



MARKETING OR MANIPULATION? MANIPULATION TACTICS USED BY BRANDS TO ATTRACT CONSUMERS

Authors- Anand Singh¹ Divyansh Sahu² Nupur Bairagi³ Preet Gawade⁴ Shipra Singh⁵

MBA (marketing) students of MIT SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, S.No.124, Paud Road, Kothrud, Pune, Maharashtra 411038.

Abstract

The market is increasing exponentially as the needs and demands of people are increasing. People are getting various alternatives in products so they choose those commodities which satisfies their needs the most. Companies are using many manipulative tactics to attract their consumers towards their products.

Consumers generally fall prey to the attractive advertisements that a company uses. This paper reflects on how the companies use the stimuli, the techniques and mechanism of the advertisements to manipulate the consumer.

Purpose

Manipulation tactics used by brands to attract consumers strives to understand the various tactics that a brand or a private retailer undertakes in order to increase its sales. Such manipulative tactics are considered unethical practices. This research paper will try to showcase the outcome and impact of the same on the consumers targeted.

Design/Methodology/Approach

Our paper is based on the feedback and reviews of people about the manipulation tactics they have come across in their life with any type of product

We generated a google form where we asked some questions related to the same. Respondents filled the form according to their experiences of the topic.

We divided the audience according to:

- Age- 18-24, 24-30, 30 & above
- Sex- Male/Female
- Product they frequently bought through online or retail shopping
- Manipulative techniques (Tactics) they came across

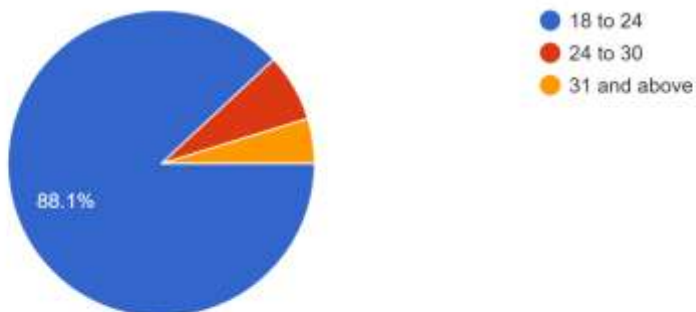
The main purpose of generating the form is to understand what a consumer thinks about the market and what is their behavior towards these kinds of activities

We used a **convenience sampling** method to collect the data.

Primary Data-

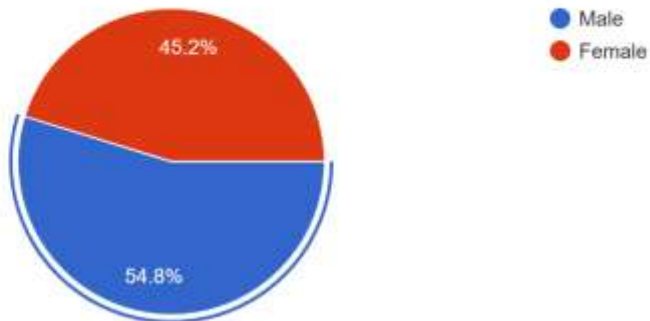
Age

42 responses



Sex

42 responses



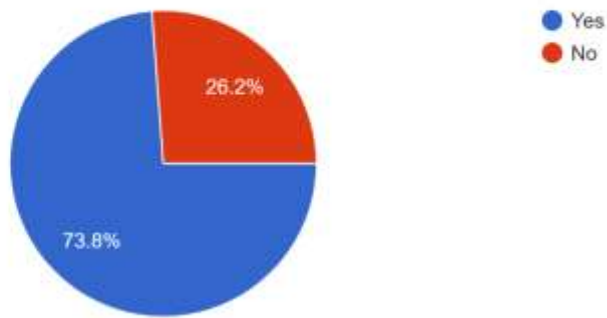
Did you ever come across any offers by brands through advertisements

42 responses



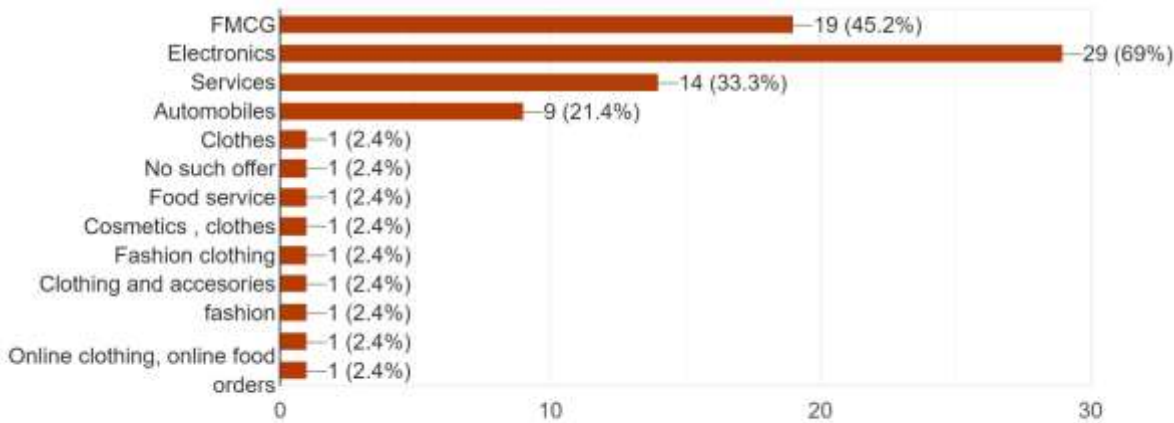
Did you opt for such offers

42 responses



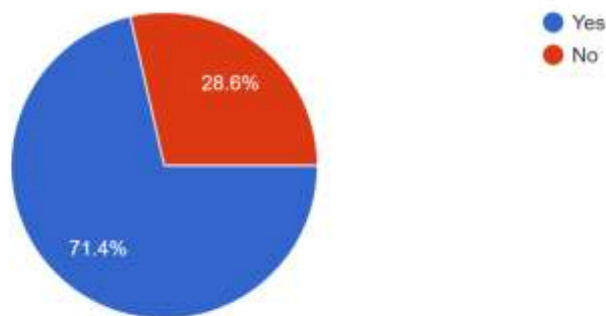
What type of products did you come across with such offers

42 responses



After accepting the offer, Did you realize that it was manipulative?

42 responses



Various tactics people come across-

Reponses received-

1. When buying clothes online, they tell us how easy it is to return if I don't like or if there's some other issue before. I agree the return process is easy but what they do is instead of giving the amount in return they hand over some gift cards so that now we have to shop at their website or from their app compulsorily.
2. About the online food ordering, they give us offers like 50% off or for e.g. Zomato gold where you get one on one free, here they'll tell you to order above Rs. 500 minimum which requires at least two items (sometimes more) to be added to make that amount and above that Zomato says that I'll receive an extra piece of the item that is low in cost from the items I have added to the cart. What if I want something else as an extra piece?
3. The trick the salesman used was he first reduced the price of the electronic item and at the next moment he started offering me different items and later told me sir u have to buy this also with this and further added we cannot sell this item separately but in the advertisement it was written that the price of the electronic item is X. But after visiting show price became twice with a hell lot of taxes and accessories
4. Prices for products that I often searched for kept on dropping to manipulate me in to buying the said product. Also, I would receive pestering amounts of ads and pop-ups everywhere, that includes, web searches, social media, browser notifications and emails.

5. The base price of the product was such set that even after discount, it may satisfy a customer that he has saved a lot of money but in reality, the company had still earned a lot of profit out of it and the customer had overpaid for the product.
6. Brands use manipulation very smartly that it seems ethical, like they pinch you where it hurts the most and then you're automatically drawn towards that product.
7. Generally, whenever we visit to a mall outlet, they put up the board of 50% off and below and then they write on minimum 2 purchases.
8. Bought new mobile phone and in exchange of that i have sold my old one. They took it on a very nominal price but their site was showing high exchange prices.
9. Food items are usually marketed to very appetizing and larger portion sizes, but the food served/received is usually a little disappointing.
10. In advertisement they showed discount on a LG TV but after I bought that TV, they reduced the amount by applying some conditions
11. Use Manchester United credit card by ICICI bank and get a Fully paid trip to Old Trafford Manchester which comes with a lot of hidden conditions.

Literature review-

Paper 1

The manipulation through advertising became an issue the consumers are facing on almost a regular basis. This practice moves away the mission of marketing that of meeting the needs of customers and widens the asymmetries of power between the company and the consumer. Many of manipulative advertisements are difficult to prove because of their controversial nature and content. This paper is about how the companies use the stimuli, the techniques and the mechanisms of advertising to manipulate the consumers. At the same time, it advances some suggestions about the diminishing of the manipulative practices. The effectiveness of these solutions will depend on the observance of some principles by the companies which advertise in areas where they and the consumers can find mutual goals and interests

Author - Victor DANCIU Bucharest University of Economic Studies dvictorsambotin@yahoo.com

Paper 2

A desire to purchase goods and services is fostered by marketers. Marketers can incorporate manipulation tactics into their efforts to create mass product appeal, effectively controlling consumer behavior. This practice however is not permitted as per the American Marketing Association's Statement of Ethics. This ethics statement incorporates the principles of maleficence and honesty as core components of ethical norms and values, respectively. These ethical principles are congruent with the technological capabilities that serve as the foundation of the digital era, as the digital era results in increased transparency. This transparency ultimately leads some corporations to adjust their marketing approaches, which others may or may not implement differing forms of consumer manipulation.

Author- Jar Tiautrakul

Paper 3

Paper was written to bring to the attention of researchers in this field – and beyond – the opportunities to reduce the gaps between the consumers' subconscious and their behavior, in order to fulfil their desires. Therefore, it was shown how studying the sensory, cognitive and emotional reactions of consumers to stimuli related to a product or an

advertisement allows the researchers to find out why consumers make the decisions they make when choosing a brand or another, without the subjectivity specific to traditional research methods. The paper includes the description of the main techniques used in neuromarketing, aspects regarding the domestic market and Romania's situation in this field, the areas of its use and the limitations imposed by the current economic context. This article may also be the starting point in developing a code of ethics on the use of neuromarketing, as well as the legal factors that can help ease the arising conflicts regarding neuromarketing – between influence and manipulation.

Author- Larisa Dragolea, Denisa Cortilea

Hypothesis-

The main purpose of any company is profit maximization.. the company focuses more on profit and product development than customer needs, demands and satisfaction sometimes in this process companies lead to unethical ways to generate revenue for industry through products. one of the unethical practices which company undertakes is manipulation for the product. Manipulation can be done through false advertisement, wrong portray of products and etc.

Consumer buying behavior: To study the consumer behavior a company should understand what a consumer chooses whenever there are number of substitutes for one product what are the qualities a consumer considerate while buying the product and why the product is different from other substitutes. Every consumer has different taste and preferences so it's quite difficult to understand the choice and need of customer and there the manipulation arises as when the companies realize that they are not able to achieve the customer attention they start manipulate them through advertisements, etc.

Deceitful advertising: Which uses facts, but deceptive facts. It uses confusing, misleading or blatantly untrue statements when promoting a product, that's why this advertising is also known as false advertising. Facts are given, but they are either false or there are significant facts which are hidden or not mentioned

The emotive persuasion: Which is likely more common and it play on consumer emotions and usually threaten him with dangers or promises amazing results, either of which are questionable, at best. Products like diet pills or exercise equipment sold through infomercials or TV often promise amazing results, and so persuade through sponsoring hopes and visions of happiness.

The green ad claims have more potential than any other type of claims to mislead and deceive the consumers. A misleading or deceptive advertisement is known as "green washing" which is misleading marketing about environmental benefits of the product. The consumers appreciate the green corporate activities and as long as a company is true to its word and truth-in-advertising is uphold the companies who act in a socially and environmentally responsible manner may be rewarded

Exaggeration of quality: An exaggeration can be nothing less than false information about the product, but it can also be a form of puffery. Puffery is the term used to denote the exaggerations reasonably to be expected of a seller as to the degree of quality of his product, the truth or falsity of which cannot be precisely determined.

Other understandings-

- Emotional appeals are the claims playing with consumers emotions both at conscious and unconscious level. In the advertisements can be included appeals to the need to achieve, dominate, feel safe, nurture, satisfy curiosity, the need of sex, the need of affiliation, guidance, prominence, attention, autonomy, physiological needs such as food, drink, sleep and so on.
- The most important and effective linguistic manipulation is that of subliminal advertising which aims at the subliminal seduction of the consumer. The basic concept of subliminal seduction in advertising makes possible for consumers to receive information on an emotional level without even being aware of it
- Another motive of such conduct consists in the reality that many of today's products are "parity products" which all or most are nearly identical like beer, gasoline, soap, soft drinks cold remedies and ads help create an illusion superiority. The creation of the illusion of superiority of one product could use two major language techniques that are the use of the comparatives "better" and "best" and the effort of making the consumers believe something about the product that is not true.
- The basic purpose of this paper is to understand the techniques used by advertisers, the propaganda they create and the real dangers they cause in modern society. Our argument is essentially unless people become aware, our society will change direction.
- The main goal of advertising is to demonstrate in every ad that consumers have an important and interesting offer and the reason to buy a product. Advertising helps a product to be sold. If it is well advertised, people will be aware of a product and it will lead to an increase in sales. Moreover, with a well marketed ad, it is easier for consumers to understand the benefits of a product and where to find it.
- As the industries realized that people easily get manipulated through the advertisements the started making false advertisement to manipulate the buying decision of the consumer and to increase the sales and eventually it helps in increase the company's profit. For example, they show that Maggie can be made in 2 minutes but every person knows that it takes much more time than 2 mins. Likewise, they portray that whenever you apply deo on yourself all the girls will start running behind you, that's not true but it helps to increase their sales. Moreover, fairness cream ads Shows that a girl can become fair and can achieve anything in her life, there is no connection between success and fairness of a girl these manipulation techniques leads to disappointment in the mind of consumer.

Ways of manipulation

(Examples)

1. Product placing- we have noticed that products in the supermarket are placed same in every store.it is because the layout generate income for the store. Things like egg, pulses or other regular stuff are always kept at the end of the store because it is the companies want people to go through their whole variety of products and meantime persuade customers to buy what they don't need.
2. Flash sale-to increase the demand limit the supply or at least pretend there is limited supply and a fraction of seconds huge stock of Chinese smartphones gets sold.
3. Anti-ageing cream shows that you will look younger but eventually we get old
4. Diet coke has some calories but not zero
5. Himalayan water claims that water is from Himalaya
6. Zero interest EMIs- interest taken in the form of processing fee.

The neuromarketing concept comes from neuro-sciences, which are used to study the causes of the main abnormal diseases and behaviors. The neuronal tests provide maps for brain functioning from the time people make a decision or are exposed to an advertising message. Measure the activity changes in certain parts of the brain; Understand why consumers make the decisions they make; Find out what part of the brain leads them to that particular decision. In 1976, Pepsi launched a bold and well-thought campaign called The Pepsi Challenge. In a series of tests, the buyers were asked to decide which is the tastiest of two drinks (Pepsi and Coca-Cola). Without knowing what are the two drinks, most participants (57%) chose Pepsi, while 43% chose Coca-Cola. Although these results have been intensely used in order to boost up sales, the result was insignificant regarding the increase of the company's market share.

When they knew what they were drinking, the ratio was inverted, 75% of the subjects preferred Coca-Cola areas of the brain that responded were the ones of reasoning and judgement of value, as well as the area associated to emotional memory.

Findings

- Through our research we realized that most of the consumer feel that electronic companies manipulate the buying decision of the consumers the most followed by Apparels, FMCG, Services and Automobile sector respectively
- Consumer encountered that advertisements showcase different privileges but after claiming the offer they provide something else
- Consumer prefer online shopping more than physical shopping because of the offers and discount which are given by different companies
- Almost all the consumers agreed to being manipulated by the companies

Conclusion-

Innumerable types of practices are followed that are deceiving customers and tricking them into buying products they don't need or with a manipulative advantage to the brand. Such practices can only be made aware about but cannot be stopped as they can be stated **unethical but most of them are not illegal.**

Research implications

This research will help understanding the various tactics that companies use to raise awareness of the same. The findings suggest that every individual has experienced manipulation in their life while buying a product or a service. This also talks about most affected sectors by manipulation in marketing. Such research will help consumers to not fall prey to such unethical practices of advertisements that companies follow.

Practical implications

Every consumer is affected by the manipulative tactic used by the brands and the research hopes for consumers to be more aware against such activities but practically, people falling prey to the tactics cannot be totally eradicated in total as such, as such practices will still occur and people will still try to look for the best offer available provided by such brands making them the victim of the manipulation.

Originality/Value-

The research irrespective based on a well-established fact that companies indeed use the manipulative tactics is still one of the very few researches actually available that have been carried out for the same purpose. Also, the primary data collected gives a concrete answer that each and every individual has faced the marketing manipulation.

Keywords-

Unethical, Manipulation Tactics, Ambiguous, Advertisements, Retail, Online

