

PERCEPTIONS OF CONSUMERS TOWARDS DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING

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Abstract : *This paper tries to ascertain the extent of consumers' perceived deception due to unethical, stereotyping, deceptive advertising or misleading information. Data were collected through questionnaire administered to about 200 respondents.*

IndexTerms - *Deceptive advertising, perceived deception, unethical or misleading information.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a very important and vital element of marketing mix. Advertising is the medium through which marketers communicate with their target audience on a wide scale. Advertising creates expectations in the minds of consumers. However, the quality of services provided by this sector is very important for the survival of the sector. In marketing and particularly advertising deception is practiced widely by the marketers because of its positive effect on sales volume (Estrada, 2006) and appraisal of product characteristics (Olson and Dover, 1978).

"Deception" through advertisement is a common phenomenon today. Marketers make use of deceptive, fraudulent and misleading advertisements through various media such as sign boards, bill boards, TV, radio, satellite channels, transportation and so on. According to the consumer experts, these types of deceptive advertising malpractice should be monitored properly. Also there should be strict and specific codes of conduct and monitoring authority for the malpractices within the country.

Deception is deliberated as the important and major ethical issue as it affects the consumers' opinions in dishonest way. It also affects the consumers financially, psychologically and physically (Boush, Friestad and Wright, 2009; Hyman, Tansey and Clarc, 1994). It affects the consumers options thereby adversely affecting competition and increase in transaction costs of the market (Lord and Kim, 1995; Gao, 2008). Now-a-days, consumers are getting more aware of their rights and they have become less vulnerable to malpractices. The losses of the marketers can be huge and immeasurable as the feeling of being cheated can be having negative influence on the consumers' behavior (Darke and Ritchie, 2007). Misleading information about price and their influence on consumers' behavior is studied and it was found that the level of trustworthiness and willingness to buy are positively related (Romani, 2006).

The objective of the research paper is to ascertain the consumers' opinions regarding the perceived deception regarding advertisements.

II. Literature Review

The deception is of great importance to various researchers. The deception in the field of interpersonal communication and advertising needs to be considered.

Deception in the Field of Interpersonal Communication

It has been found that deception is a part of everyday life and it is necessary for the survival in the society (Kerr, 1990; Serban, 2001; DePaulo et al., 2003; Masip, Garrido and Herrero, 2004). Interpersonal deception is described as fabrication, manipulation and fabrication of the factual and emotional information via nonverbal or verbal means. Certain characteristics of deception are:

- **Deception Is an Intentional Act:** deliberate intention is essential for deception. The intention of providing false information should be to create a false belief and not because of bad memory (Massip et al., 2004; Buller and Burgoon, 1996). An honest error i.e., providing false information unintentionally, unconsciously and involuntarily cannot be called as deception (Miller, 1983; Köhnken, 1989). However, past studies revealed that to measure intentionality through the facial expressions or emotions itself poses a great challenge (Ekman and Friesen, 1969; Ekman, 1992).
- **Information communicated is considered false by the sender:** it is crucial that the sender of the information consider the communicated information as false to be termed as deception otherwise it is reflected as persuasive communication (Massip et al., 2004).
- **Deception is purpose oriented:** deception is not an end itself but a means to achieve respect, material gains and prestige (Buller and Burgoon, 1996).

Deceptive Advertising

The use of deceptive advertising has much of importance among researchers. In the United States deception has been defined by Federal Trade Commission (FTC) as "representation, omission or practice that is likely to mislead the consumer acting reasonably in the circumstances, to the consumer's detriment" (FTC, 1983). Legal representatives consider the "capacity of a claim to deceive (deceptiveness) rather than actual deception" (Richards, 1990). The major focus is on the importance of claim in buying decision to be termed as deception. Most of the academicians considers the cognition effect of misleading information. If the beliefs/ impressions of consumers are different because of advertisements than they would have been formed in the case of reasonable knowledge possessed by consumers and moreover if beliefs and impressions are not true and representative then it is termed as deception (Gardner, 1975). Deception is found to exist if the consumers acquire false beliefs because of exposure to the advertisements (Olson and Dover, 1978).

From the view point of lawyers and regulators the advertisements are misleading if it has a false or misleading information resulting in inaccurate beliefs and encourages viewers to act upon those inaccurate beliefs (Hyman, 1990).

Deception in marketing from the social viewpoint has been defined as those acts which provokes consumers to act unreasonably on the basis of message without the authentic verification of the information or leads to the loss of trust, virtuous beliefs preferred in the society (Aditya, 2001).

Some of the common features which can be identified through the above conceptualizations are:

- Deception occurs after the introduction of an advertisement that contains false information.
- Interpretations and beliefs are formed due to the advertisement should be false.
- The communication of false information can be made intentionally or unintentionally. For deceptive advertising element of intentionality is not compulsory.

Types of Deception in Advertising

Though there are several bases of classifications of deception but majority of the researchers agreed for two forms of deception classification (Armstrong and McLennan, 1973; Gardner, 1975; Armstrong and Russ, 1981):

Explicit Deception: explicit deception can be easily discovered by equating the false information contained in message against the real features of the product.

Implicit Deception: implicit deception cannot be easily detected as it involves the evaluation of real product or service features against the distorted perception of consumers formed because of information that is factually true but leads the consumers to form incorrect conclusions (Hastak and Mazis, 2011).

Perceived Deception in Advertising: Definition and Existing Measurement Tools

If the consumers can detect that the advertisement contains false, ambiguous and biased information then only consumers are said to be exposed to deceptive advertising (Maddox, 1982). While Roman (2007) that to exist perceived deception the consumers must have opined that online retailers have given distorted information to persuade them to buy online offerings. Xiao and Tan (2006) postulated that if the consumers believe that advertisements are made to dupe the consumers then perceived deception occurs even if such beliefs are without substantiation.

The major thrust of this research work is to identify the extent to which consumers feel that they are being deceived. In the past efforts are made to measure the extent of consumers perceived deceptive advertising. Maddox (1982) propounded a three item seven point bipolar scale. This scale revealed the reliability and validity in the domain of advertising and e-commerce (Newell et al., 1998; Grazioli and Jarvenpa, 2000). Roman (2007) developed a 4 item Likert scale and it relates to the opinions of consumers for the ethical behavior of online retailers. But both these scales were found to be focusing only single dimension of deception and unsuitable for the several dimensions of perceived deception in interpersonal communication.

Keeping in mind these shortcomings, Chaouachi and Rached (2012) has developed a multi-item scale to measure perceived deception in advertising. This scale measures the consumers perception of advertising deception rather than actual deception. It is a 25 item 5 point Likert-type scale from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree". The present study makes use of this scale.

III. Research Findings and Discussion

The necessary data is collected by administering the questionnaire to 200 respondents in Delhi during the month of January to March, 2018.

Out of these 119 questionnaires were received back and used for the present study.

The scale has dimensions namely perceived veracity, consequences, ethic, vulnerability and legal aspect. The major advantage is that it is a multi-dimensional scale which is developed specifically to measure perceived deception in advertising.

The first dimension "*perceived veracity*" is concerned with the truthfulness of the advertisement experienced by the viewers. The dimensions "*ethic*" and "*consequences*" focus on the unethical things prevailing and its impact on the consumers. "*Vulnerability*" is the extent to which consumer's are susceptible to the false advertisement. "*Legal aspect*" takes into account whether the advertisement is as per law or some further acts or regulations are required.

The study provides useful information to marketing practitioners as it helps to identify the actions which are considered deceptive by viewers and provide guidelines to make obligatory actions. Even if the deception is not intended on the part of marketers, consumers still feel negative when they perceive an advertisement deceptive.

In future similar studies can be conducted on other communication media also. Also it would be interesting to take into consideration the effect of moderating variables like acceptance of deception, emotions and product implication etc.

Dimensions	SA	A	N	D	SD
Perceived veracity					
Most of the advertisements try to convince the consumers by lie.	87	18	2	7	5
Most of the advertisements falsify the actual characteristics of the products.	59	23	13	12	12
Advertisements are not entirely truthful about their offerings.	52	29	8	15	15
The information in advertisement is not logically acceptable.	33	26	36	13	11
The information in advertisement is exact. (-)	23	20	56	7	13
I think that the reality is different from what is mentioned in the advertisement.	83	21	7	4	4
The quality of information is manipulated in advertisement.	43	27	37	9	3
Most of the advertisements use deceptive tactics to convince consumers to buy the product.	79	23	2	4	11
Most of the advertisements try to convince consumers by exaggerating the benefits and characteristics of their offerings.	49	21	7	13	29
Consequences					
Advertisements distort the perception of reality.	37	29	5	21	27
Most of the advertisements led to misinterpretation of the information presented.	39	24	31	11	14
Majority of the advertisements mislead consumers about the actual performances of the product	58	26	9	17	9
Advertisements try to persuade consumers to buy things he does not need.	97	13	3	4	2
Ethic					
Advertisements are unethical.	78	14	9	11	7
Advertisements are fraudulent.	63	33	5	5	13
Advertisements are trying to dupe the consumer.	51	24	8	13	23
Most of the advertisements harm consumer' interests.	53	21	27	9	9
Majority of the advertisements are contrary to the principles of fair competition.	47	23	29	17	3
Advertisements harm competing products.	13	29	7	41	29
Advertisements are dishonest.	43	21	19	27	9
Vulnerability					
Advertisements take advantage of less experienced consumers to make them purchase.	65	27	23	3	1
Advertisements show to the individual what he wants to see and not the reality.	51	33	7	13	15
Legal aspect					
Majority of advertisements do not respect laws.	44	23	17	24	11
Advertisements should be judicially sanctioned.	41	41	21	7	9
Advertisements need to be regulated.	43	23	12	23	18

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