

The Social Responsibility of Association Media in Protecting Consumers from False Commercial Advertising

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Abstract

This article explores the increase in commercial advertisements broadcast by traditional and modern media, including deceptive ads that push consumers to purchase products. Although advertising is essential for media, serving as a major source of funding and ensuring their sustainability, it also imposes on them the responsibility to serve the public interest. Media outlets must raise public awareness about the dangers of deceptive advertising, not only through media broadcasts but also through other means such as posters and billboards. The goal is to develop consumer awareness regarding the risks associated with these practices.

Keywords: False commercial advertising, Consumer protection, Media responsibility, Public awareness campaigns, Social responsibility.

Publicite commerciale mensongere, protection des consommateurs, responsabilite des medias, campagnes de sensibilisation publique, responsabilite sociale.

Résumé

Cet article explore l'augmentation des publicités commerciales diffusées par les médias traditionnels et modernes, y compris les publicités trompeuses qui incitent les consommateurs à acheter des produits. Bien que la publicité soit essentielle pour les médias, en tant que principale source de financement et garantissant leur durabilité, elle leur impose également la responsabilité de servir l'intérêt public. Les médias doivent sensibiliser le public aux dangers de la publicité trompeuse, non seulement par les diffusions médiatiques, mais aussi par d'autres moyens tels que les affiches et les panneaux publicitaires. L'objectif est de développer la sensibilisation des consommateurs aux risques associés à ces pratiques.

Mots-clés : Publicité commerciale mensongère, Protection des consommateurs, Responsabilité des médias, Campagnes de sensibilisation publique, Responsabilité sociale.

Introduction

Advertising is a key function carried out by various types of mass media. The significance of commercial advertising lies in its role as a bridge between the consumer and the advertiser, as media outlets promote products or services, providing consumers with a complete picture. This is equally crucial for advertisers. Additionally, advertisers serve as a source of funding and revenue for media institutions, acting as a vital artery that helps cover a significant portion of media expenses.

Despite the importance of advertising for consumers, it can sometimes turn into a source of false information when a product or service is presented through media with inaccurate or misleading information. This is referred to as false commercial advertising, which may expose consumers to fraud and deception by advertisers.

The importance of addressing the phenomenon of false commercial advertising lies in the efforts of consumer protection associations through various mechanisms, such as legislation and public awareness. Informative media in these associations play a crucial role in raising awareness among consumers about false advertisements.

This article aims to shed light on the role of association media in promoting social responsibility toward protecting consumers from misleading commercial advertisements. It also emphasizes the importance of educating consumers about the potential risks of false advertisements and enhancing their trust in the information provided.

The rise of false commercial advertising has become a pressing concern in today's consumer-driven society, as deceptive advertisements increasingly mislead consumers, undermining their ability to make informed purchasing decisions. This not only leads to financial harm but also erodes trust in the advertising industry and distorts the marketplace. In response, media outlets affiliated with consumer protection associations are uniquely positioned to address this issue by utilizing their reach and credibility to raise awareness and promote responsible advertising practices. However, the challenge lies in determining how these media outlets can effectively combat the spread of false advertising, raise consumer awareness about its risks, and ensure the provision of accurate and reliable information. This question is crucial for fostering an informed consumer base capable of protecting its rights and demanding greater accountability from advertisers.

Commercial advertising serves as a crucial communication tool between consumers and advertisers, but it can sometimes mislead consumers with false information. In this context, the role of the media in combating such misleading advertisements is essential, primarily through raising awareness and verifying the accuracy of the information presented. The first hypothesis posits that media outlets affiliated with consumer protection associations can significantly reduce the impact of false commercial advertising by offering targeted legal and informational awareness programs. These programs can help consumers distinguish between genuine and misleading advertisements while emphasizing the importance of verifying information before making purchasing decisions. The second hypothesis suggests that public awareness campaigns organized by these associations enhance consumer trust in the information provided by the media and improve their ability to deal with commercial advertisements. Continuous education enables consumers to identify potentially fraudulent or deceptive ads, thus fostering an informed consumer society capable of safeguarding its rights.

1-The Concept of False Commercial Advertising

Most legislators define it as the dissemination of false information, where false commercial advertising includes inaccurate data that misleads its audience and exposes them to deception (Beliman, 2009, p. 297). **Among the methods of deceiving consumers through misleading advertisements are the following** (Al-Samari & Awatef, 2021):

Some deceptive practices in commercial advertisements involve using only phone numbers to market products without providing company addresses or headquarters, making it difficult for consumers to verify the credibility of the advertisers. Additionally, some advertisements promote goods and products without disclosing important information such as the source of the goods or the availability of a warranty, which misleads consumers about the product's quality (Al-Khalfawi, 2024).

Moreover, some advertisements employ unrealistic exaggerations about the nature of goods and services to attract the largest number of consumers, creating a false impression of the product. Others use enticing promotional offers in terms of price and quantity that are contrary to reality for products that do not meet specifications, leading to consumer disappointment after purchase.

Some advertisements also make false claims about the product having certifications or quality marks to encourage consumers to trust and buy it. Furthermore, unauthorized products are sometimes promoted, which may cause serious health risks, particularly in the fields of herbs, stimulants, cosmetics, and weight-loss drugs.

Finally, services are advertised without clarifying contract terms, service locations, benefits, or associated warnings, increasing the potential for consumer exploitation and fraud. As for the reasons behind the spread of false commercial advertisements in the media, they can be summarized as follows (Manjad, 2015, p. 5):

The weakness of specialized regulatory bodies in monitoring violations of consumer rights and protecting them from paid misleading advertisements is one of the most prominent factors contributing to the prevalence of this phenomenon. This lack of oversight leads to the inability to effectively address misleading advertisements that harm consumers, thus increasing their exploitation.

Additionally, the desire of media outlets to achieve financial profits from commercial advertisements plays a significant role in spreading misleading advertisements. Media platforms often prefer to accept any advertisement without verifying its credibility, as long as it generates financial returns.

On the other hand, advertisers hold considerable power and influence over media outlets, exerting pressure on them to broadcast their advertisements regardless of their authenticity or their potential negative impact on consumers.

Moreover, the lack of awareness among consumers is a key factor that amplifies the impact of these misleading advertisements. Many consumers lack sufficient knowledge about how to distinguish between genuine and misleading advertisements, making them more vulnerable to exploitation.

2- Aspects of Consumer Protection from False Commercial Advertisements:

The consumer has become vulnerable to fraud, deception, and manipulation. Various forms of deception are practiced through elements of the marketing mix, whether in the characteristics, components, or qualities of products, or by imposing prices that do not match the consumer's income level, or by adopting a distribution policy that increases the consumer's need for the product. This is achieved by deliberately making it difficult to access the product in certain locations. Furthermore, misleading promotional methods are used to convince the consumer to pay more for a product than its actual benefit, with false advertising being one of these methods (Younes & Huda, 2016, p. 433). This necessitates protecting the consumer from all these tactics. Consumer protection is based on three main pillars, which are:

2-1 The Regulatory Aspect

This ensures the safety of the offered goods and services and their compliance with international standards. Government agencies, along with consumer protection associations, play this role. Their aim is to prevent consumers from falling victim to fraud, commercial deception, and misleading practices in all their forms and manifestations. In this context, it is possible to monitor what the media broadcast in terms of false commercial advertisements and intervene to take legal action against media outlets that promote such advertisements.

2-2 The Legislative Aspect

This is based on the need to reconsider the existing legislation in order to establish a protective framework for all consumer rights. In this area, the responsible authorities can enact a set of laws aimed at protecting media consumers from false advertisements.

2-3 The Educational, Informational, and Advisory Aspect for the Consumer

This focuses on raising consumer awareness and informing them about their rights and duties, guiding their decisions, and directing them toward actions that provide the greatest protection (Amar & Eid, 2018, pp. 3-4).

3- Media Mechanisms for Associations in Countering False Advertising:

Social awareness is considered one of the key pillars for the progress and development of any society. It plays a significant and essential role in the stability and advancement of society by elevating the status of its individuals. Social awareness is defined as "the conscious realization that we are part of an interconnected society." (Majed Mohamed, 2024)

- **Media:** Consumer protection associations can use the media to raise consumer awareness. The media is diverse and varied, with a focus in Algeria on broadcasting specific programs on radio and television or intervening in some programs that address consumer issues. Additionally, newspaper articles in printed publications are also used.
- **Organizing Conferences and Study Days:** According to Article 24 of Law No. 12-06 on Associations, an association may, within the framework of the applicable legislation, organize study days, seminars, and all meetings related to its activities.

- **Publishing Specialized Publications:** According to Article 03 of Law No. 12-06, associations can publish newsletters, magazines, informational documents, and brochures related to their objectives. These brochures contain information that can help consumers avoid the risks associated with consumption, which means protecting them.
- **Creating Digital Websites:** Consumer protection associations ensure the creation of websites on the internet that contain information relevant to consumers, along with advice prepared by specialized experts, in addition to information about the association and its objectives.
- **Organizing Awareness Campaigns:** This is an important mechanism used by consumer protection associations due to its unique approach, which enables direct communication with consumers to raise awareness, guide, and advise them. Through these media campaigns, informational brochures can be distributed to educate consumers about their basic rights (Ould Ahmed & Tafer, 2020, pp. 617-618).
- **Social Media:** Social media has become the most effective tool in raising consumer awareness due to the rapid dissemination of information. This makes it an important space for consumer protection associations to inform and educate consumers about the risks associated with products and services that may harm their safety and security (Nadia, 2020, p. 604).
- **Counter Advertising or Anti-Advertising:** Consumer protection associations direct criticism toward certain goods and services through media outlets (Kheira & Mohamed, 2017, p. 166).

4- The Responsibility of Consumer Associations and Their Role in Addressing False Advertising

The concept of social responsibility in the media can be summarized as an ethical obligation between the media institution and society. This responsibility consists of a set of functions that the media must perform in order to serve the public interest and meet the needs of individuals in various political, economic, social, and cultural fields. Media, in all its forms, plays a significant role in shaping societal awareness among a large segment of individuals on one hand, and communities on the other hand, by promoting and solidifying healthy values and norms. Therefore, these media outlets bear the responsibility of building public awareness for the society (Al Thani, 2024).

While the necessity and importance of these media in introducing new products and their advantages to consumers is clear, they often engage in clear deception of consumers. As a result, consumers may be enticed to purchase a particular product, only to find that it does not meet the specifications advertised, leading to consumers falling into the trap of misleading advertising, which could cause them health or financial damage and lead to the wastage of their resources. In contrast, this process results in more profits for producers and marketers.

If the state is among the entities responsible for protecting consumers from all potential harms, it directly assumes this responsibility through the laws enacted by its regulatory institutions. In this context, media outlets, whether state-owned or independent, in all their forms (visual, auditory, and written), can play a significant role in educating consumers, raising awareness, strengthening it, warning them about substandard goods, and directing them toward

other products of higher quality and appropriate prices, due to the close relationship between media and advertising. Advertising for a particular product is often carried out through various forms of media (Al-Othman, 2024).

Consumer protection associations can play an important role within the scope of their legal duties through media awareness and public sensitization of consumers. Article 21 of Law No. 09-03, in its first paragraph, states the following: "Any association established according to the law aims to ensure the protection of the consumer through informing, sensitizing, guiding, and representing them (Nadia, 2020, p. 604)." The awareness media can be conducted through various methods, such as preparing and distributing publications to consumers via newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet. This is also confirmed by Article 19 of Law No. 90-31 concerning associations: "The association may publish and distribute, within the framework of applicable legislation, newsletters, magazines, informational documents, and brochures related to its objectives. (Youssef & Houria, 2015, p. 289)"

The role of association media is to evaluate the products and services offered in the market, ensuring their compliance with legal specifications, and informing consumers of any risks or harm, if present (Nadia, 2020, p. 606).

Conclusion

This research paper addressed the topic of the social responsibility of consumer associations' media in protecting consumers from false advertising. We have reached several important conclusions. First, commercial advertisements have increased, often linked to the profit-driven objectives of advertisers. Additionally, media and digital spaces are flooded with false advertisements that mislead consumers. In this context, raising awareness about false advertising is a fundamental task that associations must undertake, and it falls within their responsibilities toward society. It is important for the media of associations to play two roles in raising awareness about false commercial ads: the preventive aspect and the corrective, confrontational aspect of this phenomenon. Consumer protection associations' media should also take advantage of digital media and social media platforms to raise awareness about this issue. However, awareness alone is not enough to tackle this problem. Other counteracting mechanisms must be employed and integrated, particularly the legal aspect, to ensure an effective impact.

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