

Social Media and Advertisement Ethics: Assessing Compliance of Herbal Medicine by Instagram in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine ethical aspects of advertising herbal medicine on Instagram pages among consumers in Tanzania and to specifically assess Instagram's advertisers compliance with advertisement ethics. Carried out in Nyamagana District of Mwanza Region between May 2021 and September 2022, the study applied mixed methods involving both the purposive and convenience sampling procedures that guided selection of respondents. In-depth interviews were initially carried out for eight (8) respondents before a structured survey questionnaire was subjected to 120 respondents out of which 100 (83%) were answered and returned for analysis. Collected data was analyzed using both *thematic* and *descriptive statistical* analysis. Findings suggest Instagram advertisements of herbal medicine in Tanzania hardly comply with ethical advertisement guidelines and considerations. There is a lot of manipulated and fabricated information in most herbal medicine adverts on Instagram pages that jeopardize and endanger the lives of consumers in danger.

Keywords: Social Media, Media Ethics, Herbal Medicine, Advertising,

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Introduction

Advertisement is a key marketing unit trusted as means of building the image and brand of products of an organization. Advertisement aims at convincing, encouraging and persuading customers to buy products and services of an organization. It is a field resulting from many years of capitalism beginning from ancient empires. The Egypt Empire used papyrus to promote slave sales while the Babylon Empire used dirty splits inscriptions about shoemakers, clerks and salesmen and the Roman Empire the album and libellous to promote self-interests. Media in these empires dealt with edicts, laws, promotions of gladiators' threats and fights, possession sales, show programs, and other things using posters, papyrus, and a board of blanched walls (Nichols, 2013).

Advertisement in the printing era of the Middle Ages became more simplified as tailors and millers used pictures to convey messages about their trade including sales of boots, suits and wines for people who could not read (Brown, 1997).

The Gazette produced by Benjamin Franklin, is the earliest American newspaper in 1704 to promote. *The Spectator* by Joseph Addison and Richard Steel in England followed by publishing advertisements preferred by the nobility and high class (O'Barr & William, 1996). China took on advertisement in the 19th century following technological advancements which allowed mass production of soaps, cloths and other materials, necessitating manufacturers to find other means of communicating with customers they could no longer meet personally and easily. Newspapers dominated advertisements in this period.

By 1836, *La Press* which was a French newspaper included paid advertisements for the first time. Then in the 1900s, advertising agencies became a trail of planning and creativity, and then advertisement was established as a profession. The first agency brokers for advertising space in newspapers were N.W. Ayer and Son. N.Y Ayer was opened in 1869 and was located in Philadelphia; it is known as the foremost advertising plan created for Gillette (razor blades). During the 20th century, the field of advertisement became a full-fledged industry and agencies developed. The history of advertisement development is closely associated with the periods of rapid urbanization, massive immigration, and labour unrest that experienced abuse of capitalism, motion pictures, mass culture, and the first feminist movement (suffrage).

During World War I, advertising turned out to be an instrument of direct social relations targeted to educate the public on war-related matters, promote sales of war bonds and to persuade through electronic mass media. During the World War Two the global economy globally turned to manufacturing of war goods with the American government forming the first the War Advertising Council which involved advertising agencies, publicists, and creative consultants.

In the early 1950s, the *Dumont Television Network* station started trading advertisement airtime to several sponsors. Many American agencies driven by their clients at home wanted to do effective marketing of their commodities in foreign settings and so opened branches in Latin America, Australia, South Africa, Western Europe and others in the Middle East where top managers were Americans but the copywriters, artists, and most other staff members, were locals.

With the coming of the advertisement servers in the 21st century associated with, "dot-com" bang of the 1990s, several websites with Google search engine started online advertising

emphasizing contextually unobtrusive and relevant online advertisements anticipated to assist, rather than overwhelm consumers.

A recent advertising innovation is “guerrilla marketing”, which involves approaches such as dramatic encounters in public areas. The approach uses giveaways of products like cars, or any product covered with brand messages. It also includes interactive means of advertising by allowing viewers to accept to become a branch of the advertising process. This design of promotion is innovative and stimulates clients to buy products or ideas. This reflects an escalating trend of interactive and implanted advertisements. In addition, it allows for various innovation placements and having consumers vote through text- messages. Moreover, it offers various innovations that involve utilizing social network services such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Montenegro, 2017).

Statement of the problem

The health in Tanzania has been an issue. Not only locally affected but even globally. Before colonialism in Africa, Indegeneous African had their own ways of living and struggling with health issues. Thus depended on the herbal treatment to varieties of diseases in assumption. It is thus after decolonization where modern medicines were introduced.

It is well known that herbal is globally known through advertisements both locally and even through media. Despite of all those efforts made, still there is a need to localize the impact of herbal and its substitution with the modern medicines. Some local communities in Tanzania are not informed about the use and the impacts of the herbal health wise. Hence researcher intend to enhance the communities on that epistemology and its ethical impacts.

The objective of the study

General objective

The general objective of this study is to assess the Compliance of advertising ethics by Herbal Medicine on Instagram in Tanzania.

Specific Objectives

- i) To explore the ethics of social and media advertisement
- ii) To examine herbal medicine exploitation by the consumers
- iii) To analyse the marketing of herbal medicine in Tanzanian communities

Research Questions

- a) What are the ethics behind social and media advertisements?
- b) How is herbal medicine exploited by consumers?
- c) How is herbal medicine marketed in Tanzanian communities?

Significance of the study

This work will benefit not only the community in the research being conducted but also the whole Tanzanian society. It is expected that the community will change from negative to positive on the exploitation of herbal medicines.

Herbalism Herbalism forms the bases of African traditional medicines as most traditional healers practising in Africa are herbalists (Diouf, 2013). Some treat only one disease and are renowned experts on that disease or for diseases of specific organs (for example heart, kidney or lung disease consultants) (Truter, 2007). In addition to that, the consumption of herbal medicine in Africa and narrowly in Tanzania is remarkable even before the colonial error.

Advertisements in Tanzania

In Tanzania, advertising gained momentum following the proliferation of soon after radio, television, newspapers, mobile phones, and computers. The momentum was a result of the increased industrial production and rising market competition among companies struggling to win consumers. At the peak of advertisement competitions in the 1990s, some of the advertisements were found to be unethical, necessitating the government to form the Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA) in 2005 to ensure ethical control in communication among the advertisers, communicators, and consumers (Tenga 2011)

With the increase in the usage of smartphones and computers, social media (SM) platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, websites, and email are now used for advertisement in Tanzania (Mwenegoha 2005). The rapid growth of business and advertising sites has seen ethics in advertisements fall below standards as advertisers create content of their own interest.

There are ethical issues to be considered while advertising for markets and customers. Problems arise when marketers fail to fulfill their social responsibilities and cross their lines by creating immoral advertisements that are socially unacceptable (Clow & Baack, 2007). Advertisers have been creating adverts for profit generation without considering the effects of such adverts on the public. A good example is increasing adverts for the availability of herbal treatments for HIV/AIDs, a disease known to have no cure. , It is out of this concern that the researcher sought to investigate if ethical issues are considered when preparing, processing and publishing advertisements of herbal treatments on SM platforms using Instagram as a case.

The Do's and Don'ts in Processing and Producing Advertisements

Ashraf et al. (2021) point to some approaches to be followed when preparing adverts. These approaches include Claims (such as 'We are the best in town') and Appeal (such as 'Save a penny to save Darfur') that are published in newspapers, radio, television, magazines, cinema, video games, the internet, Billboards and Walls. In recent years, there have been increased efforts to protect public interests by regulating the content and the pressure of advertising. In countries like New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and many other European countries, advertising agencies and media agreed on some code of advertising standards to be met.

The generation of such codes is to make sure any advertisement is legally truthful, decent, and honest. The values that guide advertising practitioners rely upon responsibility, truth, honesty, and clear information (Gary, 1993). Becker (2019) contends that the checklist for advertisement ethics is the presentation or promotion of either the product or the services, yet the fundamental truth about its hazard should not be hidden. Therefore, product promotion should not be dehumanizing, particularly for children and when promoting a product, ethical entities which include cultural values and norms of a targeted society must be observed.

Advertisers must also free their content from abusive language and immoral behaviours. They should make sure an advert does not promote racial, tribal, or religious hatred. An advertiser should not destroy the identities of others without their consent. Information provided to the public should be as accurate as possible for consumers to make choices. Any kind of content manipulation with false information should be avoided to ensure a good image of an organization. In addition, an advertising company should never block journalists from getting the truth.

According to Chunawala and Sethia (2002), people have not only been exposed to a large number of commercial messages, which have increased in quantity and improved in quality, but also radio, television, cinema, and billboards which have contributed to the development of the advertising industry. Different claims have arisen in a way suggesting that advertisements seem to be deceptive, misleading, and falsified. Bogart (1985) urges that the probabilities of careful processing of advertisements are driven by a number of them competing for individuals. However, technological advancements are leading to significant growth in online advertisements. This makes competition for attention more intense.

Advertising can directly be perceived in two ways namely: the rationale of advertising and the nature of advertising. Advertising and promotion have a significant influence on people and society at large in shaping their attitudes, behaviours, and priorities (William & O'Barr, (1994.) Ahmed et al. (2017) explain that an advert can be considered unethical when its content maltreats women, advertises to children, is misleading and offensive, and has false statements and unreal opinions together with all other ethical issues that can lead to an ethical decline in society.

According to standards prepared by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As), advertisements should not involve any misleading information in terms of price or comparison among competitors; there should be no vulgar or rude language and no exaggeration of information. Bartels (1967) in his article "*A Model of Ethics in Marketing*" noted that advertisers are expected neither to take advantage of the ignorance of the consumers nor to fall short of a customer's expectation of truthful information. The key moral principles should be based on truthfulness, human dignity, and social responsibility. Ethical values are created to guide advertisers in advertisement preparation and should be put into consideration.

Methodology

This study used a mixed method by applying both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach was employed in interviewing herbal clinic owners to know if their adverts complied with the ethical issues guiding advertising in Tanzania. A convenience sampling technique was used by taking samples that are expedient for the researcher. This technique was used in this study because there was no pattern whatsoever in acquiring the respondents. It was used by asking the respondents from an accessible area to take part in the research on ethical considerations in advertisements on Instagram. This technique enabled the researcher to get users of herbal medicine who at the same time are the users of Instagram as a social medium of communication. Purposive sampling was used to get herbal Clinic owners with unique qualities of providing relevant information. The intention was to find out if what is published in the adverts relates to the results after using the products. The sample size was 128 respondents out of which 120 were herbal medicine users and 8, were herbal clinic owners.

Questionnaires were mainly employed to collect data from herbal medicine users, while in-depth interviews were used to gather data from herbal clinic owners. The data obtained from this group of respondents were qualitatively analysed into themes, but the information obtained from the structured interview was analysed quantitatively.

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Number of Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage
Valid Sex		76
Female	76	24
Male	24	
Total	100	100
Age Total		
15-25	23	23
26 – 35	61	61
36 and above	16	16
Total	100	100
Marital Status	53	
Single	30	53
Married	17	30
Divorced	100	17
Total		100

Source: Field Data, 2022

Results and Discussion

Findings from the interview conducted with eight herbal clinic owners revealed that the main target of such advertisements is to use content that will attract consumers to use their herbals. One of the eight herbal clinic personnel said...

“When the target is to attract the customer, we don’t explain the side effects of our medicine; we focus on how our customer will be cured. The side effects of the drug will be explained to the customer when one reports unusual issues after using our medicine. The main aim here, and as for any business, is profit maximization.”

The majority of herbal clinic owners (6 out of 8) revealed that due to the complications involved in registering herbal clinics and the taxes involved, the main issue they consider is making sure their medicine isn’t lethal. The fact that a particular medicine doesn’t cure a specific patient’s disease may be attributed to many reasons including the patient’s hormonal differences and blood group. Such issues can also be observed in patients using modern medicines. Regarding exaggerations in advertisements, like those made on herbals used to enlarge human body organs, herbal clinic personnel revealed that it is a business technique aiming at attracting customers. However, they asserted that their herbal medicines do work to some extent.

Ethical Considerations when publishing herbal medicine adverts on Instagram

The structured interview conducted in this study shows that to a great extent, ethical issues are not considered when publishing adverts on Instagram. 75 respondents out of 100 herbal medicine users agreed that advertisers are more into business rather than customer satisfaction. This number of herbal medicine users (75 out of 100) did not attain the advertised results as one of them says:

"Their ads are full of fiction and exaggerations. You can take a product that claims to increase something in your body or heal heart-related diseases, but nothing will happen. When you follow up with specialists on why their medicine did not bring positive results, they will start convincing you to take another dose. Such kind of soft language has made us become slaves to their medicines"

This view of respondents implies that most advertisements do not consider truth as a major ethical issue to be observed in the advertising industry. Results show that advertisements for herbal treatment concentrate more on exaggerating what advertisers can offer than the efficacy of their services and products. Herbal medicine products are taken orally, posing a great health danger to the human body when the medicines are fake. Another respondent of this study noted:

"Tanzania has become a nation of witch doctors who are under the umbrella of herbal medicine technicians. Look at the issue of Covid-19; herbalists started advertising its cure even before the virus was reported in the country. This freedom of advertising is too much and cannot be entertained by allowing everyone to use the media to tell audiences that they cure all diseases.

.....This does not mean that people should stop taking herbal medicine; it is about the truth and reality of products and services in advertisements. We have seen professional doctors specializing in curing certain diseases like the heart, lungs, reproductive organs, and the like. Sometimes it's not about the whole heart, one can specialize in dealing with the cardiac blood veins, but these friends of ours are specialists in everything as far as the human body is concerned. This situation raises queries, and it is unfair to consumers."

In a similar way, the majority (68 out of 100) of herbal medicine consumers mentioned some effects of being a consumer of herbal medicines such as; loss of money because herbalists would not accept defeat and will thus keep on convincing their customers to try another type of medicine, and will not allow one to see a specialist. Wastage of time was mentioned as another negative effect. Psychological problems were also mentioned as another effect that results from prolonged use of herbal medicine without curing the disease. Misunderstandings do occur in society because when customers question the inefficacy of the medicine provided, the answer given is that neighbours are not happy with someone's success. The unreality of advertisements increases inferiority due to a lack of self-esteem and stereotyping of consumers. The majority of respondents (89 out of 100) in this study revealed that pictures printed on Instagram are manipulated. Even people, who give testimony and evidence of getting cured after using herbal medicines are fake, just like some pastors who use crippled and paralyzed people pretending to be able to heal them through their prayers in the synagogues.

Furthermore, the advertisement of herbal in media in some places has become challenging due to biases within those media where the 'who is known' and the 'how' is applicable. Also, some herbalists are regarded as fake with fake medicines which make them not accomplish their mission to the full extent for the benefit of the consumers.

Instagram is one of the easy sources to reach information customers, but the question arises, how many people possess phones with such capacity the issue of the bundle is another problem. On the use of advanced media, sometimes the advertisers are prone to corruption where they impose some conditions which become rigid to herbalist medics specialists and in the end that attracts embezzlement. This leads to a low supply of services as society members

lack information about such existing services. According to Aristotle, mean solve all problems within the society and to this leads to just society which is the happiest life to live.²

Conclusion

From the data presented above, it is quite clear that Instagram advertisers ignore some of the ethical issues in preparing their advertisements so that they can gain more customers and profit. Publication of exaggerated adverts full of fabrications means that herbal medicine manufacturing companies don't pay attention to customer satisfaction, and customer protection. Based on the nature of the findings the researchers of this study conclude that most advertisers prepare their adverts for the sake of drawing customers' attention and thus focus on forcing them to use more enticing language and images to win the customers who are the consumers of their products. This study concludes that what is advertised does not relate to the outcomes of the products after use as agreed by most of the respondents who are 85 out of 100. For some products which are curative, their efficacy is not as advertised.

Recommendation

Researchers of this study believe that it is very difficult, and sometimes impossible for the government to stop citizens from using herbal medicine. It is out of this concern that now the government should protect the citizens from false herbal medicine. It must specifically be emphasized that advertisers follow all the ethical standards to be considered when processing an advert. This should not only be about the existing rules and regulations set by regulatory bodies in Tanzania, but rather making a follow-up to see if herbal clinic owners are abiding by such kinds of ethics and laws. Nevertheless, the government should educate advertisers on the importance of following ethical standards when making adverts on human health. Briefly, the study recommends that the government should not let herbalists misuse the media.

Based on the nature of the study and its findings, the researcher recommends that other future researchers can do further studies on the advantages of being genuine in advertisements. In addition, the researcher recommends that advertisers have to consider ethical issues when preparing their advertisements so as to build a good image of their organization.

As a nation, Tanzania must set up, implement, and make a follow-up on strategies to protect consumers from such products. Giving someone a license and a list of rules regulating a certain area, then sitting in the office monitoring if that individual is paying taxes and other necessary payments is not healthy for the citizens. Besides, the issue of warning citizens on how to avoid using fake herbal medicine is not enough too, because a human being who is sick and searching for a cure for what is disturbing her/his well-being is unpredictable. What is in the mind is, "who or what will cure my disease?" Therefore, the ones supposed to be warned are producers who should invest a lot in alerting the consumers.

² Nicomachean Ethics, 1251b30-35.

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