

## ADVERTISING CLUTTER AND CONSUMER APATHY

**Dr. K. R. Subramanian**

Independent Consultant & Professor of Marketing

### SYNOPSIS

*The growing Consumer apathy to mindless advertising clutter, and efforts of over enthusiastic producers to position their products by creating a 'niche' in the already crowded space in the Consumer minds, is quite apparent. Consumers were always able to avoid mass media advertising, and today, advertising avoidance becomes increasingly easy. Televisions have remote controls, many people watch only shows that were recorded earlier so the commercials can be skipped, or many broadcast services are now by subscription and commercial-free. Yet it appears that the advertisers' "solution" to audience avoidance of their messages is to increase the number of messages, so even the effort of commercial avoidance becomes a source of audience frustration. Advertising writers say that the solution is more creative advertising that breaks out from the advertising clutter. They are partially right, since the problems of clutter are compounded when the exact same, dull message is seen multiple times within the same vehicle. But for advertisers, they need to realize that a less cluttered environment is worth more money. A sponsored vehicle with a greatly reduced number of advertising messages means that each message would have a greater impact, assuming they provide information that the audiences would like to receive. People throw out direct mail messages because it is irrelevant to them; spam is the plethora of email you'd never want to read. The solution for clutter is for advertisers to be willing to pay the price for messages surrounded by less of it.*

**Key words:** *consumer apathy, advertising clutter, audience avoidance, sponsored vehicle, spam, plethora of messages, viral marketing,*

## INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, a customer had to be “touched” 6-7 times with your marketing before they would buy from you, trust you. Today, with the monumental increase in advertising, a customer has to be touched 12-14 times before they make a buying decision. What’s caused the huge increase? Naturally - the internet. Internet advertising alone has jumped 6,381% since 1997. More than 6,000 display ads were delivered to U.S. internet users during the 3rd quarter of 2010 and over 5 trillion ads per year.

By the time a person today reaches 65, they have seen over 2 million commercials. That’s the equivalent of watching advertising 7 days a week, 8 hours a day for 6 straight years. (Time to turn off the TV) And, some stats show that only 14% believe marketing, anyway.

So, is your marketing being seen? Or is it lost in the noise of advertising?



**Fig 1: The rising Advertising clutter**

In addition to being a problem for marketers trying to reach their customers, advertising clutter is also a topic of research by people in other fields. Some sociologists and psychologists are interested in the way advertising shapes social attitudes, and they examine advertising clutter to learn more about how advertising contributes to the way people think, act, and behave. It is also an aesthetic concern in some regions, as seen in cities where some forms of advertising, such as billboards, have been restricted in the interest of keeping communities more beautiful.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Television commercial breaks are longer and the commercials are shorter, so there are more spots appearing per break. Even after time-shifting favorite television programs, the zapping of the increasing quantity and length of commercial breaks gets tedious. Broadcast radio often seems to have more advertising than entertainment or news, sending the formerly captive audiences of automotive commuters to satellite radio, prerecorded music and the less-than-safe alternative of talking on a cell phone. Magazines have multiple pages of advertising before you even get to the table of contents while newspapers' free-standing inserts alone fill their own recycling box. Often you open a newspaper to see the first page: a full page commercial advertisement!

This increasing advertising-to-programs ratio is really a function of simple media economics. With the decline of the former mass media into more segmented and targeted options, the total audience size of even the largest vehicles is greatly reduced. With smaller audiences, the vehicles need to sell more time or space to make the same amount of money. And yet, if the clutter were less, each message would have greater impact and the advertisers should be willing to pay more per audience member reached, assuming it is well targeted. Too many advertising plans make the purchase of time or space done by little more than counting the size of audiences instead of considering the thoughts and desires of consumers (Miller 2004). Demographic data remain the predominant basis for how vehicles' audiences are defined, despite them being poor predictors of how audiences think or act in the marketplace. And even the numbers available are not used. Most newspaper advertising appears run-of-paper, without regard for which audiences read each section, while many broadcast and cable commercials are placed run-of-schedule on a variety of stations or programs whose total audiences are an agreed upon size but may or may not be potential consumers for the advertisers' products.

But aside from issues of vehicle selection, the quantity of commercials alone creates the feeling of overwhelming mass media spam. As noted, the problem is increasing but not necessarily new. The audience complaints and advertiser persuasion problems of message clutter with repetitive messages was frequently criticized by Howard Gossage from the mid-1950s to his death in 1969.

#### SO, WHAT DOES ADVERTISEMENT DO OR SAY?

Amongst the sea of communication channels hitting the consumer constantly, the actual message usually gets lost. Many a times, the possibility of the right message reaching the right target is also dwindled, not ruling out the fact that this has a direct impact on the costs shelled out for such activities.

Unlike the mass media, SMS enables micro targeting, which ensures that there is no spillover of the communication. The use of this medium also allows the consumer to react to the communication on the spot, which helps measure the effectiveness of the campaign. Then there is always the option to explore the possibility of this medium being used to propagate word-of-mouth. Every single target that the communication is being sent to carries the potential to be the originator of a new chain of targets. It just depends on how interesting and action-provoking the message designed is for the chain to remain continual.

SMS has graduated from a mere add-on service into a communication channel alongside voice calls in India. Media players too have picked up the pulse and are using this medium for many of its unique advantages. Radio Mirchi broke new grounds in FM Radio interactive programming by auctioning a date with Kareena Kapoor. Listeners had to SMS their bid to 8888. The auction could be played by anyone with an access to a mobile phone. The bidding for the lunch date began with Rs 5,000 and on the first day of the two-day auction, there were already more than 1,800 responses and the bid has crossed Rs 85,600 in Mumbai alone. The proceeds of the auction were donated to Nav Nirman Foundation, a home for the poor, addicts and the mentally challenged.

The solution for advertising might be to turn back the clock, to a time of sponsorships and fewer commercials. When Gossage first started writing, the main form of television advertising was program sponsorship, though use of 60-second spots was growing. By the time of his death, spots

replaced sponsorships as the main type of broadcast purchase and the 30-second spot started to supplant the 60 as the common length for a television commercial, but prime time network programs had only eight or nine minutes of advertising per hour. Today the commercial breaks have gone from four per hour to five or six, with many spots running 15 seconds.

#### HOW DO PEOPLE COMBAT CLUTTER?

Advertising clutter is a term used to refer to the very high volume of Advertising; people are exposed to, on a daily basis. It can be difficult for advertisers to cut through the clutter to reach potential consumers. New methods of advertising are constantly being developed in an attempt to stay ahead of the curve in the advertising world. Innovative and aggressive approaches to advertising are expected from most advertising agencies as it can be difficult to reach people with conventional means. The number of individual messages people are exposed to on a given day varies, but generally people hear advertisements on the radio, see them on television and in print publications, interact with them online, and sometimes receive them in their mailboxes. Many of these contacts are very brief. Consumers can be overwhelmed by the volume of advertising material they see every day and ads that rise above the clutter will stand out.

Understanding the role of advertising clutter in the way consumers engage with advertising is important. People developing ad campaigns must think about issues like clutter and how to reach their target demographic. Researchers study the way different groups of people interact with advertising and take note of ads that stand out in given demographics, using this information in the development of advertising strategies. Failure to research a particular demographic well and find out how to reach that demographic can have costly consequences for advertisers, such as campaigns that flop when released into the marketplace.

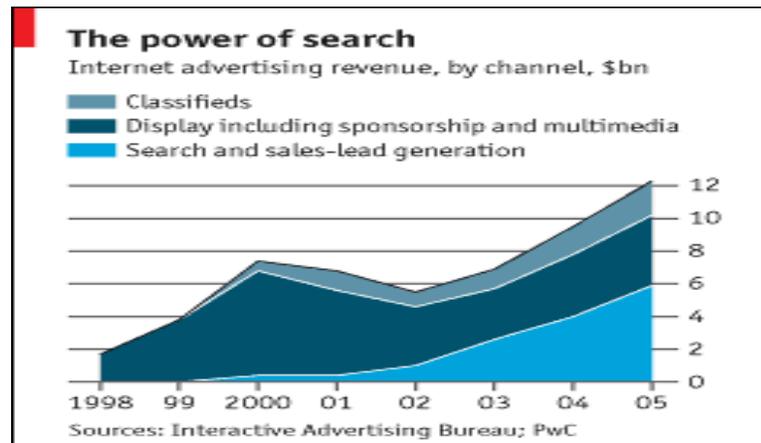
Since people are spending more time away from home, marketers are spending more money on bringing TV to you: in shopping malls and in grocery stores. There's even an Auto-net in auto repair shops, and of course, advertising reaches people on computers and movie screens. To reach people, advertisers have had to get much more creative digitally inserting virtual products within shows and even video games -- making them part of the entertainment instead of a break from the entertainment.

## THE CHALLENGE OF OVERCOMING CONSUMER APATHY

Unsolicited text messages, web page banners while browsing the mobile Internet and banner ads on idle screens... These formats still constitute the most predominant types of mobile advertising that mobile phone users are exposed to today, and are largely initiatives based on formats from the online world of advertising. For mobile operators, this highlights the risk of alienating their subscribers if mobile advertising is not handled properly. However, where user benefits are tangible, ads highly targeted and delivered in a non-intrusive manner, the potential for generating revenues from mobile advertising remains significant. In addition to incremental revenue opportunity for an operator, the service can also serve as a customer retention tool, through the perceived delivery of value to end-users. For advertisers, the attractiveness of this medium undoubtedly lies in the immediacy, cost effectiveness and increased engagement. With the increasing adoption of smart phones, a number of mobile advertising firms have emerged in the full screen display segment.

The mobile advertising market continues to draw a lot of buzz and excitement with so many initiatives being launched in the industry, however to realise the full potential of this market segment, ensuring advertising is done properly remains the major challenge for mobile operators. These developments mean an increase in the opportunity for mobile advertising— and an increase in spending. Thanks to the power of the internet, advertising is becoming less wasteful and its value more measurable. By contrast, the new advertising models based on internet technologies amount to innovation. The idea is based on consumers themselves taking the initiative by showing up voluntarily and interacting with what they find online.

Because this advertising model is so lucrative, all internet portals want to catch up with Google. Then Microsoft, which owns MSN, another large internet portal, built ad-Center, its version of a “monetisation engine”, which has now replaced Yahoo! as the advertising system for searches on MSN. In addition, eBay, the largest auction site on the web, has a version called Ad-Context. Nonetheless, pay-per-click remains much more efficient than traditional marketing for many advertisers. It is the fastest-growing segment of the online advertising market (see chart).



**Fig 2: The Power of search engine optimization**

Meanwhile, Mr. Gross, almost famous from his first innovation (and not at all bitter that Google got most of the credit), is once again busy pursuing what he considers the “Holy Grail” of advertising—the complete elimination of Wanamaker waste. He calls this cost-per-action, or CPA, although he means cost-per-sale, and says that it “just makes too much sense” not to catch on. His start-up this time is called Snap.com, a small search engine. An airline, say, that advertises on Snap's search results would pay not when a consumer clicks on its link but only when he buys a ticket. Google, which is researching almost all conceivable advertising methods, also has plans for CPA. Its new Google Checkout, an online payments system set up to rival eBay's PayPal, will allow Google to know more about how many users who click on one of its advertisements subsequently go on to complete a purchase.

#### CUT THROUGH CLUTTER AND CONSUMER APATHY

Marketing clutter refers to the very high volume of advertising messages that the average consumer is exposed to on a daily basis. "We've gone from being exposed to about 500 ads a day back in the 1970s to as many as 5,000 a day today." Jay Walker-Smith, Yankelovich Consumer Research. Even if people do happen to cast their eyes on your advertising messages, whether they actually take any notice or process the information is a different matter.

So, how do you get noticed in the crowded modern marketplace?

1. Engage with customers emotional or practical needs

Certain themes strike an emotional chord with the vast majority of the population. These wide appealing subjects can be used in marketing to make the message strike a personal note while generating interest with the widest possible audience. Examples of such themes include love, money, health, career, hopes and dreams. The features and benefits of a product are usually the focus of practical advertising, and although these may not be as exciting as more emotive subjects, they can appeal equally well to the customer if executed correctly.

2. Use media effectively

Mass media such as TV, billboards, radio and posters are all completely saturated with marketing messages and competition is high, and this makes them costly. Media space is usually priced depending on the number of people who are likely to see your advertisement, however it's much more important to be noticed by the right people rather than simply playing a numbers game.

3. Fight dirty – try new approaches to promotion

Innovative approaches to marketing are evolving every day but these are some of the most popular:

- Guerrilla marketing is a term for the most daring approaches to advertising. Many ideas have been tried, including illuminating buildings, sponsoring car, or even sky diving into a stadium with a branded parachute. Possibility for PR exposure is high.
- Experiential marketing involves physical interaction with individuals using live events. If done well, these can be the most powerful marketing medium so are well worth considering.
- Viral ads require clever thinking and a fair amount of luck – but a successful viral can bring vast amounts of attention to a business or product. Ensure the ad is humorous, shocking or likely to generate strong opinions.

Gaining exposure is great but you need to generate sales, so when designing a campaign consider things from the customer's point of view.

#### 4. Ensure the message is obvious and easy to achieve

If people do take notice of you, it is vital that your message is clear. Consider the next steps you would like the potential customer to take, whether this is dialing a number, visiting a website or even turning on their Bluetooth. Make it obvious what you're offering and make it as easy as possible for customers to achieve the goal, which this means looking at your internal processes. Even the best produced adverts can fall on deaf ears if the message isn't clear and appealing.

#### 5. Appealing to Senses

Another clever way to stand out is by engaging a consumer's senses through touch, smell, sound and sight. These strategies are most often implemented in high traffic areas such as airports, or at retail locations and kiosks. Create extra large and visually appealing images or models of your product. Engage consumers with touchpad computer screens, where they can move objects around and play with certain features. Make the experience enjoyable so they remember your product or company name.

#### 6. Selective Retention

Selective retention on the part of consumers can be achieved by repeating your advertising messages and associated images so people remember them, according to marketing experts at Hausman Market Research. To be effective, consumers who are most likely to use your products must be targeted either by age, income, certain personality traits, beliefs or lifestyles. Create messages that appeal to your target audience. Include in your content key benefits consumers can gain by using your products or services. Repeat those messages often through various media, including print and the Internet. Use unique slogans or catchphrases that stress key benefits. Make it easy for people to recognize your advertisements with logos, characters or jingles.

#### 7. Advertising on Popular Objects

You can also cut through the clutter by advertising on ubiquitous vehicles or objects seen by the public such as taxicabs, buses, restroom walls, subway tunnels and parking lot stripes or blocks. Consumers are often more captive and attentive when in transit or standing around idly. They are

also continuously exposed to your ads, which can make your brand or company more recognizable. Advertise on objects or locations within your trade area. However, stay within your advertising budget, and always test these ads on a small scale to determine effectiveness and profitability.

#### 8. Understanding the new connected generation today

How are consumers changing today? The diversity of today's technology had given consumers an exceptional capability to decide what they want to view and not to view (Jaffe, 2005). Thus, with the ever-growing change, there is a need to understand the mind of the consumer today as it is no longer an advertiser telling consumers what brand they should purchase but more to consumer deciding which brand to choose. Advancement in digital technology that results in the change in consumption patterns in consumer today

#### 9. Addressing consumers' short attention for effective advertising communication

The consumer's short attention span was something, which the advertising industry has been looking into. This could indicate getting an image to the consumer's attention had become shorter than before due to the immense exposure of all the media that had been available in the present day. Hence, it is very important to choose the one thing to be conveyed due to the time limitation.

In particular of the television commercial field, there is no doubt that there was a shift in the commercial trend in order to address the short attention span issue as well. In the early days, all the commercials were 60 seconds long before the 30-second spots were introduced which then brought about the availability of 15-second and 10-second spots as well (White, 2003). Hence, the shrinking attention span of the consumers introduces the shortening of commercial length.



**Fig 3: Overcoming impact of shorter attention span**

Commercials that are shorter than 30-seconds are embedded with surprise value way before commercial-haters can do something about it, while those that last longer than 30 seconds are more towards story-telling in a bid to appeal to the consumer (Elliott, 2005). Thus, this could show how the industry tried their means and ways to get the message across to the consumer in order to address short attention span for an effective advertising communication.

#### 10. Consumers' response to advertising appeal and tone

Engaged in consumer's emotions is a powerful tool in advertising where it allows no cogent reason for them to purchase product that they do not need. (Danziger ). This is because consumers make purchase decision at an emotional level where they are highly receptive to, without being consciously aware of what is happening. (Danziger). As a result, this could result that for every advertisement, with an input of emotion, it stands a higher chance of appeal to the consumer as consumers usually make buying decision at an emotional level.

#### CONCLUSION

For consumers Advertising clutter may turn out to be the biggest challenge of the present times. The kids in “Generation Y”— young people who tend to be adept at using media, constantly online and skeptical—are increasingly immune to the clichés of prime-time television and radio and mentally tune out these nuisances. Online, however, they may accept advertising, if it is

unobtrusive, relevant and fun. As they take some action to invite the advertisement, they may even find it useful.

The concern among media people, of course, is that an increased number of ads vying for a viewer's attention; means that each advertisement becomes less effective in getting its message across. A viewer's ability to recall an advertisement goes down by about 45 percent, for example, in commercial breaks with seven or more spots compared to breaks with three or fewer (According to a report from Nielsen Media Research and the Cable television Advertising Bureau).

In reality, the solution for advertising might be to turn back the clock, to a time of sponsorships and fewer commercials. Advertising writers say that the solution is more creative advertising that breaks out from the advertising clutter. They are partially right, since the problems of clutter are compounded when the exact same, dull message is seen multiple times within the same vehicle. But for advertisers, they need to realize that a less cluttered environment is worth more money.

People throw out direct mail messages because it is irrelevant to them; spam is the plethora of email you'd never want to read. *The solution for clutter is for advertisers to be willing to pay the price for messages surrounded by less of it.*

#### REFERENCES:

1. Herbert Jack Rotfeld, Professor of Marketing, Auburn University, Alabama, USA, *Understanding Advertising Clutter & the Real Solution to Declining Audience Attention to Mass Media Commercial Messages*, Journal of Consumer Marketing, (vol. 23 ,Issue 4, 2006), p. 180- 181.
2. Donaton, Scott (2004), *Madison and Vine: Why the Entertainment and Advertising Industries Must Converge to Survive* (NY: McGraw-Hill)
3. Gossage, Howard Luck (1995), *The Book of Gossage* (Chicago: The Copy Workshop).
4. Gossage, Howard Luck (1986), *Is There Any Hope for Advertising?* edited by Kim B. Rotzoll, Jarlath Graham and Barrows Mussey (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press).
5. Harris, S. Miller and Howard Gossage (1962), *Dear Miss Afflerbach, or The Postman Hardly Ever Rings II, 342 Times* (NY: The Macmillan Company).
6. Miller, Chris (2004), *Blood on My Briefcase: 30 Years in the Advertising Wars* (USA: Xlibris Corporation).

7. Rotzoll, Kim B. (1980), *"Gossage Revisited: Reflections of Advertising's Legendary Iconoclast,"* Journal of Advertising, 9 (#4): 6-14, 42.
8. Louisa Ha and Barry R. Litman *'Does Advertising Clutter Have Diminishing and Negative Returns?'* Journal of Advertising , Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 31-42
9. Tom J. Brown and Michael L. Rothschild , *Reassessing the Impact of Television Advertising Clutter;* Journal of Consumer Research ,Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jun., 1993), pp. 138-146
10. Gossage, H.L., Rotzoll, K.B., Graham, J. and Mussey, J.B. (Eds) (1987), *Is There Any Hope for Advertising? ,* University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL.
11. Harris, S.M. and Gossage, H. (1962), *Dear Miss Afflerbach, or The Postman Hardly Ever Rings II,34? Times,* The Macmillan Company, New York, NY.
12. Miller, C. (2004), *Blood on My Briefcase: 30 Years in the Advertising Wars,* Xlibris Corporation, Philadelphia, PA.
13. Rotzoll, K.B. (1980), *"Gossage revisited: reflections of advertising's legendary iconoclast,"* Journal of Advertising, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 6-14, 42.
14. Herbert Jack Rotfeld, *Understanding advertising clutter,* Journal of Consumer Marketing, Volume 23 · Number 4 · 2006 · 180–181
15. John Deighton, *'The interaction of advertising and evidence,'* Journal of Consumer Research, vol. 11, No. 3, December 1984, pp763-770.
16. Scott Hawkins and Stephen Hoch, *'Low Involvement Learning: Memory without evaluation,'* Journal of Consumer Research, 19, Sept. 1992, pp 212-225
17. Scott Hawkins, Joan Meyers-Levy & Stephen Hoch, *'Low involvement learning: Repetition and Coherence in Familiarity and Belief,'* Advances in Consumer Research, VXXII, 1995, p63
18. John Philip Jones, *When Ads Work: New Proof that Advertising Triggers Sales,* Lexington NY 1995 and Colin McDonald, *From "Frequency" to "Continuity" - Is It a New Dawn?;* Journal of Advertising Research, July/August 1997 pp21-25.
19. M. Von Gonten & J. Donius, *'Advertising exposure and advertising effects: New panel based findings,'* Journal of Advertising Research, July/August 1997, p59
20. S. Shapiro, D. Macinnis, & S. Heckler, *'The effects of incidental ad exposure on the formation of consideration sets,'* Journal of Consumer Research, vol 24, June 1997, pp 94-101.
21. M. Sutherland & J. Galloway, *'The implications of agenda setting for advertising research,'* Journal of Advertising Research, 1981, Sept. 1983, pp. 52-6
22. Andrew Ehrenberg, Neil Barnard & John Scriven, *'Differentiation or Salience,'* Journal of Advertising Research, Nov/Dec 1997, pp7-14
23. M. Sutherland & S. Holden, *'Slipstream marketing,'* Journal of Brand Management, June 1997,

24. R. Fazio, P. Herr & M. Powell, '*On the development and strength of category-brand associations in memory: the case of mystery ads*', Journal of Consumer Psychology, 1992, Vol I (1), pp1-13
25. P. Dickson & A. Sawyer, '*The price knowledge and search of supermarket shoppers*', Journal of Marketing, July 1990, pp. 42-53.
26. W. Wells & L. Losciuto, '*Direct observation of purchasing behaviour*', Journal of Marketing Research, Aug. 1966 p227.
27. M. Sutherland & T. Davies, '*Supermarket shopping behavior: An observational study*', Caulfield Institute of Technology Psychology and Marketing Series, no. 1, Aug. 1978
28. Giusberti et al 1992 as reported in C. Cornaldi et al, '*Stretching the Imagination: Representation and Transformation in Mental Imagery*', Oxford University Press N.Y. 1996
29. Elliot M.T and Speck P.S.(1998), '*Consumer perceptions of advertising clutter and its impact across various media*', Journal of Advertising Research 38(1), pp -29-41
30. Ha, L & Litman B.R. (1997), '*Does advertising clutter have diminishing and negative returns?*', Journal of Advertising 26(1), pp 31-42.

#### WEB REFERENCES

1. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4189025>
2. [www.myuniverse.co.in/](http://www.myuniverse.co.in/) Zip SIP