

There has been a lot of discussion about the role of advertising in New Zealand society.

On one hand, health campaigners criticise fast food and soft drink advertising because they claim it helps to make New Zealand children obese.

On the other it has been proven that public service advertising helps people understand a range of different issues; from mental health, diet, smoking, drink driving to prescription drugs.

What is your view about the role advertising plays in society in New Zealand, both positive and negative? – Provide and justify your own opinion as the conclusion.

Advertising has been defined in a number of ways by various academics and admen over the years. Raymond Williams called advertising "the official art of capitalist society" (cited by O'Barr, W.M - 2005 - "what is advertising?"- A), and this is in contrast to James Laver's assertion that "Advertising is as old as Humanity: indeed, much older; for what are the flaunting colours of the flowers but so many invitations to the bees to come and "buy our product"...

Advertising might be defined as any device which first arrests the attention of the passer-by and then induces him to accept a mutually advantageous exchange." (cited by O'Barr, W.M - 2005 - "what is advertising?" - B), This definition is so broad that almost any form of interaction or communication could be characterised as advertising. In 1904, John E Kennedy defined advertising as "Salesmanship in print," (cited in Advertising Age, March 1999), and more recently Jeff Richards of the University of Texas has perhaps the most widely accepted definition, "Advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future." (cited by Wright, B.D, 2010)

By this last definition, Advertising has been established in New Zealand longer than New Zealand has been a nation. Advertising was visible in colonial times in the same way it is today upon the signage of trading stores. Newspapers were introduced early on, with examples still in the archives of The National Library from 1839 (The New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator). Advertising in newspapers of those times related mainly to the colonial nature of society at those times – advertising services for immigrants such as accommodation and passage via ship. Advertising in New Zealand has continued to reflect society of the times, and often also influence it. Advertising is inextricably linked to commerce, and is (usually) distinctly different to editorial, which often appears in the same media.

The most basic role of advertising in New Zealand has been to promote goods and services, with the intention of increasing sales of those products, services and businesses. In addition to this, these same methods and forms of media have now also been employed as a means to promote and address non-commercial public services & social issues, using the language and methodology of commercial advertising. This is done with the intention of increasing awareness of, and facilitating changes (to thoughts, ideology, behaviour, habits etc), in regards to these social issues and social causes.

As with most things, there are both positive and negative issues related to Advertising, and in the following pages I will detail how some of these issues affect New Zealand society - economically, socially, ethically and legally.

It is well known that there is a clear link between increased advertising spend, and the growth of national GDP. It has been found in an American study, by Nobel economics laureate Lawrence Klien “that every dollar spent on advertising generates just less than \$20 in total economic output,” (Maddox, K. 2010). This would suggest that there is a nearly 1900% increase in economic value from each dollar spent in advertising. Although this means increases in profits to the advertiser, the trickle down effects means positive

implications for society, where production increases, where jobs are created, and where money is reinvested into local and national economies. The impact of advertising on the New Zealand economy may be slightly different, as this is an American study, but it is certain that the impact is still quite significant. In economic terms, there seem to only be positive effects from advertising (as long as the advertising campaign is sound, and hits its target).

The social impacts of advertising can also be quite significant. Society is affected both positively and negatively by advertising, and it is difficult to gauge if the influence is more positive or more negative. This can ultimately come down to the ideology and the perspective of the individual making the assessment.

Positive social outcomes from advertising can include increased employment as noted earlier - resulting in greater wealth for a larger proportion of the population, and a happier and healthier population. Increased tax revenues generated from increased employment, increased sales of goods and services, and greater profits, means more money can be spent on health, education, social services, civic projects etc.

The skills and medium used in advertising have also been employed by governmental and not-for-profit organisations to increase awareness in a wide variety of social issues, and have had positive outcomes attributed to advertising.

In the 1990s a media-wide campaign was run over many years with an aim to decrease the rate of Cot Death, also known as Sudden Unexpected Death in Infants (SUDI). With increased awareness attributed to advertising, and new guidelines in primary healthcare, the incidences in Cot Death have decreased significantly. There have been renewed calls to revive the original campaign as “60 to 80 babies still die in their sleep each year. Although that is down from 250 deaths in the 1980s, it is still the main cause of preventable baby

deaths in the first year.” (The Marlborough Express 2010).

More recently, the Like Minds Like Mine campaign, funded by the Ministry of Health has helped to raise awareness and reduce the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health issues. With former All Black John Kirwan fronting the ads, it has been acknowledged as being a very successful campaign. Research for the Ministry of Health has found that the positive outcomes of the campaign have been the equivalent of “a Cost-Benefit ratio of 13.8:1 if the Like Minds project had an impact for the period 2005-2007. This would imply that the total expenditure of \$52 million had generated an economic benefit of approximately \$720 million.” (Vaithianathan,R. 2010)

These are but a couple of examples of social service advertising campaigns that have had positive social and economic implications, and many others over the past 20 years have included campaigns for Fire Safety (fire-wise, smoke alarms, dont drink and fry), Sun Protection (Sun smart), various campaigns have been run by the police to reduce drink driving, and speeding and increasing the use of seat belts. There have been campaigns addressing anti-smoking & quitting smoking, problem gambling, breast cancer screening & cervical cancer screening, prevention of accidents (ACC) , advisory advertising of law changes (i.e the recent give way law changes), 5 plus a day (to encourage healthy eating), back health (don't use your back like a crane), prevention of driveway fatalities (kids in driveways), never shake a baby, and the current EECA energy saving advertising, just to name a few. Each of these issues would have been assessed to be of significant economic and social cost, to justify the costs attributed to advertising.

There are also positive social effects from commercial advertising, the promotion of sporting and cultural events such as rugby, cricket, motor sports, music, art and dance, help to promote healthy social and community interaction, contributing to a vibrant and diverse society. The use of humour in advertising can make people feel good, regardless of whether or not they will

be purchasing the product or service advertised.

Of course, there are also negative social effects from advertising too.

Advertising is particularly effective in influencing children and young people, and advertisers know it. This is a social and ethical issues surrounding advertising. Advertisers have been known to target their advertising at children so as to create longer lasting affinity with their brands. There are some legal limitations to advertising to young people but the spread and reach of advertising is such that restrictions aren't wholly effective, as well as current laws not having the necessary scope to be effective. A paper by the American Academy of Pediatrics entitled "Children, Adolescents, and Advertising" (2006) reported various concerns about advertising in media including television, movies, print media, internet, about various marketing techniques including product placement in tv and movies, television and movie tie-ins with fast food restaurants, celebrity endorsements, alcohol and prescription drug advertising, food advertising, sex in advertising, and advertising in schools. As children lack the ability to critically analyze and differentiate between persuasive advertising and entertainment, these techniques can be particularly abhorrent. Advertising in this way can result in desensitizing children to poor nutritional choices, violence in movies, television and video games, premature and unsafe sexual activity, just to name a few. The social repercussions can mean increased rates of obesity and the health costs associated with it, increased violent and anti-social behaviour, increased teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. If there is a proven increase in product awareness and sales due to advertising, it would be disingenuous to say that children wouldn't also have an increased awareness to the messages conveyed, both subtle and explicit, in advertising.

Advertising is obviously also effective on adults. Tobacco advertising has in the past been very effective. Government and health organisations have been aware of the significant social and economic costs associated with smoking.

Over the past thirty years, many restrictions have been placed on the use, sale and advertising of tobacco products, as a means to limit these negative effects. These restrictions on tobacco companies have included laws prohibiting advertising and sponsorship, the placement of health warnings on packaging, the minimum age of purchase, restrictions on visibility in stores and prohibition on smoking indoors - in workplaces and public spaces. All of this has been done so with the intention of reducing tobacco smoking within the population. Taxes gained from the sales of tobacco have been used to fund anti-smoking and quit-smoking campaigns, as well as making tobacco products prohibitively expensive. So this has been a positive approach to a negative social issue.

As effective as this approach has been, the heavy handed approach to tobacco has not been emulated with other hazardous substances such as alcohol. It could be argued that alcohol has similar, if not greater negative impacts on New Zealand society as tobacco, but Alcohol companies can continue to advertise their products in any media, the products are often highly visible in store, there are restrictions on where alcohol is sold, there are restrictions on age to whom alcohol can be sold, there are some limitations on the time of day alcohol can be advertised, but alcohol companies are able to sponsor, teams, events, shows etc, within certain guidelines. In this way, there does seem to be some disparity in governmental approach to the restriction of hazardous consumer substances.

Hazardous substances aren't the only area of concern for New Zealand society. Over the last few years we have endured the effects of a global recession. The failure of a number of finance companies had major effects on our economy. Going back to the days before the crisis, these finance companies had been employing advertising to promote themselves to investors and borrowers, and many trusted that the statements made in the advertisements were true, as well as the endorsements of the people making the statements. As these finance companies began to tumble, it became

apparent that these companies weren't what they claimed to be in their advertising, and many people lost their investments, and others lost their homes. On the face of it, advertising had a pivotal role in these companies being able to do what they did. In 2011, the Financial Markets Authority was established by the government, creating a new legal framework with the intention of preventing similar incidents occurring in the future.

Society places a lot of trust in advertising. It's unclear to me the reason why this is. Advertising could be considered a heuristic for trust, a mental shortcut that consumers use to gauge whether a brand, company, product or service is trustworthy. The professionalism inherent in the media format, a well constructed advertisement, speaks of a company that does what it does, well. People may understand, or believe, that advertising is expensive, and so only large and well established businesses can afford to do so. Smaller companies advertising in the same media as larger companies, have the trust established from these large companies "rub off" on their own business because of proximity within the same media, like newspapers, magazines or television. Maybe its a percentage game? If 98% of a consumer's interaction with businesses, products and services that they have come by via advertising are of a positive nature, then they would certainly also trust the other 2% without fear. Unfortunately the unscrupulous can easily manipulate this trust to their advantage.

The times are changing. It feels to me like the nature of advertising, and the media that advertising appears in is now much greater and more pervasive than it was even just 20 years ago. Newspapers, magazines, television, letterbox mailers, radio, were all well established advertising medium. Billboards have seemed to pop up everywhere, and have begun to dominate the urban landscape as well as vehicle livery signage, bus shelter and bus livery advertising adding to this. Commercial sponsorship of community events, community groups and community spaces has resulted in previously non-commercial spaces becoming advertising outlets. Technological

advances such as personal computing, the internet, mobile phones, mobile computing, and the prominence of these technologies in our lives, has given advertising greater means to be present in virtually all aspects of our waking lives.

We had better get used to it. Advertising people talk of “noise” and “clutter” as aspects of their trade, and at the same time they continue to add to it so as to create “cut-through” to reach target markets. Advertising is going to continue to dominate the landscape, where we work, play, rest, sleep, eat, drink etc etc, and continue to compete for our attention and our hard earned dollars. If we are aiming for a wealthier population, greater economic growth and improving our national GDP, then we must be prepared to withstand greater levels of advertising, with fewer and fewer aspects of our lives that haven’t been sold to advertisers. Having accepted the role of advertising in New Zealand society, all we can do now, is demand that advertising, and the industries advertising, do so with ethics and morality, and the greater good of society in mind.

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