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Dunu, Uche, Obiora & Ojiakor *Internet Use, Abuse or Misuse by Advertising Practitioners in Nigeria: A Study of Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria*

## **INTERNET USE, ABUSE OR MISUSE BY ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS COUNCIL OF NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of new media technologies has revolutionized several countries' economy, institutions and professional bodies, including the advertising profession. With the explosion in the media of advertising and the concomitant liberalization of the advertising landscape where social networking site like Facebook tends to welcome anybody, group or organization that wants to advertise on its platform and individuals creating several advertising links on the micro blogging platform, Twitter; discerning minds are being agitated. Census research design was adopted in obtaining data from a population of fifteen staff of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) in Enugu Zonal Office. The study was aimed at finding out the challenges faced by this regulatory agency and the options available to them in this era of new media. Findings suggest that regulation and monitoring have become increasingly complex as both regulators and the regulated grapple with the dynamics of a digitized world. The study recommends an APCON organized International Regulatory Conference where stakeholders such as advertisers, advertising agencies, bloggers, web publishers, the academia, professional journalists as well as citizen journalists would rub minds on how best to regulate Internet advertising in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Internet, new media, advertising, advertising practitioners, social media

### **Introduction**

The Internet variously referred to as the net, the information superhighway or the web, (Cozic, et al., 1996; Stern, 2001; Stern et al., 2002; Ademolekun, 2003) brought a lot of changes in several fields, professions, sectors and frontiers. Virtual world has become a constant interface with real world thereby revolutionizing the way businesses are conducted in our world today. Advertising as one of the fields of human endeavor has been greatly affected by this revolution. Mallia & Windels (2011), posit that digital media has profoundly affected the advertising industry as new channels supplant traditional media and Internet advertising moves beyond rudimentary display adverts to the likes of viral video and social networking. In this day and age, the Internet is taking over and advertising agencies are changing their ways and jumping aboard the social media bandwagon left and right (The Brainchild Group, 2010).

In fact, the very philosophy of advertising has changed, not wholly but in large part, as a result of the opportunities created online (Tuten, 2008). Content consumers have become content producers. The print-based model for raising advertising revenue to support a large, independent journalism organization has greatly been altered. Cheaper, more widely available Internet advertising is taking over (Erbe 2009, p. 1). With little or no expertise, a good number of individuals in Nigeria can now design their own advertisement and relay same via the new media without passing through any advertising agency or recourse to the guidelines stipulated by APCON which is the regulatory body for advertising in Nigeria. Advertising audience can also block, filter and determine which messages they want to expose themselves, how and when. In this work, we explored the position of APCON (Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria) as the chief regulatory body of advertising practice in the country, in this evolving phenomenon. This is to determine whether the Internet is being appropriately used, misused or abused within the context of advertising regulatory framework.

### **Background of the study**

Internet advertising has evolved dramatically since its inception in 1994 when the first banner adverts appeared on the Hotwired site (Adams, 1995 as cited by Li et al., 2002). The advent of the Internet brought with it a lot of issues, some positive while some are negative. Several vistas of human endeavor have also been impacted by the new media. Many professions, associations and institutions in recent times, have their own story to tell regarding new media and its associated technologies. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) as a body which has the duty of regulating the advertising profession in Nigeria seem to have a lot on their hands with over 93 million Nigerians said to be internet users (PM News, 2015)

### **Statement of Problem**

The emergence of new media technologies has revolutionized several countries' economy, institutions and professional bodies, including the advertising profession. Things are no longer the way they used to be as processes are being transformed in line with the dynamics of a digitized world. Nyekwere et al. (2013, p. 175) citing Tuten (2008) pointed out that the very philosophy of advertising has changed. The usual advertising tripod comprising the advertiser, media and advertising agency is gradually being replaced with the "advertising circle." The walls of partition are becoming thinner, collapsing and fast fading away; thus, ushering in a new dawn in the advertising world. The usual media of advertising have also undergone tremendous changes. Television, radio, newspapers and magazines are no longer the exclusive platforms for relaying advertising messages. The new media have entered the scene and as it were, getting and gaining their fair share of the 'advertising cake' thus liberalizing the advertising landscape. One therefore wonders how the advertising regulatory body in Nigeria popularly called the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria, APCON is coping with the advent of these new trends in advertising landscape. This paper therefore seeks to examine the position of APCON on the use of the Internet by advertising agencies, practitioners and individuals who engage in online advertising. Is the Internet being abused or misused by those engaged in the business of advertising? What challenges do APCON face in carrying

out its regulatory functions in an Internet mediated environment? These are the concerns of this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To find out APCON's position regarding on-line (Internet) advertising
2. To identify the extent to which the Internet poses a challenge to the practice of advertising in Nigeria
3. To determine the degree of compliance in Internet advertising to the basic principles of advertising
4. To determine the effects of the Internet on advertising practice in Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the current position of APCON on Internet advertising?
2. What extent of challenge does the Internet pose to the practice of advertising in Nigeria?
3. What is the degree of compliance to basic advertising principles in Internet advertising?
4. What effects does Internet advertising have on advertising practice in Nigeria?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the literature review, the researchers discussed the work under sub-themes like: 'Advertising practice in a digital age', 'the online Nigerian advertising landscape', 'challenges faced by the online advertising industry in Nigeria' and 'APCON and its regulation of online advertising in Nigeria'.

#### **Advertising Practice in a Digital Age**

Erbe (2009, p. 1) postulates that the print-based model for raising advertising revenue to support a large, independent journalism organization is outmoded. Cheaper, more widely available Internet advertising is taking over. In a speech to the Internet Advertising Bureau in London, a member of British Parliament, Ed Vaizey captured the leading role of online advertising in ensuring the explosion and sustenance of the Internet. He writes:

One of the primary reasons for the success of the Internet as a medium has been the enormous amount of information and content, people can access online for absolutely no cost. By all rights, providing content for free should be an unsustainable business model but advertising has made it possible to give something away for free and still make money. From Facebook and Twitter to Google and Yahoo! Advertising has been the foundation for the way some of the largest, most successful businesses in the world have achieved the massive success they have, (Vaizey, 2011).

The internet has upended how consumers engage with brands likewise transforming the economics of advertising and making obsolete many of the functions of traditional strategies and structures (Edelman, 2010). This for marketers, the old way of doing business is unsustainable. Today, he asserts, ‘consumers are promiscuous in their brand relationships: they connect with myriad brands, through new media channels beyond the manufacturer’s and the retailer’s control or even knowledge and evaluate a shifting array of them, often expanding the pool before narrowing it. After a purchase these consumers may remain aggressively engaged, publicly promoting or assailing the products they’ve bought, collaborating in the brands’ development, and challenging and shaping their meanings. In his own words, Consumers still want a clear brand promise and offerings they value. What has changed is when and at what touch points of which they are most open to influence, and how you can interact with them at those points. In the past, advertising strategies that put the lion’s share of resources into building brand awareness and then opening wallets at the point of purchase worked pretty well; but now the touch points have changed in both number and nature, requiring a major adjustment to realign advertisers’ strategy and budgets with where consumers are actually spending their time. In line with this, Moss (2015), in his work, “advertising in the age of New Media”, opined that as digital media increasingly becomes part of everyday life, the opportunities for advertisers to interact with their customers will dramatically expand.

Internet advertising revenue has been on the increase for about two decades now especially in the United States and other developed world. In 1998 alone, Internet advertising revenue passed the \$1 billion mark; more than double of its 1997 level. In 2012, advertising revenue stood at \$36.5 billion, 2013 it increased to \$42.7 billion, 2014 there was yet another growth to \$49.4 billion while in 2015, advertising revenue stood at \$59.5 billion (Jacobs, 1999; IAB, 2015). Incidentally, Nigeria is yet to have an up to date data on revenue accruing from internet advertising in the country.

In a similar report from the United States, there is a growing trend towards digital advertising which is expected to account for 33 percent of all media spending in 2016. The industry statistics showed that in 2013, mobile internet advertising spending per mobile internet user in North America amounted to 66.22 U.S. dollars. It is also expected that that this spending will steadily grow in the future and it is estimated to amount to 247.93 dollars per mobile internet user in 2018. Worldwide regional distribution in 2014 shows that North America and Asia pacific were the leaders in mobile advertising, having spent 10.8 and 8.8 million euro respectively on this medium (statistica.com, 2015). With the increase in the number of internet users in Nigeria, Internet advertising is sure to increase.

### **Nigerian Online Advertising Landscape**

The advertising industry in Nigeria is growing at an extremely fast pace. There are so many types of advertisement methods and opportunities that are being offered to business owners in Nigeria, however many companies cannot afford these services which play a tremendous role in booming their businesses (Leadership News, 2015). According to Dabiri (2015), the advertising industry in Nigeria is well developed, all things considered. It is constantly improving and there is presence of all forms of advertising in Nigeria at the moment. Lots of our advertising agencies have received

international recognition for the work they are doing. It is a thriving industry and is set to continue growing. As a large country, there will always be demand to reach consumers. Similarly, Nnamdi (2015) explained that the advertising industry in Nigeria is a huge industry that is developing to become one of the most respected in the world. The advance in both technologies and creativity in the industry is making it to become one of the most enviable in the world. He asserted that “When you look at the adverts we had 10 years ago and compare it to what we have today you are compelled to be impressed with the development in the industry. We now have award winning agencies across Nigeria coming up with some of the most innovative mediums you can find in the world.”

On the uniqueness of Internet advertising, Dabiri (2015) posits that there is a bigger measure of control in the online space. And you have a more accurate measure of who is interacting, engaging with and viewing your adverts. Companies also want to have a presence in as many areas as possible. You will never see the death of offline advertising, but companies with smaller budgets are likely to choose online over offline now because of the increase in options. Digital advertising is also a lot more customizable and can fit a wider range of budgets. People will choose a sustained presence online as opposed to one or two billboards or radio adverts.

In the views of Adeola (2010), Nigeria has over 75 million active mobile phone lines as at March 2010, and the factor that contributes to this is as a result of the growing middle class with disposable income. In his words,

TV viewing habits are changing due to lack of time and the Facebook and Twitter generation is also on the increase. If about 60% of Nigerians are below 25 years, there is the need for brands to pay attention to this trend in their marketing approach; and also media consumption is changing too, the rise of convergent technology, social media is growing, consumers online is growing rapidly because the internet makes their lifestyle easier as they tend to shop around more because they have access to several other points of information, they use the internet to research before committing to purchase, are early adopters of technology and do have a world view (p. 2).

FinIntell, the doing business Magazine states, “in the Nigerian landscape, marketers and their clients are becoming aware of the fundamental effect and needs of online advertising, and agencies now advise clients to use banner adverts and display campaign adverts on Facebook, Yahoo, local news and entertainment sites. The Magazine was however quick to add that the emphasis should now critically address what the clients want to achieve and advise them on all the various digital marketing platforms available. Media consumption is also changing. The rise of convergent technology through social media is growing. The numbers of consumers online are rapidly growing since the Internet makes their lifestyles easier as they tend to shop around more because they have entry to several other points of information and they use the Internet to make inquiries before committing to purchase (FinIntell, 2015).

### **Challenges Faced by the Online Advertising Industry in Nigeria**

Adeola (2010) citing an industry source (MMS 2009), posited that the total advertising spent in Nigeria for 2009 stood at over \$400 million, with digital media accruing less than 1% of this spend. Despite huge leaps in advertising spent and mobile operators in Nigeria, digital media spend was still negligible compared to other media. However, it can rightly be argued that the advert spend would have gone bearing in mind the number of Nigerians who now have internet access which is put at about 93 million (PM News, 2015) coupled with the number of online marketing outfits such as Jumia, OXL, Konga, Yudala among others.

Compliance to advertising code in the new media era has raised more concerns as some practices contravene the advertising code. Nwanejuafor (2013) laments that most advertising agencies are presently so wrapped up in the use of sexual appeal, that it seems almost impossible for them to create an outstanding advert without the use of half-naked models or sexual innuendos. Indeed, it needs not be said that Nwanejuafor's view is apposite, past studies both within and outside Nigeria also indicate the preponderance of sex and sexual undertones in advertising. Dunu (2014, p. 53) made reference to studies like Melanson, 2001; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004; Mahboob, 2006; Thompson, 2008 among others, which point to the fact that there is the wide use of sex in advertising in order to sell products and services. However, in the conclusion of her studies on *Sexuality and the Images of Women in Nigeria Print Media*, Dunu postulated that "the proliferation of sexual imagery in the developed society's media terrain may not necessarily be reflected in the Nigerian print media, especially with regards to daily newspapers. (p. 73)" But, Dunu's postulation may not hold when it comes to Internet advertising, for example, when one visits the homepage of NigerianDatingAgency.com, one would first see a beautiful young woman seductively posed with exposed bosom and open thighs. Sites that promote products ranging from beauty products to electronics and even services such as Internet banking use albeit subtly obscene materials in one form or the other.

Adeola (2010, p. 1) posits that one of the challenges facing online advertising in Nigeria is the fact that there are very few specialized digital marketing agencies/consultants that offer professional services. This has led to poor output thereby making organizations think of online advertising and interactive marketing in Nigeria as ineffective.

Internet advertising has also raised the question of credibility. The combination of the vast quantity of and accessibility to digitally stored and transmitted information has prompted concerns about its credibility (Flanagin & Metzger 2008, p. 8). They argue that credibility which is the believability of a source or message has two dimensions: trustworthiness and credibility. The new media has turned content consumers to become also content producers. People are blogging, writing and of course advertising whatever they care, contribute and comment on issues of which they may have little or no experience let alone authority. There are hardly any given standard or guaranteed quality control mechanism. Evaluation of contents most times is lacking and ambiguous owing to the fact that the social media is relatively new. There are no universal standards for posting information online, and digital information may be easily altered, plagiarized, misrepresented, or created anonymously under false

pretenses. The malleability and dynamic nature of digital information exacerbate potential problems of information reliability, given that the alteration of digital information is difficult—if not impossible—to detect (Flanagin & Metzger 2008, p. 13).

Deji Dabiri of Swift Digital Motions Lagos in an interview granted to Leadership Newspapers identified one of the challenges the advertising industry is facing in Nigeria to be the rapidly changing and shifting consumer habits.

Traditionally, advertising revolved around television, newspaper and radio. If you have a good product, a respectable budget, advertising on these platforms will get your product attention. This was because a lot of people watched television, read a newspaper and listened to the radio or some combination of all those activities. At the moment, people's attention spans are taken by so many things. Phone, tablets, applications, games consoles, websites and the rest. All of a sudden there are so many places people are spending their time and to capture attention, you no longer need a good product, you need something that is either exceptional or meets a definite need of the public. Consumer attention span is also reducing and there is a jostling for space between different media (Dabiri, 2015).

#### **APCON and Regulation of Online Advertising in Nigeria**

In their new policy document, the Federal Trade Commission of the United States, the equivalent of APCON, the introductory part of that document reads:

Day in and day out, businesses advertise and sell their products and services online. The online universe presents a rewarding and fast-paced experience for consumers, but also raises interesting — and occasionally complex — questions about the applicability of laws that were developed long before “dot com,” “smartphone,” and “social media” became household terms (FTC 2013, p. 1)

The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria-APCON is the regulatory agency in Nigeria. It is to Nigeria what the Federal Trade Commission-FTC is to the United States or what Advertising Standards Canada-ASC is to Canada. According to Ozoh (1998, p. 197), Decree 55 of 1988 among other provisions provides that APCON shall regulate and control the practice of advertising in all its ramifications. It is in exercise of this immense and wide power conferred on it that APCON developed a code of ethics to guide and regulate the practice of advertising in Nigeria. However, in the year 1992, an amendment was initiated called the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (Amendment) Decree No 93 of 92. It provided under its section 21a for a body to be established and to be known as the Advertising Standards Panel (ASP). The Panel is empowered to vet all advertisements before they are exposed on the media. No advertisement ideally is to be exposed by the media unless it has been vetted and approved by the Advertising Standards Panel (Ozoh 1998, p. 205).

Basic advertising requirement as indicated in APCON's website, include:

- All advertisements shall be legal, decent, honest, truthful, respectful and mindful of Nigeria's culture.
- They should be prepared with a high sense of social responsibility and should avoid misinformation.
- All advertisements should confirm to the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business, and of fair comments expected in free human communication.
- The aim is to enhance public confidence in advertising and should always be in the interest of the consumer and wider society.

The vetting guidelines apply to:

- All individuals registered as Advertising Practitioners
- All organizations, corporate bodies and individuals which/who use advertising services

All advertisements and sales promotions require pre-exposure vetting before publication/screening. Turn-around time for obtaining approval are 8 hours, 16 hours, 24 hours, 48hours and 2 weeks respectively (conditions apply). It is a sanctionable offence to cause to be aired or published in the print, advertisements which have not been approved by the ASP.

Ozoh (1998, p. 228) pointed out that the Advertising Code of APCON, number 5 under administration of the code specifies thus:

- (i) This code applies to the entire contents of an advertisement, including all words and numbers (spoken or written), visual presentations, music and sound effects.
- (ii) It should be applied in spirit as well as by the letter

In spite of the above, regulating internet advertising has become a herculean task for both operators and the regulator. According to the Chief Executive Officer of Karewa.com, Nino Njopkou, regulating online advertising contents poses huge challenge for operators; on the Internet, fraud is a big issue that all User Generated Content, UGC websites confront. Nonetheless, APCON is set to tighten regulations on all forms of advertising carried out through the internet medium (Nwokpoku, 2013). According to him, the Chairman of APCON, Lolu Akinwumi stated this while speaking to Vanguard on the sideline of an event to present corporate licenses and certificates to some organizations under the new APCON regime in Lagos recently. He said that owing to the unique challenges that online advertising pose for regulation, the regulation agency would partner with Google and other online classified advert operators in the country to strengthen regulation and protect consumers. Here: 'Regulating all advertising contents has always been and will continue to be APCON's core duty. We have the Advertising Standard Panel, ASP, which under the law, has the power and the responsibility to vet all advertising materials in all media including the internet for the Nigerian market.' He however added that, 'There are obvious challenges because the monitoring of the internet is something that poses its own problems but having said that, the council of APCON is working with Google and the other online advert operators to ensure that there is



enough control on the content that goes out of the websites of all the big organizations.’ Reporting further (Nwokpoku, 2013), wrote that when he contacted two of the leading online classifieds operators in Nigeria, OLX and Karewa on how they are regulating advertising through the internet medium, they said that they already have mechanism in place that ensures that fraudulent contents are warded off and consumers are protected. Quoting the Head of Marketing OLX Africa, Ms Brown Johnson admitted: “we have people who read every advert submitted before it is posted and there are certain things that they look out for to ensure that it is not a scam. We generally take zero tolerance approach to that kind of entry and we do not let it go. We also report to local authorities like the police if we pick up such things. We know we cannot guarantee 100 per cent safety but we do all the things we can to protect our users” (Nwokpoku, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the theory of ‘Technological Determinism’. Wood (2004) plainly states that technology shape the way individuals think, feel and act and how societies organize themselves and operate. He asserts that as communication technology (like the new media) evolves and advances, so does human life. Baran (1999, p.22) sees Technological determinism as machines and their developments which drive historical, economic, political and cultural change. He opines that along this line of reasoning, thinkers along this perspective see technology as more neutral and claim that the way people use technology is what gives it significance; and accepts technology as one of the many factors that brings historical, economic, political and cultural changes. This means that technology’s influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it. This perspective to technological determinism has posed an important question: Are we more or less powerful in the wake of technological advances like advertising via the new media? If we are at the mercy of technology, as the former perspective argues, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if these technological advances are indeed neutral and their power resides in how we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever culture we want. To apply this theory to the study, Use, Misuse or Abuse of advertising on the internet platform is what we will use to explain this study. Can we say advertising on the internet is abused by Nigerians? Aziz (2014) posits that the new media offer novel opportunities thus we can say that fresh opportunities are offered by the new media as the internet has become the prime mover which drive the socio-economic, political and historical advancements in our Nigerian advertising landscape. Worthy to note is the fact that there is now a paradigm shift as new technologies have transformed content consumers into content producers including advertising; thus, giving rise to what is known as ‘Prosumers’ (Ballard 2011, p. 13; Odii 2013, p. 163).

### **Methodology**

Census research design was adopted in obtaining data from a population of fifteen staff of APCON working in Enugu zonal office. The census approach is a research design where the researcher selects everybody in a given population. This design is most appropriate in a situation where the population is significantly limited in size

such that selecting a sample from it becomes unnecessary (Adepoju 2003, P. 57 cited in Adum, Odogwu, Nwosu & Duru 2015, p. 242). A 28-item questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. These items addressed variables directly related to research questions that were developed for this study.

### Data Presentation

The results of the study were presented under the following headings:

- Demographic description of respondents.
- Current position of APCON on internet advertising
- The degree of compliance to the basic principles of advertising
- Challenges internet advertisement poses on advertising practice in Nigeria
- Effects of internet advertising on advertising practice in Nigeria

**Table 1: Description of the Demographic Variables of the Respondents.**

Description	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	7	46.7
	Female	8	53.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>
Age (years)	26 – 33	8	53.3
	34 – 41	2	13.3
	42 – 49	4	26.7
	50 and above	1	6.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Field survey, 2015

Table one indicates the demographic features of the respondents. Female respondents are more with 53.3% against the male respondents that constitute 46.7%. The age bracket illustrates that majority of the respondents are young people that are below the age of 49 years. Those above 49 years are just 6.7% of the total respondents.

**Table 2: Current Position of APCON on Internet Advertising**

Positions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Already under regulation	13	86.7
Yet to be under regulation	2	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Field survey, 2015

Table 2 illustrates the current position of APCON on internet advertising. Responses (86.7%) show that internet advertising has already been under regulation though the regulation was considered recently. However, 13.3% of the respondents still feel that APCON is yet to regulate internet advertising because no machinery has been put in place except the constitution of a committee called 'social media committee' that is set to monitor internet advertising in conjunction with NBC and NCC.

**Table 3: The extent of compliance of internet advertising to eight advertising principles**

Responses	Frequency and Percentage %								Total	
	To a very large extent		To a large extent		To some extent		Not at all		Fr e	%
All advertisements shall be legal, decent, honest, truthful, respectful and mindful of Nigeria's culture.	3	20	4	26.6	7	46.7	1	6.7	15	100
They should be prepared with a high sense of social responsibility and should avoid misinformation.	1	6.7	2	13.3	10	66.7	2	13.3	15	100
All advertisements should conform to the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business, and of fair comments expected in free human communication.	1	6.7	3	20	11	73.3	1	6.7	15	100
All advertisements should always be in the interest of the consumer and wider society.	1	6.7	6	40	6	40	2	13.3	15	100
Inappropriate and/or illegal contents should be avoided	1	6.7	2	13.3	11	73.3	1	6.7	15	100
All advertisements and sales promotions require pre-exposure vetting before publication/screening.	2	13.3	3	20	2	13.3	8	53.3	15	100
It is a sanctionable offence to cause to be aired or published in the print, advertisements which have not been approved.	1	6.7	4	26.6	9	60	1	6.7	15	100
It is a criminal offence to practice advertising, for gain, without registration by APCON.	4	26.6	1	6.7	4	26.6	6	40.1	15	100

#### Field survey, 2015

Table 3 demonstrates the extent of compliance of internet advertising to the eight advertising principles. The table above shows the frequency at which the respondents expressed their levels of agreement to each of the eight principles. Those who felt that internet advertising comply to some extent with the eight advertising principles have the majority frequency in almost but 2 instances as contained in the table above. Those who felt that it complies with "no extent" had the lowest frequency at almost all the categories of the code.

**Table 4: Responses to the challenges confronting the regulation of internet advertising in Nigeria**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
It is impossible to adequately monitor Internet ads due to inadequate infrastructure like power, internet facilities	4	26.6
APCON does not solely regulate Internet or	9	60

Online ads		
It is the sole duty of the owners of such Online platforms where the ad is placed to monitor/regulate such ads.	1	6.7
Only the activities of registered Advertising Practitioners can be regulated or monitored by APCON	1	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

**Field survey, 2015**

Table 4 displays the emerging challenges facing APCON in the regulation of internet advertising. 60% of the respondents explained that since APCON is not solely responsible for the regulation of internet adverts, it is a big problem for the council to regulate advertisements online as processes from one agency to another slows down the efficiency of the regulation in as much as different interests from different groups do mar the smooth flow of processes. Other challenges include: the impossibility to monitor the Internet in Nigeria as basic tools are not available as well as necessary manpower and skills. Others said it is the sole duty of site owners to regulate online advertisements and only the activities of registered APCON can be regulated by the council.

**Table 5: Effects of internet advertising on advertising practice in Nigeria**

Responses	Agree	%	Disagree (F)	%
Information can be easily altered, misrepresented or plagiarized	15	100	0	0
Credibility of advertising source/advert is not guaranteed	9	60	6	40
Internet advertisements intrude on one's Privacy	11	73.3	4	26.7
Internet as a medium for advertising is being abused	12	80	3	20
Internet as a medium for advertisement is being misused	13	86.7	2	13.3
Internet ad is complementing other forms of advertisement	11	73.3	4	26.7
Internet ad is displacing other forms of advertisement	3	20	12	80

**Field survey, 2015**

Table 5 shows the respondents' views on various effects of internet advertising on advertising practice in Nigeria. 100% of the respondents agreed that information can be easily altered, misrepresented or plagiarized online. 60% of the respondents agreed that the credibility of advertising source/advert is not guaranteed while, 40% disagreed with this effect. 73.3% agreed that internet advertisement intrudes on one's privacy while 26.7% disagreed that internet advertising does not intrude on privacy. 80% of the respondents concurred that internet as a medium of advertising is being abused while 20% disagreed. 86.7% of the respondents affirmed that internet as a

medium of advertisement is being misused as 23.3% said the contrary. 73.3% of the respondents agreed that internet advertisement is complementing other forms of advertisement as well as 80% of the respondents also said internet advertisement is not displacing other forms of advertisement. However, 26.7% and 20% of the respondents respectively disagreed that internet is complementing other forms of advertisement and that internet advertisement is displacing other forms of advertisement.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study examined the internet use, misuse or abuse by advertising practitioners in Nigeria: a study of Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) with the aim to find out if internet advertising complies with basic principles of advertising in Nigeria and challenges APCON faces in regulating the online advertising. Based on the analysis of data generated, the following findings were made:

APCON is actually regulating internet advertising through a social media committee recently set up with the sole responsibility of monitoring and regulating internet advertising in collaboration with other agencies like Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). Although APCON is regulating advertising on the Internet, nonetheless 60% of the respondents believed that since APCON is not solely responsible for the regulation of internet adverts, it is a big problem for the council to regulate advertisements online as processes from one agency to another slow down the efficiency of the regulation in as much as different interests from different groups do mar the smooth flow of processes. Other challenges include: the impossibility to monitor the Internet in Nigeria as basic tools are not available as well as necessary manpower and skills. Others said it is the sole duty of site owners to regulate online advertisements and only the activities of APCON registered agencies that can be regulated by the council.

On various effects of internet advertising on advertising practice in Nigeria, 100% of the respondents agreed that information can be easily altered, misrepresented or plagiarized online. This position is underscored by Ozoh (1998, p. 196) that "deceptive advertising could be harmful to the society. This is perhaps why all arms are raised against it." They also highlighted the issues of privacy intrusion. Some advertisements just pop up on accessing the Internet. This is in tandem with the views of Okunna & Omenugha (2012, p.169) that unwanted solicitations abound on the Internet. The credibility of certain advertisement was also pointed out by the respondents. Blatant lies, half truths, unsubstantiated and unverifiable claims abound. 40.8 % of respondents were of the view that Internet advertising complies with advertising principles to some extent. The challenges facing APCON in regulating internet advertising as specified include: impossibility to monitor internet advertising due to inadequate infrastructure and skills; APCON does not regulate internet advertising solely, among others. It is evident from this study that internet as a medium of advertising is being abused and misused. Nevertheless, Internet advertising is complementing other forms of advertising such as television, radio, cinematography film, newspaper, billboards and magazine rather than displacing them.

### Conclusion

Internet advertising has come to stay and as the new media advertising platform continues to expand and mutate; the issue of regulation will continue to arise. The onus therefore lies with the Nigerian regulatory body (APCON) to look beyond the now and prepare for more challenges that would surely come as more people, products and services migrate to the online platforms. The activities of “netizens” who are both content consumers and producers may indeed prove a bigger challenge since their self-assigned roles traverse both agency and advertisers. In such a situation, capacity building, inter-agency cooperation, international collaboration, pro-activity and creativity as well as guidelines revision remain the best option for APCON.

### Recommendations

Having explored Internet advertising and the APCON’s regulatory roles, the following recommendations become imperative:

- ❖ There should be strict monitoring of advertising agencies that engage in Internet advertising to ensure that the principles guiding advertising are complied with by these advertising agencies as well as individual advertisers that engage in internet advertising.
- ❖ APCON should organize an International Regulatory Conference where selected stakeholders such as advertisers, advertising agencies, bloggers, web publishers, the academia, professional journalists as well as citizen journalists would rub minds on how best to regulate Internet advertising in Nigeria.

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