

# Attitudes to Social and Political Advertising Among Russian Youth

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## Abstract

The article presents the results of an empirical study of the characteristics of the evaluation of social and political advertising by young men and women. In total 96 respondents aged 18 to 22 years ( $M = 18.7$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ) took part in research. The semantic differential was used as a research method; respondents were asked to evaluate two photographs depicting social and political advertising on public transport. By comparing the average estimates of social and political advertising, it was found that political advertising as a whole is evaluated more negatively than social advertising. Young men evaluate social advertising more positively than young women. There were no significant differences in the assessment of political advertising between the two genders.

**Keywords:** political advertising; social advertising; youth; semantic differential

**JEL Classification:** Y 80

## The Relevance of the Study and Background

The study of people's attitudes to various forms of advertising exposure in different periods of history was an urgent task of social psychology and the psychology of marketing communications (Lebedev & Gordyakova, 2015; Lebedev-Lyubimov, 2007). Currently, researchers set themselves the task of studying the impact of various types of advertising on the population, increasing its effectiveness, taking into account the interests of both advertisers and consumers. Some researchers, for example, Orlova and Gordyakova (2019) and Gordyakova and Lebedev (2017) raise fundamental issues such as the impact of advertising on social norms, values and the development of society and vice versa. Currently, commercial, social and political advertising has become widespread in the Russian advertising market. In terms of content, technology and the principles of psychological impact on the population, these types of

advertising differ significantly. In this article, we focused on two types of advertising — political and social to figure out peculiarities of youth attitudes.

The purpose of social advertising is “to change the public's attitude to any social problem, and in the long term — to develop new social values” (Horoshkevich, 2015, p. 10). The subject of social advertising can be considered a socially significant idea, a social project, a certain standard of behaviour. The object of social advertising is the totality of socially significant ideas, social projects, certain standards of behaviour and socially significant actions [ibid.]. As a form of interaction, social advertising involves the creation of a positive image of a society struggling with injustice and vices. It sets as its primary goal to draw attention to emerging social problems and calls for moral values. Partly, social advertising is a reflection of the views of the state. However, topics related to the health and safety of citizens can be broadcast, namely issues of alcohol and

drug use, AIDS, attitudes towards abortion, smoking, etc. Any of these topics are of particular importance for the state, but they have a less political connotation. The mechanism of social advertising, like any other, implies the presence of two components: rational and emotional and efficiency is mostly associated with the emotional component. That is why we concentrated our attention on attitudes to advertising. Several Russian authors note that the psychological impact of low-budget social advertising, on which Russian public activists had high expectations a decade ago, is insignificant when compared to commercial advertising (Lebedev & Gordyakova, 2015; Lebedev-Lyubimov, 2007; Orlova & Gordyakova, 2019). And this is not only since following the Law on Advertising of the Russian Federation, the ratio of social advertising to a commercial one is approximately equal from 5 per cent to 95 per cent. The psychological effectiveness of social advertising is, in many ways not high enough because it is most often based on negative emotions. Its plots are usually associated with problems of society (anti-smoking, careless and drunk driving, environmental problems, raising children, helping people with disabilities, older people, etc.). Social advertising addresses mainly socially relevant issues. On the contrary, other types of advertising appeal to the apparent benefits, pleasures, and advantages of an individual, which he “will definitely receive” after purchasing the advertised product or electing a specific political candidate. In this regard, the question arises of the perception of social and political advertising by young people and their willingness to make socially-oriented choices.

On the one hand, political advertising is a concept very close to social advertising for it addresses problems of society. On the other hand, it sets completely different goals. Political advertising also forms certain psychological attitudes in the mass consciousness, while they are aimed at realising the rights and freedoms of citizens in society. It should be noted that political advertising contains a call to action and participation in the political process, the adoption of a particular point of view and appropriate behaviour concerning the accepted position. The purpose of political

advertising is to “induce people to participate in any political processes ... to encourage people to a particular type of political behaviour, including electoral behaviour” (Horoshkevich, 2015, p. 71). Its object is the participants in the political process, who have to make this or that choice, to determine for themselves this or that political orientation. The subject is “a candidate, a party, their programs, as well as a political rally, support or protest movement” (Androsova, 2008, p. 7).

Psychological studies that raise the question of the role of the individual in the perception of political advertising are at particular interest. In the articles by Lebedev (Gordyakova & Lebedev, 2017; Lebedev, 2017) consider the problem of the influence of information and political marketing on the formation of different types of patriotic behaviour of Russians. Using the developed questionnaire, we identified three types of patriotic behaviour: ideological, problematic, and conformal. Ideological patriotism is characterised by excessive, often demonstrative activity and even aggressiveness of the subject. It emphasises initiatives, lack of reflection and self-criticism. It is also insensitive to logical contradictions, unwillingness to listen to the opponent and inability to hear him. The other features are peremptory judgments, ostentatious resentment, excessive moralization, “impaired” self-esteem; declared readiness to “sacrifice oneself for one’s homeland, even when there is no sense to do so”; search for external and internal enemies, intolerance to another’s the point of view, etc. Such a person rarely reconsiders his views and seldom from them refuses, since they are based not on rational logic, but faith. This form of patriotic behaviour in some cases may transform into conformal patriotism but never into the shape of the problematic patriotism. Problematic patriotic behaviour: this type of behaviour based on a sense of duty.

Subjects with this type of patriotic behaviours tend to have broad erudition and developed intellectual abilities. As a rule, these are people with higher education, but working in areas that are not associated with business, big politics or top government posts. These are people with a particular spectrum of emotions and a sense of justice. They are ready to



Fig. 1. On the left is social advertising: “Cardio-route is a route of life”; on the right is political advertising: “Liberal-Democratic Political Party of Russia: We are for Great Russia”.

listen to the opponent, put self on his place and look at the problem from the opponent’s point of view. Conformal patriotism: people with this type of patriotic behaviour externally manifests itself in a wide range (from demonstrative reactions to complete indifference to what is happening). However, in reality, such a person is entirely free and without severe psychological consequences for himself refuses earlier declared beliefs when situation is changed. This form of patriotic behaviour is a social adaptation. An analysis of the results allowed authors to conclude that ideological and conformal types of patriotic behaviour are formed to a greater extent under the influence of marketing technologies. The problematic kind of patriotic behaviour is a characteristic of people who are least affected by the impact of advertising and propaganda. Respondents with a problematic type of patriotic behaviour in the Kettell 16PF test (factor Q1) are more likely to show radicalism. Respondents with a predominance of ideological and conformal types of patriotic behaviour are more likely to show conservatism ( $p < 0.05$ ). The tendency of people to irrational decisions makes it possible to use information and political marketing to form a sense of patriotism (Gordyakova & Lebedev, 2017; Lebedev, 2017).

The processes of psychological perception of advertising by men and women are very different. Research in the field of advertising says that women are more susceptible to advertising slogans, and they are the consumers of most of

the offered goods and services. However, social and political advertising is somewhat different, and its aim is not the creation of a separate, physically existing product. Therefore, we need to consider the impact of advertising from the side of the channels and methods of communication. In the advertising text, the attention of women is attracted to male characteristics. It means that when the text contains such adjectives as strong, reliable, brave, faithful, a woman carries the image and perceives it as qualities inherent in a man. Accordingly, it forms a subconscious sense of trust. An advertisement that contains references to the characteristics of a man, a woman perceives more willingly. From the position of visual broadcasting of advertising, there are also significant differences in perception, since men and women tend to focus on entirely different things. Naturally men are more active, work-oriented and inclined to change the world around them, while women have a more relaxed lifestyle, finding happiness and harmony. So, an advertisement reflecting active actions is aimed at the attention of men. Contrary, an advertisement showing “quiet family happiness” attracts the attention of women. In this regard, we hypothesised that young men and young women would have different opinions on social and political advertising.

Hypothesis: The attitude of young women to political advertising is more negative, and to social — more positive than that of young men. Social advertising is perceived more positively than political.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics and t-test for attitudes to social advertising of male and female respondents*

Characteristics	Males		Females		T	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Aggressive/Benevolent	1.2	1.7985	1.9	1.0999	1.98	0.052
Hostile/Friendly	1.0	1.6897	2.0	1.0776	2.795	0.007
Unpleasant/Pleasant	0.7	2.1144	1.1	1.4687	1.01	0.316
Stupid/Clever	0.6	1.6652	1.0	1.4606	1.122	0.266
Ugly/Nice	0.7	1.8686	1.2	1.306	1.209	0.231
Deceitful/Sincere	0.5	1.6529	1.2	1.3545	1.953	0.054
Indifferent/Caring	1.1	1.7223	1.8	1.6064	1.668	0.1
Sad/Joyful	0.7	1.7399	1.2	1.4167	1.108	0.272
Relaxing/Annoying	0.2	1.8245	-0.3	1.0545	-1.305	0.196
Unconvincing/Convincing	0.3	1.7555	0.8	1.4167	1.37	0.175

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics and t-test for attitudes to social advertising of male and female respondents for attitudes to social advertising of male and female respondents*

Characteristics	Males		Females		T	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Aggressive/Benevolent	-0.682	1.9141	-0.531	1.3675	0.38	0.705
Hostile/Friendly	-0.023	1.9349	0.125	1.3854	0.368	0.714
Unpleasant/Pleasant	0.14	2.1222	-0.323	1.3512	-1.066	0.29
Stupid/Clever	-0.25	1.8568	-0.313	1.4242	-0.159	0.874
Ugly/Nice	-0.209	2.0419	-0.469	1.2948	-0.63	0.531
Deceitful/Sincere	-0.512	1.8692	-0.344	1.2078	0.443	0.659
Indifferent/Caring	-0.659	1.7777	-0.438	1.4354	0.581	0.563
Sad/Joyful	0.163	1.7719	0	1.0473	-0.463	0.645
Relaxing/Annoying	0.477	1.8107	0.719	1.114	0.667	0.507
Unconvincing/Convincing	-0.386	2.0025	-0.25	1.3678	0.333	0.74



## **Methodology**

Respondents: 96 students of the Financial University, from 17 to 22 years old ( $M = 18.7$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ), of which 58 are young men. Most of the respondents were from Moscow: 90 per cent of girls and 97 per cent of boys. At the same time, the posterior distribution we observed in other cities: 3 per cent of the girls surveyed from Ramenskoye, 3 per cent from Elektrostal, 2 per cent from Domodedovo and Zelenograd.

Along with socio-demographic data, we received respondents' answers to questions that characterise the social, political and economic situation in the country. To identify attitudes toward social and political advertising, we used the method of semantic differential. As an incentive, we presented to respondents images of social and political advertising placed on public transport (Fig. 1). Both pictures were coloured.

Evaluating advertising (Fig. 1) for each pair of opposite characteristics (ten in total), respondents had to choose the one that more closely matches their perception. Thus, the range of answers was from “-3” to “3”.

## **Results and Discussion**

First, we will consider the gender differences in the assessments of the political and social advertising. The results we present in Table 1.

We noted that for almost all characteristics of social advertising, the values lie in the field of positive values. It means that respondents evaluated advertising positively. An exception is a value for females on a scale of relaxing/annoying. Here, women rated social advertising as “a little annoying”.

Significant differences in the evaluation of social advertising between males and females we identified as concerns the characteristics of Aggressive/Benevolent, Hostile/Friendly, Deceitful/Sincere. Although estimates of social advertising for subjects of both groups of respondents are in the field of positive values, females tend to rate social advertising as less, and males as more benevolent. Since both average ratings are positive, it is more likely not about evaluating advertising as aggressive, but about the degree of the emotional reaction. On a scale Hostile/Friendly, a similar situation:

females on average rated advertising as less, and males as more friendly.

On a scale of Deceitful/Sincere, the average rating among girls is close to neutral, and boys rated advertising as more honest. On the whole, we can say that women are less likely to assign an emotional rating to an advertisement. Men are more interested in advertisement and tend to attribute positive ratings to it.

A similar procedure was carried out by us for evaluating political advertising; the results we show in Table 2.

Compared to social advertising, political advertising is evaluated more negatively, as indicated by the negative values of most scales. Comparison of the average values of the ratings of political advertising by boys and girls according to the Student criterion, did not reveal significant differences.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the study, we have drawn the following conclusions. Firstly, political advertising as a whole provokes an adverse reaction, equally among males and females. Secondly, social advertising as a whole is evaluated positively. Thirdly, males tend to rate social advertising as more benevolent, friendly, and sincere than females. Thus, our hypothesis of a more positive assessment of social advertising compared to political advertising was confirmed. We have not found substantiated the hypothesis of a more emotional advertising evaluation by girls than by boys. Here, we obtained opposite results. Differences in the assessment of political advertising were also not received. The perception of advertising is influenced not only by the content but also by the colour scheme, context, possible associations, previous experience of respondents, and many other factors that we may not have taken into account.

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## Отношение к социальной и политической рекламе российской молодежи

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*Аннотация.* В статье приводятся результаты эмпирического исследования особенностей оценки социальной и политической рекламы юношами и девушками. Респондентов (были опрошены 96 респондентов в возрасте от 18 до 22 лет) просили оценить с помощью методики семантического дифференциала две фотографии с изображением социальной и политической рекламы, размещенной на общественном транспорте. Сравнивая средние значения оценок социальной и политической рекламы юношами и девушками авторы установили, что в целом политическая реклама оценивается более негативно, чем социальная. При этом юноши оценивают социальную рекламу более положительно, чем девушки. Достоверных различий в оценке политической рекламы не выявлено.

*Ключевые слова:* политическая реклама; социальная реклама; семантический дифференциал; молодежь