

# **National College of Ireland**

***Subject: Marketing consumer behaviour***

***Topic: Effects of deceptive and unethical  
marketing on consumer behaviour***

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## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form  
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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## **Declaration**

I hereby proclaim that this thesis entitled "Effects of Deceptive and unethical marketing on consumer behaviour" represents my authentic, original endeavour and has not been submitted, either partially or entirely, for any other degree, diploma, or professional accreditation. The data, concepts, and conclusions showcased in this thesis stem from a comprehensive investigation and assessment of many sources, encompassing scholarly articles, journals, books, and government documents.

I acknowledge every source utilized in this thesis, and suitable citations and references have been furnished for each source in compliance with the mandated citation style. Additionally, I verify that any essential ethical approvals and permissions have been procured for executing the research.

I comprehend the consequences of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, and I am cognizant of the university's regulations and guidelines governing such behaviour. I affirm my adherence to these regulations and guidelines during the preparation and submission of this thesis.

I convey my appreciation to my mentor, family, friends, and all those who have supported and directed me throughout the research journey. Their invaluable counsel and motivation have been pivotal in the triumphant culmination of this thesis.

**Date: 08/05/2023**

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## **Acknowledgement**

Each student must finish their dissertation according to the university's requirements. I chose the topic Effects of deceptive and unethical marketing on consumer behaviour after speaking with my mentor Prof. Ruben Ruf. Understanding the origins and repercussions of dishonest and unethical marketing is the objective of this study. For the research, I used primary quantitative data. However, a number of secondary data sources were used to conduct this study's literature review on this subject. I reviewed a number of prior research articles, looked into pertinent topics, and talked to my mentor before writing this dissertation. I will always appreciate and owe my mentor Prof. Ruben Ruf for his guidance, collaboration, and sharing of necessary knowledge that enabled me to improve my work in every aspect. This task will benefit from the professor's advice, encouragement, and guidance, and careful assessments will confirm that it is exceptional and faultless.

Thank you.

## **Abstract**

***Aim:*** The aim of the study is to find out the effect of unethical marketing practices on the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

***Methods:*** This study has made use of quantitative primary research methodology, where the data is collected by conducting a survey of 50 consumers. It has made use of the positivist approach to find a cause-and-effect relationship between unethical marketing practices and consumer purchasing behaviour.

***Findings:*** After conducting and carefully analysing the survey, it was evident that there is a negative correlation between using unethical marketing practises and consumer purchasing behaviour, i.e., unethical practices lower the purchase repeats of the customers.

***Conclusions:*** As deceptive marketing strategies negatively affect purchasing behaviour, firms should focus on following ethical and transparent marketing practices to continue to gain the trust of consumers so that they can stay competitive in the long run.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Theoretical Background**

In this Introduction chapter, the key terms connected with the research problem and the theoretical viewpoints of the study are shared. It will include various aspects of ethical marketing, business ethics, and unethical advertisements.

#### **Ethical Marketing**

Marketing means creating and delivering goods and services to customers through communication with the customers and partners of the organisation (Woodall, 2017). Similarly, marketing ethics would identify and satisfy customers profitably. Marketers attempt to build and sustain client preferences and accomplish the market goals of organisations. Marketing ethics face challenges when they must be aware of what is ethical and reasonable.

Marketers must follow six ethical values: fairness, citizenship, transparency, responsibility, honesty, and respect (Mandal, 2019). It is important for marketers to understand their customers' requirements and needs to offer them the best feasible solutions. There should be the maintenance of privacy and communication through government rules and regulations. Marketers, media, and advertising agencies need to accept the standard practises in the business environment and fulfil all professional and social responsibilities.

Companies worldwide, particularly in the UK, have recently been concentrating on sustainability and customer retention. Corporate marketing initiatives prioritise winning over customers' loyalty. However, the repurchase rate and customer retention rate may frequently be used as indicators of such loyalty. Enhancing competitive advantages in the marketplace is the critical goal. In the middle of this, ethical marketing is on the rise in the UK.

Additionally, there is an increase in global ethical fashion. Over three billion dollars will be added to the ethical fashion market's value between 2021 and 2025 (Smith, 2023). These businesses also engage in ethical marketing. Promoting goods or services honestly, openly, and socially responsible is part of this ethical marketing (Lee & Jin, 2019). A component of ethical marketing is promoting goods and services that benefit society. As a result, many organisations' CSR and ethical marketing are linked. The same author also discussed the consequences for



businesses regarding which (unethical) marketing strategies should be emphasised to build corporate brand loyalty.

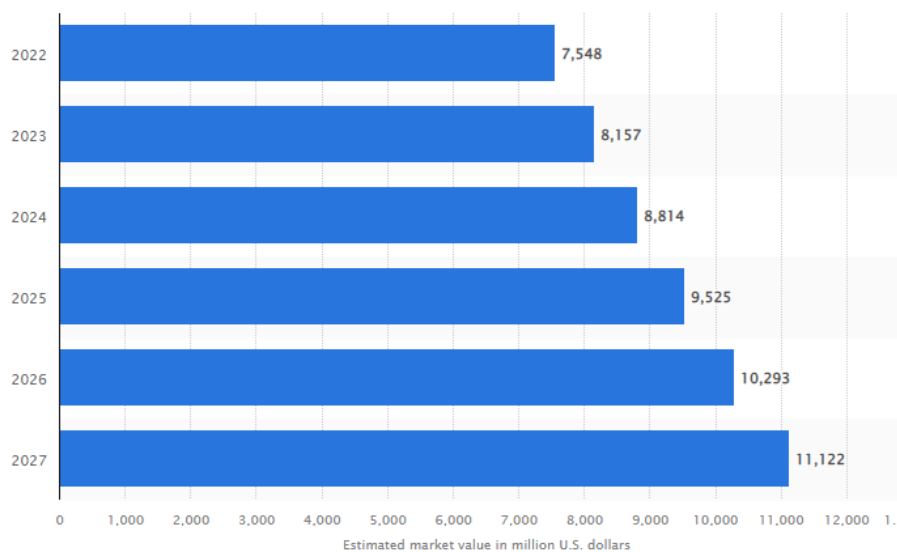


Figure 1: Ethical Fashion market value

Source: (Smith, 2023)

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a design, term, name, symbol, or sign, or a combination of these, that fulfils the purpose of identifying the products or services of a single seller or group of sellers and differentiating them from their competitors (Al Adwan, 2019). Branding is concerned with marketing communications. The moral principles of wrong and right are defined during branding decisions through ethical branding. These decisions would be helpful in promoting public goods. Even if the ethical concerns of customers impacted people's buying behaviour, organisational success would also be affected (Mamula, 2018). This would make the brand's customers doubt it because of the misleading advertisements.

### **Business ethics**

Ethics is a kind of philosophy that includes the systematisation, defence, and recommendation of concepts of what is wrong and right conduct. As given by Huq (2016), ethics can be defined as laying down a person's or group's moral values and principles. It is the decision or preference between good and evil and right and wrong.

Sidhu et al. (2015) define business ethics as the study of business circumstances, tasks, and decisions wherein the problems of wrong and right are addressed. These include a few government firms, charities, commercial organisations, and other organisations. Organisations need to resolve ethical issues. Organisations impact the community and individuals; therefore, they should look for ways to contribute positively to society.

Additionally, there are various business ethical rules that management or other stakeholders must abide by. Positive communication, morality, responsibility, and other virtues create an ethical firm that strives to practise ethical communication (GeeksforGeeks, 2023). Creating ethical guidelines and standards within the company is also crucial. If there are problems with ethical standards experienced by stakeholders or employees, then these problems can be remedied using business ethics. Organisational leaders who are truthful gain the ability to make moral decisions as a result of business ethics. A company's marketing activities include ethical marketing when it successfully adopts ethical norms.



Figure 1: Business Ethics

Source: GeeksforGeeks (2023)

With business ethics, the critical rules for clients and employees are determined. When people work with organisations, they have to fulfil the ethical expectations of the business. With business ethics, various professional behaviours, maturities, and occupational identities can be accepted. The organisations must encourage and support ambitious principles and self-evaluation for the staff (Munjaj, 2016).

Managers are critical aspects of organisations as they promote ethical behaviour in their places of work. Organisations are often focused on business, economic, and ethical behaviour. The perception of the staff's words and organisation can influence the behaviour of employees. Business ethics means the moral regulations and laws of the organisation that need to be followed. Phonetic challenges in organisations have increased because of the risks, temptations, and rewards of unethical behaviour.

## **1.2 The Rationale of this Topic**

Concerning the current generation and business trends, research on the current topic is quite essential. The primary goal would be that it could have a substantial impact on both society and people. However, unethical marketing techniques can influence customers to make hazardous or ignorant decisions that harm their well-being. The fundamental rights of consumers are the human rights mandated to protect customers. The rights to be heard, to select, to be educated, and to safety would be considered consumers' four most fundamental rights.

As an illustration, false weight-reduction pill advertisements can significantly negatively impact other people. Four more consumer rights—the right to a healthy environment, the right to consumer education, the right to redress, and the right to representation—were added in the 1980s (Schmalz & Orth, 2012). Customers should be protected against deceptive and dishonest advertisements. The second argument is that unethical marketing may cause consumers to lose faith in specific brands and the market as a whole. Consumers can cease purchasing a specific product if they believe businesses have tricked or misled them. This could have a significant negative impact on both the company's revenue and reputation. The customers' rights are violated when they suffer harm—invasion of privacy, interference with independence, and infringement on the right to information.

The establishment of goods and services at fair prices, as well as the provision of accurate product information to consumers, are essential (Gaurav & Suraj Ray, 2020). Before the product is made, various offerings in the proper amount and quality must be made. Consumers need to be made aware of these circumstances. Finally, buyers need to be informed about the laws, infractions, and rights of consumers that apply at the time of the purchasing process (Huq, 2016). To safeguard consumers from harmful practices, legislation and regulation might be informed by research on the effects of unethical marketing. Understanding how marketing strategies affect people and society can benefit various businesses.

### 1.3 Research Question(s)

The scope of the research is to identify and understand deceptive and unethical advertising so that the researcher can understand its impact on customer behaviour. Customers often get dissatisfied with advertisements because of the unsuitable implementation and non-accomplishment of specific promises, so the study will help businesses understand how unethical and falsified claims in advertisements can affect their customers' behaviour. So, the analysis will be based on consumers' responses to deception through advertisements.

The research questions of this dissertation are as follows:

- What is the effect of misleading and unethical advertisements on consumer behaviour?
- Is there any effect of the gender of customers on their vulnerability to false or misleading advertisements?

### 1.4 Hypotheses

Typically, two sorts of hypotheses are described during a research procedure. The null and alternative hypotheses are as follows: A claim that presupposes no link between two variables is a null hypothesis (H1). The alternative hypothesis (H2), which states that there is a link between two variables, is the exact opposite. Consumer behaviour and unethical and dishonest marketing practices are the two variables in this study's approach. The two hypotheses below can be used as per the research questions above.

- **H1:** Deceitful and unethical advertising does not affect consumer behaviour.
- **H2:** Unethical and deceitful marketing affects consumer behaviour.

### 1.5 Chapter Summary

Ethical advertisement rules state that advertisements must be valid in no way and that standards of a moral order must be followed. The advertising messages must not be fraudulent, perplexing, or distorted. The information must have a clear presentation and not excessively use colour; thus, the client can select appropriately. There is no permission to use stereotypes or sex appeals. With ethical advertising, there is fairness, truth, trust, and honesty. There is positive content with no exploitation of stereotypes.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Marketing is concerned with delivering demanded goods to the market and getting those goods sold. Marketing communication has a significant role in introducing the product and building the organisation's brand image. It is easier to open in a highly competitive business environment with effective marketing communication. The capability and attention of the proportional programme significantly impact the product's brand image, sales volume, and market share (Joshi, 2011). Through marketing communication, organisations can attract customers willing to purchase their products. There is stimulation and encouragement of the buying intent of people who are not planning to purchase. There are different kinds of marketing communication techniques applied by organisations, including advertisements, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion, publicity, and interactive marketing.

### **2.2 Literature Review**

Advertisement is a highly effective and robust form of marketing communication that persuades and challenges potential customers' minds. Because of its strong influence, billions of dollars are invested in advertisements worldwide to promote goods and to use this highly influential power to promote products (Adetunji et al., 2011). It is an approach to delivering information to the target customers by informing them about the new offerings in the market. Therefore, advertisement is beneficial to the organisation and the customers, as they get informed about where they can get the products and services they require. The critical objective of advertising has to be one that benefits both parties in a win-win manner without any extra cost to either of them.

Even if the marketing of products has a crucial role in the improvement of sales after organisation, it is still highly criticised as different marketing processes might reflect the cultural, legal, social, and economic aspects of a country, and it turns out to be unethical practices when these areas get affected (Cho, 2017). The marketing approach and its content have to fulfil the considerations, social norms, and values of the society in which such an approach is utilised.

The problem of deception in marketing is one of the topics that has gotten much attention in different marketing-related applied studies. The highly ethical issues in the area of marketing, which call for deception, are:

- False promises: these are used in advertisements, and such promises are impossible to fulfil.
- Imperfect explanation: The campaigns involve falsified, deceptive, and inaccurate information.
- Partial disclosures: exposure of only some portion of the quality of a product, and the worst element of it is concealed.
- False endorsement: there is a notion conveyed that an "individual" endorses an advertiser's products or services while the individual does not (Azer, 2015).
- Visual distortions: there are highly attractive, colourful, and bigger pictures of the products in the advertisement, which is entirely different from the real thing.
- Minor print qualifications: the disclaimers or certain information that might stop a customer from making the purchase decision are printed in tiny font, and only the attractive side of the product is reflected in large font.
- Bait-and-switch offers: there is a markup on a lower-priced product that is usually out of stock; therefore, the customer is made to switch to a costly item.
- Deceptive or misleading celebrity endorsement: famous persons or celebrities use the frame to support promoting any good or service irrespective of its actual performance.

Generally, deceptive marketing programmes would lead to falsified beliefs and buying behaviours that might not have taken place without the influence of the advertisement or promotion. Since the results of such deception range widely and might involve social distrust, financial cost, and psychological distress, this type of promotion is not safe for customers, as there is intentional misleading by misrepresentation of attributes, features, or the quality of goods or services offered by diverse organisations. Because of the rising consumer interest in using social media networks to search for goods and services that meet their requirements, there has been a rise in interest in two marketing campaigns. However, these organisations can misuse social media networks through unethical deception practises. This has adversely affected the relationship between businesses and customers in the short and long run (Wilkins et al., 2016).

### **2.2.1 Deceptive marketing**

Deceptive or false advertising is marketing through any visual content or information wherein the content is unrealistic and misleading. This kind of advertisement is used for promoting goods under claims that do not match their actual functionality or appearance. Deceptive advertisements can make customers buy goods or services that might be malfunctioning, fake, imitations, or dangerous. An example of this is Volkswagen's promotional campaign, where the vehicles were promoted as "clean diesel" despite being charged by the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) for deceptive marketing. Usually, there are three kinds of deceptive or false advertisements: failure to disclose, insignificant or inconsistent or weak searches, and disparagement of the product. Failure to disclose occurs when there is a falsified representation because of the inability to disclose an immaterial fact. So deceptive advertisements can be based on partially correct statements or misstatements, which would mislead the consumers as there is a non-disclosure of something that consumers must know. Even insignificant or weak research also forms part of deceptive marketing as the representations are not supported by accepted authority or research, and there can also be certain contradictions. Product disparagement includes discrediting any competitor's offerings through false advertisements or false claims. Infringement of a trademark is also just like disparagement of the offerings; therefore, it also forms part of false marketing. It would involve the usage of any copy, imitation, counterfeit, or the production of unregistered marks concerning the sale or distribution of any goods or services in such a way that there is a mistake or confusion caused to the buyer or with an intent to deceive the consumers.

### **2.2.2 Perceived Deception**

Deceptive strategies are widespread in the marketing field, and even if marketers do not deliberately try to deceive buyers, their approaches and communications appear to be deceptive or dubious in some way (Chaouachi and Rached, 2012). Deception is a common situation in any form of communication (like conflicting interests). Deception is an extensive set of procedures apart from the irrefutable lie, and among the features that distinguish it are collective and ample information, level of truth, intent, and precision (Roman, 2010); irrespective of the type of deception, it leads to numerous ethical problems and queries for customers, businesses, and the management (Agag and El-Masry, 2016). The study by Xie et al. (2014) suggests that the negative effect of perceived deception could be improved when the inevitable consequence of being deceived is solemn. From Solomon's analysis (2009),

deception includes the intents, objectives, and nature of the prevaricator, not only the specific deception. From a deception viewpoint, the sale and advertisement areas have an undivided interest. It is unreasonable and unethical to use deceit in the context of marketing procedures (Liu et al., 2018). Devious tactics like an overstatement of the benefits and characteristics of an item and many other selling strategies are well-known instances of deception. The deceiver's tactical activities and information management challenged people to recognise fraudulent communication. Deception is an interpersonal procedure wherein a falsehood transfers among different parties and has several negative consequences for its sufferers (Kray et al., 2014).

According to Zhou et al. (2014), information management usually considers verbal behaviour as part of deceptive strategies. In the past literature regarding deceptive advertisement, there has been a high focus on the determination of the particular kinds of claims that misguide taking a fair decision and their impacts on consumers' beliefs, impacts, and behavioural intents. The outcomes of the above set of literature showed that deceptive selling tactics lead to a reduction in client satisfaction and trust. According to O'Dowd (2014), it is suggested that deceptive advertising prompts customers' scepticism. There is a positive link between brand trust and brand loyalty; therefore, the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty, directly or indirectly, is known as the brand effect. Honesty, generosity, reliability, and honesty are the aspects of trust that are highly built among two associates or businesses over time. Trust is a significant concept in public relations research. It is suggested that brand trust is a medium-critical aspect of customer behaviour before and after buying any commodity or merchandise. It is the basis of long-run loyalty and reinforces the relationship between two groups (Liu et al., 2011). Brand trust can be described as the readiness of ordinary customers to depend on the capacity of the brand to carry out its specific functions (Jung et al., 2014).

### **2.2.3 Unethical marketing**

Ideally, everybody should be honest, and all marketing efforts should be truthful. Unethical marketing is widespread, and it can be done in different ways. Even if the vast majority of marketing is honest and ethical, if there is a single unethical advertisement, it can wreak havoc on consumer trust, the reputation of the brand, and the general perception of marketing. Unethical advertising is any kind of advertisement wherein any brand, service, or product gets misrepresented. This can be done through exaggeration of the benefits of the offerings or the use of false statements just to manipulate sales through people's trust. In the worst-case scenario, it is intentional; however, many organisations might need to learn that there are ethical



missteps in their marketing programmes. The various kinds of unethical marketing efforts are misleading advertisements, plagiarism, former false endorsements, deceptive pricing, twists in the research and facts, exaggerated outcomes, hidden fees, exploitation of social issues, misleading images, objectifying human bodies, pressure tactics, and sharing of false information.

Advertisement is a highly influential promotional mix that faces much criticism for its unethical practises. Unethical marketing or advertising is one wherein there is a deliberate campaign design for falsifying, misleading, and misrepresenting any product with the intent to cheat and exploit customers. Also, as per the perspective of various scholars, unethical advertisements make society buy worthless products and services and would lead to manipulation of behaviour, exploitation of sex, and a contribution towards the collapse of a whole social system (Nisa et al., 2022).

It can also be described as imprudent promotional practises that revolve around an organisation's advertising programme. It involves deceptive practises wherein the message content, the actual image, advantages, and nature of the product get deliberately distorted by users with any falsified or eliminated fact concerning any product (Lee, 2022).

There are diverse unethical advertising activities that various researchers recognise. In 2013, Goltz and Neufeld mentioned a few unethical advertising practises. These involved subliminal advertisements, horrible taste, promoting unhealthy goods, targeting kids, stereotyping, and puffery. Zannettou et al. (2019) also recognised the critical ethical problems in marketing promotion, such as unfair advertising and stereotyping, untruthful allegations, manipulative advertisements, offensive ads, deceptive ads, making people buy unplanned, and playing on people's insecurities and fears. Activities like advertisements targeting children, deception, unpractised and free promising, endorsing and providing false testimonials, mocking up, and attacking advertisements were also considered unethically claimed practises by Lee (2022).

### **2.3 Importance of Business Ethics**

Organisations also face ethical problems with marketing. Customers are sent messages through the Internet, and organisations often meddle with customers' privacy by acquiring information regarding them. Also, ambiguous prices are set up, and wasteful packaging is encouraged. Businesses experience issues in producing, monitoring, and distributing goods; therefore,

marketers have to consider maintaining ethical principles and values in their organisations. Even when organisations mistreat their clients, encourage and manipulate them to purchase goods that they would not necessarily require, local businesses are destroyed. A lot of organisations wish to be the biggest and most profitable in the industry; however, by following unethical practises, a message is sent to people that the organisation is greedy and ruthless.

As a result, it may be said that all businesses should engage in ethical marketing techniques. All businesses must abide by the laws, rules, and regulations governing advertisements. Businesses operating with integrity, honesty, and respect for their clients are ensured by ethical marketing (Erlangga, Heri, & Sos, 2020). The regulations protect consumers from false, misleading, and inappropriate advertising. The regulations governing advertising are at the discretion of states and governments. These guidelines also aid in establishing credibility and trust. If advertising laws are followed, the results could be safe and beneficial to the company (Lubben, 2016). Because of the diffused behaviour of advertisers, unethical and moral issues will always surround advertising. Additionally, socially conscious consumers who value sustainability and openness in corporate practises can be attracted by ethical marketing.

As organisations significantly affect how customers understand the brand, businesses must avoid unethical practises. The businesses also use unethical marketing methods such as destructive mouth competition or exploitation. Organisations must avoid the use of scarce approaches, and there should be a high focus on the value of goods and not on the criticism of competitors. Organisations must be highly humane rather than pretending to care for the community (Anastasia, 2015). Organisations must have ethical behaviour towards clients and investors, as positive feedback can bring positive results. There are challenges in overcoming the negative attitudes of customers. There can be financial issues if the investors do not invest in the business. Therefore, businesses must abide by the rules for maintaining an ethical working environment, and destructive mouth competition, exploitation, and scare tactics should be avoided.

Advertisers like to take chances, push boundaries, and create divisive advertising. Advertising's unethical issues might also be economic, religious, moral, or cultural. Ethical marketing allows businesses to expand into new markets and promote their goods and services more widely. Unethical ads employ justifiable motives when highlighting differences in product quality and cost (Hiller, 2010). Using useless things can cause financial difficulties. Due to intense market competition, which encourages advertisers to violate moral standards in advertising, there may

be cultural harm. Consumers will be more willing to spend money when marketing is ethical (El Junusi, 2020). A business may benefit in the long run from this. By using inappropriate content, religion, or pornographic elements, advertisers try to rile up the public. Any company should not accept this.

## **2.4 Unethical and deceptive advertisements**

The ideas, goods, and services are promoted and presented through advertisements. Advertising is spread to the consumer by different sources of media. It is the communication between the buyer and the seller using mass media channels. It is used to inform the streamers about the brand of the organisation. As it is, means are continuously transforming; therefore, some regulations have to be followed by advertisers. Advertisers generate highly ethically inappropriate content, and they are not concerned regarding the ethical challenges or the consequences that might be caused to people.

Advertising is unethical if there is the distribution of social principles and models set up by spiritual, governmental, or political institutes to one that considers principled and honourable direction. Moreover, it is restrained from being deceptive if it has an inclination to defraud a huge number of clients in a material manner (Srivastava, 2010). Unethical advertising is the making and misrepresenting of ethically wrong content to individuals through the use of mass media channels. Advertising is unethical if there are efforts to damage competitors' goods, provide misleading or deceptive communications and information, make exaggerated claims that are ethically distorted, or impact people's lives disastrously. Unethical advertising makes the clients baffled regarding the goods. Advertisements have to be honest and ethical, as customers are the ones who look at them (Vaux, 2018). The advertisers release extremely deceiving and exaggerated allegations of goods and services. Organisations may lose credibility and a competitive position in the market because of unethical advertisements (Sidhu et al. 2015).

This research is based on unethical and deceptive marketing, which is the application of misleading arguments in advertisements. Yet this concept has transformed with time due to regulations (Kotler et al., 2019). For this kind of advertising, there has been the development of a substantial body of rules and regulations by policymakers. Deceptive advertisements are illegal in many nations (FairShake, 2020). At the beginning of the 1970s, there was some growth in the pregnancy industry, and diverse approaches to communication were developed.

For the expansion of sales, these organisations made use of a few deceptive advertising concepts. Actually, there was a proclamation by them regarding the power of women's perfume to attract men. This proclamation was used to attract a wide set of customers, even if it was deceptive.

Deceptive advertisements have been used for many centuries, and these are highly recognised in the trading world. This approach is utilised by each kind of business and in industries with retail trade. This advertisement technique is used by organisations in a highly competitive market. Therefore, Kotler (2010) suggests that these advertisements lead to the creation of statements to differentiate themselves from the competition. This is particularly the case when there are similar products offered with almost similar performances and there is a need to build a competitive advantage. An organisation utilising deceptive advertisements pays a lot of attention to market share and profitability in comparison to their customers (Ho, 2013). The consumer is influenced by the features of the goods or services. Even the organisations that are not acting in a socially responsible manner are the ones that deceive their clients. So, this will have an inaccurate impact on the competition.

Also, deceptive advertising has outcomes with respect to the organisation. A deceptive advertisement is only feasible for organisations that carry out one-time sales, as these organisations would not consider it about their clients. Therefore, value cannot be achieved in return since customers will only purchase once in the majority of cases. As per some research by Kotler (2010), it is suggested that with the yield, profitability is enhanced, one-time sales lead to short-run yields, and there is no assurance of profits in the long run.

The search for unethical and deceptive advertisements is also defined in diverse ways by the research. Yet, it can be summarised as an activity, message, or claim that would lead to at least a few customers acting reasonably by making decisions that would not be made otherwise by them. Some consumers are made to reasonably trust something regarding the brand, product, or producer that is not actually correct or true or has the potential to foster distrust among the potential buyers. Also, deceptive advertisements and unethical marketing practices have consequences for the organisations that utilise such approaches and for buyers and consumers (Tosun, 2020). There is a variance in the relationship between organisations and customers, and consumers have lots of perceptions regarding deceptive advertisements.

## 2.5 Factors Affecting the Perception of Consumers

Customer perception is a marketing idea that summarises a client's judgement or viewpoint regarding a brand or a firm by assessing their experience with the firm based on the merchandise's branding and services. Customer perception can be constructive or adverse, depending on the experience of the customer. Customer experience is close to surpassing price and product quality as the major competitive advantage; thus, the firms must focus further on the improvement of customer experience and perception.

There are various factors affecting the perception of customers, including:

- **Customer reviews:** Before making a purchase, customers would prefer reading online reviews to see the brand. Positive reviews are highly effective, yet when businesses take time to respond to negative reviews, there is also a huge impact on the brand. Compassionate and caring responses reveal that even as things go awry (as they usually do), the business will be there for the buyers.
- **Marketing:** The perception of the customer is also influenced by the way in which the brand is showcased through the marketing efforts of the business. Advertisements, websites, and social media posts play a major role in the development of the public image of the business. Packaging and branding have a significant effect on customer perceptions as per how the product is offered at the time of purchase. Attraction and display quality enhance perceptions. Thus, it is important to be consistent through business-owned media. The message from the brand can influence brand perception.
- **Company Values:** Customers prefer doing business with firms that have similar principles to their own. Public business values have a high influence on the customer's perception of the brand.
- **Customer support quality:** Great client support reveals that the business cares about its customers and that the brand invests in the client experience. Rather, if there is a poor client experience, then the perception is that the brand either does not care or is not able to offer great support. So, if the product fully meets the requirements of a customer, then there is an enhancement in his or her perception of it.
- **Price:** The clients have a high likelihood of favouring a good or service that has economical pricing.

- Reputation: The reputation of goods develops over time and differs with experience with the items and intensive marketing campaigns that improve the reputation and brand uniqueness. This defines customers' perceptions regarding the product.

As per Iqbal and Siddiqui (2015), deceptive advertisement affects the loyalty of consumers in a negative manner through false, misleading, and wrong advertisements of the products and services, while deception is confirmed when customers' words individually utilise our experience of the product or service. In cases where consumers are not informed regarding the full details or there is any unrevealed picture that contradicts the actual attributes of the product, they are unable to make the best decisions for themselves (Mardani, 2020).

Whenever any organisation engages in misleading advertisements, the trust of the consumers is lost because the new and existing claims might make them feel deceived and switch to any other organisation offering similar products or services. The business might get a terrible reputation as a deceptive one, which would lead to a drop in its profitability. Also, in competitive markets, it is highly important to find out if factors like customer satisfaction, customer trust, and word of mouth have an impact on customer behaviour and loyalty because there are many innovative players entering the industry and they can drive away the profit of the business. The business has to also build superior relations with its loyal customers so that there is recurrent buying of goods and services. However, this can be achieved once trust is developed.

Customer loyalty is only achieved through genuine and enlightening advertising; hence, the majority of misleading advertising is not regarded as having long-term relations with customers (Faerber and Kreling, 2014; Soroa-Koury and Yang, 2010). Diverse factors make customers content and loyal to an organisation. Organisations that look for loyalty should constantly make sure direct, real, and genuine information is offered through advertising. Research on the way consumers perceive an advertisement and the way in which they recognise deception by Fransen et al. (2015) reported that advertisers receive customers through the description of untrue and erroneous attributes of products. The customers are misled by the involvement of ambiguous messages and doubtful declarations in the advertisements. Whenever there is a false advertisement, then the demands of customers are not addressed, and their minds are full of negative depictions of the brand (Chalotra and Chalotra, 2013).

With a few studies, there has been an exploration of advertisements with a focus on areas such as media statements, consumer interaction, packaging, salespeople, and different other communications with respect to sales. A lot of scholars have focused on the idea of deception, opining that with deception, usually the seller's benefit (Faerber and Kreling, 2014). There are certain behaviours shown by customers to satisfy their demands and desires by buying, consuming, making decisions, making choices, and evaluating goods and services. Consumers go through many phases and procedures before buying any good or service (Cario, 2013). The responses of the buyers are as per the kind of services they receive. If consumers experience misleading marketing practises, then there is a high chance of disappointment (Katuoka and Navickait-Sakalauskien, 2016). Moreover, they might fully switch away from the specific brand. Also, when a lot of customers circulate negative word of mouth regarding a bad experience with any product or service, it is highly unlikely that others would also like to try such a brand (Parguel et al., 2015; Xie, Madrigal, and Boush, 2015). With misleading advertisements, the customers are persuaded to purchase any item not because it is the finest amongst different alternatives but rather because that advertisement shows that product as the best. Yet, lots of customers can identify the forms of fake products as per their attributes in comparison to other similar items, and they react to them as deceptive. While responding to misleading or false advertisements, consumers are likely to suffer financial and emotional losses (Pollay, 2010). The purchase decisions of the customers are made regarding particular products or services as per the misleading advertisements; therefore, they get impacted emotionally and mentally too. In cases where the customers have limited resources, the use of those restricted resources to purchase fraudulent or fake products can lead to medical, financial, and emotional losses, and therefore fraudulent advertisements and unethical marketing are known to cause helplessness and loneliness and boost self-esteem among consumers (Gensler et al., 2013; Oscario et al., 2016).

## **2.6 Consumer buying decision**

A consumer is an individual who purchases and utilises goods or services, so consumers keep moving the production cycle and have a significant role in the economic system of a country. Therefore, any country will experience a crisis if consumers do not have effective demand for products and services. They buy diverse commodities as per their preferences and tastes. The buying of goods is influenced by the consciousness of the goods amongst the consumers. Different factors influence the preferences and tastes of consumers, including environmental

and psychological aspects. With time, there are changes in the tastes and preferences of customers, so advertisements have a significant role in influencing their choices.

The term "consumer behaviour" is described as the behaviour displayed by consumers while they search for, use, evaluate, and dispose of goods and services that they anticipate will meet their requirements. The decision-making of people regarding the usage of available resources and consumption-linked products would be based on consumer behaviour. These resources can be money, effort, and time. Consumer buying behaviour has been a well-known marketing subject that has been highly debated in the past few years. The highly known strategy, wherein the fundamentals of consumer behaviour are explained, elucidates the consumer buying procedure as a learning, information processing, and decision-making task, which is segregated into various stages, namely:

- problem identification
- search of information
- evaluating alternatives
- buying decision
- post-purchase behaviour (Muzahidul Islam, 2021)

In a study by Virvilait and Matuleviiien (2013), there is an exploration of the analyses of the attitudes of customers in different age groups towards watching television advertisements, and from there, an effort has been made to be aware of whether they believe in the advertisements or not. This study was carried out in India with a sample size of 200 individuals, and there was a detailed understanding of the perspective of customers towards advertisements. With this study, it has been determined that the consumer's attitude towards advertisements is positive, and people believe that the ads assist them in getting what they require and also inform them about the availability of the products. However, a few customers had negative views with respect to the ads, as they found the ads to be exaggerating regarding the features and design of the product, which would not be the same as the delivered features, and therefore, the customers began to disbelieve the specific product.

Kim (2018) identified that there is a favourable attitude among customers towards social media advertisements. It has a drastic influence on the customers regarding clicking on advertisements that reflect a positive attitude on the way to online ads. In one more study by Sadeghi (2020), it was identified that YouTube content linked with the products has a huge impact on the



attitudes of consumers and is useful to change their perceptions. It also significantly affects social media advertisers.

It was suggested by Barbaritano and Savelli (2021) that there are a few factors, such as Internet skills, advertisement site, income, Internet usage per day, and advertisement content, that have a significant impact on online advertising. It was also concluded that the reviews by different customers would have a huge impact on online buying behaviour. Prior to making any purchase of a product online, consumers look into the reviews of goods on different websites. Since the reviews of consumers are a highly significant aspect of online purchase behaviour, factors like feedback, previous online buying experience, opinions of other customers, and loyalty towards the brand would have a significant place in influencing the attitude of customers.

In a study by Brown (2013), highly significant online advertisement opportunities were identified, which included Pinterest, mobile marketing, and social media marketing. It was also confirmed that with enhanced usage of the Internet, there is a gradual move towards the World Wide Web becoming a common advertising platform. The web is providing the business advertising world with extremely rich media tools, global reach, and interactive services. It is important to identify and understand the target consumers, and then wise strategizing is needed to get the most out of this new platform.

According to Stocchi et al. (2015), brand advertising has a huge effect on the image of the brand, and therefore, it has a strong influence on consumer buying behaviour. It was also concluded that there is a noteworthy relationship between advertising and consumer buying decisions. Consumers have a preference for buying goods that are advertised rather than those that are not advertised at all or have a low level of advertisement.

## **2.7 Literature Gap**

The chosen research topic has been the subject of substantial study. Some of the research articles that have been quite helpful and are somewhat comparable to this study subject are those by Brown (2013), Barbaritano and Savelli (2021), Kim (2018), Muzahidul Islam (2021), Katuoka and Navickait-Sakalauskien (2016), Barbaritano and Savelli (2021), and others. Prior research has shown that unethical marketing tactics can result in unfavourable effects such as customer mistrust, scepticism, and unhappiness. Additionally, the majority of research has concentrated on the detrimental impacts of unethical marketing. However, very

few people have talked about comparing ethical versus immoral behaviour. As a result, the chosen research technique will be used in this research process to accomplish the stated goal. The chapter that follows explains this study's methodology.

## 2.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides an explanation of the purpose of the study. Due mostly to the material that is already available, it gives a summary of the already-known facts. It reveals gaps in our comprehension of phenomena and offers the groundwork for research approaches. Therefore, a conceptual framework is crucial to comprehending the significance of the study. An independent variable in a scientific enquiry is one that you modify or change to investigate its effects.

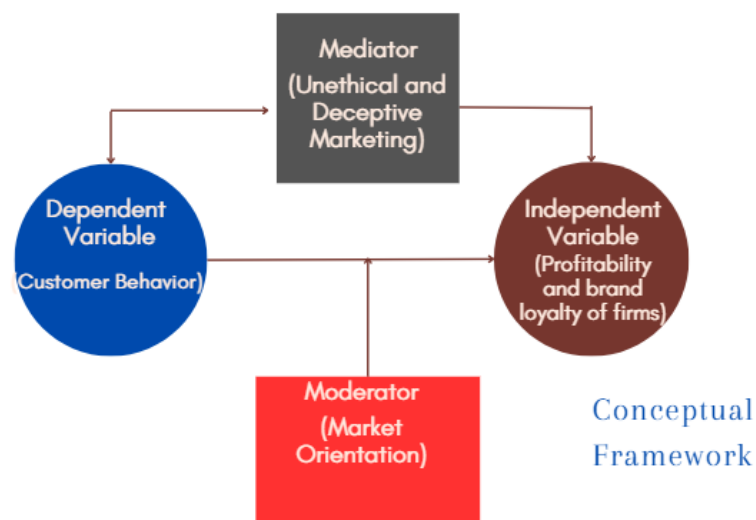


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Source: (self-made)

There are four different variables in this image. These variables include the mediator, moderator, dependent variable, and independent variable. An independent variable is one that, as the name implies, is not dependent on any other variable relevant to this study issue. Profitability and brand loyalty in this context are independent of other study factors. Customer conduct, however, is regarded as the dependent variable. The mediator establishes the relationship between these two variables. It illustrates the relationship between two variables. The unethical and dishonest marketing of businesses in this situation acts as the intermediary. The strength, direction, or presence of a correlation between the two variables is impacted by

a moderator. It specifies who, when, and how long a relationship ought to last. It is the market orientation in this instance. These various variables will be assessed in this study, and the conclusions and hypotheses will make it clearer how unethical marketing and consumer behaviour are related.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

There are different advertisements on virtually every platform that can be accessed by consumers. As false and misleading advertisements have a negative effect on consumer behaviour, consumers turn to being highly careful when facing false advertisements. In cases where there has been exposure to a lot of false and misleading claims, consumers are likely to drop the brands and move on to another alternative. Therefore, these unethical practises and misleading advertisements can have a negative effect on consumer behaviour when customers find out that businesses are not truthful in their marketing practises. This clarifies why organisations with true advertisements always have a huge market share. In such a case, strong national and international regulations are required to restrict the exposure of consumers to such misleading advertisements and unethical marketing practises. However, in the present scenario, it's tough to control online platforms, yet there can be enforcement of such regulations so that the interests of consumers can be protected.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

When there is a systematic or logical approach carried out to research, it is termed "synthetic research, wherein the most up-to-date and effective information is gathered on the chosen topic of study. Therefore, in this research also, efforts have been made to look for the answers to the research questions by carrying out a systematic analysis. This research is performed to gather knowledge regarding the effects of deceptive or unethical marketing on consumer behaviour; therefore, real scenarios have been considered and different sources have been used to get the latest set of information.

### 3.2 Research Onion

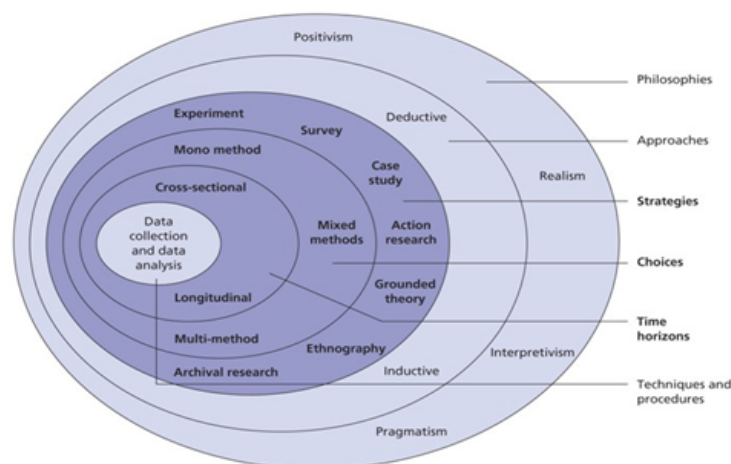


Figure 4: Research onion

Source 4: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019)

The research onion is a reasonable system that helps specialists comprehend and coordinate the various stages and parts involved with directing exploration. It offers a methodical strategy for efficiently designing and carrying out a study. There are numerous layers to the research onion, including ethical considerations, sampling, data collection and analysis, time horizons, research philosophy, and research approach. The research process is represented by each layer, which helps researchers make decisions and ensures a systematic

and rigors research methodology. Saunders et al. (2019) provided the research onion for the full research methodology with customization for the accomplishment of the requirements of the research paper on the given topic. In this study, the use of research onions has been used to outline the set of tasks carried out to achieve the goals of the study.

### **3.3 Research Method**

Ayanso and Lertwachara (2015) research approaches the outline of the study and the system, which has got different steps for detailing the approaches for assessment of the research method. It is completely set up on the basis of the research objectives and questions. Under the research approach, there are two kinds of analysis: one is the collection of data from different sets of sources, which are highly reliable. The other approach is primary analysis. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative approaches can be utilised for this study. Yet, in this case, the quantitative primary method (survey) as well as qualitative secondary data are used in the literature review as well as the findings and discussion for comparison. The use of this research methodology is justified since it will enable the analysis of primary as well as secondary data. In addition to primary information, this data will give a summary of the present state of affairs and the respondents' current viewpoints (Sürücü & Maslaki, 2020). This may provide more accurate and impartial knowledge of the phenomena under study. However, another important justification for employing this research approach is its capacity for hypothesis testing. Additionally, this research's high sample sizes and approach provide it with an advantage.

### **3.4 Research Strategy**

The survey research methodology has been applied in this study procedure. This research methodology was chosen because it is effective in describing the traits of a large group. No other form of research can offer such a wide range of capabilities. Additionally, the high number of participants will aid in ensuring that the information acquired is precise and beneficial for obtaining focused findings to draw inferences and make significant judgements (Van Holm, 2021). Additionally, a research approach has also been chosen. The choice of a descriptive approach has been made as the key focus of this research is to just identify the behaviour of the demographic understudy rather than concentrate on the "why" (Baum and Kabst, 2014). It is highly useful in exploring the various relationships between the study variables. It is a design that is likely to produce proof connecting cause-and-effect relations from the gathered data.

### 3.5 Research Design

There are different elements connected to the research topic that form part of the research design. So the research design is linked to the issues and challenges of the research, and it would also help to identify the methods of collection and analysis of the data. There can be a descriptive research design or an explanatory research design based on the recorded documentation of the collected information or on the topic of study, respectively. Under exploratory research, there is an exploration of the chosen topic and the collection of information.

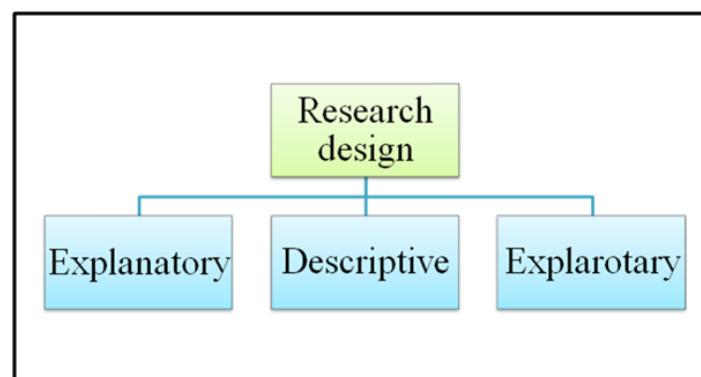


Figure 5: Research Design

Source: (Self-made)

There has been a descriptive approach. The choice of a descriptive approach has been made as the key focus of this research is to just identify the behaviour of the demographic under study rather than concentrate on the "why" (Baum and Kabst, 2014). It is useful in exploring the various relationships between the study variables. It is a design that is likely to produce proof connecting cause-and-effect relations from the gathered data.

### 3.6 Research philosophy

Research Philosophy is a wide topic offering different areas of development of knowledge. The research philosophy of positivism places an emphasis on the systematic observation, measurement, and analysis of observable phenomena in order to identify cause-and-effect relationships. Positivist analysts try to lay out generalisable information by utilising thorough logical strategies, like quantitative information assortment and measurable investigation. They hold the belief that there is a real world that can be measured and

comprehended through empirical evidence. Researchers aim to discover and establish objective relationships between these marketing practices and consumer behaviours by adopting a positivist research philosophy in their investigation of the effects of deceptive and unethical marketing on consumer behaviour. In an effort to identify patterns, trends, and effects that can be quantified, they collect and analyse data using techniques like surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis. This study makes use of interpretative research philosophy as there has been a usual survey for getting the correct knowledge through dependable evaluation and regular observation. This philosophy is connected to inductive research, which is useful in evaluating the whole process of consumer behaviour throughout the research paper (Ramsberg, 2018). The premise underlying this research perspective is that reality is inherently subjective, layered, and socially produced. This philosophy's central tenet is that we may understand another person's reality by looking at how they see it. It makes the assumption that social reality is complicated, arbitrary, and reliant on circumstance (Ryan, 2018). This research philosophy often uses research techniques, including focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews. As a result, the survey research approach was employed in this study. However, this attitude necessitates a thorough comprehension of the viewpoints and experiences of all parties.

### **3.7 Research process**

There are three key steps followed for the research process. The first step involves defining the inclusion standards, followed by the second step, which involves a preliminary search, and the subsequent step includes the study of the selection.

1. *Describing inclusion standards:* As per the topic of study, there has been the identification of the inclusion standards so that the way of advertisements by the notation can be utilised to understand the impact on consumer behaviour.
2. *Preliminary Search:* While carrying out the secondary research, there was the use of things like deceptive and unethical marketing, consumer behaviour and impacts of false marketing. These keywords helped in identifying the different research papers, and the researcher was able to use the relevant studies as the basis of the literature and analysis. Therefore the title of the study and the research questions helped in identifying the relevant papers and articles to be used for this study.
3. *Study selection:* once the researcher identified a few relevant papers, then there was further filtering as per the abstract or the summary of the paper, followed by a review of the complete text. Even the abstract was also filtered to ensure that the selected research papers

satisfied the need of the present study and helped in answering the research questions. There was a full-text preview for all selected papers, and a comparison was made with the inclusion criteria for making the best choice.

4. *Survey methods:* Surveys involve gathering data by asking respondents a series of questions. It planned a poll to survey purchaser discernments, mentalities, and ways of behaving connected with tricky and untrustworthy showcasing rehearses. Standardised data collection was made possible by surveys, which could be carried out via online, in-person, or phone interviews.
5. *Quantitative methods:* Quantitative exploration includes gathering mathematical information and dissecting it utilising factual methods. It used quantitative methods to measure the extent to which deceptive and unethical marketing practices influence consumer decision-making in the context of consumer behaviour research. This could include investigating study reactions utilising measurable tests, relapse examination, or information mining methods to recognise examples and connections.
6. *Qualitative methods:* The investigation of in-depth insights and comprehension of the underlying reasons and motivations behind consumer behaviours are the primary goals of qualitative research. It used focus groups or interviews to gather substantial qualitative data. The experiences, perceptions, and feelings of consumers in relation to dishonest and unethical marketing can be better understood using qualitative methods. Procedures like topical investigation or content examination can be utilised to dissect subjective information and recognise normal topics or examples.

The research strategy started with consideration of the idea of consumer behaviour and unethical marketing practices or deceptive procedures of marketing. This search brought many research papers on the selected topic, yet only these papers would not fulfil the need of the research; therefore, it was combined with primary research by use of an online survey. Since the idea of consumer behaviour is not new, therefore, the secondary research was based on the research papers starting from the year 2012 onwards so that the most up-to-date information can be included. With the combination of primary and secondary data, there can be the attainment of a dependable outcome for this study. This research was carried out in a reproducible and balanced manner. To lead the exploration, Plainly characterise the examination issue and goals connected with the subject. To learn more about existing theories, frameworks, and studies on the subject, conduct a thorough literature review. A Survey was



conducted as stated earlier to collect the primary data for data analysis. Later in the Discussion chapter this primary data was compared with the Qualitative Secondary data. Consumer attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of deceptive and unethical marketing practices ought to be the primary focus of the survey questions. Utilise statistical methods to conduct a quantitative analysis of the survey data. Explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and feelings regarding dishonest and unethical marketing by asking open-ended questions.

### **3.8 Data Collection**

Two categories of sources can be used to get data. They are primary and secondary sources, respectively. The term "primary data" refers to information gathered through interviews or surveys. That is first-hand information. The sources of secondary data are referred to as secondary data sources. Peer-reviewed articles, journals, earlier research papers, official websites, etc. are a few examples (Tayyab, 2020). Through the use of an online surveying technique, primary data will be gathered from a number of participants in this study. However, the literature review portion also made use of secondary data. The study questions were put forth in light of the literature gap, which could be understood thanks to the secondary data.

For a number of reasons, employing surveys to gather primary data is preferable in this research procedure. The first benefit is that everyone can participate from anywhere and offer helpful insights. Therefore, using online surveys, data from varied demographics may be collected. The data also gets quite diversified in this way. Online surveys are also becoming more popular due to their ease, affordability, etc. However, it's crucial to make sure the approach is suitable for the study objectives and the intended audience.

### **3.9 Sampling**

Primarily, 80 participants received the invitation to participate in the research process. However, 50 respondents were obtained through stratified random sampling. Through their email addresses, the survey's 50 participants were given access to the link to the online survey form. The data is produced via Google Surveys. From a wide range of online users, the target

respondents were chosen, focusing on those who had posted critical remarks about the products on social media. Conducting the survey online is a practical decision because it may attract customers from other communities who can contribute their opinions. This survey solicited online consumers' perspectives on diverse aspects of deceitful and unethical advertising. So, this research is primarily founded on primary data and quantitative research methods.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

A study approach called descriptive method analysis (DMA) tries to give a thorough and precise account of a phenomenon or occurrence. It entails gathering information using many means, including surveys, interviews, and observation. In this instance, the data was gathered via surveys, and it will be compared to the conclusions of the literature study (qualitative secondary data). This data analysis technique offers comprehensive and complex knowledge of a phenomenon, which makes it particularly useful. DMA has certain drawbacks, too, including the potential for researcher bias and the challenge of extrapolating results to larger groups.

### **3.11 Research Ethics**

Under research ethics, there is an understanding of the efficiency of the research process and the ways in which the researcher carries out the research. It would involve high standards to perform the research, like honesty, dependability, integrity, and reliability. There is a need for honesty to be reflected by the researcher while the data is gathered and generated. Moreover, it is important for the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. In the case of the survey, the responses need to be kept anonymous. Also, for the secondary data, proper referencing has to be done by clearly mentioning the sources of information. One more significant area to deal with in the ethics of study is plagiarism, because it is important for the study to be free from all types of plagiarism. In this study, the researcher has also considered all these areas to ensure that the research is fully ethical.

### **3.12 Chapter Summary**

This chapter includes a discussion on the ways of carrying out the research and gathering data. Thus, it reflects how the researcher aimed to accomplish the research objectives and answer the research questions stated in Chapter 1. Research methodology provides the

necessary expertise in gathering and organising information, participating in fieldwork when necessary, and in procedures for collecting information relevant to specific challenges, allowing conclusions to be drawn from the information gathered after a thorough evaluation that is supported by evidence. By using statistics, surveys, properly supervised experiments, and the collection, management, and analysis of data, this competence is offered. A researcher must choose the study methods and approaches they use extremely carefully since the research process is time-consuming and sensitive. Since this research largely focuses on consumer behaviour and unethical marketing, understanding data collection and analysis is crucial. The majority of organisations today are looking for methods to improve their operations. Therefore, conducting thorough research is crucial. So that the reader may comprehend the significance of these studies, this chapter briefly examines the many parts of the study methodology.

## Chapter 4: Results and Findings

### 4.1 Demography

Age Groups	Percentage	Gender	Percentage
18-24	28%	Male	36%
25-34	22%	Female	54%
35-44	12%	Others	6%
45-54	32%	Prefer not to say	4%
55 & above	6%		

Table: The Demographics of the Survey

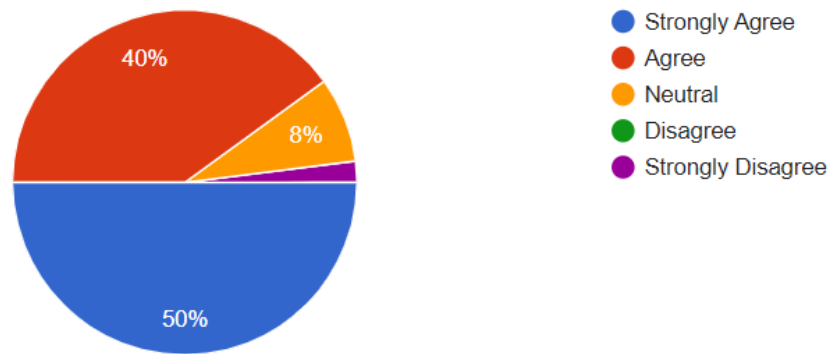
The respondents who participated in the survey belonged to different age groups and different genders. It was revealed from the survey that the respondents were in the age range of 18 and above. It is very necessary to consider age and gender factors for marketers. It helps them customise their strategies and messages to be specific to the target groups. For instance, when a marketer is designing an advertisement for the latest headphone technology, they would make sure that it attracts the younger generation and design their ads accordingly, which would attract people from the age of 18–35 (and according to the survey, it accounts for 28 and 22 percent, respectively); similarly, when designing advertisements for retirement homes, it would be effective if it was directed towards the older population of age 36 and above who are looking for settling down and retirement (which includes 12, 32, and 6 percent, respectively).

The role of gender is also important when it comes to advertisement design. People of different genders have different tastes and preferences. The participants of the survey contained 54 percent females and 36 percent males, and under general consideration, for instance, women are mostly inclined towards cosmetics, fashion, and beauty products, whereas men are more interested in technology and gadgets. If the marketers keep these preferences in mind, they can design the advertisement gender-specifically, which can be more relevant to the target market.

## 4.2 Impact of Advertisement on Sales (linking to an overdose of advertisement)

Advertisements can Increase the sale of the Product:

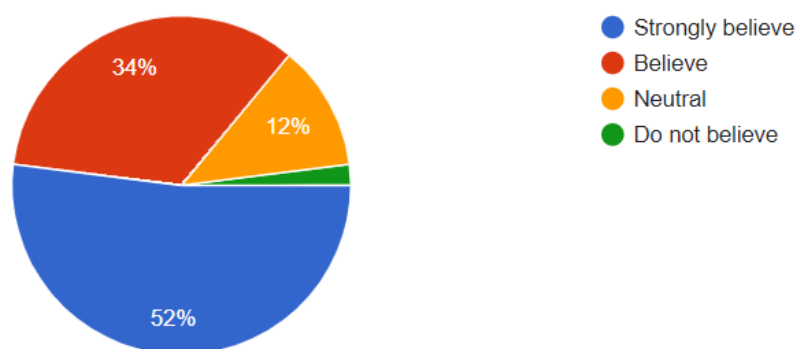
50 responses



According to the survey, 50 percent of individuals strongly agreed, and 40 percent agreed that ads are important for making sales. They believe that ads are the source that lets them know about the products and services that are provided by the firm, and they basically act as the first attraction. It was revealed from the survey that most people believe that advertising has a huge impact on the sales volume of any firm. Effective advertising campaigns assist the firm in raising brand awareness, attracting new customers, and advertising the advantages of the product (Becker, Wiegand, and Reinartz, 2019). It is also believed that effective advertising can maintain the client's buying decisions, which increases the loyalty of the customers and increases the chances of repeat business.

Do you believe that the Public is exposed to an overdose of advertisements?

50 responses

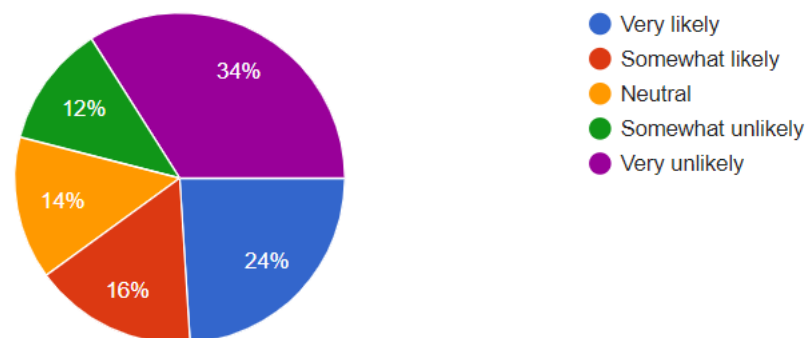


The world has gone digital because of the availability of the internet in every corner. With this advancement, every individual now has access to the internet, and companies have effectively made use of this. Initially, companies had to print and paste their advertisements, but now they have created e-advertisements that can be shared and distributed with just a click. Due to this, people are now exposed to an overdose of ads, and it has been rightly proven in the survey that, when asked, 52 percent of individuals strongly believed and 34 percent of people believed that they overdosed on ads. But an overdose of advertisements can have a negative impact on sales. When customers regularly receive a lot of advertisements, they become accustomed to them over time and start ignoring them entirely. This is known as ad fatigue, and it can reduce the efficiency of marketing advertisements and sales (Rohde *et al.*, 2018). It can also result in extra expenditures, lower margins of profit, and lower sales. Hence, it is very important for marketers to maintain a balance between advertising and sales. Marketers should be able to create relevant ads that can successfully attract the target market without harassing them with too many messages.

### 4.3 Effect of unethical marketing on the Trust of Consumers

Will people trust a brand that uses an unethical marketing strategy?

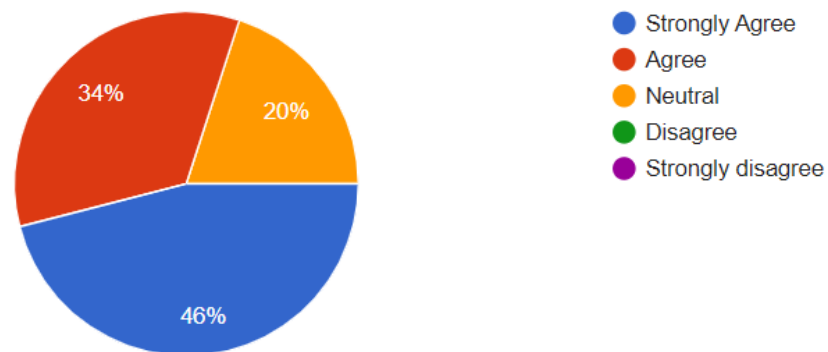
50 responses



The survey evidently states that the use of unethical marketing methods can significantly damage the trust of consumers. According to the survey, 34 percent of individuals are very unlikely to buy from a company that uses unethical marketing, and 12 percent are unlikely to do the same.

Are the people negatively affected by purchasing as a result of deceptive marketing practices?

50 responses



But sometimes unethical practises lure customers, as people are always looking for the best goods at lower prices, but when they find out that what the offer says and the actual marketing are different, they are not likely to continue purchasing from the same company, and this has been proven when 46 percent of individuals believed that they were negatively affected by unethical marketing practises. When a firm engages in unethical and exploitative marketing activities, it is highly likely that customers will lose trust in the brand and its products. This will eventually result in low purchases as customers start boycotting items from the firm that practises unethical marketing strategies (Bachnik and Nowacki, 2018). The customers can also report these activities to the authorities and regulators, which often results in legal and reputational harm for the firm that gets involved in such practises. Also, when consumers find out about the unethical marketing practises of the firm, they often advise other customers not to purchase products from the company.

Thus, the reputation of the brand can fall, and its sales volume can also suffer when people start talking about their negative practises through word-of-mouth, social media, online reviews, and personal discussion.

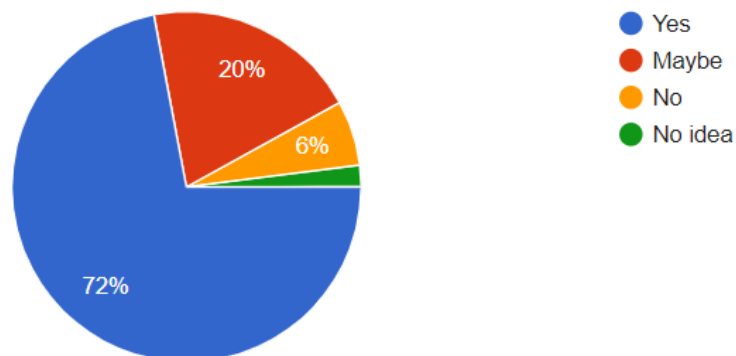
#### **4.4 Unethical market practices cause brand switching**

When customers lose trust in a company due to its unethical marketing strategies, they tend to seek replacement products from the company's competitors. As evident from the survey,

consumers feel tricked and exploited when huge corporations make use of fraudulent advertising and misleading claims, which result in price gouging and bad opinions about the company. Approximately 72 percent of individuals agreed that unethical marketing strategies make them switch brands and go for brands that make use of ethical practises.

#### Do unethical marketing practices make people switch brands?

50 responses

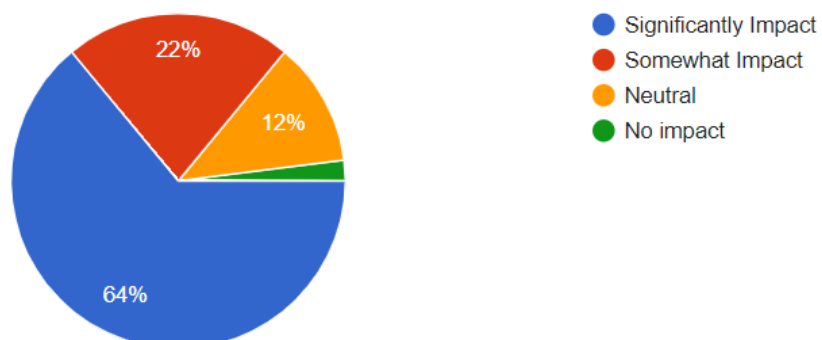


When a consumer believes that the rival company follows more ethical practices, they are willing to move towards a different brand and products (Chowdhry, Ali, and Faisal, 2021). If the customer actually switches brands, it can have serious repercussions on the firm they were first loyal to and result in sales losses for the firm, a harmed reputation, and a decreased profit margin.

#### 4.5 Impact of Ethical market practice on brand image and customer loyalty

Can ethical marketing practices positively impact the brand image of the company?

50 responses

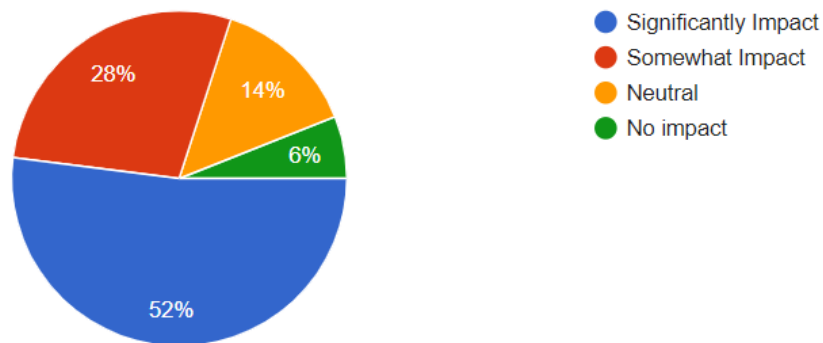




When people get what they are promised, they tend to speak up and promote the brand positively. On the contrary, firms face backlash when they use unethical practises. According to the survey, 64 percent of individuals strongly believed and 22 percent of individuals believed that ethical marketing practises significantly impacted the brand image of the company. When a firm follows ethical marketing practises, it can substantially influence the image of the company as well as customer loyalty. Some ethical marketing practises like transparency, honesty, and fairness can help the firm create a brand image that can form a connection with customers (Iglesias *et al.* 2019). These practises can also boost loyalty and repeat business among customers because they foster trust and credibility.

### Can ethical marketing practices positively impact customer loyalty for the company?

50 responses

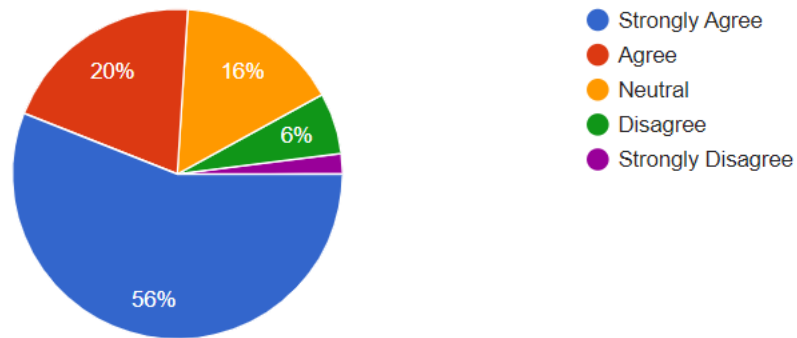


When asked, 52 percent of individuals responded that they are highly likely to go back to the same brand, and 28 percent of individuals are likely to go back to the same brand and give repeat business if they know that the firm, they put their trust in makes use of ethical marketing practises and is transparent about their deals and offerings. In certain cases, it has been seen that customers tend to form emotional bonds with firms that follow ethical marketing practises because they believe that the firm is concerned about the well-being of its consumers and appreciates their trust. It has often increased brand loyalty among consumers who support the brand even in difficult situations (Alwi, Ali, & Nguyen, 2017). These practises can also help the company attract new customers who value similar principles. Hence, firms can distinguish themselves from their rivals by having a USP that connects with their target audience by making use of ethical activities in marketing campaigns.

## 4.6 Impact of Strict marketing policies on customer protection

How strongly do you agree that strict marketing policies could protect the consumer from false claims?

50 responses

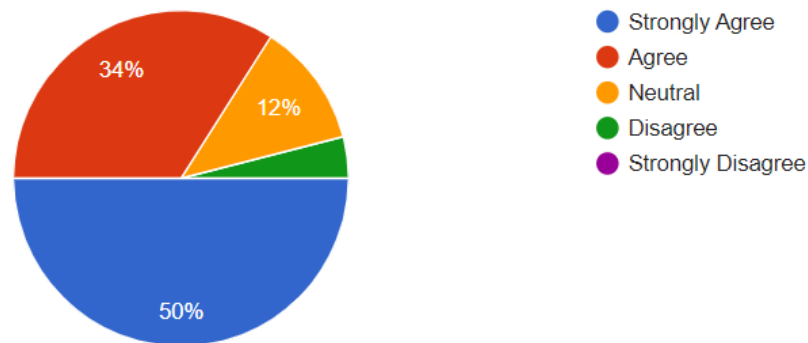


The government and the industrial authorities have the right to impose strict marketing policies to prohibit businesses from participating in activities that are misleading and can cause damage to customers. Such policies include precise labelling, clear pricing, and ethical promotion (Shangguan *et al.* 2019). Customers can be protected from such fraudulent activities by following strict protocols and making sure that they have access to valid and reliable information while completing a purchase. When the company follows strict label rules, for instance, they assist the customers in making informed choices where they can find out about the components and nutritional worth of the products. Similarly, when the company follows the rule of transparent pricing, it can protect customers from unfair pricing practises. According to 56 percent of the customers, more effective market policies can protect consumers from false claims since the firms will not have a lot of options for luring consumers with false information.

## 4.7 Impact of Customer Education on advertising practices for Informed Purchasing Behaviour

How much do you agree that education on advertising practices can assist customers in making informed purchasing decisions?

50 responses



When customers have a better grasp of the strategies that can be employed by companies for advertising, they can make informed buying choices. This education can guide the customers in recognising the misleading claims of the advertisement, make them understand the influence of advertisements on their purchasing habits, and assist them in identifying the products that will best fit their needs and preferences. Customers feel empowered with the knowledge they have obtained from their education and can understand the difference between ethical and unethical marketing practises. Also, this strategy can pressure firms to adopt ethical advertising practises because the customers they would then face will be educated and informed. From the answers received in the survey, 50 percent of individuals strongly agreed, and 34 percent agreed that they should have education about effective advertisement practises so that they can make informed purchasing decisions.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Overview of Chapter**

The survey results will be examined in the discussion chapter. We will compare similarities to the literature review. This chapter will assess the various factors on which the researcher built his or her research questions. The impact of unethical advertising on customer behaviour and loyalty, as well as different tactics that deceive consumers, will be explored. This might undermine consumer confidence in the economy and result in lower company sales. However, ethical marketing has a variety of advantages as well as a favourable impact on consumer behaviour.

### **5.2 Discussion**

#### ***Effect of unethical ads on Customer Behaviour and Customer Loyalty***

Marketing frequently exerts a significant effect on customer behaviour. Customers have very diverse expectations for the information they receive from different media, including TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet (Sama, 2019). Additionally, businesses use such media to attract clients and boost sales. However, consumer behaviour quickly shifts when businesses use misleading marketing to persuade consumers to purchase products or services that may be defective, fake, imitation, or even dangerous. According to Roman (2010), deception is a broad range of methods distinct from the irrefutable lie. The features that set them apart include ample and collective information, the degree of truth, intent, and precision. Similar things were discovered in the findings as well. When participants were asked if they trusted a company that employed immoral marketing tactics, 34% responded that it was very unlikely that they would. The fundamental justification is the harm done to customers by unethical and dishonest marketing. They stop believing in the brand. When deciding what to buy, consumers look to commercial messages as a source of information (Nuseir, 2018). It follows that when people encounter a deceptive advertisement, it has a negative effect on them. Customers are less inclined to trust a brand in the future if they believe they have been misled or influenced. Even 46% of the participants concur that consumers are harmed by purchases as a result of misleading marketing techniques. This demonstrates that the findings and the literature review have some overlap.

Advertisements can Increase the sale of the Product: Are the people negatively affected by purchasing as a result of deceptive marketing practices?			
Strongly Agree		50%	46%
Agree		40%	34%
Neutral		8%	20%
Disagree		0%	0%
Strongly Disagree		2%	0%

Table: The comparison of how advertisement can increase sales and how it can negatively impact the purchasing habit of the customers

Source: (self-made)

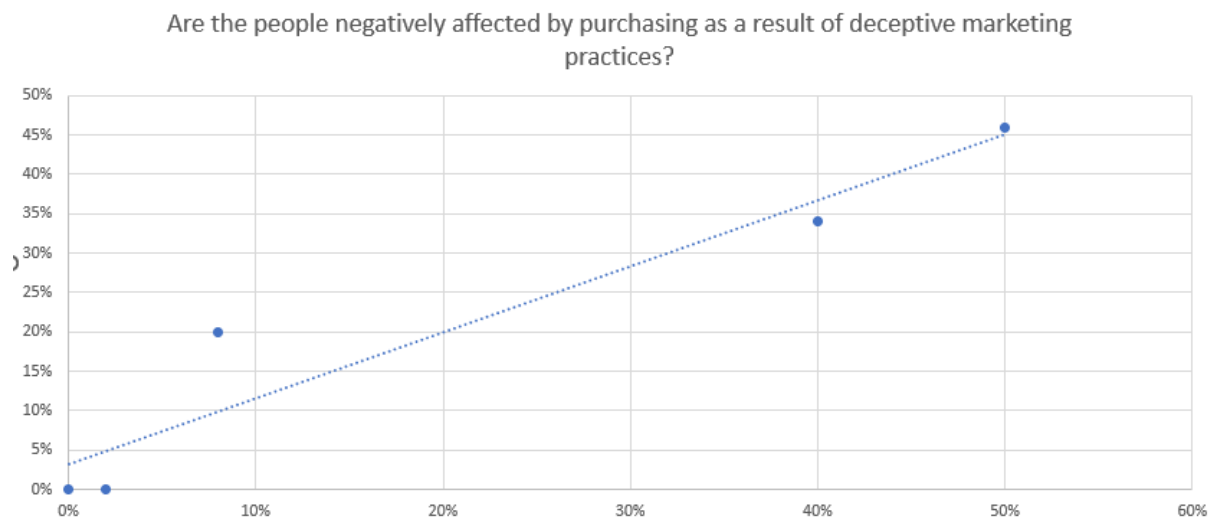


Figure: Linear Regression of the above data table

Source: (self-made)

Customers' loyalty to the company is now lost when there is a negative impact on them. Customers who experience unethical marketing feel that they have been treated unfairly or dishonestly. They are unlikely to continue supporting the brand because of this. This might be especially harmful to businesses that depend significantly on repeat customers. This brings the customers' final option—changing brands—to the fore. Even 72% of the voters said that unethical marketing techniques cause consumers to switch brands. Iqbal & Siddiqui (2019) discovered similar findings. The author claimed that while word of mouth is negatively linked to customer satisfaction, false information, stereotyping, and unethical advertising are negatively linked to consumer purchasing behaviour. Even with these detrimental effects, there remain ongoing difficulties. Customers who have been tricked or misled could be less trusting of any marketing and advertising initiatives. Thus, these customers won't buy anything in the future after seeing an advertisement. Even from the literature review, it was seen that O'Dowd

(2014) makes a similar argument that dishonest advertising makes consumers sceptical. Since brand trust and brand loyalty are positively correlated, the brand effect is the result of brand trust's direct, mediating effect on brand loyalty. A decrease in overall sales and profitability may result from this. Additionally, if the unethical advertisement is associated with a particular product, it may harm the entire product line. The overall sales of the business may also suffer as a result.

### ***Effect of Ethical and unethical marketing on Brand Image and Sales***

The use of unethical marketing has certain immediate benefits. In the presence of rivals, marketers do engage in unethical business practices, but on the other side, this aids managers in developing strong marketing plans and giving manufacturers advice on how to make wise business judgements (Tabish, Hussain, & Afshan, 2017). Even nearly 90% of the participants concurred that advertising can boost product sales. But customer attitude is what loyalty is all about. But as was mentioned in earlier sections, unethical marketing causes long-term complications. Kotler (2010) made a similar claim in the literature review. According to the author, short-term yields are caused by one-time sales and are improved by yield, but long-term business profitability is not guaranteed. So, the findings and the literature review state similar aspects.

	Can ethical marketing practices positively impact the brand image of the company?	Can ethical marketing practices positively impact customer loyalty for the company?
Significantly Impact	64%	52%
Somewhat Impact	22%	28%
Neutral	12%	14%
No impact	2%	6%

Table: Comparison between how ethical marketing practises positively affects the brand image and customer loyalty

Source: (self-made)

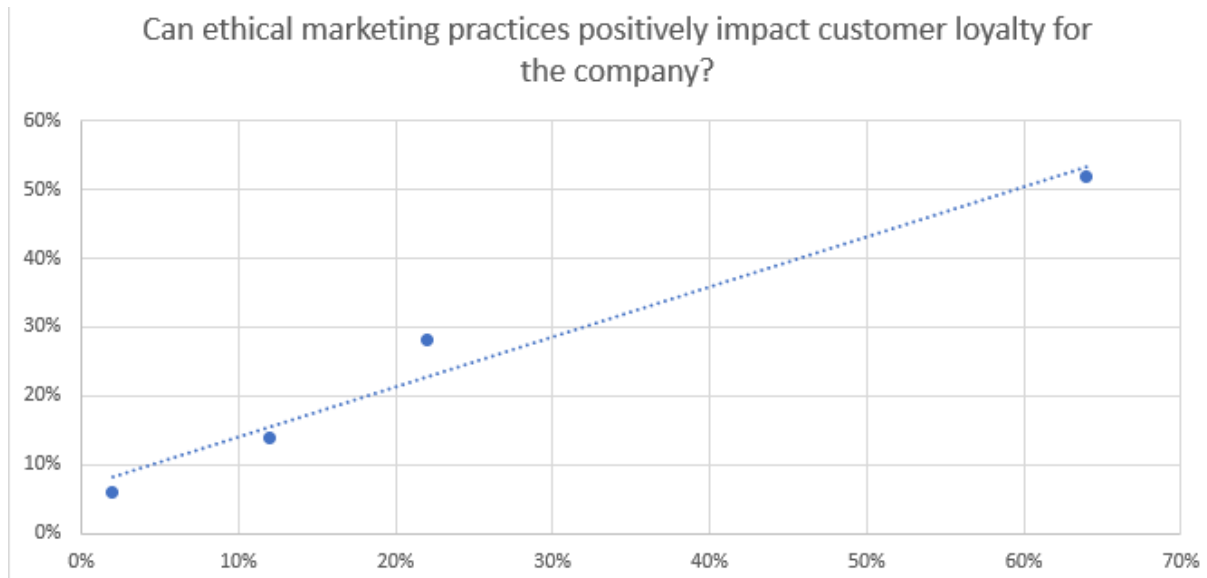


Figure: The Linear Regression of the above data table on Ethical marketing practice

Source: (self-made)

The detrimental impact on consumer behaviour and the drop in sales and revenue are two of the unfavourable elements. A brand can employ ethical marketing in a variety of ways, such as by being upfront about product benefits and promises, creating accurate and truthful advertisements, and abstaining from using offensive or discriminatory language. The businesses also employ a lot of unscrupulous marketing strategies, which are overdosing on individuals. Likewise, 52% of respondents expressed a strong belief. Customers are becoming more aware of these tactics and are more likely to reject them. Making misleading or exaggerated product claims, utilising deceptive advertising, or using rude or discriminatory language are a few instances of unethical marketing.

A significant media backlash might result from unethical marketing. Some marketers go so far as to portray an unpopular viewpoint or try to create controversy to generate conversation. Even though bad news frequently garners just as much attention as good news, that doesn't mean that it won't draw in customers (Tama, 2019). The company's reputation may suffer greatly as a result of these cheap techniques. Concerns regarding ethical business practices are becoming more vocal among consumers. Additionally, delicate controversies have a significant impact on how badly they affect businesses. Additionally, customers can file complaints against the company for providing false information, and there may be legal repercussions. According to 52% of the participants, consumers very frequently complain about deceptive or fraudulent

marketing. 36% endorsed this observation. This demonstrates that marketing deceptive material can have unfavourable effects, such as decreased market share and sales.

### ***Importance of Strict Policy and Education***

It is very necessary to formulate strict marketing policies as well as provide customers with education about effective advertisement practises so that the firms follow fair and transparent marketing practises and the customers are aware of deceptive advertising techniques. There are numerous reasons why these should be followed, and some of them are:

**Protecting the rights of the consumers:** By making use of strict policies, the government as well as the authority in charge make sure that no firm is able to use fraudulent or unfair marketing advertisements to attract and wrongfully sell their products and services to consumers (Ionel, 2018). Also, when the customers are educated about different types of advertisement practises, they will be able to find out about these deceptive strategies and make educated buying decisions.

**Building the trust of the customers:** If the authorities enforce strict policies and the customers are educated, a sense of trust is built between the customers and the businesses (Sharma & Kushwaha, 2019). When customers know that a firm follows the policy made by the authorities and is transparent about their operations, they are more likely to trust such a firm and make repeat purchases. This also helps in the development of a favourable reputation for the company, which will be a useful asset in the long run.

**Promoting healthy competition:** When all the firms are held to the same standards and are made to follow the same set of marketing policies, a level playing field is created wherein everyone will have to compete in a fair and equitable manner. This will also make sure that the more established organisations do not exploit their size and resources in an unfair manner to dominate and eliminate smaller, more competitive organisations.

**Encouragement of ethical practices:** With such policy development as well as consumer education, firms are more likely to stick to following ethical practices so that they do not face backlash or unfavourable boycotting from customers as well as heavy penalties from the regulatory bodies. If the contrary happens, the firm suffers a huge loss, both monetarily and reputationally.



### **5.3 Chapter Summary**

After careful discussion and linking for similarities and differences with the literature review, it was found that unethical marketing practises often lead to misleading consumers, which breaks their trust, and they often try switching to brands that make ethical choices. Such practises almost always result in a loss in revenue, a poor brand name and reputation, and a loss of the existing customer base. This chapter has also shown the importance of ethical practises and how strict policies and customer education can impact firms' ethical marketing practise choices.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Overview of Chapter**

This chapter will provide a summary of how using unethical marketing practises can affect consumer behaviour, as well as whether the gender of the consumer has anything to do with the unethical practises. It will link the findings with the objectives that were stated at the beginning to draw the final conclusion of the topic in question and provide the necessary recommendations for the firms to act accordingly so that they can avoid practising unethical marketing strategies. It will also state the limitations of the study and the future prospects of this particular research under consideration.

### **6.2 Linking with Objective**

Unethical practices tend to have a negative influence on the behaviour of consumers. When consumers find out that a company is following deceptive marketing practices, they become distrustful of the products as well as the services provided by the company and are highly likely not to come back to the company for any goods or services. Also, misleading advertisement practises lead to dissatisfaction with the product, which ultimately harms the reputation of the company. Also, the impact of gender on the vulnerability of misleading advertisement practises is a complex factor that depends on a variety of factors. Nevertheless, both genders are equally gullible to deceptive marketing practises, depending on the type of product under consideration as well as the target market of that product and company.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

The following advice is provided to various businesses so that they can stay clear of various unethical marketing circumstances:

- These companies ought to refrain from fabricating information, such as through deceptive advertising. It occurs when a business exaggerates or embellishes the advantages of its goods and services. Overpromising might hurt your chances of winning over clients. False claims can also lead consumers astray. Many businesses exaggerate their marketing claims, highlight their products' positive attributes, and conceal their negative ones. Furthermore, some even advertise unhealthy products as

healthy to increase sales. Customers should conduct their own research as well, as market research refutes stereotypes.

- Another suggestion is to avoid using consumer data for corporate gain. If discovered, it might result in severe fines. Businesses must ensure that the data they gather is secure from other parties. To guarantee that their customer data is secure and not disclosed to third parties without their consent, businesses may also wish to speak with a privacy expert. Additionally, businesses must not alter the user agreements' terms and conditions. Most users don't read the agreements' several pages of fine text. As a result, firms find themselves in difficult situations that they might subsequently exploit. When such behaviours are revealed, they cause widespread distrust.

#### **6.4 Limitations and Future Scope**

Despite the extensive research and survey conducted for this dissertation, there are some restrictions. The study uses a quantitative survey approach to start. Although this approach is very practical and collects a sizable data set for statistically analysing research issues, there is a disadvantage. The opinions of customers and marketers, who could have insightful opinions on the study issue, cannot be provided by this technique. A qualitative interview, however, may have offered the researcher the chance to carefully examine the viewpoints of the marketers and the consumers, who might be more conscious of unethical marketing practises.

Another drawback of this study is that, although it may have examined the impact of dishonest and unethical marketing on customer behaviour, it could not give a thorough analysis of a particular market or company-specific information. You might think of this as a potential area for future study. Future scholars can examine companies that have adopted unethical marketing strategies, investigate their practises, and assess the results. This will assist other businesses in avoiding specific procedures and creating a more substantial marketing team.

#### **6.5 Chapter Summary**

Thus, this chapter has concluded that unethical market practises can have a negative impact on the purchasing behaviour of consumers, bringing a sense of mistrust among the consumers towards the business. It also reduces customer loyalty as well as the brand image of the firm. The company's reputation is at stake, and after some point in time, the firm is seen to be suffering heavy losses. The regulatory authority should focus on constructing strict policies,

and the consumers should be educated about marketing practises so that the firms can follow ethical practises and help the consumers make efficient purchasing decisions.

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## Appendix

### *Survey Questions:*

1. What is your age?
  - 18-24
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45-54
  - 55 & above
  
2. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Others
  
3. Advertisements can Increase the sale of the Product:
  - Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
  
4. Do you believe that the Public is exposed to an overdose of advertisements?
  - Strongly believe
  - Believe
  - Neutral
  - No belief
  
5. Will people trust a brand that uses an unethical marketing strategy?
  - Very likely
  - Somewhat likely
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat unlikely
  - Very unlikely
  
6. Are the people negatively affected by purchasing as a result of deceptive marketing practices?
  - Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree

7. Do unethical marketing practices make people switch brands?
  - Yes
  - Maybe
  - No
  - No idea
  
8. Do people agree that companies that use unethical marketing practices should be reported?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly agree
  
9. How often do people advise against buying products and services from companies that use unethical marketing?
  - Very Often
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
  
10. How much do you think trust in advertising and marketing has declined in recent years due to deceptive marketing?
  - Significantly declined
  - Somewhat declined
  - No change
  - Somewhat Improved
  - Significantly Improved
  
11. Can ethical marketing practices positively impact the brand image of the company?
  - Significantly Impact
  - Somewhat Impact
  - Neutral
  - No impact
  
12. Can ethical marketing practices positively impact customer loyalty for the company?
  - Significantly Impact
  - Somewhat Impact
  - Neutral
  - No impact
  
13. How strongly do you agree that strict marketing policies could protect the consumer from false claims?
  - Strongly Agree



- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. How much do you agree that education on advertising practices can assist customers in making informed purchasing decisions?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree