

EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL ADVERTISEMENTS: AN URBAN– RURAL COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present paper tries to find out the factors which discriminate between urban and rural respondents in terms of their attitudes about social advertising.

Methodology: The study was conducted on a sample size of 400 adult television viewers drawn from rural and urban areas of Punjab. Primary data collected through a structured questionnaire was analysed using discriminant analysis along with supporting statistical too such as mean scores, t-tests, and F-ratios.

Findings: The results show that the difference between urban and rural respondents with regard to attitudes towards social advertising is statistically significant, most specifically in terms of importance ascribed to different factors in advertising and the perceived effectiveness of chosen social campaigns.

The study also has certain limitations, like geographical confinement to Punjab alone, which may limit the generalisability of the findings.

Policy Implications: The strategies of social advertising need to be specifically designed to match the sensitivities and perceptual differences of both rural and urban populations to increase effectiveness.

Keywords: Social advertising; effectiveness of social campaigns; urban-rural differences; behavioural change; public awareness

INTRODUCTION

Social advertising has been found to play a vital role in affecting public awareness, attitudes, and behaviour towards socially desirable causes. However, the potency of social advertisements differs according to the specific change factor involved. Cognitive change, or creating awareness and knowledge, has been found to be most receptive to social advertisement campaigns. Action change, or encouraging individuals to perform a specific act, can also be attempted by using social advertisements, albeit with only moderate success. Behavioural change with respect to food habits, smoking, or drinking makes it even more difficult for social advertisements to be effective. Value change, or transforming basic beliefs and value direction among individuals and society, ranks as one of the most difficult tasks for social advertisements (Kotler, 1971).

In India, crores of rupees are spent every year on social advertising campaigns. However, if these campaigns fail to achieve their basic purpose of bringing about positive behavioural or social change, the substantial effort and resources invested become futile. Therefore, assessing the effectiveness of social advertisements becomes imperative to understand the factors that act as levers of effectiveness and to evaluate their overall impact on society.

Several factors influence the success or failure of social advertising campaigns. These may include inappropriate audience targeting, insufficiently motivating messages, lack of constructive response mechanisms, or inadequate funding. A post-mortem analysis of social

advertising campaigns often reveals deficiencies that could have been corrected with a more appropriate approach. Against this background, the present study attempts to analyse the effectiveness of social advertisements by identifying the factors that contribute to their success or failure and by examining public perceptions regarding the success of selected social advertising campaigns in urban and rural areas.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of message content and execution in determining the effectiveness of social advertising. Researchers have emphasized that a clear and relatable theme enhances message recall and persuasion (Kotler and Lee, 2008). Narration and storytelling have been found to increase emotional engagement and comprehension of social messages (Singh and Pandey, 2016). The type of appeal--whether emotional, rational or moral--also plays a critical role in shaping audience response (Belch and Belch, 2015).

Celebrity endorsement in social advertising has produced mixed results. While some studies suggest that celebrities enhance credibility and attention (Misra and Beatty, 1990), others argue that celebrity presence may overshadow the social message itself. Music, visuals and slogans have been identified as supportive elements that enhance memorability, although their relative importance varies across demographic groups (Roy and Gupta, 2019).

Urban-rural differences in media exposure and socio-cultural orientation further affect perceptions of advertising effectiveness. Urban audiences are generally more media-savvy and responsive to creative execution, whereas rural audiences tend to focus more on message clarity and relevance (Kumar, 2014). However, empirical evidence comparing the importance of different social advertising factors across urban and rural populations remains limited, thereby justifying the present study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of social advertisements.
2. To examine the level of importance assigned to various factors of social advertising by respondents.
3. To analyse the perceived success of selected social advertising campaigns.
4. To compare urban and rural respondents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of social advertisements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 400 adult television viewers from urban and rural areas of Punjab. Respondents' opinions regarding the importance of various advertising factors and the success of selected social campaigns were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean scores and percentages, along with inferential statistical tools including t-tests, F-ratios, and discriminant analysis to examine differences between urban and rural respondents.

IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS FACTORS IN SOCIAL ADVERTISING

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of selected factors influencing the effectiveness of social advertising. These factors included timing of broadcast, type of appeal

used in the message, narration of the message, theme of the social advertisement, celebrity endorsement, music/photography, and slogan or jingle.

Table 1

Level of Importance of Various Factors in Social Advertising (Overall Sample)

Factors	Mean	SD	% Mean
Timing of Broadcast	3.95	1.04	79.05
Type of Appeal used in the Message	4.31	0.73	86.10
Narration of the Message	4.33	0.77	86.65
Theme of the Social Advertisement	4.41	0.78	88.25
Celebrity used in the Advertisement	3.53	1.00	70.60
Music/Photography used in the Advertisement	3.48	0.94	69.65
Slogan/Jingle is Interesting	3.71	1.04	74.15

F -ratio = 3.34** (Significant at 1 per cent level)*

The results indicate that respondents attached the highest importance to the *theme of the social advertisement*, followed by *narration of the message* and *type of appeal used*. Timing of broadcast was also considered important. In contrast, factors such as music/photography and celebrity endorsement were perceived as relatively less important. The variation in importance assigned to different factors is statistically significant, suggesting that message-related elements play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of social advertisements.

URBAN AND RURAL COMPARISON OF IMPORTANCE LEVELS

To examine differences between urban and rural respondents, the importance of various factors was analysed separately.

Table 2

Level of Importance of Various Factors in Social Advertising (Urban and Rural)

Factors	Urban Mean	SD	% Mean	Rural Mean	SD	% Mean	t-value
Timing of Broadcast	4.04	0.97	80.72	3.81	1.14	76.27	2.15**
Type of Appeal used	4.42	0.64	88.48	4.11	0.88	82.13	2.86***
Narration of the Message	4.46	0.72	89.20	4.12	0.87	82.40	3.76***
Theme of Advertisement	4.51	0.77	90.16	4.25	0.80	85.07	2.98***
Celebrity used	3.44	1.01	68.88	3.67	0.97	73.47	2.57**
Music/Photography	3.51	0.92	70.16	3.44	0.97	68.80	0.70
Slogan/Jingle	3.78	1.04	75.52	3.59	1.04	71.87	1.85*

(Significant at 5%; **Significant at 1%)

Both urban and rural respondents ranked *theme*, *narration*, and *type of appeal* as the most important factors. However, urban respondents assigned significantly higher importance to most factors compared to rural respondents, indicating perceptual differences between the two groups.

PERCEIVED SUCCESS OF SELECTED SOCIAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

Respondents were asked to evaluate the success of ten selected social advertising campaigns on a five-point scale ranging from “Very Successful” to “Failure”.

Table 3
Perceived Success of Selected Social Advertisements (Overall Sample)

Social Advertisement	Mean	% Mean	Rank
Pulse Polio	4.24	84.80	1
Blood Donation	3.67	73.40	2
AIDS Awareness	3.60	72.00	3
Girl Child Education	3.50	70.05	5
Family Planning	3.41	68.20	4
Eye Donation	3.18	63.65	6
Breast Feeding	3.10	61.95	7
Against Driving when Drunk	2.90	57.95	8
Save Water/Oil/Electricity	2.83	56.50	9
Stop Female Foeticide	2.79	55.75	10

The Pulse Polio campaign emerged as the most successful, while the Stop Female Foeticide campaign was perceived as the least successful. This highlights the relative ease of achieving awareness and action change compared to value change through social advertising.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that social advertising is more effective in achieving cognitive and action-oriented change than in bringing about deep-seated value change. The success of the Pulse Polio campaign can be attributed to extensive coverage, repeated exposure, clear messaging, and strong institutional support. On the other hand, campaigns such as Stop Female Foeticide involve value transformation, which is inherently difficult to achieve through advertising alone.

The significant differences between urban and rural respondents further emphasise the need for audience-specific social advertising strategies.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the effectiveness of social advertisements is primarily determined by message-related factors such as theme, narration, and appeal rather than peripheral executional elements. While social advertisements are effective in creating awareness and encouraging specific actions, their role in altering deep-rooted social values remains limited. A differentiated approach that considers urban-rural sensitivities is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of social advertising campaigns.

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