DECLARATION

I declare that, except from sources which have been duly acknowledged, this work is a result of my own research conducted at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. The work was supervised by Professor Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh.

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(Supervisor)

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(Student)

Date

INTEGRi PROCEDAMUS
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the glory and praise of the Almighty God and to all who helped me in diverse ways. My sincere gratitude goes to my family and all lecturers of the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, for their support.

This piece of work is also dedicated to Malden Bongolo, for his belief in me and untiring support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank the Almighty God for his grace and mercies. My gratitude also goes to Professor Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh, the course lecturer for Research Methods for his comprehensive lectures and supervision throughout this project work. Professor Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh, it is a privilege to be supervised by you.

A big thank you goes to my parents for supporting me to pursue one of my dreams of gaining knowledge and be trained in the field of communication studies.

Finally, my immense appreciation goes to University of Ghana’s Department of Communication Studies for stimulating me to show my potentials and giving me the chance to contribute to academic knowledge through this project.

Thank You!
ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate how some advertising practitioners in Ghana conceptualized ethical guides by the Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG) and applied them to their daily work-related activities. The study focused on knowledge levels of agency practitioners regarding the ethical guides, their ethical dilemmas and how they resolved them.

The study was underpinned by the utilitarian ethical principle, categorical imperative and the golden mean theory. Data was obtained from 10 key advertising practitioners from four (4) advertising agencies in Ghana using semi-structured in-depth interviews.

A thematic analysis of findings revealed that, the advertising practitioners had limited knowledge of Ghana’s advertising code of ethics. The practitioners’ major challenge was revealed to be the issue of difficult clients, who had little care for the ethical guides. In resolving ethical dilemmas, the practitioners did not consult the code of ethics for direction but rather operated from the utilitarian perspective. That is, they gave in to the demands of clients in order to maximize profit rather than adhering to the ethical codes.

The study recommends that, the Advertising Association of Ghana should engage in more awareness raising and professional development activities for its members and the public at large. As a way of motivating practitioners to hold higher the ethical standards, the Advertising Association of Ghana can also expand its award scheme to include ethical advertising. Practitioners should also operate from the categorical imperative perspective and thus make an effort to fulfil their moral duty in accordance with Ghana’s advertising code of ethics.

Keywords: advertising, practitioners, ethics, perspective, advertisers and Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG).
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http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND

The field of advertising has and continues to experience immense growth as a result of increased industrialisation and an ever popular consumerist culture. Like any profession, advertising practitioners have a huge responsibility to their clients and Bovee (1994, p. 21) spells these responsibilities out as;

To differentiate products from advertisers’ competitors, to communicate product information, to expand product distribution, to increase brand preference and loyalty and/or to reduce overall sales cost.

The activities of service professionals like doctors, lawyers, and bankers are often deeply connected to human beings giving rise to situations that pose potential ethical problems. Advertising practitioners, as service professionals are not exempted from these potential ethical dilemmas (Hunt, Shelby and Chonko, 1987). Advertising practitioners are obliged to produce ads that are truthful and ethically appropriate. Failure to do so may gravely affect the credibility of the sponsoring organisation and morally harm the society. Advertising ethics is therefore defined by Cunningham (1999, p. 500) as;

What is right or good in the conduct of the advertising function. It is concerned with questions of what ought to be done, not just with what legally must be done.

The act of mixing facts and art in advertising communication must always be done taking advertising ethical principles into consideration (Sidhul et al, 2015). However, this is not always the case as suggested by Drumwright and Murphy (2009, p.86), who have indicated that, practitioners are generally unethical because the temptations of unethical behaviour often surpass...
any ethical concerns. Putting ethics aside in the creation of ads has become easier because such provocative and unethical ads break through advertising clutter and achieve results (Sidhul et al, 2015).

Some ethical issues in advertising as asserted by Amoako, (2012, p.65) include;

Vulgarity/obscenity used to gain consumers’ attention, misleading information and deception, puffery, stereotypes, racial issues and controversial products such as alcohol).

Hyman, Tansley and Clark (1994, p. 5-15), also identified crucial themes such as advertising of ‘health care’, ‘tobacco’ or ‘alcohol’ and also children advertising, racial discrimination, political advertising as well as the use of ‘fear’ and other ‘advertising appeals’ are some of the controversial issues in the advertising sector. Indeed, Burnett et al (2003, p. 33) expressed that, advertising industry everywhere is receiving high numbers of ethical complaints from various stakeholders. Sidhul et al (2015, p.115), reinforces this point by stating that;

The advertising industry has been frequently criticized for putting out misleading or exaggerated claims in respect of product, goods and services advertised.

Taking an insight from academic literature on advertising ethics, the following views, conceptualization and negotiations on ethical issues were identified. Some practitioners had acknowledged the negative implications of unethical ads on society but did not assume moral responsibilities for them. Practitioners were mostly concerned with the legal aspect of the ads than the ethical aspect (Academy of Marketing Conference, 2013). Previous studies have also revealed that, practitioners viewed raising ethical concerns to advertisers (clients) as uncomfortable and bad for business. Therefore, the practitioners usually operated from ‘client is always right’ perspective (Drumwright and Murphey, 2004).

These reinforce the argument that, adherence to ethical guidelines and considerations in advertising practice remains a critical challenge.
In Ghana, advertising regulatory bodies have provided practitioners with ethical guidelines to guide them in the production of ethically appropriate ads. Industry regulators such as the Advertising Standards Committee (ASC) exist to ensure that advertisements conform to the prevailing laws of Ghana as well as the code of ethics of the advertising profession. The Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG) also seeks to promote the adoption of standards or best practices in the business relations between media owners, advertising agencies and advertisers. Every year, the AAG awards members across all sectors of the advertising industry for their ‘excellence’, ‘creativity’ and ‘outstanding innovative work’ through its awards scheme, known as the Gong Gong Awards (Advertising Association of Ghana, 2016). The scheme nomination includes categories such as radio, print, television, outdoor and digital innovation for alcoholic beverages, insurance, fashion, corporate services and many more. In June 2016, Ghana’s advertising bill which is meant to help sanitize the advertising industry was presented to cabinet for final approval and onward transmission to parliament for consideration and passage (JoyOnline, 2016).

To ensure that the advertising industry remains credible and beneficial to all its stakeholders, particularly, its target audiences, there must be concerted and consistent efforts from academia, regulatory and professional bodies on the issue of ethics in advertising.
1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Consumers are exposed to many advertisements on a daily basis. The ethical concerns raised about some of these advertisements in turn raise questions about the credibility and the social responsibility of the advertising profession itself. There exists some scholarly, academic dialogue about ethics in advertising, ranging from its sometimes offensive nature (Barnes and Dotson, 1990; Drumwright and Murphey, 2009; Fam and Waller, 2003) to its wide social consequences (Amoako, 2012; Laczniak and Murphey, 2006; Beard, 2003). However, not much is known about how advertising practitioners conceptualize and apply the ethics in their work (Drumwright and Murphey, 2004). Drumwright (2007) as cited in Reilly (2013, p.19) succinctly describes this problem by stating that;

Advertising ethics research tends to look at advertising ethics from either a macro view examining its impact on society or a micro view looking at its impact on individuals and most of the time ignoring the meso.

This apparent gap in scholarly literature is even more worrying when one looks at the pivotal role that advertising practitioners have to play in improving ethics in advertising. Practitioners stand a great chance at influencing the ethical aspects of their clients’ expectations and ultimately translating these expectations into advertising communications that is ethically appropriate. It is therefore imperative that stakeholders like marketers, academia and policy-makers engage in efforts to understand advertising practitioners’ level of knowledge about ethical issues.

Furthermore, how practitioners conceptualize and negotiate the issue of ethics in their profession will be useful information in any quest to improve ethical standards in the advertising industry in Ghana. This study, hopefully attempts to contribute to this area of knowledge.

Another challenge identified from studies on advertising ethics was the tendency to focus on
Western countries (Burnett, Keith and Pettijohn, 2003; Cohn, 2005; Drumwright and Murphey, 2009; Akhter et al., 2011; Moon and Franke, 2013; Sidhul, 2015) to the detriment of developing regions like Africa. This further gap in advertising ethics literature is problematic because the economic and socio-cultural contexts of non-western countries may influence how advertising practitioners in such regions internalise and practise advertising ethics. This argument is supported by Moon and Franke (2013, p.51) who stated that:

…the bulk of this research has examined advertising only in the United States. U.S. results do not necessarily apply to other countries, because cultural differences lead to differences in ethical decision making.

This present study is aimed at examining advertising ethics from the “meso” perspective, that is, practitioners’ perspective and within the Ghanaian context of the subject matter. Specifically, the main interest of this study was to find out the viewpoints of advertising practitioners on Ghana’s advertising code of ethics. The study also aimed at using ethical theories to ascertain how the practitioners applied the ethical guidelines to their daily work-related activities.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to address the above research problem, this study set out to achieve the following objectives;

1. To explore Ghanaian advertising practitioners’ understanding of ethical standards and their relevance in their work.

2. To find out the challenges (if any), agency practitioners face in adhering to Ghana Advertising Code of Ethics by the Advertising Association of Ghana.

3. To find out how advertising practitioners in Ghana resolve ethical dilemmas encountered in their work.
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Specifically, this research aimed at answering the following questions;

RQ1. How well informed are advertising practitioners about the advertising code of ethics issued by the Advertising Association of Ghana?

RQ2. How important do advertising practitioners in Ghana consider the code of ethics in their day to day work?

RQ3. What difficulties do advertising practitioners in Ghana face in their quest to adhere to ethical standards?

RQ4. How do advertising practitioners resolve ethical dilemmas in their work?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Principally, this study is significant because it helps in understanding advertising practitioners’ level of knowledge about advertising ethics and its practical ramifications in their day-to-day work. This scholarly contribution is even more relevant when one considers how studies have generally tended to focus on Western parts of the world to the neglect of Africa and other emerging market contexts. Furthermore, knowledge acquired from this research may serve as a critical starting point for any policy-related or practical endeavour to improve ethical standards in the advertising industry in Ghana.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to understand the perspectives of advertising practitioners on the critical issue of advertising ethics. In order to effectively address this research interest, the study limited itself to examining practitioners in advertising agencies in and around Accra, the capital of Ghana. In
as much advertising practice in Ghana revolved around agencies, especially those in Accra, it was expected that such a scope will still yield beneficial scholarly information.

1.6 OPERATIONALISATION

Ethics – Ethics, as it relates to this study refer to Ghana’s Advertising Code of Ethics by the Advertising Standards Committee (ASC) which is championed by the Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG). The code of ethics is made up of five parts and contains 136 Articles. Some of the major themes of the code of ethics include legality, decency, honesty, sexuality, gender discrimination, minors, appeal to fear and distress, religion, violence, competitive advertising, price and product hype.

Perspective – For the purpose of this study, perspective refers to the viewpoints of advertising practitioners on Ghana’s advertising code of ethics. In other words, perspective here refers to how advertising practitioners see or think of the ethics of their profession.

1.7 SUMMARY

This chapter gave a background of the issue of advertising ethics. Through that it showed the problem at hand and emphasized the need for researchers to focus on practitioners’ perspective of advertising ethics and in developing regions like Africa. This chapter also described the confines within which the study was conducted and explained the meanings of some keywords as they related to the study. It also stated what the researcher sought to find and the significance of a study of this nature.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter describes and places into context the theories on which the present study was underpinned as well as the literature that guided the study. Relevant to this research, most of the literature selected was based on ethics in advertising and revolved around ethical theories. Therefore, this study was also grounded in ethical theories. Specifically, the study employed utilitarianism ethical theory, categorical imperative and Aristotle’s golden mean. Secondly, scholarly studies in this field were sought out and discussed. This was to help get a deeper and wider knowledge of practitioners’ perspective on advertising ethics in Ghana.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.0 Utilitarian Ethical Principle

Utilitarianism was propounded in 1789 by Jeremy Benthem and John Stuart Mills. The theory posits that the right course of action is the one that promotes the greatest pleasure or minimizes the most pain (Bivins, 2009). According to Moreland (2016), this principle implies that, “an action conforming to the principle of utility is right or at least not wrong; it ought to be done, or at least it is not the case that it ought not be done.” Jeremy Benthem and John Stuart Mills did not talk about duty in utilitarianism. Utilitarianism posits that the rightness or wrongness of an act or rule depends on the consequences of doing that act (Moreland, 2016). Here, consequences represent concepts such as “profit, pleasure, happiness or satisfaction of individual desire (Moreland, 2016).”
Also known as consequentialism, utilitarianism revolves around the concept of “the end justifies the means” (Anderson, 2004). This principle holds the view that, the most important thing is the outcome as a result of an action and it has a greater value compared to the latter. In utilitarianism, morality is a means to some other end; it is in no way an end in itself. It is also important to note that, the main aim of utilitarianism is to “maximize happiness (Edwards, 1990).

2.1.0.0 Criticisms of utilitarianism

According to (Moreland, 2016), some common criticisms of utilitarianism included the argument that, “if adopted, justifies as morally appropriate things that are clearly immoral.” For example, utilitarianism can be used to justify committing bank fraud if it maximizes happiness. There was also the argument that, it was not possible to apply because “happiness cannot be quantified (utilitarian.org, 2008).” Explaining the argument, how does one quantifiably, compare happiness to suffering?

2.1.0.1 Importance to present study

Despite these criticisms, the ethical principle of utilitarianism was used for the study because its tenet of the ‘end justifies the means’ helped identify if the advertising practitioners were of the same notion. That is, if to the advertising practitioners, morality was not an end in itself. This would make maximizing their own pleasure (profit) more important than the moral implications of their actions. Simply, the principle of utilitarianism helped to understand if advertising practitioners in Ghana cared more about maximizing profit and therefore forfeited the advertising ethics in their daily work related activities.
2.1.1 Categorical Imperative

This theory was propounded by a German idealist philosopher of the 19th century, Immanuel Kant (Guthrie, 2001). Deontology is concerned with duty and its roots are from a Greek words “deon” and “logos,” meaning the “study of duty.” Unlike utilitarianism, this theory focuses on the rightness or wrongness of actions themselves and not the rightness or wrongness of the consequences of those actions (Mastin, 2008).

Categorical imperative theory posits that our actions should be one that can be ‘universalized’ (Mastin, 2008). It suggests that what is right for one is right for all and therefore our actions should be one that can become a universal law (Mastin, 2008). That is to say, it should be the case that, our actions would be the same as others put in a similar situation.

This theory also suggests that, humans should be treated as objects of intrinsic moral value; that is, as ends in themselves and never as a mere means to some other end Moreland (2016). That is to say, human beings should never be wrongly used to achieve a personal or corporate goal (Moreland, 2016). In other words, we should not put our own personal ambitions above the respect that others deserve.

It also posits that both the actions and outcomes of an individual must be ethical. It points out that the action’s morality is of greater weight and the result of a wrong action does not make its outcome the same (Anderson, 2004). In other words, categorical imperative just like deontological ethics is in the view that right actions are those actions that are not initiated by impulses, inclinations or desires, but by practical reason. That is, this theory is more concerned with doing what one believes is their moral duty and not for the purpose of pleasing others.
2.1.1.0 Criticisms of Categorical Imperative

Fieser (2012) criticised Kant’s categorical imperative by implying that categorical imperative basically shrinks to the egoistic principle (Fieser, 2012).” As explained by Fieser (2012), true moral conduct must be sympathetic in nature and therefore criticized Kant for denying the role sympathy plays in moral actions (Fieser, 2012).

Secondly, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher was of the opinion that, this ethical theory is impossible to apply (Fieser, 2012). That is, Kant did not offer a strong guideline for determining moral behaviour, and it did not give us any specific moral duties to follow (Fieser, 2012).

2.1.1.1 Importance to present study

Despite its criticisms, the categorical imperative principle was relevant to the present study for the following reasons:

Firstly, it helped identify whether the actions of the advertising practitioners could be ‘universalized.’ It also helped to find out if their actions were initiated for the sake of fulfilling one’s duty. The theory describes ‘fulfilling one’s duty as acting in accordance with certain moral laws (Fahey, 2012). Lastly, Categorical imperative theory is more concerned with doing what one believes is their moral duty and not for the purpose of pleasing others. Therefore, this principle helped the present study find out whether the practitioners were more concerned about performing their moral duty of being ethical or rather, pleasing their clients even if it meant being unethical.
2.1.2 The Golden Mean Theory

Aristotle introduced the golden mean in his work called ‘Nichomachean Ethics (NE)’. Aristotle’s golden mean principle is about finding the necessary middle between two extremes, of which one is excess and the other is deficiency (New World Encyclopedia, 2013).

Hwang and Kretchmar (2010, p.103) described Aristotle’s golden mean as;

A place that is intermediate between excess and deficiency. Accordingly, Aristotle described the mean as a special location of virtuous behaviour. He insists that those who are interested in virtuous actions should aim for what is intermediate.

It is important to note that, this principle is not insinuating that virtue lies exactly at the centre of two vices; there is no universal middle that would apply to every situation. Also, according to Hwang and Kretchmar (2010), “the mean is not an arithmetical mean, but a point on a scale between two extreme dispositions which represent the excess and deficiency of a virtuous trait.”

What Aristotle sought to explain is that virtue is in between the two vices, meaning, different degrees are needed for different situations. The most important thing is to know exactly what is appropriate in a given situation, that is finding and striking a balance (New World Encyclopedia, 2013). The importance of the golden mean is that it re-affirms the balance needed in life and thus balance needed when making decisions of ethical concerns (Aquileana, 2014).

2.1.2.0 Criticism of the golden mean theory

This theory was critiqued by (MadLab, LLC, 2016), who raised the question that, “if courage taken to excess would manifest as recklessness and if deficient as cowardice, then what are the extremes of the virtue of knowledge? Should we take a little from knowledge and a little from ignorance? The author emphasized that this was not possible.”
2.1.2.1 Importance to present study

Despite, this critique, relevance of the golden mean ethical theory to the study was identified. The present study employs the tenet that the most important thing for a person to do is to know exactly what is appropriate in a given situation and thus, find and strike a balance.

Consequently, this tenet helped to identify if advertising practitioners found a balance between ethics and profit. In other words, if in trying to make profit they considered the social and moral implications of each of the ads and tried to do what was morally appropriate in every situation.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this work, some relevant studies were reviewed. These literatures helped to put the present study in perspective. The reviewed studies were organized into two main themes; namely practitioners’ perspective and clients’ perspective.

2.2.0 PRACTITIONERS’ PERSPECTIVE

Advertising practitioners are a major part of the advertising industry. They are most of the time the inceptors and producers of advertising content. They therefore play a major role in ensuring the ethical appropriateness of advertisements. It is therefore helpful to understand how advertising practitioners conceptualize and apply ethics in their work.

Salvador (2012) explored the subject matter of ethics by focusing on the Dominican Republic advertising industry. Specifically, the study sought to find out the intersection between the use of concepts, principles and code of ethics by advertising practitioners. Using a qualitative method,
the researcher conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview of 20 practitioners. Sampling was done by using purposive sampling method. This helped the researcher to focus on the particular characteristics of the population of interest. Theoretically, Salvador (2012) employed the utilitarian theory by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mills. The findings indicated that, there was a widespread adherence to universal ethical values such as truth and human dignity among advertising practitioners in the Dominican Republic. This study is relevant to the current study because it also seeks to find out if practitioners in Ghana adhere to ethical standards in their line of duty and the findings can therefore be duly compared.

In a similar study, Drumwright and Murphey (2004) examined what advertising agency personnel think about ethical issues. Similar to Salvador (2012), utilitarian ethical theory was used in addition to the deontological theory. The methodology used was semi-structured in-depth interviews. According to the findings, the researcher identified two groups of advertising practitioners; those who were not sensitive to ethical guides and a few who were. As Drumwright and Murphey (2004, p.12) put it; the former “often equated the legal with the moral” and often oversubscribed to the perspective of the client to the extent that advertising practitioners could not raise ethical concerns. Another finding by Drumwright and Murphey (2004) indicated that, the practitioners felt helpless in the face clients’ demands. The practitioners felt they had to delegate responsibility for ethics to the client and operate from “the client is always right” perspective. Such findings point to the varied ways advertising practitioners in different parts of the world understand ethical issues in their work and how they go about resolving ethical dilemmas they encounter. The question that begs to be answered is how such considerations play out within the Ghanaian advertising industry.
Also Cohn (2005) whose study titled “current ethical dilemmas of advertising professionals” sought to create a taxonomy to find out the ethical considerations of advertising professionals. The findings supported that of Rotzoll and Christians (1980) that ethical challenges could be grouped into message content and agency/client relationships. Per the findings, a significant number of practitioners raised the issue of deception as an ethical issue and were also concerned with how their output impacted societal and cultural norms.

Another study of relevance to the present study is one conducted by the Academy of Marketing Conference (2013). Academy of Marketing Conference (2013) also sought to find out the way in which advertising practitioners made advertising decisions that had ethical implications through interviews. The findings indicated that, the practitioners were not completely unaware of the moral implications of controversial campaigns. It would be relevant and useful to know of what happens in this regard in the Ghanaian context since the present study seeks to find out what difficulties advertising practitioners in Ghana face in their quest to adhere to ethical standards. However, the finding above is similar to the findings of Drumwright and Murphey (2004), the practitioners usually framed their decisions in legalized/regulatory or commercial terms than in ethical ones. The findings also indicated that most UK practitioners recognised that advertising decisions indeed had ethical implications but did not individually assume moral responsibility for them.

Chen and Liu (1998) also examined the ethical problems Taiwan advertising practitioners were mostly confronted with. Similar to previous studies examined here (Drumwright and Murphey, 2004; Salvador, 2012; Academy of Marketing Conference, 2013), similar to previous studies the authors used semi-structured in-depth interviews. Per the findings, issues raised by the
practitioners included “unethical products or services, the message of advertisements and agency/client relationship as the areas of ethical dilemmas (Chen and Liu 1998).

Also from the practitioner’s perspective, Moon and Franke (2013) conducted a study with the objective of finding out if and how culture influences the ethical perceptions and concerns of advertising agency practitioners in South Korea and the U.S. The findings showed that, culture did influence both Korean and American advertising executives in their decision making processes, especially those with ethical implication. Korean advertising practitioners were found to be more sensitive to ethical issues. This could be attributed to the fact that the American society was generally deemed to be “individualistic”, hence less in tune to societal sensibilities. The Korean society on the other hand, is generally viewed as being “collectivistic” and conservative, one that places emphasis on shared values and sensibilities. Since one can say that Ghana’s cultural system is more collectivistic than individualistic, will findings from this study agree with those found in Korea?

A similar study was conducted by Hunt, Shelby and Chonko (1987), who sought to identify major ethical problems advertising agency practitioners were actually confronted with. Unlike the majority of ethical studies on advertising, this study was not theoretically driven. However, similar to the findings of Rotzoll and Christians (1980) and Chen and Liu (1998), agency/client relationship was identified as the major ethical challenge to the practitioners. The finding also indicated the creation of honest, non-misleading, socially desirable ads as another major challenge practitioners were confronted with (p. 23).

Drumwright and Murphy (2009) investigated what advertising practitioners and teachers of advertising thought of advertising ethics and if they incorporated it in their work and lessons
respectively. Although the researchers used mixed method, similar to the other studies reviewed, the authors adopted in-depth interviews as one of the methods. The finding as relevant to the present study indicated that, due to constant checks on the mass media than digital media, practitioners of traditional advertising agencies were forced to be more ethical.

Heinonen and Rozenveld (2013) also contributed to the subject matter by conducting a study on how advertising practitioners were experiencing and addressing the challenges of the on-going digital era. The authors used in-depth interviews to source data from seven advertising practitioners. Finding showed that, in the past decade, clients had cut down their budget on advertising due to the recent global financial crisis. As a result, clients had become more demanding and were requiring the services of ad agencies on project-to-project basis instead of maintaining a long-term relationship. This allows clients to change ad agencies more easily. This situation implies that clients wielded more power than usual client-agency relationship, making it more difficult to challenge unethical client requests. The tendency for practitioners in various studies to view agency/client relationship as an area of ethical dilemma is a running theme in studies reviewed, one that will also be explored in the Ghanaian context through this study.

2.2.1 CLIENTS’ PERSPECTIVE

All the previous study seemed to have focused on the practitioners’ perspective of the subject matter. Reilly (2013) however undertook a similar study but from the perspective of the clients (advertisers). The focus of this study was on agency/client relationship which was observed earlier is a major theme in findings of (Rotzoll and Christians, 1980; Chen and Liu,
1998). Similar to other studies, Reilly (2013) adopted the utilitarian and deontological ethical principles. These ethical principles appears to have adequately guided previous studies that sought to examine advertising practitioners’ understanding of ethical standards and how they applied them to their work-related activities. This study will similarly adopt these ethical principles as a framework for understanding advertising ethics in Ghana. The findings also indicated that, most clients see ethics as important but would feel uncomfortable if agencies questioned them on ethics, yet felt that if an agency approached it the right way they would respect them for bringing it up and it might even strengthen the bond between the clients and agency.

2.3 Summary

This chapter discussed all the ethical theories that had been selected for the present study. Specifically, the tenets, criticisms, relevance of each theory to the present study and how each ethical theory relates to the research objectives have been spelled out in this chapter. The chapter additionally reviewed relevant literatures that helped informed the theories and methodology used in the present study.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction
This chapter discusses the method used in gathering data for this study. It defines the study design, sampling method, justification, sampling size, data collection procedure, data collection instrument and analysis. The present study was pinned under a qualitative study whereby the focus was on getting an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter from the informants’ perspective rather than numbers.

3.1 Study Design
The general method for this research could be placed within the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research was employed due to the fact that it has become a reputable mode of investigation in social behaviours (Creswell, 2009). This research method was also used because the goal of research was to understand the meanings that individuals gave to their actions rather than to predict their behaviour (Braybrooke, 1965). Therefore, this method helped the present study to understand the viewpoints of advertising practitioners concerning the ethical guides of their profession.

On the issue of the specific qualitative method used, the present study used in-depth interview as described by Wimmer and Dominic (2011: 119) as one of the many ways of gathering data qualitatively. The reason for selecting in-depth interview as the most appropriate qualitative method to use is also captured by Lindlof (2002: 173) who stated that,

The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to understand the social actor’s experience and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations.
Therefore, a face to face in-depth interview was used for the purpose of understanding how advertising practitioners in Ghana made sense of the ethical guides by the Advertising Association of Ghana and how they applied them to their work-related activities.

Interviews can also be conducted in three different ways depending on the amount of control the researcher exerts over the interaction. They are; structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviewing style was adopted. This is because unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews do not limit informants to a set of predetermined answers; neither does it provide informants with too much space and risk the conversation going off track. This interview style is neither an open free discussion nor a closed questionnaire. Semi-structured interviewing style also provides the perfect mean to evaluate the validity of informant’s answers by observing their non-verbal communication (Wimmer and Dominick, 2014). Harrell and Bradley, (2009, p.27) provided another advantage of semi-structured interviews by asserting that;

Semi structured interviews are often used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided.

Therefore, taking advantage of the benefits semi-structured interviews presents, the study adopted this style with the aim of thoroughly understanding how advertising practitioners made sense of the advertising code of ethics by the AAG and how they applied the ethics in their work related activities.

3.2 Sampling Method

The selection of the agencies started with brainstorming. The brainstorm process contained two crucial questions: - What kind of agencies will be selected for the study (traditional, digital or both)? What about the number of agencies? The brainstorming process ended with a conclusion
to focus on mixing both traditional and digital agencies; specifically choosing an equal number of agencies from each category. With these factors the comparative element would be on its’ richest.

Therefore, in relation to sampling, purposive sampling was used as an informant selection method. Tongco (2007) describes purposive sampling as a deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. Taking a cue from Tongco (2007), the present study focused on particular characteristics of a population that were of interest and would best enable the present study to answer its research questions. Letters were sought from the department of communication studies and personally delivered to 10 purposely sampled traditional and digital advertising companies relevant to the study.

3.3 Justification

Ideally, advertisements are meant to inform and educate the public with the aim of persuading potential consumers to patronize the said good(s) or service(s). However, as pertains to other countries, there is an increase in public outcry concerning unethical ads within the Ghanaian context which reinforces the need for constant scrutiny and monitoring by key stakeholders (Wireko, 2009). For instance, the Advertising Association of Ghana and the Consumer Protection Agency of Ghana were forced to call out and condemn Guinness Ghana Brewery Limited for developing and running an unethical ad for their Guinness brand in Ghana. The ad in question was found to have breached Article 32, Section 1 and 2 of the advertising code of ethics by using five members of the national football team (Black stars) as models (myjoyonline, 2010). This particular ethical code specifies that, “children, sportsmen/women and pregnant women shall not be used as
models when advertising alcoholic beverages.” Another case in point was when the then Minister of Trade and Industry, Mr Haruna Iddrisu on 20th May, 2013 called on the Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG) to help check what he described as “unethical practices” by some of its members. His public admonishment was necessitated by billboards ads in the country that in his words, were “completely misleading and unacceptable because they insult the sensibilities of the people, either culturally or religiously” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2012 - 2016). The above concerns reinforce the need to investigate the very issue of advertising ethics in Ghana, from the perspective of those responsible for creating the ads, that is, the advertising practitioners.

Similarly, the decision to focus on certain key informants was guided by the relevance of their professional roles to the subject matter. Hence, the persons selected for this research are the main actors in the making and placing of ads in the various media channels. Specifically, Creative Directors, Account Managers and Managing Directors were the focus of interest in this present study. Creative Directors were selected because they oversee the creative aspect of the ad. They control the development of the idea, the message the ad contains, the characters selected and finally supervise how the copywriters and art directors will turn an idea into a complete ad. Account Managers also play a pivotal role by serving as a liaison between the client and the ad agency. Managers were also selected because they approve the final creative work (ad) before it is disseminated to the public either through television, radio, print, outdoor or online (Bovee, 1994 p. 33). Each of the practitioners selected possessed more than five years’ experience in the advertising field and was therefore able to make an informed and relevant contribution to the study.

3.4 Sample size

A total of four ad agencies out the 10 purposely sampled companies responded positively to the study’s request for an interview. Two of which were traditional ad agencies while the other two
were digital ad agencies. The traditional ad agencies were ‘Orakle Multimedia’ and ‘Origin8’ while the digital ad agencies were ‘Now Available Africa’ and ‘Theory Limited.’

The present study sampled 10 advertising practitioners from the four ad agencies. Specifically, one creative director and one account manager in each of the four companies were interviewed, making a total of 8 practitioners. Then, two managers out of the four agencies were interviewed in order to get a managerial perspective of advertising ethics in Ghana. However, this does not affect the validity of the study since the two Managers interviewed were a representative sample of two different organizational charts in the ad agencies. Two out of the four ad agencies (Orakle Multimedia and Theory Limited) had a different organizational structure compared to the other two (Now Available Africa and Origin8). Though according to Bovee (1994, p.33), it was the responsibility of the Managers of independent ad agencies “to review and pass the ad before it is released to the client for approval,” this was not the case across all four agencies. With the organizational structure of Orakle Multimedia and Theory Limited, it was the creative director who had the full responsibility of creating and passing ads. Therefore, representatively, one manager was chosen from each type of organizational structure and interviewed; two managers were interviewed in all.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Using the objectives of this study, an interview guide was developed for this research (See Appendix). The questions were crafted in a semi-structured format and a date, time and venue was fixed with the four ad agencies who had accepted to grant the interview. Though, the subject matter of the research was communicated to them prior the research, the interview guide was not shown or discussed in anyway. This was to avoid informants from giving already prepared
answers. A tape recorder was used to record the conversations between the researcher and the informants and notes were taken during the interviews.

3.6 Data Analysis

As stated earlier, face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted among 10 key advertising practitioners. These interviews were recorded after having sought for the approval of the interviewees. The recorded interviews were transcribed by hand. Then a systematic qualitative analysis procedure as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.61 -116) was followed. Starting with focused reading, the study acquainted itself with the gathered data with the aim of achieving familiarity with the data. It was then followed by conducting an open coding, which allowed the study to find distinct concepts and categories in the data. This formed the basic units of analysis. The third stage, which was axial coding, was a stage of reconfirmation. Here, the study confirmed the concepts and categories created as well as explored how the concepts and categories related. Therefore, the data was coded inductively through a manual reading and systematic categorization of emergent themes. These themes were then analysed together with the present study’s literature reviewed as well as the theories under which the study was pinned.

3.7 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to indicate and explain with supportive explanations how data would be collected in a manner that would give in-depth insight and understanding into advertising practitioners’ perspective of advertising ethics in Ghana. The next chapter is a presentation of the findings from the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION
This chapter presents the findings of the 10 interviews conducted in the quest to find out advertising practitioners’ perspectives on advertising ethics in Ghana. Based on the research objectives, the findings of this study were organized under seven thematic groups reflecting broadly practitioners’ knowledge of, attitude towards and practices of advertising ethics by AAG.

4.1 INFORMANTS’ DETAILS
The researcher in this study assured anonymity to the informants and their organization. This was because the subject of ethics is often a sensitive one. There was also the need to encourage practitioners to grant the interviews and express their views in a comfortable manner. Such practice is common in social sciences, and has often been used in qualitative field research in advertising and marketing (e.g., Drumwright and Murphey 2004; Arnould and Price 1993; Drumwright 1996). For this purpose, the informants in this study are assigned code names in lieu of their actual names. The table below details the informants.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMANT’S POSITION</th>
<th>AGENCY NUMBER</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Agency 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Director</td>
<td>Agency 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>Agency 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Agency 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Director</td>
<td>Agency 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>Agency 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Director</td>
<td>Agency 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>Agency 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Director</td>
<td>Agency 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>Agency 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.2.0 Knowledge level of practitioners

A key objective of the study was to find out how well informed the practitioners were about Ghana’s advertising code of ethics issued by the Advertising Standards Committee of the Advertising Association of Ghana. To fully explore this theme, the practitioners were questioned whether they knew of the existence of Ghana’s advertising code of ethics and to name at least five of the themes.

A synthesis of the responses suggests that, the practitioners knew of the existence of the advertising code of ethics as issued by the AAG. With the exception of one practitioner who did not know of its existence, the others were able to mention some of the themes of the ethical
guide. The themes commonly mentioned by the practitioners included advertising to minors, misleading ads, use of superstition, gender stereotypes, decency, advertising alcohol, using testimonials, advertising medicine and nudity. It is worthwhile to note that though the practitioners knew of the existence of the ethical guide, only a few were able to name five themes. Some gave as little as one theme.

4.2.1 Consideration of ethics by practitioners

This theme was derived from the findings based on the research question that sought to find out the importance practitioners placed on the advertising code of ethics. To effectively expand this theme, they were asked to express the ethical standard they personally adhered to the most. Generally, the sample showed diverse views on the importance of conforming to the advertising ethics. Some outrightly could not answer the question. Those who answered gave response such as creating a good reputation for the agency and clients, to be eligible to win institutional awards and the main interest of the consumer. The following excerpt by Creative Director - Agency 2 adequately captures this notion:

In order for my agency and our clients to get good reputation and secondly also to win an award from the AAG for being ethical.

In expressing the ethical code that these practitioners mostly adhered to, the principle of truth telling or not creating misleading ads was the most popular view among the sampled Managers, Creative Directors and Account Managers. There was only one exception by way of response that was keen on the importance of advertising alcohol correctly. The following response by Manager – Agency 1 is representative of this:

For me, I just dislike the way alcohol is advertised in the country. Therefore, anytime we are creating an ad campaign for an alcoholic beverage, I try to make it as ethical as possible. It is very dear to me as a practitioner.
Another important insight gained from the findings suggests that, the practitioners considered the legal aspect of advertising ethics more important than the moral aspect. Practitioners seemed to be more concerned about creating legal ads than ethical ads. The views expressed by Creative Director – Agency 3 and Account Manager – Agency 2 capture this point respectively:

I am familiar with the laws surrounding advertising but I do not know about the ethics by the AAG.

Generally, clients have the final say, even if you advice clients, they have the right to accept it or reject it. I just try to create ads that do not break the laws of Ghana that is all.

4.1.2 Feasibility of ethical standards

In quest to find out if the practitioners faced any challenges when applying the code of ethics, one theme that came up from the findings was the feasibility of these ethical guides. The general response gathered was that, they perceived the ethical guides by the AAG to be feasible. However, almost all the practitioners qualified this statement by expressing that, they lacked full knowledge of the ethical guide to be completely positive about their answers and that from the little they knew of the ethical codes by the AAG, they were feasible.

However, there was an exception who clearly indicated that, his lack of knowledge of the ethical codes by the AAG made it impossible for him to answer the question.

4.1.2 Practicality of ethical standards

Another theme that was derived from the findings was the practicality of the advertising code of ethics as perceived by the practitioners. Similar to the viewpoint the practitioners had about the feasibility of the ethical codes, the general perception on the practicality of the ethics was that,
from the little knowledge they had of the ethics guides, it was practical. They however
highlighted that they lacked enough knowledge about the code of ethics to make a complete
analysis of it. There was an exception by way of the perception that the code of ethics was not
practical. Creative Director – Agency 1 stated that:

Sex sells, so if you tell me to limit nudity, it is like you are blocking me from
being fully creative. It is the target matter that should matter not the guidelines.

4.2.3 Client Power

In a liberal advertising environment in which clients, as customers rule the market, the
professional advice of the ad agency could become secondary. There is accordingly, an ethical
dilemma when the client’s wishes contravene ethical guidelines.

The perception of practitioners were sought to find out the challenges practitioners faced when
adhering to these ethical guides. The viewpoint of the practitioners on this issue was a
unanimous one. The sampled practitioners viewed clients as their major problem. Though some
of the practitioners had never directly questioned clients about the ethics of an assignment, they
perceived clients to be headstrong, authoritative and powerful. According to the responses, some
clients did not care about the industry’s ethics. What they cared about was getting ads that were
provocative enough to break through the clutter of ads in the media. This means using certain
kinds of appeals that might not necessarily be ethical.

The following response by Account Manager - Agency 4 and Manager – Agency 2 captures this
point respectively:

Some of the clients are headstrong very powerful and they want exactly what they
are asking for. You can only advise them and they can choose not to take it. If you
fail to give them what they want, you can lose your account.

Clients are powerful and they know that, they can change agencies at any time.
4.2.4 Resolution of ethical dilemmas

This theme was developed from the findings of how practitioners resolved ethical dilemmas in their line of work. To expand this theme, practitioners were asked if they consulted the advertising code of ethics each time they were faced with ethical dilemmas. Interestingly, most of the sampled practitioners admitted to not seeing the need to consult the code of ethics when faced with ethical dilemmas while a few others pledged to work side by side with the ethical guide. The following excerpts elaborate this perception by Account Manager – Agency 3 and Manager – Agency 1 respectively:

… so when a brief comes to you, you are answering just the brief. You do not need the code of ethics to help you answer your brief.

I consider myself a professional and abiding to the ethics of my profession is what separates me from others who are not even registered with the AAG but are still practicing.

For those who did not consult the code of ethics, they justified their actions by insisting that some clients have their target market and these clients therefore knew how they wanted to communicate to them. Therefore, if an agency questioned that manner of communication, that agency was likely to lose the account.

4.2.5 Bearing ethical responsibility

This theme was derived from the findings of the importance placed on the ethical guides by these practitioners and how they dealt with ethical dilemmas. The findings gathered from the informants when asked if there was someone within the agency responsible for the ethical aspect of every ad their agencies created was in the negative. All the informants indicated that no one was currently responsible for that. However, a few insisted that though no one was directly responsible, they were not oblivious of the ethical guides.
Secondly, to effectively expand this theme, the practitioners were questioned if clients currently shared part of the responsibility of ethical content of the ads and what they thought the ideal thing would be. The viewpoints of some of the practitioners on this issue were that, ethical consent of ads should be a check and balance from both sides (agencies and clients). However, most of them perceived that ethical consent of ads should be the responsibility of the clients and not the agencies.

**Other finding**

One of the main advantages of intensive interviews can be seen in the wealth of detail that it provides (Wimmer and Dominick, 2014). As such, the nature of this methodology allowed the present study to acquire an important detail than the research objectives sought to find.

Even though the study did not explicitly ask the practitioners about their perception on the Advertising Association of Ghana, there seem to be a general complaint that the association was not doing a very good job of advocating about Ghana’s advertising code of ethics. The following responses by the Account Manager - Agency 1, Creative Director – Agency 3 and Creative Director – Agency 4 capture this point respectively.

What I would like to add is that, the AGG is not doing a very good job. If there is an ethical guideline, then they should spread the information well. You just don’t keep it on a table and except everyone to know about it.

Until today, I did not know Ghana had an advertising code of Ethics. This shows the kind of work the AAG is doing.

I think advocacy of the ethics is poor. The AAG should sit up.
4.4 Summary

This chapter presented and analysed the findings of the study. The findings were derived from a semi-structured interview of 10 key informants considered relevant to the study and the findings were also thematically analysed. A total of seven themes were derived from the findings and they were; knowledge level of practitioners, considerations of ethics by practitioners, feasibility of ethical standards, practicality of ethics, client power, resolution of ethical dilemmas and bearing ethical responsibility.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to gain an understanding of advertising practitioners’ viewpoints on advertising ethics in Ghana and how they applied it to their work related activities. Questions about knowledge of, importance placed on ethics, challenges faced when applying the ethics and how practitioners dealt with ethical dilemmas were asked. These questions helped to provide findings which were put into themes and presented in the previous section.

In this chapter, these themes are discussed in details taking into consideration the implications of previously reviewed literature and theories guiding the study.

5.0.1 Knowledge level of practitioners

Since decisions by advertising practitioners on ethical considerations are likely to be premised on how knowledgeable these practitioners are on the subject matter, this study was interested in discovering how well-informed advertising practitioners were on the subject of ethics.

With the exception of one, all the practitioners demonstrated remarkable knowledge about the existence of the ethical codes. However, the practitioners were not as well informed about specific ethical injunctions as they showed limited knowledge of the contents of the code of ethics by the AAG.

The theoretical implication of this is that the act of not seeking much information to educate oneself of the ethics of one’s profession reflects a laissez faire, or even cavalier, attitude and approach to principles. As the categorical imperative ethical theory posits, ones actions should be
such that it can be universalized (Mastin, 2008). In this case, the practitioners’ lack of adequate knowledge of the ethical guide of their industry cannot be universalized.

5.0.2 Consideration of ethics by practitioners

Three considerations of ethics by advertising practitioners were identified under this theme. The practitioners had diverse but very positive reasons as to why they should be ethical. They also perceived ‘truth telling’ as the most important ethical principle to adhere to. Finally they considered the legal aspect of the industry more important than the ethical aspect. These perceptions are expanded below.

If agency practitioners would adhere to the code of ethics, the ethics would first of all have to be important to them. The present study tried to find out if Ghana’s advertising code of ethics by the AAG played a significant role in the daily work of these practitioners.

Generally, the informants showed diverse views on the importance of conforming to the advertising ethics. Among the views given included: to create a good reputation for the agency and clients, to be eligible to win institutional awards and to protect the main interest of the consumer. The latter, which is to protect the main interest of the consumer, adequately conforms to one of the tenets of the categorical imperative theory. The tenet explains that human beings should be treated as objects of inherent moral value; as ends in themselves and never as mere means to some other end (Moreland, 2016). That is to say, human beings should not be wrongly used to achieve a personal or corporate goal (Moreland, 2016). As such, by putting the interest of the consumer first, these practitioners had put the commercial expediency of winning or retaining a client’s account, professional judgment and the industry’s reputation.
On the ethical principle the sampled practitioners personally adhered to the most, all the informants pointed to being keen on adhering to the universal principle of truth telling. This finding supports that of Cohn (2005), in which practitioners in Dominican Republic cited ‘deception’ to be one of the most popular issues in advertising. Similar to Cohn (2005), the finding in the present study indicated that the practitioners did perceive deception as unethical and therefore regarded the principle of truth telling to be very important.

Lastly, another consideration of advertising practitioners in Ghana was identified from their viewpoint on the legal aspect of the industry. This was seen in the manner in which they attempted to justify themselves for not being well informed about the ethics of their profession. The practitioners insisted that they were knowledgeable of the legal aspect of the profession and therefore always tried to create legal ads. This notion was perhaps created because the practitioners were afraid of the consequences of being sued but not of ethical consequences because there are no legal repercussions to dishonoring codes of ethics.

Interestingly, this finding supports that of the Academy of Marketing Conference (2013, p.4) where most UK practitioners framed their decisions more in legalized terms than in ethical ones. The finding is particularly also not far from that of Drumwright and Murphey (2004, p.12), where practitioners in the United States who did not care about the ethical codes “often equated the legal with the moral.” However, this finding does not support that of Cohn (2005, p.162) as it quite evident that, practitioners in Ghana were not concerned with how their creative output impacted societal and cultural norms.

The theoretical implication for this perception, of the legal aspect of ads being more important than the moral aspect goes against the tenet of categorical imperative which states that our actions should be universalized (Mastin, 2008). The act of placing more importance on the legal
aspect of ads while neglecting the moral implication betrays a failing in the institutional structures that should underpin and define industry norms. The moral impact of the creative work the advertising practitioners produce should be as important to them as the legal aspect.

5.0.3 Feasibility of ethical standards

If advertising practitioners would apply the code of ethics by the AAG to their daily work, they must first of all consider these ethical guides to be feasible. As such, the study sought to find out the feasibility of these ethical guides. The findings indicated that, the practitioners indeed viewed the ethical guides as somewhat feasible. However, their lack of adequate knowledge made them unable to give a complete judgment of the feasibility of the ethical codes. They sincerely admitted that, their opinion was solely based on their current limited knowledge of the code of ethics by the AAG.

The AAG as a professional body needs to engage in more awareness raising and professional development activities for its members and the public at large.

5.0.4 Practicality of ethical standards

Some ethical codes may be feasible but not practical. As such the perception of advertising practitioners was sought on how such a dilemma might be navigated. The findings were interestingly similar to the perceptions they had on the feasibility of the ethical guide. The general perception was that, from the little knowledge they had of the ethics guides, it was practical. The practitioners however highlighted that they lacked enough knowledge about the code of ethics to make a complete analysis of it. This indicates that, there is an important need for awareness and advocacy to make practitioners more knowledgeable of the contents of the
code of ethics of their industry. This way, they would have a well-informed opinion about the feasibility and practicality of the ethical standards.

5.0.5 Client Power

Another important theme that emanated from the findings on some of the challenges practitioners faced when adhering to the code of ethics was the issue of agency/client relationship. The theme of agency/client relationships was also identified by Cohn (2005) where practitioners expressed it as one of their major challenges in the industry. Notwithstanding the difference in years, the issue of agency/client relationship persists among practitioners in Ghana, as it did in the findings of Rotzoll and Christians (1980) and Hunt, Shelby and Chonko (1987).

In the present study, though some of the practitioners claimed not to dare question clients about the ethical integrity of an assignment. Others also insisted that some clients knew exactly what they wanted and such clients would even go to the extent of changing ad agencies in order to get things their way. Therefore, the practitioners felt helpless in such situations. To them, pleasing the clients was more important than performing their moral duty of being ethical.

This goes against the tenet of the categorical imperative theory, which requires that practitioners should be more concerned about going in accordance to the ethical code of their industry and not pleasing clients. Rather, this action of the practitioners is geared more towards the utilitarianism ethical principle, in that; they were more concerned with maximizing profit at the expense of the ethics.

Relating this to previous literature, the finding of this study interestingly supports the findings of Drumwright and Murphey (2004). Drumwright and Murphey (2004, p.14) identified that practitioners in the United States felt helpless because they sensed they must delegate responsibility for ethics to the client and operate from a “the client is always right” perspective.
With the exception of a few who had never had conversations about the ethical aspect of ads with clients, the practitioners seemed to be challenged by the idea that the clients were headstrong, powerful and did not listen. This finding also supported the finding of Rotzoll and Christians (1980) and more currently, Cohn (2005) where agency/client relationship was identified as a major ethical challenge advertising practitioners faced. The popular belief among Ghanaian practitioners that clients were powerful and therefore had to be pleased at all cost was similar to the findings of Heinonen and Rozenveld (2013, p.63). The authors indicated that practitioners in Sweden and Netherland were of the perception that clients/agency relationship had changed from the usual long-term relationship to the agency being hired on project basis only. This allowed the clients to change agencies easily and thus, made the client more powerful (Heinonen and Rozenveld, 2013). However a study conducted by Drumwright and Murphey (2004) on advertising ethics revealed the reason for which practitioners may be afraid of their clients. Drumwright and Murphey (2004) identified that, practitioners in the United States who were unethical were so because they often over identified with the clients’ perspectives to the extent that advertising practitioners could not raise ethical concerns (Drumwright and Murphey, 2004). Bringing it into context, perhaps, if practitioners who over identified with clients’ perspective halted that act; they would be able to remain focused and talked to clients about the importance of adhering to the advertising ethics of Ghana.

4.1.4 Resolution of ethical dilemmas

This theme was developed from the findings on how practitioners resolved ethical dilemmas in their line of work. With the exception of a few who pledged to work side by side with the ethical guidelines, most of the informants did not see consulting the code of ethics for direction as a way of resolving ethical dilemmas. They rather blamed their actions on authoritative and adamant
clients for directly and/or indirectly forcing them to be unethical. The practitioners in question therefore viewed giving in to the demands of the clients as the best way to resolve their ethical dilemma.

Measured against the selected three ethical theories, and to find out how the practitioners resolved their ethical dilemmas, the following were identified. The categorical imperative ethical theory helped identify that the practitioners were more concerned with pleasing the clients than performing their moral and professional duty of conforming to the advertising code of ethics. The practitioners did not respond from the categorical imperative perspective when faced with ethical dilemmas. They rather dealt with this dilemma by yielding to the so called ‘client power.’

Aristotle’s golden mean theory was also used to find out if practitioners made an effort to find a balance between ethics and profit. This theory posits that, when faced with an ethical dilemma, the most important thing is to know exactly what is appropriate in a given situation and strike a balance (New World Encyclopedia, 2013). The findings analysed indicated that the practitioners generally did not integrate the ethical codes of their profession into their decision making process when faced ethical dilemmas. Rather, they pleased the clients due to the fear of losing the clients to rival agencies. The current industry regime of the market pluralism, therefore, seems to exert a strain on the practitioner’s capacity to exercise professional ethical authority in their dealings with clients.

It can therefore be said that, in dealing with ethical dilemmas, the practitioners were not concerned with performing their moral duties as suggested by Kant’s categorical imperative nor do they try to strike a balance like Aristotle’s golden mean theory suggests. The practitioners were more tuned to applying the utilitarian ethical principle which revolves rationalising choices on the grounds that the end justifying the means. The practitioners’ manner of resolving ethical
dilemmas conforms to the tenet of this theory. That is, to the advertising practitioners interviewed, morality was not an end in itself and therefore what they considered most important was maximizing their own pleasure (profit) and not about the moral implications of their actions.

Furthermore, an interesting insight that emerged from the findings indicated that, the advertising industry was a very competitive one and what one agency was unwilling to do; another agency was willing to do for the same client and at a cheaper price. It is perhaps for this reason that the practitioners considered pleasing the client as more important than adhering adamantely to the code of ethics and therefore had less knowledge of the ethics and consequently hardly consulted the advertising code of ethics when making decisions with ethical implications.

5.0.6 Bearing ethical responsibility

This theme explored the importance practitioners placed on ethics in their creative work. The findings gathered indicated that, there was no designated individual in the ad agencies charged with the responsibility of checking the ethical aspects of ads produced. However, a few insisted that though no one was directly responsible, they were not also oblivious of the ethical guides.

With the beauty of qualitative research lying in the wealth of its details, as suggest by Wimmer and Dominick (2014), the present study was able to gather from the practitioners’ body language and voice modulation that, this particular question made almost all the informants uncomfortable. The few that gave a further explanation of not being oblivious of the ethical guides said so with little observable conviction. It came across as something they had quickly decided to say just to protect their agencies.

On the issue of dealing with ethical dilemmas, some of the practitioners indicated that they had not faced a situation where authoritative bodies and/or consumers had complained about the
ethics of their ads. However, a few were of the viewpoint that ethical consent of ads should be a check and balance from both sides (agencies and clients). Unfortunately, most of the practitioners were of the perception that the clients must solely bear such responsibility and not the agencies. This suggests that, the practitioners in question did not assume moral responsibility of their ads. This observation is similar to the findings of the Academy of Marketing Conference (2013), which revealed that most UK practitioners also recognised advertising decisions to have ethical implications but did not individually assume moral responsibility for them.

The act of neglecting the moral responsibility of ads created and circulated to the general public goes against the tenet of categorical imperative. The few that suggested that it should be a check and balance between the ad agencies and the clients were speaking from Aristotle’s golden mean point of view of finding a balance.

5.0.7 Other finding

As indicated earlier, due to the nature of qualitative research, an observation was made. Even though the study did not explicitly ask the practitioners their perceptions about the Advertising Association of Ghana, there seemed to be a general impression among them that, the association was not doing a very good job of advocating about Ghana’s advertising code of ethics. The impression they gave was that, if the association had done this, practitioners would not only have known of the existence but also, they would have had an in-depth knowledge of the content of the ethical guidelines.
5.1 CONCLUSION

This study was a first step in an attempt to undertake a comprehensive study on agency practitioners’ perspectives on advertising ethics by the Advertising Association of Ghana. Perspective as operationalised in the study referred to the viewpoints of the advertising practitioners. Questions about the knowledge level, importance placed on the ethics, challenges faced by practitioners and how they dealt with ethical dilemmas in their work were asked. Along the way, seven themes were derived from the findings, namely; knowledge level of practitioners, consideration of ethics by practitioners, feasibility of ethics, practicality of ethical standards, client power, resolution of ethical dilemmas by practitioners and bearing ethical responsibility.

Relevant findings of this study included the fact that, though the practitioners seemed to know of the existence of the ethical code, they had very limited knowledge of its content. However, the practitioners were of the view that, an increased advocacy of the ethical code by the AAG would be the answer to the problem. Another interesting finding was that, some of the practitioners were more concerned with avoiding a law suit than doing what was morally right and this can be said to be a utilitarian way of thinking. When faced with ethical dilemmas, the perception that clients were powerful seemed to cast a spell on the practitioners. Instead of acting morally responsible, the practitioners concentrated on pleasing such clients in order to maximize profit, thus, applying the utilitarian ethical principle. The popular notion that difficult clients were the main problems of the practitioners suggests that, the AAG should not limit advocacy of the ethics to practitioners alone, but should extend it to advertisers as well. On the other side, agency practitioners are advised not to over identify with the perspective of their clients and rather stick to the ethics of their profession.
On a positive note, some of the advertising practitioners in Ghana considered the advertising code of ethics feasible and practical though they lacked adequate knowledge of it. Also they considered it their responsibility as practitioners to tell the consumers the truth and not deceive them of products and services advertised. This should encourage the AAG to engage in more awareness raising and professional development activities for its members.

The above research findings and suggestions adequately support the Advertising Association of Ghana on how to arouse the interest of practitioners in the ethical guidelines it has provided. Unlike popular notion among practitioners, ethics are not only relevant to win awards and gain good reputation; it also provides guidelines on how to treat each other as human beings. As suggested by Immanuel Kant’s’ categorical imperative ethical theory, “humans should be treated as objects of intrinsic moral value. That is, as ends in themselves and never as a mere means to some other end. In this case, this research serves as a reminder to the AAG to insist and push practitioners to think about the social and moral impact of their ads on society and not only focus on pleasing their clients.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be beneficial to all individuals concerned while at the same time contribute to knowledge enrichment in the academic world.

5.3 LIMITATION OF STUDY

As every researcher knows, there is always a limitation in an academic study and this study is no exception. Qualitative study is generally known for proving rich data that other quantitative methods cannot. However, there is the uncertainty of how age, gender, career stage or personal values of the sampled informants impacted the present study. Davis (1994) found an age-related correlation, whereby the oldest respondents is more likely to being most concerned about ethics
and it is not certain how the practitioners’ ages, career stage or personal values affected the conversation. Given that most (though not all) of the informants were in their thirties and forties, this could have had an impact on the study.

Despite this limitation, the present study adds to literature by providing new insights regarding the advertising practitioners’ perspective on advertising ethics in Ghana. It builds on the work of previous researchers and creates opportunities for further study.

### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Academic

There has been a vibrant change in the advertising industry as well as a radical increase of ad agencies in Ghana. Consequently, proliferation of the media has also provided a platform for the hundreds, if not thousands of ads produced to be disseminated, whether ethical or unethical. These reasons and more have made research into advertising ethics in Ghana a fertile ground.

As a recommendation, since the focus of the present study was to look at depth (the informant’s opinions, experiences, feelings and motivations) and not to look at spread, future research could approach this topic quantitatively. Also, the study focused on one part of the “meso” circle as suggested by Drumright (2007). Future researchers can thus explore the other side by interviewing other important players such as advertisers themselves as well as the media professionals. Future research could also focus on finding out the perceptions of advertising students on advertising ethics in Ghana. Research may also concentrate on a comparative analysis of Ghana’s advertising ethics to that of other countries.
With digital advertising becoming more popular in Ghana, future research can zoom into digital ad agencies and can specifically seek to find out if these ads are ethical. Another direction can also be accessing the websites of ad agencies in Ghana to find out if they pride in producing ethical ads as a way of selling their agency.

**Industry**

Previously stated in the significance of study, this research has practical implication and significance to important stakeholders in the advertising industry in Ghana. An authoritative body like the Advertising Standards Authority or the Advertising Association of Ghana as a whole must intensify advocacy of Ghana’s advertising code of ethics as suggested by the practitioners themselves. The Advertising Association of Ghana is also recommended to expand its award scheme to include adherence of the ethics as a way of motivating the practitioners to learn about and adhere to Ghana’s advertising code of ethics.
REFERENCES


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Ghana Advertising Code of Ethics by the Advertising Association of Ghana (ND)


APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thanks so much for this opportunity. I am very interested in learning your thoughts on advertising ethics in Ghana. The interview will be recorded but please note that, everything you say is confidential. I encourage you to be as frank as you possibly can and give as many examples as possible. Thank you.

1. Please, are you aware of Ghana’s Advertising code of ethics by the Advertising Association of Ghana?

2. Can you please name and explain at least five of the Advertising code of ethics in Ghana by the AAG?

3. Kindly tell me why you think it is important for you as a Manager/ Creative Director/ Account Manager to conform to Ghana’s advertising code of ethics?

4. In terms of ads themselves and the messages they contain, what are the most important ethical standards you adhere to?

5. Do you consult the code of ethics each time you are making decisions with ethical implications?

6. Is someone or a group of people responsible for the ethical content of ads in your agency?

b. Currently, what is the client’s responsibility for the ethical content of an ad? What would you have wished it would be?

7. In your line of duty as a Manager/ Creative Director/ Account Manager, how feasible do you find Ghana’s advertising Code of Ethics?

8. Do you personally encounter any challenges when adhering to these ethical standards?

9. Which part(s) of the code of ethics do you struggle to adhere to the most?

10. How do clients react when your agency questions the ethics of an assignment?

11. Is there anything that I omitted to ask you about advertising ethics that you would like to add? Is there anything we discussed that you would like to expand on?