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Extended Abstract

ADVERTISING ETHICS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Abstract

Although the nature and extent of advertising ethics can be complicated and vivid, researchers are conducting numerous studies concerning the underlying concepts of advertising ethics. A comprehensive understanding of the domain still finds little trace in the relevant literature. The purpose of this study is to understand and review the literature on advertising ethics and identify the research gaps in the literature that can lead to future research. Morphological Analysis (MA), a qualitative analysis framework that helps in the identification of research gaps through the distinction between explored and unexplored areas of the study is used. This study develops a comprehensive framework that includes six dimensions and twenty-seven variants within the research domain, leading to the identification of eighty-seven research gaps. This further leads to numerous future research avenues. This study is the first known MA framework in the domain of advertising ethics.

Keywords

advertising ethics, morphological analysis, literature review, research gaps

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Advertising is an essential part of modern marketing. It provides a way for firms to connect with customers and market their goods and services. In the modern world, advertising has a significant role in shaping our attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of different goods and services. It is a very powerful communication tool for firms to promote their offerings, attract customers and clients, and boost sales. As the significance of advertising expanded largely, so have questions about advertising ethics.

Although the concept of advertising is well-defined, the ethical elements of this concept appear to be complicated. Hyman, Tansey, and Clark (1994) noted that the domain of advertising ethics was "a mainstream topic" and a "fertile area for future research" (Beltramini, 2011). According to Cunningham (1999), what is right or good in the conduct of the advertising function is advertising ethics. Advertising ethics deals with issues of what should be done rather than what is required only by law (Cunningham, 1999; Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). According to Drumwright (2018), a consensual understanding of what all advertising ethics include is complicated due to the pluralistic nature of ethics.

This review article attempts to answer some important research questions. Firstly, what are the main dimensions and variants that the literature on advertising ethics considers? Secondly, what are the various research gaps that can be identified within the relevant literature on advertising ethics? Thirdly, what are heavily explored areas in the relevant literature?

2. Methodology

Morphological Analysis (MA) is a qualitative method that is frequently employed in the social sciences to structure and examine the entire set of interactions present in multidimensional, non-quantifiable situations (Ritchey, 2011). MA allows for the identification of certain dimensions (parameters) that constitute the key themes of the study. Thus, a wide range of pertinent values and underlying concepts constitute each dimension, and this further leads to the identification of variants (options) (Ritchey, 2011). The MA framework provides the outcome in the form of a cross-consistency Matrix (CCM) which provides all the possible pair-wise combinations of variants, known as configurations (Goel et al., 2019). This ultimately enables the distinction between the explored and unexplored areas in the specific domain.

Research articles were selected from Scopus and Web of Science through a systematic approach. 119 articles constituted the final set of articles for the study.

3. Findings

A total of 6 dimensions and 27 variants were identified after careful reading of the literature. Using the MA framework developed by identifying the dimensions and variants, a cross-consistency matrix (CCM) was constructed to find the unexplored areas of research in advertising ethics. The cross-consistency matrix, which details the areas under the domain where research has been done and those that have not yet been examined, is a matrix arrangement where the variants under each dimension are cross-matched. Thus, after eliminating inconsistent combinations, a total of eighty-seven research gaps were identified through the MA framework.

4. Implications and Conclusion

Based on these research gaps found in the CCM, the study directs researchers and practitioners to potential areas for more investigation. These gaps can help with questions that can direct future researchers to expand the avenues within the domain of advertising ethics. Managers can use this framework as a steering instrument that can help them understand the domain and act accordingly. In conclusion, morphological analysis has been a useful approach for reviewing the literature on advertising ethics, offering a structured method for comprehending the complexity of the domain.

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