
A STUDY ON MISLEADING MARKETING CAMPAIGNS CONDUCTED BY MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES TARGETING INDIVIDUAL CONSUMERS IN THE SUBURBAN AREAS OF MUMBAI CITY

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ABSTRACT:

This study Investigates the Impact of Misleading Marketing Campaigns conducted by Multinational Companies targeting Individual Consumers in the suburban areas of Mumbai City. Utilizing a Descriptive Research Methodology, data were gathered from 416 respondents through a structured survey. The findings reveal that a significant portion of consumers is aware of Misleading Advertisements, with 84.62% perceiving ads as deceptive and 65.63% expressing Dissatisfaction with the claims made by Multinational Companies. Despite this awareness, 76.92% of respondents still rely on Advertisements for Purchase Decisions. The study also highlights a growing concern about the inadequacy of existing Legal Frameworks, with 87.74% advocating for stricter Government Guidelines. Additionally, Social Media emerged as the most common platform for encountering Advertisements, particularly in product categories like Noodles and Health Proteins/Drinks. The research underscores the need for enhanced Consumer Education and stronger Legal Measures to combat Misleading Marketing Practices effectively.

Keywords: Consumer Awareness, Legal Frameworks, Multinational Companies, Misleading Marketing, Social Media

INTRODUCTION:

The History of Advertising in India goes to early 20th century when advertising was mostly done via print medium. The oldest form of advertising in India may be linked back to 29th January, 1780, when the first advertisement was published in India's First Newspaper named 'The Bengal Gazette' (weekly). However, it was not until the 1920s that the modern advertising business started to take form in India the First Indian Ad Agency, The Indian Advertising Agency, was founded in the year 1931. The debut of radio stations and television in advertising scene signalled a new era, with over 30% of world's population utilising them by 20th century start. Television advertising first debuted in India in 1976 with the introduction of Door-darshan. The first television commercial that debuted in India was on 1st of January in the year 1976 for Gwalior Suiting.

An advertising is typically regarded as a public communication that promotes a product, a service, brand or event. Advertising has three major purposes to inform, to convince and to recall. Advertising is a means of letting prospective buyers know about a product. Main purpose of advertising is to raise the sales of a product and make the consumers pick the product over all other items available in the market after evaluating the positive and the negative side of the product. It is difficult to quantify precisely how much advertising an individual sees every day, since it may vary greatly based on a variety of variables such as the people's age, location, hobbies, and online and offline activity. However, it is believed that the typical individual views between 4000 and 10000 commercials every day. But currently there are numerous deceptive advertising because of which people's reliance on them is eroding day by day.

Any advertising or promotion via television, radio or any other means to misrepresent the nature, quality or geographic origin of products, service or commercial activities so as to mislead the customer is termed misleading advertisement. A misleading advertising is the one, which does not give genuine information regarding the goods being marketed. The primary purpose of misleading advertising is to provide customers

inaccurate information and influence their decision of purchasing items which is a means of performing a fraud with the consumers. It may feature one or more qualities which mislead the viewer's such as inaccurate information, false pricing, exaggeration, etc. There are numerous forms of bait advertising, false promises, failure to disclose, misrepresentations, hidden costs, etc.

Revant Hemantsinghka, widely known as 'Foodpharmer' has started a new effort dubbed 'Label Padega India' that invites people to read labels of daily packaged goods marketed in India. The influencer thinks this would drive large firms to quit bogus marketing promises and start supplying higher quality items. In order to convince people to read labels, he has established a social media challenge that invites individuals to publish a story or post with a label.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Vadehra, S. (2010):

Hindustan Unilever was found guilty of making false claims about its malted beverage "Kisan Amaze," which allegedly provides over 30% of children's daily brain nutrients, in a case under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act. This first investigation by the Food Safety Authority committee found the claims unscientific and harmful to children's food habits. Violators face up to six months' imprisonment and product withdrawal by states. The case serves as a deterrent against misleading food advertisements and underscores the need for stringent guidelines. It highlights the vulnerability of children, who, unable to recognize marketing strategies, are easily influenced by advertisements, emphasising the broader issue of protecting consumers from deceptive health claims and ensuring advertising transparency.

S. Turner, C, Jones (2018)

A public health complaint was lodged with the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in June 2017 against Nestlé for misleading advertising of its Milky bar, which touted milk as the main ingredient despite its high sugar content. The ASA dismissed the complaint, siding with Nestlé's claim that milk, though in powdered form, was the primary ingredient. Subsequent complaints to Food Standards Scotland (FSS) about inadequate nutritional labelling were also rejected. This case highlights failures in regulatory oversight and the need for continued advocacy against misleading food advertising. The Milky-bar 'Kid': Nestlé, childhood obesity and the regulation of advertising of high sugar and fat ultra-processed products.

Bilal Ahmad Rather, Iqbal Ahmad Hakim (2019)

In April 2014, a raid by the Lucknow Food & Drug Administration on a local shop in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, led to the discovery of Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) and excessive lead in Nestlé's Maggi noodles. This unexpected finding escalated into a major public relations crisis for Nestlé India, whose Maggi brand accounted for 30% of its revenue. The case highlights the importance of adherence to quality standards, legal compliance, and the implications of failing to manage public relations effectively.

Alford Chris, Cox H, Wescott R (2001)

Red Bull is a brand of energy drinks created and owned by the Austrian company Red Bull GmbH. With a market share of 43%, it is the most popular energy drink brand as of 2020, and the third most valuable soft drink brand, behind Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Benjamin Careathers filed a case against Red Bull in 2013 as the advertisement stated that RED BULL GIVES YOU WINGS this is their tag line which actually means it make you feel light after you consume it. In this case, the court ruled in favour of Benjamin and other plaintiffs and, thus, ordered Red Bull a class settlement for all victims. It agreed to pay a total of \$13 million as compensation to the customers who felt cheated by drinking its energy drink in the last decade. The compensation per victim was a cash pay-out of up to \$10.

Dr. Indu R (2022)

Advertising, a crucial promotional tool, influences consumer behaviour through paid, non-personal communication. Effective advertising requires substantial investment in ad creation and media scheduling, aiming to drive purchasing behaviour. Credibility is vital; credible ads are more persuasive and likely to succeed. The study focuses on the impact of advertising credibility on the effectiveness and brand image of children's health food drinks (complan). In Kerala, known for its high literacy and consumerism, ads significantly shape consumer behaviour, making it an ideal market for studying advertising effects.

Sana Sarfaraz, Tanveer Bano, Wajeaha Fatima, Rana Amjad, Ammarah Mehak, Mahira Iqbal, Kiran Nadeem (2017)

This study surveyed 200 young individuals aged 15-25 in Karachi to assess their consumption patterns and preferences for cold drinks. Results indicate high consumption rates, with 90% consuming these drinks and

51% doing so daily. Most favoured black coloured drinks, despite higher sugar content associated with health risks. Experimental findings on rabbits showed significant blood sugar increases after consuming black drinks. The study highlights youth addiction to cold drinks and their preference for coloured varieties, posing potential health concerns.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To determine the awareness level of misleading advertisements among the individuals in the Mumbai City.
2. To study the misleading marketing campaigns conducted by the multinational companies in India.
3. To understand the influence of misleading marketing campaigns by multinational companies.
4. To understand the claims made by the multinational companies in their marketing campaign.
5. To analyse the unhealthy ingredients added by the multinational company in their highly selling products.

LIMITATIONS:

1. **Area:** The data is limited to the suburban area of Mumbai City, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population.
2. **Time:** Due to time constraints, the research had a limited window for collecting sampling data, potentially impacting the depth and breadth of the study.
3. **Subjective Thinking:** Not every respondent may exercise utmost care in filling out a survey, introducing the possibility of response bias. The survey method may make it challenging to ensure that all respondents dedicate accurate time and attention to the questionnaire, potentially affecting data reliability.

Hypothesis:

HO₁: Individuals in the suburban areas of Mumbai City have a high awareness level of Misleading Advertisements conducted by Multinational Companies.

H1₁: Individuals in the suburban areas of Mumbai City have a low awareness level of Misleading Advertisements conducted by Multinational Companies.

HO₂: Misleading marketing campaigns conducted by multinational companies do not significantly influence the purchasing decisions of individual consumers in the suburban areas of Mumbai City.

H1₂: Misleading marketing campaigns conducted by multinational companies significantly influence the purchasing decisions of individual consumers in the suburban areas of Mumbai City.

Research Methodology:

1. **Research Category:** The research conducted is descriptive, focusing on individuals in the suburban area of Mumbai City.
2. **Tools and Techniques Applied:** Statistical patterns and representations were employed to present primary data in the research paper. The data analysis included frequency and percentages to ensure accuracy.
3. **Sampling Method:** Simple random sampling was used to gather practical information. Respondents participated by answering a survey conducted through Google Forms, providing a snapshot of the opinions of individuals in the suburban area of Mumbai City. The use of Google Forms facilitated efficient data collection within the constraints of time.
4. **Sample Size:** The primary data for the research study consisted of 416 responses. This sample size was deemed sufficient for the research objectives while accommodating time limitations.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS:

(Primary Data: Question 1)

Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
14 - 17 Years	17	4.09%
18 - 30 Years	219	52.64%

31 - 45 Years	131	31.49%
45 Years and Above	49	11.78%
TOTAL	416	100.00%

The survey data shows a diverse age distribution among respondents. The majority fall in the age group of 18 – 30 years, comprising (52.64%) of the total, followed by 31 – 45 years at (31.49%). A small percentage, (11.78%), are in 45 years and above, and even smaller that is (4.09%) in the age group 14 – 17 years.

(Primary Data: Question 2)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	215	51.68%
Female	201	48.32%
TOTAL	416	100.00%

The data reflects a slightly higher representation of males at (51.68%) compared to females at (48.32%). This indicates a nearly balanced gender distribution among respondents, with a slightly higher number of male participants.

(Primary Data: Question 3)

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Partial illiterate	21	5.05%
SSC	19	4.57%
HSC	32	7.69%
Under-Graduate (Pursuing)	123	29.57%
Graduate (Pass-out)	79	18.99%
Post-Graduate	95	22.84%
Professional	47	11.30%
TOTAL	416	100.00%

The educational profile of the respondents shows a significant portion with undergraduates, comprising (29.57%) of the total. Graduates make up (18.99%), while Postgraduates constitute (22.84%) and Professionals comprise (11.30%). Partial literates and 12th pass individuals form smaller percentages at (5.05%) and (7.69%), respectively. SSC individuals carry the smallest percentage of (4.57%).

(Primary Data: Question 4)

Professional Category	Frequency	Percentage
Job	86	20.67%
Business	60	14.42%
Professional	48	11.54%
Student	176	42.31%
Homemaker	46	11.06%
TOTAL	416	100.00%

The survey reveals that a large proportion of respondents are students, making up (42.31%) of the total. Service Job holders represent (20.67%), followed by Businessmen at (14.42%) and Professional Service providers at (11.54%). Homemakers form the smallest group holding (11.06%) of the total.

(Primary Data: Question 5)

Do you gain information or knowledge from advertisements?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	359	86.30%
No	57	13.70%
Total	416	100.00%

The survey shows that (86.30%) of respondents gain information or knowledge from advertisements, suggesting that ads still play an informative role. However, (13.70%) of respondents do not find advertisements informative.

(Primary Data: Question 6)

Do you find advertisements misleading these days?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	352	84.62%
No	64	15.38%
Total	416	100.00%

A significant (84.62%) of respondents find advertisements misleading, indicating widespread distrust. In contrast, (15.38%) of respondents do not find advertisements misleading.

(Primary Data: Question 7)

Are you aware of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 ?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	263	63.22%
No	153	36.78%
Total	416	100.00%

The data reveals that (63.22%) of respondents are aware of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, while (36.78%) are not aware of this legislation.

(Primary Data: Question 8)

Does advertisement have influence on your decision while purchasing the product?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	320	76.92%
No	96	23.08%
Total	416	100.00%

The data shows that (76.92%) of respondents have been influenced by misleading advertisements while making purchasing decisions, highlighting the impact of advertising on consumer behaviour. Conversely, (23.08%) of respondents stated that they are not influenced by misleading advertisements.

(Primary Data: Question 9)

Are you generally satisfied with the claims made by multinational companies in their advertisements?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	143	34.38%
No	273	65.63%
Total	416	100.00%

Only (34.38%) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the claims made by multinational companies in their advertisements, suggesting scepticism among consumers. Meanwhile, (65.63%) of respondents are not satisfied with these claims.

(Primary Data: Question 10)

Do you read the product label before making a purchase?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	324	77.88%
No	92	22.12%
Total	416	100.00%

A significant majority of respondents (77.88%) reported that they read product labels before making a purchase, indicating a high level of consumer awareness. In contrast, (22.12%) of respondents do not read labels before purchasing.

(Primary Data: Question 11)

Do you agree with the claims made by multinational companies about their products?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, I do	146	35.10%
No, I don't	270	64.90%
Total	416	100.00%

The majority of respondents (64.90%) do not agree with the claims made by multinational companies about their products, such as "100% natural" or "rich in vitamin C." However, (35.10%) of respondents do agree with these claims.

(Primary Data: Question 12)

The current lawsuit is capable enough to protect the consumer against the misleading advertisement ?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	103	24.76%
No	313	75.24%
Total	416	100.00%

According to the survey, (75.24%) of respondents believe that the current legal framework is not adequate to protect consumers from misleading advertisements. In contrast, (24.76%) of respondents think the current laws are sufficient.

(Primary Data: Question 13)

Do you believe that the government should establish more strict guidelines for advertisements?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	365	87.74%
No	51	12.26%
Total	416	100.00%

An overwhelming (87.74%) of respondents believe that the government should implement stricter guidelines for advertisements to protect consumers. Only (12.26%) of respondents disagree with this sentiment.

(Primary Data: Question 14)

Do you believe that chocolates and protein bars contain more sugar than their primary ingredients? (i.e. Cocoa, protein)	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	353	84.86%
No	63	15.14%
Total	416	100.00%

A substantial (84.86%) of respondents believe that chocolates and protein bars contain more sugar than their primary ingredients like cocoa or protein. On the other hand, (15.14%) of respondents do not share this belief.

(Primary Data: Question 15)

Products with high sugar content in the name of fruit juice, health drink- (Bournvita and Horlicks) and tomato ketchups, have contributed to rise in diabetes in India ?”	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	348	83.65%
No	68	16.35%
Total	416	100.00%

The survey indicates that (83.65%) of respondents believe that products with high sugar content, marketed as fruit juices or health drinks, have contributed to the rise in diabetes in India. Meanwhile, (16.35%) of respondents do not believe these products are a contributing factor.

(Primary Data: Question 16)

Through which medium do you watch the advertisements more ?	Frequency	Percentage
Television	158	18.76%
Bill Board	136	16.15%
Social Media	319	37.89%
Newspaper	127	15.08%
Pamphlets	102	12.11%
TOTAL	842	100.00%

Social Media is the most dominant medium for watching advertisements, accounting for (37.89%) of the total. This is followed by Television at (18.76%) and BillBoards at (16.15%), while Newspapers and Pamphlets have the lowest percentages at (15.08%) and (12.11%), respectively. This suggests a significant shift towards digital platforms for advertising exposure.

(Primary Data: Question 17)

Select the product category of Multinational Corporation that does Misleading Advertisement.	Frequency	Percentage
Wafers (Lay's , Balaji , Pringles , etc.)	109	08.423%
Biscuits (Good day , Tiger , Oreo , etc.)	101	07.805%
Health Proteins / Health Drinks (Protein-ex , Bourn vita , Horlicks, etc.)	213	16.461%
Noodles (Maggi , Yippee , Patanjali ,etc.)	232	17.929%
Soft Drinks (Coca cola , Pepsi , etc.)	189	14.606%
Sauces (Kissan Ketchup, Maggi Ketchup, Heinz Ketchup,etc.)	132	10.201%
Dairy Products (Amul , Mother Dairy , Punjab Sind , etc.)	130	10.046%
Frozen Foods (McCain , Godrej yummiiez , etc.)	99	07.651%
Cereals (Kellogg's , Nestle , etc.)	89	06.878%
Total	1294	100.00%

Noodles (17.929%) and Health protein drinks (16.461%) have the highest frequency of Misleading Advertisements, followed by Soft Drinks (14.606%), while categories like Biscuits (7.805%) and Wafers (8.423%) have relatively lower frequencies.

(Primary Data: Question 18)

How do you usually stay aware about misleading advertisements?
Always look up reviews and company info before purchasing.
Verify if the product has official endorsements or certifications.
Carefully read all terms, conditions, and disclaimers.
Check similar products to see if the claims are realistic.
Use the BBB or FTC to report and investigate dubious ads.

Researching the product and company is a highly effective strategy to verify legitimacy. Checking for official certifications ensures credibility of claims. Reading the fine print, comparing with competitors, and reporting suspicious ads are also crucial to uncover hidden conditions, validate claims, and mitigate misleading advertisements. These are the five best responses for staying aware of misleading advertisements.

(Primary Data: Question 19)

Give Your Opinion On The Concept Of Food Rating?
Helps consumers make informed decisions about food quality.
Drives restaurants and producers to improve offerings.
Provides clear insights into food quality and safety.
Boosts visibility and business for local eateries
Can be influenced by personal taste and experiences.

Food ratings help consumers make informed decisions and drive improvements in restaurant and producer offerings. They provide clear insights into quality and safety while boosting visibility for local eateries. However, ratings can also be influenced by personal taste and experiences. These are the five best responses for opinions on food rating.

FINDINGS:

As per the Researcher's Findings: -

1. The majority of respondents in Mumbai City are aged 18 to 30 years, representing (52.64%) of the total, with the 31 to 45 years' age group following closely at (31.49%).
2. Males slightly outnumber females, comprising (51.68%) of the respondents compared to (48.32%), indicating a nearly balanced gender distribution.
3. The majority of respondents are undergraduates, accounting for (29.57%) of the total, while partial illiterates represent a smaller portion at just (5.05%).
4. Students constitute the largest occupational group, making up (42.31%) of the total, while homemakers represent the smallest group at (11.06%).
5. The majority, (86.30%), agrees that advertisements provide consumers with a wealth of information.

6. (84.62%) respondents find advertisements misleading.
7. The data reveals that (63.22%) of respondents are aware of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
8. According to the research (76.92%) respondents depended on advertisements while making purchase decisions.
9. (65.63%) of respondents are dissatisfied with the claims made by multinational companies in their advertisements.
10. A significant majority of respondents (77.88%) reported that they read product labels before making a purchase which indicates consumers are highly aware.
11. The majority of respondents (64.90%) do not agree with the claims made by multinational companies about their products in the advertisements.
12. (75.24%) of respondents believe that the existing legal framework is insufficient to protect consumers from misleading advertisements.
13. (87.74%) of respondents feel that the government should build stricter guidelines to protect the consumers against misleading advertisements.
14. Most of the respondents (84.86%) believe that chocolates and protein bars contain more sugar than mentioned on the labels.
15. The survey reveals that (83.65%) of respondents think that high-sugar products, marketed as fruit juices or health drinks, have played a significant role in the increase of diabetes in India, while (16.35%) disagree with this view.
16. Social media is the most common platform for viewing advertisements, accounting for (37.89%) of the total. Television and billboards follow, with (18.76%) and (16.15%) respectively, highlighting the continued significance of traditional media.
17. Noodles (17.929%) and health proteins/drinks (16.461%) show the highest rates of misleading advertisements among product categories. In contrast, biscuits (7.805%) and wafers (8.423%) experience significantly fewer misleading ads, indicating that these categories are less affected by deceptive advertising practices.
18. Researching the product and company, checking for official certifications, reading the fine print, comparing with competitors, and reporting suspicious ads are the five best responses for staying aware of misleading advertisements. These strategies help verify legitimacy, ensure credibility, uncover hidden conditions, validate claims, and mitigate misleading ads.
19. Food ratings are crucial for informed consumer choices and driving improvements in food quality. They also boost local business visibility, though they can be influenced by personal taste and experiences.

CONCLUSION:

The findings reveal that a substantial portion of respondents in suburban Mumbai City are aware of misleading advertisements, with a majority expressing dissatisfaction with the claims made by multinational companies. Despite this awareness, many consumers still rely on advertisements when making purchasing decisions, highlighting the powerful influence of marketing campaigns. The study also indicates a significant concern about the adequacy of existing legal frameworks, with many respondents calling for stricter government guidelines to protect consumers. Furthermore, the analysis shows that misleading advertisements are particularly prevalent in specific product categories, such as noodles and health proteins/drinks, and that social media is the dominant platform for viewing ads. These results underscore the need for greater consumer education and more robust legal measures to combat deceptive marketing practices, ensuring that consumers are better protected and informed.

ECONOMIC RELEVANCE:**1. Consumer Spending and Economic Efficiency:**

Misleading advertisements can lead to inefficient consumer spending across India. When consumers are deceived, they may make purchases that do not meet their needs or expectations, resulting in wasted resources and potential financial losses. Enhancing awareness and regulatory measures can improve consumer decision-making and boost overall economic efficiency.

2. Impact on Market Competition:

Misleading marketing campaigns can disrupt fair competition within the Indian market. Multinational companies that use deceptive tactics gain an unfair advantage over local and honest competitors, which can stifle innovation and reduce market diversity. Addressing these practices helps create a more level playing field and fosters a competitive business environment.

3. Regulatory and Legal Framework Costs:

The national enforcement of regulations against misleading advertising involves substantial costs. This includes regulatory oversight, legal proceedings, and enforcement actions. Efficient and effective regulation is essential to protect consumers without imposing excessive burdens on public resources and administrative systems.

4. Consumer Confidence and Economic Stability:

Persistent issues with misleading advertisements can erode consumer trust in the market, leading to decreased consumer spending and potentially slowing economic growth. By strengthening consumer protection laws and improving transparency, the study's insights can help restore consumer confidence and support stable economic conditions across India.

5. Public Health and Economic Burden:

The analysis of unhealthy ingredients in products reveals potential public health risks, which can lead to increased healthcare costs and strain on public health resources. By addressing misleading claims related to product safety and health benefits, the study can contribute to reducing public health expenditures and improving overall societal well-being.

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