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The Influence of Advertising on Child Raising within the Family

by

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There is a saying, "Advertising is trade's mainspring." It shows the close relationship of advertising with this field of human life, which is a possibility of sale and purchase of some goods. It has been like that for many centuries. However, this situation has recently undergone a serious change. Presently, man is exposed to advertising almost constantly because it is present almost everywhere. One may find it on TV and radio programs, in the press, on the streets in the form of billboards, in shops and in the media. Facing this omnipresence, it is necessary to ask a very important question concerning the nature of advertising. Specifically: what is its influence on the full development of man, especially a young man, whose personality hasn't yet completely formed? And so, an important problem appears here of determining the impact of advertising on the proper upbringing of man.

1. The Nature of Advertising

The very word "advertising" originates from Latin and is a derivative of *reclamare*, which might be translated as "making a racket, noise". The historical practices of past centuries were perfect examples of this sense of the word. Merchants or traders informed potential customers about the goods for sale in this way. The noise they made was intended to draw attention to, first, their product and, next, to the stalls where it could have been purchased.

It was one of the most effective means serving this purpose in the past. Basically, that is how advertising has been understood up until present times. Its function was a direct support of trade. However, with introduction of mass media (press, radio, TV) into social life, this function of advertising has significantly changed, or more precisely, broadened.¹ This broadening of the advertising function is manifested in the fact that presently it is not only intended to inform about goods, but also to convince its recipients that the advertised goods can be the best, or sometimes the only way, to provide for their needs. This means that its recipient should be convinced that the advertised goods are indispensable. The information contained by the advertising constitutes the base on which the whole, powerful mechanism of persuasion is built.² Moreover, advertising also intends to keep as many as possible of its recipients with the given product, which they have already purchased.

In order to achieve its aims, advertising must utilize various mechanisms, which means it must draw attention, interests, and induce the need and action as well. That's why advertising contains multilevel transmission directed to a potential customer. For the purpose of achieving the intended aim it should be visible, ingenious and intriguing.

One of the most frequently used mechanisms is ***the fact that human needs and desires are not always conscious***. Accurately chosen words and proper picture might not only make them conscious but actually create. The manipulation process is taking place here, understood as a purposeful and secret activity that imposes a false picture of some reality on the individual or a group.³ In this case it is a linguistic manipulation, in which linguistic means – certain characteristics of words and grammar structure (but not the substance expressed by the language) – allow for influencing the consumer in a way he is not aware of.⁴

Therefore, encouragement to buy the advertised product is, in this case, based mainly on the promises of benefits obtained after its purchase. This means that if any man's need is not presently provided for, it must be done through the purchase of this product.

In order to intensify this effect, advertising uses request, encouragement or advice directed to the recipient. For example: *give yourself some luxury, reach for health, follow your instinct, let's discover a better world*. The contents of these sentences are willingly accepted because the sender seems to care about the recipient's well being. A suitable verbal form, that is a direct address to the consumer, magnifies the impression. This form might be perceived as stressing and emphasizing the individuality of the text's recipient. Besides, the form of request, encouragement or advice influences his emotions and, in this way, creates a nice atmosphere.

Very often the advertised product appears as the one capable of solving various problems. The structure of many advertising spots is based

on presentation of the problem such as cough, headache or stomachache. Thanks to application of the advertised product it is possible to eliminate the difficulty and create an atmosphere of satisfaction and happiness for oneself. It is clearly apparent that advertising tries to create a conditioned reflex in its recipient.

Another mechanism used in advertising is referring to *famous, commonly known or popular persons*. A basic characteristic of human psyche is interest in other people. That is why the person of the sender, presenting the product, plays an important role in advertising. Relating the product to the proper personage constitutes one of the most important factors influencing the customer. Attention is drawn to the celebrity's shape or facial image. The advertising recipient identifies himself with the characters taking part in the spots..

Therefore, advertising often uses famous and popular people. Tastes and behavior are most frequently taken from them because they belong to a specific social elite. Being aware of having the same product that "the great" of this world use may be nice for many customers. It is easy to distinguish the advertised product with the help of a famous name. Utilizing the weight of authority, many spots refer to popular characters found in the literature of the given community. It is similar to the case of experts in certain fields appearing in the spots, for example chemists advertising washing agents, doctors advertising pharmaceuticals. It's not easy to oppose the expert's opinions, even if they are not credible. Experts, as competent, enjoy trust and a positive association of the recipients to the presented contents might be expected.

Some characters are permanently bound with the given product or company. The appearance of such a character serves a role of creating contact with customers, who associate him exclusively with certain products. Advertising people make contact with the recipients through expression of their experiences, conditions, emotions or sharing their own problems. They do it to induce similar emotions in their customers. It constitutes an invitation to the common experience of satisfaction from the use of the purchased product, to the experience of community with others. If one neglects this chance, it may cause regrets from missing a chance of improving one's life.

It is also a known fact that a man's opinions about what other people say depend on his social position, post, education, age, sex and even his looks. Therefore, the customer reacts intensely when he meets people similar to himself in advertising. On one hand, he easily selects spots directed to him while on the other hand he automatically considers the advertised product as part of his lifestyle. This suggests to the customer certain behavior which he subconsciously registers and then involuntarily copies. Stimulation of the specific needs of mass public through advertising is taking place, which creates certain life style.⁵ That is why in the spots advertising foodstuffs,

hygienic and everyday life products, people appear easy to identify with by the majority of society. People from the advertising spots are very different but always sympathetic, so they draw attention and induce nice emotions. They are satisfied and happy and the source of this condition is possession or use of some product. Such state of happiness is desired by everyone and very easy to attain. It is sufficient to buy the given product. This sounds irrational, yet advertising works in exactly this way, beyond consciousness.

Besides, people in the advertising spots are characterized by great kindness and seem to care about their recipients. They assure them that, thanks to the purchased thing, they will achieve benefits that will change their life and make them healthy, perpetually young, modern, successful or satisfied people. Sometimes a very strong pressure, proceeding beyond consciousness, is exerted on the recipient of the message.

Another mechanism used in advertising is *identification of the products with the values appreciated by people*. One of these is the value of interpersonal relationships, especially family ties. This is used mainly for advertising goods and services related to home and body as well as every instance in which the advertiser wants to convince the customers about his honesty and partner-like approach. Typical stimulus in this case is a child, his gesture, smile, protective behavior, hugging, stroking or a kiss. Children's behavior creates a positive atmosphere for such neutral things as a safety razor, dishwashing liquid, etc. Advertising spots also show scenes from family life, radiating with warmth, love and mutual care. They are used even for presentation of such unimportant products as margarine or washing powder. Mother's image is also an important element and has a great influencing power in advertising, because she symbolizes good, care, and protection. That's why she evokes positive emotions and a kind attitude towards the product.

Mostly, however, advertising refers to such values as beauty, health, life, happiness, good looks, comfort, love, success and safety but they are treated hedonistically. This means that the product presented in the advertising spots appears as the most important value in man's life, even though in reality, it may be almost meaningless. However, the role, characteristics and properties assigned to it bestow upon it the power to decide about quality of human life, feelings of happiness and satisfaction.

As a result of the applied manipulations, advertising contents effectively influence with illusion. Thanks to that, the customer does not think about the real value of the goods, but remains convinced that they are indispensable and exceptional.⁶ This creates some fairy-tale world with no place for half-measures, doubts or dissatisfaction.

That is the world created by advertising. The thing advertised is the most important and the customer should want it. And so, man's production, intended to make life and activity easier, but not always necessary,

becomes something worthy of desire, a goal that should be achieved.

Another technique designed to obtain this effect consists in granting human characteristics, because people's attention is drawn to creatures resembling themselves in appearance and behavior as well. That is why graphic symbols or pictures resembling the human face are used. Resemblance to humans makes things seem sympathetic. This is identification of the product with man. For example, washing powder is shown as a friendly creature coming to help. A certain rule is applied here, based on selection of facts, which might be expressed in the slogan: "advertising should not say the whole truth, but only the truth". This allows for the presentation of the chosen characteristics of the advertised product and omission of those that seem less important. This clearly shows that advertising means dissemination of incomplete information and half-truths, since it shows only positive properties, while there is no presentation of the negative ones. Repetition of such half-truths contributes to popularization of the presented opinions and their acceptance as obvious truths. Stereotypes are created in this way.⁷

II. Impact of Advertising on Children

Mechanisms presently used by advertising as well as its contents justify the opinion that it begins to constitute a threat to man, especially the one not fully mature or completely developed, in other words, a child. For this reason modern advertising threatens the proper upbringing of a child in the family, which is the basic and most important educational reality. This danger is manifested in three planes.

The first of them is related to the *intellectual sphere*. Here, the threat created by advertising consists mainly in destruction of the possibility of forming the correct value hierarchy based on truth, in the child.⁸ A full recognition of reality is thus restricted and it becomes limited to certain aspects — such as material — expressed in popularization of consumptionism and hedonism, treating them as the only goal of human life. Advertising renders development of independent thinking impossible by teaching indiscriminate acceptance of all suggestions. That is because a child still has no formed judgement of reality sufficient for precise differentiation of what is truth and what is false, what is good and what is evil. And advertising imposes a perception of the world, forms values and appreciation criteria, which often lead to reduction of man to his material needs, as if only they could make sense of human life.⁹

Moreover, one may notice that advertising shows life as continual entertainment and fun which, of course, is not true. Work is also necessary in life and constitutes its significant part. Advertising blurs the difference between fun and work. The way of presentation of the goods shows such understanding of life. The ideology of permanent entertainment appears

and life is understood as a continual party. This message is often prominent in advertising spots directed to children and young people. Therefore, the goods are wrapped in entertainment and fun ideology. Only "now" counts and one does not think of what will be "later".

It might even be noticed that such slogans lead to putting a thing in place of God, because man becomes addicted to it, wants it and his happiness as well as feeling depend on it. Advertising gives a deceptive hope that with the help of a thing man is capable of getting rid of all his anxieties and will make his life easy, simple and nice. It suggests that man can avoid everything related to renouncement, trouble and suffering.

In this way the child becomes isolated from complete truth about the world. It is obvious that the world presented by advertising does not lead a child to God, but to concentration on himself through creation of the impression that, beyond him, nothing else exists. Thus, it does not fulfill the task intended by the Creator but, to the contrary, totally appropriates the child's attention.

The world of advertising finally becomes opposed to God, because it concentrates only on worldly things, impudently popularizing the life style of consumption. Frequent popularization of this lie results in planting it deeply in a child's conscience, the more so if parents do not undertake educational efforts to prevent such understanding of the world. It is a known fact, that the opinions presented by mass media create public opinion, this anonymous authority, with great powers of influence.

In this way advertising contributes to destruction of the child's independence and his family upbringing. In place of the values which his parents try to pass on to him, it offers the cult of technology and things. Presently, advertising has ceased to fulfill its important function, which is presentation of goods. It concentrates instead on promises of happiness, health, wealth and successful life. It does not care what will happen to people who believe it. In this way it creates certain opinions and views, which become obligatory in people's eyes. These opinions tell people who they are and who they should be. And so, through falsehood and blurring of truth, advertising builds behavior patterns influencing everyday thoughts and actions of people.

Another plane of threat on the part of contemporary advertising for the correct family upbringing of children concerns the *volitional element*. It consists in destruction of man's ties with tradition. This is achieved through shaking of all general norms as well as through depriving national symbols of their significant meaning. By popularization of identical products throughout the whole world, for example the same drink, the same shoes or the same clothing for everyone, advertising leads to unification of life standards in various parts of the world or country. This, unfortunately, is achieved at the cost of destruction of the local culture,

which is presented as outdated or indicative of backwardness. Therefore, the effect of such processes is breaking with tradition as a reference point towards national values originating from the particular country's history.¹⁰

It seems that this activity is aimed at creation of a uniform culture for the whole world, or total globalization. Standardization takes place, which means popularization of identical behavior patterns for everybody.¹¹ It must be added here that this process of destruction of local cultures and imposed uniformity of all cultures of the world by advertising is of a very intensive character and based on the lowest human instincts.

For that reason this process is especially harmful in case of a child, because it concentrates exclusively on arousing these instincts in him. Correct upbringing tries to subject these instincts to conscious activity, so that man wouldn't be governed in his behavior solely by reflexes. Popularization of consumption in advertising limits the recipients' internal freedom, which is effective even in case of the 5-7 year-old child.¹² On the other hand, every fixed form of internal constraint destroys the effectiveness of parental educational influence. It is clearly apparent in this context that advertising becomes a steamroller crushing everything constituting not only some cultural difference, but also destroying any elementary educational rules.

A strong ideology manifests itself here, apparent for instance in such slogans used by advertising as: "new quality of life", "new value". Their sense does not mean anything better, but rather something widespread and identical for everybody. There is no reference to a hierarchy of values, but exclusively to the popularity of certain behavior. It isn't important how one behaves, which in this case is good, but only that everybody and everyone does it. Unfortunately, this means bad behavior most frequently. Therefore, there's nothing in common here with any pedagogical rules, originating if only from common sense, not to mention religious rules.

The result of this is weakening or even destruction of the ability to control one's behavior, and arousal of the lowest human instincts. Such patterns, or rather anti-patterns destroy cultural models. New patterns are created in their place, negating the dignity of the human being. Rejection of certain norms forming man's behavior leads, in consequence, to the rejection of all authorities, including this especially important parental authority, and finally to chaos and anarchy. Lack of man's reference to cultural models — of the child in this case, in which advertising destroyed such models — makes him susceptible to all manipulation. It is very dangerous during childhood, because it can permanently warp the psyche.

Very often advertising spots directed to children overtly break moral norms, misinform and exploit the child's lack of suitable knowledge and experience. Sometimes they even appeal to fear, cause terror, exploit prejudices and encourage violence. The example of such procedures might

be advertising spots popularizing subcultures, which result in strengthening of criminal behavior. Wanting of respectful approach to another man and praise of humiliating behavior is apparent in these spots.

Such conduct is described as full freedom, that is being oneself. It blurs the truth that being oneself, or maturity, is not acquired through criminal behavior but through intensive work and control of one's conduct. Advertising addressed to the young is intended to symbolize that an old person is the obsolete element of community. In this way, respectful treatment of the elder by the young people is destroyed. This constitutes special threat for the child as a result of warping his ties with parents.

Such destruction of proper family ties is apparent in the advertising spots directed to children and utilizing techniques of neurostimulation. An adult person might be immune to them but a child, whose psyche isn't formed enough to resist, is vulnerable to a very strong influence. Those techniques use psychoactive elements manifested in picture pulsation, its frequency, kind and intensity of sound, colorful effects, changes of tempo and utilization of electronic music of brain wave frequency.¹³ That this might lead to tragic consequences has been demonstrated in Japan and other countries, where children who watched a program intended for them, suffered epileptic seizures and had to be hospitalized.

A child influenced by such advertising becomes an instrument of pressure on his parents concerning purchase of the specific goods. This is how the manufacturer exploits parental feelings. A child becomes the means of acquiring customers by senders of advertising.

Negative influences of advertising on the child's volitional sphere are especially distinct in a very important domain, namely, sexuality. Many advertising spots referring to this sphere blur the truth of its important elements and its significance for man. This mainly concerns a false picture of human sexuality.

It is done firstly through making public the most intimate matters. That deprives this beautiful sphere of its privacy, which is very important between man-husband and woman-wife. Advertising approaches the subject in a very vulgar way and shows only the physical side of these intimate contacts, without relating them to spiritual matters, love and emotion as well as moral rules. This, therefore, constitutes demoralization of a young man. It is apparent in demonstrated nakedness, obscene pictures and dissolute gestures, used by advertising spots of, for example, perfume, deodorants or sweets as well as especially glaring presentation of underwear. Subconscious, emotions and desires are influenced here. Many advertisements in the form of posters are characterized by outright provocation concerning these matters. It might be called preying on the aroused and lowest human instincts, in this case stripped of all higher values. A man driven by his biological instincts, rather than intellect, might be totally manipulated.

The impact of the above is intensified by promotion of harmful condiments such as alcoholic beverages and nicotine. Extensive research in this field shows increased consumption of these agents after such influence, which concerns mainly young people and children. This is especially bad since precisely they are susceptible to addiction. In a general context manifested in excessive consumption of alcohol in Poland, this problem becomes very dangerous. A similar situation might be observed with regard to tobacco, because the image of the world created by advertising spots suggests that smoking is a proof of adulthood.

It is very well known that television possesses great powers of creating its viewers' needs, forming personality models and behavior norms. A child or young man subject to perpetual bombardment with colorful pictures, which are TV commercials, completely loses his ability of reflection and criticism. In this way, gradually and imperceptibly, he falls into stupefaction and changes his values, those passed on from parents during the upbringing process.

Equally negative results for a child's volitional sphere is the utilization by advertising of religious symbols and assigning to them a totally different meaning than the one they actually possess. The example might be banalization of evil which, in effect, leads to blurring of the important dogmas of faith. The elements of magic, fortune telling, astrology or horoscopes are promoted together with it.

In the light of the above analyses regarding the influence of advertising on the process of child upbringing in the family, it might be said that advertising nowadays has lost its function, which was to inform about the given goods and encourage purchase of them. Presently, advertisement has become a means of manipulation of man. Through creation and popularization of illusions concerning the role of things in human life, as well as through various mechanisms, it strives to create a new lifestyle, completely new and different hierarchy of values, new behavior models and moral norms.

These have little in common with the well being of man — proving that advertising does not care about man's development — but also become a negation of the whole of civilization, which was erected so laboriously by past generations. Advertising presently constitutes a great threat for the proper child upbringing. By arousing his various instincts, from his earliest years, it reduces him to the level of mere immediate practical value, that is object and not subject. Besides, advertising contributes to making him a slave of things.

At this point in history, the saying "*advertising is trade's mainspring*", whose existence was justified in the past, should rather be paraphrased as follows: "*advertising is the mainspring of falsehood*". And where falsehood exists, there are always constraints. We know, however,

that: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".¹⁴ It seems that behind this falsehood, promoted by advertising nowadays, the final goal is hidden, that is total destruction of civilization. That is why family plays such an important role in the cause of proper child upbringing in order to protect him against the destruction emerging from behind advertising.

Finally it is worth asking a question: *whose purpose is served by popularization of destruction through contemporary advertising?*

References

1. Which is manifested, for example, in the description of contemporary advertising as any message intended for promotion, sale or other forms of utilization of goods and services, support of precise matters or ideas or striving to achieve other goals desirable for advertising's sender and transmitted for fee or other form of payment. *The Act on Radiophony and Television*, art. 4, clause 6. *Official Gazette* no 7 (1993) item 34.
2. Persuasion is a manner of influencing the recipient's emotions and will do so with various means, except intellectual argumentation, which is intended to induce them to undertake activities suggested by the sender. All conditions, emotions and experiences of people from the advertising spot aim to induce identical conditions in their recipients. Persuasive functions of the text itself, understood as a function of forming human attitudes and, indirectly, their behavior. J. Puzynina. *Linguistics but aksiology. The Bulletin of The Polish Language Association*. XXXIX (1982) p. 23-32.
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14. John 8,32.