



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

## Impact of Advertisements on Consumption: A Socio-Graphic Study of Students in Iran

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### Abstract:

*The paper explores how the power of advertisements facilitates the purchasing and consumption. It bridges between the two sources — the decision of the buyer/consumer on the one side, and the supplier on the other. It also eliminates negotiation, bargaining and the hard part of decision-making. Therefore, interactions take place quicker under the power of graphic advertisements. The paper implicitly argues how the consumption market is strengthened and improves through graphic advertisements. Culture of consumption is made and influenced by graphic illustrations and advertisements. The paper argues that while sociability supports consumption, isolation promotes withdrawal from consumption. Therefore, advertising bridges between production and consumption. Similarly, consumption contributes to the reproduction of culture and modernity. The research is based on the main hypothesis that: "graphic advertisements motivate and affect consumption within the youth in the society". The present research investigates 470 students of age group 18-29 of various disciplines and of both genders in Tehran City. In that, more female students 311 (66.2%), and less male students 159 (33.8%) participated in interviews.*

**Keywords:** *Graphic billboards, advertisements. Consumption, graphic arts, cultural behavior*

### 1. Introduction

In advertising, graphic design is the use of text and graphics to create a visually appealing message that entices consumers to learn about the product/ services being offered, and move to the next step in the purchasing process. It encourages consumption culture.

There is a close connection between culture and consumption. Similarly, a full survey of consumption shows a close relationship between production, distribution and consumption. Producers promote purchase and use of newly-designed and produced goods and services through the means of graphics and advertisements. So, supply and demand in economic terms are highly influenced by the means of graphics and advertisements. The paper attempts to demonstrate the inter- link between culture and consumption. It must be noted that culture itself is highly influenced and motivated by graphic illustrations, and through the means of advertising industry. Keeping in mind that consumption is somehow a rational maximizing behavior, a sort of expressive behavior, is affected by graphic language and advertisement.

Scholars of consumption study economic institutions such as department stores, taste formation, food consumption, media advertising, household budget and so on (Miller:1981); (Rosenzweig:1983); (Tiersten:2001); (Mintz:1996); (Lears:1994), and (Horowitz:1985).

In an appraisal of consumption, (Miller:1998) provides evidence that sociability, culture and purchasing of goods support each other, while isolation promotes withdrawal from consumption. However, arts scholars clearly have much to learn about consumption from outside their disciplines in particular from sociologists to uncover the social implications and involvement of consumption behavior.

Various thinkers such as (T.Veblen:1953); (George Simmel:1957); (Lynd:1929); (Lazarsfeld:1957), and (Riesman:1964) have worked on consumption differently. In recent decades, perhaps the most influential synthesis came from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984). Bourdieu combined an ambitious theoretical program with a remarkable range of concrete studies of consumption practices including photography and housing markets (2000). Bourdieu introduced the ideas of cultural and social capital into analysis of consumption. Bourdieu was of the opinion that class culture determines consumption.

British sociologists also used consumption studies to examine patterns of inequality and cultural change in Britain. They focused on economic studies from production to consumption (Campbell:1995; Slater:1997). Similarly, there is a link between consumption, production and distribution (du Gay:1996).

Similarly, in discussing consumption and culture, George Ritzer (1996) has initiated a somewhat separate analysis of what he calls "McDonaldization", or the spread of standardized fast food which leads to uniform practices on consumption and culture. So, the practice of such standardized consumption initially started through extensive advertisements. However, consumption contributes to the reproduction of culture, social structure, consumer culture and modernity (Ritzer and Slater 2001).

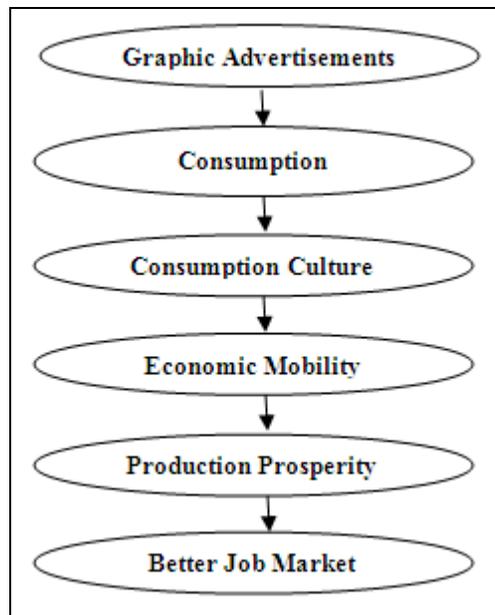


Figure 1: Model of Research: Motivations of Advertisements

## 2. Research Problem

To select a research problem is of prime importance, and needs careful consideration at the beginning of research. The most important being that the problem should be researchable as well as manageable. Research problem can be on account of factual evaluation of a program, to collect information, to respond the curiosity of the researcher, or to find information for policy-makers. The problem of research may be the concern of some industry; in public or private sector, to find out the reaction of certain masses towards their product, the potential market for a type of proposed new brands, to promote consumption of certain goods and services and so on.

The researcher expects that the topic and problem of research are likely to bring him/her some prestige. Since the research is good-directed, a goal researcher will always see that his/her problem and topic of research bring desired report within a specific time, that it is possible to collect data which can be organized by him/her efficiently. Similarly, the researcher will have to see that the problem has been defined properly.

A research problem includes such components: what one wants to know? why one wants to know? are possible answers to questions. That is to say, first a question arises, then why the question arises, followed by possible answers (Merton:2010).

However, the purpose of the present research is to introduce the reader to that importance of the topic being studied. For that, we place the problem, i.e. the reciprocal variables of advertisements and consumption in the context of the investigation. Eventually, the findings provide us with the necessary expected information about: the impact of advertisements on consumption in Iran, with special reference to the youth/students.

## 3. Methodology

The technique used in the present research is a quality- quantity method to generate a comprehensive and detailed description of the relationship between advertisement and consumption in a sociographic context. To conduct the present research, 470 students of various disciplines in different universities in Tehran City were approached and interviewed through the tool of questionnaires. The present research is based on the main hypothesis that: "graphic advertisements motivate and affect consumption within the youth in the society". To conduct the research, theoretical arguments as well as empirical considerations were used. As it was not possible to reflect the full 21 extracted tables, they were presented in *abridged form*. The questionnaire was also initially pretested on 25 students.

### 3.1. Consumer Behavior

The term indicates that modern societies are distinctive in that they are increasingly organized around consumption. There is a growing debate about the characteristics of consumer societies which include:

1. Rising affluence leading to spending more on consumer goods, holidays, leisure etc.
2. In a consumer society, working hours usually fall, and that permits more time for leisure pursuits.
3. People usually acquire a new identity in the form of a consumer culture following the industrial development in their society.
4. Due to aestheticization of everyday life, there is more interest in the presentation of an image and construction of a lifestyle; both of which involve the purchase of commodities and services of various kinds.
5. Consumption-based behavior, and development of such a lifestyle are used as markers of social position.

In consumer societies, consumers gain power and authority through consumption of goods and services, and through offer in services by professionals such as doctors, teachers, lawyers etc. However, increasing numbers of goods and services have contributed to such a transition. Under such conditions and through increasing advertisements, shopping becomes a leisure activity, and a new culture (Lury:1996). Despite the increasing power of graphic advertisements, many contributors debate about the consumer society in which more attention is paid to the production rather than consumption. It is worth mentioning that graphic advertisements affect all, regardless of class, race and gender differentiations. It must also be noted that consumer society results in empowering of consumers. However, in such circumstances, the market extends into all areas of activity. Similarly, many thinkers doubt that the consumer society results in the empowering of consumers and argue that it simply represents the extension of capitalist values, and further divides the rich from the poor (Boudieu:1993).

### 3.2. Consumption Divisions

In many sociographic works, social class has been taken to be the source of important social divisions. Recently, however, a number of sociographic thinkers have argued that, for a variety of reasons, class divisions are not nearly as important as they were. Social divisions are increasingly based on differing patterns of consumption, which is highly influenced by graphic advertisements. Another version of the argument may be found in those writers who suggest that *identity* in modern societies is increasingly founded on differences in consumption. People therefore do not derive their identity from their class position, or from their work lives, but rather from the tastes, habits and consumption patterns that they share with others (Saunders:1990).

### 3.3. Influencing Patterns

The way of living or lifestyle of the students/ youth is widely influenced by the physical, psychological, social and cultural icons; values which are reflected in advertisements. In other words, lifestyle is a composite of motivations, needs and wants influenced by factors such as culture, family and social class. However, quality of consumption itself highly impacts lifestyle. Similarly, advertisement determines how consumers make their purchase decisions (Retrieved from Business Dictionary. com).

Psychographics, or the study of personality, values, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles affect the students/youth and their way of living. Therefore, psychographic studies of individuals can be valuable in their consumption behavior. Psychographic profile or make-up of a person is constructed and used in advertising, and as a means to encourage consumption.

### 3.4. Advertisements, Consumption and Economy

Advertisements and consumption highly impact the citizens to purchase goods and services. Even, when they do not have cash, they use credit to buy things that they cannot afford. The action sometimes causes a situation in which they cannot pay their debts, and therefore, they have no money to purchase more goods, resulting in less money for everyone. In such conditions, manufacturers have to lay off workers as more goods are not needed.

Therefore, the advertisements cause people to buy things, and in this process the company makes profit. This leads the company to hire more workers — those workers buy more things, and as a result, the government collects taxes on.

On the other hand, in case of shortage of advertisements and shortage of consumption, the economy would collapse, and the government would not receive taxes enough. However, people who see advertisements, have more chance of buying the advertised products, and in this way the economy functions as well. So, in this way, jobs are created, and that helps the economy boost forward.

### 3.5. Positive Impacts of Consumerism

The positive impacts of consumerism on economy and society are varied and extensive. That results in more industrial production, higher growth rate of the economy, more goods and services available, and more employment opportunities. More goods and services to choose from, and eventually more comforts for a better living style (Retrieved from Shukla). However, the circulation of cash in its essence is necessary in a vibrant consumer society, and the appropriate cultural behaviour of the people of which is necessary.

## 4. Findings

As shown in Table 1, two-thirds of the interested students participated in the interviews were females, of whom 36.4 percent were of age group 18-20.

Age	Total		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	159	33.8	311	66.2
18-20	203	43.2	32	6.8	171	36.4
21-23	126	26.8	45	9.6	81	17.2
24-26	74	15.7	41	8.7	33	7.0
27-29	67	14.3	41	8.7	26	5.5

Table 1: Students questioned by age and sex in Tehran City

As reflected in Table 2, over 40 percent of students participated in the survey belonged to social sciences, commerce and law, while 22.3 percent of the students belonged to humanities and arts. Other categories are followed in table2.

Age	Total		Educational sciences		Humanities and Arts		Social Sciences, Commerce and Law		Maths & Computer		Engineering, Production & Structure		Agriculture & Veterinary		Hygiene & Welfare		Services	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100.0	13	2.8	105	22.3	190	40.4	56	11.9	69	14.7	2	0.4	25	5.3	10	2.1
18-20	203	43.2	8	1.7	51	10.9	94	20.0	17	3.6	16	3.4	0	0.0	13	2.8	4	0.9
21-23	126	26.8	5	1.1	33	7.0	41	8.7	10	2.1	25	5.3	0	0.0	8	1.7	4	0.9
24-26	74	15.7	0	0.0	12	2.6	26	5.5	15	3.2	16	3.4	1	0.2	3	0.6	1	0.2
27-29	67	14.3	0	0.0	9	1.9	29	6.2	14	3.0	12	2.6	1	0.2	1	0.2	1	0.2
Male	159	33.8	5	1.1	15	3.2	59	12.6	23	4.9	51	10.9	2	0.4	1	0.2	3	0.6
18-20	32	6.8	1	0.2	5	1.1	12	2.6	6	1.3	7	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.2
21-23	45	9.6	4	0.9	3	0.6	14	3.0	5	1.1	19	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
24-26	41	8.7	0	0.0	3	0.6	16	3.4	7	1.5	13	2.8	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2
27-29	41	8.7	0	0.0	4	0.9	17	3.6	5	1.1	12	2.6	1	0.2	1	0.2	1	0.2
Female	311	66.2	8	1.7	90	19.1	131	27.9	33	7.0	18	3.8	0	0.0	24	5.1	7	1.5
18-20	171	36.4	7	1.5	46	9.8	82	17.4	11	2.3	9	1.9	0	0.0	13	2.8	3	0.6
21-23	81	17.2	1	0.2	30	6.4	27	5.7	5	1.1	6	1.3	0	0.0	8	1.7	4	0.9
24-26	33	7.0	0	0.0	9	1.9	10	2.1	8	1.7	3	0.6	0	0.0	3	0.6	0	0.0
27-29	26	5.5	0	0.0	5	1.1	12	2.6	9	1.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 2: Students questioned by age and sex, and their field of study in Tehran City

Table 3 of the survey represents that out of the total 470 students interviewed, 41(8.7%) were students of associate degree, 368(78.3%) were students of bachelor degree, 53(11.3%) were students of master degree, and only 8(1.7%) of the interviewees were of doctoral level.

4.1. Table 4: A General Socio-graphic Perspective of Students towards Various Related Indicators "Abridged Tables"

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	93	19.8	265	56.4	112	23.8
Male	159	33.8	46	9.8	76	16.2	37	7.9
Female	311	66.2	47	10	189	40.2	75	16

Table 3: Students by age, sex and Coca Cola consumption as affected by advertisements in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	70	14.9	286	60.9	114	24.3
Male	159	33.8	34	7.2	81	17.2	44	9.4
Female	311	66.2	36	7.7	205	43.6	70	14.9

Table 4: Students by age, sex and the motivation power of Coca Cola billboards to consume it in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	193	41.1	158	33.6	119	25.3
Male	159	33.8	74	15.7	41	8.7	44	9.4
Female	311	66.2	119	25.3	117	24.9	75	16

Table 5: Students by age and sex as affected by the font and color of billboards to consume it in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	203	43.2	148	31.5	119	25.3
Male	159	33.8	69	14.7	50	10.6	40	8.5
Female	311	66.2	134	28.5	98	20.9	79	16.8

Table 6: Students by age and sex impacted by billboards to see more on the streets rather than the roads

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	261	55.5	78	16.6	131	27.9
Male	159	33.8	97	20.6	24	5.1	38	8.1
Female	311	66.2	164	34.9	54	11.5	93	19.8

Table 7: Billboards with less inscriptions and more graphics contributing to more consumerism among the students by age and sex in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	363	77.2	40	8.5	67	14.3
Male	159	33.8	113	24	15	3.2	31	6.6
Female	311	66.2	250	53.2	25	5.3	36	7.7

Table 8: The technic of "short and snappy" is the main characteristic of a successful billboard among the students by age and sex in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	336	71.5	41	8.7	93	19.8
Male	159	33.8	119	25.3	11	2.3	29	6.2
Female	311	66.2	217	46.2	30	6.4	64	13.6

Table 9: Reflections of students by age and sex on: In case a text or inscription is used in a billboard, it must be short in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	403	85.7	24	5.1	43	9.1
Male	159	33.8	131	27.9	8	1.7	20	4.3
Female	311	66.2	272	57.9	16	3.4	23	4.9

Table 10: Reflections of students by age and sex on:  
The message of a billboard must be so designed, to be transferred within seconds in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	197	41.9	62	13.2	211	44.9
Male	159	33.8	68	14.5	27	5.7	64	13.6
Female	311	66.2	129	27.4	35	7.4	147	31.3

Table 11: Ideas of students by age and sex on:  
Consumption of many goods and services at present time depending on advertising billboards in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	283	60.2	38	8.1	149	31.7
Male	159	33.8	89	18.9	18	3.8	52	11.1
Female	311	66.2	194	41.3	20	4.3	97	20.6

Table 12: Reflections of students by age and sex on:  
"advertising billboards must be compatible with the mental and taste sphere of the youth in Tehran City"

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	268	57	38	8.1	164	34.9
Male	159	33.8	88	18.7	12	2.6	59	12.6
Female	311	66.2	180	38.3	26	5.5	105	22.3

Table 13: Reflections of students by age and sex on:  
"Power of information dissipation billboards is of great importance to the consumers in Tehran City"

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	233	49.6	41	8.7	196	41.7
Male	159	33.8	85	18.1	13	2.8	61	13
Female	311	66.2	148	31.5	28	6	135	28.7

Table 14: Reflections of students by age and sex on: "Cycle of billboards attracts the youth/spectators and eventually affects their consumption habits" in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Disagree		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	346	73.6	26	5.5	98	20.9
Male	159	33.8	123	26.2	8	1.7	28	6
Female	311	66.2	223	47.4	18	3.8	70	14.9

Table 15: Reflections of students by age and sex on: "Exact and creative design of billboards affects the success and maximization of the power of communication" in Tehran City

Age	Total		Not sure		A little		Much		To some extent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	44	8.9	116	24.7	136	28.9	176	37.4
Male	159	33.8	17	3.6	37	7.9	49	10.4	56	11.9
Female	311	66.2	25	5.3	79	16.8	87	18.5	120	25.5

Table 16: Reflections of students by age and sex on: "To what extent they notice advertising billboards" in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Somewhat agree		Disagree		Not Sure	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	289	50.9	163	34.7	25	5.3	43	9.1
Male	159	33.8	80	17	55	11.7	10	2.1	14	3
Female	311	66.2	159	33.8	108	23	15	3.2	29	6.2

Table 17: Reflections of students by age and sex on: "If I see a billboard much, it is likely that I remember that brand" in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Somewhat agree		Disagree		Not Sure	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	140	29.8	142	30.2	81	17.2	107	22.8
Male	159	33.8	47	10	46	9.8	33	7	33	7
Female	311	66.2	93	19.8	96	20.4	48	10.2	74	15.7

Table 18: Reflections of students by age and sex on: "If I watch a billboard several times, I no more pay attention to it" in Tehran City

Age	Total		Agree		Somewhat agree		Disagree		Not Sure	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	470	100	254	54	124	26.4	50	10.6	42	8.9
Male	159	33.8	90	19.1	43	9.1	15	3.2	11	2.3
Female	311	66.2	164	34.9	81	17.2	35	7.4	31	6.6

Table 19: Reflections of students by age and sex on: "If I see a billboard much, more probably I understand its message" in Tehran City

### 5. Discussion

The two variables of advertising and consumption reciprocally affect each other. While advertisements impact consumption, increasing consumption is dependent on advertisements of various forms. In modern industrial world, graphic advertising highly changes the consumer culture. It also leads to economic change. However, progressive consumer culture is inevitably concerned with the quality of graphic reflections in terms of advertisements. Similarly, graphic advertising persuades consumption in one way or another. In other words, graphic-based advertisements create a new modern civilization style using large and fashionable imagery. Advertising being a form of communication intended to persuade an audience to purchase products, ideas or services, is largely practiced in the form of, and with the help of graphic arts. Advertising is found to be necessary for economic growth in today's world with special reference to the younger generations.

It is becoming harder to escape from advertising and the media. Advertisements are everywhere such as schools, airport lounges doctors offices, hospitals, gas stations etc. — all affecting different groups of people (McChesney:2008). However, advertising leads to an overall increase in consumption in society.

It serves to promote consumption as a way of life (Lasch:1994). Advertising or better to say, graphic advertising persuades people to buy goods that they do not need, and generally contributes to the formation and maintenance of consumer society.

In most contemporary societies including Iran, advertising is omnipresent, being transmitted in a wide variety of media, and more recently through a variety of graphic billboards. Thus, it may indeed contribute to the formation of a consumer culture (Dyer:1982).

## 6. Conclusion

Although cultural variation plays a significant part in consumption, yet it is a common mistake to suppose that consumption forms a cultural island. However, the capacity of graphic advertisements undermine the cultural variations. A much clearer understanding of advertising practices comes from recognizing how meaningful impacts pervade production, acquisition, and use of goods and services. Consumption, like production needs to be encouraged and promoted through graphic advertising in order to have a sustainable economic cycle. Yet, the challenge is there: Consumers in general are sometimes increasingly leading impoverished lives as a consequence of growth in consumption.

In today's world, advertising is largely practiced in the form of, and with the help of graphic arts. It persuades people, and in particular the youth to buy goods that they do not need, and it generally contributes to the formation of a consumer society. On the other hand, lack or declining economies, and consequently decline in collecting taxes.

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