

## **Ethical Considerations in Advertising and Conflict Resolution**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the ethical considerations in advertising and their implications for conflict resolution within the Nigerian context. Utilising the library research methodology, the researcher systematically reviewed existing literature to identify patterns and gaps related to ethical advertising practices and conflict resolution. The findings revealed that ethical advertising plays a crucial role in preventing conflicts by ensuring truthful and transparent marketing messages while also facilitating effective resolution of disputes when they arise. It was also discovered that brands that prioritise ethical standards are more likely to cultivate long-term relationships with consumers, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and trust in an increasingly fragile marketplace. The findings underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity in navigating ethical dilemmas, particularly in the unique socio-economic landscape of Nigeria. Based on these findings, it was recommended that advertisers prioritise ethical standards through training and clear guidelines, regulatory bodies establish comprehensive local advertising guidelines and consumers actively engage with brands to demand transparency in advertising.

**Keywords:** Ethical Advertising, Conflict Resolution, Integrated Marketing Communication, Consumer Trust, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Advertising plays a pivotal role in contemporary society, serving as a primary means through which businesses communicate their products and services to potential consumers. It encompasses various strategies and mediums, from traditional print and broadcast media, to digital platforms, all aimed at influencing consumer behaviour and driving sales (Aigbefoh, Obi & Asemah, 2022). However, the effectiveness of advertising is not solely determined by its creativity or reach; ethical considerations are increasingly becoming a focal point in the discourse surrounding advertising practices (Asemah, 2011a, 2011b). According to Mahmood (2021), ethical advertising is essential for fostering trust between brands and consumers, as it ensures that marketing messages are truthful, transparent and respectful of consumer rights.

Conflict resolution, on the other hand, refers to the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012a). In the context of advertising, conflicts may arise between consumers and brands, particularly when advertisements are perceived as misleading or deceptive (Joda & Asemah, 2021). The ethical implications of advertising practices can significantly influence these conflicts, as unethical advertising can lead to consumer dissatisfaction and distrust. As highlighted by Zakari (2022), the resolution of such conflicts often requires a commitment to ethical standards that prioritise consumer welfare and promote fair practices in advertising.

The interrelationship between advertising, conflict resolution and ethical considerations is complex and multifaceted. Ethical advertising not only aims to prevent conflicts by ensuring that marketing messages are honest and accurate but also plays a crucial role in resolving disputes when they arise. For instance, when consumers feel misled by an advertisement, an ethical approach to conflict resolution can involve transparent communication and a willingness to address grievances. As noted by Adeyemi (2023), the integration of ethical considerations into advertising strategies can enhance brand reputation and foster long-term relationships with consumers, ultimately reducing the likelihood of conflicts. Thus, this study focuses on exploring the ethical considerations in advertising and their implications for conflict resolution in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the increasing emphasis on ethical advertising practices, many marketers continue to employ strategies that may mislead consumers or exploit their vulnerabilities. This lack of adherence to ethical standards often results in conflicts between consumers and brands, highlighting the urgent need for practical frameworks that guide ethical advertising practices. As noted by Afolabi (2021), the absence of clear guidelines on ethical advertising can lead to misunderstandings and disputes that undermine consumer trust and brand integrity.

Furthermore, existing research on advertising ethics in Nigeria is limited, particularly in exploring how these ethical considerations impact conflict resolution. Most studies have primarily focused on the theoretical aspects of advertising ethics without adequately addressing the practical implications for conflict management in real-world scenarios. According to Willy (2022), this gap in research limits the understanding of how ethical frameworks can be effectively applied to resolve conflicts arising from misleading advertising practices. There is a pressing need for empirical studies that investigate the experiences of Nigerian consumers and advertisers regarding ethical dilemmas and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Additionally, while some research has touched on the role of ethics in advertising, few studies have examined the specific contexts and cultural nuances that shape advertising practices in Nigeria. The unique socio-economic and cultural landscape of the country necessitates an exploration of how local values and norms influence perceptions of ethical advertising and conflict resolution. As highlighted by Oladipo (2023), understanding these cultural dynamics is essential for developing effective advertising strategies that resonate with Nigerian consumers while promoting ethical standards. Addressing these practical and research gaps is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of advertising and conflict resolution in Nigeria, ultimately fostering a more ethical and trustworthy advertising environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Theory**

The integrated marketing communication theory is particularly relevant for examining ethical considerations in advertising and conflict resolution. Originating in the late 20th century, the theory was developed as a strategic approach to creating a unified and cohesive message across various marketing channels, ensuring that all communications

work together to reinforce brand identity and values (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). This theory emphasises the importance of consistency in messaging, which is essential for building trust and credibility with consumers.

The key tenets of integrated marketing communication theory include the integration of various communication tools, the importance of understanding the target audience and the necessity of delivering a consistent brand message across all platforms. By coordinating different marketing efforts—such as advertising, public relations and digital marketing—brands can create a holistic communication strategy that resonates with consumers and addresses their needs effectively (Pickton & Broderick, 2005). This approach not only enhances brand perception but also plays a crucial role in conflict resolution, as consumers are more likely to feel understood and valued when their concerns are addressed consistently across all channels.

Despite its strengths, integrated marketing communication theory has faced criticism regarding its implementation. Critics argue that the complexity of integrating diverse media channels can lead to a diluted message if not managed carefully (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Additionally, the focus on brand consistency may inadvertently overlook the unique contextual factors that influence consumer perceptions and experiences, potentially leading to conflicts when messages do not align with consumer expectations (Homburg & Giering, 2001). Nevertheless, integrated marketing communication theory remains a vital framework for understanding the interplay between ethical advertising and conflict resolution.

In the context of this study, integrated marketing communication theory provides a valuable lens for exploring how cohesive communication strategies can mitigate conflicts arising from misleading or unethical advertising practices. By ensuring that all marketing communications are aligned and transparent, advertisers can enhance consumer trust and facilitate effective resolution of disputes. Moreover, applying integrated marketing communication principle enables brands to engage with consumers more meaningfully, addressing their concerns in a way that reflects a commitment to ethical standards. Thus, the integration of integrated marketing communication theory into the study of advertising ethics and conflict resolution offers insights into how advertisers can navigate ethical dilemmas while fostering positive relationships with their audience.

### **Conceptual Review of Advertising**

Advertising is a strategic communication process that seeks to inform and persuade consumers about products, services or ideas. It employs various media channels, such as television, print, digital and social media, to reach targeted audiences effectively (Asemah, 2020). The primary goal is to influence consumer behaviour by creating awareness and generating interest in what is being offered (Asemah, 2011c, 2011d). This strategic communication not only aims to sell a product but also to build brand recognition and loyalty over time. As noted by Moyo (2021), effective advertising captures the audience's attention while delivering a clear message that resonates with their values and needs.

Advertising can also be defined as a cultural artifact that reflects societal norms, values, and aspirations. As Nkosi (2022) argues, advertisements serve as mirrors of the society in which they exist, often showcasing cultural identities and social issues. This perspective highlights the role of advertising in shaping public perceptions and influencing social behaviours. For instance, advertisements that promote inclusivity and diversity can contribute to broader societal change by challenging stereotypes and encouraging acceptance (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). Thus, advertising transcends mere commercial intent, becoming a platform for cultural expression and dialogue.

Furthermore, advertising is increasingly recognised as an interactive process, especially in the digital age. Chikoko (2023) explains that modern advertising strategies leverage social media platforms to engage consumers directly, facilitating two-way communication. This interactivity allows brands to gather feedback, address consumer concerns, and foster community engagement. As a result, the relationship between brands and consumers becomes more dynamic, requiring advertisers to be responsive and adaptive (Asemah & Edegoh, 2014). Therefore, effective advertising today involves not only delivering messages but also actively listening to and engaging with the audience.

### **Understanding Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution refers to the systematic process of addressing disputes and disagreements between parties in a constructive manner. It involves identifying the root causes of conflict, facilitating open communication and working collaboratively towards a mutually acceptable solution. According to Mutanda (2022), effective conflict resolution is essential for maintaining relationships, as it fosters understanding and restores trust. This process requires active listening, empathy and a willingness to compromise, highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence in resolving conflicts.

Another perspective on conflict resolution is its role in negotiation. Ndlovu (2023) emphasises that successful negotiations often hinge on the ability to navigate conflicts through clear communication and strategic problem-solving. In various contexts, including advertising, conflicts may arise from misunderstandings or unmet expectations. Therefore, effective negotiators must be adept at identifying common ground and proposing solutions that satisfy all parties. This approach not only resolves the immediate conflict but also strengthens relationships, paving the way for future collaboration.

Additionally, conflict resolution can involve mediation, wherein a neutral third party assists in facilitating discussions between conflicting parties. As Kamara (2023) elaborates, mediation provides a structured environment for dialogue, allowing parties to express their concerns and explore potential solutions in a safe space. This method can be especially effective in situations where direct communication has broken down. By employing mediation, brands can demonstrate their commitment to ethical practices, fostering an environment of trust and cooperation that can ultimately enhance their reputation.

### **Overview of Ethics**

Ethics in advertising refers to the moral principles and guidelines that govern advertisers' behaviour and decision-making processes. It encompasses the responsibility to ensure that advertising messages are truthful, fair and respectful of consumer rights. As Banda

(2023) notes, ethical advertising is crucial for maintaining consumer trust and brand integrity. Advertisers must be vigilant in avoiding misleading claims and ensuring that their messages do not exploit vulnerable populations. Asemah, Edegoh & Ojih (2013) assert that this ethical framework not only protects consumers but also contributes to the overall credibility of the advertising industry.

Moreover, ethics in advertising is intricately linked to corporate social responsibility. Agyemang (2022) explains that corporate social responsibility reflects a company's commitment to conducting business in an ethical manner while considering the social and environmental impacts of its actions. In the context of advertising, this means that brands should not only focus on promoting their products but also consider how their advertising practices affect society at large. For instance, campaigns that promote sustainability or social justice can resonate with consumers who value ethical conduct, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and reputation.

### **Role of Ethics in Advertising Practices**

The importance of ethics in advertising practices cannot be overstated, as it fundamentally shapes how brands communicate with consumers and influences the overall consumer landscape. Ethical frameworks guide advertisers in making responsible choices that not only aim to sell products, but also uphold moral standards. Patel (2023) asserts that ethical advertising practices help build consumer trust, which is essential for fostering long-term brand loyalty. As consumers become increasingly aware and critical of marketing strategies, transparency and honesty emerge as key components of effective advertising. Brands that embrace ethical practices are more likely to resonate with audiences who prioritise integrity, ultimately leading to stronger customer relationships.

Moreover, ethical advertising serves as a mechanism for differentiating brands in a competitive marketplace. As highlighted by Chirwa (2022), companies that prioritise ethical considerations can establish themselves as leaders in corporate responsibility, thereby enhancing their reputation. This differentiation is especially vital in markets where consumers are increasingly sceptical about traditional advertising methods. By aligning their advertising strategies with ethical values, brands can create a unique identity that appeals to socially conscious consumers. Additionally, ethical advertising can act as a safeguard against negative publicity and consumer backlash, which are increasingly prevalent in today's digital age.

In the context of Africa, ethical considerations in advertising take on added significance, given the diverse cultural landscapes and varying consumer expectations across the continent. As noted by Mthembu (2022), brands operating in African markets must navigate complex cultural nuances to be effective and responsible in their advertising efforts. This requires a deep understanding of local customs, values and social issues. Ethical advertising that resonates with African consumers not only enhances brand loyalty but also contributes to social welfare by promoting positive societal norms and addressing pressing issues such as sustainability and social justice.

Furthermore, the rise of digital media has introduced new ethical challenges and opportunities for advertisers. As Juma (2023) argues, social media platforms facilitate unprecedented levels of interaction between brands and consumers, making ethical considerations more prominent than ever. Advertisers must ensure that their messages are not only engaging but also socially responsible. This requires a commitment to ethical training and awareness among marketing professionals, who must remain vigilant in

adhering to ethical standards while navigating the complexities of digital engagement. In this evolving landscape, brands that prioritise ethical advertising stand to gain a competitive edge by cultivating trust and loyalty in an increasingly discerning consumer market.

### **Conflict Resolution Strategies in Advertising Disputes**

Conflict resolution strategies play a critical role in addressing disputes arising from misleading or unethical advertising practices. As advertising becomes increasingly multifaceted, the potential for conflicts between brands and consumers grows. Effective conflict resolution methods are vital for maintaining brand integrity and consumer trust. According to Kalu (2022), open communication and negotiation are among the most effective strategies for resolving advertising disputes. By fostering dialogue between conflicting parties, brands can directly address consumer concerns and work toward mutually acceptable solutions. This collaborative approach not only resolves immediate conflicts but also strengthens the relationship between the brand and its consumers, fostering long-term loyalty.

In addition to negotiation, mediation has emerged as a valuable tool in conflict resolution. As noted by Osei (2023), mediation involves the engagement of a neutral third party who facilitates discussions between conflicting parties. This method allows for a structured environment where parties can express their concerns and explore potential solutions. Mediation is particularly effective in advertising contexts where direct communication has faltered, as it provides a safe space for dialogue. By employing mediation, brands can demonstrate their commitment to ethical practices and consumer satisfaction, ultimately enhancing their reputation in the marketplace.

Moreover, the role of regulatory frameworks in conflict resolution should not be overlooked. As highlighted by Nkunda (2023), regulatory bodies establish guidelines and standards for ethical advertising practices, providing a framework for resolving disputes. These regulations serve as a deterrent against unethical behaviour and promote transparency in advertising. For instance, the Advertising Standards Authority in various countries plays a crucial role in overseeing advertising practices, ensuring that they align with established ethical norms. This regulatory oversight not only protects consumers but also encourages brands to adopt ethical advertising practices, thus fostering a more trustworthy advertising environment.

### **Future of Ethical Advertising in a Globalised World**

The future of ethical advertising in a globalised world presents unique challenges and opportunities for marketers. As the advertising landscape becomes more interconnected, brands must navigate a complex web of cultural norms and ethical expectations. According to Abdi (2023), the globalisation of markets necessitates a nuanced understanding of ethical advertising practices, as what may be considered ethical in one culture might not resonate the same way in another. This complexity requires brands to adopt culturally sensitive approaches to advertising, ensuring that their messages align with local values while maintaining ethical integrity.

Emerging consumer trends further shapes the future of ethical advertising. As consumers become more informed and socially conscious, they increasingly demand transparency and accountability from brands. Mwale (2023) argues that this shift in consumer expectations drives brands to adopt ethical advertising practices, as failure to

do so can result in reputational damage and loss of market share. In this context, brands that prioritise ethical considerations in their advertising strategies are likely to gain a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. This is particularly relevant in Africa, where consumers are increasingly aware of social issues and expect brands to contribute positively to their communities.

However, the challenges of maintaining ethical advertising practices in a globalised world cannot be underestimated. As Juma (2023) highlights, the rapid dissemination of information through digital platforms can lead to misinformation and consumer backlash. Brands must be vigilant in ensuring that their advertising practices align with ethical standards, as the consequences of unethical behaviour can be severe in an age of social media. Therefore, continuous education and awareness of ethical guidelines are essential for marketers navigating this complex landscape. This commitment to ethical advertising will not only help brands avoid conflicts but also cultivate trust and credibility in an increasingly discerning marketplace.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Banda (2023) conducted a critical overview of ethics in advertising, aiming to examine the current state of ethical advertising practices and their implications for businesses and society. Employing a qualitative approach, the researcher utilised a literature review methodology to synthesise existing knowledge on the topic. Grounded in the moral development theory, the finding showed that ethical advertising practices are essential for building trust and credibility with consumers, while also contributing to the overall well-being of society. The researcher concluded that advertisers must prioritise ethical considerations in their marketing strategies to avoid negative consequences. Recommendations were made for advertisers to adopt a more ethical approach to advertising and for regulatory bodies to establish stricter guidelines on advertising practices. This study relates to the current study in its emphasis on the importance of ethical considerations in advertising, but differs in its focus on the broader implications of ethical advertising practices for businesses and society.

Abdi (2023) explored the future of ethical advertising in a globalised world, with the objective of examining the challenges and opportunities facing advertisers in navigating ethical dilemmas. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the researcher combined a literature review with expert interviews to gather insights from industry professionals. Framed within the globalisation theory, the findings showed that advertisers must adapt to changing consumer expectations and regulatory environments to maintain ethical standards in their advertising practices. The researcher concluded that ethical advertising is essential for building trust and credibility with consumers in a globalised market. Recommendations were made for advertisers to prioritise transparency and accountability in their marketing strategies. This study differs from the current study in its focus on the globalised context of advertising, but relates in its emphasis on the importance of ethical considerations in advertising practices.

Chirwa (2022) investigated ethical advertising as a competitive advantage, aiming to examine the relationship between ethical advertising practices and business performance. Employing a quantitative approach, the researcher utilised a survey methodology to collect data from a sample of businesses. Grounded in the stakeholder theory, the findings showed that ethical advertising practices are positively related to business performance, as they contribute to building trust and credibility with consumers.

The researcher concluded that advertisers can gain a competitive advantage by prioritising ethical considerations in their marketing strategies. Recommendations were made for businesses to adopt ethical advertising practices to improve their performance. This study relates to the current study in its emphasis on the importance of ethical considerations in advertising, but differs in its focus on the relationship between ethical advertising practices and business performance.

Adeyemi (2023) examined ethical considerations in advertising strategies, with the objective of investigating the impact of ethical advertising practices on consumer behaviour. Utilising a qualitative approach, the researcher employed a case study methodology to gather insights from a sample of consumers. Framed within the social learning theory, the findings showed that ethical advertising practices are essential for influencing consumer behaviour, as they contribute to building trust and credibility with consumers. It was recommended that advertisers must prioritise ethical considerations in their marketing strategies to positively influence consumer behaviour. This study relates to the current study in its emphasis on the importance of ethical considerations in advertising, but differs in its focus on the impact of ethical advertising practices on consumer behaviour.

### **Methodology**

The library research method was employed in this study. Asemah & Nwaoboli (2024) note that library research involves a systematic approach to gathering, analysing and synthesising existing literature related to a study. Asemah, Nwaoboli & Asemah-Ibrahim (2022a, 2022b) add that it involves conducting a comprehensive literature review to establish a theoretical framework, collecting data from various scholarly sources such as academic journals and online databases and critically analysing and synthesising the information to identify patterns and gaps in the literature. This approach was chosen for its accessibility to a vast array of resources, cost-effectiveness compared to other research methods, depth of analysis it allows, and its role in laying the foundation for future research.

### **Discussion**

The findings from the study underscore the critical intersection between ethical advertising practices and effective conflict resolution strategies. The research reveals that ethical advertising not only serves to prevent conflicts by ensuring truthful and transparent marketing messages, but also plays a significant role in resolving disputes when they arise. This aligns with the assertion of Mahmood (2021) that ethical advertising is essential for fostering trust between brands and consumers, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and mitigating potential conflicts.

Moreover, the discourse indicates that brands prioritising ethical considerations in their advertising strategies are better positioned to establish long-term relationships with consumers. This is particularly crucial in a marketplace where consumer trust is increasingly fragile. As highlighted by Zakari (2022), a commitment to ethical standards is essential for promoting consumer welfare and effectively addressing grievances. The findings also resonate with Patel (2023), who emphasises that ethical advertising practices help build consumer trust, which is vital for fostering enduring brand loyalty. Transitioning to the role of conflict resolution strategies, the discourse demonstrates that open communication and negotiation are pivotal in addressing disputes between

consumers and brands. Kalu (2022) highlights the importance of fostering dialogue to resolve conflicts, suggesting that when brands engage transparently with consumers, it not only addresses immediate concerns but also strengthens brand loyalty. Furthermore, mediation emerges as an effective tool for resolving advertising disputes, especially in situations where direct communication has faltered. Osei (2023) asserts that mediation creates a structured environment for dialogue, enabling parties to express their concerns and collaboratively seek solutions. This approach aligns with the principles of integrated marketing communication, which advocates for cohesive communication strategies that resonate with consumers.

The findings also reveal the significant impact of cultural contexts on advertising ethics and conflict resolution. The unique socio-economic landscape of Nigeria necessitates an understanding of local values and norms as these factors shape consumer perceptions of ethical advertising. Oladipo (2023) emphasises that culturally sensitive advertising strategies can enhance brand reputation and foster positive relationships with consumers. Consequently, brands that appreciate and incorporate these cultural dynamics into their advertising practices are more likely to navigate ethical dilemmas effectively and minimise conflicts.

Additionally, the findings highlight the evolving nature of advertising ethics in the digital age. As noted by Mwale (2023), the rise of social media has empowered consumers to hold brands accountable, thereby increasing scrutiny of advertising practices. This shift necessitates that brands remain vigilant in adhering to ethical standards, as any deviation can lead to rapid public backlash. Banda (2023) further supports this notion by indicating that the use of digital platforms requires brands to be proactive in maintaining ethical integrity, as unethical practices can lead to immediate consumer backlash.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the integration of ethical considerations in advertising practices is paramount for effective conflict resolution and the establishment of trust between brands and consumers. The research demonstrates that ethical advertising not only helps to prevent potential conflicts by ensuring transparency and honesty in marketing messages, but also plays a crucial role in resolving disputes when they arise. This dual function is essential in a marketplace where consumer trust is increasingly fragile, as highlighted by various authors in the field. It is, therefore, recommended that:

1. Advertisers should prioritise ethical standards by ensuring all marketing messages are truthful and transparent. Regular training on ethical advertising practices and clear guidelines should be implemented to foster a culture of integrity, enhancing consumer trust and loyalty.
2. Regulatory bodies need to establish and enforce comprehensive guidelines for ethical advertising specific to the local context. This includes monitoring advertising content and addressing consumer complaints effectively to protect consumers and promote fair practices.
3. Consumers should actively engage with brands and demand transparency in advertising. By voicing concerns about misleading advertisements and supporting brands that prioritise ethics, consumers can influence responsible advertising practices that align with their values.

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