

# MORAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN ADVERTISING

**Joseph Nnaemeka Chukwuma, University of Nigeria**

**Hilary Chimezie Ngwoke, University of Nigeria**

## ABSTRACT

*The rightness and wrongness of human act (actus humanus) as against the act of man or of animals has always been a debatable issue among moral philosophers. This is because every human acts and choices are supposedly products of reasoned intra-personal deliberation; as man is conceived as a thinking being whose unique and primary essence is rationality. Rationality which constitutes the basis for human actions also forms the basis for accruing responsibility to his action, and by extension, necessitates the subjection of these act to the scrutiny of moral philosophy whose academic domain is concerned with the consideration of the wrongness and rightness of human acts. It is against this backdrop that advertisement as a particular case of human act cannot be completely exonerated from the censorship of moral validation. Hence, the ground for investigating into the ethical issue bordering on the phenomenon of advertisement with the aim of unraveling its areas of wrongness and rightness. In order to achieve this feat, information will be sourced and sought from the library and the internet, and the method of critical analysis and evaluation will be adopted.*

**Keywords:** Morality, Ethics, Issues, Advertising.

## INTRODUCTION

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.

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.

Advertising is a profession in which a body of experts is involved in the conceptualization, planning, creating, packaging and placing of advertisements on the media. Advertising: is a form of communication intended to persuade its viewers, readers or listeners to take some action. It is an exciting, dynamic, and challenging enterprise. It is a powerful means of commercial communication which links the supply and demand sides altogether. It plays a vital role in informing consumers about the products and services. Hence, if the advertisement does not fulfill the ethical aspects (like loyalty, truth, and responsibility), it will have negative impact on its audiences.

Advertising is an instance of human acts which ethics is concerned with. It is a practice in the business domain which aims at promoting the sales of goods and services. It is a practice that has in an alarming rate, been fraught with so many unethical practices ranging from insincerity to dubious tendencies among business men and women. It is therefore the primary thrust of this work as an evaluative exercise in specifically business ethics; to explore into the exigencies and practices of advertising with the aim of exposing its intricacies and revealing its areas of moral merits and demerits.

The first part of this research work embodies the introduction; the second part highlights different views of thinkers on the ethical status of advertising; the third part conceptualizes the term advertising by defining it and discussing its elements and types; while the fourth and last part discusses the ethical implications of advertising by first putting advertising in-perspective of ethical theories; and then sifting out pertinent issues which emerge with the practice of advertisement.

These days, it is obvious to watch and listen to a significant number of advertisements both on print and broadcast media in our society. The broadcast media are more likely to have power in grabbing audiences' attention because of their images, audio and video clips. Some of these advertisement clips are likely to mislead consumers and affect purchase decisions, cause distrust, regret and panic buying. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest over the issue of how advertising reflects, reinforces and affects societal values. Some say advertising is a wise teacher providing useful and relevant information; others think it is overly intrusive. This research work sets to address the ethical dilemma involved in determining the rightness and wrongness of advertising. The primary purpose of this work is to philosophically investigate into the moral issues in advertising and its implications for the consumers of goods and services. Given the fact that advertising is a social reality, this research work aims at bringing to fore, the basic emerging social challenges and problems caused by advertising in the business world. It also seeks to judge and validate advertisement, from the perspective of some selected ethical theories.

The significance of this research work for the society cannot be overemphasized as it will serve the purpose of a theoretical blueprint where ethical based guidelines will be provided for the key role players in the business domain. For the sellers and advertisers, this work will help draw their attention to the need for considering the ethical implications of what they do while advertising in order to avoid conflict and violence in the business environments. For the consumers of goods and services, this research work will serve the function of an eye opener to the manipulative techniques and approaches of sellers and advertisers in order to escape instances of regrets and panick buying. For regulatory bodies saddled with the duty of making laws and professional ethical regulations for advertising and business institution, this work will serve as a frame of reference for laws and ethical regulations they make. This work is also contribution to literatures on the ethical implication of advertisement. Hence it will also serve as a point of reference for researchers who seek to investigate into the ethical issues that emerge in the practice of advertisement. This research work is limited to discussions of issues of ethical relevance and implication in advertising. The method of critical exposition, analysis and evaluation would be employed to determine instances where advertisement could either be ethical or not ethical. To achieve this feet, information will be sourced from the internet and library.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

So many postulations have been made by moral philosophers on what constitutes the moral status of advertisement as a controversial social issue that affects men as members of the society.

It is therefore necessary to take a cursory look at these postulations. In his comments which resulted from a critical analysis of the moral issues involved in advertising, De George in his book experiencing “*ethics*”, argues that since advertising is a transaction between a buyer and a seller, both parties are morally bounded to have adequate and appropriate information about the product (De-George, 1982).

This is an emphasis on the moral obligation to provide proper information about the product being advertised. The seller should also see it as a point of duty to acquire good knowledge of the product so as to enable him orientate the buyers on the merits and demerits of products advertised. It is only when buyers buy products without being informed that advertising is rendered morally bad. De George likens business transactions to contracts where both parties are aware of the content of the contract. So long as there is awareness and consent, advertising is morally permissible and justified since both parties enter into the transaction willingly and without coercion (De-George, 1982).

However, in a sharp disagreement with De George, Nicholas Kalder in his book “*economic aspects of advertisement*”; argues on the basis of intents of the sponsors of advertisement, noting that in the world of commodities, the authors write their own reviews (Kalder, 1966). He is of the opinion that by the virtue of the fact that advertisers, in advertising, manipulate and determine the consumer's choice and course of action; hence, advertising is unethical. From this view, advertising distorts the faculty of reasoning and the activities of genuine ratiocination; it is in this respect morally wrong because it interfaces with the proper functioning of man's rationality; by employing manipulative psychological tools to persuade their audience into making choices they would not ordinarily make.

In concurrence with Nicholas, Vaclav in his book; *The Economic Analysis and Comparison*, stresses on the consumer's sovereignty. He noted that communication between consumers and the production sector can be in the nature of true dialogue only if it is a dialogue between equals. The possibility of withholding or distorting information to which the less informed party does not have direct access is precisely where the problem begins (Vaclave, 1977). For him, advertisement does not guarantee equal access to information on the product as consumers are being positioned as objects of manipulation by the advertisers. This manipulation is orchestrated in the form of misinformation and poor orientation which is a violation of the consumer's right to information about the product; hence, unethical. It is also against this backdrop that the pastoral instruction on the means of communication declared thus; but serious harm can be done if advertising and commercial pressure become so irresponsible that communities seeking to rise from poverty to a reasonable standard of living are persuaded to seek progress by satisfying wants that have been created artificially (Okpara, 2001).

Emeka Okpara advanced the above view by digging out its psychological undertone in his book “*Consumer Behaviour: A Psychological Approach*”, where he opined that modern advertising techniques have subtly made us want things we do not really need or that may even hurt us. Misleading promises in print and on television have led consumers to waste money and jeopardize their health (Okpara, 2001). Advertising for Okpara has the implication of misleading

the consumers in such a way that they make wrong choices and by extension, inflict harm on themselves.

Bobbitt (2020) in his article *Ethical Issues in Advertising*, a contribution he made in *Uche Journal of philosophy Department of the University of Nigeria*, noted that (Bobbitt, 2020), a seemingly innocuous effect of advertising is the stimulation of desire and the creation of artificial wants. Man from the economist's point of view is characterized by enormous and insatiable needs and desires but with scarce means of actualizing these needs. The moral evil of advertising for Bobbitt lies in its high propensity to arouse these needs in man without providing a commensurate means of meeting these needs. It is on this ground that he condemns advertisement thus to deliberately stimulate desires and to create artificial want without providing means of satisfying the wants is an unfair manipulation and exploitation of the benighted consumers (Bobbitt, 2020). This means therefore, that advertising is morally evil because it only advances the course of the advertisers which is profit making; rather than ensuring the satisfaction of the consumers.

Amoako in his article, "*ethics in advertising*" conceives advertising as a business institution of its own that fetches finances for those involved in it, as they depend on it to make their ends meet. Advertising today is a huge business and many industries (TV, Newspaper, magazine etc.) Depend on the inflow of money it brings for their survival (Amoako, 2012). He however, condemned advertising on the basis that it can celebrate and encourage materialism, and consumption, stereotype and drive us to purchase meaningless and unfulfilling items, take advantage of children, manipulate our behaviour, exploit sex to sell, and generally contribute to the downfall of our social system. Given these negative effects of advertising, Amaoka does not seek for a total abolishment of advertising because of its good sides of strengthening the economy both at the microsmic and mascrosmic level. In order to create a balance, given both it good and bad sides, he advocates for self regulation on the side of the advertisers. In order to ensure this self regulation, the society must play a vital role, which is that, the cultural values of the target audience must be factored into advertising campaigns. African governments and regulatory bodies must educate the public on the ethical issues and challenges involved in advertising.

Reichert in his book, "*Advertising*", accuses advertisement of using its tempting tool of persuasion to input a sense of materialism in consumers. He argues along this line when he noted that advertising is credited with helping to accelerate the pace at which luxurious necessities are demanded (Reichart, 1978).

### **Definition of Advertising**

Advertising has variously been defined differently by different scholars. From the etymological dimension, it comes from the Latin word "*advertere*" meaning "*to turn the minds towards*". Thus, by virtue of its etymology, advertising is a persuasive communication which can be used to turn the minds of consumers towards a product, service, idea, movement, opinion, course etc. Advertising can also be used to get people to consume less of a particular product or service (demarketing).

Ogbodo, in the book titled *Advertising in Nigeria*, noted that advertising is the printed, written or pictured representation of a person, product or services, openly sponsored by the advertiser and at his expense; for the purpose of influencing sales, use votes or endorsement

(Ogbodo, 1990). It then means that advertising could either be rendered in a picture form, written or spoken words; the most important factored element is that it is sponsored with the intention of influencing actions. However, Ogbodo in his definition did not identify the place of electronic media as a means of advertising.

G.B. Gills views advertising as a non-personal communication directed at target audience through various media in order to preserve and promote products, services and ideas. The cost of media space, time and advertisement production is borne by the sponsor or sponsors (Gill's, 1976). Gills' definition recognizes the fact that advertising could be conveyed via different media. It also emphasizes the target audience and its non-personal nature. That is to say that the information contained in the advertisement is not for the advertiser's personal consumption; rather it is for the target audience. In an attempt to give a concise and simple definition of advertising, while highlighting its various channels of procedures, Russell and Lane noted that advertising is a method of delivering a message from a sponsor through an impersonal medium to many people (Russell & Lane, 1990).

Daniel Starch conceived advertising as one of the categories of mass communication. He is of the opinion that advertising is the paid form of mass communication designed to influence people to favour a product in order to induce them to buy it (Daniel, 1966). While Richard De George conceived it as information and sales too. He puts it thus; advertising must inform potential buyers that the product is available, what it does and how it might be a product they wanted or needed (Richard & Avrum, 1973). He adds further that advertising is part of the process of selling one's product since any side is a transaction between a buyer and a seller.

Advertising is a form of communication radiating the particular goal of influencing and turning the attention of a buyer either away or towards a particular product or service. It is noteworthy to state that advertising is not compulsive in nature, rather it tends to persuade. Also, it is also non-personal; meaning that it seeks to address its target audience on an official and business bases.

## Elements of Advertisement

Elements of advertisement are those factors that characterize any communication as an advertisement. These elements are; non-personal communication, identified sponsor, media and persuasiveness.

**Non-personal communication:** Advertising is non-personal because it does not involve a direct interaction or contact with the consumer. There are two ways of selling or marketing a product; it is either personal selling or non-personal selling. In personal selling, there is a direct interaction between the seller and the buyer, while in non-personal selling, there is no direct contact or interaction as it is done through a means. As a form of communication, advertising could either be verbal or non verbal. It is verbal when it employs speech sounds to pass information across; while it is nonverbal when pictures and body gestures are employed. The negative implication of advertisement as a non-personal form of communication is that it technically creates a lacuna between the seller and the buyer of the product in such a way that sellers are not availed with ample time to discuss in details, the whole constituent of their product. Also, buyers are denied the opportunity to ask questions, get answers, and examine evidence for or against purchase owing to the involvement of middle men such as the media and the advertisers.

**Identified sponsor:** The identified sponsor or sponsors refer to the individuals or group, putting out the advertisement. The advertisers, in the course of advertising, also inform the audience about the sponsors. It is legally required that a sponsor make his or herself known to the consumers of a product so that the consumers are not misled or left in the dark. Also, it makes good sense as it will prevent the consumer from believing a particular product being advertised is for competitors; thus making waste of effort, time, creativity and money put into making and placing the advertisement. The sponsor of a product is also responsible for the payment of all cost incurred by the advertisers. Sponsors pay for the cost of created time and space in the media. Payment as a component of advertisement has the implication of skyrocketing the prices of products and services as these sponsors still need to make profits out of their products.

**Media:** The media in advertisement serve as the means or channels of communication invented by advertisers for use. It comprises every means through which ideas about a product or services are communicated in a non-personal manner from one person or group to another. These can be broadly categorized into two namely; the print media and the electronic media. The print media encompasses the news papers, the magazines, bill boards, sandwich, skywriting and posters; while the electronic media includes radio, television etc.

**Persuasiveness:** Persuasiveness stands to be an indispensable component of advertising and it forms the basis for the invitation of ethics into advertising. The fundamental purpose of advertising is to identify and differentiate one product from another in order to influence the consumer towards buying a particular product in preference to another. Persuasion in advertising serves the purpose of turning the attention of a consumer towards a product or service in a non-coercive manner.

## **Types of Advertising**

Advertising can be broadly classified in accordance to how they are carried out. It could either be product oriented, image oriented, advocacy oriented or public service oriented. A product oriented advertisement seeks to promote a particular product, idea or services. It is the most common type of advertisement. An example of a product oriented advertisement is an advertisement on African Independence Television; promoting Dangote cement. In addition to providing information about a product, this type of advertisement can draw comparison either directly or indirectly between the product being advertised and other products of the same nature, produced by competitors.

Image oriented advertising places much emphasis on the institution, organization or company as a whole, rather than a particular product of such company or organization. It is aimed at increasing awareness and enhancing the reputation of the company by prioritizing its brand prestige. An example of this type of advertising is an advertisement which seeks to promote the activities and operations of Dangote group instead of a particular product produced by Dangote group for instance; cement. It is a case of selling the name and not basically the product; and has the implication of making people buy products on the ground that it comes from a particular brand; rather than considering the effectiveness of the product.

Advocacy oriented advertisement on the other hand, seeks to advocate a course as the name implied. It is a form of advertisement which focuses on issues of public interest, influence public opinion or address social and political challenges. Non-Governmental and Non-Profit

organizations adopt this kind of advertisement sometimes to advocate against the violation of certain human rights.

Public service advertisement refers to advertisements which are sometimes sponsored by the community or government and which are created to promote and improve public welfare.

### **Moral and Ethical Statues of Advertisement: Advertisement and Ethical Theories**

Some theories have been projected by moral philosophers on what constitutes a good or bad act. This section sets to discuss some of these theories especially to the extent at which they have bearing on the act of advertising, in order to unravel areas in which they either justify or crucify advertising. The theories to be briefly discussed are the contractualists' ethical theory, the utilitarian ethical theory and the deontologist's ethical theory.

#### **Advertisement and the Contractualists Ethical Theory**

The contractualists' ethical theory conceives right and wrong, good and bad as functions of an agreement. That is to say that an action is not adjudged to be inherently bad or good; rather, it is the extent at which such action conform to a consented and a mutually agreed upon conditions and rules which spells out how such actions should be done that confers rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness on it. It is believed that men are rational beings who are constantly conscious of that which benefits them especially in a society where their needs are enormous but the means to satisfy these needs are scarce. In order to avoid unhealthy struggle and scramble for these scarce resources and as a matter of necessity, preserve their lives and satisfy some of these needs; men freely and with their consent, enter into a contract.

Advertisement when discussed within this context radiates some elements of a contract. Men in order to satisfy their needs of shelter, food, good health etc., proceed to the competitive market to purchase advertise goods. It is at that point of purchase that an assumed contract takes place. The consumer buys the product on the basis that its contents can satisfy the needs for which the product was bought; while the seller releases the product on the basis that the money paid by the buyer can satisfy the need for which the product was sold. It becomes morally wrong when at the long run, it is discovered that what was advertised as the content of the product and which informed the contract; is not the actual content of the product. In this case, the condition which constitutes the basis for the contract was not met. Hence the act becomes morally evil.

#### **Advertising and Utilitarian Ethical Theory**

The utilitarian theory of morality is a consequentialist theory of morality which emphasizes the result of an action as against the motive behind such action. For them, the wrongness or rightness of an action lies in the effect it produces rather than the actual intention. It is a purpose oriented ethical theory whose implication, is the separation of the rightness and wrongness of an action from the goodness and badness of the acting agent.

Utilitarianism as an ethical theory upholds the principle of utility; that is to say that actions are adjudged right or wrong to the extent that they produce happiness or pleasure. The rightness and wrongness of an action is determined by its propensity to generate a higher number of pleasure or happiness over pain or unhappiness. When an action prevents people from

suffering any setbacks and promotes their welfare or well being, it explains very well and adheres completely to the utilitarian concept.

It therefore implies that advertisement from a utilitarian point of view is not inherently evil; rather it is when it produces evil consequences that it can be adjudged evil. However, it could be adjudged well if it guarantees less pain, less sorrow, less loss, less regret, less anger, less suffering for the highest number of consumers.

### **Advertising and the Deontologists Ethical Theory**

As against the utilitarian consequentialist ethical approach, the deontologists theory is a duty-based, non-consequentialists ethical theory which emphasizes certain moral precepts recognized by reason, irrespective of varying situations. It is a theory that emphasizes duty over and above value. For this view, the consequence of an action does not confer rightness or wrongness; rather it is the sense of duty, resident in a good will. Nothing can possibly conceive in the world or even out of it, which can be called well without qualification, except a good will (Areji, 2009). W.D. Ross calls this duty a prima-facie duty, that is, actions which are obligatory and which in their very nature must be done whether they produce good or bad irrespective of who it is done to. Kant, a renowned proponent of the deontologists view postulates that the moral worth of an action is wholly dependent on its being done from duty. Fletcher gives a situationist version of this theory by emphasizes that good actions are those action done from the duty of love.

Advertising from a deontologist view point can only be adjudged good only when it is done from the duty of love for the good of the consumers no matter who is involved. Advertisers should also ensure that the driving force behind advertising is not merely for profit but also for humanity sake. It is therefore morally wrong if the intentions of advertisers contradicts the prima-facie duty of ensuring that good be done and evil avoided; that truth be told, promises kept, the love of the good of the consumers upheld as they should be treated not as a means to only the end of profit making but as ends in themselves.

### **Some Ethical Issues in Advertising**

This section identifies some debatable ethical issues embedded in advertising. For the purpose of this work, the issues to be addressed are; the issues of alienation, truth telling, deception, the dignity of the human person and slander.

### **Advertising and Alienation**

The major opponents of the practice of alienation throughout the history of moral philosophy are the Marxist school of thought. The Marxists had condemned the capitalist's exploitative social, political and economic practice on the basis that they promote alienation. For the Marxists, the workers in a capitalist society are psychologically estranged and denied access to the rightful management and control of the output of their labor and it's attending profits.

As an ethical issue, alienation is a mental separation, a psychological estrangement and a feeling of denial of access to knowledge of that which rightfully ought to be accessed or known. It is centrally the idea of something being separated from or strange to something else



(Blackburn, 2016). Any act done to directly or indirectly deny an individual access to knowledge or idea of something to which it is his or her right to know amounts to alienation which is immoral.

Advertising as a non-personal communication which employs the use of various media in the dissemination of its message radiates some elements of alienation. As a non-personal endeavor, does not provide an avenue for interaction in the form of questioning and answering between buyers and sellers. It does not avail the seller ample time to discuss in detail, everything about the product being sold. Also, it denies the consumer the opportunity to ask questions, get answers, and examine evidences for or against the purchase as there is a psychological gap between the owners of the products being advertised and the consumers of such products due to the involvement of middle men such as the media and the advertisers in the whole process. By implication, it denies the consumers his right to adequate information about the product to be bought; and information about the seller of the product. It also denies the seller, access to adequate knowledge of the buyers of his product. Hence, advertising being coated with this moral inadequacy becomes morally wrong given its tendency to create epistemological cum psychological gap between buyers and sellers.

### **Advertising and Truth Telling**

One major controversial issue among philosophers, especially epistemologists has always been the issue of what constitutes truth. A school of thought known as the correspondence theory of truth had argued that truth is an agreement between the idea in the mind and objects or events outside the mind. Another school of thought known as the coherence theory of truth hold the view that a statement is true only if it displays an evidence of coherence with other set of propositions; while a third group known as the pragmatic theory of truth holds that truth is that which is practicable and produces good result.

Within the context of this discussion it will be proper to conceive truth telling as the quality of stating things the way they truly are. A truth statement report thing the way they are; conversely, a false or half- truth statement distort fact and paints events or objects the way they are not. Advertisement communicates by reporting, describing and narrating to consumers, the nature, contents and makers of a product with the goal of making this consumers purchase these products.

Truth telling as a sensitive issue in ethics is no doubt a pertinent issue to be considered in advertising, given the fact that a lot of the time, it has been fraught with either half-truth or total lack of truth all in an effort to make people buy sold products. Advertisement as a means of communicating information about a product to the consumers is made possible with the instrumentality of language which is capable of conveying both truth and falsity. Advertising is certified morally right when it gives adequate and exact information about the content and nature of a product to the consumers. That is to say that, it does not in any way, deliberately withhold any information whether good or bad from consumers and buyers of a product. Anything short of or in contrary to this, amounts to an immoral act; hence, ethically wrong.

The profession of advertising permits the use of figurative to convey their message; it however, does not permit the use of these figurative to make deliberate false claims about their products even when they are aware of the implications of such false claims. False claims have the implication of misleading potential consumers into buying products they would regret ever

buying; by extension, purchasing products out of false conviction may cause regrets, sorrow, pain and conflict in the society. However, not all advertising is baked with half-truth or false conviction; some advertisers especially those with a good doze of morality still display a great sense of sincerity while advertising their goods or services.

### **Advertising and Deception**

Deception is an instance of action fabricated to trick, mislead or delude someone into making decisions or taking actions he or she would ordinarily not make; it is a purposeful and deliberate plan to twist fact with the aim of achieving a motive. Deception does not necessarily need be a lie or false statement; it could be a manipulation of facts and truth in such a way that such facts and truths are not really the way they seem but a scheme directed towards the achievement of some kind of ulterior business ends. An advertisement may omit important information; it claims may be technically true but does not include information which a reasonable person would consider relevant. For example, a radio advertisement for malt drink would include sugar as its component but would not clearly specify the quantity of such sugar.

Deception in advertising refers to a manufacturer's use of confusing, misleading or blatantly false statements when promoting a product. This could be done through hidden fees or the use of surcharges. It implies that the manufacturer charges extra fees beyond the advertised price for a product or services. It could also be done to mislead consumers on price and availability in such a way that an advertiser makes a particular claim about the price and availability of a product with no intention of actually selling at that claimed price. When consumers respond to such advertisement, the seller exploits their interest by marketing a more expensive available product or at a different price higher than was advertised.

Also, advertisers make claims about quality, origin, quantity or content which cannot be substantiated. For example, an advertisement may claim a product was made in France while it was actually made in Nigeria; an advertisement is deceptive if it implies that a product or services serves the purpose it is not adequately designed for by the manufacturers or if the product has defect in quality and or inadequacy in quantity which are attributed to inordinate reasons not fully disclosed.

Deception in advertisement takes place not only via sentences or propositions, but also via pictures, juxtaposition of objects, gestures, signs and symbols. It has the implication of trading on a background of empty expectations and; eliciting thoughtless reactions and decisions; and arousing false believe and regrets. These implications which constitute the bases for its moral unacceptability could result to the violation of trust of consumers and destruction of working relationships.

### **Advertising and the Dignity of the Human Person**

The ethical issue of the dignity of the human person was brought to limelight in the ethical writings of Immanuel Kant who prescribed that in acting or making decisions, men should ensure that they treat humanity not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. The basic moral principle for all men should be that which can be universalize; implying that we shall also be comfortable when the standard of action we adopt towards others are inversely used against us.

Confucius had prior to Kant, drew attention to the need to consider humanity in every of one's dealing with others in his proposal of the doctrine of reciprocity where he postulated that human acts towards other humans must not distort or violate that which is intrinsic to human as humans. To be able to judge of others by what is nearby in ourselves, that is what we call the art of humaneness (Kessinger, 2004). W.D. Rose identified this obligation acting men owe to humanity as a prima-facie duty; Fletcher on his part termed this prima-facie duty as love; implying that it is our duty always and everywhere to be guided by a sense of love in our dealings towards others.

When placed under the scrutiny of the above ethical condition, advertisement could be condemned on the basis that some of the time, it does not put into consideration, the dignity of the human person; as in most cases, the human person who also doubles as the buyers of advertised products are objectified as means to profit making rather than as human who should be served and whose needs should be satisfied first before considerations about profits are made.

It is a basic ethical requirement that the freedom of the human person to make a responsible choice be respected. However, this moral right is being violated if the human lower inclinations are exploited or his ability to reflect and choose manipulated and compromised. Advertising could toe an unethical path either by content such as puffery and false claims; or by the impact it seeks to make on the consumers such as; its appeal to vanity, envy, greed lust and artificial needs. Advertising uses its persuasive technique to manipulate and exploit human weakness and lure buyers into buying product which its producers might in some cases, not risk to consume; this of course amounts to man's inhumanity to man; a derail from the ethical prima-facie duty of love as proposed by Fletcher; and of reciprocity as was proposed by Confucius.

For an advertisement to be certified ethical it should guarantee the respect for the dignity of the human person; treat humans not as objects viewed as numbers to be delivered, but as human beings to be served. Hence, the measure and end of all advertising should be the human person.

### **Advertising and Slander**

Slander is a term both in the realm of law and of morality that refers to the act of inflicting harm and casting aspersion on the reputation of another. As a form of character assassination and defamation, it is the act of maligning an individual or group either by fabricating or by highlighting the flaw, inadequacies and other bad sides of the individual for the purpose of disfiguring him and eclipsing his good personality.

Advertising is both a consequence and a bye-product of a competitive business world where the fittest especially in terms of popularity among customers survives and booms. This competitive atmosphere which characterizes the business world makes it necessary for the engagement of the services of advertising as a tool for promoting and popularizing companies' images.

However, the activities of advertising are sometimes fraught with slanderous statements in an attempt to undermine and deface the brand image of their clients' competitors. This they do by castigating competitors' products and dissuading buyers from looking the way of such products. Also, slander can be subtly perpetrated through inconsistent comparison where an item is compared with many others but only compared with each on the attribute where it wins; leaving the false impression that it is the best of all products.

Slanderous advertising is unethical because it has the implication of destroying the images of products which ordinarily are not detrimental to the health and life of consumers; with its dissuasive consequence and attribute, it could blind the consumers from making purchase consideration of products that are of genuine necessity to their healthy and happy living.

Having x-rayed through the various ethical issues in advertising, it becomes necessary at this point to weigh the practice of advertising on the scale of morality to determine its moral statues and to render a verdict on its moral worth.

Advertising has been commended for serving as a means through which information about good moral values are disseminated to the audience; it serves as an enabling ground for religious leaders to pass messages about chastity, sacrifice, peace, humility, love and benevolence; across to their congregation. This has the advantageous implication of eradicating in their listeners, the vices of pride hatred and greed.

In addition to the above, advertising provide the governments of societies, an avenue to promote moral virtues of tolerance, transparency and justice among its citizens; thereby, checking cases of intolerance, corruption and injustice with its attending implication of distorting the societal moral order, engendering war and genocide. Human rights activists also seize the opportunity advertising avails to orientate the people on the basic duty to enthrone ensure and guarantee the protection of the human rights of every other citizen.

Within the ambit of the business world, the role of advertising cannot be over-emphasized as it provides the required platform for unraveling not only information about a product but also about the nature and use of such products to potential users. This is against the backdrops that it will be unethical to denial buyer's access to information about the nature, use effect and defects of the product they intend using. As a matter of fact, it has the positive moral implication of addressing puzzles, perplexities and ignorance on the side of the consumers about these products. Political parties especially in a competitive multiparty political society, sell their party policies and manifestoes to the electorate via advertisement; although if not properly checked, it could sometimes be masked with propaganda which is a tool for deception.

## CONCLUSION

The axe of condemnation will not fail to fall on advertising on the basis that even though it aids the provision of information about products, it does not give producers ample time to discuss in details about their product; hence, breeding alienation. Also, it has been accused of generating tension, distrust and conflict in the business environment as buyers get disappointed at the point of discovering differences between what was advertised as the content of bought products and the actual content and use of such products due to the falsity and deceptive nature of such advertising.

Advertising as characterized by capitalist's tendencies and with its profits motivated orientations has the moral implication of undermining the dignity of the human person; as the human person is treated not as ends in themselves but as means to the end of profit making. Consequence upon this profit motivated orientation, is the denting of the images and reputations of competitors through the use if slanderous statement.

Given the above evaluation, and weighed pros and cons of advertising, it is lucid that advertising is not inherently evil; rather, it is the way advertisers go about it that determine the extent at which the status of good or evil can be conferred on it.

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