qualitatively new nature of interpersonal relationships, which are characterized by generosity of the buyer to himself and his family; the focus on the "little" pleasures of life or on the social problems of the whole society, which is oriented at realization of your own contribution to the overcoming of global problems (AIDS, drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking).

While coping with various situations of human relations and complex relationships, a real advertising can satisfy the spiritual and moral needs, which solve the problem of the harmonization of social and individual life, the transformation of social values in the individual-social practice, revealing the importance of, above all, personal and social – social advertising. By demonstrating the solved moral conflicts, advertising enforces you to empathize with popular characters, forming an integrated system of psychological qualities, which satisfy moral necessities. A central role in the advertising communication belongs to the syntony mechanism - the transfer of the state of another person, the empathy of another person on you. Expanding the vital contacts, advertising provides the opportunity to experience the infinite trivial variants of everyday communication, being a vivid example of the moral behavior of the individual. The latter is essential for the development of optimal variants of behavior. The representation of something singular, personal, and individual in the advertising breaks the established social and public norms. Spirituality in relation to advertising is a standardized morality, which subordinates to the traditional standards of behavior and strictly reminds about the exist-

ence of ideal relationships, the morality, in which all roles are strictly assigned, and the digression from these roles will lead to a public blame or censure. It should be emphasized that these standardized advertising images are not always a standard or direct guide to action, you shouldn't totally "dissolve" in the advertising, absolutely believing in all its appeals, demands and temptations.

As a universal phenomenon, advertising communication increasingly strives for the adaptation to the whole variety of spiritual and creative powers of the person. At the same time it becomes a modernizer of the creativity far beyond the limits of the promotional product, which was created by this advertisement, - in the space of human deeds and actions, people's attitude to things, and the relationships between different people. Almost every human action "is not only a technical operation in relation to things but also an act in relation to another person, expressing the attitude to this very person. Through the attitude to things and to the human subjects the relationship between people is carried out"- fairly pointed out S. Rubenstein [10, p. 32].

Thus, the problem of existence of the modern institution of advertising in the coordinates of socio-moral space acquires a debatable nature in line with socio-philosophical understanding, as the spiritual and moral categories within the boundaries of the advertising communication are not defined identically. The spiritual and moral problem of the ratio of good, benefit, and beauty in the advertising communication occurs when an integration of these values into a single promotional product takes place.

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