

SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Subliminal messages are hidden messages that are made to act on your subconscious mind. They are an attempt to make you think or want something without you even realizing it. These hidden messages can be transmitted by images flashing extremely fast on a screen, in pictures within pictures, in themes, or even in slogans. This paper talks of the impact of the subliminal messages on the buying behavior of the consumer and the increased use of this tool by the marketers to increase the sales of their products.

KEYWORDS: *subliminal messages, persuasion, learned behavior, attention seeking, subliminal advertising.*

INTRODUCTION

Controversial issue comes up when use of subliminal messages in advertising comes into play. While some advertisers and consumers agree that if subliminal messages are real, they show no effect on consumers; others believe that these messages directly affect sales of certain items being advertised. Research in this area is necessary to find out if subliminal messages are real and ethical to be used in advertising today.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“The charge that advertising attempts to persuade buyers is surely true” (Demsetz, 1974, p.67). One of the works of advertiser is to get a consumer to recognize an ad and motivate consumer buy product being advertised. This can be achieved by creating distinct advertisements, or “ads that pose a change or contrast due to their color, size, intensity, contrast, position, movement, or isolation” (Andrews, Akhter, Durvasula, & Muehling, 1992). If a consumer easily recognizes a product, they will be more inclined to recall past experiences with product and buy product again (Telser, 1974, p.31). It has been proved not only that subliminal messaging exists, but it works on consumers. In a study conducted in London by Beatty and Hawkins study (1989), participants

were given cards that said, “COKE,” “DRINK COKE,” or nothing. Study found that those with messages telling them to “DRINK COKE,” or just said, “COKE,” were thirstier than those whose cards said nothing. Another experiment was done in 1957 where a researcher named James Vicary flashed messages, “Drink Coca-Cola,” and “Hungry? Eat Popcorn,” on screen at a movie theater. This resulted in an increase of sales of both items. Though messages may not always work, “researchers have shown that if conditions are right, subliminal advertising to promote a brand can be made to work.” (Motluk, 2006, p.16)

Many argue that these findings in subliminal messages are due to chance, University College London (2007) has found research that shows that subliminal messages actually do cause stimulation in brain. This does not show a direct correlation between subliminal advertising and sales, but it does show that subliminal advertising does have an effect on brain activity.

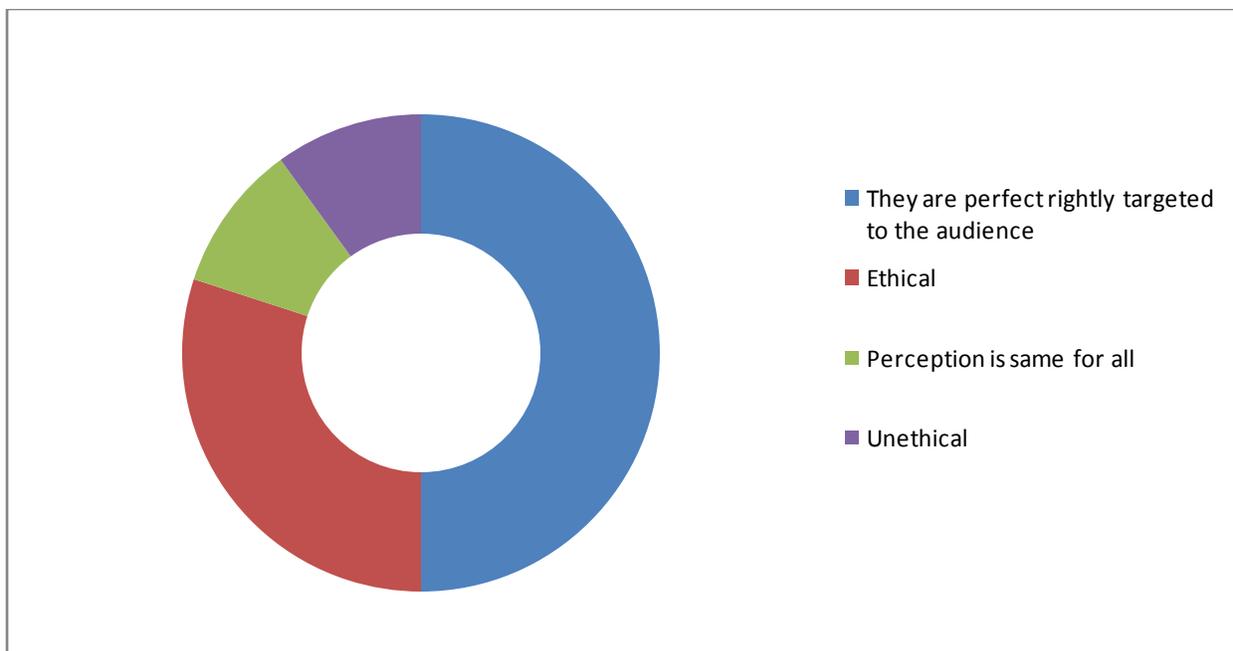
There is some evidence about existence of subliminal messages; many advertising firms today do not believe these messages have a real effect on consumers. Dr. Timothy Moore, chairman of department of psychology at York University in Toronto, believes that since subliminal messages can't be easily detected, message won't have its intended influence (Brody, 1982, p.2).

Most advertisers are of the view that only way to get a message across is to say it rather than try to decode it with subliminal messages. American Association of Advertising Agencies stated, “We are convinced that there is no subliminal advertising in America today. Advertising people learned long ago that best way to say a thing is to say it – up front, on top and aboveboard, where it belongs” (Brody, 1982, p. 3). Advertisers want people to know, “when someone tries to read too much into an advertisement, consumers should trust their own eyes” (Broyles, 2006), because many advertisers think that consumers should be able to take what they see at face value.

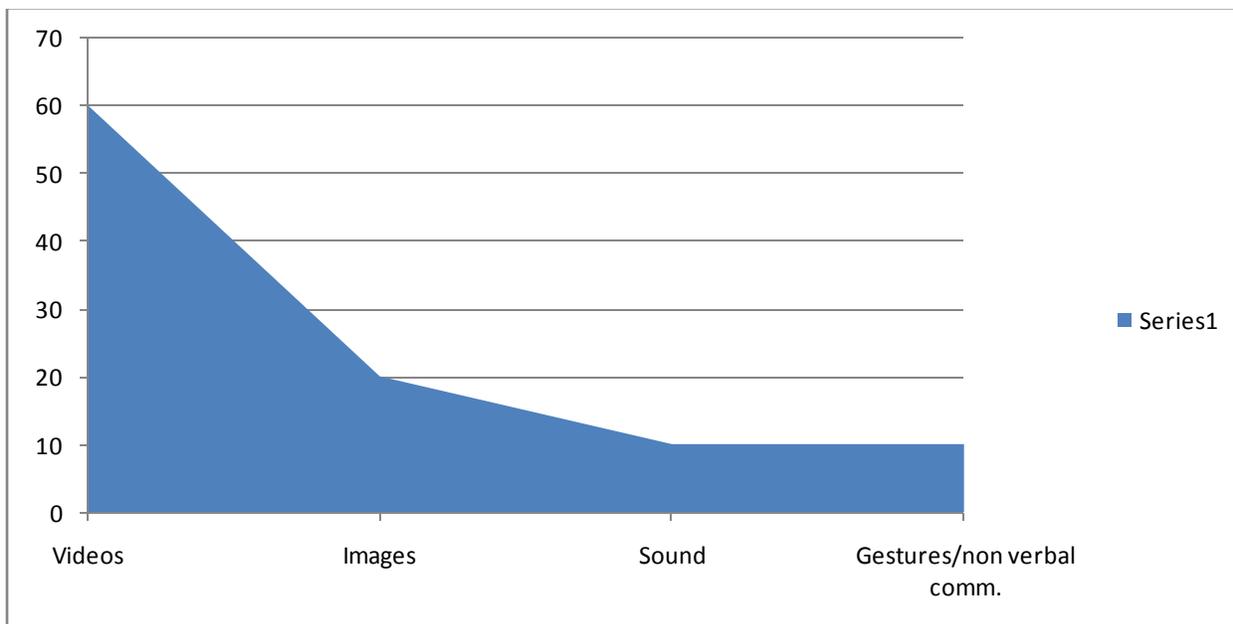
Subliminal advertising is a much debated subject. Many believe that this type of advertising gives advertisers no advantage over consumers. These people believe that telling consumers message they want to get across directly shows better results. On other hand, some people think that subliminal messages can have a great influence on consumers. How message is shown to consumer affects how they feel about products and their likeliness to use product over a long period of time.

DATA FINDINGS

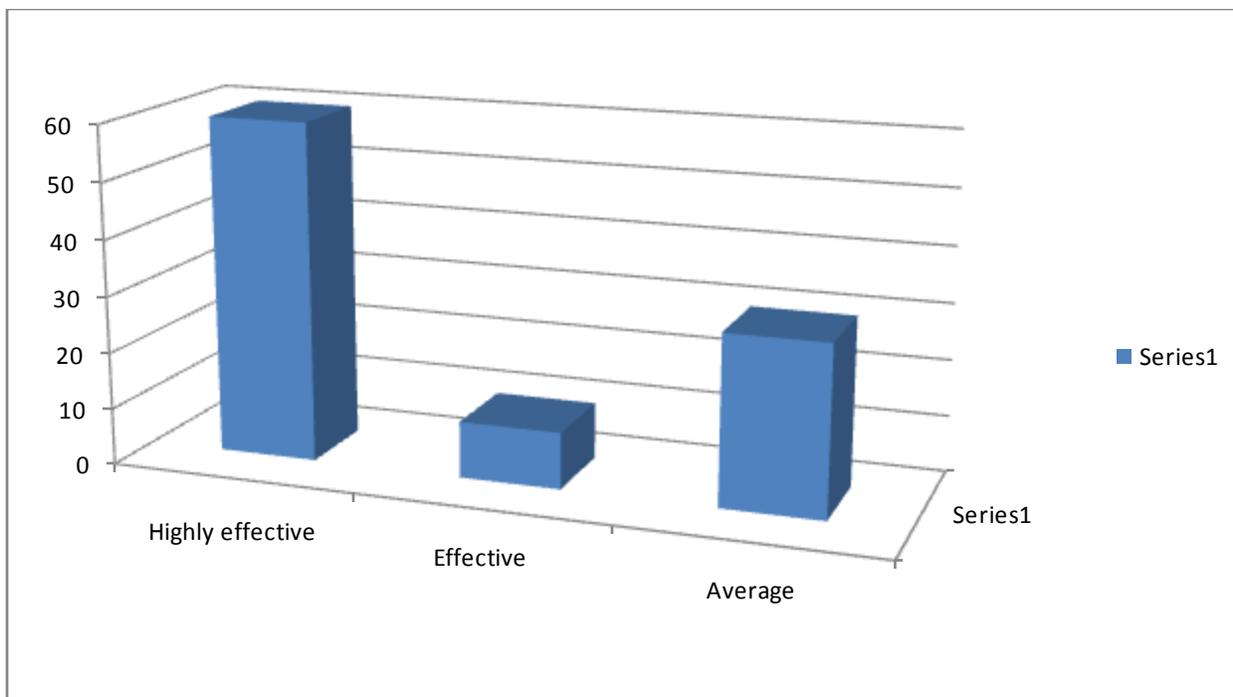
The research methodology includes filling up of a questionnaire by 100 respondents regarding the various aspects on subliminal advertising.



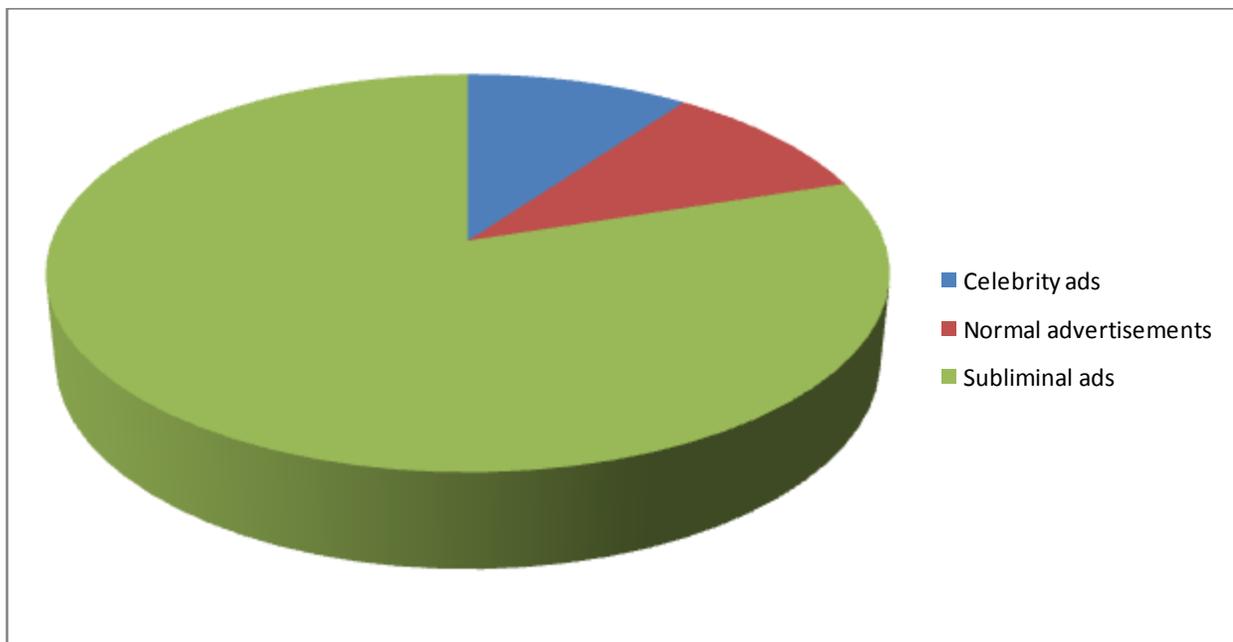
The results show that 50% of the people agree that the marketers are right in actually targeting their products to the audience as it works best when the product is targeted at the subconscious mind of the customer while 30% think that they are doing ethical things by sending such subliminal messages, 10% respondents think they are doing unethical things by doing so and rest 10% have the same perception for all the advertisements.



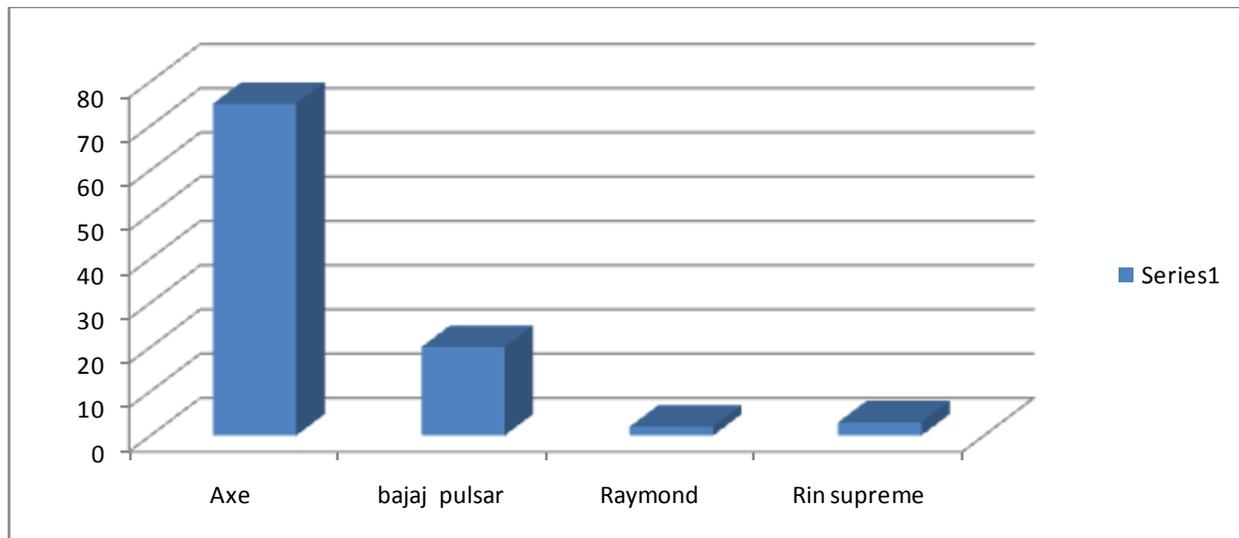
Most of the respondents have agreed that the advertisements which have the highest impact on the the subconscious mind is through video (60%) followed by images (20%), sound (10%) & gesture (10%) respectively.



Out of the 100 people surveyed 60% feel that subliminal advertisements are highly effective in communicating their messages while 30% feel that the subliminal messages are having an average effect on the minds of the consumers & 10% feel that they are effective.



80% of the respondents feel that subliminal messages are used to arouse, excite, trigger and appeal the unconscious parts of our brain which also inevitably influences our psychology while the effect of normal and subliminal advertisements is minimum.



The above chart shows that 70% of the people consider Axe jobs under the category of subliminal advertising while 20% people think bajaj pulsar ads to be in the the subliminal category followed by 5% each for raymond & rin supreme ads.

ANALYSIS

The reason why we see more subliminal advertising used today is may be because of the shortage of time or lack of awareness among the customers about the products/needs. Subliminal advertising is used now-a-days by the marketers for a company to advertise their product offerings compared to their competitors (which may/may not increase the pie of their market share). I agree with most advertisers who agree who think that a more effective form of advertising is to tell consumers how product will affect their lives. Directly telling someone how a product will benefit them will establish a trust between company and consumer that will end up benefiting company in long run. Products like Axe (and many more other companies) use advertisement below that show their consumers that using their product could potentially benefit them by gain of attention from opposite sex.

CONCLUSION

The data findings somewhat how shows the respondents perception that subliminal advertising is real. The paper did find a lot of information suggesting possibility of truth behind this type of advertising. All of information found has showed consistent results and direct correlations that proves this type of advertising works. It seems that subliminal advertising is now-a-days used as a tool by the marketers. Messages that are flashed before viewers eyes do stimulate brain and can result in purchase of a product. Finally, subliminal messaging, or messages that are below liminal or smallest detectable sensation (Carroll, 2005), are very effective. Advertisers today realize that best way to get a consumer to buy a product is not to be upfront but to use tools such as subliminal persuasion. In today's society, People don't want to know why they should buy something or what effect it will have on their life nor they have time to do so. People are buying something because a company tells them to. The future work which the paper suggest is to

actually look at the various opportunities to look whether by using subliminal advertising (through video, audio, images, visuals) is helping companies to increase the sales of their products. Like in the case of Mc Donald's (and many more companies like that across various domains) they deliberately flashed a commercial at the peak time just for a few seconds which company claimed that it was done mistakably. Now, whether that has led to the increase in the sale of the product is the question of future research.

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