THE NEXUS BETWEEN CRITICISMS AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN ADVERTISING PRACTICE

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Abstract
The Study sought to find out ethical issues in advertising, and the nexus between criticism and ethical issues in advertising practice. Social responsibility theory, AIDA Model and Persuasion theory formed the theoretical review. Library research method was used to gather data for this study. Findings revealed that, false advertising, deceptive advertising, comparative advertising, endorsements and testimonials and children advertising, were some of the ethical issues that confront advertising practice. Finding revealed that, when an advertisement is targeted at children in an unfair or deceptive manner or in a way that takes advantage of the children's credulity such advertisement is unethical. It was also discovered that stereotype in advertising does not depict reality, and that it can make someone to pick one thing over the other. It was discovered that people criticise advertising as a result of unethical issues in advertising. Advertising fatigue also accounts for criticisms of advertising. Related empirical studies were reviewed. It was concluded that, for advertisement to be devoid of unethical issues, advertisers, advertising media and advertising agencies must endeavour to adhere to the code of ethics and code of conducts. It was recommended that, to ensure best practices and maintain high level of professionalism, the advertiser, advertising media and advertising agencies must always play by the rules, as enshrined in the codes of ethics and conducts.

Key words: *Advertising, Ethical issues. Criticism, Advertising practice.*

Introduction

Advertisers, advertising agencies and advertising media all need to adhere to advertising ethics. Little wonder there are code of conducts and code of ethics. Codes of conducts and ethics are expected to guide professionals and employees in the discharge of their duties. Advertising ethics are moral principles that govern how a business promotes its service or product to its target audience (India Today,2023). These principles are there to ensure that advertisers and advertising agencies do not become too powerful to the extent that they can do what they want when they want. Little wonder, a sage of yore once said, power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. There is therefore the need to have measures in place, that would guide the conduct of professionals and employees as they carry out their duties. Indeed Editorial (2023) sees code of conducts

as rules and policies that are intended to guide the conduct of employers and employees in a workplace. Code of conduct therefore guides behaviour in a workplace, it also ensures that things are done in accordance with laid down rules and regulations or established laws. Code of ethics according to Hayes (2024) refers to principles that are meant to guide professionals in performing their functions in workplace with honesty and integrity. The foregoing connotes that, advertisers, advertising media and advertising agencies must endeavour to ensure that, in the discharge of their duties honesty and integrity are not relegated to the background. This they can do by adhering to the code of ethics and codes of conducts. This assertion holds true in that, a code of ethics in an organisation is intended to ensure, best practices for maintaining professionalism, integrity and honesty (Hayes 2024). Adhering to the codes of ethics can therefore bring about integrity and honesty and also ensure maintenance of best practices and professionalism. Adhering to the code of ethics can ensure to a large extent that, an advertisement is devoid of unethical issues.

There are professionals who work in various advertising firms or agencies, these professionals are mainly concerned with how to sell the product or services of their clients. This is so because advertising according to Oberlo (nd) is a promotional activity which aims to sell a service or product to a target audience. Advertising according Oberlo is a marketing tool that is intended to influence the target audience to act in a way desired by the communicator or message. This means that, advertising message should be persuasive and it should also require the target audience to not to only listen to the message but also act on the message. In carrying out their functions, these professionals are expected to adhere strictly to advertising code of ethics of the profession.

Questions like Is it legal? Is it true? Is it decent? Is it honest? Are questions that relate to code of ethics in advertising practice. For advertising professionals to perform their functions in accordance with the ethics of the profession they need to constantly ask themselves the questions above. Regulatory bodies also need to constantly monitor activities of these professionals and agencies. Nzeribe (2012) states that, in Nigeria for instance, Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) is the body that regulates advertising activities to ensure that advertisers and advertising agencies adhere to laid down rules and regulations. APCON according to Nzeribe (2012) is charged with the responsibility of: developing codes of practice, making the code public, handling complaint from the public, approving advertising copy before it is published and monitoring of advertising after publication. This study therefore seeks to find out criticisms associated with advertising practice in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out what constitutes ethical issues and whether there is a link between ethical issues and advertising criticism. The specific objectives of this study is to:

1. investigate what accounts for and what constitutes ethical issues in advertising practice
2. identify the reasons that account for criticism of advertisements.
3. determine whether there is a link between ethical issues in advertising practice and criticism of advertising .

Review of related Literature

Issues in Advertising Practice, Advertising Ethics and Social Responsibility

Kumar(2023) Identifies the following as issue in advertising practice: false advertising, deceptive advertising, comparative advertising, endorsements and testimonials and children advertising. Advertising is said to be false when it makes misleading or false claims about a product or a service. This is a situation whereby an advertiser, intentionally states in his advertisement what the product is not or when the advertiser says what the product cannot do. When an advertiser uses words that are ambiguous or misleading or pictures that misrepresent a service or a product with the intention of deceiving people into patronising the product or service, that advertisement is said to be deceptive. Deception in advertising is one of the unethical issues in adverting practice. Brandingsolutionllc (2023) states that, unethical advertising often involves deception, which can come in the forms of: false claim, hidden charges, or exaggerated benefits. Deceptive advertising has negative effect on the reputation of the brand and it also undermines consumers trust.

Comparative advertising is another issue in advertising practice.When an advertiser, in his advertising message compares his product or service with other products or services in an unfair or untrue way. Simply put, when in a comparison the advertiser false fully claims that his product or service is better than, that or those of his competitors. This is not to say that comparative advertising is bad. It is only considered to be unethical when the comparison is untrue and unfair. Comparative advertising is used by advertisers to compare their products to those of their competitors in the industry. Comparative advertising according to Indeed Editorial Team (2024) has to do with side-by-side comparisons, customers reenactments, live demonstration and taste test. Effective comparative advertising can increase the loyalty of customers or consumers; it can also encourage potential customers to patronise your product or service. Equally important

is the fact that, comparative advertising can help differentiate your product or service from those of your competitors in the industry. However, it must be done the right way.

Endorsement or testimonials is another issue in advertising, this is when an influencer or someone may say things that may not be entirely true about a product or service or things that the advertiser cannot substantiate. Cleland (2024) notes that, if individual X decides to post on his Facebook page that he used product Q and it solved his problem, individual X is said to have endorsed product Q. However, if individual X has no relationship with the company producing Product Q and he is not selling product Q, it is not an endorsement, subject to the Federal Trade Commission Act in America no matter how false it is (Cleland 2024). However, if the organisation according to Cleland (2024) later decides to use individual X post to promote product Q, then the company would have committed an offence under Federal Trade Commission Act. The company would have committed an offence if the company cannot authenticate the claim made by individual X in the post that the company is now using to promote product Q. For an endorsement or testimonial to be subject to the Federal Trade Commission Act, there must be evidence of sponsoring advertiser, that is, the advertiser must provide something or material to the endorser in hopes that he endorses the advertiser's product. A company that gives out free sample of its product to a blogger who always writes about the product is said to be a sponsoring advertiser (Cleland 2024). An advertiser can be legally responsible for any false statement about the product, that is coming from the blogger. Giving credence to the preceding point Cleland (2024) opines that, advertisers are liable for statements made by their endorsers, including influencers and affiliate marketers. This means that once there is evidence of sponsoring advertiser, social media posts by influencers are considered endorsement. An advertiser for instance, can be held responsible if the influencer fails to declare a material connection or if the paid influencer makes a false claim about the product that the advertiser cannot confirm (Cleland, 2024).

Another issue in advertising is, children's advertising. This is when an advertisement is targeted at children in an unfair or deceptive manner or in a way that takes advantage of the children's credulity (naïveté or innocence). This Brandingsolutionllc (2023) refers to as exploitative marketing. It is considered unethical when an advertisement tries to take advantage of the weakness or innocence of the audience. Directing advertising message to a vulnerable group such as children, with the intention of promoting unhealthy and or addictive product is considered unethical (Brandingsolutionllc 2023). Exploitative marketing or advertisement is not only when it is directed at children, exploitative marketing or advertisement can also refer to, when an advertiser decides to take advantage of the elderly or children who are vulnerable for financial gain. This form of advertisement should be jettisoned because it is unethical.

Other ethical issues in advertising according to Kumar (2023) are: environmental impact, privacy, exploitation, stereotyping and cultural sensitivity. Environmental impact here talks about an advertised product that may have negative impact on the environment. Talking about environmental impact of advertising Brandingsolutionllc (2023) calls it environmental irresponsibility. Environmental irresponsibility is when the advertiser fails to take into consideration the effect of the product or service on the environment and is considered unethical, because Brandingsolutionllc (2023) posits that, advertising messages that promote products that have detrimental effects on the environment can lead to long term harm. It therefore behooves on advertisers, media organisations and advertising agencies to always ensure that, advertisements do not have detrimental effects on the environment. This is so because, the long term effects of such advertisement on the environment can be disastrous.

Privacy on the other hand, has to do with a situation whereby an advertiser uses information about an individual without the person's permission or consent. In the 21st century personalised advertising has made the issue of data privacy a thing of huge concern. This is true in that Boerman and Smit (2022) note that, digital communication technology has made it possible for advertisers to collect, use, extract, sell and share consumers' information so that advertising messages can be personalised and tailored towards specific target audience. However, these data driven possibilities come with challenges that concern the privacy of consumers. These concerns are usually referred to as "data privacy" or "information privacy". A definition of information privacy quoted in Boerman and Smit (2022) is that, it is" the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others". This definition shows that individuals, group or institutions have the right to determine and or control the flow of information that concern them. So collecting and using consumers' information without their consent is a violation of their data privacy right or information privacy.

Stereotype according Amy et al cited in Nwabueze (2020) is an impression, popular belief or perceptions, often wrong about a group of individuals. Stereotype can therefore lead to intolerance that are formed about a person based on opinions that are not true reflection of the person or opinions that are not based on actual experiences or reasons and could lead one into favouring one person or group over the other. A stereotype that is gender based for instance, can make one favour one gender over the other. Stereotype, can also be seen as, when an advertiser promotes ideas, images or ideas that are harmful in his message. Stereotype in advertising according to Lazzari (nd) refers to the oversimplification of something that is more complex than it is portrayed. This implies that, the way groups or people are portrayed in advertisement does not always fully represent reality, this is so in that, people are more complex in reality than can be defined by the role specified in advertisement (Lazzari nd). In some advertisement for instance

women are portrayed as sex toys, they are made to wear bikini to attract the opposite sex. In reality women are more complex than they are portrayed in such advertisements. Campaigns of the world (COTW)(2023) identifies some gender stereotypes that are commonly used in advertising, and they include:

The Macho Man: Men are mostly portrayed as hyper- manly figures emphasising physical strength and dominance. This portrayal according to COTW (2023) encourages men to embrace their emotions and can lead to toxic masculinity.

The Damsel in Distress: Here advertiser try to portray women as weak and always in need of saving. This portrayal according to COTW (2023) undermines the strength of women and encourages unhealthy power dynamic between men and women in the society. Women are always seen as the weaker vessel.

The Bumbling Dad: This stereotype in advertisement tries to portray the male folk as having little or no experience when it comes to house hold tasks or parenting. This stereotype according to COTW (2023) gives no credit to the active and competent roles many fathers play in the lives of their families. This therefore, gives the audience the impression that household tasks and parenting are mainly roles of women.

The Fashion fixation: This is a stereotype in advertisement, that tries to make people believe that women are obsessed with fashion. Advertisements according to COTW (2023) often reinforce the stereotype that, all women care about is appearance, while in reality women just like men have diverse interest.

The Ageless Beauty: This according to COTW (2023) is a stereotype in advertisement that scarcely represents older men and women realistically. This form of stereotype in advertisement perpetuates the notion that, only young people are valuable and desirable, thereby neglecting the beauty and wisdom that comes with age (COTW 2023).

In order to choose freely, a person should be free of external constraints which control or even influence the choice of one alternative over another. The outside controlling forces are categorised as coercive tactics that are always controlling. The preceding point is echoed in The Universal Marketing Dictionary (nd) which sees coercive influence strategy as a form of marketing communication that, puts direct pressure on customers or potential customers to perform a specific behaviour with unfavorable consequences of non-compliance stressed implied and mediated by the communicator. This tactic may involve the use of fear appeals when they are not needed. On the other hand, a persuasive influence is a deliberate and successful attempt at bringing the prospect to the advertiser's point of view. Persuasive tactic or advertising according to Intuit Mailchimp (nd) is when the advertiser in his message tries to convince customers

not with facts, statistics and benefits but by rather conjuring an emotional response that will elicit desired action from the target audience. There are three types of emotion that are meant to persuade people: ethos, pathos and logos. Ethos persuades customers with credibility, authority and trust. Customers according to Intuit Mailchimp (nd) can only trust you and your product if credibility is the bedrock of your brand. In advertising one of the primary ways of building this trust is by using an authority or getting testimonials (Intuit Mailchimp nd). Pathos on the other hand mostly uses emotional appeals by trying to elicit feelings like joy, nostalgia, sympathy. Advertisement that uses pathos according to Intuit Mailchimp(nd) allows the brand to connect with the consumers and persuade them to take action, and that pathos advertisement comes mostly in the form of storytelling. Logos on the other hand appeals to the consumers' sense of logic and intellect. Advertisements that use logos try to persuade consumers with data, facts or statistics (Intuit Mailchimp nd).

In view of the foregoing, it can be said that, while coercion is considered ethically and socially unacceptable, persuasion in which good and objective reasons are given to the prospects for accepting the desired outcome is acceptable while irrational persuasion which plays on the emotions of the people rather than objective judgment may be considered as manipulative and ethically unacceptable. Manipulative influence includes deliberate effort by advertisers to deceive people. Playing on a person will be treachery or deceitful, unfair or insidious (De George, 1982). There is therefore the need for ethical advertising, which according to Arens and Bovee (1994) entails doing what the advertiser believes is morally right for a given situation. While social responsibility on the other hand means doing what society views as best for the welfare of the people.

Reasons People Criticize Advertising Messages

Some of the things that have drawn criticisms to advertising according to National Open University (nd) are: nature and content of advertising, effect of content of advertising on the people and the entertainment effects of advertising. Nature and content of advertising is one of the reasons for criticism of advertising. The public according National Open University (nd) have continued to express concern about the content and aggressive nature of advertising, which use appeal and persuasion to achieve the purpose of selling its products or service. Because of the nature of advertising some critics have come to believe that, the repetitive nature of advertising sometimes makes it silly and irritating. Some people according to National Open University(nd) hold to the believe that advertising use deception and unfair approach to achieve its objective. It is also believed that advertisers also use fear appeal unnecessarily so as to be able to persuade target audience into patronising them. This is true in that National Open University(nd) opines that a giant insurance company in Nigeria had to use scenes of accident and loss of close relations to persuade the public to take an insurance policy. The unnecessary

use of fear appeal to "compel" people into patronising your product or service is unethical. Fear appeals are supposed to be use in advertising when they are absolutely necessary. Deception was also mentioned as one of the criticism of advertising in Nigeria. Deception according to Asemah, Kente and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2021, p.137) is "any advertisement that has some elements of misrepresentation, omission or other practice that can mislead a large number of consumers to their detriment". The foregoing connotes that deception is a deliberate attempt by advertiser to lure consumers and prospects into patronising their products or service by either blowing content out of proportion or saying things that are misleading. This is unethical and unlawful way of going about advertising. This assertion is echoed in Scott (2020) who opines that, Section 123 (1) of Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act (FCCPA) of Nigeria, states that producers , importers distributors traders or service provider shall not make any false representation to a consumer in a manner that is likely to imply any false or incorrect representation about those goods. Similarly, Article 84 of the Advertising Code according to Scott (2020) provides that the product advertised must conform to the descriptions as provided in the advertisement. It must be an exact replication of the descriptions and features as mentioned in the pages referred to above. This shows that deception in advertising is not only unethical but also illegal. This accounts for why people criticise advertising. There is therefore the need to jettison deception in advertising, so as to reduce criticisms from target audience.

Another criticism of advertising is the effect of the content of advertising on the people**.** Advertising it is believed can change the lifestyle and values of people in the society **(** National Open University nd). This is so because, it is said that the contents of advertising messages are capable of affecting the minds of the people. Advertising messages according to National Open University(nd). are also capable of working on the sub-consciousness of the mind and may force people to do what ordinarily they would not have done. This means that advertising messages to some extent have what it take to make a member of the public (target audience) act in a way desired by the communicator. The issue is that advertisers may use this to exploit the consumers. The preceding point is echoed in National Open University (nd) which states that, a school of thought have argued that, advertising can spur people into materialism and acquisition attitudes, which impinge on the values of the society.

Economic effect of advertising is yet another criticism of advertising. Critics according to National Open University (nd) argue that advertising can lead to the increase in prices of goods and services. It is argued that, because advertising is not free and it cost advertisers, millions to produce, the burden (cost of producing advertisement) is usually shifted to the consumer of the goods and services, which usually comes in the form of higher prices of the advertised service or product. However, this argument according to, National Open University(nd) has been countered by practitioners in the advertising

profession who believe that, advertising can create a lot of awareness for a product and that such awareness can lead many people into patronising the product or service. This school of thought hold tenaciously to the believe that, the producer produces more and gains from the benefits of large scale production. This they also believe will eventually lead to lower cost of production and prices of the units. Our concern is that advertising practitioners must know that, that particular product or service is in competition with similar products or service provider in that industry. This means that a product cannot take over the market overnight. There are existing and potentially customers who are brand loyalist and who may prefer the other product to your product. It is also difficult to take over the market when you have an existing product that has become a household name. We like to say here that advertising can lead to higher cost of product or service especially when the product or service is new.

Relevance is one of the reasons that makes people to criticise advertising. People have said that some of the advertisement they come across are not relevant to them. A recent survey according to Dan (2022) revealed that, majority of the respondents were worried with advertisements that are not relevant to them. This shows that consumers are really interested in advertising messages that are relevant to them or messages that they can act on. This is true in that, Dan (2022) posits that, many advertising messages fail to holistically understand their target audience and as such consumers fail to understand what the product is or how it benefits them. Likeably is another reason people criticise advertising. This implies that, is not what you say but how you say it, that really matters. Giving credence to the preceding point Dan (2022) avers that, consumers' emotional responses have greater influence on their intent to buy the product than the content of the advertising message. Little wonder advertising is said to be persuasive in nature. Advertiser should endeavour to present their messages in such a way that the audience is emotionally attached to the message.

Inability of an advertising message to effectively communicate the product benefit is another reason people criticise advertising. This Dan (2022) refers to as" treating selling as a dirty word". David Ogilvy according to Dan (2022) once admitted that "99% of advertising doesn't sell much of anything." Dan (2022) states that, most of the ads that are out these days are pretty much ineffective, and that most of the advertising messages scattered around today are simply, just, not informing people of needs that can be met, or even problems that can be solved. One of the criticisms of advertising therefore stems from the fact that most advertising messages are not able to properly articulate the product's benefit to the target audience. As such after watching, listening or reading an advertisement, the audience may end up not finding it useful to him or her. To make your message meaningful to the audience Dan (2022) argues that, to sell, advertising should communicate the benefit of a company or product in a buyer's life thus, resulting in a visceral response to the given message.

Another reason that accounts for advertising criticisms is that, people do not believe in advertising messages. This position is echoed in, Dan (2022) who posits that, 96% of people don't believe that ads are truthful. This is true in that, Gallup conducted a survey asking people just how they would rate the honesty and ethical standards of workers in 21 different professions. Nurses were rated tops, with 85%, while advertising practitioners were fourth from the bottom at 10% approval rating, slightly ahead of car salesmen, telemarketers and politicians (Dan, 2022).

Advertising fatigue also accounts for criticisms of advertising. Advertisers tend to bombard the audience with their messages not minding the effects of this bombardments on the audiences. Dan (2022) notes that, the average American is exposed to between 4,000-10,000 ads per day. Most of these advertisements are considered noise by the consumers. Little wonder Dan (2022) states that, consumers in general, do not care for advertising. He maintained that, greater number of consumers do not really need any advertising to determine which brand or service to patronise. According to Dan bombarding the audience isn't the only problem, another problem is that advertising messages are becoming ever more intrusive, inescapable, and offensive, due to advances in technology and data science. People are constantly bombarded with advertising junk which turns them off.

Theoretical Review

The following theories and Model: Social Responsibility Theory, AIDA Model and Persuasion Theory were reviewed for this study.

Social Responsibility Theory

Social Responsibility theory of the press came into being in 1947 as a result of the US Commission on the freedom of the press. This position is echoed in Ojobor(2002) cited in Ijwo & Omula (2014) who opines that, the theory originated from the work of the American-initiated Hutchins Commission (headed by Robert Maynard Hutchins) of 1947, which was a commission on freedom of the press. Social responsibility theory according to McQuail (1997) involves the view that, media ownership and operation are a form of public trust or stewardship. For the private media continued McQuail, the theory has been expressed and applied mainly in the form of codes of professional journalistic standards, ethics and conducts. In view of the foregoing it can be said that, the theory introduced codes of ethics and conducts that are intended to guide the activities of journalists and media houses, so as to ensure professionalism and best practices. This assertion holds true in that, what informed social responsibility theory according to Folarin (1998), was that publishers during the Libertarian era abused their freedom with impunity. Media content during the Libertarian era were characterised by

character assassinations and media owners were subservient to big time advertisers. Social responsibility theory disagrees with the abuse of freedom witnessed during the Libertarian era, and that there should be code of conduct or code of ethics that would guide the reporter in the discharge of his duty (Ijwo & Omula 2014)

The assumptions of Social responsibility theory according to McQuail (1997) are;

a. Media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional standards.

b. The media have obligation to the society and media ownership is a public trust.

c. Under some circumstances society may need to intervene in public interest.

d. News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant.

e. The media should free but self-regulating.

f. The media should provide forum for ideas.

The first assumption for instance is saying that media organisations should adhere to the codes of ethics of the profession. The third assumption underscores the need for objectivity, fairness, accuracy, all these are intended to ensure integrity and honesty. Assumption number five is saying the media should be free but self-regulating. The need for self-regulation should not be toyed with. The relevance of this theory to this work lies in the fact that, the theory advocates adherence to the codes of ethics and the codes of conducts, which are required to attain best practices and high level of professionalism in the advertising industry

AIDA Model

The AIDA model was introduced in the late 19th century by an American businessman and advertising advocate Elias St. Elmo Lewis. AIDA is an acronym for: attention, interest, desire and action. The thrust of this model is that, an advertising message should be able to first, capture the attention of the audience, then generate interest in the audience, after that the message can create desire for the product in the audience. Finally, the message should be able to prompt the audience into action. The acronym AIDA according to Hanion (2023) stands for

Awareness or Attention: This has to do with creating awareness for a product or a brand. For people to like your product or want your product the first need to know about it. One sure way of letting people know about your product is by creating awareness. The first step in the AIDA model according to Kumar (2023) is to capture the attention

of the audience and make them aware of your message. This can be achieved by having a catchy headline, or an intriguing opening statement or by using visuals that are appealing. The goal is to break through the noise and capture the attention of the audience (Kumar 2023)

Interest: Once the message is able to capture the attention of the audience, the next thing according to Kumar (2023) is to generate interest in what you offer. To generate interest, you need to provide your audience with compelling and relevant information that would make them want to know more. To achieve this, you can highlight the benefits and unique selling proposition(USP) of your product or service. Generating interest in the benefits of the product or service, makes prospects to start to research further. The interest is able to make the consumer to like the product or service.

Desire: This means been able to make prospects have desire for your product or service through an emotional connection, that shows the personality of your product or service. This kind of connection moves the consumer from liking the product or service to wanting it. At this point Kumar (2023) avers that, you need to persuade prospects into believing that, what you offer is of great value, desirable and can satisfy their need or solve their problem. This you can achieve by appealing to the audience emotion by bringing in testimonials and success stories.

Action: This stage is to prompt the audience to take action. There is need to clearly call for action by telling the audience what to do next. This means that advertising messages should be able to make prospects, interact with the brand or company and taking the next step which entails: downloading the brochure, making phone calls, engaging in live chat and eventually patronising or recommending the product or service. (Hanion 2023).

Persuasion Theory

Persuasion theory according to Asiekpe in Ijwo and Omula (2014) is based on Aristotle's rhetorical theory of communication. Giving credence to the preceding point, Rokeach and Defleur(1989) cited in Ijwo and Omula (2014) note that, the basic idea of persuasion has ancient roots, and that, it referred to the art of using language to influence judgement. However, the concept of persuasion in recent time according to Ijwo and Omula (2014) was developed between 1940s and 1950s. The thrust of this theory is that, the communicator tries to persuade his audience to act in a way he the communicator wants them to. Folarin (1998) cited Bradley as saying, "persuasion is the process whereby an attempt is made to induce change in attitude and behaviour". This is true in that persuasion theory focuses on the content of the message and the audience. As such the message, should be designed a way that it is able to capture the attention of

the audience. For a message to be able to capture the attention of the audience Ijwo and Omula (2014) note that, the communicator should consider the following:

Selective Exposure: This means that people are more interested in messages that support, their (audience) opinion, and ideas that they already have. This means that, the message should, to some extent align with preexisting beliefs and opinions of the audience. It also means that the audience will most likely expose themselves to a message when it agrees with their beliefs and opinions.

Selective Perception: This implies that audience members tend to select those messages or information that is right with them. This also connotes that; audience perception of a message is also dependent on whether the message is right for them or not. A message according to Ijwo and Omula (2014) can be voluntarily misunderstood if the audience chose not to receive such a message.

Note that besides, exposure and perception, there are other factors that can reinforce the persuasion process. The credibility and reputation of the communicator can play a huge role in the persuasion process. The level of persuasion is low if the communicator is considered not to be credible and reliable by the audience. This is true in that, Griffin (1989) according to Ijwo and Omula (2014) quoted Aristotle as saying the available means of persuasion are based on three proof : the Logical(logos), ethical(ethos) and emotional(pathos)

Empirical Studies

In the study "Influence of Airtel Television Advertising on Choice of Mobile Telecommunication Networks by Students of Institute of Management and Technology Enugu" .The researchers, Omeje, Oparaugo, Chukwuka and Anigbo(2023) sought to find out, the influence of Airtel television advertising on choice of mobile telecommunication network by students of the Institute of Management and Technology Enugu. The study was anchored on Cultivation Theory. Survey research was employed to sample the opinion of 387 respondents. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Findings revealed that, students of Institute of Management and Technology Enugu used Airtel network and were heavily exposed to Airtel television advertisements. It was recommended that, advertising messages should be both persuasive and reminder oriented. This study is similar to the current study in that, both studies advocate for the use of persuasion in advertising. This is also in line with the thrust of persuasion theory, which is one of the theories in the theoretical review. This simply means that unethical advertising should be jettisoned.

Sandhe (2016) in a study entitled "An empirical study on the impact of advertising on

buying behaviour" wanted to find out, whether advertisements were effective in terms of their impact on buying behaviour. Survey research method was used to sample 500 respondents. Questionnaire was the instrument used to generate primary data. Findings revealed that, appeals that were made in advertisements were the most important factors that attracted respondents, this was the views of respondents in Table 3. It was further revealed that, what really influenced the purchased decisions of respondents in Vadodara was self. Table 4 showed that, advertisements were found to be insignificant in terms of their influence on purchasing decision, and that, respondents were taking their own decisions to make purchase. It was concluded that, though advertisements play important roles in the promotion of a product and informing consumers, however, heavy advertising would not necessarily result into large market share. This study has shown that, advertising is needed to create awareness about a product, this shows a link between this study and the current study. The identified gaps in this study are that, not a single theory or model was used in the study. Secondly the study has no recommendations.

Research Method

The study adopted qualitative approach and Library Research Method was used, which entails the use of library documentary materials. This implies that secondary data was used all through the study. Library research according to IGI Global (n.d) is the act of using either in print or online materials to find information which satisfies or answers a question. The implication is that the study is based on consultation of theoretically related studies carried out by other scholars. Conclusion and recommendations were based on consultation of journal articles, textbooks and in online materials.

Discussion

The first objective of this study was to investigate ethical issues in advertising practice. Finding revealed that stereotype is one unethical issue in advertising practice, this is so because stereotype makes an individual to pick or favour one person or group over the other. This is in line with the submission of Aketsam, Rosengren, Dahlen, Lijedal and Berg (2023) who in their study found out that, portrayal of men and women have a presumed negative influence on others, leading to a higher level of advertisement reactance. Unfair and untrue comparison was also discovered to be another ethical issue in advertising. Comparative advertising is not bad but when it is unfair and untrue it becomes a thing of concern. Exploitative marketing, is an ethical issue in advertising practice, that advertisers must try to avoid in their advertisement. This is so because children advertising or exploitative marketing according Brandingsolutionllc (2023) is when an advertisement take advantage of weak and vulnerable group.

The use of coercive tactics or strategy is an issue in advertising practice that is of concern to researchers and the public. Cases abound where advertisers unnecessarily use fear appeal to make their target audience patronise their product or service. The preceding point is echoed in The Universal Marketing Dictionary (nd) which states that, coercive influence strategy as a form of marketing communication, that puts direct pressure on customers or potential customers to perform a specific behaviour with unfavorable consequences of non-compliance stressed implied and mediated by the communicator.

The second objective of this study was to ascertain why people criticise advertising. Finding revealed that, people criticise advertising because of the way advertisers present their advertisements, and the way target audience are bombarded with advertisement on a daily basis. This shows that advertising is not the problem but the way advertisers go about it. This assertion is echoed in Coppola (2020) who opines that, advertising itself is not the problem but the type of advertisement that business are running. This is in line with the findings of Coppola (2020) who posits that, according to a Hubspot Research, 91% of people believe advertisements are more intrusive now compared to some years ago, and that 79% were of the opinion that. they were being tracked by targeted advertisements. Little wonder Dan (2022) states that, the average American is exposed to between 4,000-10,000 ads per day. Equally important is the fact that, most advertising messages are not able to properly articulate the product's benefit to the target audience. Again Dan (2022) states that, most of the ads that are out these days are pretty much ineffective, and that most of the advertisements scattered around today are simply, just, not informing people of a need that can be met, or even a problem that can be solved. Corroborating this view is Coppola (2020) who posits that, people tend to dislike advertisement that are not engaging, entertaining, or informative, Coppola continued that such advertisements do not resonate with modern buyers.

Another reason people criticise advertising is that, advertising is believed can lead to unnecessary increase in the prices of products and services. This is true in that, Critics according to National Open University (nd) argue that advertising can lead to the increase in prices of goods and services. It is argued that, because advertising is not free and it cost advertisers millions to produce the burden (cost of producing advertisement) is usually shifted to the consumer of the goods and services, which usually comes in the form of higher prices of the advertised service or product.

The third objective was to determine the nexus between criticism and ethical issues in advertising practice. It is pretty obvious that, there is a connection between ethical issues in advertising and the criticism of advertising. It can be said that most of the criticisms in advertising stem from the unethical ways advertisers and advertising agencies go about advertising products and services. Some of the ethical issues in advertising cited in Rani (2021)are: Advertisement misleading people, advertisements inducing children to perform an unsafe /unhygienic acts, advertisements belittling women showing them

in low esteem, advertising undesirable and prohibited goods in the guise of normal goods with the same brand, advertisements portraying untenable promises as to the performance /effectiveness of the product, advertisement showing celebrity endorsement that is a deliberate attempt to mislead people, advertisement making impracticable promises. These and many more are unethical ways advertiser go about advertising products and services with the aim of misleading target audience. These unethical issues account for why people criticise advertisements. The truth is that, sooner or later the target audience will find out the truth and when they do, they certainly will dislike or criticise the advertisement for misleading them, hence the nexus between criticism and ethical issue in advertising.

Conclusion

For advertisement to be devoid of unethical issues, advertisers, advertising media and advertising agencies must endeavour to adhere to the code of ethics and codes of conducts of the profession.

Recommendations

1. Integrity and honesty must not be relegated to the background, in the creation and dissemination of advertising messages to target audience.

2. To ensure best practices and maintain high level of professionalism, the advertiser, advertising media and advertising agencies must always play by the rules, as enshrined in the codes of ethics and conducts.

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