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Comparative study of TVCs treatment before and during covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan

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Abstract

The worldwide health economy has been decimated by Covid-19 pandemic. Advertisers take advantage of the public's anxiety and emotions as a result of the pandemic. In this research, the content of various products' advertisements shown on television, before and during Covid-19 pandemic were compared. These ads have not been compared empirically in terms of their running period before this. Content and techniques of advertisements also changes according to the developing situations. Therefore, this paper focused on the changes in the approach for advertising, their presentation and the level of deception in the ads. Data collection was done by purposive sampling. This research paper critically analyzed the TVCs treatment in both periods. Through comparative analysis of the selected sample, the research paper found that these companies made false claims, deceptive ads and mislead the consumers to promote their products by taking advantage of the ongoing pandemic situation in Pakistan.

Keywords: TVCs treatment, Deceptive ads, Covid-19 pandemic, Pakistan

Introduction:

In sales of cleaning and disinfection products, the spread of the corona virus disease has stimulated a heave. Governments of different countries and their health departments recommend general public to wash their hands and frequently wash touched surfaces. Declaring both of these as standard practices proved useful in slowing the spread of virus. However, a product that clearly promises to kill the virus can disappoint the consumers if the product will not be effective against the virus. Although, the novel corona is a type of virus that can be killed determined by the scientists till day, but scientists are trying to find its nature and effects on different surfaces. But on the other hand, soap and detergent product producers are claiming in their advertisements that their products can kill 99.9% germs of covid-19.

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In most nations throughout the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on practically every element of human life. Misinformation rapidly spreads from the early days of the Covid-19 outbreak in various senses like fear, misrepresentations, assumptions etc. Advertisement has an evident impact on the sales. Hundreds of advertisements are shown on TV daily, and their effect on the audience is cumulative and unavoidable (Brujerdi Alavi & Hadad, 2012). Millions of people are affected due to false and misleading advertisements. Some people exploit the present circumstances by false advertising products and services that claim to prevent and cure Covid-19. False advertisements generally claim to prevent and cure Covid-19 by unregistered products and services (PTI, 2020).

Problem statement:

The swift spread of corona virus and different variants has changed everything, causing different countries to apply lockdown. Second and third waves of Covid-19 affect various countries, so is Pakistan. Scientists are still working on defining nature and spread of this deadly virus on different surfaces. Governments of different countries and their health departments recommend cleaning of frequently touched surfaces regularly and washing hands. Soap and detergent producing companies are so active in the time of this pandemic. Advertisers take advantage of the public's anxiety and emotions as a result of the pandemic. Every company is claiming about their products that, it kills 99.9% of covid-19 germs, including those who had different presentations and using method of their products before the arrival of this pandemic. This research will analyze the advertisements shown before and during the covid-19 pandemic. Comparing the ads' content will help find the answers to the changes in the ads according to situations.

Objective of the study:

The study's objective was to critically analyze the content of soap and detergent television advertisements before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study tried to find the answers that why and how the advertisers change their approaches in ads to reach their customers. For example, companies who claimed before Covid-19 about their products that their products are very responsive in removing strains quickly are now clamming otherwise. Do soap and detergent products bring advancements in their formulas or false information they are claiming in advertisements?

- To evaluate treatment and messages (soap and detergent TVCs) shown in the advertisement, before and after the covid-19 pandemic
- To provide the consumers with the knowledge, so they can critically analyze the content of advertisements
- What significant changes are taken by the soap and detergent advertisers, particularly during Covid19?
- Pakistani soap and detergent TV commercials are less informative or

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

uninformative about their products.

- Advertisers use the psychological impacts of different scenarios as a tool to increase their sales.

Literature review:

Paid transmission of an organizational message was termed as an advertisement by McNair (S Ali, Z Yousaf, 2005). The findings of the same study explored several characteristics, such as the nature of the content that motivated the masses towards achieving specific objectives. While speaking about the advertising, the importance of their broadcast medium cannot be underestimated. Belch (2005) discussed TV placement in the present era of technology as an essential medium of information and evidence. The study depicted that TV played a vital role in the lives of modern people regarding making choices in life, market trends, product information, etc. The study proved that TV played a significant role in passing on information about the products to the masses, which may not otherwise. In 2005, Belch also confirmed after these findings that commercials often present false information about the products or/and also such activities which might go against the culture. Thus, the art of advertisement was found guilty of an unethical role-play in society. The details of false information about products were missing in that paper, specifically when text is intentionally created by the advertisers for the consumers in some particular situations, as this research did a comparative study on soaps and detergent ads' content before and during Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2001, according to Cook, commercials serve various roles in influencing people to grasp, remember and change their emotions and opinions.

Companies always try to differentiate them from their competitors; they worked too much before making the advertisements of the products. Multiple strategies and techniques are taken by them so that the ads can grab the viewers' attention. Companies are experimenting with different ways to manipulate consumer views of commercials and appeal to their beliefs to close the gap, Bachnik and K. Nowacki 2018, stated in their article, how to Build Consumer Trust: Socially Responsible or Controversial Advertising sustainability. It also influence the buying behavior of customers (Fazal & Hassan, 2018).

It is essential to attract public interests and attentions. The very first step is to make them start thinking about the need for a product or service. It should be recognized that each customer is unique and uniquely responds to information. This is dependent on several factors, and it has an impact on how the customer reacts to the content. They may be psychologically, culturally, or socially motivated. The customer's enthusiasm for a product or service is also significant (Wolters Kluwer: Bratislava, Slovakia, 2017)

Deciding what to say to recipients is the first step in communicating with them is important, but knowing how to say it is even more crucial for the message to be

understood and trusted (Victor Danciu, 2014). He also stated that, on the other side's many advertisements are deceptive that may misguide the consumers because they are persuaded by the advertisements. In unique environment provided by advertisers the audience becomes vulnerable to their advertisements. Mohammad T. Nuseir, 2018 stated that Consumers look upon commercial messages as a source guide to lead them in making decisions on what to buy. Amid this case, buyers are defenseless where they can't perceive misleading messages (Aslam, 2014).

The claims that are made on purpose about a product or service with main goal of misleading the consumers to come to assumption about the product or service being presented are referred as false advertising (Hasan et al., 2011). Deceptive claims in advertisements are in large number. If the trust of the consumers is based on advertisements, they are likely to be cheated. When the consumers become more aware of deceptive advertising and its procedures, they become more sensitive towards any kind of advertisement. They become more suspicious about the advertisers. The impacts depend on how they see the product and the instant environment where the claims are presented and the level of emotions. It is referred to as a 'situational contexts' (Hackley, 2010). He also stated that, situational context and individual characteristics are the ones that affect the ability of the consumers to make choices because of false advertisement. The psychology of advertising focuses on the impact of advertising on a person's emotions.

Using psychological techniques, the patterns of consumer behavior are used in the production of the advertisement. At least one of the five psychological techniques is used in any high-quality commercial given by Kuban, S. Co Spaja, 2018.

Emotions and psychological enhancement resonate with the customer even more than emphasizing the functionality and features of the product. The most significant feature of a product is its impact on the customer's life.

According to author Pansari and Kumar, 2017, achieving customer loyalty is not enough. A company must arouse the emotions that lead to a commitment to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in building relationships with customers.

Focus on shortcomings: Customers question marketing claims. Often, marketing claims are not even believable. It is suitable to point out the shortcomings if a company wants to increase the credibility of its product.

Change customer understanding: It is vital to shift the product's position in consumers' minds. For example, stating that this particular product is superior to the competitor's product in quality, taste, smell, etc. These are appropriate for promoting food, air freshener, laundry detergents, and other similar products.

People want to feel special, so encourage exclusivity. They aspire to be a member of a prestigious and exclusive club. This is why advertisers often make advertisements like, "We are not for everyone". Expensive items like cars and jewelry are often conveyed in this way.

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

Companies often use confusion, fear, uncertainty, and doubt to slow down consumers and make them think about their behavior. It is used to communicate with a broad group of people and for more serious topics. However, this should be done with caution because many consumers do not want to be bombarded with offensive messages or even consider them. These commercials aim to shock and change behavior, even if it means being absurd.

Every day customers are bombarded with numerous commercials. That is why a business needs to ensure that their advertisement reaches consumer's subconscious minds. Customers would not remember the advertisement for longer period if it is not presented in this manner. To implant an advertisement in the subconscious of a client, up going one of the five psychological strategies are used. The key benefit of using them is that it increases consumer's curiosity and develops interest. It is used to manipulate the consumers to boost profits, increasing the company's business longevity. The perception of advertising also depends on its psychological aspects.

While talking about the ways to create ads and tactics to make them popular among public, it is also essential to highlight the importance of using music in these ads. Music in advertising is the most typical musical technique for preserve memo ability and thus product recall. Music creates a product lot more unforgettable to viewers because it is thought to remain within the listener's mind. Once utilized in an ad, the content of the ad remains alongside the music. Consumers' response can be evoked by using different music in the ads. By evoking affective responses from end users, brands can obtain emotional reactions from consumers by associating with their state of minds and feelings. Music allows brands to convey a mood or feeling to consumers to elicit an emotional response. These retaliation ranges from sensations of fervor to sensations of dread (Daire O'Connor, 2021). Prominent or noted personalities are also being casted by companies in order to make advertisements popular quickly among the public. They influence customers' preferences that influence their purchase decisions (Hubert, M. Kenning 2008). However, it is recommended to consider the purpose of advertising campaigns carefully.

Research Questions:

- How soap and detergents selling brands advertise their products before and during the Covid-19 period?
- To what extent brands have repositioned the claims about their product during the Covid-19 period?
- Do the selected brands have modified the formulas of their product during this period?
- Do brands misleading desperate consumers by making false claims about their products?

Method:

Qualitative method is being used in this research to analyze and understand the changes in the data presented by brands in their advertisements during COVID-19. Purposive sampling is being used as the sampling technique. Qualitative research method is applied to analyze and to conduct a comparative analysis of selected TVCs of both periods (pre COVID & during COVID) to find the changes in their contents. Advertisements of four different soap and detergent companies are selected as a sample from before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Researchers compare brand claim in advertisement and also analyze the ingredients mentioned on their packaging. Each of these brands is considered the most popular household product makers among the consumers.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Advertisement #1

Time Period: Pre Covid-19

Product: Lifebuoy hand wash

Claim: 99.9% germs protection in 10 seconds

Ad description:

The ad of a Unilever product shows the competition between ordinary soap and lifebuoy hand wash. On the left side of the screen, the boy is seen washing his hands with ordinary soap, while on the right side, the girl dressed in red and white, washes her hands with lifebuoy hand wash.

This Unilever's product ad starts with a performance competition between an ordinary soap and a lifebuoy hand wash, shown to the viewers on split screen.

Two children have germs on their hands are shown washing their hands with different products. At the same time, with the help of creative visualization, the germs on the hands of both the children have also been shown. Girl washes her hands with lifebuoy in about 9 to 10 seconds and removes all the germs, while boy on the other hand continues struggling in eradicating the germs with ordinary soap. The commercial ends up with a message to switch to lifebuoy hand wash rather than an ordinary soap, as it only takes less than 10 seconds to remove all the germs.

Advertisement #2

Time Period: During Covid-19

Product: Lifebuoy soap and hand wash

Claim: 99.9% germs protection in 20 seconds

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

Ad description:

This ad of Unilever's product lifebuoy starts with a message of H for hand washing. The girl in the school uniform writes it on the blackboard and then joined by three more students and they start singing this message in rhythm like, keep washing hands with soap and water, wash for 20 seconds, whether day or night. At the same time, a clock is displayed on the bottom left of the screen, which shows a time of 20 seconds. Young children recite this message, and through close-up shot of hands movement, they explain to their viewers how to wash hands properly. Moreover, on the blackboard, the protective measures to avoid the corona virus are displayed one by one. This is followed by a long shot of the four children, who arrange alphabet square boxes in a specific order to make H. And all together gives a shout-out to lifebuoy.

Comparative Analysis:

By comparing both ads' ideas can easily be extracted that the product is same, but the claims about it are completely changed according to the situation. The ad presented to viewers before the Covid-19 period claimed the killing of germs in 10 seconds. However, after the Covid19 pandemic, medical researchers, doctors, and World Health Organization asked people to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds to remove the germs on hands. Advertisers always keep an eye on current affairs and changing trends. And by keeping these trends and requirements in mind, advertisers make ads of their products that can be relatable to these situations. As WHO said to every person from the world to wash hands for a minimum of 20 seconds, lifebuoy soap not been able to carry further their claim of killing germs in 10sec hand wash. So, immediately the company changed their approach and start claiming that must was your hands for at least 20 seconds.

Using the tactics of giving the message through song and music, lifebuoy advertisers now told their viewers to wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds, whether it is day or night. The seller intends to show the product with an innovative theme those appeals to the consumers and they try it immediately that enhances the business. Different researchers stated in their writings about the role and importance of language and music in advertisements. Similarly the message in the new ad presented with music and through songs sung by school children in order to remains in viewers unconscious minds for longer period of time.

Table 1:

Comparison of Ingredients

Pre Covid-19 Ingredients	During covid-19 Ingredients
Sodium Palmate, Sodium Palm Kernelate, Water, Glycerin, Talc, Perfume, Sodium Chloride, Lauric Acid, Tetrasodium Etidronate, Penta Sodium Pentetate, Silver Oxide, Tetrasodium Edta, Terpinol VP/VA Copolymer, Thymol, CI 12490, CI 11680.	Sodium Palmate, Sodium Palm Kernelate, Water, Glycerin, Talc, Perfume, Sodium Chloride, Lauric Acid, Tetrasodium Etidronate, Penta Sodium Pentetate, Silver Oxide, Tetrasodium Edta, Terpinol VP/VA Copolymer, Thymol, CI 12490, CI 11680.

Advertisement #3

Time Period: Pre Covid-19

Product: Ariel Detergent

Claim: Removes tough stains in 1 wash

Ad Description:

A well-known (R) Pakistani cricketer is in the cast of this advertisement. Ad begins with Wasim Akram's dialogue, "So should there be a competition?" The competition between washing powders is staged at a public place where a large number of women gathered as spectators. One of them is ordinary powder, while another one is new Ariel. Women apply hard stain leaving items such as curry, ketchup, and ink on a white cloth. After stubborn stains on the fabric, women then cut the cloth into two parts. After washing both clothes separately with two different detergents, they are shown to the public. Cloth washed with Ariel detergent looked cleaner and shinier. Wasim Akram then asked the question to the audience "Who landed on your challenge?" Women were holding washed cloth by Ariel surf, chant Ariel Ariel's slogan. Some women dressed in white and green are also carrying packets of Ariel surf, as shown in that scene.

In the ad, the company claimed to produce the best washing powder from all of the others because of its double-action formula that removes the hard stains in just one wash. Qualities of the powder are shown on-screen through animation and creative visualization. Finally, a packet of Ariel surf is shown on the white screen. Below is written "tough stain removal in one wash".

Advertisement #4

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

Time Period: During Covid-19

Product: Ariel Detergent

Claim: Powerful clean and removes 99.9% bacteria

Ad Description:

The commercial opened with Wasim Akram's scene, who is watching online videos sent by women all across the country, they look confused and hopeless. Wasim Akram turns towards the camera by saying: "An important question has come from all over Pakistan, can Ariel detergent eliminate germs as well as stains? The shirt is shown by creative visualisation, which has stains as well as germs on it. Wasim Akram then said, "let us know the answer from our expert." A woman dressed as a medical expert introduces the new Ariel surf to Wasim Akram. "We have designed a new Ariel Machine expert to remove both stains and germs," says the woman. She claimed that Ariel machine expert cleans stains and eliminates 99.9% of germs. Clean and sanitized shirt is shown to the public. Wasim Akram says that "this is a strong answer to a trivial question". The women in the multi-windows look happy, holding clean clothes. Ad ends by claiming that machine expert could remove all difficult stains and germs in just one wash.

Comparative Analysis:

Ariel was the best powder for cleaning clothes, as claimed in their advertisement before Covid-19. Soon after the Covid-19 pandemic hits Pakistan, it changes the user's behaviors. People are much frightened than ever in their lives. Following the instructions of doctors and medical health experts, people try to get protected themselves from germs and viruses. According to medical research by Yanan Zhao, Marcus H. Cunningham (2021) Covid-19 can survive on clothes, but its survival time is less as compared to hard surfaces. The study explained that Covid-19 on fabric could last for at least two days, while its survival time on plastic and metal is almost seven days. While explaining the five major psychological techniques used by advertisers, Kuban (2018) stated that companies often use fear, uncertainty, and doubt to slow down consumers and make them think about their behavior. Such techniques are used to communicate with a broad group of people and for more serious topics. By analyzing the situation, the seller aims to present the product with different theme and claims. The same fear and doubts were aroused among the public by the advertiser in the ad that aired on television during the Covid-19 pandemic. New detergent was introduced to the public by claiming that this antibacterial detergent can kill 99.9% of germs. However, Covid-19 is caused by a virus rather than by bacteria, so unless it has an antiviral claim, an antibacterial product may not be effective (*Ministry of health, NZ*). So, by utilizing the pandemic of Covid-19, the Ariel brand first aroused fear among people and then manipulates their audience through deceptive advertisement. People who are less or not able to critically analyze the content of advertisements usually fell into their trap. So, by claiming the product antibacterial, they manipulate their

audience, believing that this particular product can kill all types of germs from their clothes.

Similarly, before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was not much need to talk about germs, so the main focus of this detergent brand was to claim the performance of the detergent in removing stains. The brand claimed that green crystals in this detergent make it more efficient in removing stains. David M. Gardner in 1975, while explaining the categories of deception, said such type of advertisement is "Claim-Belief Interaction". He stated that deceptive advertising "claim-belief interaction" is that during which a commercial or advertising campaign interacts with the collected attitudes and beliefs of the purchaser in such a way that leaves a deceptive belief or attitude about the product or service being advertised, without making either explicit or implied deceptive claims.

Table 2:

Comparison of Ingredients

Pre Covid-19 Ingredients	During Covid-19 Ingredients
Builders, Surfactants, Oxygen-based bleaching agents, Polycarboxylates, Enzymes, Optical brighteners, Perfumes.	Builders, Surfactants, Oxygen-based bleaching agents, Polycarboxylates, Enzymes, Optical brighteners, Perfumes.

By comparing the ingredients from in-hand products, both these up going products have the same ingredients. By presenting the same product with false claims company tried to manipulate its consumers. The claim made intentionally about a product for deceiving the consumers to make them use the product based on the way it is being presented is referred as false advertising (Hasan et al., 2011). Similarly, in this case the company mislead their consumers that means this detergent does not do what they purport to do. The brand is cheating on the vulnerable customers.

Advertisement #5

Time Period: Pre Covid-19

Product: Harpic toilet cleaner

Claim: Cleaning of commode, 10X lesser wastage than acids

Ad Description:

The ad starts with Ahsan Khan's scene, who along with the cameramen and team, told the audience that we are on Harpic mission to clean Pakistan, and today we come to

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

Mrs Khan's house. Upon reaching the woman's house, Ahsan Khan asks the woman; how do you wash your commode? The woman replies that she cleanses daily with detergent and uses acid for the removal of tough stains.

Ahsan Khan, dressed in white shirt with Harpic logo, replies that, madam detergent is used for washing clothes while acid is used to open drains. He then said that Harpic 10X is made for the cleaning purpose of commode. Its thick formula stays on the commode longer and gives ten times more cleaning than acid. With the help of a split-screen, it is shown that one side of the commode is cleaned with acid is dull and unclean and the other side with new Harpic that looks much cleaner.

Advertisement #6

Time Period: During Covid-1

Product: Harpic toilet cleaner

Claim: Cleaning of commode, Effective to kill viruses including Covid-19

Ad Description:

The ad opens with a logo of moon and star inscribed "Mission Clean and Safe Pakistan" and the Harpic name at the very top. Ahsan sends a message to the audience that we know that cleanliness is half faith. That is why a clean and safe toilet is the right of every Pakistani, but cleanliness is not enough in today's changing world. Clean is not safe. The brand claims that we are providing you Harpic for cleaning and killing germs for years. Now it is also effective against the corona virus. Harpic is affected to kill viruses, including the Covid-19 virus, tested and proven. Wearing a white shirt and a blue coat, Ahsan, accompanied by women, says that Harpic's mission is to have a clean and safe Pakistan.

Comparative Analysis:

A toilet cleaner suddenly started killing viruses. This must not be new for the public who critically analyze and understand the techniques of advertisers. However, still, such brands can change the buying behavior of many people. In advertisements, the product is presented to the audience to start believing that the only solution to their problem is their particular product. Before Covid-19 pandemic, a company that claimed to produce the best toilet cleaner that removes all stains from the commode has started claiming in the Covid-19 period that their product which is already giving you neat, clean, and germs free toilet for years, is now helpful in killing viruses including Covid-19 virus, as stated by Lawernce J. Marks and Michael A. Kamins (1988), that usually the advertisers use general psychology to put a pressure on the consumer by over exaggerating the products' benefits and the consumers end up buying the advertised product. Similarly, the brand claimed that their product not only removes strains but it can kill various other viruses as well. Nowhere in the ad it has

been proven that how this cleaner can kill other viruses.

While claiming its effectiveness against the Covid-19 virus, the testing process that is written at the bottom left of the screen is this "as tested undiluted on SARS-CoV-2 after 5 minutes of contact." The font size of this proof is too tiny that one can hardly read this while watching the ad on television furthermore, no details and references about this test are mentioned anywhere in the ad or on the product.

In such a tactic full manners, they miss guiding their viewers not just to survive in the market but also to increase their sales. As said by Vance Packard (1957) in his book The Hidden Persuaders, a lot of companies misguide their consumers in their ads. He explained that modern advertising uses psychology to emotionally playing with the consumers, as the messages are hidden; the viewer's critical resilience is avoided and minimized. This clearly shapes how the potential consumers can be manipulated with ads.

Table3:

Pre Covid-19 Ingredients	During Covid-19 Ingredients
Hydrochloric Acid. Surfactant, Perfume, Dye and Water.	Hydrochloric Acid. Surfactant, Perfume, Dye and Water.

Claims about this product are ambiguous and fallacious. Product with efficiency to kills all germs after sixty minutes of contact time, all of a sudden, with not a single change in the formula the product has been able to kill germs and viruses just after five minutes of contact time as claimed by Harpic. As people gets more attract towards a celebrity, so hiring a popular character for your ad in an easy but useful tricky way to mislead the consumers that is done by Harpic.

Discussion and Conclusion :

The COVID-19 pandemic created an environment where many companies are fighting unprecedented constraints to assist their customers and keep their businesses alive. The previously reviewed literature and findings from the data maintained that advertisers form emotionally loaded messages using psychological tools. The public is misled in various ways. Panic has been spread among these people through advertisements. After creating unrest and fear among the people, these companies offer their products as a solution to all these problems, in which no truth has been found. Companies provide deceitful hope to their consumers by mentioning that their products are effective against the deadly Covid-19. As messages are hidden, psychology forms emotionally loaded messages, and the viewer's critical resilience is dodged and minimized. Claims about the product’s effectiveness against Covid-19 are not biased on proofs. It is found after analyzing the selected sample, that these companies made ambiguous claims

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

regarding their products to mislead the consumers by taking advantage of the ongoing pandemic situation in the country. Contemporary time demands government institutes and health experts that the public must not be misled in any way. Companies should carefully review their marketing strategy and claims to ensure that all reasonable interpretations of the claims are truthful and are adequately supported by reliable data. But by analyzing the content of sample data, it has been found that the companies raise new and heightened false advertising concerns in the field of antimicrobial and antiviral technology. These companies have seen a huge increase in exaggerated claims and misleading products. The intention was to capitalize on the widespread fear created by the corona virus crisis, promising consumers a full protection from the virus that they simply cannot support with reliable evidence. The companies deceive the audience by claiming their products antiviral without changing a single ingredient in them.

Moreover, the companies in the ads hired prominent personalities to promote their manipulated, misleading, and fraudulent products. Being a public fandom, most people convinced when they watch such claims made by their favorite personalities. The public is misled in various ways. Panic has been spread among these people through advertisements. Consumers' health has been compromised as they are not only misled psychologically, economically, but in countless other ways like fear-arousal among them as, it has been found by comparing the available sample that advertisements for such products make unfounded claims and favor profit over consumer health and safety.

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ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 3, Issue 2, Page 1-16, December 31, 2023

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