
SELF-REGULATION PRACTICE OF ADVERTISING INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA: OUTLOOK OF INDUSTRY PLAYERS AWARENESS AND APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of advertising practitioners and advertising agencies creative teams in Malaysia specifically within the process of modifying creative output with reference to the two self-regulatory rules that govern the advertising industry in Malaysia. Players in the industry are required to take responsibility and abide by the rules outlined in two Advertising Self-Regulations (ASR) that are part of the Malaysian Code of Advertising Practise and the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted as a part of the qualitative method to get critical feedback on the holistic view of ASR. A total of nine informants representing three categories of senior industry insiders such as regulators, advertising practitioners and creative agency members were involved through in-depth interviews through the selection of purposive sampling method. The study has revealed many advertising practitioners have recognised their internal and external duties to guarantee a favourable image from the creative material they generated or authorised. Which have also reflected mostly positive outcomes through the concept of knowledge, relevancy, and acceptance of the code of practise.

Keywords: *advertising industry, advertisement, self-regulation, code of practice, advertising key players*

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s, Malaysia's creative scene which relates to the advertising industry began to be influenced by the Internet era, which caused the country to move into a knowledge-

based economy (Abdullah, 2002). An official government project, the Multimedia Super Corridor was set up to promote legislation, rules, and regulations that are relevant to the area's multi-media, communication, and information technology (IT) goals (Alsagoff, 2016). The Pandora's box was unlocked at this time for any digital content that supports uncensored content and free speech (Jennings et. al, 2014).

Key players within Malaysia's advertising industry have taken the lead in organising a conversation on self-regulation for the country's advertising sector in 2016. This is mostly due to the industry's efforts to ensure that major players can maintain the trust of stakeholders and defend the rights of customers. Participants included media and creative agencies gathered at a forum session organised by the Malaysian Advertising Association (MAA) titled "Keeping It Legit! Self-Regulation in Malaysian Advertising." Main goal of the forum is to examine relevancy of self-regulation as a necessary or obstacle for the advertising industry, including regulatory groups and government agencies, for the industry. Discussions about the significance of compliance and the idea that industry key players should take responsibility for their actions emerged from the conference (Malaysian Advertising Association, 2020).

Following through topics of self-regulation, Advertising in Malaysia is subject to the Malaysian Code of Advertising Practise or The Code if the platform is operated by an individual media outlet (Advertising Standard Authority Malaysia, 2021). The Communication and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia is in charge of enforcing a different code of behaviour for advertisements that travel through broadcast media, online services, and other electronic media (Content Forum, 2021). This includes any advertising agency or professionals who are involved in enhancing the advertising content. The mechanism of self-regulatory for the advertising industry is within accessibility of the advertiser's message, as well as any industry players who must adhere to the self-regulated regulations. In spite of not breaking any rules, advertisements that deviate from the usual in terms of style or content will be given a pass as long as they don't infringe on public's rights (Asuhaimi, 2017). In order to understand modern advertising, the public's knowledge was integrated into the concept of current advertising code of conduct.

It is mainly through the context of a country such as Malaysia which upheld multicultural nation with Islam as its official religion. As the general public is receptive to advertisements that insult their religious beliefs, advertisers were under pressure to take the Muslim community's sensibilities into account. Even though they are permitted to be advertised in other media, some goods that are forbidden by Islam are not allowed to be advertised on television or the radio (Mokhtar, 2018). Along with religious restrictions, advertisements that are insensitive to other cultures are also forbidden or limited from being shown to consumers in an effort to prevent animosity toward any race in which the category of advertisements carrying insensitive content towards their culture or way of life is represented (Rasit et. al, 2021).

Among industry players, it is mentioned by Shabbir et. al (2019) that the effectiveness and competitiveness of an organization's advertising strategy are the two most important factors in determining that organization's level of success. A study by Slanbekova et. al (2019) highlighted the essence of promoting aggressiveness, materialism, romance, elitism, racism, and consumerism, which all contribute to the establishment of a new culture that is harmful to the general public, advertising can provide social value that is not beneficial. Therefore, the reality is that the advertisements are published or transmitted in the form of

non-informative in some scenarios. The majority of advertisements that are published or broadcast in electronic media in most to show up the joy of the “user” using a product have been published, while the main content of the advertisements should be more focused on providing helpful information about the nature of the goods or services being advertised. This unethical advertising is not only cheating the adult and kid endanger (Singh, 2014), but it is also encouraging people to be wasteful, spending their money on items and services that are not required in day-to-day living at the same time providing misleading information about the products and services on sale, as well as advertising that is overstated and irresponsible, are all examples of unethical marketing practices (Raza et. al , 2019; Kadir and Al-Aidaros, 2015).

Malaysia does not have an official Act under guided law that regulates advertisements; however, due to the extensive growth of the advertising industry over the past decades, Malaysia has continued to regulate the advertising industry through Malaysia Advertising Codes of Practice, which were established in 1977 (Asuhaimi, 2017). According to a Malaysian Advertisers Association article from 2015, regulatory supervision in the local advertising industry was unable to be found relevant due to the revolutionary expansion of creativity within advertising. The primary goal of the response is to make the legislative process more stringent and restrictive. As a result, the industry committee, through organisations such as the Malaysian Advertisers Association (MAA), plays an equal role, despite the widely held belief that innovation is stifled. Little research has been conducted to define the regulator’s proactive involvement in regulating the effects of guidance provided to industry practitioners.

However, in recent years, brands have begun to use controversial material to assess consumer awareness and attention. Malaysia’s technological advancements have set precedents for the expansion of the advertising industry. Concerns have been raised about current advertising patterns that could be construed as offensive to the general public (Nooh, 2014). A self-contained ethical approach is preferred because it is free of personal bias and cultural nuances, as well as religious, nationalistic, and paternalistic dictates. Advertising self-regulation standards, for example, provide a universally agreed-upon and objective set of rules that encourage honesty and sincerity while allowing designers and branding teams to make educated design decisions. When faced with a potentially harmful design task, external and independent rules make it easier to engage in perceived wrongdoing in one’s profession and make educated decisions (De Lange, 2021). To reiterate, this paper focused on the analysis of both codes of practice by reviewing the impact on creativity standards in Malaysia which involves advertising agencies and the Advertising Self-Regulations governed by appointed regulators such as Advertising Standard Authority of Malaysia (ASA) and Communication and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia.

The Advertising Standards Authority of Malaysia (ASA)

A self-regulation system known as the Malaysia Advertising Codes of Practise, or “The Code,” was established in 1977 by the Malaysian government and entrusted to the Advertising Standards Authority of Malaysia (ASA). It was introduced by Malaysia’s first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. Association of Accredited Advertising Agents Malaysia (4A), the Malaysian Advertisers Association, the Malaysian Newspaper Publishers Association (MNPA), AMSA, and the Outdoor Advertising Association Malaysia (OAAM) are the five members of ASA. Mainly, advertising regulation’s primary goal is to ensure that advertising serves the interests of consumers Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia (2021).

It is credible to understand that brands' success or fail dependable on consumer faith and credibility, which is translated into their purchase decisions. Some advertisers set out to deceive, insult, or mislead the general population (Chibueze, 2018). They are rarely successful however when they do, it is to the detriment of advertising as a whole and undermines its credibility and is unfair to the creative team and brand owners who diligently substantiate their claim and practice the prevention of offending people for the sake of grabbing attention (Singh, 2014). This has brought to the attention of the existence of a self-regulatory framework. Regulators scope such as the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) are responsible to monitor advertisements within the platform of print, outdoor, cinema, and point of sale. Advertisers and marketers are solely accountable for such advertisements and promotions that develop and must be able to corroborate the validity of their claims to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), they have a responsibility to make those statements objective and transparent, and thus to avoid harming anyone (Advertising Standard Authority Malaysia, 2021). Within the code of conduct, it has been imprinted that advertising key players have a responsibility to generate advertisements that are honest, moral, and do not misrepresent or offend. Publishers and advertising players acknowledge that they will always only transmit advertisements which it corresponds with The Code. They acknowledge the ASA Committee's decisions as final. Arguments that are considered unacceptable by the ASA Committee or those that are not and can be confirmed will be deemed in violation of The Code. Anyone in charge of soliciting, developing, placing, or releasing an advertisement or promotion and makes such statements will be required to adjust or retract it as immediately. Public agreeableness in voicing concerns and reporting back, as well as participation throughout the complaint general approach, seems to be a fundamental and crucial need for efficient self-regulation (Advertising Standards Advisory, 2021).

The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (The Content Forum)

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Forum known as the "Content Forum", is mandated by the Communications and Multimedia Act of 1998 to supervise and encourage self-regulation of content over electronic networks, and it is registered with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). On September 1st, 2004, the Content Code was originally registered with MCMC after being created by the Content Forum (Content Forum, 2021). The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia, which serves as an industry self-regulatory body, is made up of important players in the communications and multimedia content sector, including advertisers, broadcasters, content producers or distributors, audiotext hosting service providers, internet service providers, and civic organisations (Mokhtar, 2018).

With the goal of making self-regulation easier, The Content Forum adds another layer of protection for consumers on top of the laws. Also, they have promised to control and encourage the making, distributing, and use of content on electronic networks. The Content Forum is in charge of putting the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code into place and making sure it is followed (Nawi and Faizol, 2018). This strong and active group of industry professionals makes sure that content standards are still being made. The goal is to create a self-regulating content ecosystem that will boost creativity, innovation, and the healthy growth of an industry that is always changing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Advertising Self- Regulation (ASR)

Advertising self-regulation (ASR) has spent decades addressing moral issues in advertising (Feenstra & Estaeban, 2019). Research data by Lim et al. (2018) have reviewed advertising to be considered as deceitful and undesirable material. In research from Auxtova et al. (2020), the adaptation of ASR in United Kingdom advertising is evident that complainants may be elevated from statement-makers to discussion participants, a subject position that already exists but is denied to them. According to the same study, the re-governance of ASR might be accomplished through increasing complaint and public engagement in regulatory and investigative processes. Minimum requirements include supporting complaints and countering marketers' reasons. To imitate aspects of the models of representation and governance already presided over by the Human Rights Committee, the inclusion of advertising's stakeholders, including organisations such as "The Citizens Advice Bureau" throughout the complaint adjudication process would be to imitate aspects of the models of representation and governance already included in the process (International Justice Resource Centre, 2019). These ideas have been brought to the advertising community's notice and are largely acknowledged by marketing scholars, albeit not always adopted in reality (Gordon et al., 2020).

It was mentioned that self-regulation can boost compliance incentives (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2020) through industry-created norms and it has been identified as a rational alternative to apply and more readily accepted by industry players. Companies are more likely to follow regulations they jointly produced than government or outside restrictions. The government spends less on self-regulation since the industry develops and enforces the regulations (Steinberg, 2017). The cost-transfer is an attractive solution for the government since it would save administrative and supervisory costs (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992).

Challenges of Adapting Advertising Self-Regulation (ASR)

In the last 35 years, the study of self-regulation has created a variety of theoretical literature; appraisals of self-regulation roles and prospects in reaching acceptable advertising benchmarks are notable (Boddewyn 1992; Harker 2008). Harker (2008) classifies self-regulation schemes into two groups. First, compare self-regulation systems in different nations. Study by Noel et al. (2016) explains certain forms of media are notorious for their frequent and flagrant disregard for the content limits contained within self-imposed alcohol marketing rules. Another common occurrence is being exposed to marketing of alcoholic beverages, especially among younger people. The data, when taken as a whole, provide credence to the hypothesis that the self-regulatory institutions now in place to oversee alcohol marketing tactics are not achieving the objective of safeguarding vulnerable groups as intended. ASR study focuses on creating governance frameworks that should characterise these processes. ASR establishes criteria that industry players must follow to encourage truthful advertising. The public's and customers' faith in these systems determines their validity. Thus, self-regulation is only "self" in the sense that the sector applies it, but it acquires respect and legitimacy if the public considers the commitment as genuine and worthwhile (Feenstra et al., 2019).

Creativity in Advertising

Advertising success hinges on creativity. Scholars say creativity is the most significant part of advertising's least scientific aspect (Reid et al., 1998). While Agnoli et al. (2019) study concluded to consider collectively and despite the aforementioned restrictions, has significant ramifications for the theoretical understanding of creative performance in certain work situations. The study made clear proof that individuals who have a lot of experience in terms of years spent in the advertising field and are open-minded can produce a lot creatively at work and utilise divergent thinking skills more effectively. To test the generalizability of the current findings, we think further research is needed on the effects of different types of domain knowledge, personality traits such as creative self-beliefs, and cultural settings on creativity.

Many researchers studying advertising creativity have recently concentrated on examining the variety of agency-based elements that affect creative outcomes. Researchers have looked at how agency social dynamics affect creative performance, with research examining conventional sociological topics including socioeconomic class or gender (Koppman, 2016). Other characteristics unique to advertising include the employment of creative teams, agency creative processes, and peers' shared mental models (Stuhlfaut and Windels 2015; Lee and Lau 2018). Research on how Google search may both assist art directors and copywriters in finding pertinent material and can also constrain their ability to come up with original ideas shows how the interaction between creatives and digital technology has also been examined (Barker 2018).

The Game Theory

Nash's (1950) Game Theory was used in the research primarily to understand why advertising are trying to circumvent or even defy self-regulatory rules. Using a game framework to analyse systemic interconnection concerns, which are instances in which one player's actions influence the decisions and rewards of other players, can be seen. Consumer preferences and advantages, as well as the options and incentives available to the advertising community, will be impacted by industry actors' breach of a code of conduct in the problem statement scenario. Theories like these will provide light on how industry participants make decisions, how they respond appropriately, and how they benefit all parties involved. As a result of this self-regulatory system, firms are able to benefit from other people's hard work and can do so without contributing to its upkeep or making more than a little effort to comply with the regulations it puts down (Rossiter, 2022).

This behaviour has the potential to disrupt the growth and success of the self-regulating advertising sector. Consenting advertising agencies and brand owners are necessary for self-regulation to be successful and viable (Cusumano, 2021). Self-regulation, on the other hand, has no bearing on one's own behaviour. Because the industry's reputation has been improved through self-regulation, each entity seems to be motivated by a desire for incremental gains, regardless of whether or not self-regulation is beneficial. To put it another way, proposed scenarios are based on the goals and expectations of industry actors, as well as the government's anticipated enforcement methods.

The infringers had every intention of stepping out of line, but they didn't anticipate the path widening to accommodate their new position. Instead, they'd like to see the industry's laws flouted. Key players believe they will be punished by the regulators if they don't comply,

especially in places where industry compliance is optional, such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Harker, 2008). The consensual approach essentially expects that the industry participants whom back the system fiscally would likewise adhere with choices. The threshold expander, on the other hand, focuses on pushing the line in the hope that many will fall in line and the industry will identify the new brand. Stader (2014) have analysed a short-term focus on border violations is expected to be followed by a long-term shift toward a more comprehensive approach to industrial practise. The compliance firm, on the other hand, intends to stay well inside the limit and expects any offenders to be punished, guaranteeing that the compliant firm is safe. The new boundary will eventually be followed as part of ordinary compliance, despite the fact that a threshold relocation is unexpected. Finally, the possible outcomes are explored, and the results under three distinct government regulatory autocracies are reviewed: zero tolerance, moderate tolerance, and high tolerance.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers have applied Creswell's (2014) qualitative methodology and emphasise the challenges and problems that led to the study. Because of this, an explanation of the primary purpose of the study as well as a presentation of the research questions have been developed.

For the purpose of eliciting critical input from informants, a qualitative technique consisting of in-depth interviews and evaluations of policy documents was adopted (Cohen and Manion, 2007). Because of this, the spotlight has been placed on their vast expertise and experience, and they have consequently emerged as a viable guide for advertising sector authorities.

Purposive sampling also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling is a sampling technique in which researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study (Campbell et. al, 2020). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs when elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher (Magwood et. al, 2022). Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money.

Due to experience within the advertising industry itself, researcher have opted for purposive sampling as alternatively, it proves to be effective when only limited numbers of people can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of research design and aims and objectives specifically for this research. And so, for this research, the direction in requiring informants within advertising industry to verify the lengthy history of development in the profession, and opinions on its simplicity and complexity are equally divided. This in which includes Campbell (2020) sampling concepts of ensuring the industry players transcribed interview reflects credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

A lack of data saturation compromises the reliability of the results and the veracity of the information (Bowen, 2008; Kerr, Nixon, and Wild, 2010). This study was aimed of fourteen informants however, due to the setbacks during Covid-19 pandemic, nine informants have agreed to the research. This in which still is answerable to the suggested number to achieve in phenomenology design (Onwuegbuzie, 2016). As a result of saturation, the ultimate number of informants that was interviewed were nine.

Table 1: Informant’s profile

Informant ID	Job Designation	Business Orientation	Working Experience
ADVERTISING AGENCIES			
A1	Executive Creative Director	Advertising Agency	25 years
A2	Creative Director	Advertising Agency	18 years
A3	Senior Copywriter	Advertising Agency	10 years
CORPORATE COMPANIES			
B1	Regional Brand Manager	Global Sports Broadcast	12 years
B2	Marketing Campaign Specialist	Telecommunication	20 years
B3	Head of Branding	Aviation	14 years
B4	Chief Brand Officer	Aviation	13 years
REGULATORS			
C1	President	Governing Bodies	19 years
C2	Vice President	Governing Bodies	35 years

This study’s in-depth interview informants came from three industrial organisations. The existing study employs triangulation to ensure rigour based on interviewee selection:

- i. The first type is self-regulators who have experience with advertising standards and regulations and represent high-level management.
- ii. The second group includes advertising agency creatives with at least 10 years of experience. The informants were chosen based on their experience and viewpoint on how Self-Regulation is adapted in advertising material drawn from client briefs.
- iii. The third group was picked from companies or corporate brands with top managerial positions and 10 years of brand custodian experience. Such a group is chosen to provide a new perspective on Self-Regulation adaption and The Code or Content Forum context. Brand owners may provide a different perspective on comprehending creative material as a client.

Application of data analysis by Sutton and Austin (2016) have been made by the researcher on the processes involved in which are closely made relevant to ensure that the researcher garners the sufficient amount of data that is of a high quality to be organised and converted as future findings with the assistance of Atlas.ti (Ver. 8.0).

Table 2 : Data analysis process adapted from Sutton and Austin (2015)

Analysis phases	Description	Instrument
Step 1: Data collection	The raw data were analysed through various philosophical standpoint. Through data collection method, the process will be basing on list of semi-structured question to understand better concepts that was developed from the framework. Researcher started to consolidate large amounts of data received from informants.	In-depth interview
Step 2: Data analysis and Management		
Interpreting and transcribe data collected	Zoom recording from the nine in-depth interview and self-regulation analysis converted into textual form. The researcher chooses a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to transcribe the data before transferring all data to be organised.	Transcribe
Organize data	The researcher proceed to make sure to organize all the filtered subthemes from the data with assistance from the qualitative software.	Atlas.ti 8 (Codes and network)
Data Coding	The researcher start segregating the data through the quotations and coding to compress transcribe data into easily understandable concepts for a more efficient data analysis process.	Atlas.ti 8 (Codes and network)
Validate Data & Theming	Several round of data validity were tested and the researcher continuously conducted the process continuously till saturation point is achieved all through the data analysis process..	Atlas.ti 8 (Codes and network)
Step 3: Data Synthesis		
Planning and writing the report	The conclusion here simply means stating researcher findings and outcomes based on the research objectives. While concluding, the researcher will have to find a valid link between the analyzed data and your research questions/objective. This is the vital step in concluding the data analysis is presenting the data analysis as a final report.	Thesis report

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak that rocked Malaysia in January 2020, face-to-face interviews with selected informants had to be conducted utilising Zoom under the Movement Restriction Order from March 2020 to June 2020. The interviews were recorded online through Zoom to assure data validity and quality. Open-ended inquiries were asked concerning the informant's background and industry experience. More in-depth queries about motivation followed. The interview closed with open-ended questions about self-regulation, industry viewpoints, and innovative material in local advertising.

During the interview session, representatives from regulatory bodies, advertising agencies and brand owner informants had been selected for the study. They were given a briefing of the anticipated research outcome in order to obtain a comprehensive explanation based on their experiences and feedback. Listed for the representations of self-regulators are sets of questions that are interrelated to one another in order to ensure that the study objectives are accomplished.

To summarised, the fact that the Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice serves as the basis for the case study's foundation, a comprehensive analysis of the operation of the code of practice was carried out. The goal of the in-depth interview mainly is to gained an understanding of the fundamentals of self-regulation through reading factual texts has been harmonised across all instruments (Cresswell, 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Industry Players Knowledge on ASR Content

The analysis that was made coming from advertising agencies and practitioners reflected the understanding of the term "Self-regulation" were sufficient. Majority of the informants representing both advertising corporate practitioners were able to identify the in-depth functionality of the code of practice through reflection of ethical guidelines and consumer protection. They have provided a specific interpretation of both codes in which they grasped the content purpose of protecting consumers from any inaccurate information supplied by industry practitioners:

"I think from a baseline perspective it achieves the objectives in making sure that no information is that will bare for kind of leading to, not to say bad decisions but more about misleading choice of the consumer in that aspect." (Informant B2)

"I think the name 'The Code' itself is quite self-explanatory. So, it means to be a guideline for the practitioners of advertising to self-regulate themselves, in terms of how they will use content for the general audience and for the customers of their brand." (Informant B3)

"The guidelines is to help us to deal with communications in advertising. So, we don't want our message misled, we don't want being backfired because of things. By the end of the day, will affect the brand that we are working on. So, that's why I personally thinks the ethics is there for us to be a guide in terms of rules and regulations that we need to follow. Otherwise, we would be like the western culture." (Informant A1)

Amongst all the informants, two had shown uncertainty in understanding the code of practice however still with relevant assumptions of the impact that it provides to today's contemporary advertising competitive trends:

"I'm aware but not super familiar with it. But I do know the gist of it in terms of the regulations. Keeping it culturally relevant, keeping things honest. I supposed it is a good effort since it provides a good playing field for agencies and brand owners to kind of have that equal amount of fair play." (Informant A2)

"If I was explicitly told, no, I do not know in detail what does The Code stands for. But what I did know I think as most countries in Southeast Asia and across the world, they have a regulatory board that ensures the messaging or the messages of the product is clear." (Informant B1)

Surprisingly, there were one informant whom representing the advertising agency creative team which has no understanding on the purpose of the Advertising Self Regulations. However, this representation only reflects small fraction from the entire sample:

"I think, the objective of the Self-Regulation is to protect the agencies. Maybe?." (Informant A3)

Relevance of the ASR Framework and the Code of Practice

In order to evaluate the degree to which industry actors have adopted self-regulation, researchers need to guarantee that the relevance and credibility of the ASA in relation to the enforcement of self-regulation are clarified to the point where a connection can be drawn. All informants representing the regulatory bodies reflected that there were sufficient and adequate to cater all advertising practitioner from different industries:

"I think the code is adequate. If you look at both the ASA and CMCF codes, they are both very similar because the industry experts were involved in drafting the code.. So, in the code, the display of national spirit is very good and sufficient, right? Example, in The Code it stated advertisers do not delve into politics because in Malaysia, we need to be careful with all the sensitive issues." (Informant C1)

It was also explained by informant C2 within the same context that the primary reason for the adoption of the Self-Regulation was due to the lack of understanding that certain marketers have when it comes to showing their material in more popular advertising content. As a consequence of this, they are obligated to uphold the entirety of the responsibility that has been bestowed upon ASA in its capacity as the council and guardian of the regulations:

"We (ASA) have an advertising council. In fact, the council sits everybody who are custodian of guideline for advertising. So, the whole idea is to have a one-stop centre and the main task is to protect consumers so that they don't get hooked by advertising. You cannot just simply just put something on the wall. You cannot do that." (Informant C2)

Informant C1 have informed on the “engagement” techniques are now being created from the regulatory bodies as an effort to improve the knowledge of the Self-Regulations practise and its guiding principles to all of the stakeholders. These includes conversational efforts with the external community will be available to any and all industry relevant representatives who are interested in participating. This also involved the educational institutions mainly to raise awareness and communicate the following themes to potential future players in the industry:

“There is a lot of things that we (ASA) will need to do. One, is to go out and engage with our stakeholders. Coming from students in school and universities who are learning about advertising. We need to go over and share with them what we have, our experience, so that they are aware. So if they are not aware, then they need to read a bit more, they need to understand, talk to us, read the law, then to understand what are the practices, what’s the guideline, those kind of things.” (Informant C1)

The Acceptance of Industry Players on Both Code of Practice.

Majority of the responses of the industry players who were interviewed can be categorised into provided complete acceptance of the content of both The Code and Content Forum. The positive acceptance predicated on the acknowledgement of the value of the standards: The clarification that was provided by Informant A1, who represented the advertising agency, pointed out a positive support on the Self-Regulation framework. However, it also suggests that it could be stricter if the exposure of mainstream media to mass audiences is high. Where else, other people have brought up a support particularly recommend the restrictions set primarily to the ‘flexibility’ that it still allows even if there has been an earlier misunderstanding of the content. One particular source of information has provided positive feedback on the guideline, which has been described as a necessity, in particular for newcomers to the advertising industry:

“I think for me personally the ethics is good for industry players. Mainly to guide us in terms of rules and regulations that we need to follow because, otherwise, would be like the western culture. They need to implement a bit stricter.” (Informant A1)

“Coming from the regulation itself in general, it hasn’t really been that restrictive, I think there is some level of flexibility. But having said that I also think that in some ways it becomes a bit of a case of misinterpretation or interpretation or limited interpretation.” (Informant B2)

“I think I have an answer. I have not encounter where it actually hinders creativity. Because I think it just makes things easier when there are guidelines to refer to especially for folks who are new to the industry.” (Informant B3)

On the other hand, the were few informants emphasise the pros and cons of the code of practice hence do not categorised their response to be fully accepting towards the code of practice applicability. This primarily as a result of the rewards and challenges presented to advertising practitioners during the creative process:

“It restricts to a certain extent and then it has its sort of freedom. I mean when you say the case like your strength is also your weakness, that kind of feels like that.” (Informant A2)

“I would say that it’s not entirely a hindrance and it’s not entirely a necessity as well. I think it depends on the situation.” (Informant A3)

“I don’t think it is a hindrance, no. I think if anything, it is a necessity. But the code shouldn’t have limitations based on, I guess, freedom of speech.” (Informant B1)

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings that were consolidated, this study gave useful information about the development of Malaysian ASR from the perspective of industry players and the processes involved from creative team on putting the guidelines into practise. This has led industry players to meet the goals of the regulators to set a standard benchmark. It can be seen that ASR has ensured that local advertising agencies were able to provide enough and useful information and data to their audiences by adopting and following the code of conduct in a proper manner.

Also, the results of the study showed that ASR in Malaysia still carries relevance to local advertising professionals and the industry. Respondents talked about the positive outcome of the advertising industry towards their creative development specifically within the aspect of guidelines of cultural value. Over time, the practice have grown into a true national identity and image for the development of advertising content. However, these are important key points highlighted due to the adaptation between digital and non-digital advertising content that can be a hindrance to being creative in general.

Finally, this study gave industry players more insight into alternate ways to use the best creative practises while making sure that audiences get content that is acceptable and tasteful. Each advertising agency’s process must be ethical and not hurt the reputation of the work done by the creative team or the expectations of the brand. These goals can be reached by increasing the experience of local talent and using advertising award-based practises to make the situation for advertising agencies and brand owners healthier and less stressful.

The study showed that being creative is just as important as following the rules. From the subjective idea of what makes a good creative, other challenging factors in the demanding industry in Malaysia were thought about and talked about. The results have shown that ethics are still not a big deal, even though their existence is well known. In addition, over the course of this study, researcher faced with few limitations during the Covid-19 lockdown, in which hinders the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews with chosen respondents and affected the data collection timeline. Interviews had to be rescheduled to accommodate informants’ new work-from-home habits, which disrupted the seamless experience and caused issues with the internet connection, sufficient facilities, and clear audio. an analysis of the level of support for the code of practice among local players was carried out. However, this study manages to successfully reflect that both The Code and The Content Forum were analysed to determine their respective advantages, disadvantages, and flaws, as well as the likelihood that local industry participants will come to regard them as more trustworthy in the future. It has gained credibility and is now on par with other systems that are used in a number of

industrialised countries. These are the fundamental conditions for adopting the self-regulation approach, and it has earned credibility in recent years.

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