

Ethical Policy on Advertising Effectiveness: It's Implementation on Television Advertising in Ghana

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the ethical policy on advertising especially its implementation on television advertising in Ghana. After analysis of the views of Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG), it was revealed that the existence of the authority thrives on self-regulation yet, limited effectiveness of the ethical policy on advertising was confirmed. This was attributed to some advertising practitioners (AAG members) working with the policy while non-AAG members did not. The study again revealed the state of the division in ethical policy adherence affecting the current television commercials aired. This kind of division contributes to ethical policy implementation challenges. The study recommended an adoption of AAG ethical policy on advertising for the National Media Commission to bind other advertisers

who do not feel obliged to be part of AAG.

Key words: *Ethical policy, advertising, television.*

Introduction

The Ghanaian media landscape is increasingly witnessing a great level of change in media presentation. The change, especially when compared to the past years of media experience, shows indications of development today. On television, the advertising front is experiencing enhanced design concepts in message presentation to reach out to desired audiences. The focus of television advertisement is seen as a set of television programming produced and paid for by an organization that bears a message to advertise products or services rendered (Un-Nahar, 2015). The projection of these messages in the form of ideas that seek to advertise on the media, especially on television to the public, have been very proactive in Ghana today.

With television advertising being a medium that engages the public, the practice is guided by a set of ethical dimensions called *ethical policies* which guide how advertising (television) is practiced. This looks at how information is gathered, organized and presented to the public who are consumers of what is being advertised (Munjaj, 2016). From this submission, it can be emphasized that ethical policy is what directs advertisers during the orchestration of concepts for it to be presented into advertising contents. The set ethical policy on advertising when implemented, especially on television advertising front, becomes a means to reflect concerns of advertising practice so as not to present information that in one way or the other affect the human life of living. It is with some of these reasons the ethical policy of the AAG in practical terms, spells out and suggests 'how and what' an advertising should follow in certain domains of concerns. The ethical policy covers and highlights potential areas in the advertising practice that have tendencies to disrupt advertising intentions which end up creating effects on society.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the media and its content regulation in Ghana. It is becoming more difficult to ignore the spate of advertisements on the media, and it has raised questions on what ought to be read and heard on media platforms. With television taking a centre stage, the multiplicity of television commercials previewed to the public have generated some issues regarding questioning the effectiveness and implementation of the ethical policies guiding ethical television advertising in Ghana (Obonti, 2014). This is seen to be creating an unbalanced and unprofessional media landscape.

As witnessed by many, contents of these television commercials do not portray the cultural values and ethics of the Ghanaian society. This has called for several criticisms. A typical example is a response by the Consumer Protection Agency – Ghana (CPA) to one Facebook post on October 8, 2015 due to the manner in which those commercials were aired, and the adverts in question were Vodafone 2Ghana Offer, Vodafone -Best in 3G Internet Speed.

These advertisements give no recognition to respect for the elderly, stereotyping women of a particular tribe in Ghana; and some neglect the socio-cultural values of Ghanaians. (<https://www.facebook.com/consumerprotectionghana/posts/1083688568322550>). It is for this and many other concerns that this study was pursued to contribute to exploring the effectiveness of the ethical policy on advertising and its implementation on Ghanaian produced television commercials.

Literature Review

Quite a lot of studies (Un-Nahar, 2015; Aneeja, 2014; Hassan & Daniyal, 2013) have been conducted in the area of ethics in television advertising. It is interesting to note that, most of all these researchers have their views to ethical issues on television advertising. However, very few (Haefner, 1991; Singh and Sanhu, 2011) contribute to ethical policy dimensions that guide television advertising practice and its implementation on specific advertising phases. The study becomes significant as it contributes to current discussions on ethical policy effectiveness particularly on its implementation in television advertising in Ghana.

An Overview of Television Advertising

Television is still one of the primary sources of information on various aspects relating to our everyday life (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Primarily, television advertisement or advertising material means any material included in a television programme service which is designed to promote the sale of any particular product or service or to promote the interests of any organization, commercial concern or individual. These materials may be produced whether by means of words, sound effects (including music) and/or of visual demonstration and whether in the form of direct announcements, slogans, descriptions or otherwise, as well as any promotional reference in the course of a programme to any products or services (Hong Kong Communications Authority, 2013).

Television advertising, which is the focus of this study in simple terms are carefully crafted visual presentation of video and sound aired on television which are paid for with the purpose to inform and persuade viewers about product and service offered by an individual or group of entities, with Television being a visual (images) and auditory (sound) medium that affords advertisers extra means and chances for influencing customer choices (Ryan, 2014). The distinctiveness of television advertising creation is based on clearly followed established guidelines after which it is offered placement on television to communicate its contents to the viewers.

Television Advertising in Ghana

It is hard to know exactly when formal advertising began in Ghana. The penetration of the media generally started through radio by the then Gold Coast Broadcasting System (GCBS) now Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), which paved way for radio information dissemination. According to Nartey (2010), by 1960, indigenous companies had entered the market. From the mid-1980s, Ghana got involved in the free market economy as directed under the Economic Recovery Programme. This led to a surge in

competition due to the increase in local production and influence of foreign goods, which also witnessed a surge in the advertising industry in the 1990s (National Media Policy, 2001).

In recent days, the content of television advertising on Ghanaian television are usually consumer ads, trade and public service. In real terms, ads are on telecommunication companies and their offers, banks, schools, insurance companies, consumables (food, drinks (alcoholic/soft), medicines, pomades, paints) with some on health education, voting and government decisions and offers, automobiles and others.

Ethical Downplay in Television Advertising in Ghana

Studies have proven that, in the quest for advertisers to reach out with their messages carried in various forms of concepts, some television advertisements or commercials do not only present to viewers' products, services and ideas. They also introduce a number of varied ideas in actions that are not in-line with societal morals and ethics thereby going contrary to ethical policy guiding advertising practice. Drumwright & Murphy (2004) point out that by the constant quest of advertisers to attract consumers and associate products with "cool" or luxurious and hedonistic lifestyles, some advertisers have consistently pushed the boundaries of what is ethically and socially acceptable. Some advertising practitioners have also been characterized as having moral myopia, a distortion of moral vision that prevents ethical issues from coming clearly into focus (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004). In this case, most of these ethical policy directives are often not seen nor focused on nor given recognition by practitioners. Their ads are aired to the public and these tend to start discourse dominating discussion on the media with greater concerns noted for the society who absorbs advertising content. Yesodha, Kanchana and Sebastina (2010) see the picture from communicators' view point. They spell out that in the quest to attract ever larger audiences (viewers and listeners) and deliver them to advertisers, communicators can find themselves desirous in fact pressured, slightly or not slightly to set aside high artistic and moral and ethical standards and lapse into superficiality, tasteless and moral filth.

Television advertising is seen as an impersonal presentation, where a standard or common message regarding the merits, price and availability of product or service is made by the manufacturer or marketer (Aneja, 2014). Un-Nahar (2015) emphasizes that, television advertising is a sub of advertising responsible for spreading through its presentation with misleading information, promotion of adverse values, making of fake claims and passing subliminal seduction messages. Un-Nahar (2015) goes on to establish that, television advertising continues to persuade people to purchase things they do not need, spreading unsustainable consumption patterns around the globe over and encouraging excessive use.

These and many more criticisms have received the attention of researchers in different scope and relations. For example, in a study in Bangladesh, Un-Nahar's (2015) study sought to identify the outcome of advertisement, specifically television commercials, if

they are informing or cheating the viewers. The analysis of the study revealed that, although western cultures have already grabbed a huge part of the lifestyle of Bangladeshis especially in urban areas, companies in the country are using various advertising appeals to convince people. However, most of the marketers in Bangladesh are not following ethical policies and directives for the ads. They are just interested in making an ad popular at any cost, although there are set ethical policies by Bangladesh Government. Therefore, those commercials which are not following the ethical policy directives are cheating viewers since the people are not privy to contents in line with the set moral standards but rather things that contradict government's ethical requirements.

In a separate study by Richins as cited in Singh and Sandhu (2011), it was pointed out that comparison with the idealized images in television advertising raised comparison standards for attractiveness in the case of young women and lowered their satisfaction with their own attractiveness.

These studies are manifestations of television advertising and associated effects of unethical advertising. In the exposure of the posed effects, it can be deduced how ethics is important in the television advertising industry, its functioning in regulation, setting standards, maintaining societal morals and indeed significance in the sustenance of human life and existence.

The Media Policy of Ghana

Specifically, the National Media Policy outline guidelines intended to affect a particular media operation. With three mass communication mediums noted (Print, Broadcasting; and Film working under Public, Commercial and Community categories), each entity has separate outlined policies in the National Media Policy. The National Media Commission's Print Media Guidelines (2003) outline the regulations governing the operations of the print media on key areas which include accuracy and fairness of reportage, sources, right of reply, news gathering, harassment, privacy, protection of the vulnerable, reporting crime, violence, disasters, discrimination, photographs, language, financial journalism, copyright or plagiarism, conflict of interest and miscellaneous. Under the section of electronic media (radio and television) regulations sort out issues of national identity and programming, accuracy, objectivity and fairness, good taste and decency, language in broadcasts, authenticity, morality and social values, portrayal of sex, crime, law and order broadcasts and the law, portrayal of violence, cruelty and horror, children's, quiz, schools, news, current affairs, political, religious programs, music, drama and film, advertisements, program sponsorship, station identification, monitoring of programmes and programme relays covered. This intends to sanitize activities of media operations in regard. It is to this effect that advertising should play an effective role in the Ghanaian society, honouring its role to inform and not a means to jeopardize the society's ethical demands.

Self-Regulation in Media Policy of Ghana

An important element that features on the media of Ghana is self-regulation. It is an

aspect of the policy that allows members of a particular profession to regulate their activities in the earnest possible way. The Advertising Standards Authority of the New Zealand puts forward self-regulation in the advertising sector as the recognition of the advertising industry (advertisers, agencies and the media) that advertising should comply with a set of ethical rules. From this perspective, it can be viewed that, advertising practice calls for some kind of directives, policies and guidelines that should help regulate advertising in an ethical sense. It can be inferred that, ethical policy for advertising operation in Ghana thrives on the self-regulation mandate from the media policy to exist. In this way, the body of professionals within advertising Advertisers Association of Ghana (AAG) exists as part of the National Media Commission (NMC) who have the power to handle advertising issues in Ghana.

In the sufficiency for self-regulation to operate as intended, the Advertising Standards Authority of the New Zealand (2008) identifies four key stands to ensure the best practice self-regulation namely, effectiveness, coverage, funding and independence. These stands ensure that self-regulation is in good shape. Effectiveness accounts on being able to establish and publish performance objectives, an explicit objective being that it should be easy to find through which channel to complain, recommend to the advertising industry minimum standards for training of new advertising recruits about compliance standards and sanction practitioners who go contrary. Coverage aims to cover all forms of commercial or marketing communication. Funding looks at an appropriate level of funds basically to ensure that the self-regulatory body has the resources required to carry out its functions to a high standard while, Independence covers the composition, nomination process, independence and integrity of members who are the key determinants for the credibility of the system. This often looks at openness and transparency as critical points for the public acceptability of the self-regulation on advertising. In practicality, media policy outlines some of these directives for self-regulation operations to ensure AAG is up to the task to ensure they can fully function.

The Ethical Policy of the Advertisers Association of Ghana

Under specific policy implementation guidelines, the media policy sets a fundamental ethical guideline which permits the Advertising Association to set out its ethical policy. To this end, it mandates AAG to ensure that their ethical policy reflects the concerns of this media policy document which looks at ethics and standards that shall bind on all advertising practitioners. The policy outlines 137 articles which indicate how advertising should be practiced within the various contexts it can exist. It expresses in detail the following areas of advertising: making of choices, promotion of high aesthetic and ethical values, honesty, decency legality, gender, children, women, religion, presentation claims, special provisions (alcoholic advertising), tobacco products, health beauty products, therapies, advertisement on religious matters as well as the many issues which call for clear and comprehensible means of reaching out with information to the public. It ends with clearly outlined sanctions for the advertising practitioners.

Research Approach, Population, Sampling, Data Collection and Data Analysis

The study was approached qualitatively with data gathered from face-to-face interview conducted with AAG official. The qualitative approach explained by Guba and Lincoln (1985) is the procedures of choice if one wants to conduct research that is consistent with the view of knowledge and reality. The population for this study was the Advertisers Association of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants from the AAG who are mandated to handle advertising issues and have direct knowledge in the area of inquiry in Ghana. Hence, primary data collection focused mainly on the AAG. Secondary data were collected from Ethical Policy of AAG and the Media Policy of Ghana.

Data was collected from a Representative at AAG's head office. Guided by the Ethical Consideration Guidelines of British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011), keen areas of interest to this study was the recognition of access. This required an official writing to the association to grant permission to conduct an interview.

Qualitative data from the structured interview was analyzed based on the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework approach for analyzing qualitative data. The framework looked at three main components which were data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification, and that provided an outline for analyzing data from respondents. The data reduction phase involved reducing and organizing mass data attained. This was done through transcribing of raw data, coding and grouping to arrive at themes.

Results

The results from analyzing data from the interview were presented under themes as follows:

a. Institutional Capacity and Representation

The television commercial is known as a means of advertisement. That is, it falls under the section of advertising. In Ghana, advertising as a means to reach out to the public is protected by the AAG who acts as safeguards to advertising, be it for radio, television, online and print. Insights into the association's capacity as an institution providing ethical policies that guides advertising in Ghana was examined. The media regulator, The National Media Commission (NMC) was created and mandated by an Act of Parliament that is, the National Media Commission Act 1993, Act 449 in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and this equally makes it the appropriate institution charged for the media and its content safeguarding. The NMC serves as the authority that ensures the regulation of all media in existence in the country. The media policy created, however has section on advertising which stresses on self-regulation".

According to the Media Policy (2001), the unit of self-regulation from the Media Policy is noted to be key as it enables the different sections of bodies which are under the auspices of NMC (Ghana Journalist Association (GJA), AAG, Institute of Public Relations of

Ghana, Publishers and owners of the Private Press, Ghana Bar Association, Ghana Association of Writers and the Ghana Library Association and Association of Private Broadcasters) to operate and be guided by their own ethical policies which should guide their operations. The interviewee noted: *self-regulation is what enables us (AAG) to fully function particularly we as advertisers. So, we can work to promote our field as, it makes us responsible for advertising's presence hence a need to be together as a collective people.*

In this case, AAG is part of NMC as the authority to handle advertising in Ghana. As a media policy requirement, advertisers have also felt the need to mobilize as a collective people.

b. Ethical Policy Activeness

The subject of activeness in the ethical policy functioning is an indicator that contributes to knowing how effective ethical policy is implemented on television advertising. Highlighting activeness presents two classification of advertising practitioners; members and non-members of AAG. In the present state where active members are directed with ethical policy demands non-members feel they are not obliged to be part of the association. This was an indication that some advertisers are aware or not aware of ethical policy directive as some obliged to produce commercials that is best for the Ghanaian television viewers while others (non-members of AAG) produce based on what they deem as right.

The focus of adherence to the ethical policy of AAG was also significant. Probing into adherence, it was revealed that the AAG strives to put measures in place to ensure ethical policy adherence. Its strong involvement in the reach of advertisers is a direction to ensure that advertisers become more aware of AAG's presence, their instituted ethical policy of operation and a need for non-members to be part of the association to function as a front for advertising in Ghana. An interviewee expressed;

Adherence is key. Actually, it is a determiner to know if our instituted ethical policies are effective. That is why we've been strong in media with frequent engagements to talk about advertising issues especially to the public not to buy into anything people put on the media. We give constant training to our members to always remind them of their presence and the ideals of this association and a call to always act in harmony with ethical policy demands. We've been doing public education as well, to serve as a wakeup call for advertisers and even television stations to be sensitive to what they receive and air to the public...TV ads in particular.

c. Implementation of Ethical Policies

The issue of effectiveness mostly revolves around implementation. In this case, in determining the effectiveness of ethical policy to television advertising landscape in Ghana, implementation is of keen focus as it defines what has gone into ensuring that the progress of certifying policies, are actively working and serving the purpose intended. AAG admits that as part of its measures to ensure ethical policy implementation, they have in place a committee mainly on ethics.

The association has an ethics sub-committee. So, cases of ethical concerns and complains are referred to them for investigation. They recommend appropriate directives on what to do to help save the situation.

d. Effective Ethical Policy Implementation Challenges

On the take on ethical policy implementation challenges, AAG admits that certain activities of media house and non-members of AAG pose challenges to the association. There was inquiry in this regard to know if the activities of these bodies have a resultant effect which to AAG are challenges which hinder their ability to effectively run television advertising resulting in ethical policy reflection in the system. The resultant affirmative outcome was revealed as such, and this has caused the AAG to also develop effective implementation strategies to create a healthy advertising practice in Ghana. The interviewee in his own words shared that;

“the media houses today... I tell you, they now constitute their own advertising agencies. They produce most of these ads and before you realize the advert is on air. They fail to connect with AAG on certain things.... and its broadcasted. One issue too is that most of these ads are produced by non-members therefore compliance on ethical requirements by becomes a problem. Getting non-members on board to champion the course of healthy advertising too is a problem. We need something bigger as in authority...”

e. Effects of Ethical Policy Strength and Capacity

In the capacity of the ethical policy to guide operations of advertising in Ghana, it was identified that its strength has relied much more on members and some number of non-members of AAG. In this case, AAG is aware of the nature of advertising being practiced in Ghana to which they attest that there is some division in the practice; some people doing what they feel; others doing what is not in conformity with set ethical standards. An interviewee corroborated these findings:

there is an unbalanced system now that’s why there is proliferation of unethical advertising. There is the dominance of non-members of AAG.... there issue is people are doing what they want and you know it all balls down to the freedom of operation by advertisers. They are doing what they deem is right which might not be so.

Discussion

Advertising Association’s Role in Ethical Policy Effectiveness

The subject of ethical policy on advertising functions within advertising circles. Therefore the idea of an advertising association serves as an umbrella which seeks to bring together all advertising agencies and practitioners in the field so they can be mobilized as a people who would work to ensure that the directives of ethical policies are used within their jurisdiction. The result of this study indicates that the call of the AAG is to create the setting where these practitioners can come together to join a common course of action. It is however observed that the drive of the AAG is seen as a universal call for the practice of advertising. For example, in Nigeria, there is the

presence of the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN), Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI), India; in America, American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA); in Australia, Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) and some which even extend internationally to International Advertisers Association (IAA).

Despite the existence of these associations, their regulations, policies and directives to ensure the proper course of advertising are sometimes given by the authority of government on media operations, but often leave out certain sections of procedures which are seen mostly put in place by associations. Practically in Ghana, the NMC covers the practice of advertising, however, it allows the majority of its ethical functioning to be managed by AAG under the ordinance of the National Media Policy. Although some authors (Amoako, 2012; Uwom and Alao, 2013) see the Media Policy take as the ethical policy, AAG has the required ethical policies clearly outlined to cater for the types of advertising.

In this direction, it can be viewed that the issue of effective, ethical policies on advertising is underpinned by the drive of an association. AAG has this as a core mandate to ensure that these ethical policies operate within the advertising practice in Ghana. In discussing the effectiveness of ethical policies on advertising, the set out of the association is of importance, as it is the main force that pulls the entities together to create an avenue for an ethical policy play in advertising operations.

Self-regulation Necessity on Ethical Policy on Advertising

One of the key findings of this study was on self-regulation on the part of advertising operation particularly with AAG. It was deduced that self-regulation enables the association to fully operate on its own to ensure that ethical policies guard advertising in Ghana. This can then be interpreted that the establishment of ethical policy exists on the autonomy given by the National Media Policy of Ghana, which gives the room for AAG to operate using ethical policies to guide the practice of advertising.

The concept of self-regulation in advertising practice exists on a global call, as Boddewyn (1988) identifies self-regulation as a major force, if not the predominant factor, for advertising controls. For example, in Turkey, Advertising Self-Regulatory Board exists under the self-regulation programme to assess advertisements ethically and solve disagreements, while in India the Advertising Standards Council of India adopted a self-regulatory means to handle advertising activities (ASCI, 2012). Castro (2011) draws attention to the relevance of using the concept of self-regulation to be used in diverse industries, such as health care, higher education, fashion, advertising, mining, marine, fishing, professional sports, and nuclear power, to use self-regulatory processes to oversee industry practices. He recognizes that the private sector relies on self-regulation to report a range of issues, including establishing industry standards, developing and applying ethical policies and codes of professional ethics and conduct and ensuring consumer confidence. That is to say, the consumer can rely on the entities since self-

regulation handles situations and practices which will put the consumer first as works produced will consider them and not to bear effects if any (Castro, 2011).

The Significance of Ethical Policy on Television Advertising

In the institution of an ethical policy on television advertising and even advertising in general, a finding from this study revealed its essence in advertising practice. Findings from this study revealed that the AAG makes the ethical policy visible to be used as a system that directs, informs and coordinates the right practice in terms of orchestrating the right content expression in advertising. It is of importance, as it directs the practice and essence of advertising not only in putting across what advertisers want, but the right channel not to offend or misinform consumers. With its effective presence in television commercials, it handles values, culture, education and religion which come into play in television advertising and reflect in the idea presentation (commercial) to people. This becomes a framework coordinating ideas in the right and proper means of information dissemination and justifies the right course of action. In television commercials produced, it sometimes becomes hard for viewers to even know if there are existing ethical policies to guide advertising operations. However, when advertisements show elements going contrary to viewers' expectations, values and views, it usually becomes obvious as it prompts viewers to question if there is an authority in charge.

Questioning authority tickles what has been instituted to help in the regulation on television advertising. At this point, ethical policies become a means to facilitate the kind of advertising to show so as to ensure that standards shown are good enough for public viewership. It is based on this premise that Synder (2011) of the American Advertising Federation (AAF) suggests to advertising professionals to make it an obligation to exercise the highest usage of ethics in the creation and dissemination of commercial information (advertisement) to consumers (viewers). Synder (2011) continues to maintain that the role of professionals is central to the practice of high ethical standards by their companies indicating these are meant to serve as guideposts for professionals in carrying out their professional responsibilities. This can be envisaged as a call out to refer to ethical policies, especially in the case of Ghana, where these policies are set to guide the dimensions of advertising practice, companies, agencies, groups. Practitioners in the advertising circles are obliged to adhere to the ethical policy requirement of AAG to help produce the best for the viewers who are the consumers of products advertisers put across.

Conclusion

The study assessed how effective ethical policy on advertising and its implementation on television advertising. AAG's view was sought to know how effective its ethical policy on advertising runs. The study revealed that the existence of their authority thrives on self-regulation, yet, confirmed that limited effectiveness of the policy on advertising are adhered to by some practitioners (AAG members) while others do not. The study again revealed the negative effects of the division in ethical policy adherence by AAG

members and non-members on television commercials aired. This division contributes to the challenges AAG faces with the implementation of its ethical policy.

It is however recommended that, the ethical policy of AAG should be adopted by the National Media Commission to bind all advertising practitioners. This would compel non-members of AAG to act with ethical policy directives to reflect in advertising products, especially television ads which have access to the large consumers.

The issue of media houses (non-members, AAG) having in-house advertising agencies was also of much concern to AAG. If the activities of media houses associate itself with the creation of ads, then they should be recognized as advertising agencies. It is however recommended that, media houses with in-house advertising agencies should work with the ethical policy on advertising and also register as members of the AAG.

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