RESPONSIBLE ADVERTISING AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v9i8.03

Keywords

Responsible Advertising, Misleading Advertising, Consumer Protection, Advertising Ethics, Consumer Rights, Advertising Regulations, Consumer Awareness

Abstract

Research Problem:
Advertising is a powerful persuasive tool, but its expansion through digital and influencer-driven platforms has raised ethical concerns about deception and consumer vulnerability. Despite existing regulations, unethical advertising practices persist in developing markets like Nigeria, questioning the effectiveness of regulatory enforcement.

Methods/Theory:
A qualitative design was used, analysing print, broadcast, and digital adverts from ethically sensitive sectors, along with regulatory documents, advertising codes, and consumer complaints. Data were analysed through an inductive-deductive thematic approach to identify patterns of ethical compliance, violations, and regulatory responses. The study is guided by Stakeholder Theory and Persuasion Knowledge Theory.

Results:
The findings show that responsible advertising builds consumer trust and supports informed decision-making. In contrast, practices like exaggerated claims, omitting important information, and targeting vulnerable groups undermine confidence in advertising.

Conclusion:
While regulatory bodies like the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria and the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission oversee advertising, enforcement remains mainly reactive. The study concludes that effective consumer protection requires embedding ethical responsibility into advertising communication during the persuasive process.

Key Contribution to Knowledge:
The study contributes to advertising ethics and consumer protection by proposing a message-centered framework for strengthening ethical advertising practices in Nigeria and similar markets globally.

Recommendation:
To improve consumer protection, ethical responsibility should be

embedded within advertising communication at the point of persuasion, ensuring that advertising practices are responsible by design, not just through reactive regulation.

Introduction

Advertising is a fundamental aspect of modern market economies, serving as a persuasive communication method that influences customer awareness, attitudes, and purchase behaviour (Belch & Belch, 2020). Kotler and Keller (2016) assert that the proliferation of digital platforms and influencer marketing has augmented the reach, accuracy, and persuasive efficacy of advertising, broadening its impact across various audiences and settings. Academic scrutiny has progressively concentrated on the ethical ramifications of this increase. Current research underscores ongoing issues associated with deceit, hyperbole, manipulation, and the diminishment of consumer autonomy, especially in digital advertising contexts (Wells et al., 2018; O'Barr, 2019).Responsible advertising is typically defined by compliance with ethical values including truthfulness, fairness, and social responsibility, which are crucial for maintaining customer trust (Drumwright& Murphy, 2017; Shimp& Andrews, 2013).

Nonetheless, a significant portion of this material is prescriptive, providing scant understanding of how ethical duty is manifested in commercial communications. The United Nations (2016) asserts that consumer protection studies has predominantly concentrated on legislative frameworks and institutional enforcement aimed at mitigating unfair and misleading marketing practices. This corpus of work mostly views consumer protection as reactive, focussing on treating harm post-occurrence, rather than as a preventive measure integrated within commercial communication. Consequently, the function of advertising content as a domain of consumer protection remains little theorised.Research on digital advertising indicates that algorithmic targeting and influencer endorsements obscure the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial content, heightening consumer susceptibility (Tuten& Solomon, 2021).
However, such studies frequently highlight consumer knowledge and coping mechanisms, implicitly transferring blame to audiences instead of scrutinising marketer accountability during the persuasive process. In Nigeria, research indicates persistent fraudulent advertising activities despite the existence of regulating agencies like the Advertising regulating Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) (Okorie et al., 2019; FCCPC, 2022). These studies largely assess regulatory efficacy, providing minimal theoretical exploration of responsibility as a communication practice.This study fills these gaps by enhancing ethical advertising and consumer protection scholarship through a proactive, message-focused approach. It frames responsible advertising as an ethical duty integrated into message design rather than as a subsequent compliance measure, so shifting accountability to the moment of persuasion and enriching discussions on ethical advertising in both global and Nigerian contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The primary research issue pertains to assessing the degree of implementation of responsible advertising practices by businesses and evaluating the efficacy of current consumer protection systems in alleviating the adverse effects of unethical advertising on consumers. Empirical research regarding the interplay between responsible advertising,

regulatory enforcement, and consumer awareness in influencing ethical marketplace behaviour is scarce. Rectifying this deficiency is crucial for enhancing consumer protection legislation, augmenting corporate accountability, and cultivating durable, trust-based partnerships between enterprises and customers.Responsible advertising plays a crucial role in protecting consumer rights and fostering equitable market practices by guaranteeing that marketing messages are accurate, clear, and non-misleading.

Notwithstanding the presence of regulatory frameworks and ethical principles intended to safeguard consumers, deceptive, inflated, and manipulative advertising tactics remain prevalent in both traditional and digital media platforms (Armstrong et al., 2019). The OECD (2020) contends that the swift expansion of digital advertising, influencer marketing, and tailored data-driven promotions has exacerbated the enforcement of consumer protection norms, heightening consumers' susceptibility to disinformation and deceptive persuasion strategies.Despite the efforts of regulatory entities like consumer protection agencies to mitigate unethical advertising activities, discrepancies persist between policy development, enforcement, and the advertising strategies implemented by companies (Richards & Murphy, 2021). Consumers frequently possess insufficient awareness, resources, or methods to recognise and contest irresponsible advertising, resulting in financial detriment, diminished trust, and skewed consumer decision-making (Kotler et al., 2022). This difficulty is especially evident in developing and highly competitive markets, where regulatory control may be inadequate or inconsistently enforced.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine organisational adherence to responsible advertising principles in marketing communications.
2. To assess the effectiveness of existing consumer protection regulations and enforcement mechanisms in addressing unethical advertising.
3. To analyse consumer awareness of responsible advertising and protection measures and its influence on decision-making and trust.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach utilising content analysis to investigate responsible advertising practices and consumer protection concerns. Qualitative content analysis is suitable as it facilitates the systematic evaluation of advertising messages and regulatory documents to discern ethical issues such as sincerity, transparency, and justice in advertising activities (Krippendorff, 2018).The research utilises secondary qualitative data obtained from specific print, broadcast, and digital adverts in ethically sensitive industries, such as food and drinks, pharmaceuticals, and financial services. Supplementary data sources encompass advertising codes of ethics, regulatory guidelines, consumer complaint records, public warnings, and court judgements pertaining to advertising malfeasance. Collectively, these resources offer insight into advertising tactics and institutional regulatory reactions.

A purposive sample method is utilised to select advertising and documents that demonstrate ethical issues or have garnered regulatory or consumer scrutiny within a specified timeframe. This sampling method is suitable for qualitative research as it facilitates the selection of information-dense examples that correspond with the study's analytical aims (Patton, 2015). Advertising materials are procured from official brand websites, social media platforms, broadcast archives, and print media, whilst regulatory documents are acquired from official publications of the

government and advertising regulatory agencies. All materials are meticulously compiled and arranged to guarantee transparency and uniformity in analysis.Data are examined with qualitative content analysis via an inductive-deductive coding methodology. Preliminary open coding reveals persistent ethical concerns, which are then categorised into overarching theme groups based on recognised advertising ethics and consumer protection standards. A comparative study is performed to discern patterns of compliance, deficiencies, and ethical transgressions in advertising content according to regulatory criteria (Mayring, 2014).

Conceptual Clarification

This study reconceptualises responsible advertising as an anticipatory communicative obligation inherent in message design, rather than as a post-hoc regulatory compliance, positing that ethical responsibility resides in how advertisers preempt consumer vulnerability and interpretive constraints during the persuasion process (Richards & Murphy, 2021). Consumer protection is therefore conceptualised not merely as a legal or institutional duty but as a communicative process manifested inside advertising, where message framing, transparency, and persuasive aim can either alleviate or exacerbate harm (OECD, 2020). Utilising Persuasion Knowledge Theory, the research differentiates ethical persuasion from manipulation by transferring responsibility from consumer awareness to advertiser self-regulation, arguing that understanding consumers' persuasion knowledge should limit persuasive tactics (Friestad& Wright, 1994; Boerman et al., 2017). These clarifications present anticipatory ethical advertising as a conceptual intervention that regards message production as a fundamental aspect of consumer protection, so broadening the scope of current advertising ethics and consumer protection research.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilises Stakeholder Theory and Persuasion Knowledge Theory (PKT) as sensitising frameworks instead of rigid explanatory models. In alignment with WISJ's focus on theoretical contribution, the study evaluates and expands both theories to incorporate responsible advertising as a preventive measure for consumer protection. Stakeholder Theory conventionally positions responsible advertising as a normative duty to customers and society (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010). Nonetheless, its implementation has frequently remained theoretical. This study advances the idea by framing consumers as interpretive stakeholders, whose safeguarding relies on the extent to which advertising messages address consumer vulnerability, understanding, and regulatory purpose. This transitions Stakeholder Theory from ethical justification to an analytical framework for assessing message-level accountability.PKT has mostly been utilised to elucidate how consumers identify and react to persuasive intent, especially in covert and digital advertising environments (Friestad& Wright, 1994; Boerman et al., 2017). Such programs typically assign responsibilities to consumers.

This study reframes PKT from the advertiser's ethical standpoint, contending that awareness of customers' persuasion expertise should limit persuasive tactics. PKT is hence utilised as a framework for advertiser responsibility rather than for consumer self-defence. This study proposes a concept of anticipatory ethical advertising by merging these viewpoints, wherein accountability is inherent in message production rather than applied retroactively through regulation. This recontextualization enhances the fields of advertising and consumer protection by establishing responsible advertising as a progressive ethical practice that aligns with regulatory

frameworks (Richards & Murphy, 2021; OECD, 2020).

Legal and Institutional Framework

Consumer protection in Nigeria is fundamentally based on the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act (FCCPA) of 2018, which created the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC). The FCCPC is tasked with safeguarding consumer rights, fostering equitable competition, and mitigating fraudulent market activities (FCCPC, 2022). This paradigm signifies a notable institutional progression; yet, its rationale is predominantly enforcement-oriented, addressing issues only post-consumer harm. This reactive approach constrains its ability to examine how advertising communication functions as a mechanism of consumer protection or detriment.

The FCCPC is supplemented by sector-specific regulatory agencies, including the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON). ARCON's Code of Advertising Practice mandates honesty, legality, and social responsibility in advertising content (APCON, 2022). Nonetheless, these norms primarily depend on post-publication penalties, indicating a minimal focus on instilling ethical accountability during the message formulation phase. While NAFDAC and SON proficiently control product safety and quality, their oversight is inadequately prepared to tackle deceptive persuasive claims within advertising narratives.This institutional arrangement mirrors wider worldwide issues in consumer protection. UNCTAD (2016) contends that robust consumer protection regimes necessitate legislative enforcement, institutional independence, and consumer education.

However, in numerous developing economies, enforcement constraints diminish regulatory effectiveness. Empirical evidence substantiates this concern, as Olojede and Fashina (2020) indicate that inadequate institutional capacity and regulatory deficiencies facilitate the continuation of unethical advertising. Furthermore, Agbaje and Okpara (2021) illustrate that consumers in Africa and certain regions of Asia are especially susceptible to deceptive advertising due to information asymmetry and regulatory inadequacies.Eko Solicitors and Advocates (2025) indicate that present enforcement actions in Nigeria demonstrate both regulatory determination and structural limitations. The Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria Act 2022 criminalises deceptive advertising and stipulates penalties including fines and imprisonment. Prominent incidents of fraudulent health advertisements on Meta platforms underscore ongoing governmental action, while also revealing the rapidity and magnitude of misleading digital advertising that exceeds effective oversight.

ARCON's 2023 lawsuit against Meta regarding unapproved political commercials, although dismissed by the Federal High Court, indicated further regulatory oversight of digital advertising practices (Templars Law, 2024).Eko Solicitors and Advocates (2025) contend that recurrent sanctions against inflated health and herbal product assertions highlight the exploitation of consumer sensitivity in health-related advertising. The continued occurrence of these breaches indicates that punitive enforcement has a restricted ability to prevent them. The legal and institutional literature indicates a consumer protection structure that is strong in statutory terms but largely reactive in implementation. Notwithstanding comprehensive regulatory measures, misleading advertising, particularly in digital contexts, continues to be widespread. This gap highlights the necessity to redefine consumer

protection as a proactive, message-oriented obligation integrated within advertising communication, rather than depending exclusively on retrospective regulatory measures.

Consumer Awareness and Education

Consumer protection is only effective when customers are cognisant of their rights and obligations. Public awareness campaigns, media advocacy, and educational initiatives are vital instruments for enhancing consumer power (Eze et al., 2020). The FCCPC (2022) in Nigeria indicates that numerous civil society organisations, media entities, and governmental agencies work together to inform the public with product labelling, warranty claims, return policies, and complaint procedures. The FCCPC's "Don't Take It" campaign urges consumers to refuse inferior items and report infractions.

Informed consumers are less susceptible to deceptive marketing tactics and more inclined to demand accountability from corporations for unethical conduct. Kotler and Keller (2016) asserted that consumer education enhances legal enforcement by fostering a culture of alertness and informed decision-making.In addition to awareness campaigns, ongoing consumer education necessitates institutional backing, curriculum incorporation, and digital literacy programs that empower individuals with the skills required to traverse increasingly intricate markets. With the growth of digital transactions, e-commerce platforms, and online advertising in Nigeria, it is imperative that customers are informed about data privacy, online fraud prevention, and avenues for redress in virtual markets. Recent studies highlight that continuous education aids in closing knowledge disparities among marginalised populations, including rural residents, the elderly, and low-income individuals, who are frequently adversely impacted by inequitable trading practices (Adeyemi & Adebayo, 2021). Consequently, thorough consumer education enhances regulatory initiatives and fosters inclusive economic participation by enabling all societal segments to demand transparency, quality, and accountability from enterprises.

Challenges of Consumer Protection in Nigeria

Notwithstanding advancements, numerous obstacles impede the complete attainment of consumer protection objectives in Nigeria. These encompass: i. Inadequate enforcement of current legislation attributable to bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption.ii. Limited consumer awareness, especially in rural regions. iii. Proliferation of counterfeit and inferior items, particularly in informal marketplaces. iv. Restricted access to redress mechanisms, hindering consumers' ability to pursue justice (Olojede&Fashina, 2020). Overcoming these problems necessitates enhanced institutional coordination, augmented funding for regulatory bodies, and the incorporation of technology for complaint management and product validation.

Responsible Advertising

Responsible advertising should be regarded as an ethical activity based on professional judgement rather than merely a result of legal compliance. Regulatory frameworks establish baseline requirements for advertising activity, although they do not inherently ensure ethical responsibility. Drumwright and Murphy (2019) assert that ethical advertising must be accurate, culturally aware, and safeguarding of susceptible demographics, including children and the elderly. This position, although establishing a significant ethical baseline, diminishes the role of advertisements in influencing moral outcomes. This study contends that responsibility in advertising is not just dictated by regulations or institutions

but is actively shaped by the ethical decisions of practitioners and companies.In the Nigerian advertising landscape, the ethical ramifications of advertising tactics are heightened by socio-economic vulnerability, cultural variety, and disparate degrees of consumer literacy. The continual employment of hyperbolic assertions, undisclosed celebrity endorsements, and emotionally provocative message, especially in health, financial, and political advertising, raises essential enquiries regarding the authenticity of ethical commitment in practice. Although these tactics may superficially adhere to regulatory standards, they frequently undermine the essence of responsible advertising as defined by Drumwright and Murphy (2019).

This tension exposes a disparity between ethical theory and practical implementation in Nigerian advertising practices.Responsible advertising is intrinsically connected to corporate social responsibility (CSR), serving not merely as a symbolic act but as a communicative manifestation of business principles. Pomering and Dolnicar (2018) illustrate that firms incorporating ethical issues into their communication strategies are more likely to cultivate consumer trust and enduring brand loyalty. This study asserts that CSR-driven advertising in Nigeria often serves as a means of reputational control rather than authentic ethical involvement. Inconsistent CSR messaging with commercial claims or product reality undermines confidence and may exacerbate public scepticism.The connection between advertising and consumer protection highlights the ethical responsibility imposed on advertisers. Belch & Belch (2020) warn that the persuasive efficacy of advertising can readily devolve into manipulation when precision and transparency are compromised for the sake of attention.

In Nigeria, regulating entities like the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) function as institutional safeguards by scrutinising advertising before their release. This regulatory intervention is crucial; yet, dependence on post-hoc approval systems indicates a reactive rather than proactive stance on ethical advertising. Consequently, ethical duty cannot be wholly delegated to regulators without undermining professional accountability.This study contends that ethical advertising in Nigeria should be redefined as a fundamental professional ethic instead than merely a regulatory obstacle. Ethical advertising must emphasise evidence-based assertions, complete transparency, and cultural awareness, acknowledging Nigeria's intricate moral, religious, and societal context. When advertising honours consumer intelligence and refrains from misleading tactics, it bolsters consumer empowerment and fortifies marketplace integrity. Responsible advertising is not ancillary to advertising efficiency; rather, it is fundamental to the legitimacy and viability of advertising as a socially accountable institution.

The Effectiveness of Advertising Regulations in Protecting Consumers

Advertising regulations are essential since they safeguard customers from deceptive, detrimental, or misleading communications. They guarantee that advertisements are accurate, ethical, and equitable to the public (OECD, 2019). When effectively enforced, these regulations ensure that consumers obtain accurate information and are not deceived into purchasing harmful or substandard items. Advertising regulations have effectively diminished deceptive assertions and misleading advertisements in numerous nations. For instance, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States and the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) have both implemented measures to eliminate misleading commercials and penalise violators (FTC, 2024; ARCON, 2023). These measures demonstrate that robust legislation and vigorous enforcement can safeguard consumers and foster confidence in

the advertising sector.The efficacy of these regulations is contingent upon the rigour of their enforcement.

Insufficient budget or personnel in regulatory authorities may lead to ongoing violations by certain corporations (Krnel et al., 2023). The OECD (2024) contends that the proliferation of social media and internet advertising has complicated the monitoring of advertisements and the identification of deceptive information. This indicates that legislation must be perpetually revised to accommodate emerging kinds of digital advertising. Harker (1999) discovered that self-regulation is effective when the industry is honest and open; nevertheless, it frequently fails when business objectives supersede consumer protection. Consequently, specialists recommend integrating self-regulation with governmental oversight for enhanced outcomes. Consequently, public awareness is necessary. Dubé (2025) asserts that consumer education regarding their rights enhances their ability to recognise and report misleading marketing. This enhances regulatory efficacy by engaging both regulators and the public in upholding ethical advertising standards. Approaches to Enhance Ethical and Responsible Advertising in NigeriaEthical and responsible advertising is crucial in Nigeria as it safeguards customers against deceptive, offensive, or misleading communications. It fosters public trust and enhances the reputation of the advertising business (Okoro &Agbo, 2019).

Scholars concur that fostering ethical advertising necessitates collaboration among government regulators, professional groups, media outlets, and advertisers (Nwosu &Nkamnebe, 2006). A primary strategy is enhanced regulation and enforcement. The Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), previously referred to as APCON, establishes regulations to govern advertising practices. Nonetheless, these regulations necessitate continuous updates to remain aligned with developments in digital and social media advertising (Ekeanyanwu&Obianigwe, 2012). ARCON must collaborate closely with entities such as the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) to ensure the penalisation of misleading and detrimental advertisements (ARCON, 2023; FCCPC, 2022).

An additional crucial element is education and training. Oloyede and Adekoya (2020) asserted that advertising professionals require ongoing training in ethics and ethical communication to prevent the creation of inaccurate or hurtful messages. Simultaneously, consumers must to be instructed on how to identify and interrogate deceptive or manipulative marketing. This fosters a more informed populace capable of advocating for improved advertising methods (Okoro &Agbo, 2019). The self-regulation of professional groupings is also significantly essential. The Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria (AAAN) advocates for its members to adhere to rules of conduct and to report unethical practices (AAAN, 2021). Self-regulation is most effective when accompanied by governmental supervision and public participation (Ekeanyanwu&Obianigwe, 2012). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) assists corporations in endorsing positive principles inside their ads. When organisations employ advertising to promote honesty, fairness, and social reasons, they not only safeguard consumers but also enhance their reputation (Oloyede& Adekoya, 2020).

Emerging Directions in Adverstising and Consumer Protection

Modern advertising is being transformed by technological advancements, evolving consumer values, and increasing regulatory demands. This study contends that, although experts emphasise the transformative potential of immersive technologies like augmented

reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), their importance is more associated with the ethical hazards they present than with improved involvement. Johnson et al. (2023) and Lee and Kim (2024) underscore the capacity of immersive advertising to customise and enhance consumer experiences. Nonetheless, this intensified persuasion obscures the distinction between influence and manipulation, especially in environments where consumer literacy and regulatory enforcement are inadequate.As augmented reality and virtual reality advertising integrates into mobile and social media platforms, advertisers obtain enhanced access to consumers' behavioural and emotional data. The augmentation of data collection engenders apprehensions over informed consent and consumer autonomy. In the absence of parallel enhancements in consumer protection frameworks, immersive advertising threatens to exacerbate power imbalances between marketers and audiences. This dilemma is especially pertinent in emerging advertising markets like Nigeria, where ethical regulation frequently trails technology advancement.Privacy and data ethics have thus become crucial issues in modern advertising practices.

Smith and Nguyen (2024) and Rodriguez (2023) observe that regulatory frameworks like the GDPR and CCPA are reshaping international benchmarks for transparency, consent, and data accountability. Although these frameworks are not generally applicable, their normative impact transcends their countries. This paper contends that their fundamental importance is in redefining trust as a strategic and ethical asset. In Nigeria, the inconsistent implementation of data protection, coupled with a lack of stringent controls, exacerbates consumer susceptibility and diminishes trust in digital advertising. Demographic shifts further complicate the relationship between advertising and consumer protection. Generation Z and Generation Alpha increasingly want brands that demonstrate authenticity, diversity, and social responsibility (Martinez & Patel, 2023). This study argues that the commercialisation of authenticity has new ethical issues, despite the effectiveness of influencer marketing and user-generated content on platforms like TikTok in reaching these audiences (Chen & Li, 2024). Concealed endorsements and algorithmic targeting jeopardise transparency, especially among younger consumers.

Towards a Future of Ethics and Transparency

The concurrent advancement in advertising methodologies and consumer protection indicates a future characterised by enhanced ethical standards, transparency, and a focus on customer interests. These developments indicate a fundamental change towards enhanced customisation, coupled with stringent privacy protections, requiring firms to implement consumer-centric strategies based on ethical standards and regulatory adherence (Harris & Patel, 2024). Organisations that adeptly incorporate immersive technology and exhibit a robust dedication to data ethics are likely to cultivate enduring consumer trust and loyalty. Furthermore, governments and industry stakeholders must cooperate to establish clear and uniform policies that tackle the intricacies of developing technology. Promoting transparency, equity, and security is crucial for ensuring that advancements benefit customers and foster fair marketplaces (Nguyen & Garcia, 2024). As technology advances swiftly, continuous education and adaptability will be essential for both organisations and consumers to efficiently navigate this changing landscape.

Discussion of Findings

This section examines the findings in relation to the research objectives within the context of

Nigeria's advertising and consumer protection system. The discourse extends beyond validating current literature to delineate the conceptual and theoretical ramifications of responsible advertising on consumer trust, market integrity, and regulatory efficacy. Research indicates that responsible advertising, characterised by truth, transparency, and respect for consumer rights, substantially improves informed consumer decision-making and confidence. This result corresponds with ethical communication and persuasion theories that underscore the importance of trustworthiness in exerting influence. This study builds upon prior research by illustrating that in the Nigerian advertising landscape, responsible advertising serves not only as an ethical standard but also as a balancing force in a market marked by consumer mistrust and recurrent exposure to deceptive assertions. This substantiates the argument that ethical restraint enhances, rather than diminishes, persuasive efficacy, hence contesting advertising frameworks that normalise exaggeration as a tactical instrument.

The findings indicate that irresponsible advertising techniques, including overstated promises, deletion of essential facts, and targeting vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly, directly threaten consumer welfare and trust. This study corroborates previous research connecting misleading advertising to consumer detriment, although it distinguishes itself by emphasising the institutional repercussions of these practices. In Nigeria, recurrent occurrences of deceptive advertising undermine trust in both specific products and the advertising profession as a whole. This theoretically contradicts utilitarian conceptions that prioritise attention and sales over ethical responsibility, bolstering critical views that identify irresponsible advertising as a systemic danger to marketplace legitimacy.

The findings prominently highlight the significance of consumer protection procedures. Regulatory entities like the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) and the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) are crucial for overseeing advertising activities and enforcing ethical standards. This discovery aligns with literature centred on regulation. This study diverges from regulation-centric methodologies by illustrating that enforcement in Nigeria is predominantly reactive, frequently happening post-consumer exposure. This concept endorses normative ethical theories that assert sustainable responsible advertising must be guided by internalised professional ideals rather than just depending on external regulation.The findings indicate a complementary albeit uneven relationship between responsible advertising and consumer protection in Nigeria. Responsible advertising mitigates regulatory scrutiny and bolsters consumer confidence, whilst robust consumer protection regimes strengthen accountability. This study redefines responsible advertising as a fundamental professional ethic instead of merely a procedural requirement, contending that the legitimacy and sustainability of advertising practices in Nigeria rely on the alignment of persuasive efficacy with ethical accountability and strong consumer protection.

Conclusion

This study emphasises ethical responsibility and consumer protection as fundamental theoretical principles of modern advertising, rather than as secondary regulatory issues. The findings substantiate advertising's dual function as both a communication instrument and an economic catalyst, highlighting that its credibility, efficacy, and social legitimacy are contingent upon the incorporation of ethical principles into advertising practices, especially within the digital realm. The results align with prior research that acknowledges advertising's

impact on consumer behaviour, societal values, and market competition, along with the dangers linked to deceptive and manipulative tactics. This study enhances the current literature by examining developing trends in digital, immersive, and data-driven advertising, where conventional ethical frameworks frequently fall short.This study highlights the collective responsibilities of advertisers, regulators, and consumers in maintaining marketplace integrity, in contrast to previous studies that focus solely on regulatory compliance.

Emerging advertising practices should not be assessed exclusively based on innovation or efficacy. Their sustainability relies on the robustness of ethical norms and consumer protection measures that follow technological progress. This study positions ethics at the core of advertising theory and practice, so enhancing scholarly dialogue and affirming advertising's function as a socially responsible communication tool.

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