

DIGITAL MARKETING AND GLOBAL SHIFT TOWARD ETHICAL ADVERTISING

Jatto Abdulmajeed Adewale^a, Abdulquadri Abdulazeed Olamide^b, Zubair, Oluwatosin
Sidiqat^c

^aUniversity of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria,

^bAbazol Digital, Lagos, Nigeria,

^cMTN Nigeria Communications Plc.

Corresponding authors: ^ajatto.aa@unilorin.edu.ng, ^bolamide.abdulazeed@yahoo.com,
^ctosynox@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Ethical advertising has become a crucial aspect of modern marketing, particularly in the digital era where corporate social responsibility, consumer trust, and regulatory compliance play vital roles. This study examines the integration of ethical advertising practices in Nigeria, identifying key strategies for aligning Nigerian digital marketing with global ethical standards while highlighting existing gaps and challenges. The research explores how businesses navigate the ethical landscape of digital marketing, focusing on consumer privacy, advertising transparency, and corporate accountability. Through a detailed literature review with focus on database research articles published within 2020 to 2024, accessible on Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and MDPI, this study investigates the current state of Nigeria's advertising industry, focusing on regulatory mechanisms, industry challenges, and the effectiveness of existing ethical guidelines. Findings reveal that while institutions such as the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) attempt to regulate advertising practices, enforcement remains inconsistent. Additionally, the growing prevalence of influencer marketing and digital advertisements has introduced further ethical concerns regarding transparency, misleading claims, and unauthorized data usage. The study underscores the urgent need for Nigerian businesses and regulators to adopt comprehensive ethical advertising frameworks that align with international best practices.

Keywords: Ethical Advertising, Digital Marketing, Consumer Trust, Regulatory Compliance, Nigeria, Corporate Accountability

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethical advertising has become a critical focal point in contemporary marketing, reflecting the growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility, consumer trust, and regulatory compliance. As digital marketing continues to evolve, organizations must navigate ethical considerations to maintain transparency, safeguard consumer privacy, and promote responsible advertising practices (Burr & Floridi, 2020). With the increasing influence of digital platforms, businesses are not only presented with unprecedented opportunities for engagement but also face heightened scrutiny regarding their ethical conduct in advertising.

The shift toward ethical advertising is largely driven by rising consumer awareness, corporate accountability, and regulatory pressures. Research indicates that modern consumers are more likely to support brands that demonstrate ethical integrity and sustainability commitments (Christensen, Hail & Leuz, 2021; Hansen & Bo Nielsen, 2023). As a result, organizations worldwide are re-evaluating their marketing strategies to align with ethical advertising standards, ensuring that promotional efforts do not exploit vulnerable demographics or reinforce harmful stereotypes.

The evolution of digital marketing has played a significant role in reshaping advertising practices. Traditionally, marketing communication relied on conventional media channels such as print, television, and radio (González-Padilla, Navalpotro & Saura, 2024). However, the advent of the internet and digital technologies has revolutionized the industry, enabling precise targeting, real-time engagement, and personalized marketing experiences (Quesenberry, 2020). From the early 2000s, businesses began leveraging social media platforms—initially Orkut, followed by Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok—to enhance consumer interaction and brand visibility (Guerrero, 2023). Today, artificial intelligence and machine learning further optimize digital marketing strategies, allowing marketers to predict consumer behaviour and tailor content accordingly (Kshetri, Dwivedi, Davenport, & Panteli, 2023).

Despite these advancements, the reliance on digital platforms has also led to unethical marketing practices, including data privacy violations, deceptive advertising, and targeted manipulation of susceptible audiences. This necessitates a global push toward ethical advertising frameworks that uphold consumer rights and corporate accountability (Naveed, 2023). In emerging markets such as Nigeria, where digital adoption is accelerating, ethical advertising is particularly crucial.

Nigeria's digital economy is characterized by a tech-savvy youth demographic and an increasing reliance on digital media for commerce and communication (Shankar, Grewal, Sunder, Fossen, Peters & Agarwal, 2022). However, without robust regulatory frameworks and industry compliance, unethical marketing practices could undermine consumer trust and brand reputation.

To address these challenges, Nigerian regulators must strengthen legal frameworks to align with global ethical standards in digital marketing. This includes enforcing stricter guidelines on advertising transparency, consumer protection, and corporate responsibility (Sircar, Yadav, Rayavarapu, Bist & Oza, 2021). By adhering to international ethical advertising norms, Nigerian businesses can enhance their brand credibility and foster consumer loyalty while contributing to a more responsible digital marketing landscape. The following objectives were looked into in the course of this investigation:

- i. examine the regulatory mechanism governing Advertising practices in Nigeria
- ii. assess the effectiveness of existing ethical guidelines in the industry.
- iii. identify gaps and challenges in achieving ethical advertising in Nigeria

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Nigeria Advertising Industry

The Nigerian advertising industry has over the years, been in a growing state, due to enhanced consumer patronage, digital evolution and emergence of social site (Adelabu, Alade, Sanusi & Oloyede, 2023). Advertising is an important communication platform in Nigeria for the organizations that intends to target a majority of the population. Nigeria alone is home to over 200 million people and, most of these are the younger generations who are also into technology (Owebor, Diemuodeke, Briggs & Imran, 2021). However, there are challenges especially when the issue of ethical conduct in the industry is concerned or the lack of governing institutions to regulate the activity (Coelho, Jayantilal & Ferreira, 2023). The Nigerian Advertising Regulatory Council (ARCON) ensures that ads communications are done in accordance with the prevailing laws and ethical standards in Nigeria. Some of the areas concerned are prohibition of regulatory

laws aspect such as the regulation of deceptive advertisements, consumer protection, and regulation of information content in the media (Hovenkamp, 2024). However, the enforcement is still somewhat lax and the sector is still looked at unfavorably when measured up to internationally recognized ethical benchmarks, especially in issues such as data protection and disclosure in online promotion.

Advertising in Nigeria functions under a multiphase legal framework that seeks to promote freedom of creativity whilst cabining deceptive commercial messages (Abioye, 2021). Nigeria's ARCON alongside other institutions like the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) aims at evolving rules and laws with regards to advertising content in media which include television, radio and social media. However, the industry still encountered issues like the continual unhealthy practices including cases of deceptive advertising especially with advertising that is pervasive in the digital platform that sometimes involve business organizations, use fake claims or manipulated statistics to draw consumers (Willis, 2020). The current state of affairs is fairly fluid as well, particularly with the rise of digital marketing – several guidelines regulating everything from online advertisements, influencer marketing, and social media campaigns are still new to many advertisers. Despite these progress in this area, it can be noted that today's new forms of advertising regulation remain far from perfect as the further development of digital technologies outpaces the increase in its regulation. Furthermore, the move toward ethical advertising by companies around the globe has intensified pressure on Nigerian marketers to conform to global best practice. As the ethical consume becomes the new normal and Nigerian companies make efforts to abide by rules dictated by the global environment such as the GDPR Nigeria advertisers need to additionally factor in ethical perspectives to their method. These are clear and honest advertising, truthful and proper descriptions of products and services, and appropriate use of consumers' information. While it is true that some Nigerian companies are gradually adopting some of these global ethical standards some firms have Challenges in adopting sound data protection measures and producing truthful advertisement content (Ogbechie & OguntimehinJr, 2024).

Ethical Advertising

Ethical advertising has emerged as an important theme in modern society as consumers pay keen attention on how the organizations pay attention to ethical process in the promotions of the brand (Cambier & Poncin, 2020). To this end, some of the most fundamental regulatory requirements and standards have evolved globally to assist as well as to ensure business entity act ethically throughout advertising. Such a regulation is more specifically the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which has been implemented by the European Union in 2018. GDPR makes high demands to data protection and privacy, it enshrines priority of consumer interests and declares that businesses may collect and process consumers' data only with their consent (European Commission, 2020). It has facilitated this regulation to immensely affect digital marketing through the enhancement of transparency and consumer control.

Specifically, in the USA there are special rules for ethical advertising which are listed under the Federal Trade Commission known as Truth in Advertising laws. Federal Trade Commission laws state that adverts cannot be misleading, false in a material respect, or unwarranted (Kerchhoff, 2020). This comprises disclosure of sponsored relationships between the advertisers and endorsers as well as truthful representation of product or services (FTC, 2022). These guidelines are meant to shield the consumers from being sold wrong products through what may amount to unfair production of information by the manufacturers and other players in the relevant market. Also, two associations representing advertisers globally include IAA and the WFA have unique set of globally accepted code of conduct which call for ethics in advertising. These codes require marketers to practice responsible marketing, to respect rights of individuals, encourage social responsibility as well as preserve the environment (IAA, 2021; WFA, 2022).

Customer sentiments and expectations about ethical advertising have over the years changed markedly. Contemporary customers are knowledgeable and selective regarding the companies they deal with, and their sustainability standards. The Nielsen global survey, 2021 revealed that majority of consumers are willing to pay a premium for goods and services offered by organisations committing to ethical standards and sustainability. Such a change is associated with the changes in the population's expectations of sincerity, non-gaudiness, and ethical corporate behaviour, including in the advertising business. The customer today does not only demand that a brand provides him/her with quality products, but a brand that will practice what he/she believes

in. This entails revealing the sources where products are obtained, provision of equal wages for workers and care on the ecosystem. Companies that do not capture these expectations may end up being punished and consumers lose trust in the companies (Apampa, 2020; Dickinson-Delaporteeetal., 2020; Baragiola & Mauri, 2021).

Nigeria Unethical Advertising Practices

The context of Nigerian advertising industry is full of numerous unethical acts that erode consumer trust and regulatory standards (Baragiola & Mauri, 2021). Some of them include; false advertisements, tendency that firms give out over-ambitious statements on their products or services in an advertisement without supporting facts (Thomas, 2023; Oxmanetal., 2021). For instance, a cross-section of the health and wellness brands in Nigeria has been established to deliver products with unfounded health claims as outlined by Lokulo-Sodipe (2019) and Olatunji (2018). These claims also fall foul of ethical principles and more particularly the rules and recommendations set by the National Advertising Regulatory Council (NARC) which has helped in preventing false and deceptive advertising. One more considerable issue that remains relevant for the Nigerian advertising industry is the opacity of influencer marketing (Dwivedietal., 2021). This social marketing strategy is now used to popularize brands; however, many of them have not endured proper endorsement disclosure. It also brings to reality consumer manipulation whereby consumers take verdicts to be inherent instead of being paid an endorsement, thus going against the ethical standards of advertising (Adebisi, 2024; Wellman etal., 2020).

Another component of the unethical advertising known in Nigeria is privacy violations (Effah & Alomenu, 2021). Consumers today have gotten hooked with digital marketing because of the growth of data collection and usage for advertising purposes (Davida, 2021). But, it is regrettable that the majority of firms fail to uphold best practices in data management; unauthorized data collection is rampant, and firms provide inefficient security measures, undermining consumer privacy. Due to such issues the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) was approved but its compliance is still a bit irregular and many marketers are still in a position to fully adhere to the regulation stipulations (NITDA, 2020). This has over time been evidenced by poor application of data protection laws and inability to meet consumer expectations on privacy of their data. This is coupled with other challenges that are associated with the deceptive advertisements and these include: fake endorsements and fake testimonials which has stretched the unethical situations in

the Nigerian advertising to a higher level (Opia, 2020). They further mislead consumers while at the same time eroding the legitimacy of substantive advertising campaigns.

However, it is creditable to discover that the Nigeria landscape has embraced some level of ethical advertising practice which are informed by developing digital marketing techniques and enhancing advertising legal requirements. In the recent past, Nigeria has experienced exponential growth of the digital marketing industry, increased spending on online marketing tools including social media marketing. The Nigeria major companies like Jumia and Konga have embraced digital media to communicate with consumers and make sales. However, ethical advertising even today is an area that needs a lot of developments. This study reveals that ethical advertising in Nigeria has been an obscured concept, especially due to the vices of transparency and privacy of consumers' data as well as manipulation of information (Ejiogu et al., 2019). In Nigeria at the moment, the regulations governing digital marketing include but not limited to the following; the National Advertising Regulatory Council (NARC) guidelines and the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR).

Current State of Digital Marketing in Nigeria

Nigeria like many other countries has in the recent past seen growth and evolution of Digital marketing, this is due to the expanding coverage of internet and mobile technology (Ogbeide-Osaretin & Ebhote, 2020). Nigeria is currently among the biggest and fastest-growing markets in Africa, and therefore presents a huge potential for successful targeting of digital marketers willing to deliver their message to a literate and technology-savvy audience (Pillay, 2023). The Nigerian digital marketing industry has various local and international industry players who develop new services and products to compete in the industry (Awotunde, Oyedele & Adewale, 2024). Some of the local agencies that have emerged to the lime light include Dodo Graphics, X3M Ideas, Wild Fusion among others. Dodo Graphics, a company that specializes in Branding and social media since it started obtaining attention and recognition in creating Brands (Kawaf & Dekel-Dachs, 2024). Likewise, X3M Ideas has built strong capacity to provide integrated communication and digital marketing strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing across board for various clients.

Other local agencies include Mobi Label, Imack, Graphic, and media access; however, digital marketing giants from all over the world like Google and Facebook are the biggest players in

Nigeria's market. Google has a series of advertising products such as Google AdWords and Google Analytics that help businesses advertise and reach Nigerian consumers conveniently or even gauge the success of the advertising strategies being used. Owned by Facebook with a vast coverage and complex targeting features, Nigerian brands may effectively reach the audience using advertisement opportunities like Facebook Ads and Instagram promotions (Vitalisetal., 2023). These global markets not only help the indigenous business establishments in their promotional campaigns online but also bring new ideas and technologies to Nigeria. As we speak, there are several notable trends that are airily defining the digital marketing industry and scene in Nigeria. One of them is the mobile first strategy based on a very high mobile penetration in Nigeria. Given the fact that a big percentage of the Nigeria's population is now on the internet through their mobile devices, mobile-first trends have become a key importance among the Nigeria's digital marketers. Such as mobile advertising, app promotions and sms marketing, which have become core strategies of digital marketing (Statista, 2022).

Another of the most recognizable trends in Nigeria's digital marketing is social media dominance. Some of the social networking sites popular among the Nigerians include; Facebook, Instagram and X (which was formerly known as twitter); this makes these sites relevant tools for marketing on the social media. Influencer marketing has become one of the go-to approaches used to engage the public; December 2017 saw brands tapping into famous personalities to market their products on social media platforms. Different retail brands have made social media a central point in the creation of a brand image and consumer engagement (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Besides, the development of e-commerce solutions such as Jumia, Konga and PayPorte, has also enhanced the usage of digital marketing methods. Today's e-commerce store owners are using promotional mails and email marketing, Telemarketing, and Advertisement campaigns to sell their products and gain customers (Purnomo, 2023).

Challenges and Gaps in Nigeria's Digital Marketing Regulation

There has been some measure of progress in the regulation of digital marketing in Nigeria, there are many hurdles and gaps that make existing measures partly effective. There is always one major problem – the observation and adherence to the existing set rules. Inadequately equipped digital marketers in Nigeria have restriction issues with data protection and advertising regulatory frameworks and discourses they often do not know or have the capacity to engage with (Ere, 2020).

Such a non-compliance is likely to lead to the adoption of unethical behaviours as well as its leading to generation of consumer distrust. For instance, according to Vojković, Milenković and Katulić (2020) many firms have inadequate structures that offer protection to the consumer data thus the latter gets exposed to volatilities such as data leakages, misuse of the consumers' information amongst others. The discrepancy is further evident in a more general term that often these regulatory agencies do not have the means or even tools to track or sanction non-compliance, where proved right in this case.

Another concern is the absence of clearly defined specific regulatory rules within the existing system. These existing regulations appear to be more like firefighting modes rather than prophylactic ones, which does not give them the leverage needed for the dynamically growing field of digital marketing. Even though different digital marketing techniques and technologies continue to emerge there is need for more rigorous as well as more up to date regulation of these areas. For example, the rapidly developing means of social networks and using influencers has created new problem areas like the control of paid posts and readability of sponsored collaborations. These aspects are not coherently explained in those guidelines, which points towards a serious gap in the literature on regulations (Abbott & Snidal, 2021). Failure to be proactive in updating the regulations means that Nigeria loses the ability to properly navigate the current complexities of most contemporary digital marketing (Fulgoni, 2016).

2.2 Theoretical Review

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory posits that organizations must consider the interests of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, rather than focusing solely on shareholders (Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen, & Laude, 2022). Developed by Freeman (1984), the theory emphasizes the interconnected nature of businesses and their stakeholders, including consumers, employees, regulatory bodies, communities, and investors. A detailed review of this theory is essential in this study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its relevance within the advertising industry, particularly in relation to ethical considerations and corporate responsibility.

In the context of advertising, Stakeholder Theory suggests that companies should align their marketing strategies with ethical principles that cater to the expectations and welfare of diverse

stakeholders. Ethical advertising practices are not merely regulatory obligations but strategic imperatives that influence long-term stakeholder trust and brand sustainability. For instance, transparency in advertising ensures that consumers receive accurate and non-deceptive information, reducing the risks of misleading claims that could erode trust and provoke regulatory scrutiny. Similarly, adherence to data privacy laws is critical, as mishandling consumer data can result in reputational damage and legal consequences, ultimately impacting corporate credibility (Freeman & By, 2022). Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory highlights the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a key aspect of ethical business conduct. Organizations that integrate social responsibility into their marketing strategies—such as promoting sustainable consumption, supporting local communities, or engaging in philanthropic activities—enhance their public image and strengthen relationships with both consumers and regulators. Empirical evidence suggests that socially responsible brands often enjoy greater customer loyalty and advocacy, leading to long-term competitive advantages (Kujala et al., 2022). By embedding ethical considerations into marketing strategies, organizations can cultivate goodwill not only among consumers but also within the broader stakeholder network, including employees who value ethical work environments and regulatory bodies that reward compliance. This aligns with the argument that ethical behavior in advertising is not just a compliance measure but a tactical business strategy that fosters long-term success. A more detailed exploration of Stakeholder Theory within this study will provide critical insights into how ethical advertising influences stakeholder engagement, regulatory compliance, and brand reputation. This theoretical foundation underscores the need for businesses to recognize that ethical decision-making in advertising is a multifaceted approach that benefits all parties involved, ultimately contributing to corporate sustainability and long-term profitability.

2.3 Empirical Review

Daud, Rameli, Man, and Aris, (2023) examined the implementation of Islamic marketing ethics among Muslimpreneurs utilizing Facebook for digital marketing. Through content analysis of 32 advertising materials, the study revealed that while fundamental Islamic marketing ethics were generally upheld, there was a notable lack of clear disclosure regarding marketing information. This finding highlights the need for greater transparency in promotional materials. Similarly, Granstedt (2024) provided a comprehensive overview of ethical challenges in social media

marketing through a systematic literature review. Five distinct themes emerged from the study, including advertising and customer-brand relationships, the dark side of social media, privacy concerns, fake news, and emerging research areas. The author emphasized that firms must proactively advance ethical practices to build consumer trust and combat misinformation.

The role of digital marketing in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was explored by Bruce, Shurong, Ying, Yaqi, Amoah and Egala (2023), who investigated how digital marketing adoption impacts the sustainable growth of SMEs in Ghana. Using the theory of planned behaviour, the study analyzed data from 533 SME owners and managers, revealing that subjective norms and perceived behavioural control significantly influence the intention to use digital marketing, which in turn enhances SME sustainability. In a different context, Cunningham and Roberts (2025) examined the progress made in addressing sexism in advertising due to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives. Despite advancements, the study noted concerns about a backlash against DE&I in major U.S. corporations, potentially reversing progress. The researchers emphasized ongoing challenges such as the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women over 50 in advertisements.

Consumer perceptions of ethical digital marketing practices were the focus of Smith and Johnson (2021). Their study, based on surveys and focus groups, found that transparency, honesty, and respect for privacy are paramount to consumers. Ethical digital marketing practices were linked to increased consumer trust and loyalty. Likewise, Nguyen and Wang (2022) examined how ethical advertising influences brand loyalty among digital consumers. Their findings suggest that ethical advertising practices, such as truthfulness and social responsibility, significantly enhance brand loyalty, particularly among younger demographics.

Martinez and Lopez (2020) conducted a comparative study analyzing various digital marketing strategies and their ethical implications across different industries. Their results indicated that industries facing higher regulatory scrutiny tend to adopt more ethical digital marketing practices. Meanwhile, Kumar and Gupta (2023) explored ethical challenges in influencer marketing, particularly in the digital landscape. The study identified issues such as the disclosure of sponsored content, authenticity, and the impact of influencer marketing on vulnerable audiences, highlighting the need for clearer guidelines and ethical standards.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review, a structured method of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research on a specific topic (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2019). Secondary data were collected from credible academic databases, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PubMed, and MDPI, using keywords such as “Digital Marketing,” “Ethical Advertising,” “Consumer Behaviour,” and “Ethical Marketing.” The review specifically targeted empirical studies published between 2020 and 2024 in English, ensuring the findings remain relevant and up to date.

To analyze the collected literature, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, thematic analysis was applied to extract key themes such as the promotion of ethics by digital platforms, regional variations in ethical advertising practices, and the impact of ethical marketing on consumer trust and brand loyalty. This approach was justified as it allows for the synthesis of various research findings to identify trends, offer theoretical insights, and provide recommendations on the development of ethical marketing within the digital landscape. Table 1.0 below presents 12 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2024 that explore the intersection of digital marketing and ethical advertising.

Table 1: Empirical Studies Used

S/No.	Author(s)	Predictor Variables	Relevance to the Present Study
1	Akseki, S. (2022)	Ethical principles in digital advertising	Examines ethical debates in online advertisements, highlighting issues similar to traditional media, and analyzes brand practices.
2	Famila, J. J. (2024)	Transparency and authenticity in digital marketing	Discusses ethical advertising in digital marketing, emphasizing principles and practices that navigate ethical dilemmas.

3	Belleme, J. (2024)	Ethical marketing tactics	Provides a comprehensive guide to ethical marketing practices, featuring insights from experts in marketing and communications.
4	Carson College of Business (2024)	AI in marketing and ethical considerations	Surveys American opinions on AI, misinformation, influencer marketing, and ethical marketing practices.
5	Liakos, S. (2024)	Ethical marketing strategies	Explores ethical marketing, emphasizing honesty, transparency, and responsibility in advertising practices.
6	Hemker, Herrando & Constantinides, (2021)	Ethical use of consumer data in digital marketing	Synthesizes empirical studies and theoretical frameworks on the ethical use of consumer data in digital marketing.
7	Duivenvoorde, B., & Goanta, C. (2023)	Digital advertising regulations	Discusses the impact of recent legislation on digital advertising practices and the importance of ethical compliance.
8	Ghanbarpour, T., Crosby, L., Johnson, M. D., & Gustafsson, A., (2024)	Corporate social responsibility in digital marketing	Investigates how incorporating ethical considerations in digital marketing strategies affects brand equity and consumer loyalty.
9	Kim, W., Ryoo, Y., Lee, S., & Lee, (2023)	Chatbot advertising as a double-edged sword: The roles of regulatory focus and privacy concerns	Explores the relationship between consumers' perceptions of ethical digital advertising and their purchase intentions.
10	Hemker, (2021)	The transformation of data marketing: how an ethical lens on consumer data	Examines the impact of ethical content creation on audience engagement and trust in digital marketing campaigns.

		collection shapes the future of marketing	
11	Patel, P., Bose, S., Joshi, D., & Bose, N., (2020)	Ethical challenges in influencer marketing	Analyzes ethical challenges in influencer marketing and their effects on consumer perception and brand image.
12	Chen, L. & Zhao, X. (2020)	Privacy concerns in digital advertising	Investigates how privacy concerns influence consumer behaviour and lead to ad avoidance in digital advertising.

Authors' Compilations (2025)

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study point to the importance of digital media played in influencing the move towards ethical communication campaigns, particularly in alerting the global market on the importance of the cardinal values of openness, genuineness and customer relevance. Authors such as Borchers and Enke (2022); Chong and Patwa (2023) proved that ethical practices including the accurate message of the advertisement, the proper use of data, and the presentation of information about the contracts with the influencers help to gain consumers' trust and develop brand loyalty. Also, these practices are useful in the emerging problem-solving in advertising that is categorized by fake and privacy invasive content (Alghamdi, 2020). As mentioned earlier, this global perspective complements trends in Nigeria where digital marketing is rapidly growing daily owing to enhanced interconnectivity and expanded access to 'Internet' and 'mobile devices.' However, the conventional ethical features of advertising in Nigeria are confronted with numerous difficulties because customers within the Nigeria market have different literacy levels and the concept of ethical ads is relatively new.

In Nigeria, the bodies that currently exist, and oversee the regulation of advertising and digital communications are the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). However, enforcement of the act is still a problem. These areas of risk in ethical considerations as misinformation, data privacy breach and nondisclosure especially in influencer marketing still transpire in the digital marketing (Reuille-Dupont, 2023).

Applying the results to Nigeria, the encouragement of all forms of advertising that revert to consumer transparency can help in boosting the confidence of the consumers and their trust in ethical global standards. For instance, ethical content creation as featured in a global analysis can address consumer cynicism in evolving Nigerian e-commerce, which is fueled by fake claim and data misuse sensitization (Arora, 2024). It is in light of this that the authorities of Nigeria need to improve the rates of ethical compliance and consumer protection laws for facilitating the social marketing within the expansionist of Nigeria's cyberspace.

The findings are also in alignment with the need for ethical practices in advertising for the purpose of enhancing social responsibility which is topical in Nigeria's socio-economic life. Research shows that there is a possibility of integrating CSR into digital marketing mainly with the aim of developing brand value and making companies to be in par with the society's expectation as highlighted by Smith and Johnson in 2023. And where social issues like poverty and unemployment are prevalent, ethical advertising if merged with CSR would solve consumer sensitivity towards brands in Nigeria and other developing countries (Adigun, 2021).

In addition, there is the problem of deficiency of legislation in regulating new trends in digital marketing like influencer marketing as well as the targeted advertisements. For instance, the recent actions by the ARCON towards trying to regulate influencer marketing align with global studies outputs that focused on transparency and disclosure specifically Belleme 2024. However, there is no wide legislation that complies with the data protection laws and guidelines for ethical digital advertising on the internet. Based on the best practices from across the globe, Nigeria adoption could be more stringent as is seen under the EU GDPR owed in digital advertising to protect the consumers.

The paper's results also show that the level of centralization dominates in digital marketing, which has the potential to increase the availability of information for consumers, as well as promote the informed decision-making of buyers. Pricing transparency, sourcing and product claims assertions helps a consumer to make an ethical decision (Akseki, 2022). This is especially applicable in Nigeria wherein digital media has emerged as an important avenue for interacting with the consumers because of the increasing significance of the e-establishments. Ethical advertisements shall enhance the bond between the brand and the consumer since sectors like fashion and foods

demand ethical practices in aspects like the use of sustainability, proper labor standards etc (Chong &Patwa, 2023).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper discussed the incorporation of ethical issues in digital marketing within Nigeria while recommending compliance with global standards. The findings include policy recommendation to increase transparency in the advertisement content, improving protection for data collects by firms, and integrating societal values inclining responsibility into ads. Nigeria today calls for overhauling of the existing institutional framework in order to capture more emerging trends as well as match with high ethical standards. There is need to enhance enforcement of ethical advertising and legal measures; improve on the transparency of the regulators; and build their capacity to regulate the advertisement. The regulatory authority in conjunction with marketers should stick to best practices that can open Nigeria markets for international collaborations since the various changes can be in tandem with international standards to inspire consumer confidence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided for the operators marketing industry in Nigeria as well as the regulating authorities:

- i. The Nigerian government, through agencies like ARCON and NCC must develop and apply modern policy frameworks to solve new ethical issues in digital marketing.
- ii. A training agenda should be set to ensure that regulators and marketing practitioners learn more on ethical principles in advertising. Seminar, training, and experience-sharing websites can assist the stakeholders to keep current with the changing global practices and practices these requirements with.
- iii. Consumers should be consciously informed on their rights and unfair and ethical advertisement. Awareness campaigns and technological savoir-faire programs can make consumers more conscientious in the detection of such vices and then report truly, restoring believability in digital marketing.

- iv. Brands operating in Nigeria should add CSR into their online promotional activities with the issues of sustainability, labor relations, and communal welfare. This approach is dear to the consumers and helps in attaining general developmental objectives such as the SDGs.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, K. W., & Snidal, D. (2021). Strengthening international regulation through transnational new governance: Overcoming the orchestration deficit. *In The spectrum of international institutions* (pp. 95-139). Routledge.
- Abdulquadri A.O. (2024) Adoption Of E-Marketing In Service Delivery Of Commercial Banks Products In Nigeria (Evidence From Guaranty Trust Holdings Company GTCO PLC). *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, 7(2); pp. 15 - 27; ISSN: 2682-6135
- Abioye, F. O. (2021). Impact of smart card readers on the credibility of the 2019 gubernatorial election in Ilorin-metropolis (Master's thesis, Kwara State University (Nigeria)).
- Accenture. (2022). Consumer attitudes towards sustainability and ethical consumption. *Accenture Research*.
- Adebisi, A. O. (2024). Investment In telecommunications infrastructure, unemployment and economic growth in Nigeria (Doctoral dissertation, Babcock University).
- Adelabu, O. T., Alade, M. O., Sanusi, B. O., & Oloyede, B. D. (2023). Audience perception of online advertising and product patronage in three LGAs in Lagos State. *Humanities, Management And Social Sciences*, 204.
- Adigun, R. (2021). CSR as a marketing strategy among manufacturing companies in Nigeria.
- Akseki, S. (2024). Ethical principles in digital advertising and sample analysis for brands. *Academic Social Resources Journal*, 7(42), 1083-1098.
- Alghamdi, M. (2020). Targeting mechanism and data mining: An exploratory study identifying challenges and solutions to programmatic advertising in relation to human rights, social justice, and ethics in digital media. Pepperdine University.

- Apampa, O. (2020). Social media movements: A data-driven analysis of gender issues, social advocacy, climate change and environmental communication on selected online social media platforms.
- Arora, P. (2024). From pessimism to promise: Lessons from the Global South on designing inclusive tech. MIT Press.
- Awotunde, M. O., Oyedele, O. O., & Adewale, A. R. (2024). Navigating the 21st century marketplace: the role of digital marketing in SME development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science*, 13(5).
- Baragiola, G., & Mauri, M. (2021). SDGs and the private sector: Unilever and P&G case studies.
- Belleme, J. (2024). 2024 Guide to Ethical Digital Marketing. <https://jbmediagroupllc.com/ethical-digital-marketing/>
- Borchers, N. S., & Enke, N. (2022). "I've never seen a client say: 'Tell the influencer not to label this as sponsored'": An exploration into influencer industry ethics. *Public relations review*, 48(5), 102235.
- Bruce, E., Shurong, Z., Ying, D., Yaqi, M., Amoah, J., & Egala, S. B. (2023). The Effect of Digital Marketing Adoption on SMEs Sustainable Growth: Empirical Evidence from Ghana. *Sustainability*, 15(6), 4760.
- Burr, C., & Floridi, L. (2020). The ethics of digital well-being: A multidisciplinary perspective. *Ethics of digital well-being: A multidisciplinary approach*, 1-29.
- Cambier, F., & Poncin, I. (2020). Inferring brand integrity from marketing communications: The effects of brand transparency signals in a consumer empowerment context. *Journal of Business Research*, 109, 260-270.
- Carson College of Business (2024) 2024 Report: Ethical Marketing. <https://business.wsu.edu/ethical-marketing-survey-2024/>
- Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). Digital marketing. Pearson uk.
- Chaffey, D., & Smith, P. R. (2022). Digital marketing excellence: planning, optimizing and integrating online marketing. Routledge.

- Chong, W. K., & Patwa, N. (2023). The value of integrity: Empowering SMEs with ethical marketing communication. *Sustainability*, 15(15), 11673.
- Christensen, H. B., Hail, L., & Leuz, C. (2021). Mandatory CSR and sustainability reporting: Economic analysis and literature review. *Review of accounting studies*, 26(3), 1176-1248.
- Coelho, R., Jayantilal, S., & Ferreira, J. J. (2023). The impact of social responsibility on corporate financial performance: A systematic literature review. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 30(4), 1535-1560.
- Cunningham, J., & Roberts, P. (2025). Will DE&I backlash affect advertising industry war on 'sneaky sexism'? The Australian
- Daud, N. M. @ H., Rameli, M. F. P., Man, N. C., & Aris, N. M. (2023). An Implementation of Islamic Marketing Ethics among Muslimpreneurs on Digital Marketing Via Facebook. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(9), 613–624.
- Davida, Z. (2021, May). Consumer personal data driven digital marketing. In international scientific conference “new challenges in economic and business development–2021: *Post-Crisis Economy*” proceedings, Latvia (pp. 150-159).
- Desai, V., & Vidyapeeth, B. (2019). Digital marketing: A review. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 5(5), 196-200.
- Dickinson-Delaporte, S., Mortimer, K., Kerr, G., Waller, D. S., & Kendrick, A. (2020). Power and responsibility: Advertising self-regulation and consumer protection in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 54(2), 675-700.
- Duivenvoorde, B., & Goanta, C. (2023). The regulation of digital advertising under the DSA: A critical assessment. *Computer Law & Security Review*, 51, 105870.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., ... & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International journal of information management*, 59, 102168.

- Effah, E. A., & Alomenu, C. (2021). 'Adverthics'—A Relationship Growing Sour. *IUP Journal of Brand Management*, 18(2), 50-63.
- Ejiogu, A., Ejiogu, C., & Ambituuni, A. (2019). The dark side of transparency: Does the Nigeria extractive industries transparency initiative help or hinder accountability and corruption control?. *The British Accounting Review*, 51(5), 100811.
- Ere, A. (2020). Digital surveillance and social justice in Nigeria: A study of new media regulations.
- European Commission. (2020). General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Retrieved from [ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection_en)
- Famila, M. J. J. (2024). Ethical Advertising in digital marketing: navigating principles and practice.
- Freeman, E., & By, R. T. (2022). Stakeholder capitalism and implications for how we think about leadership. *Journal of Change Management*, 22(1), 1-7.
- FTC. (2022). Advertising and Marketing on the Internet: Rules of the Road. Federal Trade Commission.
- Fulgoni, G. M. (2016). Fraud in digital advertising: A multibillion-dollar black hole: How marketers can minimize losses caused by bogus web traffic. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 56(2), 122-125.
- Garcia, M., & Rodriguez, L. (2021). Privacy Concerns and Ethical Digital Marketing: An Empirical Analysis. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 45, 101024.
- Gardner, T. A., Benzie, M., Börner, J., Dawkins, E., Fick, S., Garrett, R., ... & Wolvekamp, P. (2019). Transparency and sustainability in global commodity supply chains. *World Development*, 121, 163-177.
- Ghanbarpour, T., Crosby, L., Johnson, M. D., & Gustafsson, A. (2024). The influence of corporate social responsibility on stakeholders in different business contexts. *Journal of Service Research*, 27(1), 141-155.

- González-Padilla, P., Navalpotro, F. D., & Saura, J. R. (2024). Managing entrepreneurs' behavior personalities in digital environments: A review. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 20(1), 89-113.
- Granstedt, A. (2024). The past, present, and future of social media marketing ethics. *AMS Review*, 14, 278–296
- Guerrero, K. J. (2023). An analysis of TikTok's digital marketing capabilities and its effectiveness for brands and businesses across different industries.
- Hansen, A., & Bo Nielsen, K. (2023). Consumption, sustainability and everyday life (p. 387). Springer Nature.
- Hemker, S., Herrando, C., & Constantinides, E. (2021). The transformation of data marketing: how an ethical lens on consumer data collection shapes the future of marketing. *Sustainability*, 13(20), 11208.
- Hovenkamp, H. (2024). Federal antitrust policy: the law of competition and its practice.
- IAA. (2021). International Advertising Association Code of Conduct. *International Advertising Association*.
- Kawaf, F., & Dekel-Dachs, O. (Eds.). (2024). *Visual Methods in Marketing and Consumer Research*. Taylor & Francis.
- Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: the impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(3-4), 248-278.
- Kerchhoff, D. (2020). False advertising and consumer protection in South Africa.
- Kim, W., Ryoo, Y., Lee, S., & Lee, J. A. (2023). Chatbot advertising as a double-edged sword: The roles of regulatory focus and privacy concerns. *Journal of Advertising*, 52(4), 504-522.
- Kshetri, N., Dwivedi, Y. K., Davenport, T. H., & Panteli, N. (2023). Generative artificial intelligence in marketing: Applications, opportunities, challenges, and research agenda. *International Journal of Information Management*, 102716.

- Kujala, J., Sachs, S., Leinonen, H., Heikkinen, A., & Laude, D. (2022). Stakeholder engagement: Past, present, and future. *Business & Society*, 61(5), 1136-1196.
- Kumar, S., & Gupta, P. (2023). Ethical Challenges in Influencer Marketing: A Digital Perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 63(1), 23–35.
- Lee, H., & Kim, S. (2024). The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Digital Marketing Ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 169(2), 321–337.
- Liakos, S. (2024). Ethical Marketing Strategies | 2024 Ultimate Guide to Ethics in Business. <https://www.ddladvertising.com/ethical-marketing-guide-2024/>
- Lokulo-Sodipe, J. O. (2019). Drug counterfeiting and the right to health in Nigeria (Doctoral dissertation).
- Martinez, F., & Lopez, R. (2020). Digital Marketing Strategies and Ethical Implications: A Comparative Study. *International Journal of Digital Marketing*, 8(2), 99–115.
- NARC. (2022). National Advertising Regulatory Council: Advertising Guidelines. Retrieved from [narc.gov.ng](<https://www.narc.gov.ng>)
- National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). (2020). Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR). Retrieved from [nitda.gov.ng](<https://www.nitda.gov.ng>)
- Naveed, S. (2023). Role of marketing ethics for clients' satisfaction. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 3(2), 987-994.
- Nguyen, T. K., & Wang, Y. (2022). The Impact of Ethical Advertising on Brand Loyalty in the Digital Age. *Journal of Business Research*, 135, 381–390.
- Niu, Y., & Wang, C. L. (2016). Revised unique selling proposition: scale development, validation, and application. *Journal of promotion management*, 22(6), 874-896.
- ObinnaOmenugha, N. (2018). The impact of e-marketing tools on the growth of the Nigerian entertainment and media (E&M) industry: Possibilities and challenges.
- Ogbechie, R., & Oguntimehin Jr, O. J. (2024). Ethical issues in business. In business ethics in Africa, *Values, Profits and Responsibility* (pp. 61-83). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

- Ogbeide-Osaretin, E. N., & Ebhote, O. (2020). Does digital marketing enhance rural agricultural transformation in Nigeria? An empirical investigation. *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development*, 10(1), 450-462.
- Olatunji, R. W. (2018). Trends in advertising and cultures in Nigeria. *Communication Cultures in Africa*, 1(1), 54-76.
- Opia, J. E. (2020). Food fraud in Nigeria: challenges, risks and solutions.
- Owebor, K., Diemuodeke, E. O., Briggs, T. A., & Imran, M. (2021). Power Situation and renewable energy potentials in Nigeria—A case for integrated multi-generation technology. *Renewable energy*, 177, 773-796.
- Oxman, M., Larun, L., Gaxiola, G. P., Alsaïd, D., Qasim, A., Rose, C. J., ... & Oxman, A. D. (2021). Quality of information in news media reports about the effects of health interventions: systematic review and meta-analyses. *F1000Research*, 10.
- Pandey, N., Nayal, P., & Rathore, A. S. (2020). Digital marketing for B2B organizations: structured literature review and future research directions. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 35(7), 1191-1204.
- Patel, P., Bose, S., Joshi, D., & Bose, N. (2020). Leveraging natural language processing and machine learning algorithms for enhanced influencer marketing analytics. *Journal of AI ML Research*, 9(4).
- Pillay, S. (2023). A conceptual framework for online consumer decision-making in an emerging market (Doctoral dissertation, University of Johannesburg (South Africa)).
- Purnomo, Y. J. (2023). Digital marketing strategy to increase sales conversion on e-commerce platforms. *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN)*, 1(2), 54-62.
- Quesenberry, K. A. (2020). Social media strategy: Marketing, advertising, and public relations in the consumer revolution. *Rowman & Littlefield*.
- Reuille-Dupont, J. (2023). The power of algorithms and big data: A marketing perspective on consumer manipulation in business.

- Roberts, A. J. (2020). False influencing. *Geo. LJ*, 109, 81.
- Shankar, V., Grewal, D., Sunder, S., Fossen, B., Peters, K., & Agarwal, A. (2022). Digital marketing communication in global marketplaces: A review of extant research, future directions, and potential approaches. *International Journal of research in Marketing*, 39(2), 541-565.
- Siddaway, A. P., Wood, A. M., & Hedges, L. V. (2019). How to do a systematic review: a best practice guide for conducting and reporting narrative reviews, meta-analyses, and meta-syntheses. *Annual review of psychology*, 70(1), 747-770.
- Sircar, A., Yadav, K., Rayavarapu, K., Bist, N., & Oza, H. (2021). Application of machine learning and artificial intelligence in oil and gas industry. *Petroleum Research*, 6(4), 379-391.
- Smith, J., & Johnson, L. (2021). Consumer Perceptions of Ethical Digital Marketing Practices. *Journal of Marketing Ethics*, 12(3), 145–162.
- Statista. (2022). Mobile Internet Usage in Nigeria. *Statista Reports*.
- Tafesse, W., & Wien, A. (2018). Using message strategy to drive consumer behavioral engagement on social media. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 35(3), 241-253.
- Thomas, P. N. (2023). Platform regulation: Exemplars, approaches, and solutions. *Oxford University Press*.
- Unilever. (2021). Sustainable Living Plan. Retrieved from [unilever.com](<https://www.unilever.com>)
- Vitalis, P. O., Onyejelem, T. E., & Okuneye, A. P. (2023). Understanding advertising in the era of social media. *Information System and Smart City*, 3(1), 502-502.
- Vojković, G., Milenković, M., & Katulić, T. (2020). Iot and smart home data breach risks from the perspective of data protection and information security law. *Business Systems Research: International journal of the Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy*, 11(3), 167-185.

- Wellman, M. L., Stoldt, R., Tully, M., & Ekdale, B. (2020). Ethics of authenticity: Social media influencers and the production of sponsored content. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 35(2), 68-82.
- WFA. (2022). World Federation of Advertisers Code of Conduct. World Federation of Advertisers.
- Wijekoon, R., & Sabri, M. F. (2021). Determinants that influence green product purchase intention and behavior: A literature review and guiding framework. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 6219.
- Willis, L. E. (2020). Deception by design. *Harv. JL & Tech.*, 34, 115.