

EFFECT OF ELECTRONIC ADVERTS ON YOUTHS' PERCEPTION OF MORALITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to assess the relationship between electronic adverts and youths' perception of morality in Nigeria. This would enable the government to develop appropriate policies to regulate immoral and harmful products adverts on our mass media and social media platforms. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to choose sample members from 178 fourth-year undergraduate students from three universities in the north, east and west regions of Nigeria. Using probability sampling, sample members were selected from the list of registered fourth-year students in Business Faculties. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression methods were adopted to analyse the data. Among others, the study found that foreign social media adverts, and immoral advertisements, had a significant positive relationship with youths' perception of morality in Nigeria. The study was limited to universities. Similar studies could be conducted among youths in Nigerian Secondary Schools.

Keywords: Advertising, consumers, morality, youths, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Morality is the acceptable ethics within certain volitional and rational conditions (Gert, 2002). It is a particular system of values and principles of conduct. It is what could be considered right or wrong behaviour. In most societies, accepted codes of conduct are handed down to the younger generation by the older either written or verbal. Deviations from such conduct are always frowned at, and in some cases, deviants are sanctioned by law

enforcement agents of the community or society at large. The values contained in these codes of conduct make for a peaceful coexistence of people in the society and easy administration by the government at various levels. However, with the advent of marketing technologies and their negative and 'supposedly immoral influence,' youths have begun to question what attitude, behaviour or conducts is right or wrong? Besides, we also notice that despots in many countries of the world exert absolute power over their subjects and crush anyone who opposes them, without impunity. Such behaviours present a serious question, and confusion among youths, on the subject of morality.

Away from Islamic countries, adverts in most countries especially on household consumer products, make use of nude women to attract people's attention. It has even become worrisome in recent times, the unsolicited pop-up adverts when one is accessing his/her electronic mails. This has been argued to be unethical. For example, pop-up information on online product adverts was considered unethical (Kevin and Stanley, 2018). The advertisement of e-cigarettes to minors in the USA has been argued to have a future adverse influence on them (Cavico, Mujtaba & Samuel, 2014). Similarly, the study of Mangwere, Wadesango and Kurebwa (2013) found that electronic media especially Television had a negative effect on the behaviour of youths in the urban areas of Zimbabwe, thereby making some African cultures lose their originality. In Ethiopia, the government had given some standards for alcohol and other beverage marketing but some firms contravened this by giving misleading information, using under-aged people and youth-targeted imageries to advertise such products (Negussie & Berhane, 2012). Literature evidence posited that social media adverts distract youths' attention and expose them to hackers, and violent and negative or nude pictures which could negatively affect their character and behaviours (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). In the research of Singh and Sandhu (2011) in India, most Television adverts targeted at youths violate ethical norms and values of the society, degrade women and illicit sex. Schenker, Arnold and London (2014) in the USA argued that some adverts could mislead patients, sever the buyer-seller relationships and produce an ethical risk to stakeholders including the society. Again, many countries of the world have witnessed a fast-growing phenomenon of moral decadence among youths in their societies. For instance, low morality caused by modernization and urbanization through social media was found among Kenyan youths (Wachege and Rugendo, 2017). Furthermore, literature evidence (Ogechuckwu, Ndubueze and Uche, 2011) posited that adverts promote materialism, gratification and greed among Nigerians. This is contrary to the good moral values of society. Adverts on gay marriage are another case of confusion to the youths because some societies accept it while many others do not.

Numerous works examined above revealed that electronic adverts have a negative influence on youths' behaviour, thereby eroding the good moral values earlier held in high esteem by their societies. The questions are: how do Nigerian youths perceive the concept of morality in the light of these immoral adverts? Do they still believe in upholding good moral values in society? This study intends to seek answers to these questions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Perspective

Conceptual perspectives provide definitions and explanations of concepts as used in this study. The term advertising has no universally accepted definition, nevertheless, Kotler (1980) posited "advertising is one of the four major tools companies use to direct persuasive communications to target buyers and publics. It consists of non-personal forms of communication conducted through paid media under clear sponsorship." Also "advertising is a paid form of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor" (Stanton, 1981).

The term 'moral' has philosophical and psychological definitions; though there is a confluence in the ideas. Drawing on Ariff (2015), "morals implied an arrangement of good standards which oversee a man's conduct or exercises." Extending the idea, Ewhrudjakpor, Ogege and Egbule (2009) found that morality is essentially an individual's level of ethical standards, that is how good or bad an individual is. In advertising, there are moral and good rule applicable to the promotion. It is clear from the above that morals are ethical questions of what is good or bad. However, we are not ignorant of the fact that human actions are partly informed by cultural values, and partly by socially recognized ways of attaining them (Otakpor, 2008). In view of the above, what are the moral and good rules expected in promoting? Some of these include honesty in promoting and advertising, truth, social obligation, and dignity of the human person (Ariff, 2015).

2.2 Theoretical Review

To help situate the analysis and identify the current state of knowledge, a review of relevant literature is imperative. From a broad perspective, morals and ethics in modern advertising and marketing have become an unending debate because of the interest of consumers and its impact on today's youths. Several works have already discussed the morals and ethical dimensions of advertising and promotion. For instance, the link between commercial morals and ethics in modern advertising and sales promotion was investigated by Ariff (2015). He argued that product promotion builds brands loyalty while adverts generate product awareness. He concluded that a lot of sponsors need

to be educated on moral standards for the sake of consumers and the youngsters.

Similarly, Gustafson (2001) examined advertising's impact on societal morality and how advertising influences individual desires and aspirations. The author is of the opinion that there exists deception in advertising which could have a negative impact on societal morality, and since adverts could affect sentiments, then such practice is unwholesome.

On the other hand, Keane (1974) opined that advertising is increasing in its economic, social and political significance and this has escalated the advertising controversy. Thus 'professional' and 'professionalism' are frequently bandied about in advertising but are seldom defined or described. For this reason, the advertising industry seems anaesthetized by its immediate operations at the expense of its long-range health and opportunities. Keane (1974) found that there is a need for a renewed ethical code for online advertising. Also important is, self-policing efforts by making advertising ethics codes more explicit with a view to arresting violators.

Murphy (1998) explored, among others, advertising ethics, especially regarding the Catholic Church and the responsibility of advertisers. According to Murphy, it is the responsibility of the advertisers to ensure ethically responsible practices in their profession with respect to sincerity and respect for human dignity. The author also corroborated the view of Keane (1974) that the advertising industry should be regulated to forestall illegal activities.

Cohan (2001) emphasized a new paradigm in the ethics of women's advertising. The author argued that successful adverts could be made without portraying women as sex objects. Such advertisements could generate stereotypes among women, violence against women and rape. The author suggested that a positive advertising image of women would serve to enhance the self-esteem of women.

It is clear from the above that advertising and the question of morality have long been dialogue of interest. This is because of deception in ads and its effect on the youths. In today's world, electronic marketing has compounded the situation through unsolicited ads on social media and television. Coleman, Butcher and Carson (1980) explained succinctly how much the violence on television serves as a model for violence and criminal behaviour. According to the authors, in 1977, a controversy entered the courtroom when a 15-year-old confessed killer was defended by an attorney who claimed that the youth had been brainwashed by TV. The attorney argued that the boy was living in a fantasy world that had been created by television programs that had given him

a distorted sense of appropriate behaviour. “The defence alleged that the youth was intoxicated by television and pulling the trigger became as common to him as killing a fly.” The panacea to unethical advertising is training and regulating advertisers on the one hand, and education and awareness among consumers on the other.

2.3 Empirical evidence

Singh and Sandhu (2011) measured TV commercials and their influence on human behaviour of 520 respondents. Using regression analysis, they found that TV commercials negatively influence human behaviour as vital societal values and norms were disrespected in India.

A study by VanHatten, Ossenkop, Dikkers and Vinkenburg (2013) investigated the relationship between life roles and value. In a cross-sectional survey of 114 employees of the Dutch public sector, and with correlation analysis method, found no direct relationship between life roles and values. In a related study, Jose and Maritza (2013) carried out a documental analysis on moral value formation in high school education. The study found that moral value education of students prevents social vices such violence and murders.

On the other hand, Tolmacheva (2013) examined the effect of advertising on youngsters. With a survey youths age 14 - 30 in 2006 and 2012, found that advertising fulfils information and commercial function as well as aesthetic and cognitive behaviour among youths, leading to good moral character in the long run.

Kostyukova, Petrova, Sklyarova and Simakova (2015) studied the importance of traditional moral values, and with a sample of 220 University students, found that traditional moral values were important for every individual and society.

Yang, Stoeber and Wang (2015) measured the influence of moral perfectionism on individual differences; and with 539 University students and correlation and regression analyses, found that moral perfectionism was better than general perfectionism in explaining moral value differences among people.

Bakare, Owusu, and Abdurrahman (2017) examined the direct impact of mobile advertising, and the moderating effects of culture, on the behaviour response of Nigerian youths to online adverts. A quantitative approach was adopted to collect data from 296 Nigerian youths in selected tertiary institutions. Using Partial Least Square data analysis method, the study found that advertising value and attitude had a significant influence on the behaviour response of Nigerian youths towards online adverts. It was also discovered that culture moderated attitude and behaviour response.

A study by Ngonso (2019) adopted a survey research method to investigate the effect of social media on youths in secondary schools in rural communities of Edo State, Nigeria. With a sample size of 260 students, the study found that rural youths have access to social media through mobile phones, and this enhanced their social life. Similarly, Ngonso and Egielewa (2018) examined social networking sites on Nigerian youth communication patterns. With a survey sample size of 66 students, the research found that social media has a set of alien values such as gossip and nude pictures. Their communication between persons and groups is mostly in a virtual setting devoid of any regulation.

A study by Umeogu and Ojiako (2014) examined the impact of foreign social media on Nigerian youths. From the analysis of 200 copies of the questionnaire, the findings revealed that the interhashave negatively affected the education, morality and culture of Nigerian youths. In the same vein, Chiemela, Ovute and Obochi (2015) examined the influence of social media on the Nigerian youths. With a survey sample of 400 youths, the study found an increase in unwanted female youths' pregnancies due to exposure to social media pornography.

Onah and Nche (2014) analyzed the moral implication of social media in Nigeria. Adopting qualitative and quantitative research methods, it was found that, though social media creates greater awareness among Nigerian youths, it is one of the major contributors to moral degeneration in the country.

2.4 Literature Gap

Ariff (2015) examined the link between commercial morals and ethics in modern advertising and sales promotion, while Gustafson (2001) investigated advertising's impact on individual desires and aspirations. Other studies such as Coleman, Butcher and Carson (1980), Singh and Sandhu (2011), and Tolmacheva (2013) examined the influence of television advert on human behaviour. Bakare, Owusu, and Abdurrahaman (2017) examined the direct impact of mobile advertising, and the moderating effects of culture, on the behaviour response of Nigerian youths to online adverts. Umeogu and Ojiako (2014), as well as Onah and Nche (2014), looked at the impact of foreign social media on Nigerian youths. On the contrary, Tolmacheva (2013) found a positive influence of advertising on information access and cognitive behaviour. However, from the above literature mappings, the effect of electronic adverts on youths' perception of morality in Nigeria has received little or no attention. That is, how Nigerian youths perceive the concept of good societal morals in the light of the prevalent immoral adverts. The present study intends to contribute to the body of knowledge in this area.

2.5 Underpinning Theory and Hypothesis Development

A theory provides a strong foundation upon which research is built. This study is tied to intention theory (Ajzen, 1991) because, arguably, the perception could lead to intention. In the intention theory, “attitude towards behaviour means the degree to which an individual has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour” (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, if electronic adverts have a positive influence on youths, then their perception of morality could be favourable, and vice versa for negative influence. For example, television adverts had a negative impact on youths’ behaviours in Zimbabwe, thereby making some African cultures lose their originality (Mangwere, Wadesango and Kurebwa, 2013). Similarly, the advertisement of e-cigarettes for minors in the USA has been argued to have a future adverse influence on them (Cavico, Mujtaba and Samuel, 2014). Again, social media adverts distract youths’ attention and expose them to hackers, violent and nude pictures which could negatively affect their character and behaviours (Siddiqui and Singh, 2016). In addition, most television adverts targeted at youths in India violates ethical norms and values of the society, degrade women and elicit sex (Singh & Sandhu, 2011). Furthermore, in the light of the immoral adverts in many electronic and social media platforms, the perception of youths in upholding good moral standards in today’s society should to be examined. We, therefore, hypothesized that:

H₁: Electronic adverts and youths’ morality are positively related.

H₂: Youths’ perception of good societal morals is positive.

The above hypotheses were formulated to guide the research and test the effect of electronic adverts on youth’s perception of morality in Nigeria. The collection and analyses of data would either support or refute these hypotheses.

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey Procedures

A quantitative approach with a proportionate stratified random sampling of fourth-year undergraduates Business students in three Nigerian Universities was adopted. Final year degree students were selected, as the unit of analysis for this study, because they must have experienced a lot of these electronic adverts in the course of their studies, especially in this internet age. Also, Business students were chosen because they have a better understanding of what constitutes unwholesome product or service adverts. Again, the country was stratified into three regions of North, East and West and simple random sampling was applied on each institution’s sample members to select the respondents. The questionnaires were administered during the 2019/2020 academic session. Descriptive statistics and regression methods were adopted to analyse the data. From a population of 178 undergraduate degree students

of the Business Faculty of three Universities, a sample size of 123 was chosen. This was determined in line with Israel (1992) based on Yamane (1967) formula for a finite population ($n = N/1+N(e)^2$). From the administered questionnaires, 105 questionnaires were returned. This indicated a response rate of 85%, which met the required minimum acceptable response rate of 30% as postulated by Sekaran (2000). After the initial screening of the questionnaires, only 100 questionnaires were properly completed and accepted for further analysis.

3.2 Measures

Electronic advertisement was measured as a negative influence on youths that undermines social, moral and religious values (Singh and Sandhu, 2011). Morality was considered as good ethical conduct determined by cultural values and socially recognized ways of attaining them (Otakpor, 2008). Measures were adapted from Siddiqui and Singh (2016) and all measures were tapped on a 4-point scale made up of: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree and (4) strongly agree.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Demographic features of the respondents were handled using descriptive (frequency) statistics, as depicted in Table 1. The table portrayed male students (61%) as the majority of students in Nigerian universities during the period under investigation. Most of them (64%) were within the 20-30 years age bracket. This result is an indication that many young people in Nigeria receive a university education.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Age	N	%	Category	Sex	N	%
	Less than 20	14	14		Male	61	61
	20-30	64	64		Female	39	39
	31 and above	22	22				
Total		100	100			100	100

4.2 Data Cleaning

Data cleaning was performed to identify possible missing data, outliers and abnormal data, among others. There was no missing data. For outliers, Mahalanobis statistics were compared with a chi-square table, corresponding to 37 items at an error margin of $p < 0.001$ (Hair et al., 2010:66). There was no respondent with a value greater than the chi-square table value of 69.35, indicating the absence of an outlier. For normality, a z-score value (kurtosis and skewness) at an error margin $p < 0.05$ corresponding to 1.96 was used. There was no respondent with a chi-square score greater or less than 69.35, so

there was no outlier. Normality was tested using a z-score (kurtosis and skewness). Critical table z-score at 0.05 error margin is 1.96. There was no respondent with a z-score above +1.96 or below -1.96. Therefore, the data was normal.

4.3 Goodness of Measures

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out, the result of which indicated that the independent variable (electronic advert) collapsed into two components: foreign social media produces alien cultures and values, and immoral adverts degrade women and illicit sex (IV1: Q18, Q12, Q5, Q14; and IV2: Q8, Q7, Q13, Q3), with a total variance expected (TVE) as 55.91% and measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) as .791. The dependent variable (youths' perception of morality) converged into one component: I still believe in good morals because I desire to live it out (Q34, Q35, Q36, Q37, and Q33), with a TVE of 76.6% and KMO as .726.

After the EFA, the mean of the items was computed which became the variables for subsequent analyses like 'reliability'. For reliability: Cronbach's alpha for foreign social media was .770 and for immoral advertisements .700. Alpha for the dependent variable (perception of morality) was .876. This is depicted in Table 2.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 2: Variables' Descriptive Statistics (M, SD) and Reliability

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reliability Cronbach' Alpha	No. items after EFA	Sample size (N)
EAFForSocMedia	3.10	2.60	.770	4	100
EAImmoralAdv	3.10	2.31	.700	4	100
YPerMorality	3.20	3.45	.876	5	100

Table 2 (descriptive statistics) revealed that foreign social media (M=3.10, SD=2.60), immoral TV adverts (M=3.10, SD=2.31), had an impact on youths' perception of morality (M=3.20, SD=3.45) in Nigeria.

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

Table 3: Result of Multiple Regressions on Perception of Morality

Variable	Beta	Hypothesis
Independent Variables:		
EAForsocMedia	.498****	H1: Supported
EAImmoralAdv	.153***	H2: Supported
R Square	.335****	
Adjusted R Square	.321	
R Square Change	.335	
F Value	24.441	
Sig. F Change	.000****	

Note: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; **** $p < .001$

DV = YPerMoral (Perception of morality). IV: EAForsocMedia (Foreign electronic advert), EAImmoralAdv (Immoral adverts)

Table 3 showed the direct effect of the electronic advert on the perception of morality. Specifically, the result indicated that foreign social media advertisements and immoral adverts had a significant positive relationship with youths' perception of morality in Nigeria, with an R-square of .335. Here, the independent variables explained 33.5% of the variance in youths' perception of morality. Generally, the regression model was significant (R-square change = .335, $p < .001$, F change = 24.441, $p < .001$, Sig. F change = .000). Also, from the individual coefficients, foreign social media (beta = .498, $p < .001$), and immoral advert (beta = .153, $p < .01$) were significantly related to youths' perception of morality. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

5. Discussion

Electronic media adverts (foreign social media and immoral advertisements) had a significant positive relationship with youths' perception of morality in Nigeria. In other words, negative foreign social media and immoral adverts could have an adverse effect on the good cultural morals of Nigerian society. This supported Singh and Sandhu (2011) who found that TV commercials negatively influence human behaviour as vital societal values and norms were disrespected among Indian youths. It also supported Jose and Maritza (2013) who found that moral value education of students prevents social vices such as violence and murders. Again, the study aligned with Ngonso and Egielewa (2018) who found that social media has a set of alien values such as gossip and nude pictures. In addition, the study supported Umeogu and Ojiako (2014) who found that the internet has a negative impact on the education, morality and culture of Nigerian youths. Furthermore, the work of Chiemela, Ovute and Obochi (2015) found an increase in unwanted female youths' pregnancies due to exposure to social media pornography. However, the study contradicted Tolmacheva (2013) who found that advertising fulfils information and

commercial function as well as aesthetic and cognitive behaviour among youths, leading to the good moral character in the long run.

6. Conclusion

The study reported that the overall model of the electronic advert and youths' perception of morality was significant. By implication, negative social media advertisements could have a harmful effect on the youths' belief of what society considers as good morals. This supports the saying that 'evil communication corrupts good manners. The study also discovers that, though negative social media adverts make youths doubt the possibility of living on good morals, most of them still believe in good morals as taught by their parents and teachers, and the desire to live it out. Therefore, negative social media adverts should be discouraged or moderated by the Nigerian government to forestall its attendant social vices. This study was limited to youths in Nigerian Universities. Further studies could be extended to include youths in Secondary Schools in Nigeria.

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