

Understanding the Literature on Advertising Ethics Using Morphological Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose : This study reviewed the literature on advertising ethics and identified research gaps to provide scope for future work.

Design/Methodology/Approach : The relevant literature was identified through a search of Scopus and Web of Science. The final sample of 174 articles was carefully read to determine dimensions and variants, which were used in morphological analysis to construct a cross-consistency matrix and obtain a comprehensive understanding of the domain of advertising ethics. The cross-consistency matrix was used to identify explored and unexplored areas of study.

Findings : A comprehensive morphological analysis framework, encompassing six dimensions and 27 variants of advertising ethics research was constructed, leading to the identification of 87 research gaps.

Practical Implications : Managers can use the MA framework as a guide for understanding advertising ethics and acting accordingly. Researchers can utilize the framework and the identified research gaps to extend the literature.

Originality/Value : This study is the first in the advertising ethics literature to construct a morphological analysis framework. A comprehensive literature search was undertaken by searching both Scopus and Web of Science databases.

Keywords : advertising ethics, morphological analysis, cross-consistency matrix, dimensions, research gaps

Paper Submission Date : September 25, 2024 ; **Paper sent back for Revision :** March 22, 2025 ; **Paper Acceptance Date :** June 15, 2025 ; **Paper Published Online :** July 15, 2025

Advertising is a powerful communication tool that helps firms connect with customers, market their goods and services (Javed et al., 2021), and boost sales. Kazi et al. (2018) and Singh (2008) noted that, in the face of intense competition, ethical practices in advertising may seem like a lost priority. According to Cunningham (1999), advertising ethics concerns what is right or good in the conduct of the advertising function. More specifically, advertising ethics addresses issues of what should be done, rather than what is required only by law (Cunningham, 1999; Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). However, a consensual understanding of what advertising ethics includes is complicated due to the pluralistic nature of ethics (Drumwright, 2018). The advertising industry is incredibly vast and varied (Dhanabhakya & Geetha, 2006), and advertising tactics possess the potential to harm and exploit. Advertisements can have unintended effects on individuals in specific demographic groups, such as children, women, older adults, and those with limited market literacy. For example, according to John and D'Abreo (2017), a common tactic used by advertisers to influence consumers' purchase

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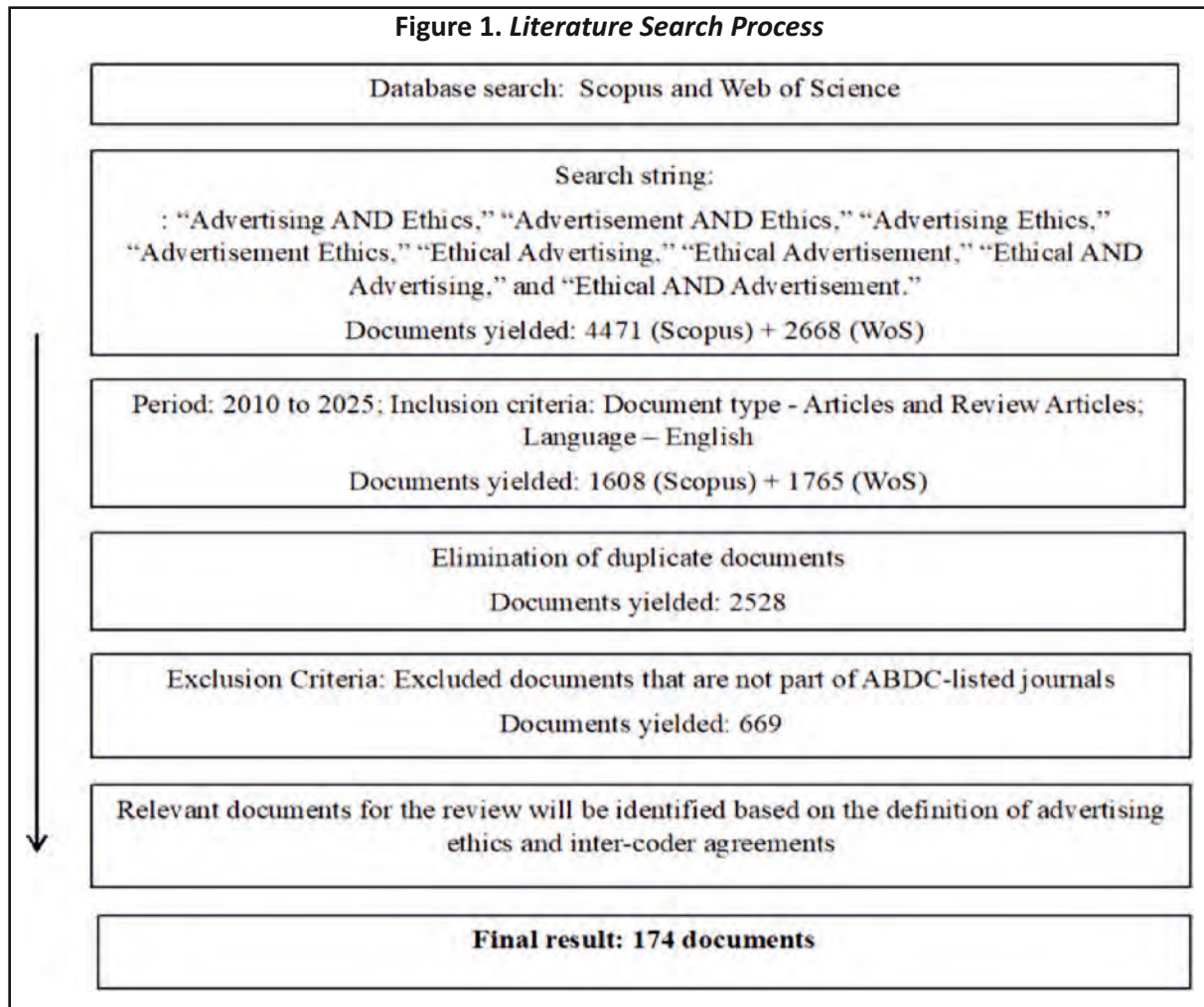
decisions is the use of sexual imagery. Sivathanu (2017) noted that the food industry is increasingly targeting children and adolescents, designing specific advertisements to appeal to them. According to Sathyanarayana et al. (2019), celebrity-endorsed advertisements have a significant influence on younger audiences.

Although numerous moral and ethical norms have been proposed around the globe, issues persist (Mohideen, 2009). Murphy et al. (2005) suggested that each country should implement an ethical ombudsman for the advertising industry. He also mentioned that many countries have agencies that monitor the compliance of advertisements with standards in advertising ethics. For instance, in 2022, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States of America penalized TurboTax (a tax preparation software company) for misleading customers with false advertising, offering “free” tax preparation, while millions of taxpayers were not eligible for the company's “free” service (Federal Trade Commission, 2023). The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), the advertising regulatory body in the United Kingdom, ensured the amendment or withdrawal of 33,903 ads in 2024, a 23.8 percent increase from the previous year (Advertising Standards Authority, 2025). In India, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) scrutinized 7,199 ads in 2024–2025, a 12.5 percent decrease from the previous year (The Advertising Standards Council of India, 2025). Ad Standards, the compliance resolution function of Australia's advertising regulatory system—the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA)—assessed 299 complaints in 2024, a 15.4 percent increase from the previous year (Ad Standards, 2025).

Numerous studies have examined the underlying concepts of advertising ethics; however, a comprehensive understanding of this domain is not readily available in the recent literature. Prior to this study, Drumwright and Murphy (2009) examined the discourse on advertising ethics by publishing “The Current State of Advertising Ethics: Industry and Academic Perspectives.” Since then, to the best of our knowledge, no comprehensive review of the literature on advertising ethics has been published for more than a decade. Thus, a visible gap exists, indicating a need for an updated review of current trends and concepts. The absence of such an updated and comprehensive review underscores the need to understand the evolving research dynamics of advertising ethics. Such a review will undoubtedly help researchers to identify existing research gaps in the domain. The purpose of this study is thus to review the current literature available within this field and identify research gaps that can be addressed in future research. The review is guided by three research questions: First, what are the main dimensions and variants in the literature on advertising ethics? Second, what are the research gaps in the literature on advertising ethics? Third, what areas have been heavily explored in the relevant literature? Most notably, this study addresses research questions by using a novel approach. It is the first to apply the morphological analysis (MA) method to the domain of advertising ethics. This method is well-suited to address the study's research questions as compared to any other method. The MA method was used to synthesize an overview of the body of literature by identifying major dimensions and their variants in this domain. For examples of prior studies that used this method in domains outside of advertising ethics, see Baliga et al. (2021), Goel et al. (2019), Ramesh and Chawla (2022), and Sunder et al. (2018). This study contributes to the literature in several aspects, as discussed later in this paper, to address the questions raised.

Methodology

MA is a qualitative approach commonly used in the social sciences to organize and evaluate the complete range of interactions found in complex, multidimensional, and non-quantifiable contexts (Ritchey, 2011). MA enables the identification of specific dimensions (parameters) that constitute the key themes of a research field. Each dimension is influenced by a wide range of pertinent values and underlying concepts, which further leads to variants (options) (Ritchey, 2011). According to Sunder et al. (2019), dimensions are components of the research, and variants are manifestations of the dimensions. The outcome of the MA framework is a cross-consistency



matrix (CCM), which provides all possible pairwise combinations of variants, known as configurations (Goel et al., 2019). CCM can be used to identify both explored and unexplored areas within a specific domain.

Research articles were identified by searching Scopus and Web of Science, as outlined in Figure 1. Both databases were used to enhance the comprehensiveness of the literature search, thereby adding to the originality of this study. A series of similar keywords was selected based on guidance from the literature (Jesson et al., 2011; Ridley, 2012). The following keyword strings were used to search the literature: "Advertising AND Ethics," "Advertisement AND Ethics," "Advertising Ethics," "Advertisement Ethics," "Ethical Advertising," "Ethical Advertisement," "Ethical AND Advertising," and "Ethical AND Advertisement." This initial search yielded 4,471 results in Scopus and 2,668 results in Web of Science.

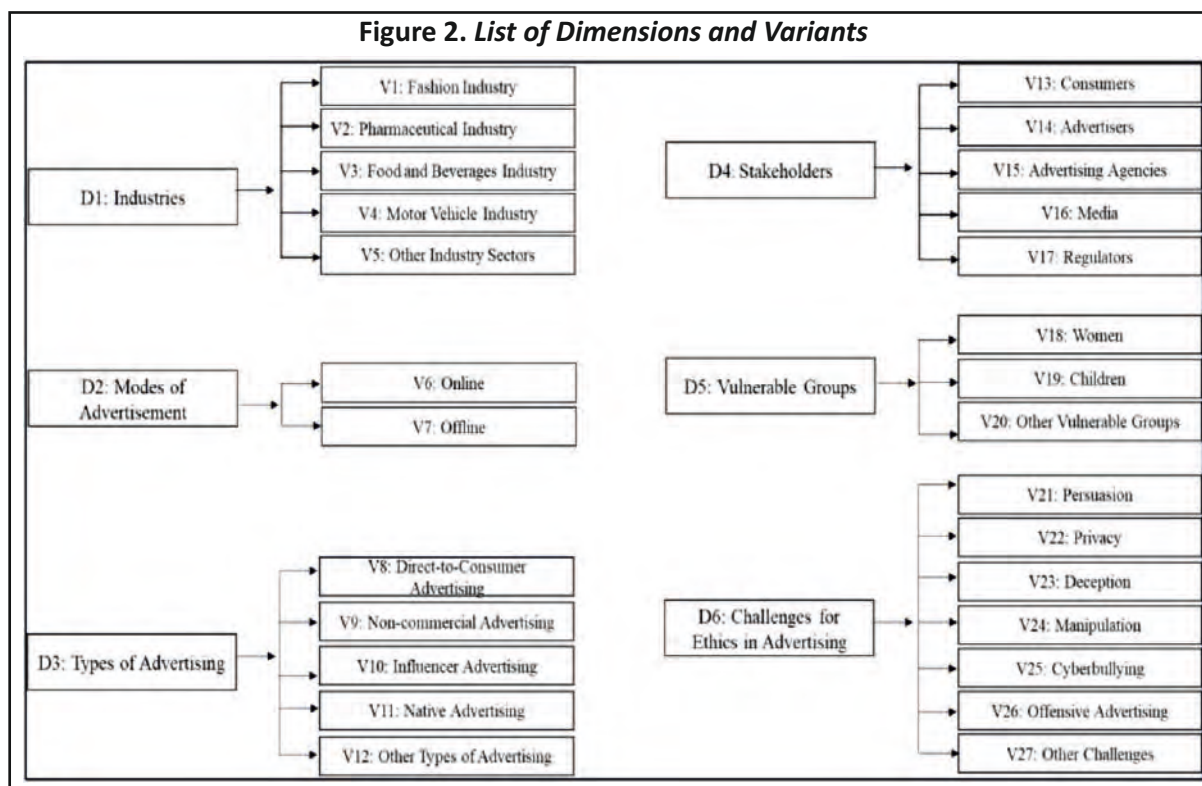
The initial pool of articles was refined by applying the following inclusion criteria: Articles published between 2010 and 2025, as the previous advertising ethics review was published in 2009 (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009); articles and review articles, which are of higher quality than conference papers; and articles in English. After applying these criteria, 1,608 results remained in Scopus and 1,765 results in Web of Science. The results from the two databases were merged, and duplicates were eliminated, resulting in 2,528 articles. Computer codes were implemented using the R programming language to achieve this purpose. Next, only articles published in journals listed on the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) were retained, resulting in 669 articles. Finally, to identify relevant articles, the following definition of advertising ethics, adapted from Laczniaik and Murphy's

(1993) definition of marketing ethics, was used: “Advertising ethics is defined as the systematic study of how moral standards are applied to advertising decisions, behaviors, and institutions.” Coding of the articles was conducted independently by two coders. The coders were provided with the definition of advertising ethics and asked to address the following question: “Does the article meet the definition of advertising ethics?” Each coder answered the question by coding either 1 (Yes) or 2 (No). Once both coders independently completed the coding process, the Kappa indicator was calculated to evaluate inter-rater reliability (Ramesh & Chawla, 2022; Sandelowski et al., 1997). The Kappa value was 0.79, which exceeded the cutoff value of 0.6, indicating good inter-rater reliability (Ramesh & Chawla, 2022; Shakerian et al., 2019). In cases of disagreement, the coders engaged in a detailed discussion to compare and justify their codes, reaching a consensus through mutual agreement. This final stage yielded 174 articles as the final set for the study.

In the subsequent step, the abstract and conclusion of each of these articles were carefully read. A second phase of reading was performed with a focus on the results and/or recommendation sections (Goel et al., 2019). The labels of the variants were taken from the reviewed literature to ensure that the resulting data closely followed the developed framework (Goel et al., 2019). Although different authors may express the same concept using different labels, a consensus MA framework can be obtained through thoughtful discussions and experiments (Sunder et al., 2018).

Analysis and Results

This section presents the outcomes derived from the MA analysis. First, the dimensions and variants are identified and explained with reference to the relevant literature. Next, using the dimensions and variants, a CCM is developed, and research gaps are identified. After carefully reading the set of 174 articles, six dimensions and 27 variants were identified, as shown in Figure 2.



DIMENSION 1 : INDUSTRIES

The major industry sectors identified in the relevant literature were the fashion, pharmaceutical, food and beverage, and motor vehicle industries.

Variant 1 : Fashion Industry

Among studies of advertising practices in the fashion industry, Andersen and Paas (2014) investigated the adverse influence of using skinny models in print advertisements on advertising performance. They found that this practice harmed consumer attitudes toward the ads, their ethical judgments of the ads, and their purchase intentions for the product. Fashion industry advertisements often utilize elements of race, color, gender, and appearance to influence consumer purchasing behavior. These strategies can raise serious ethical concerns if not used wisely. A study by Ferdousi et al. (2024) examined the effect of brief exposure to Instagram ads featuring thin and curvy models on young women's body image preferences and purchasing intentions. While participants preferred the body type they saw, they were more likely to buy clothes worn by thin models, even though both model types were rated equally attractive.

Variant 2 : Pharmaceutical Industry

The portrayal of harmful side effects of prescription medications in advertisements is a widely researched ethical problem in the pharmaceutical industry. By law, pharmaceutical advertisements must disclose any potential dangers or adverse effects that patients may encounter when taking a drug (Hagenbuch, 2019). While some side effects are relatively benign, others can be dangerous and even fatal, with risks such as stroke, coma, or death (Hagenbuch, 2019). Thus, advertisers of such products must adhere to specific advertising practices to minimize the risk of harm to consumers.

Variant 3 : Food and Beverages Industry

Food and beverage advertisements influence public health and societal well-being. Exaggerating the health benefits of a product can affect consumers' lives, and the advertised products should be safe for consumption. Some foods and beverages, which are heavily advertised and contain excessive calories but few nutrients, are known to cause long-term health problems, especially in children (Gupta et al., 2024). According to Bakir and Vitell (2010), parents' reactions to food advertisements targeting children are influenced by their concerns about the adverse effects of such advertisements. Children, as a vulnerable group, are discussed further in Dimension 5.

Variant 4 : Motor Vehicle Industry

The motor vehicle industry should promote safety and sustainability through its advertising activities and other promotional efforts. Donovan et al. (2011a) investigated how motor vehicle advertising is self-regulated within the Australian context. They examined the extent to which the content of specific motor vehicle advertisements violated the Australian self-regulatory code. Another study by Donovan et al. (2011b) explored how performance features in motor vehicle advertisements encouraged undesirable driving behavior. They found significant support for including consumer perceptions in evaluations of motor vehicle advertisements by regulators.

Variant 5 : Other Industry Sectors

Other industries, such as financial services, will be discussed in future literature on advertising ethics.

DIMENSION 2 : MODES OF ADVERTISEMENT

Advertisements can reach audiences through both online and offline channels. However, many advertising activities and campaigns combine online and offline advertising, and the mode of advertisement may seem ambiguous. Both online and offline advertising raise significant questions and difficulties in terms of ethical practices.

Online

Technological advances, along with increased bandwidth, have facilitated the availability of high-end online advertising techniques (Singh & Ahluwalia, 2017). Srivastava and Mishra (2012) stated that, compared to traditional modes of advertising, online advertising has a significantly greater reach in terms of recognition. Advertising activities conducted through digital channels, such as websites, social media platforms, and mobile applications, pose various ethical considerations. Among relevant studies, Belanche (2019) observed that, in the absence of a global government, key stakeholders in advertising collaborate to establish fundamental guidelines for internet advertising formats, aiming to mitigate the consequences of the ad-blocking phenomenon. This effort helps to reduce the catastrophic economic effects of the ad-blocking phenomenon. To help academics and practitioners better understand consumer behavior in the context of online retailing, Aiolfi et al. (2021) proposed a framework that outlines the potential advantages and hazards of online behavioral and data-driven digital advertising.

Offline

Offline modes of advertising include print media, broadcast (e.g., television), and outdoor (e.g., billboards) (Murphy et al., 2005). These are traditional promotional activities conducted through non-digital channels.

DIMENSION 3 : TYPES OF ADVERTISING

The type of advertising significantly influences how messages are communicated, their impact on consumers, and the ethical issues they raise.

Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (DTC Advertising)

DTC advertising educates healthcare consumers—individuals who take personal responsibility for their medical care—about medical conditions, treatment options, and medical advancements (Mogull & Balzhiser, 2015). Due to its potential impact on consumer health, DTC advertising is a significant topic in advertising ethics research. For instance, Koku (2021) examined the ethical and legal dilemmas posed by DTC advertising for pharmaceutical companies in the United States. He suggested that focus group studies should be performed before a DTC advertisement is launched. Jae and DelVecchio (2022) examined drug risk comprehension among aliterate consumers based on information provided through direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising. They reported that an increase in consumer aliteracy led to a decrease in comprehension of drug-risk information. However, the

decrease in comprehension of drug-risk information was lower when the information was presented in bullet format rather than in paragraph format.

Noncommercial Advertising

Noncommercial advertising is concerned with increasing awareness, altering attitudes, and promoting beneficial behaviors. ASA categorizes “noncommercial” advertisers as including governmental and nongovernmental organizations, charities, religious and community groups, political organizations, pressure groups, and trade associations (Auxtova et al., 2021). However, studies of this type of advertising are scarce, leaving a broader scope for future research.

Influencer Advertising

Influencer advertising refers to any advertising content that consumers are likely to perceive as expressing the views, beliefs, experiences, or conclusions of someone other than the advertiser sponsoring it (Federal Trade Commission, 2009). In social media influencer advertising, sponsored content can mislead users by concealing its persuasive nature, which is its intended purpose (Brüns & Meißner, 2023). Providing honest reviews of sponsored products and services, while maintaining transparency about sponsorships, can help influencers adhere to ethical advertising practices. Buvár and Orosz (2024) examined how influencers sharing content about their children, referred to as “sharenting,” in sponsored social media posts affected the ethical perceptions and evaluations of their viewers. Their findings showed that featuring children in such posts for adult-related products led respondents to judge these posts as less ethical.

Native Advertising

Native advertising refers to a marketing strategy in which advertisers present paid content in a manner that mimics the format and placement of a publisher's regular content, thereby leveraging the publisher's credibility (Wojdyski & Golan, 2016). Native advertising takes the specific form and appearance of editorial content (Fischbach & Zarzosa, 2019). To explore ethical concerns about native advertising, Fischbach and Zarzosa (2019) evaluated consumers' confidence in making ethical decisions about native advertising. They advised managers against using such ads for consumers with little involvement in the product category. Zimand-Sheiner et al. (2020) reported that adolescents perceive native advertising as credible and have positive ethical attitudes about native advertising.

Other Types of Advertising

As modes of advertising and marketing are introduced and continually refined, other types will emerge. For example, commercial advertising and surrogate advertising may be future avenues of research on advertising ethics.

DIMENSION 4 : STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders are the actors involved in the advertising process. Stakeholder participation and behavior impact how the advertising industry develops and upholds ethical standards.

Consumers

Consumers are key stakeholders in the advertising process. Consumer autonomy, perceptions, and protection are prominent topics in the relevant literature (Moraes et al., 2020). Despite extensive research on how consumers react to predetermined statements in various advertising ethics scenarios, a gap remains in understanding how consumers generally perceive advertisements (Shabbir et al., 2019). Toti and Sánchez Romero (2023) found that consumer skepticism toward advertisements of ethical products increased ambivalent feelings, which subsequently reduced consumers' willingness to engage in ethical consumption.

Advertisers

Advertisers are the companies that produce and advertise their products or services. Daems et al. (2019) examined advertising professionals' opinions on the ethical appropriateness of novel advertising formats for minors. They found that the use of such formats was ethically acceptable for minors aged 12 years or older. De Pelsmacker et al. (2023) suggested that further research is needed on the obligations and roles of advertisers in terms of diversity and inclusion in advertisements.

Advertising Agencies

Advertising agencies act as intermediaries between advertisers and consumers, serving as advocates for the companies whose products they represent (Murphy et al., 2005). These agencies collaborate with other stakeholders in creating campaigns. With the advent of online modes and digital channels, the responsibilities of advertising agencies have expanded. For example, Dickinson-Delaporte and Kerr (2014) attempted to explain how advertising agencies use social media as a tool for understanding customers and sparking innovation. Their study highlighted ethical ramifications and provided a crucial baseline for agency best practices in social media research.

Media

Advertisements reach consumers through print and audiovisual media channels. Rinallo et al. (2013) investigated the link between advertising investment and the degree to which media outlets favor advertisers. Media outlets achieve this by providing advertisers with increased exposure to their products and services within ostensibly neutral editorial content. Rinallo et al. (2013) reported that this link does not always harm consumers, except in cases where compensatory advertising is used for products of subpar quality. Media companies should be transparent and clear about the distinction between editorial and sponsored content.

Regulators

The enforcement of ethical advertising practices is largely the responsibility of regulatory bodies, such as government agencies or organizations that set advertising standards. To ensure that advertisers adhere to ethical advertising principles and protect consumers' rights, these bodies create and enforce regulations and guidelines. In an analysis of the regulation of the advertising industry in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states, Bykov et al. (2015) noted the absence of common regulation and an interest in self-regulation. They particularly looked into the context of Russia, where the opinions of the state and the public on who should be responsible for regulation differ.

DIMENSION 5 : VULNERABLE GROUPS

Although an educated, adult consumer may be familiar with the tactics and information used in advertisements, specific audiences require a more careful and efficient approach (Murphy et al., 2005). These groups may be defined based on the consumer's gender, age, or literacy level.

Women

To ensure that women are not objectified, stereotyped, or depicted in a derogatory way, advertising ethics should address how they are portrayed. The sexual objectification of women is a broader research topic in the relevant literature (Alam et al., 2019; de Kerviler et al., 2022; Theodorakis & Painesis, 2022). Numerous studies have discussed the “ideal” physical attributes of female models and gender stereotyping (e.g., Andersen & Paas, 2014).

Children

Children's susceptibility to advertising has long been a topic of social and political discussion (Rozendaal & Buijzen, 2023). Ethical considerations in this regard involve avoiding content that may encourage unhealthy behaviors. Earlier research in the relevant literature also focused on the exploitation of children's vulnerability, especially in the food and beverage industry. Mehta et al. (2010) studied children's views on food advertising on television in Australia. They found that children demonstrated the ability to react, reply, and think back on their experience of viewing advertisements. Among the recent studies, Mehta and Bharadwaj (2021) examined the targeting of children by food advertisements in India. They found that most of the ads targeting children promoted male children as the main characters and thus reinforced gender stereotypes.

Other Vulnerable Groups

Other vulnerable groups include the youth, older people, market illiterate, and the LGBTQ+ communities. Chowdhury et al. (2024) examined the impact of various forms of religiosity on consumer responses to LGBTQ-themed advertising. They found that while intrinsic religiosity often leads to negative brand attitudes, portraying LGBTQ individuals in inspiring roles can mitigate this effect.

DIMENSION 6 : CHALLENGES FOR ETHICS IN ADVERTISING

Challenges for ethics in advertising vary in prominence over time, and new challenges continue to arise. Advances in advertising ethics must address the challenges that arise.

Persuasion

According to Sheehan (2004), persuasion refers to supporting one party's perspective (e.g., an advertiser's advertisement) presented to another party (e.g., a consumer) for the latter to contest and assess. Various studies in relevant literature have discussed the persuasiveness of advertising activities. For instance, Charry and Demoulin (2012) found that the threat appeals were more effective than other common appeals (e.g., adventure, fantasy, and fun) in increasing children's healthy food consumption. Srivastava and Gupta (2021) highlighted various theoretical and contextual frameworks that researchers have employed to investigate the different modes and persuasion strategies used in advertising to children. They also explained the impact of such strategies on consumer behavior, eating patterns, and children's overall health.

Privacy

Privacy is related to individuals' freedom, rights, and autonomy over the flow of information about themselves (Boerman & Smit, 2022; Nissenbaum, 2009). Belanche (2019) observed that discussions of advertising ethics must move beyond the content of advertisements and the susceptibility of audiences to include intrusive advertisement formats. Mpinganjira and Maduku (2019) found that attitudes toward mobile behavioral advertising, perceived control over privacy, and the desire for privacy all play a significant role in shaping how consumers perceive a brand's ethical value.

Deception

Deception arises when consumers perceive and believe a false advertising claim, whether it is stated directly or implied, but this becomes a concern only if the claim holds relevance for the consumer (Armstrong et al., 1979). Deceptive advertising includes exaggeration, misleading statements, or the omission of significant information. Research on deceptive advertising is prominent in the relevant literature. For example, Campbell and Grimm (2018) examined the potential for deception in native advertising. They identified challenges that this issue poses and suggested resolutions that the industry could consider for the effective prevention of deception. To alert consumers that they are being deceived and misled, Borau and Nepomuceno (2019) suggested that advertisements should include disclaimers stating that the visuals are unrealistic and have been digitally manipulated.

Manipulation

Manipulation occurs when one entity (an advertiser) uses a method (such as an advertisement) to induce another entity (a consumer) to do something involuntarily (e.g., buying a product) (Sheehan, 2004). Manipulative advertising targets consumers' vulnerabilities. Although manipulative advertising directly suggests unethical practices in advertising, Aylsworth (2022) argued that the conventional criticism of advertising is overly broad because it incorrectly criticizes permissible acts of manipulation.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to an aggressive and deliberate action conducted by an individual or a group through electronic means, repeatedly over time, targeting a victim who finds it difficult to defend themselves (Smith et al., 2008). It is a widespread societal issue that calls for action from individuals, groups, policymakers, and online platforms. Kim et al. (2023) found that hypocrisy induction in advertising might enhance consumer awareness and prevent cyberbullying.

Offensive Advertising

ASA defines offense as “anger or upset caused by something perceived to be insulting, unfair or morally wrong” (Advertising Standards Authority, 2012). Several studies in the relevant literature have broadly examined the topic of offensive advertising. For example, a qualitative content analysis by Bae et al. (2015) adopted the theories of sexual objectification and ethical judgments to examine consumers' perceptions of offensive advertising techniques. They found that sexually explicit messages were no longer appealing to consumers. Friedmann et al. (2024) found that offensive and discriminatory ads trigger stress responses, particularly among groups that face high levels of discrimination.

Figure 3. Cross-Consistency Matrix

[illegible]

Other Challenges

The list of challenges mentioned above is not exhaustive. They have been discussed in the relevant literature. Future investigations of ethical challenges in the domain of advertising ethics could pursue other avenues, such as advertisements of offerings with dubious merits.

Cross - Consistency Matrix (CCM)

The MA framework, developed by identifying its dimensions and variants, was used to construct a CCM to identify gaps in research on advertising ethics. In the CCM, the variants of each dimension are cross-matched in a matrix (Goel et al., 2019; Sunder et al., 2018). These combinations of variants across dimensions are referred to as configurations. All variants in the MA framework are compared pairwise using this matrix to identify consistent pairs (Ramesh & Chawla, 2022; Ritchey, 2018), i.e., two variants that coexist (Ritchey, 2015). Some configurations may be inconsistent.

For all variants across dimensions, a total of 5,250 configurations ($5 \times 2 \times 5 \times 5 \times 3 \times 7$) were possible. Next, configurations in which a variant was paired with itself were excluded. In addition, configurations in which a variant was paired with variants from the same dimension were excluded. This was because variants from the same dimension may share similar characteristics, making their interaction meaningless (Baliga et al., 2021). This operation left a total of 296 configurations in the relevant literature. To eliminate inconsistencies, coding was conducted independently by two coders. Definitions of each dimension and variant were provided to the coders. Inconsistent configurations were identified after addressing the following question: “Is the configuration inconsistent?” “If YES, what is the type of inconsistency (LI = logical inconsistency, EI = empirical inconsistency, or NI = normative inconsistency)?” (Sandelowski et al., 1997). The Kappa value of 0.85 indicated good inter-rater reliability. After thoughtful discussions, four configurations were identified as inconsistent with the requirements. Ultimately, 87 research gaps were identified using the MA framework. When identifying research gaps in the literature, only the “mutual consistency” between the two variants was considered; no direction or causality was taken into account (Sunder et al., 2018). The CCM is shown in Figure 3. Cells in dark and light grey were excluded (i.e., repetitions and configurations of variants from the same dimension, respectively). Cells with vertical stripes are the configurations that have already been explored in the literature. Cells with crosshatches are inconsistent combinations of variants across dimensions. Cells in white are the identified research gaps.

Discussion

By applying MA to perform a comprehensive analysis of the literature on advertising ethics, this study consolidates a large body of knowledge. The literature search relied on both Scopus and Web of Science, thereby enriching the comprehensiveness of the results. Further, the classification and analysis of several dimensions and their variants provide a complete overview of the complex realm of advertising ethics. This includes key themes and patterns in ethical dilemmas, as well as the obligations associated with advertising practices. By identifying 87 research gaps in the relevant literature on advertising ethics, the MA framework reveals the scope for future research. However, this framework is the result of an analysis-synthesis approach, which requires a constant review of the literature. As a result, this framework can be modified (Baliga et al., 2021) and further supplemented by adding other dimensions or variants as needed. This ensures flexibility to accommodate changes and trends in the domain. Overall, this study demonstrates that MA is a valuable methodology for analyzing the literature on advertising ethics and comprehending the complexity of the domain in a structured manner.

Future Research Avenues and Implications for Researchers

The MA framework, constructed based on more than a decade of research on advertising ethics, identified 87 research gaps. Examples of possible research questions (RQs) arising from these gaps are listed in Table 1. For example, RQ1 asks, “How does the conformance of native advertising to moral standards differ across industries?” Addressing this RQ would provide a thorough understanding of native advertising not only in a specific industry but also across industries. RQ7 is “How are vulnerable groups influenced by advertising in the motor vehicle industry?” This RQ emphasizes the need to explore variants within the dimension of vulnerable groups (D5) in the context of advertising practices in the motor vehicle industry. As noted previously, research studies on LGBTQ+ communities, market illiterates, and other vulnerable groups are scarce in the relevant literature. Thus, these RQs can guide future researchers in expanding the domain of advertising ethics.

Table 1. Examples of Research Questions (RQs) Arising from the Identified Research Gaps

RQ No.	Dimension Pair	Variant Pair(s)	RQ
1	Types of Advertising (D3) and Industry (D1)	Native Advertising (V11) and Pharmaceutical Industry (V2), Food and Beverages Industry (V3), Motor Vehicle Industry (V4), Other Industry Sectors (V5)	How does the conformance of native advertising to moral standards differ across industries?
2	Types of Advertising (D3) and Industry (D1)	Noncommercial Advertising (V9) and Food and Beverages Industry (V3), Motor Vehicle Industry (V4), Other Industry Sectors (V5)	How does the conformance of noncommercial advertising to moral standards differ across industries?
3	Industry (D1) and Types of Advertising (D3)	Motor Vehicle Industry (V4) and Noncommercial Advertising (V9), Influencer Advertising (V10), Native Advertising (V11), Other Types of Advertising (V12)	How does the conformance to moral standards in the motor vehicle industry differ across various types of advertising?
4	Stakeholders (D4) and Challenges for Ethics in Advertising (D6)	Advertising Agencies (V15) and Cyberbullying (V25)	What is the role of advertising agencies in cyberbullying?
5	Stakeholders (D4) and Challenges for Ethics in Advertising (D6)	Regulators (V17) and Cyberbullying (V25)	What is the impact of regulation on cyberbullying?
6	Types of Advertising (D3) and Vulnerable Groups (D5)	Noncommercial Advertising (V9) and Women (V18)	How are women portrayed in noncommercial advertisements?
7	Industry (D1) and Vulnerable Groups (D5)	Motor Vehicle Industry (V4) and Women (V18), Children (V19), Other Vulnerable Groups (V20)	How are vulnerable groups influenced by advertising in the motor vehicle industry?
8	Industry (D1) and Stakeholders (D4)	Motor Vehicle Industry (V4) and Consumers (V13), Advertisers (V14), Advertising Agencies (V15), Media (V16), Regulators (V17)	What is the role of various stakeholders in fostering ethical advertising in the motor vehicle industry?

Managerial Implications

Managers can use the MA framework as a guide for understanding advertising ethics and acting accordingly. First, managers can refer to the framework to develop codes of conduct to address ethical challenges, such as deceptive advertising. Second, by helping advertisers understand the role of stakeholders, the framework can foster ethical advertising. For example, advertisers can enhance their relationships with key stakeholders, including consumers, advertising agencies, media, and regulators, by publicly disclosing a code of conduct. Third, the framework reveals recent trends in advertising ethics specific to certain dimensions. For example, the online mode of advertising is a variant that is an integral part of modern marketing.

Limitations of the Study and the Way Forward

This study is also subject to limitations. First, the different phases of the study were marked by an element of subjectivity. Attempts were made to reduce its intensity by ensuring verifiability and reliability through a detailed explanation of the framework's development (Goel et al., 2019) and by assessing inter-coder agreements where applicable. Second, when assembling the relevant literature, journal quality was restricted to ABDC standards. The topics of research reported in ABDC-listed journals may differ from those discussed in unlisted journals. Third, the identified research gaps may not merit pursuit. The reasons for the gaps, the methods for studying them, and their relevance and significance in terms of both theory and practice are not addressed in this study. Therefore, scholars should exercise caution and assess the worthiness of a research gap based on its potential to contribute to the literature (Baliga et al., 2021).

Authors' Contribution

Ms. Jyothis Maria Franklin assumed the lead role in conceptualizing the study, curating the data, developing the methodology, analyzing the results, creating visualizations, applying software tools, and writing the original draft of the manuscript. Dr. Jayasankar Ramanathan provided support in conceptualization, methodology design, formal analysis, visualization, and software application. He supervised the research and also reviewed and edited the draft.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report.

Funding Acknowledgement

Dr. Jayasankar Ramanathan gratefully acknowledges the use of a “Krea Faculty Development and Professional Development Grant” for language editing of an earlier version of the manuscript.

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