

Imperatives and Strategies for Ethical Advertising in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical Industry :(A Study of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited)

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Nigerian pharmaceutical industry is growing with the potentials of doing a lot better than it is presently toward achieving medicines security for the country, but it faces critical challenges regarding ethical advertising practices. Ethical advertising is important to ensure pharmaceutical products are promoted transparently protecting consumers' health and maintaining trust in the sector. This paper examines the imperatives and strategies for ethical advertising within the Nigerian Pharmaceutical Industry using Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited, a major player in the market as case study. By analyzing Emzor's advertising practices, this study aims to highlight the current ethical standards, identify challenges and propose strategies for improvement.

Methods: This study employed a two-pronged methodological approach; a review of existing literature and content analysis. The review of literature examined relevant academic articles, regulatory guidelines, and industry reports to establish a theoretical framework for ethical advertising in the pharmaceutical sector. This review provided insights into the regulatory space, industry standards, and best practices for ethical advertising. The content analysis was used to assess the actual advertising materials of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited. This included print materials, digital and broadcast materials. These were analyzed to examine how well they align with ethical standards in terms of accuracy, transparency and comprehensiveness. By comparing how it stands with recommended guidelines and regulatory requirements the study can gauge the company's compliance to these standards.

Findings/Discussion: The findings reveal that Emzor Pharmaceuticals Industries Limited demonstrates some commitment to ethical advertising as evidenced by adherence to regulatory guidelines and industry standards. The company advertisements generally provide balanced information about medicine efficacy, safety and side effects. It was observed from the content analysis that 63% reported relatively accurate information about advertised medicines while only 16% reported about the inherent risks associated with the medications. A significant proportion of advertisement materials lacked clarity in conveying potential risks associated with the medications which could mislead consumers or healthcare professionals, as there are no medicines without side effects. The literature review and content analysis showed dire needs for ethical advertising in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical sector and the need for enforcement of regulatory guidelines, the need for transparent and accurate communication, and ongoing training for those involved in company's promotional activities. Some challenges such as competitive pressures and poor regulatory oversight functions were identified as the problem of the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry.

Conclusion: The study concludes that Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited is largely successful in implementing ethical advertising practices but also faces ongoing challenges common to the industry that require attention. For the wider Nigerian Pharmaceutical Industry, the findings underscore the importance of stringent regulatory oversight and clear ethical guidelines. The findings in the industry highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to ethical advertising, incorporating robust internal controls and continuous professional development of those involved in medications promotional functions. Future research should focus

on the effectiveness of regulatory interventions and explore how similar strategies can be applied across the entire spectrum of the Nigerian Pharmaceutical sector to improve overall ethical advertising in the industry.

INTRODUCTION

The global pharmaceutical industry work to discover new, effective, and safe medications for the treatment and prevention of specific diseases and to offset the substantial costs of developing new commercially available treatments, medication promotion and advertising are used to gain competitive market share and drive sale volumes and industry profitability (Fulone, Cadogan, Barberato-Filho, Bergamaschi, Mazzei, Lopz & Silva, 2023).

Like every other form of advertising, pharmaceutical advertising is the strategic promotion of medications through different channels — TV, print, offline, or online. Pharmaceutical advertising is used by pharmaceutical companies to create awareness of the availability of medications that work for the treatment of a particular disease, and subtle persuade public health workers to prescribe their brands for treatment of diseases as applicable. However, this is the most complex and regulated industry regarding advertising since pharmaceutical advertisements must include potential side effects along with the benefits to allow for ethical concerns (Hubbard, 2007). Pharmaceutical advertising is not only recognized as a key factor in the successful launch of pharmaceutical products, but is also an important source of public health information with a significant impact on consumer choice and behavior. Today, major pharmaceutical companies cannot succeed without advertising considering the roles that advertising play in the industry. (Yousefi, Sharif, Chahian, Mombeini, & Peiravian, 2022)

In 2015 alone, the pharmaceutical industry spent an estimated USD 69.2 billion on various forms of pharmaceutical promotion and advertising in 31 countries, 3.2% up from 2014. Most of this spending was on advertising through pharmaceutical sales representatives' detailing (61.2%), followed by providing drug samples (10.8%), meetings (10.5%), direct-to-consumer advertising (8%), digital (3.8%), mailing/others (3.1%), clinical trials (2.1%) and other forms advertising (0.5%) (Fadare et al., 2018). The pharmaceutical industry invests heavily around the world to promote its products and ultimately increase sales and a large percentage of this is spent on marketing prescription medications. The pharmaceutical industry uses a variety of drug advertising activities to achieve its marketing goals including direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA), professionally branded advertising, and detailing visits by sales representatives, free drug samples, re-branding, and educational awareness programs. Drug promotion activities have multiple targets, including patients and consumers; healthcare professionals (involved in prescribing and dispensing of medications); regulators; and third-party players, such as insurers and other funders (Fadare et al., 2018)

The actual amount spent to research and develop new medicines is the subject of a significant debate with estimates of the amount of money varying considerably however, the advent of COVID-19 pandemic has increased people's interest in risk factors and health treatments and companies have therefore increased advertisements beyond the traditional media to the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, adding USD 152 million to this sector. Medication promotion involves disseminating information about new treatments (prescription and non-prescription medication) to relevant targets, including patients, healthcare professionals and regulators. However, conflicts of interest can arise when profits are prioritized over patient care (Fulone I, *et.al* 2023).

With the horizon widening and boundaries being broken down globally due to globalization every sector is on a developmental phase including pharmaceutical advertising and there is the need to apply plenty of ethical considerations to the promotion of pharmaceuticals since they are not just any other commodity that do not require stringent ethical adherence for advertising (Smith, 2012). Due to the special role that medications play in society and the harm which could be inflicted on persons if stringent regulations are not imposed in the advertisements of pharmaceutical products there is need to handle them with much care for the good of society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the number of deaths resulting from improper and unauthorized administration of medicines is the fifth leading cause of death worldwide and improper drug promotion can exacerbate this unhealthy outcome by making false or misleading claims, using inferior references, and failing to adhere to global standards (Ventola, 2011; Yousefi et al., 2022). World Health

Organization (WHO) set various criteria for drug promotion and advertisements. It defined drug promotion as "all informational and persuasive activities by manufacturers and distributors, the effect of which is to induce the prescription, supply, purchase and/or use of medicinal drugs." (WHO, 1988). Furthermore, the WHO prescribed a criteria for the ethical advertisements of pharmaceutical products so that it promotes the principles of doing ultimate good and no harm and these include transparency, clarity, safety and responsibility.(WHO, 1988)

Ethical Advertising in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical Sector

The pharmaceutical industry is a critical sector in any economy, influencing public health and well-being(Siddiq, Khan, Ali, & Ali, 2021). In Nigeria, where healthcare challenges are significant and resources are often limited, the ethical dimensions of pharmaceutical advertising become particularly crucial (Ajilore, Ojo, & Onyenakeya, 2019). Advertising within this sector plays a key role in shaping public perceptions, guiding healthcare professionals' decisions, and ultimately affecting patient outcomes. However, the need for ethical advertising practices is underscored by the potential for misinformation, exploitation, and conflict of interest that can arise from misleading or aggressive promotional tactics.(Ahaiwe, 2019)

The Nigerian pharmaceutical industry, with its rapid growth and increasing competitiveness, faces several challenges in maintaining ethical advertising practices. This study explores the imperatives and strategies for ethical advertising within this sector, focusing on how companies can align their advertising practices with ethical standards while promoting transparency and trust (Smith, 2012).

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research study was to analyze the imperatives and strategies for ethical advertising in the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry using Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited as a case study.

The specific objectives are:

1. To analyze the key ethical challenges faced by pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria regarding advertising, including issues of truthfulness, transparency, and regulatory compliance.
2. To explore and evaluate how existing regulatory frameworks and industry guidelines influence on ethical advertising practices in the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry.
3. To examine the robustness and recommend strategic approaches for pharmaceutical companies, with a focus on Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited, to enhance ethical advertising practices in their marketing operations

Research Questions

1. What are the current ethical challenges faced by pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria regarding advertising practices?
2. How do regulatory frameworks and industry guidelines impact ethical advertising in the Nigerian pharmaceutical sector?
3. What strategies can pharmaceutical companies, specifically Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited, implement to ensure ethical advertising practices?

Key terms and Definition for Operationalization of Research

Pharmaceutical Advertising, Target Audience, Pharmaceutical Industry,,Direct-to-Customer advertising, media channels.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories were used to set the framework upon which this research was built. The Utilitarian and General Marketing Ethics theories. Both Utilitarianism and marketing ethics theories provide frameworks that help pharmaceutical companies to create a balance between their business objectives and achieving the ethical responsibilities such as promoting patient safety, wellbeing and trust which they owe to the society. Since the seminal works of Vitell and Hunt and the welfare nature of health services, the application of utilitarianism has been useful theory which underpins the studies in the pharmaceutical industry (Vermillion, Winsor, & Walfried M. Lassar Florida, 2003; Zaikauskaitė et al., 2022)

Utilitarianism Theory in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Propounded by Jeremy Bentham and advanced by John Stuart Mill, the Utilitarianism theory supports the advocate for actions that puplicise happiness and tone down on suffering for the greatest number of people.

Pharmaceutical companies apply the use of utilitarian principles by focusing on actions that maximize benefits to patients and society while minimizing harm to them. For example, prioritizing the development and distribution of essential and life-saving medicines over just benefits that could be derived from more harmful ones can be seen as maximizing utility. This can also be applied to making their medicines accessible, affordable and available to patients through fair pricing principles by balancing profitability with affordability (Zaikauskaitė et al., 2022). Also in voting money for research and development for the discovery of new medicines and in conducting clinical trials, energy is put into projects that will lead to doing less harm to patients but those which will benefit society more.

General Marketing Ethics Theory in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Ethical marketing principles require clear, honest and accurate communication about benefits, risks and safety of medicines which strives to avoid using misleading claims or exaggerating the effectiveness or efficacy of drug products (Fulone *et.al*, 2023). It also involves rational promotional activities that should focus on promoting the rational use of medicines by ensuring both the health care professionals and the patients do the right things with the usage of the medicines (Sawad, 2021). Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, pharmacists) can achieve this by ensuring they adhere to professional conducts rather than succumbing to aggressive or persuasive marketing tactics of the pharmaceutical companies. By addressing conflict of interest between profit making and patient welfare is a duty the pharmaceutical industry may battle with from time to time and making this decision is one that is difficult. Putting this consideration on the table goes a long way to determine the ethical climate of a pharmaceutical company and decide whether it is an ethically inclined company or not (Malik, Junaid, & Asif, 2024; Radenković, Lazarević & Stojanović, 2019).

Studies show that pharmaceutical companies in developing countries with fragile health systems battle with ethical issues and some of their promotional and ethical practices are still marred by unethical practices (Siddiq et al., 2021; Ud et al., 2007)

Pharmaceutical Advertising in Nigeria

As shown in Table 1, Nigeria's regulation of medicines and pharmaceutical promotion is anchored in a cluster of interrelated laws and regulatory institutions. At the core is the *National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control Act* (Cap N1 LFN 2004; No. 15 of 1993), which establishes NAFDAC and mandates it to regulate the importation, manufacture, advertisement, distribution, sale and use of food, drugs, cosmetics, medical devices and related products. NAFDAC The *Food and Drugs Act* (Cap F32 LFN 2004), originally enacted in 1976, further provides for the regulation of the manufacture, sale and advertisement of food, drugs, cosmetics and devices. NAFDAC

To combat poor-quality products, the *Counterfeit and Fake Drugs and Unwholesome Processed Foods (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act* (Cap C34 LFN 2004) prohibits the sale and distribution of counterfeit, fake, adulterated, substandard or expired drugs and unwholesome foods and establishes Federal and State Task Forces

for enforcement. Professional regulation of pharmacy practice has evolved from the *Pharmacists Council of Nigeria Act* (Cap P17 LFN 2004; Act 91 of 1992) to the more recent *Pharmacy Council of Nigeria (Establishment) Act 2022*, which repeals the former Act and strengthens regulatory oversight over pharmacy premises, distribution chains and related professional conduct(Ajilore et al., 2019)

Advertising and marketing communications are now governed by the *Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria Act 2022* (ARCON Act), which abolishes the former APCON framework and gives ARCON exclusive powers to regulate advertising in all media, including pharmaceutical advertising directed at the Nigerian market. These national provisions co-exist with disease- or product-specific regulations, such as the *Controlled Medicines Regulations 2021*, which further define conditions for registration, use and promotion of controlled medicines

Table1: Key Nigerian Laws Regulating Medicines and Pharmaceutical Advertising

Law/Instrument	Year enacted	Key Focus
Food and Drugs Act, Cap F32 LFN 2004	1976 (and codified 2004)	Regulates the manufacture, sale and advertisement of food, drugs, cosmetics, and devices.
NAFDAC Act, Cap N1 LFN 2004 (No. 15 of 1993)	1992 (commencement); 1993 (Act)	Establishes NAFDAC as agency which controls importation, manufacture, advertisement , distribution, sale and use of regulated products
Counterfeit and Fake Drugs and Unwholesome Processed Foods (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, Cap C34 LFN 2004	1988–1999 (parts commenced); codified 2004	Prohibits counterfeit/fake/substandard drugs and unwholesome foods; establishes enforcement task forces
Pharmacists Council of Nigeria Act, Cap P17 LFN 2004 (repealed)	1992	Regulates pharmacy education and practice; historical framework relevant to older advertising regime
Pharmacy Council of Nigeria (Establishment) Act, 2022 (No. 31)	2022	Repeals PCN Act; strengthens regulation of pharmacy practice, premises, and handling/communication around medicines.
Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria Act, 2022 (No. 23)	2022	Abolishes APCON Act; gives ARCON exclusive authority over advertising and marketing communications in Nigeria, including pharmaceutical ads.
Controlled Medicines Regulations, 2021 (NAFDAC)	2021	Regulates registration, distribution and promotional controls for controlled medicines.

Challenges of Ethical Pharmaceutical Promotions and Advertising in Nigeria

Unethical promotional practices which often results from misinformation and persuasion concerns, stereotyping and manipulation as shown in Figure 1. These have been described as those practices that are misleading, manipulative, or are perilous to public health. It includes any form of business that is legally questionable in the

eyes of the general public. Nonetheless, illegal practices in marketing consist of actions that do not meet the expected standard of the company's activities, such as doing the wrong thing every time. In certain cases, a single person may be dishonest in the quest of his or her career, while in others, we are talking about organizational culture, when the entire business is corrupt, with catastrophic results for society. Illegal promotional actions, on the flip side, might jeopardize a company's image thus leading to losses in profits and market position (Vermillion et al., 2003). For the fact that advertising is paid for media information there is an imperative for it to be strictly regulated for the ultimate good of the people because of the roles drugs play in society (Radenković et al., 2019).

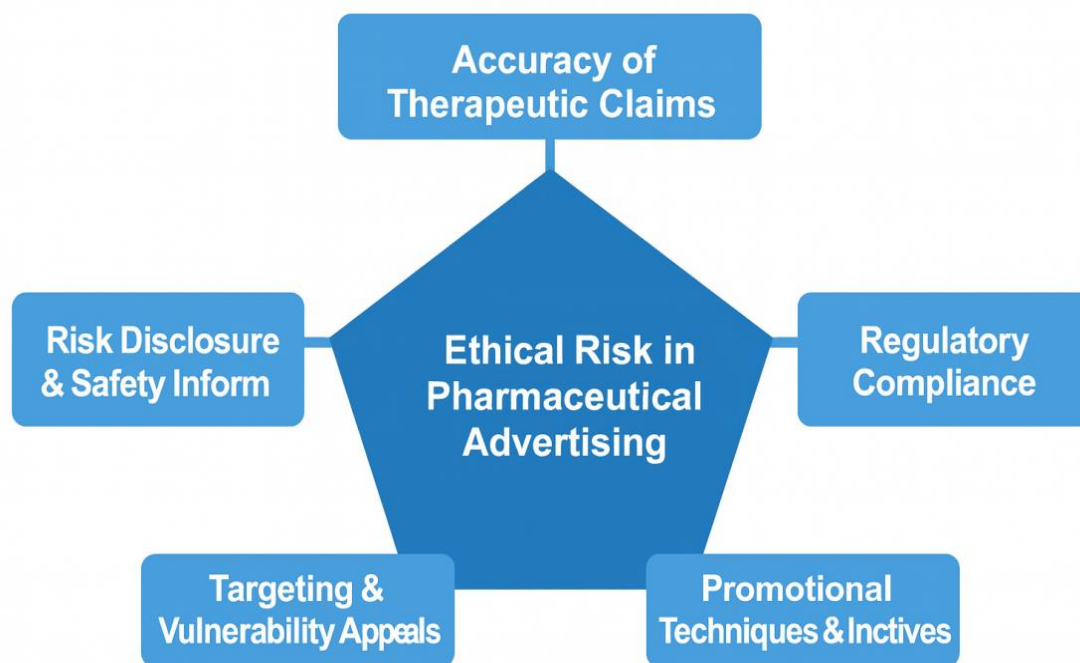


Figure 1. Ethical Risk Framework for Pharmaceutical Advertising

The Imperatives for Ethical Pharmaceutical Advertising

In the pharmaceutical industry just as it is in Nigeria, ethical advertising is crucial for maintaining public trust and ensuring the responsible promotion of health products. Studies have shown the following may serve as some imperatives for striving for ethical advertising in the industry (Onuorah, 1999; Bélisle-Pipon, 2022).:

- 1. Accuracy and Truthfulness of Information:** Advertising messages must be accurate and not misleading. Claims about the benefits or effectiveness of a drug should be supported by scientific evidence and not be geared towards making profits alone.
- 2. Transparency and Balanced information:** Clearly disclose any potential side effects, contraindications, and the terms of any promotions or discounts. For drug adverts both benefits and risks should be presented in a balanced way, ensuring that the potential drawbacks of treatment are not shaded in favour of the positive outcomes.
- 3. Adherence to Regulatory Standards:** Compliance with both local and international regulations and guidelines, such as those set by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) in Nigeria, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the USA serves as minimum standards in the issuance of ethical standards to be followed in the pharmaceutical sectors of the countries in question.
- 4. Respect for Privacy:** Avoid using personal health information without consent. Ensure that any testimonials or endorsements are genuine and not exaggerated or blown out of normal proportion to gain undue competitive advantage or mere profit oriented.

5. Professional Responsibility: Promote products in a way that does not encourage misuse or overuse. Provide balanced information that helps prescribers and consumers make informed decisions. Advertisers should act responsibly and professionally, recognizing the impact their information can have on the public.

6. Respect for Patient Autonomy: Ethical advertising respects the patients' rights to make informed decisions without coercion, exaggeration or manipulation. It should empower patients by providing appropriate information rather than manipulate them.

7. Cultural Sensivity and Inclusivity: Pharmaceutical advertising should be culturally sensitive by avoiding stereotypes and should be accessible to diverse audiences, including those with disability or low literacy levels.

8. Prohibition of Unethical Incentives: Offering financial or other inducements to healthcare providers for prescribing certain drugs can undermine trust and professionalism which may lead to compromised patient care.

9. Promotion of Rational Drug Use: Advertising should support the rational use of medicines, encouraging healthcare professionals and patients to make informed decisions based on clinical evidence rather than marketing pressure.

10. Avoidance of off-label promotions: Pharmaceutical adverts should strictly promote medications only for approved medications. Promoting off-label uses can lead to misuse and unwanted health outcomes.

Studies show that pharmaceutical advertising in Nigeria fall short of ethical expectations and there is need to do more to meet up with ethical standards required of pharmaceutical companies. In a study by Erhun, the information gotten on radio informed the decisions people make about non-prescription drugs and for fragile systems like Nigeria with low educational levels this may lead to negative outcomes (Erhun & Erhun, 2003), coupled with facts on the ground about poor regulatory oversight and functions which had given free rein to medicines sellers to advertise with little controls (Man, Akpan, Sampson, & Udoka, 2022). A study by Momodu showed although the public relied significantly on their health professionals for drug information they rarely see them but rely on various forms of pharmaceutical advertising for drug information (Momodu, Odigie, & Udezi, 2018). Another study by Adibe *et.al* buttressed the need for tighter measures to be employed in pharmaceutical advertising where an analysis of most advertised medicines showed that they did not bear enough information as required by the regulatory bodies (Adibe et al., 2015).

Strategies for Pharmaceutical Advertising in Nigeria

Some of the advertising strategies adopted by pharmaceutical companies are:

Direct-to-Customer Advertising: This is used extensively especially the radio and television for direct interactions between the companies and their consumers to target a broader audience of consumers. Advertisements that promote specific drugs focusing on their benefits and encouraging patronage or ask for more information from their healthcare professionals are documented in Nigeria (Ajilore et al., 2019; Erhun & Erhun, 2003).

Print Advertising: This is also used extensively in the Nigerian pharmaceutical advertising through the use of magazines, billboards, flyers, banners, newspapers and medical journals to provide detailed information about pharmaceutical products (Fadare et al., 2018).

Digital Advertising: Due to the online platforms becoming popular digital advertising is also becoming popular as a medium to promote pharmaceutical products (Mühlhoff & Willem, 2023)

One-on-one detailing: This is the use of direct interactions between pharmaceutical sales representatives and healthcare professionals to provide drug information and updates on developments in the field of medicines research (Ezeome, 2021).

Medical presentations, Seminars and Continuing Medical Education: Pharmaceutical companies sponsor programs that help to increase the knowledge of healthcare professionals and in turn expect their products to be

promoted, This in itself is a good practice but the borders between ethics and corrupt practices in this industry and professional interaction is becoming worrisome (Ezeome, 2021).

Health Awareness and Patient Education: Education: Educational content that raises awareness about specific diseases, symptoms, and treatments and indirectly promoting the company's products (Fadare et al., 2018).

Point-of-Care Advertising: In clinic and in-pharmacy branded displays of posters, brochures, shelf-talkers, educational materials and drug leaflets for engaging consumers at the entry levels or while waiting for their healthcare professionals (Fadare et al., 2018; Momodu et al., 2018).

Digital and Social Media: Utilizing platforms like Facebook, Twitter(X), Instagram and LinkedIn to brand and promote consumer interactions with pharmaceutical brands is on the increase (Jolibert et al., 2012; Mühlhoff & Willem, 2023).

Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Building strong positive brand image through press releases, media releases, thought leadership articles and CSR activities are ways through which pharmaceutical companies are found to be socially responsible in Nigeria.

Partnerships and Collaborations: Partnering with other likeminded organizations or influencers to create a presence, promote their brands, share resources, build following and create loyalty for their pharmaceutical brands.

These are some of the strategies used by pharmaceutical advertising companies in Nigeria and by employing a mix of these strategies companies effectively try to outdo their competitors in the market place by gaining more attention of the healthcare professionals and the consumers' loyalty.

Case Study of Advertising Strategies of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited

Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited is a leading Nigerian pharmaceutical company established in 1984 headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria. Emzor is known for manufacturing high-quality, affordable, and accessible medicines and medical devices. The company produces a wide range of pharmaceutical products, including analgesics, anti-infectives, antimalarials, vitamins, and cough and cold medications, among others. The flagship brand is Emzor paracetamol by 96 tablets. The company is committed to enhancing the quality of life for Africans by providing healthcare products that meet the highest standards of safety, efficacy, and affordability.

Pharmaceutical Advertising Strategies of Emzor:

Emzor as a company adopts most of the promotional strategies mentioned above as part of its advertising

Digital Marketing: Emzor leverages social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to engage with its audience, share health tips, product information, and updates, and run promotional campaigns. The company also uses its website and email marketing to provide valuable health information and promote its product range.

Traditional Media: Emzor employs television, radio, and print advertising to reach a broad audience across Nigeria and West Africa. Their advertisements often focus on brand awareness, highlighting the quality and affordability of their products. The popular advertisement of Emzor paracetamol tablets is often aired through this media.

Healthcare Professional Engagement: Emzor focuses on relationship-building with healthcare professionals through conferences, workshops, and continuous medical education (CME) programs. This strategy helps in building trust and credibility, influencing prescriptions, and increasing product recommendations.

Community Outreach Programs: Emzor engages in community-based initiatives like free health check-ups, awareness campaigns, and educational programs. These programs help to promote the company's products while also building brand loyalty and trust within communities. **Sponsorships and Partnerships:** The Company collaborates with healthcare organizations, NGOs, and government bodies to sponsor health-related events and initiatives. This approach helps to enhance its brand image as a socially responsible pharmaceutical company.

Point-of-Sale Advertising: Emzor uses point-of-sale materials like posters, banners, and branded displays in pharmacies and retail outlets to promote its products directly to consumers, enhancing brand recall and visibility.

By combining digital and traditional advertising methods with community engagement and partnerships, Emzor had been able to build strong brand recognition and trust among consumers and healthcare professionals making it a giant in the industry and one of the biggest indigenous to Africa.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative study concept and employed a two-pronged approach which used a synthesis of the literature and qualitative content analysis to gather data for evaluation.

Sources of Literature

Both online and grey literature were used to collate literature for the review.

Online databases were searched to retrieve relevant original research articles and review articles reporting on ethical advertising in the pharmaceutical industry both in Nigeria and the global environment. Databases such as Medline, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar were searched for articles published between year 2000 and 2024. Grey literature (government reports, industry publications, conference proceedings and company websites with information focused on pharmaceutical advertising was used.

Search Strategy

Keywords such as “pharmaceutical advertising, “ethical advertising, “Pharmaceutical industry,” and “Nigeria” were used and combined with Boolean operators to refine the search, retrieved articles were screened based on relevance and the inclusion criteria. After removing the duplicates and irrelevant studies the relevant articles were selected for full text review including the grey literature documents were included in the analysis. Quality assessment was done using a modified checklist to evaluate the reliability of the grey literature. The selected research articles from peer-reviewed journals which were then analyzed to identify key themes and trends related to ethical advertising practices in the pharmaceutical industry particularly in the Nigerian context.

Inclusion Criteria for studies

Inclusion Criteria: Research or review articles with relevant designs, peer reviewed, within the specified time frame, published in English were selected while identified non-relevant articles, those outside the specified periods, not published in English were not considered for the review.

Data Collection for content analysis

Selection of Advertising Materials

The second part of the research employed content analysis to examine the ethical advertising practices of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited within the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry. Content analysis was chosen for its ability to systematically analyze textual and visual content, allowing for the identification of patterns, themes, and meanings relevant to ethical advertising. The data for this content analysis comprised advertising materials produced by Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited. These materials included print advertisements,

digital marketing content, brochures, television commercials, and promotional videos as described by (Adibe et al., 2015).

Data were gathered from print and digital media samples of Emzor pharmaceutical advertisements published or aired within Nigeria over 24 months (January 2023- January 2025,) targeting the general public. This period was selected to capture Emzor advertisements disseminated after major regulatory shifts, including the enactment of the ARCON Act in 2022, which significantly expanded federal oversight over advertising and marketing communications in Nigeria.

Sample size selection

A purposive sample of 30 advertisements were selected from Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries' TV, radio, print, and online content between January 2023 and January, 2025. Sample size adequacy aligns with qualitative content analysis standards, which suggest that 20–30 units provide sufficient saturation for pattern comparison (Fulone et al., 2023; Yousefi et al., 2022). The 30 advertisements provided cross-media representation and allowed meaningful evaluation of compliance trends.

Inclusion Criteria for Content Analysis

Inclusion Criteria: Advertisements specifically targeting the Nigerian market.

Materials that clearly promote Emzor pharmaceutical products. Content available in English.

Exclusion Criteria: Advertisements solely for corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives not directly promoting products. Materials with insufficient information (e.g., incomplete videos, low-resolution images) and Non-English advertisements.

Data Analysis

Analytical Framework

The WHO's Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion served as the analytical benchmark. Data were coded using NVivo software under themes such as accuracy, transparency, balance of benefit and risk, presence of regulatory approval, and appeals to emotion or authority.

Truthfulness: Accuracy of the information provided in the advertisements.

Transparency: Clarity in communicating potential risks and benefits.

Responsibility: Ethical consideration in targeting specific audiences, particularly vulnerable groups.

Regulatory Compliance: Alignment with Nigerian Regulations which suggests Adherence to NAFDAC and APCON guidelines.

Global Standards: Compliance with international pharmaceutical advertising standards.

Utilitarian Impact: The Public Well-Being: The overall impact of advertising practices on public health and safety.

Risk-Benefit Balance: How well the advertisement balances the promotion of benefits against potential risks.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure credibility and transferability, peer debriefing, researcher triangulation, and member checking were employed. The data interpretation was guided by the theoretical frameworks of utilitarianism and marketing ethics.

Coding Process

The coding process involved multiple stages:

All advertisements were imported into NVivo 14 and analysed using a directed content analysis approach. The initial codebook was derived from the WHO Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion, national regulatory guidelines (NAFDAC and ARCON), and existing literature on pharmaceutical promotion ethics. The resulting codebook consisted of five parent nodes.

Interrater Reliability

To enhance analytical rigor, two independent coders assessed a subset of 10 of the 30 advertisements using the agreed codebook. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus and codebook refinement before coding the full dataset of 30 advertisements.

Thematic Analysis

Following the coding, a thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes related to ethical advertising practices. The themes were categorized based on their relevance to the study's objectives, focusing on the alignment of Emzor's advertising practices with ethical principles and regulatory standards. Theme Development: Emerging themes were developed by grouping similar codes and identifying patterns across the advertisements and were interpreted in the context of the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry, considering both the theoretical frameworks and the socio-cultural environment. The results of the content analysis were synthesized and reported according to the identified themes as predefined by the researchers. These findings were discussed in relation to the General Marketing Ethics and Utilitarian theories, providing insights into the ethical implications of Emzor's advertising strategies.

Additionally, comparisons were made with industry best practices and regulatory standards to highlight areas for improvement and recommend strategies for enhancing the ethicality of pharmaceutical advertising in Nigeria.

Ethical Considerations

As the study did not interface with human persons in any form in the course of the collection of data, it was exempt from ethical review considerations and as the study involved the analysis of publicly available advertising materials, no direct ethical approval was required. However, the research adhered to ethical standards in the handling and reporting of data, ensuring that all findings were presented accurately and objectively.

RESULTS/KEY FINDINGS

Current Advertising Practices of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited

The content analysis showed that Emzor significantly aligns its advertising practices with the national regulatory guidelines as set by NAFDAC and APCON. While the company's advert contents include the regular information required for the consumers and sometimes the disclaimers information like "if the symptoms persist after few days, see your doctor" was included. It was observed that Emzor's advertising frequently highlights product efficacy, quality and affordability, while positioning itself as a trusted and reliable brand in the Nigerian pharmaceutical market. Also, Emzor's advertising messages frequently highlights product efficacy, quality, and affordability, positioning itself as a trusted and reliable brand in the Nigerian market. However, some advertisements were found to emphasize benefits more prominently than potential risks, which may compromise the balance of information as mandated by ethical advertising standards. Furthermore, the company utilizes a mix of traditional media (e.g., television, radio, and print) and digital platforms (e.g., social media and online ads) to reach a broad audience. The study found that while traditional media advertisements tended to be more formal and compliant, digital advertising showed a greater variation in compliance, with some instances of overly promotional language. Some of the major themes identified is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Major Themes from the Study

Themes	Key Findings
Ethical Challenges	Misinformation prevalent in advertisements.
	Lack of transparency regarding drug risks and side effects.
	Non-compliance with regulatory standards
Regulatory Frameworks	NAFDAC and APCON regulations exist but are inconsistently enforced.
	Comparison with international regulations highlights gaps in local enforcement
Implementing Best Practices	Multinational Companies in Nigeria exemplify ethical advertising best practices by providing balanced information.
	Stakeholder engagement improves advertising effectiveness.
Cultural Considerations	Nigerian consumers often skeptical of pharmaceutical advertisements due to reliance on traditional medicine
	Cultural factors impact advertising effectiveness
	Limited studies on the cultural influences on advertising in Nigeria
Gaps in Literature	Insufficient research on the impact of digital advertising in the pharmaceutical sector

Ethical Challenges Faced by Emzor in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical Market

One of the primary ethical challenges identified is the conflict between Emzor's commercial objectives and its ethical obligations. The need to drive sales and market share can sometimes lead to the use of persuasive techniques that border on exaggeration, especially in competitive market environments. The study also revealed that regulatory frameworks in Nigeria, while comprehensive, suffer from enforcement challenges and ambiguities that create loopholes for non-compliance. For example, while NAFDAC provides guidelines on pharmaceutical advertising, the enforcement of these guidelines is inconsistent, allowing some companies to exploit these gaps as shown in Table 3.

Emzor operates in a highly competitive and saturated pharmaceutical market, which exerts pressure to differentiate its products through aggressive marketing. This competitive pressure can sometimes lead to ethical compromises, such as downplaying side effects or using overly emotive appeals. The Nigerian market's cultural and socioeconomic context also presents ethical challenges. Advertisements often target vulnerable populations, including low-income groups and those with limited health literacy, raising concerns about the potential for exploitation and misinformation.

Table 3. Gaps Identified in Relation to WHO Ethical Promotions Criteria

WHO Ethical Criterion	Ideal Requirements	Typical Gaps Observed in Emzor Ads
Accuracy and scientific balance	Evidence-based, up-to-date, unbiased information	Superlative claims with little evidence

Clear risk–benefit presentation	Benefits and risks presented in a balanced manner	Benefits heavily emphasized; risks rarely mentioned
Appropriate targeting and messaging	No exploitation of vulnerable populations	Emotional appeals to caregivers of sick children
Transparency of sponsorship and intent	Clear identification as advertisement	Blurring of line between education and promotion
Compliance with national regulations	Adheres to NAFDAC, ARCON, PCN rules	Inconsistent display of NAFDAC numbers in some media

Proposed Strategies for Enhancing Ethical Advertising Practices

The study suggests that Emzor as a compnay do not fully disclose risks associated with its medicies.Our findings show that findings from Emzor Ad Analysis show that 63% of ads were accurate while only 16% disclosed drug risks fully as shown in Table 4.

However,Emzor can enhance the ethicality of its advertising by developing stronger internal compliance mechanisms by paying attention to little details of ethics. This includes establishing clear internal guidelines that align with both national and international ethical standards and ensuring that these are consistently applied across all advertising platforms. Shifting towards a more consumer-centric approach in advertising can help Emzor build trust and credibility. This involves providing balanced information about both the benefits and risks of products, using clear and accessible language, and prioritizing the health and well-being of consumers in all advertising efforts. Regular training for marketing and advertising teams on ethical standards and the implications of unethical advertising can foster a culture of responsibility. Emzor could also benefit from periodic assessments of its advertising practices to ensure continuous alignment with ethical guidelines. As digital advertising becomes more prominent, Emzor should adopt specific strategies to manage the unique ethical challenges posed by digital platforms. This includes stricter controls over the content shared on social media, transparency in sponsored content, and adherence to data privacy standards.

Engaging with regulatory bodies, such as NAFDAC and APCON, and collaborating with other pharmaceutical companies can help Emzor contribute to the development of more robust and enforceable advertising standards. Industry-wide initiatives aimed at promoting ethical advertising can also foster a more level playing field where ethical practices are the norm rather than the exception.

Table 4: Compliance with WHO Advertisement Criteria

WHO Criterion	Fully Compliant	Partially compliant	Non-Compliant
Accuracy of claims	19(63.3)	7(23.0)	4(13.3)
Risk disclosure	5(16.7)	9(30.0)	16(53.3)
Appropriate targeting	13(43.3)	8(26.7)	9(30.0)
Regulatory Compliance NAFDAC/ARCON	20(66.7)	7(23)	3(10.0)
Alignment with WHO ethical criteria	8(26.7)	11(36.7)	11(37.7)

DISCUSSION

This study reveals that pharmaceutical advertising in Nigeria demonstrates partial adherence to ethical standards. While most Emzor advertisements adequately depict product benefits and include NAFDAC registration

numbers, they frequently underrepresent side effects and dosage risk information. This creates benefit-risk imbalance, a trend documented in other LMIC marketing analyses (Yenet et al., 2023;).

The use of vibrant, emotive visuals and child-targeted imagery raises further concern, especially for over-the-counter analgesics and cold medications marketed to caregivers. Table 3 highlights systematic gaps in compliance with WHO risk disclosure guidelines, and not fully compliant regarding risk information. These omissions may contribute to inappropriate self-medication patterns, a leading driver of antimicrobial misuse and medicine overuse in Nigeria and other LMICs (Yenet et al. 2023, Boltana et al & Adeleke et al. 2025).

The reliance on corporate social responsibility and sponsorship-based promotional appeals indicates a blurring between health education and brand promotion, a phenomenon that may influence consumer behavior in ways that compromise rational drug use. This reinforces calls for clearer boundaries between social marketing and branded advertising in Nigeria's pharmaceutical sector.

These discrepancies highlight the challenges companies face in maintaining ethical consistency across diverse advertising platforms and it is a major challenge of unethical practice in the pharmaceutical industry (Siddiq et al., 2021). Emzor's focus on efficacy and quality aligns with consumer expectations but may sometimes overshadow the importance of balanced information, a key tenet of ethical advertising; studies show that this could put patients and society at risk especially the vulnerable population like the children and poor literacy levels (Oshikoya, Senbanjo, & Soipe, 2009).

The ethical challenges faced by Emzor underscore the broader issues within the Nigerian pharmaceutical advertising landscape, including regulatory weaknesses, market pressures, and the complex interplay between ethical standards and commercial interests (Adibe et al., 2015). These findings suggest that achieving ethical advertising requires not only adherence to regulations but also a proactive commitment to ethical principles that transcend legal compliance (Ahaiwe, 2019). Emzor's challenges are reflective of systemic issues that affect the entire industry, highlighting the need for stronger regulatory enforcement and industry-wide commitments to ethical marketing practices (Ajilore et al., 2019; Uduji, 2012).

The proposed strategies highlight the importance of a proactive and multifaceted approach to ethical advertising. By strengthening internal controls, adopting a consumer-first mindset, investing in ethical training, and leveraging digital advertising ethics, Emzor can significantly enhance its advertising practices. Collaboration with regulators and peers can further amplify these efforts, contributing to broader industry improvements. Ultimately, these strategies align with global best practices and position Emzor as a leader in ethical pharmaceutical advertising in Nigeria.

However, this study which employed a review of the literature and content analysis to explore the imperatives and strategies for ethical advertising in the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry using Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited as a case study had some limitations and these were: the dependence on secondary data sources such as published articles, reports, and existing materials in the online space and grey literature. This dependence on secondary data and already available information limited the depth of the analysis as data might not have fully captured recent changes in the industry and Emzor Pharmaceuticals as a company. Also was the selection bias resulting from the literature review which was not systematic hence lacked the rigor and may be fraught with selection bias. The review might have excluded some relevant literature outside these parameters which may potentially impact the study findings. Furthermore, content analysis involves interpreting texts, images, and other forms of media, which can introduce subjectivity in the findings due to categorization and identification of themes despite using different researchers to interpret the same content.

Policy Recommendations

The findings from this study suggests urgent regulatory and ethical reforms:

1. Mandatory Standardized Risk Disclosure Template NAFDAC and ARCON should require all advertisements to include a uniform risk statement that specifies contraindications, age restrictions, and side effects and should be strictly enforced

2. Rating System for Ethical Compliance Develop a NAFDAC–ARCON Ethical Compliance Score displayed on ads, similar to nutrition labeling standards. Ads scoring below threshold should not air.
3. Restrict Child-Targeted Promotional Imagery for Non-Paediatric Medicines
4. Prohibit CSR/Health-Education Messaging Inside Branded Advertising CSR and promotion must be separated to prevent disguised marketing.
5. Annual Ethical Audit Reports by NAFDAC and ARCON Published reports should name compliant and non-compliant companies to encourage competition for ethical credibility.
6. Capacity Building and continuous retraining for Marketing and Media Professionals Joint training with the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN) and APCON/ARCON.

Future Direction

Future research could incorporate primary data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, or surveys with key stakeholders including consumers, healthcare professionals and regulatory bodies, to provide comprehensive insights into the ethical challenges and perceptions on pharmaceutical advertising. To improve generalizability, future studies could also compare the advertising campaigns and ethical practices of multiple pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria. Such studies could provide a broader perspective on industry wide practices and the inherent ethical challenges and their impact on public health outcomes. Conducting longitudinal or experimental studies that track changes in advertising practices and regulatory compliance over time could also provide valuable insights into the impact of evolving regulations, market dynamics, and corporate strategies on ethical advertising in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical Sector.

Addressing these issues, the future of ethical pharmaceutical advertising in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical Industry could better be understood together with the inherent complexities therein and support the development of the body of knowledge towards formulating more robust policies and strategies for ensuring ethical conduct in this critical sector of the healthcare system.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the current advertising practices of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited and evaluated their compliance with ethical standards and regulatory frameworks in Nigeria through a review of the literature and content analysis. The findings reveal that while Emzor had made efforts to comply with ethical advertising global standards, gaps remain especially in the areas of transparency, truthfulness and responsible communication.

The study discovered key ethical challenges faced by Emzor in the Nigerian Pharmaceutical market such as potential conflicts between marketing objectives and compliance difficulties which is prevalent in the industry at large and hence, the need for better controls of advertising functions. Based on these findings, the study proposes strategies that Emzor could adopt to enhance the ethicality of its advertising functions, including alignment with regulatory standards, compliance with global standards and improved internal controls. Finally, the study stresses the importance of ethical advertising in fostering trust, credibility and positive public health outcomes using the general marketing ethics in a complex yet evolving pharmaceutical market like Nigeria.

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