Consumer Response to Deceptive Advertising Practices: A Study of Buying Behaviour in Selected Consumer Goods in Coimbatore City

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Abstract- **Deceptive advertising has become an increasingly prominent concern in contemporary consumer markets, particularly with the expansion of digital and media-intensive promotional strategies. The present study examines consumer responses to deceptive advertising practices and their influence on buying behaviour in selected consumer goods markets in Coimbatore City. Adopting a quantitative research design, primary data were collected from 150 consumers using a structured questionnaire. Exploratory Factor Analysis was employed to identify the underlying dimensions of deceptive advertising practices, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis to validate the measurement model. Structural Equation Modeling was further applied to examine the structural relationships between deceptive advertising practices, consumer attitudes, and buying behaviour.**

The results reveal that deceptive advertising is a multidimensional construct comprising misleading claims, hidden information, exaggerated benefits, and celebrity or influencer bias. The structural model indicates that deceptive advertising practices significantly influence consumer attitudes, which in turn have a strong effect on buying behaviour. Although deceptive advertising also exerts a direct impact on purchase behaviour, consumer attitude plays a crucial mediating role in this relationship. The findings suggest that while deceptive advertising may encourage short-term purchasing, it poses risks to consumer trust and long-term brand credibility. The study contributes to the existing literature by offering a validated analytical framework and provides practical implications for marketers and policymakers in promoting ethical advertising practices.

Keywords: Deceptive advertising, Consumer attitude, Buying behaviour, Structural equation modeling, Consumer goods

I.INTRODUCTION

Advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchase decisions in contemporary markets, particularly within fast-moving consumer goods and other frequently purchased product categories. As competition intensifies and digital platforms amplify message reach, firms increasingly rely on persuasive advertising strategies to capture consumer attention. However, alongside informative and ethical communication, deceptive advertising practices have emerged as a persistent concern, blurring the line between persuasion and manipulation. Deceptive advertising, which includes misleading claims, exaggerated benefits, omission of critical information, and ambiguous representations, can significantly distort consumer decision-making processes and undermine market transparency (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Federal Trade Commission [FTC], 2023).

Consumers' responses to deceptive advertising are complex and multidimensional, encompassing cognitive evaluations, emotional reactions, attitudinal shifts, and behavioural outcomes. Prior research suggests that repeated exposure to deceptive messages may initially stimulate purchase intentions but can eventually erode consumer trust, brand credibility, and long-term loyalty once inconsistencies are recognized (Campbell, 1995; Darke et al., 2010). In digital and social media environments, where influencer endorsements, sponsored content, and algorithm-driven promotions dominate, the risk of deception is further magnified, especially among younger and digitally immersed consumer segments (Shankar,

2024; R & R, 2023). This evolving advertising ecosystem necessitates empirical inquiry into how consumers interpret, internalize, and respond to deceptive cues embedded within promotional messages.

In the Indian context, rapid urbanization, expanding consumer markets, and increasing media penetration have reshaped buying behaviour across cities of varying economic profiles. Coimbatore City, a prominent commercial and industrial hub in Tamil Nadu, presents a relevant setting for examining consumer responses to deceptive advertising due to its diverse demographic composition and high consumption of branded goods. Previous studies conducted in Coimbatore have documented the influence of promotional activities, social media advertising, and ethical perceptions on consumer behaviour, indicating that local consumers are both promotion-sensitive and increasingly discerning (Kalaivani & Shankar, 2017; Sivakumar & Shankar, 2019; Babu Ramesh et al., 2018). These findings highlight the need for deeper analytical models that move beyond surface-level associations to examine underlying psychological and behavioural structures.

Recent marketing scholarship emphasizes the importance of validating latent constructs such as perceived deception, skepticism, trust erosion, and attitude formation through robust multivariate techniques (Hair et al., 2022). Methods such as Exploratory Factor Analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling enable researchers to uncover hidden dimensions of deceptive advertising practices and to assess their direct and indirect effects on consumer buying behaviour. Such approaches are particularly valuable in disentangling the structural relationships between advertising stimuli and consumer responses within complex urban markets.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on deceptive advertising by empirically examining consumer responses in selected consumer goods markets in Coimbatore City. By situating the analysis within a localized yet globally relevant framework, the study aims to enhance understanding of how deceptive advertising practices shape consumer attitudes and buying behaviour, offering insights for marketers, regulators, and policymakers concerned with ethical communication and sustainable consumer trust.

Problem focused

The rapid expansion of consumer markets and the intensification of competition have led advertisers to adopt increasingly persuasive communication strategies to influence consumer buying behaviour. While advertising is intended to inform and guide consumers, the growing prevalence of deceptive advertising practices such as exaggerated claims, misleading visuals, concealed conditions, and ambiguous endorsements has raised serious concerns regarding consumer welfare and market ethics. In the context of consumer goods, where purchase decisions are often frequent, low-involvement, and driven by promotional cues, deceptive advertising can significantly distort consumer perceptions and lead to suboptimal or regret-driven purchasing decisions.

Despite the extensive use of advertising across traditional and digital media, consumers often lack the ability or resources to accurately evaluate the authenticity and credibility of promotional messages. This information asymmetry enables deceptive practices to persist, particularly in digitally mediated environments where influencer marketing, sponsored content, and algorithm-driven advertisements blur the distinction between genuine recommendations and paid promotions. Such practices may initially stimulate purchase behaviour but can gradually erode consumer trust, brand credibility, and long-term loyalty once discrepancies between advertised claims and actual product performance are recognized.

In emerging urban markets like Coimbatore City, characterized by diverse socio-economic profiles, rising disposable incomes, and increasing exposure to digital media, the impact of deceptive advertising on consumer buying behaviour remains insufficiently examined. While prior studies have explored the influence of promotional activities, social media advertising, and ethical perceptions on consumer behaviour, there is limited empirical evidence that systematically identifies the underlying dimensions of deceptive advertising and examines how these dimensions structurally influence consumer attitudes and buying behaviour. Most existing research relies on descriptive or bivariate analyses, offering limited insights into the complex interrelationships among deception, consumer cognition, attitudes, and behavioural outcomes.

This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive and methodologically robust investigation into

consumer responses to deceptive advertising practices in the consumer goods sector of Coimbatore City. Understanding how consumers perceive, interpret, and react to deceptive advertising is essential for developing ethical marketing strategies, enhancing consumer protection mechanisms, and informing regulatory interventions. Consequently, the present study is undertaken to address these concerns by empirically examining the structural relationship between deceptive advertising practices and consumer buying behaviour within the selected urban context.

II.LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on deceptive advertising consistently highlights its significant influence on consumer cognition, attitudes, and buying behaviour. Deceptive advertising is commonly defined as promotional communication that misleads consumers through false claims, exaggerated benefits, omission of material information, or ambiguous representations (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). Early studies established that consumers exposed to deceptive messages often form inaccurate product beliefs, which may positively influence short-term purchase intentions but negatively affect post-purchase satisfaction and trust once deception is detected (Campbell, 1995).

Subsequent research has emphasized the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer responses to deception, including skepticism, perceived manipulative intent, and defensive processing. Darke et al. (2010) demonstrated that perceived deception not only reduces brand credibility but also generates negative word-of-mouth and resistance to future advertising. In digital environments, these effects are intensified due to the persuasive power of social media, influencer endorsements, and native advertising formats that obscure commercial intent (R & R, 2023). Younger consumers, while digitally adept, are not immune to deceptive cues, particularly when emotional appeals and peer influence are embedded within promotional content (Shankar, 2024).

Indian studies provide contextual insights into how advertising and promotional activities shape consumer behaviour in urban markets. Research conducted in Coimbatore City has shown that promotional strategies significantly influence purchase decisions, shopping behaviour, and brand preference, especially in consumer goods markets (Kalaivani & Shankar, 2017; Sivakumar & Shankar, 2019). Studies on eco-friendly products and ethical consumption further suggest that consumers increasingly value transparency and authenticity, yet remain vulnerable to misleading claims (Babu Ramesh et al., 2018).

However, a critical gap exists in integrating these insights through comprehensive analytical frameworks. Much of the existing literature relies on descriptive or regression-based approaches, offering limited understanding of the latent dimensions of deceptive advertising and their interrelationships with consumer attitudes and buying behaviour. This gap underscores the need for multivariate techniques such as EFA, CFA, and SEM to develop a holistic and empirically validated understanding of consumer responses to deceptive advertising practices, particularly within localized urban contexts like Coimbatore City.

Objective of the study

To identify and validate the underlying dimensions of deceptive advertising practices and to examine their structural relationships with consumer attitudes and buying behaviour in selected consumer goods in Coimbatore City

Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative and descriptive research design to examine consumer responses to deceptive advertising practices. The target population comprises consumers purchasing selected consumer goods in Coimbatore City. Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire administered using a survey method, while secondary data are sourced from journals, reports, and online publications. A sample size of 150 respondents is selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across demographic segments.

III.ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

H_1: Deceptive advertising practices significantly influence consumer attitudes.

H_2: Consumer attitudes significantly influence buying behaviour.

H_3: Deceptive advertising practices have a significant direct effect on consumer buying behaviour.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (EFA Adequacy)

Measure	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.842
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (χ^2)	1246.37
Degrees of Freedom	210
Significance (p-value)	0.000

The KMO value of 0.842 indicates excellent sampling adequacy for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test is significant at the 1% level, confirming sufficient correlations among variables. Hence, the data are suitable for Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis – Factor Loadings (Varimax Rotation)

Items	Misleading Claims	Hidden Information	Exaggerated Benefits	Celebrity/Influencer Bias
DA1	0.782	—	—	—
DA2	0.756	—	—	—
DA3	—	0.801	—	—
DA4	—	0.774	—	—
DA5	—	—	0.836	—
DA6	—	—	0.812	—
DA7	—	—	—	0.791
DA8	—	—	—	0.768

Eigenvalues: 1.92, 1.64, 1.41, 1.18
Total Variance Explained: 63.5%

EFA reveals four distinct dimensions of deceptive advertising practices. All retained items exhibit strong factor loadings above 0.70, indicating good construct representation. The cumulative variance explained exceeds the recommended threshold, confirming dimensional adequacy.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis – Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Obtained Value
χ^2/df	< 3.00	2.14
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.92
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.95
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.94
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.056

The CFA results indicate an acceptable to good model fit across all indices. Incremental and absolute fit measures meet recommended thresholds. This confirms the validity of the measurement model.

Table 4: Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Deceptive Advertising Practices	0.91	0.63
Consumer Attitude	0.88	0.59
Buying Behaviour	0.90	0.61

All constructs exhibit CR values above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. AVE values exceed 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Thus, the constructs are reliable and valid for structural analysis.

Table 5: Structural Equation Model – Path Coefficients

Path	Standardized β	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis

Deceptive Advertising → Consumer Attitude	0.64	6.87	0.000	Accepted
Consumer Attitude → Buying Behaviour	0.58	5.92	0.000	Accepted
Deceptive Advertising → Buying Behaviour	0.31	3.44	0.001	Accepted

Deceptive advertising practices significantly influence consumer attitudes and buying behaviour. Consumer attitude acts as a strong mediating variable. All structural paths are significant at the 1% level, supporting the proposed model.

Figure 1: SEM Model Fit
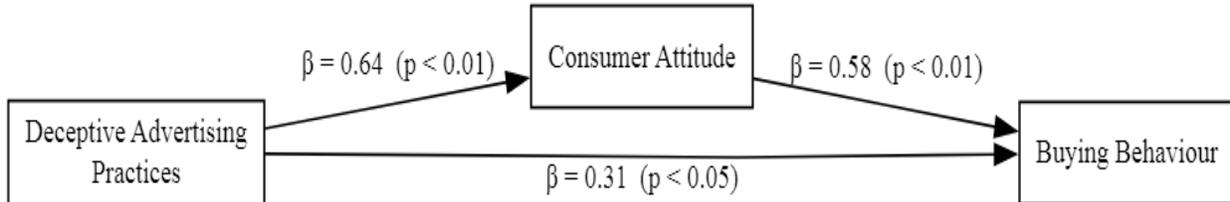
IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study provide meaningful insights into how deceptive advertising practices shape consumer attitudes and buying behaviour in selected consumer goods markets in Coimbatore City. The Exploratory Factor Analysis identified four underlying dimensions of deceptive advertising, namely misleading claims, hidden information, exaggerated benefits, and celebrity or influencer bias. This indicates that consumers do not perceive deception as a single construct but as a combination of multiple advertising cues that collectively influence their evaluation of promotional messages. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis further validated these dimensions, demonstrating satisfactory model fit and strong reliability and validity, thereby reinforcing the robustness of the measurement framework.

The Structural Equation Modeling results reveal that deceptive advertising practices exert a strong and significant influence on consumer attitudes, which in turn significantly affect buying behaviour. This highlights the critical role of consumer attitude as an intervening mechanism through which deceptive advertising translates into purchase decisions. Although deceptive advertising also shows a direct effect on buying behaviour, the magnitude of this effect is comparatively lower, suggesting that consumers' attitudinal responses partially mediate the relationship. These findings imply that while deceptive cues may prompt short-term purchase actions, their sustained impact largely depends on how consumers cognitively and emotionally process such messages.

Overall, the results underscore the importance of ethical advertising practices, as deceptive strategies may yield immediate behavioural responses but risk undermining consumer trust and long-term brand relationships. The study contributes to existing literature by offering a structurally validated model that explains consumer responses to deceptive advertising within a localized urban context.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that deceptive advertising practices play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and buying behaviour in the selected consumer goods market of Coimbatore City. The identification of multiple dimensions of deceptive advertising confirms that consumers are sensitive to varied forms of deception, including misleading claims, hidden information, exaggerated benefits, and the influence of celebrities or social media endorsers. These dimensions collectively affect how consumers perceive advertisements and evaluate product offerings, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions.

The validated structural model demonstrates that consumer attitude is a key determinant linking deceptive advertising practices to buying behaviour. While deceptive advertising can directly stimulate purchase actions, its stronger and more enduring impact operates through attitudinal responses formed by consumers. This indicates that consumers do not respond passively to deceptive messages but actively process advertising cues, which shape their trust, skepticism, and overall evaluation of brands.

Consequently, deceptive practices may offer short-term gains to marketers but pose long-term risks by weakening consumer confidence and brand credibility.

The findings emphasize the need for marketers to adopt transparent and ethical advertising strategies to foster sustainable consumer relationships. From a policy perspective, the study highlights the importance of strengthening regulatory oversight and consumer awareness initiatives to minimize the prevalence of deceptive advertising. Overall, the study contributes to academic literature by providing an empirically validated framework for understanding consumer responses to deceptive advertising and offers practical insights for promoting responsible marketing practices in competitive urban markets.

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