

## Ethical Issues In User-Generated Social Media Advertisements In Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined ethical issues in user-generated social media advertisement in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were among others to examine the nature of user-generated advertising in digital media advertisements in Nigeria. The theoretical framework of the study was drawn from the technological determinism theory and network advertising model. This study adopted a mixed research method which combined content analysis and analytical descriptive survey designs. The study was made up of two population streams. For content analysis the population is 10,750 online advertisement copies from User-generated advertising online pages. The second population stream comprises staff of the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) was 27, according to the Administrative Officer of ARCON in Lagos State. The sample size for the study was also of two streams. The interview schedule sample size comprised three (3) key members of Exco, the Investigation Panel and Disciplinary Committee. Purposive sampling technique was used for the in-depth interview schedule segment. For content analysis, census of the 10,750 advertisements was used. The instrument for data collection for the study were in-depth interview guide schedule for the survey and the coding guide will be used for the content analysis. Data for this study were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The data obtained from coding of user-generated advertisement copies were arranged in tabular format. The interview was analysed strictly qualitatively and adopted the explanation building technique in presenting the responses obtained from the interviewees. The findings revealed that that the social media platforms mostly employed for user-generated advertisements in Nigeria were Facebook. This was followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram. The study concluded that the dominance of Facebook as the primary platform for use-generated advertisements in Nigeria, closely followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, twitter and Instagram. The study recommended that Advertisers should tailor their advertisements strategies to align with the platform preferences*

*identified, focusing on optimising engagement and authenticity on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram to effectively connect with the Nigerian audience.*

**Keywords:** *Ethical Issues, User-Generated, Social Media, Advertisement*

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## **Introduction**

In today's social context, technological advancement in the digital field allows people to search and find the information they need, check reviews of products and services before purchasing, and easily share information with friends. As for the advertisers, a communication space does not necessarily have to be bought from television or print media but also "earned" through having the consumers spread the brands' message within their social network. At the same time, it is also important not to neglect the fact that more and more brands and their agencies are harnessing what one can term "mass intellectuality" as a productive resource for "user-led innovation" systems or "crowdsourcing" through the use of new digital technologies.

A code of ethics is a set of principles and rules used by individuals and organisations to govern their decision-making process, as well as to distinguish right from wrong. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. The field of ethics, also called moral philosophy, involves organizing, protecting, and suggesting concepts of right and wrong behaviour. Put differently, ethics are rules of conduct or principles of morality that point us towards the right or best way to act in a situation. Ethics vary from person-to-person or society-to-society point of view. This is essentially because various people have different backgrounds, values and interests. While an individual in one society may see nothing wrong with the advertisements for alcohol or cigarettes, another individual in some other society may be appalled by such advertisements and may oppose these actions on moral and ethical grounds.

Be that as it may, ethical judgements in general are predicated on certain values and interests that are not universally agreed upon. The subjectivity of ethical judgements implies that the ethics question in advertising is clouded in a fog of contrasting opinions and ideas. Advertising as a social process means it must follow well-established and time-tested norms of social behaviour and should not affront the moral sense of the audience. It is a highly visible business activity, and the advertiser faces severe consequences in case of any lapse in ethical standards. Some of the common examples of ethical issues in advertising are vulgarity and obscenity used to gain consumers' attention, misleading information and deception, puffery, stereotypes, racial issues, and controversial products (such as alcohol, gambling, tobacco). It is morally wrong to use manipulative, exploitative, corrupt, and corrupting methods of persuasion and motivation.

The major administrative body responsible for regulating advertising in Nigeria is the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), formerly known as Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON). The Apex regulatory body of marketing communications, recently announced the signing into law of the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) Bill into law, and the change of name to ARCON. Other regulatory bodies are the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN),

the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), among others. These bodies regulate the advertising of specific products and services in Nigeria, such as food and drugs, telecommunication services, and cosmetics. Therefore, advertising in the Nigerian space has to undergo a lot of scrutiny by respective regulatory agencies. Apart from the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), some of the key stakeholders within the Nigerian Advertising Space include, The Association of Advertising Agencies in Nigeria (AAAN), Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) and Media Independent Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MIPAN).

Companies and organisations are aware of the power of advertising digitally on social media as this is capable of adapting the content according to the rapid technological changes and this implies direct contact with prospective customers. Companies are now afforded, a hitherto unavailable, opportunity to connect with their customers by offering unique, adapted, and personalized promotions using social network sites, microblogs, content communities, and blogs. If advertisers deploy social media, it is easier for users to accept, and transmit the message. Social media channels are powerful advertising platforms that create and reinforce bonds between firms and customers. Ohiagu (2019) argues that placing online adverts on social media platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, advertisers can target a specific group of people and increase the chances of developing the powerful tool of relationship marketing. This allows for the establishment of more dependable relationships which are nonexistent in mainstream media platforms. Companies using social media for marketing promotion are believed to receive measurable business benefits, including increased sales and market size, improved customer satisfaction and relationships, improved employee relationships, better and faster technical support, reduced marketing expenses and improved search engine rankings. The reasons for the aforementioned is that advertising on online spaces helps build relationships because of its potential for interaction between the advertiser and the audience. Customers can be reached directly, there is 24-hour availability, and the global reach that characterises online advertisements placed on social media (Ohiagu, 2019).

As observed by Horvath (2021), User-Generated Advertising is a modern twist on a classic, highly effective sales generator - word of mouth marketing. Specifically, User-Generated Advertising is a technique where consumers generate the impressions while companies control the branded content. In User-Generated Advertising, businesses engage with their customers to post branded content on social media, resulting in a brand endorsement and high impact impressions. User-Generated Advertising also known as Consumer-Generated Advertising (CGA) involves a consumer sharing a photo or message that includes branded content on social media. In its current, most common form, the consumer adds a branded filter to their own photo to share with friends online. A common online tactic is encouraging the customer to share a branded photo (likely after a recent online purchase). Companies provide the means to do it, a creative filter, a promotional photo and possibly an incentive. Olson and Vries (2015) submit that CGA is regarded more trustworthy since the consumer is an independent source without any self-interest ulterior motives, or intentions to manipulate contrast to the marketer whose objective is to influence consumers to action (p. 45).

There are laws that mandate the disclosure of any material connections between endorsers and promoted products. Users are expected to disclose any financial incentives or relationships when creating endorsements. Privacy and data protection laws are applicable in

User-Generated Advertising. This is rightly so as UGA may involve collecting and using personal data. Brands must comply with applicable privacy and data protection laws including obtaining proper consent for collecting, using, and disclosing personal information. Therefore regulating user-generated advertisements is one of the major challenges faced by the advertising industry and the society in the digital era. Based on the foregoing, this study is driven by the motivation to examine ethical and legal issues in user-generated social media advertisement in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The absence of or non compliance to specific regulations for online advertising is not healthy given the global nature of online advertising as it cuts across national frontiers with their diverse cultural, social and moral values. Weak regulatory framework would be endangered with harmful and unregulated advertisements exposure to the members of society. A well-structured and enforced regulatory regime would yield a more positive result since online advertisement is subject to the rules of jurisdiction it enters. The regulations currently for online advertments are surprisingly few and thus makes the space an all-comers-affair. One could identify this as one of the myths about online ads, where the level of protection in place for other media do not apply; children can be targeted by advertisements for age-restricted products online. This is still true in Nigeria where Ijedi Iyoha, the acting registrar of ARCON, admitted in Akingbolu (2019) that a lot of unregulated messages are being churned out by bloggers and influencers on products to deceive consumers and regulators have almost become helpless. The advertising industry needs effective regulation to forge ahead with the new emerging technological trends. Online communication must be legal, decent, honest, and truthful; adverts should not include anything that is likely to cause offence. The questions at the forefront of the advertising campaign should be how ethical and legal are user-Generated advertisements in the Nigerian digital space? Principles ought to be extended and observed by online advertisements in Nigeria as a cover for further abuse of advertising practice to the detriment of the society and the profession.

The surge in E-commerce because of the increase in Internet penetration and ownership of smart phones across Nigeria has also enabled small and medium scale enterprises to jump on the path blazed by large organisations in using online platforms and social media to reach their audiences. However, most of the content by these small-scale organisations are user generated and posted directly without going through the rigorous reviews that advertments passing through agencies are meant to. User-generated online advertisements in Nigeria often present ethical and legal challenges. Instances demanding attention include the unauthorised use of copyrighted materials, false or misleading claims made by advertisers, invasion of privacy when personal information is leaked, potential defamation or slander caused by negative reviews or comments and the need to ensure that advertisements targeting vulnerable populations, such as children, comply with appropriate regulations. Ensuring ethical and legal standards in user-generated online advertisements is crucial for protecting consumers and maintaining a fair and trustworthy advertising landscape in Nigeria. The problem of this study is therefore to examine the ethical and legal issues thrown up by User-Generated Advertising in the Nigerian digital space.

## **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to examine ethical and legal issues in User-Generated social media advertisement in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to:

1. find out the social media platforms that are mostly employed for user-generated advertisements in Nigeria;
2. determine the ethical issues prevalent in user-generated advertising in social media advertisement copies in Nigeria; and
3. evaluate the actions/efforts of regulatory bodies in handling ethical and legal issues in user-generated advertisements copies in Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Online advertising**

Online advertising has expanded exponentially since the advent of the Internet. Researchers have focused on the efficacy of online advertisements and how to get the best from placing adverts online. In their study, Danaher and Mullarkey (2003) note that web advertising has a significant effect on consumers. It aids their ability to identify the item and bring back previous memories of it. They also said that individuals prefer animated graphics to plain and static adverts. Moshrefjavadi (2012) examines a variety of factors that affected consumers' purchasing decisions. Accordingly, consumers' perceptions about online shopping are negatively impacted by financial and non-delivery risks. However, it simultaneously had some favorable effects on some consumers. One of the elements that affected a consumer's purchase choice was Internet advertisement. Gaining the consumers' trust through the web adverts was another success. As posited by Mir (2012), customers have a favorable opinion on social media advertising. Customers are far more likely to click on adverts when they have a favorable view toward online advertising. Along the same line of thought, Anwar and Reham (2013) maintain that YouTube product-related content significantly affects consumer attitudes and alters their impression of products. Additionally, it has important ramifications for social media marketers.

#### **Online Ethics**

The concept of "ethics", which has been discussed since the beginning of philosophy, still continues to be questioned, but today the direction of this discussion has shifted to the online world. The main purpose of discussing the concept of ethics is not to set rules, but to base ethical preference on universal norms. In order to talk about digital ethics, we first need to focus on the philosophical meaning of the word ethics. Ethics is a concept that examines what is right and wrong within the framework of social harmony, taking moral values into account. In our daily life, we carry out many of our actions, knowingly or unknowingly, even though they differ from each other, by taking into account an ethical understanding that we have basically learned. We say that digitalization has become a part of our lives; so how well do we behave in accordance with the concept of ethics in the digital world? At this point, the order of our new world reveals the concept of ethics, which is the normal of our daily life, as the concept of digital ethics (Martinez-Martinez, et al., 2017). Online ethics refers to the definition of human behavior that takes place in the online environment and to draw a moral boundary to



these actions. The concept of online ethics, which undertakes a benchmark mission in order to determine the characteristics of human behavior in the digital world, is discussed with different names such as cyber ethics, internet ethics, informatics ethics, robot ethics and in a context related to these names. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the concept of cyber ethics and internet ethics are used synonymously.

### **The Internet, Social media and User-Generated Advertising**

The Internet and World Wide Web or Web are terms used interchangeably. However, technically these terms are not synonymous; the Web is a system of computer servers connected through the Internet, which supports the exchange of files in the form of Web Pages. Its importance is that it allows human interaction based on technological networks; specifically, it is a techno-social system of communication that enhances communication and cooperation (Nematbakhsh et al. 2012). From the perspective of marketing, it is an important tool for firm-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer communication and interaction where consumers engage directly in brand communications that may not be controlled by the brand. Its first generation, Web 1.0, was considered a read-only platform and a system of knowledge gathering where businesses broadcast information providing catalogues or brochures similar to advertisements in newspapers and magazines to present their products and services for consumers to retrieve and contact the firm; it provided limited consumer interactions or content contributions (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). Although Web 1.0 did allow communication between firms and consumers, it was mostly oriented to online commerce based on a one-way communication system from sender to receiver, and interactivity between receivers and their contributions was not available. Web 1.0 was based on a one-to-many communication model following the linear models of communication espoused by Harold Lasswell where the sender (firm, (F)) transmits content to a large group of receivers (consumers) through mass media: television, radio, newspaper, magazines, direct mail among others; arguably, Web 1.0 follows this models of communication through search engines, electronic mail, and directories (Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

### **Ethics in the Digital Space**

The concept of "ethics", which has been discussed since the beginning of philosophy, still continues to be questioned, but today the direction of this discussion has shifted to the online world. The main purpose of discussing the concept of ethics is not to set rules, but to base ethical preference on universal norms. In order to talk about digital ethics, it is imperative to focus on the philosophical meaning of the word ethics. Ethics is a concept that examines what is right and wrong within the framework of social harmony, taking moral values into account. On a daily basis, many carry out actions, knowingly or unknowingly, even though they differ from each other, by taking into account an ethical understanding that have been basically learned. Digitalisation has become a part life that it raises the question of how individuals behave in accordance with the concept of ethics in the digital world. At this point, the order of our new world reveals the concept of ethics, which is the normal of our daily life, as the concept of digital ethics (Martinez-Martinez, 2017). Digital ethics refers to the definition of human behaviour that takes place in the digital environment and to draw a moral boundary to these actions. Digital ethics determines the moral appropriateness of all our behaviours in the virtual world. It covers the issue of protecting the same values in the digital world, just as we live

within the framework of certain truths without harming people in our daily lives. Digital ethics, besides which actions would be right for us to take in the digital world; It also includes the issues of what is not appropriate and what actions are morally inappropriate in a virtual environment.

### **Advertising in the Digital Space**

As an advertising medium, the Internet offers developers endless opportunities for creativity. The growth and development of the internet ecosystem has led to the growth and development of the digital advertising industry. As a result of the opportunities offered by digital media for advertising, programmatic advertising, which uses the most up-to-date data in real time and automatically online, is one of the most important developments in new media advertising (Altınbaşak & Karaca, 2009). Digital media offers a wide variety of ways for companies to reach consumers, communicate with them, and measure their browsing or buying behaviour. These options are often valuable for marketing, but are more particularly important for firms that use information about customers to create individual marketing events. Utilising the opportunities offered by digital media requires a thorough understanding of what influences consumers and how they affect their influence and behaviour. However, the privacy violations of companies in line with these efforts are a matter of great debate today (Hennig-Thurau, 2010).

### **Ethical Dimensions of User-Generated Advertising**

It is imperative to extrapolate and link existing ethical considerations in advertising to User-Generated Advertising. Essentially, ethics in User-Generated Advertising is such an important consideration in the modern digital landscape. The rationale for this assertion is that User-Generated Advertising refers to content created by users, rather than by companies or professional advertisers, to promote a product or service. Horvath (2021) submits that while User-Generated Advertising can be a powerful and authentic marketing tool, there are ethical concerns that need to be addressed. One of the contemporary ethical issues raised by User-Generated Advertising is transparency. Olson and Vries (2015) aver that it is essential to be transparent about the nature of user-generated content and its promotional intent. Users should clearly disclose any financial incentives or affiliations they have with the brand they are promoting. Transparency builds trust and ensures that consumers are fully informed. Along the same line, truthfulness is the centre of ethics in advertising. The same application is done to User-Generated Advertising because its content should not contain false or misleading information (Olson and Vries (2015). Misrepresentation of products or services can harm consumers and erode trust. Brands and users should strive for honesty and accuracy in their advertising messages as conceived and promoted by consumers. .

### **Moral and Ethical Issues in Advertising**

Ethics as a branch of philosophy is concerned with the investigation into the rightness and wrongness of human act. Etymologically, it is related to the Greek word "ethos" which means custom or conduct; a set of principles which guides the conduct and actions of men. However, as a philosophical enterprise, ethics is not merely a code of conduct, but rather a rational activity of prescribing, with cogent premises, sets of action according to which men ought to live. Also, it is a critical enquiry into the action and activities of men with the aim of determining its

rightness and wrongness. Hence, ethics is both prescriptive and evaluative (Chukeu & Ngwoke, 2022). Advertising as a term came from the Latin word *ad vertere*, which means “to turn the mind toward a product”. The intention here is to turn or direct a person’s mind toward a specific product, service, or idea. In this case, it includes the means of letting a person know about the existence, nature and use of goods or service and persuading the person to use such goods (Chukeu & Ngwoke, 2022)..

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Ethical Theory**

John lock was generally regarded as the founder of ethical theory in 1632 - 1704. Ethical theory can be seen as belonging to deontological or teleological classes. This separation can be traced backed to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century German deontological philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The deontological focuses on specific behaviours of individual, while the consequences of such behaviours are the concern of teleological (Vitell et al., 2013). Deontological explains behaviour in term of methods and intentions while carrying out a particular activity. Thus, ethical standards such as Right principle (that emphasis minimum level of satisfaction or standard), and Justice Principle (that emphasis protection of others interest) are part of Deontological philosophy. Under teleological, advertiser’s actions are tied to the consequence of the same action on company’s performance and marketer own target. Utilitarianism itself is a teleological philosophy that established morality base on consequences of our actions (Ferrell & Gresham, 2015). Utilitarianism stemmed from the late 18<sup>th</sup> - and 19<sup>th</sup> century English philosophers and economists Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

Relating this theory to the study, in a typical advertising agency or media company in Nigeria, advertising staff are punished when they fail to meet their targets (teleological issue), but most of the time did not get punished when they trample on laid down code where doing so bring positive result to the firm (deontological matter). These show you how media agencies and advert companies use their ethical codes to suit their purposes at the detriment of the general good of the society. These cases notwithstanding, there are other agencies and media firms that try to balance between the two (deontology and teleology) a sort of following the H-V model. They have established strict guidelines to guide their employee while having separate staff assessment mechanism that in many occasions relied on meeting targets given to individual staffs and departments. Teleological ethics is on the goal or outcome of user-generated content and determines morality based on whether the outcome is good or bad, while deontological ethics evaluates the morality of user-generated content based on its inherent rightness or wrongness, regardless of its consequences of the content and the underlying principles of the content are right.

### **Technological Determinism Theory**

This theory is a reductionist theory that presumes that a society’s technology derives the development of its social structure and cultural values. Technological determinism has been defined as an approach that identifies technology, or technological advances, as the central casual element in processes of social change (Croteau & Hoynes, 2013). The term is believed to have been coined by Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), an American sociologist. The most radical technological determinist in America in the twentieth century was most likely Clarence



Ayres who was a follower of Veblen and John Dewey. But also William Ogburn was known for his radical technological determinism. Most interpretations of technological determinism share two general ideas: that the development of technology itself follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence, and that technology in turn has “effects” on societies that are inherent, rather than socially conditioned or produced because that society organizes itself to support and further develop a technology once it has been introduced.

The theory is relevant as it lies in its examination of how technological advancements shape societal norms, behaviours and regulations, thereby influencing the ethical and legal considerations surrounding user-generated content creations, dissemination and consumption in the Nigerian context. The theory explores how advancements in technology drive social, cultural and economic changes, often impacting individuals’s behaviours and institutions. In the context of ethical and legal issues in user-generated social media advertisements in Nigeria, this theory can help researcher understand how technological developments in social media platforms influence advertising practices, user behaviour and regulatory frameworks. It sheds light on how user’s interactions with technology shape their understanding of ethical and legal boundaries in advertising, as well as how policymakers respond to emerging challenges in regulating user-generated content. By considering media technological determinism, researcher can better analyse the dynamic interplay between technology, society and advertising ethics in the Nigerian content.

### **Empirical Review**

Ahmed and Khan (2016) undertook a study entitled Ethics in advertising: Exploring the telecommunication industry’s employment of ethics in advertisements. The question remains whether advertising copies are up to the ethical standards set by advertising and marketing associations. This research explored the ethical aspects set by the 4A’s (American Association of Advertising Agencies) and PEMRA (Pakistani Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) along with what the consumers think about the advertisements used by the telecommunication industry for the promotion of their products and services. The data were collected from two hundred consumers residing in various areas of Karachi using a closed ended questionnaire. The questionnaire contained images of advertisements used by the telecommunication industry to promote their products and services. Findings from the study showed that respondents saw targeting of youth in the advertisements as an unethical practice. The study also revealed that consumers were of the opinion that advertisements should not use exaggerations to mislead the consumers and in this instance where it did, it was unethical. Findings also showed that many of the price claims of telecommunication advertisements are mere exaggeration and misleading.

O’Sullivan-Gavin and Amazeen (2016) conducted a study entitled The advertising industry in the social media age: the ethical and legal implications of unsanctioned rogue or "scam" Ads. The objective of the paper was to examine different types of rogue ads, focusing on recent examples of unapproved ads and deduce the ethical and legal implications of such ads. Findings from the study reveal Rogue ads give rise to many ethical issues, including misappropriation of a client's intellectual property, discrimination, cultural insensitivity/indifference, and egoism in the context of advancing one's career interests at the expense of the employer/agency reputation. Rogue or "scam" advertisements raise various

legal issues relative to intellectual property, common law, equity, contracts, employment law, and torts.

Nyekwere (2012) carried out a study on An assessment of the use of social media as advertising vehicle: A study of Facebook and Twitter. The study explored the usage level of social media by consumers and advertisers in Port Harcourt and the effect such use has on them, especially in terms of improved patronage for business organisations and change in decision making process, particularly the buying behaviour of consumers. In order to generate data for this study, the survey research method was employed and the questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The study revealed that 70% of business organisations in Port Harcourt are embracing social media to advertise and communicate with their customers, 30% are yet to see the promises that these new media hold. The study also found out that the use of social media in advertising has been successful for 35% of business organisations using them to place advertisement. Others (65%) leverage on their social media presence to get their fans/followers informed about their products/services.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a mixed research method which combined content analysis and analytical descriptive survey designs. The study was made up of two population streams. For content analysis the population is 10,750 online advertisement copies from User-generated advertising online pages. The study scraped all the user-generated contents from these ten top online platforms between 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2022 to 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2023, a study of nine months. The user-generated advertisement copies were scraped using Netlytic. The second population stream comprises staff of the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON). This population is 27 (twenty-seven) according to the Administrative Officer of ARCON in Lagos State. The sample size for the study was also of two streams. The interview schedule sample size comprised three (3) key members of Exco, the Investigation Panel and Disciplinary Committee. Purposive sampling technique was used for the in-depth interview schedule segment. For content analysis, the total population is 10,750, the study adopted census since the population is manageable.

The instrument for data collection for the study were in-depth interview guide schedule for the survey and the coding guide will be used for the content analysis. The units of analysis for the content analysis of the study was advertisements produced and posted on the social media. Data for this study were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The data obtained from coding of user-generated advertisement copies were arranged in tabular format. The interview was analysed strictly qualitatively and adopted the explanation building technique in presenting the responses obtained from the interviewees.

## Results and Discussions

**Table 1: Social Media Platforms mostly employed for User-generated Advertisements in Nigeria**

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Twitter	1,050	10
Facebook	3,107	29
LinkedIn	604	6
WhatsApp	1,308	12
Instagram	1,040	9
Snapchat	582	5
Pinterest	396	4
YouTube	2,003	19
TikTok	660	6
Total	10,750	100

Table 1 reveals that the social media platforms mostly employed for user-generated advertisements in Nigeria were Facebook. This was followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram respectively.

**Table 2: Ethical Issues Prevalent in User-Generated Advertising in Social Media Advertisements in Nigeria**

Content	Social Media Platforms																			
	Twitter		Facebook		LinkedIn		WhatsApp		Instagram		Snapchat		Pinterest		YouTube		TikTok		Total	
	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
Stereotyping advertising	105	3	28	3	55	1	12	1	10	1	62	1	79	1	61	6	12	1	155	14
Harmful or offensive images or ideas	120	1	33	3	75	1	13	1	10	1	74	1	35	1	14	3	73	1	108	10
Using individual personal data without consent	111	2	31	3	52	1	10	1	14	1	43	1	42	1	74	2	81	1	967	9
Images insensitive to certain cultures	94	1	29	3	54	1	10	1	95	1	61	1	33	1	21	3	84	1	102	10

Sex appeal-portraying women as sex objects	110	1	28	3	42	1	12	1	12	1	57	1	38	1	12	1	76	1	968	9
Concealment of facts	66	1	32	3	64	1	15	1	84	1	76	1	56	1	11	1	55	1	990	9
Manipulative and surrogate advertisements	94	1	31	3	42	1	14	1	71	1	59	1	49	1	17	2	74	1	101	9
Discrediting competitors to gain new customers	130	1	30	3	60	1	10	1	10	1	50	1	30	1	15	1	-	-	923	9
Negative impact on environment	60	1	22	2	70	1	10	1	56	1	40	1	-	-	10	1	-	-	656	6
Advertising misleading pricing predatory	160	1	44	4	90	1	24	2	16	1	60	1	34	30	3	90	1	157	15	
Total	1050	10	3107	29	604	608	132	1240	940	582	539	439	2003	190	660	650	10750	100		

Table 2 shows that ethical issues prevalent in user-generated advertising in social media advertisements copies in Nigeria were advertising misleading pricing predatory, stereotyping advertising, harmful or offensive images or ideas, images insensitive to certain cultures, using individual personal data without consent, sex appeal – portraying women as sex objects, discrediting competitors to gain new customers, manipulative and surrogate advertising, concealment of facts and negative impacts on environment.

### Interview Report

#### On how actively regulatory bodies in Nigeria engage with the ethical challenges posed by user-generated advertisements

This section ascertains the respondents’ opinions on how actively regulatory bodies in Nigeria engage with the ethical and legal challenges posed by user-generated advertisements. When asked, Respondent “B” explained that regulatory bodies in Nigeria play a crucial role in

addressing the ethical and legal challenges posed by user-generated advertisements. The surge in digital platforms has given rise to a multitude of user-generated content, including advertisements, creating a complex landscape for regulators. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) are key regulatory bodies actively engaged in overseeing advertising content. The respondents further stated that one ethical challenge revolves around the authenticity of user-generated advertisements. Regulatory bodies strive to ensure that these ads adhere to ethical standards, promoting transparency and honesty. Instances of false claims or misleading information within user-generated content are subject to scrutiny and possible penalties.

However, respondent “B” narrated that social media influencers, a significant source of user-generated advertisements, pose unique challenges. Regulatory bodies work to distinguish between genuine recommendations and paid endorsements, emphasising the need for transparency in such collaborations. In addressing these challenges, regulatory bodies often collaborate with industry stakeholders, fostering a collective effort to establish best practices and ethical standards for user-generated advertisements. Respondent “C” stated that the emergence of deepfake technology introduces a novel ethical dilemma. Regulators grapple with the need to prevent the dissemination of deceptive advertisements while respecting freedom of expression and creativity. Ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, from potentially harmful content within user-generated advertisements remains a priority. Regulatory bodies implement measures to restrict certain types of content and promote responsible advertising practices.

Respondent “B” ascertained that regular monitoring and assessment of advertising trends are essential for regulatory bodies to stay ahead of emerging challenges. This proactive approach enables timely updates to regulations, ensuring their relevance in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Collaboration with international regulatory bodies provides Nigeria with insights into global best practices, facilitating the development of robust frameworks that address ethical and legal challenges effectively. Respondent “A” added that public awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in the regulatory strategy, educating both advertisers and consumers about responsible content creation and consumption. This proactive approach helps create a culture of compliance and ethical advertising practices.

Respondent “C” stated that penalties and enforcement mechanisms are essential components of regulatory efforts. By imposing consequences for ethical and legal violations, regulatory bodies deter advertisers from engaging in deceptive practices, thereby maintaining the integrity of the advertising industry. Regulatory bodies in Nigeria actively engage with the ethical and legal challenges posed by user-generated advertisements. Their efforts encompass adapting regulations, collaborating with stakeholders, monitoring emerging technologies and enforcing compliance, all aimed at fostering an ethical and transparent advertising environment in the digital age.

### **On what gaps or areas need improvement in the current regulatory approach to handle ethical and legal issues arising from user-generated content**

The section delved into what gaps or areas needed for an improvement in the current regulatory approach to handle ethical and legal issues arising from user-generated content. When asked, all the respondents agreed on Adaptability to Technological Changes: regulatory frameworks often struggle to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies. There is a need for more agility to address emerging challenges in user-generated content, especially in the dynamic realm of social media. Global Consistency: achieving consistency in regulations across borders is



challenging. The global nature of social media platforms requires a coordinated effort among countries to establish uniform standards for user-generated content. Enforcement Challenges: enforcement mechanisms may be insufficient or challenging to implement effectively. Regulatory bodies may lack the resources to monitor and enforce ethical standards consistently. User Empowerment and Education: there is often a lack of emphasis on empowering users with the knowledge and tools to understand and comply with ethical standards. Better user education and awareness programs are needed.

All the respondents stated Handling Misinformation: the regulatory approach needs improvement in addressing the spread of misinformation through user-generated content. Balancing free speech with the need to curb false information remains a complex challenge. Privacy Concerns: protecting user privacy is a critical aspect. Regulations should be enhanced to address the growing concerns related to data privacy and the misuse of personal information in user-generated content. Culturally Sensitivity: regulations may not adequately consider the diverse cultural contexts within countries. There is a need for frameworks that are sensitive to cultural nuances to avoid unintended consequences or cultural insensitivity. Transparency in Algorithmic Moderation: the lack of transparency in algorithmic moderation processes used by social media platforms poses challenges. Improved transparency would help users understand content moderation decisions and build trust in the platforms.

They equally streamlined Legal Clarity for Platforms: social media platforms often face legal ambiguities regarding their liability for user-generated content. Clearer legal frameworks are needed to define the responsibilities and liabilities of platforms in handling content issues. Collaboration between Stakeholders: enhanced collaboration between regulatory bodies, platforms, civil society and other stakeholders is crucial. A more inclusive approach involving multiple perspectives can lead to more comprehensive and effective regulations. Real-Time Response Mechanisms: regulatory bodies may need to establish more efficient real-time response mechanisms to address emerging issues promptly, especially during crises or situations requiring immediate attention. Addressing these gaps requires a concerted effort from policymakers, regulatory bodies and technology companies to create a regulatory environment that is robust, adaptable and capable of managing the ethical and legal challenges posed by user-generated content.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The data analysed in tables 4.1 to 4.2 and interview report provided the platform for this discussion which was purely done in relation to the research objectives.

The findings revealed that the social media platforms mostly employed for user-generated advertisements in Nigeria were Facebook. This was followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram respectively. This finding aligns with the study of Nyekwere (2012) on “An assessment of the use of social media as advertising vehicle: a study of Facebook and Twitter” which found out that majority of business organisations in Port Harcourt are embracing social media to advertise and communicate with their customers. Also that the use of social media in advertising has been successful for many of business organisations using them to place advertisement. Other leverage on their social media presence to get their fans/followers informed about their products/services.

The technological determinism theory and network advertising model in which this study is underpinned gave backing to this finding. The findings align with technological determinism theory, which posits that the characteristics and affordances of each social media

platform shape user behaviours and practices. This suggests that the early adoption, versatile features and widespread popularity of Facebook contribute to its dominance in hosting user-generated advertisements, while platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram offer unique functionalities that cater to specific types of user-generated content and engagement, reflecting the influence of technological advancements on advertising practices in Nigeria. The theory is evident in the findings that identify Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram as the primary social media platforms for user-generated advertisements in Nigeria. The theory emphasises the interconnected relationships and collaborative dynamics within social media platforms. Understanding this model is crucial for advertisers to strategically leverage the user-generated content across these platforms, recognising the potential synergies and reach achieved through a networked approach. By embracing the network advertising model, advertisers can optimise their strategies, engaging with diverse audiences on multiple platforms to enhance the effectiveness of user-generated advertisements in the Nigerian context.

The findings showed that ethical issues prevalent in user-generated advertising in social media advertisements copies in Nigeria were advertising misleading, pricing predatory, stereotyping advertising, harmful or offensive images or ideas, images insensitive to certain cultures, using individual personal data without consent, sex appeal – portraying women as sex objects, discrediting competitors to gain new customers, manipulative and surrogate advertising, concealment of facts and negative impacts on environment. This finding is in tandem with the study of Ahmed and Khna (2016) on “Ethics in advertising: exploring the telecommunication industry’s employment of ethics in advertisements” as stated that advertising used exaggerations to mislead the consumers, many of the price claims were mere exaggeration and misleading and the testimonial shown in the advertisements were a means of creating non real opinions.

The ethical theory that this study underpinned give credence to this finding. The ethical theory lies in establishing a framework to evaluate and address issues like misleading price, predatory tactics and stereotyping. Ethical theory provides a basis for assessing the moral implications of UGA practices, ensuring responsible advertising that respects users and promotes transparency. In the network advertising model, ethical considerations become crucial for maintaining trust among users and sustaining a positive online environment. Adhering to ethical principles helps in preventing the spread of deceptive content and fostering a more ethical advertising ecosystem.

The result showed that regulatory bodies in Nigeria play a crucial role in addressing the ethical challenges posed by user-generated advertisements. The surge in digital platforms has given rise to a multitude of user-generated content, including advertisements, creating a complex landscape for regulators. One ethical challenges revolves around the authenticity of user-generated advertisements. Regulatory bodies strive to ensure that these ads adhere to ethical standards, promoting transparency and honesty. This study refuted the assertion of O’Sullivan and Amazeen (2016) when studied on “The advertising industry in the social media age: the ethical and legal implications of unsanctioned rogue or “scam” Ads” and found that an ethical divide in the industry where some advertising professionals condone the practice as harmless or “proactive” creativity, while others condemn the practice as damaging to the profession, agencies, award organisation and clients.

The ethical theory upon which this study is anchored gives validation to this finding. The theory is paramount as regulatory bodies navigate the complex landscape of user-generated

advertisements in Nigeria. ethical principles provide a foundational framework to guide regulators in formulating policies that balance the need for freedom of expression with the responsibility to address ethical challenges. By incorporating ethical considerations, regulatory bodies can promote fairness, transparency and accountability in the oversight of user-generated advertisements. Ethical theory aids in shaping regulations that not only align with legal standards but also reflect the broader ethical values of society, fostering a digital environment that upholds integrity and respects the rights of users and creators alike.

### **Conclusion**

The study underscores the dominance of Facebook as the primary platform for user-generated advertisements in Nigeria, closely followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram. This hierarchy reflects the diverse landscape of social media usage in the country and suggests varying preferences among users-generated and engaging with advertisements on different platforms.

This study sheds light on concerning ethical issues in user-generated advertising within social media advertisements in Nigeria, encompassing misleading content, price predatory tactics, stereotyping, the inclusion of harmful or offensive images, insensitivity to certain cultures and the unauthorised use of individual personal data. These issues pose significant challenges to the integrity and responsibility of advertising practices in the Nigerian digital landscape. Addressing these ethical concerns is essential to cultivate a more trustworthy and respectful environment for users engaging with user-generated content.

The study underscores the pivotal role of regulatory bodies in Nigeria in addressing the ethical and legal challenges posed by the surge in user-generated advertisements on digital platforms. As the landscape becomes increasingly complex due to the abundance of user-generated content, including advertisements, regulatory intervention becomes essential to ensure fair practices, protect consumers and uphold ethical standards. Establishing clear guidelines and fostering on-going communication between regulators and digital platforms will be instrumental in maintaining ethical standards in user-generated advertisements within the dynamic context of Nigeria's digital space.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the result of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Advertisers should tailor their advertisements strategies to align with the platform preferences identified, focusing on optimising engagement and authenticity on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram to effectively connect with the Nigerian audience.
2. To mitigate ethical challenges, it is crucial for advertisers and social media platforms to institute and enforce clear guidelines, conduct regular audits and engage in comprehensive user education programmes to promote ethical standards and responsible behaviour in user-generated advertising within the Nigerian social media sphere.

3. To effectively manage this complex environment, regulatory bodies should collaborate with industry stakeholders, leverage advanced monitoring technologies and periodically review and update regulations to keep and update regulations to keep pace with the evolving digital landscape.

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