

Ethical Irregularity in Context of Ghanaian Television Advertising: A Review

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ABSTRACT: Extensively, the subject of ethics has been researched by several scholars in different context of studies. Ethics on television advertising stand out having raised issues in aspects of the breach and what determines “ethics” itself. The differences shared in studies are expressed differently in societies of the world. This paper joins the debate on the ethics of television advertising through a review of relevant studies and reports on the topic. The review identifies the decline and effects of ethical breaches from three areas which are media, law and content in television advertising in the context of the Ghanaian society. The study concludes with suggestive views as a means to sustain ethics in television advertising in Ghana.

KEY WORD: Advertising, Ethics, Television advertising

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I. INTRODUCTION

For decades, the subject of ethics has been researched across borders and disciplines of study. This has pulled the attention of many researchers and commentators and increasingly has become an important topic towards research and professional practices. The different areas of ethics in research aim to set the straight path which distinguishes between what is right and wrong as its basis and sometimes subjective to the individual. Some scholars (Un-Nahar, 2015; Amoako, 2012; Singh & Sandhu; 2011; Haefner, 1991) have also debated on the consequences resulting from ethical breaches in different contexts of studies. This paper joins the debate on ethics in its considerations on Television Advertising (TVA). Television has a wider means of reach within the shortest possible time and so important it is strengthening the rules and policies it comes with. If set rules and policies are not strengthened this gives the opportunity are created for wrong and unhealthy content to be shown on television. Boamah et al. (2018) note a strong concern continually being established for the more impressionable younger ones in society, (i.e. those who can read, talk, see, understand and reasonably reason) in their exposure to advertisement on television which are ethically/morally not right. This is because it becomes easy for them to learn and adapt to such content upon viewership (Grube and Wallack (1994). The concept of ethical irregularity in this paper looks at content, media and law which figures the ethical position of television advertising in Ghana. That is, the control on content production, policies/law provision and the media which plays content failing to utilize the acceptable standards. This, which affect the lives of the viewers directly or indirectly through television adverts they encounter on television. The decline and irregularities create holes which goes a long way to affect its consumers and for that matter, human lives.

This study however takes a keen look at the Ghanaian television advertising and its ethical decline, revisit and review some of the effects unethical television advertising poses as conclusion is drawn. The ethical decline reflects through shared stories and discussions on radio and television programmes talking about ethical concerns on television adverts. SVTV Africa (2020) in a recent post on YouTube shared a story of a youth in an interview who grew in alcohol addiction through the rampant and deceptive nature of advertisement encountered on Ghanaian television. Ghana web (2020) reports on the tussle of Food and Drugs Board (FDA) and personalities in the entertainment industry in Ghana. These they consider the entertainers as role model who have tendencies to influence the masses backing with the FDA Guideline 3.2.10. However, the situation has existed for some years now before the implementation of the guideline with some effects on the people.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

As a model of media effect studies, parasocial interaction has been vigorously researched. The term “parasocial interaction” was introduced in 1956 by Horton and Wohl to explain television viewers’ illusionary experience of being in a social relationship with television personalities (Hartman & Goldhoorn, 2011). Parasocial relationships develop over time and can be conceived as being similar to interpersonal or social interaction. Parasocial interaction is however one-sided and not reciprocated. Mass media audiences develop

parasocial interaction mainly with television personalities such as soap opera characters, news casters, performers, and celebrities among others (Young, Gabriel & Sechrist, 2012).

An important communication-scientific approach that offers both theoretical ideas and empirical insights into how mediated others may affect people's well-being deals with parasocial interaction and relationships. This approach focuses on the way users seemingly interact with and develop personal relationships with others that they only encounter in the media. Because a parasocial interaction, in a nutshell, is about users' illusionary feeling of being in a mutual social interaction with another character while actually being in a one-sided non-reciprocal situation, the approach traditionally focuses on non-interactive media like television. A typical example of a parasocial interaction would be if a user intuitively feels a sense of mutual awareness and attention towards the host of a TV news show who looks into the camera to greet the audience. A typical example of a (positive) parasocial relationship would be if users, through repeated exposure, develop a long-lasting social bond and sense of intimacy and proximity towards TV hosts, almost as if they were real friends. Based on a more detailed conceptualization of parasocial phenomena, this theoretical exposure presents the interest of viewers and their visual interaction with an example of television advertisement building such virtual relations in its quest to reach out to its viewers.

A Parasocial relationship between television personalities and audience grows stronger with every parasocial episode or viewing opportunity. The perceived attractiveness of a TV performer and the TV performer's presentation style are among the main causes of parasocial interaction (PSI). Viewer's ability to adopt the perspective of other persons is another common cause of parasocial interaction. Meanwhile, viewer's commitment to social norms during exposure and their enjoyment of the parasocial interaction experience are equally important outcomes of a parasocial interaction experience (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

Patrons of television programmes who consciously or unconsciously indulge in this process develop some form of parasocial relationship which leads to the discussion of television themes as a way of sharing and evaluating personal values. Ghanaian actors, actresses, comedians, musicians, television show hosts, fashion models, film producers, and music producers who maintain a fan base and have a consumable persona. With the emerging trend of people, especially the youth patterning their lives after faces they see on television, it is very prudent for the FDA to be very much concerned about celebrities and the products they associate themselves with in terms of advertising and promotion.

For instance, though the FDA seem to have officially placed a ban on celebrities being given brand ambassadorial positions of alcoholic products in Ghana. This officially barns them in engaging their self in advertisement of their products either on television or radio. However, they are seen to be indirectly associating themselves with the products. This directly or indirectly will yield the same effect.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Decline in Television Advertisement Over the Years

Television is regarded as a tool that carries impact (either to the individual or to the society). Oberko (2010) establishes that, across the world, media organizations are regulated because of the universal perceptions that media content and media operations can significantly impact on economies, social policies, political debate and above all the lives of the people. It therefore becomes necessary as government regulate television content on the foundations of ethics of the society and in conformity with national order.

Ghana, the National Media Commission (NMC) is mandated by the 1992 Constitution to deal primarily with media content, safeguarding the freedom and independence of the media (Philipatawura, 2014). However, television advertisement which contradicts societal ethics in Ghana are mostly aired before detecting its content breaches ethical concerns. Most at times in such cases, the people would have already related to the ad and its contents. A worrying question of concern posed is won't the effects and consequences be absorbed by viewers before taken off? It is not surprising Brenkert, (1998) points out that the explanations of advertising ethics are unclear and lacks of specific views of the problem and without specific detail, the advertisers do not know how to follow ethics.

The Daily Guide Online (2017) reported on the ban on alcoholic adverts in the Ghanaian media to take effect in 2018 which television adverts were no exception. The ban resulted to strong admonishing for some Ghanaian celebrities to use their popularity to promote health and well-being and positivity, but not things that would lead to their own destruction and that of our children. In this regard, today most alcoholic adverts on Ghanaian television has resulted to using unpopular actors and actresses to feature in such ads. Failing to regard that these unpopular faces become known with time and gets noticed by viewers. It is therefore observed that the focus is on the featuring of celebrities, whereas the people acting in their absence acting over time also pose some level effects on viewers.

Dugan (2009) reports of Cadbury accused of racial stereotyping in chocolate television advert. The ad was accused of racial and perpetuating colonial stereotypes of African people. This ad created in Ghana infuriated a number of prominent equality campaigners.

In a separate development, Graphic Online (2015) reported five traditional medicines were adulterated with *vandenaflil* (a synthetic pharmaceutical ingredient used in the formulation of prescription-only medicine for treatment of erectile dysfunction) and FDB has revoked marketing authorization permit for sale and distribution. It marvels that, despite the public declaration of these product violation, TV commercials of these products run on televisions in Ghana. This raises questions on the effectiveness and coordination of ethical play and law enforcement. The subject of ethics is critical in societal development. Therefore, its strict adherence should be supreme in sustaining the ethics of the people.

From a different phase, the rate of medicine and alcohol advertising is very rampant on Ghanaian television today (Bremini, 2019). Graphic Online (2019) reports on a press release the time for airing alcohol beverage advertisement on television and radio. This was as a result of the rampant nature of how alcohol advertisement were aired on television and even on radio. This account as a direction in the promotion of self-medication (Ershadpour, Kargar and Rajput (2019). Whereas many of these ads were banned some years back, the ads are back on screens gaining more popularity than before. In 2006, Ghana News Agency reported a temporal ban of Drug Adverts on the media (TV and radio) which were considered misleading due to the nature of unsubstantiated and false claims noted the medicines cure. Acting upon Section 14 of the Food and Drugs Board (FDB) Law of 1992, PNDCL 305B and its Amendment Act 1996 (ACT523) which mandates the FDB (a regulatory body) to regulate all foods, drugs and medical services, cosmetics and household chemicals in Ghana with the view to protect health and safety, the ban was effective on September 1, 2006 as Ghana Web (2006) reported that, the ban drug adverts have received a positive response. These commercials have bounced back on air with the products being advertised again as the public is patronizing.

Advertising Defined

Advertising or Advertizing as a word in Latin *advertere* means to “turn toward”. The inception by definition suggests a means that has a tendency to turn people/idea from its initial position to take a new direction. Practically, it possesses the ability to convince, change a state of unknown/unlikeness to an interest. Today, advertising has widened its scope in mode and medium of presentation (Pandey, 2010).

Many scholars have given exposure to the definitions of Advertisement. (Un-Nahar, 2015; Amoako, 2012; Singh & Sandhu; 2011). Some definitions expressed are vague and criticized with others diving deeper and putting across well explained the meanings and definition of advertising. For example, Richards and Curran (2002) conducted a survey via mail by sending questionnaires to “well-known agency executives, presidents of professional organizations, government regulators, and respected academics” in order to develop a new definition of advertising. Although, the participants of the study did not reach a consensus, the authors derived the following definition, Advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future (Richards & Curran, 2002:74).

According to Richards & Curran (2002), the authors add that, mediated communication” is “communication which is conveyed to an audience through print, electronics, or any method other than person-to-person contact”. Nevertheless, the proposed definition of advertising raises a few problems. First, any form of communication is mediated. Secondly, if the notion of action” implies a process of doing something then the process of viewing is an action itself. Thirdly, the problem in the definition is related to the assumption that advertising message cannot be conveyed to an audience through person-to person contact (Karimova, 2014).

Far away from the criticized definitions, other scholars also express direct definitions which give practical idea to even the lay person. However, it is important to this paper, as some definitions are presented and discussed. Advertising is contextually defined by Puranik (2016) as a paid form of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor with the view to disseminate information concerning an idea, product or service. Puranik finally adds that, the message which is presented/disseminated is called advertisement.

Karimova (2014) suggests the definition of advertising as text, a framing of text, and construction of the message by the “observer” who ascribes to the message a meaning of promotion within the specific framing which is created by the “observer” him/herself. Kirby (2005) from a different viewpoint puts forward advertising as a “strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure”.

In another submission, Bovée and Arens (1992) add up to the definition as they define advertising as a non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through various media. Bovée and Arens address all the inputs to make advertising. The addition of various media gives an idea of the increasing media today through technology.

The central ideas drawn from the definitions from the authorities revolve around the message. Thus, the information (idea), the message construction and its interpretation by the observer and the message’s potential for exposure. These, despite a direct bearing on the message should not ignore the importance of product and service which is what the information ties to for exposure to the public. We are of the view that advertising is all

around us, from the proliferation of magazines, books, posters, billboards, banners, TV commercials, web banners (on browsers) etc. Essentially, in today's world they inform us on what to do, where to go, what is available and who to contact when necessary. The repeats of several commercials act convincingly to target groups to patronize products and services advertised.

Ghana's Television Exposure

Television is a source of entertainment, information and education as the medium is widely used in the Ghanaian society. It is recognized as a powerful instrument of reach to masses of people. Nkrumah Info Bank (2016) shares that, the inauguration of Ghana Television Service, now known as Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) was intended for educating, edifying and entertaining the Ghanaian people. In the aspect of introducing advertising, Amenyo (2014) notes that GBC 2 (which was a sub-station of GBC) was the commercial wing of GBC which carried advertisement to the people of Ghana.

The National Communication Authority (2020) reports a total of 102 stations on air as at the end of June, 2020. The Ministry of Trade and Industry accounts 3,187,339 as the number of television sets imported in the first half of 2010 in Ghana. This gives a summary of the activeness and presence of television in Ghana. The television stations air programs with adverts therefore, acting as a base and means of reach used to seek the attention of the Ghanaian public. The adverts are carried in concept driven ideas and popularly known as television commercials.

Television Advertising in Ghana

As noted by Amenyo (2014), as GBC 2 being the commercial face for advertisement in Ghana, today the proliferation of television stations has given a wider platform for advertisers to showcase products, ideas goods and services. Increasingly, the content of the advertisement (ad) on Ghanaian television is usually consumer ads, trade and public service. In simple terms, there is an increasing number of ads on telecommunication companies and their offers, banks, insurance companies, consumables (food, drinks, medicines, pomades) with some on health education, voting and government decisions and offers. These advertisements usually target all categories of people (children, youth and adults) in the Ghanaian populace and beyond. Adverts produced by advertisers are showcased on multiple television stations where the viewer's tendency to miss an ad is fairly low. It is therefore easy to identify some adverts that run on the lips of most Ghanaian children. Popular ads include Key Soap that features the popular "Medξfo pa" expression, Gino – "my mommy is the best cook in the world", Tigo – "drop that yam", MTN – "edey bee kζkζ" Kalyppo – "Morkporkpor", "Adonko fa meko". These popular expressions found in television adverts have found its way to become political party slogans. For example, MTN's – "edey bee kζkζ" is used by the National Democratic Congress. This demonstrates the influence and extent of use of television advertising in Ghana.

Effects of Ethical Breaches on Television Advertising

The term "breach" is described as an act in disregard of laws, contracts or promises (Word Web, 2020). This gives the idea of the existence of set laws to govern an established entity towards the sustenance of a positive setting but hence a disregard to such effect. Paymal (2007) identifies advertising as which assails all our senses. In the context of TV advertising, the factors of sight and hearing are paramount. This carries images (still and motion) and sound to carry concept driven ideas enacted (commercials) to inform the public about products, goods and services to convince a viewer. Pollay (1986) establishes that, it is believed by critics advertising because of its status and reach wield a greater power over us. It becomes important as it is regulated in terms of viewership and the content conforming to the ethics of the society as well as pleasant being pleasant for viewership. With various concerns raised by researchers in various studies establishing the effects of ethical breaches in advertising.

This study discusses some of these effects in relation purposely to television advertising.

In the condition of unethical advertising Shimp (1993) categorizes into fraudulent, sub-consciousness, human-controlled, biased, terror-related, sex appeal and misleading adverts. From a different perspective, Hyman-Tansey and Clark (1994) puts forward seven areas of unethical advertising which raises a need for a critical look. They include deceptive advertising, child advertising, tobacco advertising, racial discrimination, sex appealed advertising and misleading advertising.

Deceptive Advertising

With advertisers aim to inform, persuade and convince a viewer of an ad, television today shows commercials which creates good impressions about a product or an offer. The extent of idea portrayed at times is an exaggeration. These, sometimes carry misleading statements, misinterpretation of a product's ability purposely or intended to persuade the public. For e.g. in Ghana, about 90% commercials for alcohol suggest

they give sexual stamina to men. These are enacted through the use of herbs for alcoholic drink, strongmen and the youth. These lure viewers due to how they portray products in the ads (Norgbey, 2017).

Tobacco, Alcohol, Gambling - “Controversial Product Advertising”

Tobacco, alcohol, and gambling are described controversial by many researchers. This covers the acceptance and non-acceptance of advertising these products being worth advertised. Whereas some believe it is appropriate and the patronage is by choice, others are on the track of the negative effects it poses to mankind. This has severely been criticized in past studies.

In a study conducted by Pechmann and Shih (1999) it was revealed that, smoking scenes in advertisement aroused the curiosity of young viewers, positively enhanced their intention to smoke and their perception enhanced to the social stature of the smoker. Pechmann and Shih concluded by suggesting that these effects could be nullified by anti-smoking ads.

In a separate study, Grube and Wallack (1994) showed that, greater recall of alcohol advertising is significantly related to more positive belief about alcohol use which in turn are associated with greater future intention.

Thomas (2014) in a study that discussed parents and adolescent on gambling advertisement. The findings of the study revealed three themes; Response to advertisement was the perception that gambling was ‘easy’ and fun. For example, some adolescent perceived that the advertisement for the casino complex portrayed that it was fun.

Some adolescents indicated that the adverts were reinforced with the use of colours and bright visuals with sports betting highlighted with the ease of accessibility of the product online. Parents also stated that, they were concerned that some of these messages may be particularly ‘enticing’ for some population subgroups. But despite all these, the appearance of longer forms of mandatory warning messages was recalled by very few participants in recollecting information contained in these advertisements.

Child Advertising

The idea of using children in and for television advertising has been expressed by many researchers as ‘dicey’. This regards child being vulnerable to advertising content and the role played in ads as to whether it is right in its conformity to societal values. With children identified “vulnerable” so they are easily attracted to heed to what is being portrayed in ads. Television commercials that features children has become an excellent trend to capture the attention of children. In the aspects where child animations are used, the enthusiasm children demonstrate are enormous as they memorize and creates a feeling of wanting in what is being portrayed in ads.

Gbadamosi, Hinson, Tukamushaba and Ingurijiri (2012) in their study identifying children’s attitudinal reactions towards to TV advertisement in four African countries revealed from the study’s findings that children like television adverts which relate to entertainment, especially when messages feature children’s characters, cartoon, music, celebrities and humour- and those promoting foods. Children derive excitement from advertising messages. For instance, in Ghana, the television commercial for Kalyppo, Gino, Indomie, Blueband margarine, etc. accounts as very notable TV commercials as it’s easy for children to relate and even talk about it in their play. The context of ethics is therefore important as the slight neglecting to what is acceptable would modify the attitudinal changes in the life of children (Gbadamosi, Hinson, Tukamushaba and Ingurijiri, 2012).

Many researchers have raised a number of areas to child advertisement as it identified that, they promote harmful products (sweets), early exposure to human sexuality and creating a high expectation of wants in product ads (Conna, Garrison, Triese and Weigold, 1994). From a different perspective, underlying the term dicey expressed, Aneja (2014) exposes a different face to child advertising, Aneja posits that, advertising on children increases the child’s knowledge about the latest innovation in the field of technology. Convincing ads which center around healthy food products can help improve the diet of a child if they are attracting enough. The key issue then in context is the subject of ethics as to what extent is being portrayed and its conformity to what is acceptable so as not to disrupt values, social, reasoning and culture the children learns gradually in their exposure to the society and the world at large.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The take on ethics through different studies have always carried a strong prevalence in ensuring what is right and noticing what is wrong so as to be changed or corrected. Therefore, the need to consider areas of television ads is also necessary so that the distinction can be drawn to amply indicate what is acceptable in line with the people's social ethics. Television advertising mainly is concerned with law, the content and the media.

The Law

From the highest order, the law is responsible in handling cases of breach and the production of advertisement in line with what the law recognizes and guides. The laws formulated should guard/guide the content and the media who presents the content of the media. Therefore, the law should hold firmly in place controlling agencies to act in accordance with what the law regards by bringing to book and enforcing corresponding punishment. Hence, it is important for the laws to be stated categorically recognizing the ethics of the society so advertisers and the media could use as a guide in their production. These controlling agencies should have the full autonomy in going through (editing) produced ads before recognizing and giving permits for public viewership. In Ghana, the case of airing ads before the recognizing it entails a breach should be checked. This ensures the right thing done before the public exposure that impacts negatively on viewership. The adherence to the law would ensure the activeness of banning TV commercials before the airing and not vice versa. In cases of established laws which regulates the system, they should be reviewed to suit the ethics of the society. The FDA should as part of its law amendment should strictly define who a celebrity is so as to help check people who get to feature in adverts created in Ghana.

The FDB should raise the standards with regards to the processes, scrutiny and details that are checked before a television advert is vetted and approved. The process of allowing ads to be played for a period of time before reviewing it should be looked at again. For instance, the “pure milk” advert with the popular phrase, does daddy know he is here? run for close to six months before it was reviewed and banned from being showed on TV. In this case, the video had already been consumed for that lengthy period of time and its effects felt. The ad had already settled into the homes of a lot of Ghanaians and in the minds of Children who were reciting or acting it out as they play. This clearly shows that, the harm had already been caused if indeed, the ad had unethical issues and was not suitable for the airwaves.

It is very important for the board in charge, to roll out discreet measures that would prevent such occurrences from happening. This means all ads should be scrutinized. Allowing ads to run before calling them back may be too late a time to reverse the harm it has caused.

The Content

The content which is provided by advertisers should be in conformity with what the society regards right. In the quest to reach international in today’s world, the subject of ethics should not be denied in concepts, ideas and strategies utilized the production of ads. The nature of portraying should factor law requirements produced using creative ideas.

The Media

The media accounts as the face of all advertisements. They receive the blames with the slightest activity wrong advertisement since they preview content to viewers. The recognition of the law by the media should be paramount despite its intention of commercializing, it should give recognition to social development. There should then be a balance in the professional practice and social responsibility. With the law strongly regulating the media’s dedicated times to TV programs should be abided.

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