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## INVESTIGACIÓN/RESEARCH

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### **Lack of truthfulness in advertising. The example of advertising of slimming products**

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#### **Abstract:**

Advertising is accused of lying on many occasions, but these accusations become more intense when it comes to announcements of slimming products. Throughout this article we will analyze some of these ads and analyze their ethical faults, as well as any harm they pose to society.

#### **Keywords:**

Ethics – advertising – products - slimming.

### **Falta de veracidad en publicidad. El ejemplo de la publicidad de productos adelgazantes**

#### **Resumen:**

La publicidad es acusada de mentir en muchas ocasiones, pero estas acusaciones se vuelven más intensas cuando hablamos de anuncios de productos adelgazantes. A lo largo de este artículo vamos a analizar algunos de estos anuncios y analizar sus faltas éticas, así como los perjuicios que suponen en la sociedad.

#### **Palabras clave:**

Ética - publicidad – productos - adelgazantes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Increasingly numerous announcements of slimming products, advertisements that promise an incredible body just by taking a pill or use a machine that vibrates. It seems something magical, but these ads say it is real and not only real, but very easy to get. Ads like these are proof of what we say:

**BAJE DE PESO CON TRATAMIENTOS Y PRODUCTOS NATURALES**

- Quema de 2,000 a 3,000 calorías y desaparece la celulitis
- Acelera el metabolismo
- Pierdes de 2 a 6 libras

8001 AIRLINE DR. SUITE 3 HOUSTON, TX 77037 **832-818-4069 • 281-448-5353**

The advertisement features a collage of various health and wellness products including bottles, boxes, and containers. On the left, a woman is shown lying on a massage table. On the right, a woman's midsection is shown with a measuring tape. The background is a mix of red and white.

**BODY PARAFFIN**  
PARAFINA ADELGAZANTE

REDUCE Y MOLDEA TU FIGURA  
NUTRE E HIDRATA LA PIEL  
CON ALGAS MARINAS

The advertisement features a woman in a white bikini measuring her waist with a yellow tape. In the foreground, there are several products: a jar of Body Paraffin, a box of Waist Trimmer, a jar of Gel Frio, and a roll of paraffin wax. The background is a gradient of orange and yellow.

COMPRANDO  
EN LA PRIMERA VISITA

LLAMAR LAS  
24/7  
Hs./DIAS

SUPLEMENTO DIETARIO NATURAL QUE CONTRIBUYE A LA PERDIDA DE PESO

# PERDÉ ESOS KILOS DE MÁS

- Es un quema-grasas de origen natural sin contraindicaciones
- Con extracto de hierbas, aminoácidos y vitamina B6

¡Vos también podés tener una vida plena y saludable! Asesorate con nuestros especialistas y decile adiós a esa panza. **TRATAMIENTO SIN EFECTO REBOTE.**

100% Satisfacción  
GARANTIZADA

TU SATISFACCIÓN ESTÁ 100% GARANTIZADA.  
DISFRUTÁ EL PLACER DE LA COMIDA CON TRANQUILIDAD Y BAJÁ ESOS KILOS DE MÁS

[www.ojosdeperro.com.ar](http://www.ojosdeperro.com.ar)

CUOTAS DESDE  
**\$53<sup>34</sup>**  
ENVIÓ INCLUIDO  
A TODO EL PAÍS

¿Cuántos kilos querés adelgazar?  Kilos

Nombre y Apellido  C.Área  Teléfono  Email

Comentario

¡Llamá HOY y decile adiós a la obesidad y sobrepeso!

RESERVALO AHORA MISMO:  
**011-3220-0818**  
Todos los días de 7.00 a 00.00 hs

APROVECHÁ YA MISMO ESTA PROMOCIÓN **ENVIAR**

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What is really surprising is that these ads are still active and can be seen by thousands of people, eager to get to lose weight effortlessly, they acquire these products, with consequent frustration that they will feel when they see that they do not get the results they have promised them in advertisements.

This frustration, coupled with the economic damage suffered by them, is one of the big reasons that make that ethics should be closely linked to advertising. Thus, the ethical faults in ads cause multiple damages in the consumer, both psychological (they do not see fulfilled their expectations and hopes) and economic (they spend money on something that does not serve them for the purpose for which they acquired it).

## 2. DISCUSSION

Advertising knows that something has to change in it. It has long been known. Respect for the truth seems to be its Achilles heel, especially in the case of advertising of slimming products. As Ogilvy says, "If lies about a product are told<sup>2</sup>, one is exposed to be discovered by the consumer, who will punish us not buying it a second time (...) Good products can be sold by honest advertising". Maybe that's why it is so since 2002, many codes of conduct arising from the sector itself (with the help of Self-Control) that show in their preambles social responsibility of advertising with society and the need for carry it out properly. We can find codes governing advertising from pharmaceuticals to children's advertising. Of all the codes, we could say that the mother code would be the Advertising Code of Conduct drawn up in 1996<sup>3</sup>. The code states that "the ethics rules apply to all advertising communication activity aimed at promoting, directly or indirectly, whatever the

<sup>2</sup>Ortega, E. (2004). Advertising communication. Madrid: Pyramid.

<sup>3</sup> Advertising code of conduct. Self-Control website. Accessed on 01/20/2010

[http://www.autocontrol.es/pdfs/Cod\\_conducta\\_publicitaria.pdf](http://www.autocontrol.es/pdfs/Cod_conducta_publicitaria.pdf)

means employed, the procurement of goods or services, or the enhancement of trademarks and trade names. These deontological rules will be applicable to any announcement issued on behalf of any natural or legal persons, of private character, in order to promote certain attitudes or behaviors. They do not apply to political advertising."

Among the many principles of the code, all of them very useful, we stress several that are related to the truthfulness and consistent respect for the consumer:

- "Advertising should never be a means to abuse the good faith of the consumer" (**art. 4**).

- Advertising must be identifiable (**art. 13**) and must not be misleading (**art. 14**), meaning by misleading advertising that could mislead recipients. In this sense, it is required that the entire message be understandable but should be especially with regard to the origin, nature, composition, availability, expiration date and manufacture, price, results from use of the product and the risks associated with their use, among others.

- In this code also different types of information accompanying the announcement are regulated and whose role is to convince consumers about the convenience of using a particular product. This is the case of technical, scientific or statistical data that can be found in many advertisements (**art. 17**). The code states that these data "must be relevant, verifiable and must not mislead." Reference to the dissemination of comparative tests of products and services (**art. 18**) is also made. In this case the code calls the revelation of the natural or legal person who has done them as well as the date of completion of them. Regarding the testimonies (**art. 19**) it states that "when advertising includes recommendations and testimonies they must respond to the truth."

- "No one can suggest in his advertising, that his product or service has particular characteristics when these are common among similar products or services. (**Art. 26- Principle of common characteristics**).

These principles are consistently breached in advertisements of slimming products: false data, unrealistic promises, abuse of the good faith of the consumer and more than misleading advertising.

The truth is fundamental, is the basis of trust in any system, profession or person. As Hugo Aznar says "when<sup>4</sup> we write a resume is not acceptable to put false information, but it would be absurd to include our shortcomings. In advertising activity, something similar happens. Never, under any circumstances, one must

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<sup>4</sup> Aznar, H. (1999) Responsible communication. Barcelona: Ariel. 155

resort to lies or false information to persuade or cause better impression, but this does not mean, for example, not to extol the virtues of a product "and omit some of its shortcomings against competitors. Soria also reflects on this issue and explains that "it can be considered<sup>5</sup> that the advertising message is not true when there is no match between the offered reality and perception that the receiver has of that reality through the message received."

Following the approach of Soria, we can say that cheating exists in the following cases<sup>6</sup>:

- Allocation of characteristics or properties and / or effects that do not correspond to reality. Offering false promises.
- Ambiguity in the content or in the form of advertising, especially in language (use of comparatives, superlatives, conditional tense, etc).
- Comparative advertising, when not supported by essential, relevant characteristics, related and objectively provable or verifiable products including the comparison is made.
- Employment of complicated and pseudoscientific terms; innovation endorsement of a university or an institute: the label 'sold in pharmacies'; use of references to the results of a survey or a scientific study whose sole purpose is to impress the potential consumer.
- Abuse by exaggeration. This is a problematic aspect of information. You cannot ask that advertising be a balanced or neutral information. But the exaggeration that cannot be seen or easily identifiable by the public may end up in a lie. Probably, for example, there is nothing wrong with showing an advertisement image of biscuits that come flying on an ad to put in the mouth of a hungry boy, but it is not lawful to call juice to what only has 25 percent of fruit.
- Surreptitious advertising. They are messages not clearly identifiable as such by the receiver of the advertising.
- Omission of relevant information. The question is difficult to solve in many cases. How much information should be disclosed or what is the same, what information can be omitted? Duque addresses rightly the theme: 'For the sake of advertising truthfulness, there is an obligation to manifest all the circumstances, according to the judgment of the average consumer, can decisively influence the willingness to hire those to whom an advertisement is directed and whose ignorance can be misleading or bring negative consequences. In any case, the moral imperative to disclose the information is logically higher when the physical or mental health, safety or other human rights of the public may be at risk.
- Denigrating Advertising, with messages that undermine or unfairly disparage products or services from the competition.

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<sup>5</sup> Aznar, H. (1999) . Communication responsable. Barcelona: Ariel. 155

<sup>6</sup>Soria, C. (1999). Ethical perspective on information. In Bonete, E. Ethics audiovisual communication. Madrid: Tecnos. P. 155-156

- Plagiarized advertising, taking advantage of the reputation of others with the use of design, slogans and even the name - exact or very similar- of other products and services, and giving up one of the characteristic features of the profession, as is the advertising creativity

### 3. CONCLUSIONES

Since the law does not appear to protect consumers from ads like this, full of deceit and false promises, the ethics of the professionals in the sector, as well as the advertisers, could be an appropriate formula that would protect consumers, citizens, from commercial abuses. As Adela Cortina says, "Ethics means<sup>7</sup> a general framework of basic moral principles within which they could legitimize themselves as equally valid and respectable different moral codes more or less compatible with each other." Perhaps that ethical commitment to achieve that we stop seeing ads as featured in this article and start respecting the consumer, as it deserves.

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<sup>7</sup> Cortina, A. y Martínez, E. (1996). *Ética*. Madrid: Akal. Pág. 23

