

Marketing and Ethics

Advertising and Ethics

The issue of advertising and ethics is often discussed in the media. Because of the need to generate advertising “cut through”, often advertising and social media campaigns are controversial, potentially offensive, possibly sexist, and sometimes misleading.

Marketers are also accused in the media from time to time of creating the material society and of “forcing” people to buy products that they really don’t want or need – which happens through peer pressure.

Student Discussion Questions

1. Think of an advertising or social media campaign that you have seen recently that you would consider potentially offensive to you or to other consumers. What was that campaign and why could it be considered offensive? How would be possible to communicate the same message without offence?
2. As we know, people have different senses of humor. Social media often uses humor in their messages in order to try to attract viral attention. Do you think it is possible to use humor that is effective enough to generate attention and viral activity that is also unlikely to offend anybody? Can you think of an example of an ad that would do this?
3. Late night direct response advertising (or infomercials) use a long advertising format to persuade people to purchase various forms of exercise equipment, diet products, household products, self-improvement products, and so on. These products are often associated with a special offer and even a finance plan of several payments. It could be argued that many of these products are sold this way because retailers will not stock them. Come up with a list of products that are sold through direct response advertising. Classify your list into products that you think have value to consumers and those that don’t. Do you think that direct response, marketers have a right to sell and promote products, regardless of their potential value?