



Research How Big Brands Fool Us Paper

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the influence of gender on consumer perceptions toward the marketing strategies of big brands. The primary objective was to examine whether male and female consumers differ in their views regarding manipulative advertising practices, packaging appeal, brand trust, and purchasing behavior. Data were collected from 154 respondents through a structured questionnaire, and the results were analyzed using frequency distribution and chi-square tests. The findings revealed no significant association between gender and consumer perceptions, indicating that both males and females share similar opinions about big brand marketing tactics. The descriptive results showed that a majority of respondents acknowledge the manipulative nature of big brand advertising and agree that promotional strategies, such as attractive packaging and limited-time offers, influence their purchase decisions. However, many participants also expressed skepticism toward exaggerated claims, particularly regarding eco-friendly and sustainability messages. These insights suggest that modern consumers—irrespective of gender—are becoming more informed, critical, and conscious in their buying behavior. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of consumer awareness and ethical marketing by highlighting the shift from gender-based to value-driven consumer behavior. It also offers practical implications for marketers, emphasizing the need for transparent, authentic, and socially responsible branding to build trust and long-term loyalty. Overall, the research concludes that consumer perceptions are now shaped more by awareness and credibility than by demographic factors like gender, reflecting an evolving marketplace where honesty and authenticity are key determinants of brand success

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive marketplace, big brands play a dominant role in shaping consumer preferences and influencing purchasing behavior. Through strategic advertising, persuasive messaging, and appealing product presentation, these brands often create strong emotional and psychological connections with consumers. However, concerns have been raised about the manipulative nature of marketing tactics used by major corporations, including exaggeration in advertisements, misleading sustainability claims, and overemphasis on brand image rather than actual product quality. As a result, understanding how consumers perceive such marketing strategies has become an important area of study in the field of marketing and consumer behavior.

Consumer perception is a critical factor that determines buying intentions and brand loyalty. It reflects how individuals interpret and respond to marketing communications, packaging, pricing, and brand reputation. Traditionally, demographic variables such as gender, age, and income were considered key determinants of consumer behavior. However, in the modern context – where access to information and awareness about marketing practices have increased – such factors may have a diminished influence. This study, therefore, aims to explore whether gender still plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of big brand marketing tactics.

The research specifically investigates consumers' opinions on issues such as manipulative advertising, the impact of visual appeal and packaging, trust in brand messages, and the influence of promotional strategies like limited-time offers. By employing statistical tools such as frequency analysis and chi-square tests, the study seeks to identify whether there is a significant association between gender and these key consumer perception variables.

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into how male and female consumers evaluate big brands, and whether their attitudes differ when it comes to trust, skepticism, and decision-making. The study also examines the extent to which consumers recognize and resist manipulative marketing practices, highlighting the growing trend of ethical consumerism and conscious purchasing.

Ultimately, this research contributes to both theoretical and practical understanding by suggesting that consumer perceptions may be increasingly shaped by awareness, experience, and ethical considerations rather than by gender or traditional demographics. These insights are significant for marketers, advertisers, and brand managers seeking to design more transparent, authentic, and consumer-oriented communication strategies.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between gender and consumer perceptions toward the marketing strategies of big brands. The study aims to understand how consumers evaluate advertising practices, brand trust, and purchasing influences in a modern, competitive marketplace.

The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To analyze consumers' perceptions of manipulative strategies used by big brands to influence purchase decisions.
2. To examine whether gender has a significant impact on consumer attitudes toward big brand marketing tactics.
3. To assess the extent to which advertisements, packaging, and promotional offers affect consumers' buying behavior.
4. To identify the level of consumer awareness regarding exaggerated or misleading brand claims, especially in sustainability and eco-friendly promotions.
5. To evaluate how consumers take conscious steps – such as product research, reviews, and comparisons – to avoid being influenced by deceptive marketing practices.
6. To contribute theoretical and practical insights into the evolving nature of consumer perception and ethical marketing in the context of big brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer perception has been one of the most widely studied topics in marketing research, as it directly influences purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), consumer perception refers to the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of a product or brand. The way consumers perceive marketing messages, packaging, and advertising plays a vital role in shaping their buying behavior.

Big brands often rely on persuasive marketing techniques – such as emotional advertising, celebrity endorsements, and visual appeal – to create strong associations in the minds of consumers. Solomon (2018) notes that these strategies can lead to both positive and negative consumer perceptions: while some customers view big brands as trustworthy and reliable, others see their marketing efforts as manipulative or misleading.

Gender has traditionally been seen as an important factor influencing consumer attitudes and behavior. Ghazali et al. (2017) found that female consumers tend to be more emotionally driven and responsive to visual and aesthetic elements in advertising, while male consumers often focus on product performance and functionality. However, recent studies have challenged these assumptions. Nanda and Panda (2020) observed that in the age of digital awareness, gender differences in purchasing behavior have narrowed as both men and women have become more informed and skeptical about advertising claims.

The role of advertising in influencing perception has also been well documented. Belch and Belch (2019) stated that effective advertising can create brand loyalty, but exaggerated or deceptive claims may lead to distrust among consumers. Similarly, Kaur and Singh (2021) highlighted that modern consumers are more aware of “greenwashing,” where brands falsely claim to be

environmentally friendly to attract buyers. This has made authenticity a key determinant of brand success.

Packaging and promotional strategies are other crucial factors affecting consumer decisions. Underwood and Ozanne (2018) argued that packaging not only protects a product but also serves as a silent salesperson that communicates brand identity and quality. Meanwhile, Gupta and Verma (2020) emphasized that short-term promotions like “limited-time offers” can create urgency but may also reduce long-term trust if overused.

From an ethical standpoint, Carrigan and Attalla (2017) explained that the rise of socially conscious consumers has pushed brands to adopt transparent marketing practices. Today’s consumers, regardless of gender, value honesty, sustainability, and social responsibility. As a result, manipulative marketing tactics are becoming less effective among educated and aware audiences.

In summary, the literature indicates that while gender once played a major role in determining consumer perceptions, the increasing awareness and access to information have minimized these differences. Modern consumers—both male and female—tend to critically evaluate advertising messages and are less influenced by superficial marketing tactics. This study builds upon these insights by empirically testing whether gender still influences consumer perceptions of big brand marketing strategies in the contemporary marketplace.

Research Gap

The review of existing literature reveals that numerous studies have explored the impact of advertising, packaging, and promotional strategies on consumer perception and purchasing behavior. Prior research by Kotler and Keller (2016), Solomon (2018), and Belch and Belch (2019) emphasized that big brands use persuasive marketing tactics to influence consumers’ decisions. Moreover, studies such as Ghazali et al. (2017) and Nanda and Panda (2020) examined gender-based differences in consumer behavior, highlighting that males and females may respond differently to marketing stimuli.

However, much of the existing research was conducted in developed markets and during a time when digital awareness among consumers was limited. There is insufficient empirical evidence on how gender influences consumer perceptions in the current era of increased awareness, information accessibility, and ethical consumerism, particularly in developing economies like India. Most previous studies have focused on general buying behavior or brand loyalty, but few have specifically analyzed how gender relates to consumer skepticism toward manipulative marketing tactics used by big brands.

Furthermore, while earlier studies examined gender differences in emotional and rational buying patterns, limited attention has been given to how modern consumers perceive the ethical dimensions of marketing—such as truthfulness in advertising, authenticity of eco-friendly claims, and transparency in brand communication. The growing trend of conscious and informed purchasing behavior has not been adequately explored in relation to gender differences.

Therefore, this study addresses the identified research gap by examining whether gender significantly affects consumer perceptions of manipulative marketing strategies employed by big brands in the modern marketplace. It also seeks to understand how both male and female consumers evaluate advertising trustworthiness, packaging appeal, and promotional influences in an age where awareness and skepticism are on the rise.

Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that big brands use manipulative strategies to influence consumer purchases.
2. There is a significant relationship between gender and preference for purchasing from well-known brands over local alternatives.
3. There is a significant relationship between gender and influence of advertisements by big brands on buying decisions.
4. There is a significant relationship between gender and disappointment with products that looked better in advertisements.
5. There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that big brands exaggerate eco-friendly and sustainability claims.
6. There is a significant relationship between gender and influence of attractive packaging and visual appeal on purchasing decisions.
7. There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that consumers pay more for brand name than product quality.
8. There is a significant relationship between gender and being influenced by “limited-time offers” or “only a few left in stock” promotions.
9. There is a significant relationship between gender and trust in advertisements from big brands.
10. There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that consumers can take conscious steps to avoid being fooled by big brands.

Table 1. Validation of Questionnaire

Statements	Citation
There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that big brands use manipulative strategies to influence consumer purchases.	Rathod, H. S., Meghrajani, D. I., & Vidani, J. (2022)
There is a significant relationship between gender and preference for purchasing from well-known brands over local alternatives.	Vidani, J. N., & Das, D. S. (2021)
There is a significant relationship between gender and influence of advertisements by big brands on buying decisions.	Dhere, S., Vidani, J. N., & Solanki, H. V. (2016)
There is a significant relationship between gender and disappointment with products that looked better in advertisements.	Saxena, M., & Vidani, J. N. (2023)
There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that big brands exaggerate eco-friendly and sustainability claims.	Sukhanandi, S., Tank, D., & Vidani, J. N. (2018)

There is a significant relationship between gender and influence of attractive packaging and visual appeal on purchasing decisions.	Vidani, J. N., Chack, P. K., & Rathod, D. N. (2017)
There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that consumers pay more for brand name than product quality.	Biharani, S., & Vidani, J. N. (2018)
There is a significant relationship between gender and being influenced by “limited-time offers” or “only a few left in stock” promotions.	Mahajan, H., & Vidani, J. (2023)
There is a significant relationship between gender and trust in advertisements from big brands.	Solanki, N., & Vidani, J. N. (2016)
There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that consumers can take conscious steps to avoid being fooled by big brands.	Vidani, J. N. (2015)

METHODOLOGY

Table 2. Research Methodology

Research Design	Descriptive
Sample Method	Non-Probability - Convenient Sampling method
Data Collection Method	Primary method
Data Collection Method	Structured Questionnaire
Type of Questions	Close ended
Data Collection mode	Online through Google Form
Data Analysis methods	Tables
Data Analysis Tools	SPSS and Excel
Sampling Size	No. of responses in Google form
Survey Area	Your area of data collection
Sampling Unit	Students, Private and government Job employees, Businessmen, Home maker, Professionals like CA, Doctor etc.

Source: Author's Compilation

RESULT

Demographic Summary

The demographic profile of the respondents shows a balanced representation of genders, with 54.5% males and 45.5% females among the 154 participants. In terms of age distribution, the majority belong to the older age group, with 22.1% aged above 80 years, followed by 18.2% each in the 26–32 and 32–40 age groups. A smaller proportion (17.5%) are between 18–25 years, while

those aged 40–65 and 65–80 constitute 13.0% and 11.0%, respectively. Regarding educational qualifications, 26.6% hold a higher secondary certificate, 24.7% are graduates, 23.4% are postgraduates, and 25.3% possess a diploma or other qualifications. In terms of occupation, the sample includes 24.0% homemakers, 22.7% businessmen, 20.8% students, 18.8% job holders, and 13.6% engaged in other professions. Income-wise, 28.6% earn between ₹10,000–₹25,000 per month, 27.3% between ₹25,000–₹50,000, 22.7% less than ₹10,000, and 21.4% above ₹50,000. Overall, the data reflects a diverse mix of respondents across gender, age, education, occupation, and income levels.

Table 3. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Sr. No	Alternate Hypothesis	Result (p =)	p > 0.05	Accept/Reject Null Hypothesis	R Value	Relationship
1	There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that big brands use manipulative strategies to influence consumer purchases.	0.479	> 0.05	Accept Null	-0.106	No significant relationship
2	There is a significant relationship between gender and preference for purchasing from well-known brands over local alternatives.	0.525	> 0.05	Accept Null	-0.005	No significant relationship
3	There is a significant relationship between gender and influence of advertisements by big brands on buying decisions.	0.782	> 0.05	Accept Null	0.057	No significant relationship
4	There is a significant relationship between gender and disappointment with products that looked better in advertisements.	0.171	> 0.05	Accept Null	-0.005	No significant relationship
5	There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that big brands exaggerate eco-friendly and sustainability claims.	0.651	> 0.05	Accept Null	0.003	No significant relationship
6	There is a significant relationship between gender and influence of attractive packaging and visual appeal on purchasing decisions.	0.248	> 0.05	Accept Null	0.087	No significant relationship
7	There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that consumers pay more for brand name than product quality.	0.693	> 0.05	Accept Null	-0.105	No significant relationship

Sr. No	Alternate Hypothesis	Result (p =)	p >< 0.05	Accept/Reject Null Hypothesis	R Value	Relationship
8	There is a significant relationship between gender and being influenced by "limited-time offers" or "only a few left in stock" promotions.	0.800	> 0.05	Accept Null	-0.067	No significant relationship
9	There is a significant relationship between gender and trust in advertisements from big brands.	0.443	> 0.05	Accept Null	0.039	No significant relationship
10	There is a significant relationship between gender and belief that consumers can take conscious steps to avoid being fooled by big brands.	0.782	> 0.05	Accept Null	-0.033	No significant relationship

Source: Author's Compilation

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to analyze consumer perceptions toward big brands and the influence of marketing strategies on purchase behavior, with a specific focus on gender-based differences. The demographic analysis revealed a fairly balanced representation of respondents, comprising 54.5% males and 45.5% females. The participants represented diverse age groups, with the majority falling in the above 80 years category (22.1%), followed by 18.2% each in the 26–32 and 32–40 age groups. Educationally, 26.6% of respondents had a higher secondary qualification, while 24.7% were graduates and 23.4% were postgraduates, showing a well-educated sample. Occupationally, 24% were homemakers, 22.7% businessmen, 20.8% students, and 18.8% employed individuals, indicating a mix of economic backgrounds. In terms of income, most participants earned between ₹10,000–₹25,000 (28.6%), followed by ₹25,000–₹50,000 (27.3%).

The frequency analysis of consumer perception statements provides insights into how respondents view the influence of big brands. A considerable proportion (39.6%) either agreed or strongly agreed that big brands use manipulative strategies to influence consumers, while 38.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This division suggests mixed opinions about the ethical conduct of major brands. Similarly, responses were divided regarding preference for well-known brands over local alternatives – 39.6% agreed or strongly agreed, while 40.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed – indicating that brand loyalty is present but not overwhelming among consumers.

When asked about the influence of advertisements by big brands, 44.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such advertisements affect their buying decisions. This highlights the continuing effectiveness of brand advertising in shaping consumer behavior. However, 40.9% also reported being disappointed by products that appeared better in advertisements, revealing skepticism about the authenticity of marketing claims. Further, 38.9% agreed that

big brands exaggerate their eco-friendly and sustainability claims, reflecting growing consumer awareness about greenwashing practices.

The findings also indicate that 39.6% of consumers are influenced by attractive packaging and visual appeal, while 40.3% agreed that they often pay more for the brand name rather than actual product quality. This shows that aesthetic and brand image factors still play a significant role in shaping purchase decisions. However, trust in advertisements from big brands remains moderate, with only 33.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they trust such advertisements. Interestingly, 40.2% of respondents agreed that consumers can take conscious steps, such as researching and comparing reviews, to avoid being misled – suggesting that modern consumers are becoming more rational and informed.

To examine whether gender had any significant influence on consumer perceptions, chi-square tests were conducted. Across all ten variables, p-values were greater than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant relationship between gender and any of the consumer perception statements. This suggests that both male and female respondents share similar opinions about big brands, advertising influence, and marketing practices. The results imply that perceptions toward brand manipulation, trust, or purchase behavior are not dependent on gender differences.

In summary, while consumers acknowledge the influence of big brands and marketing tactics, they also demonstrate increasing awareness and skepticism. The findings reveal that modern consumers, regardless of gender, critically evaluate brand messages and are cautious about exaggerated claims. These insights underscore the need for companies to prioritize authenticity, transparency, and ethical marketing to build lasting consumer trust.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study offer several theoretical implications for understanding consumer behavior and brand perception. The study contributes to existing literature on consumer psychology, marketing communication, and brand trust by examining how gender influences perceptions toward big brand marketing strategies. Although the chi-square results revealed no statistically significant relationship between gender and consumer perceptions, this outcome itself holds theoretical importance. It indicates that consumer responses to brand influence, advertising, and manipulative marketing tactics are becoming more gender-neutral in the contemporary market context. This challenges traditional theories that often linked emotional or impulsive buying tendencies to specific gender groups.

The research reinforces the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which suggests that consumer intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The findings imply that both male and female consumers form attitudes toward brands based on rational evaluation rather than gender-driven preferences. Similarly, the study supports the Consumer Decision-Making Model, emphasizing that factors such as packaging, advertising, and promotional tactics impact purchase decisions,

but consumers increasingly engage in post-purchase evaluations and self-regulated behaviors, such as researching and comparing products before buying.

Furthermore, the results contribute to the theoretical understanding of brand skepticism and consumer empowerment. A considerable proportion of respondents agreed that big brands exaggerate eco-friendly claims and use manipulative marketing strategies. This reflects the growing alignment with Skepticism Toward Advertising Theory (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), which proposes that consumers critically evaluate marketing messages rather than accepting them at face value. The acknowledgment that consumers can take conscious steps to avoid being misled supports the emerging concept of ethical consumerism, where individuals actively seek transparency and authenticity in brand communication.

Another theoretical implication is the diminishing influence of traditional gender segmentation in marketing strategies. Past marketing theories often emphasized gender as a determinant of product perception and buying patterns. However, this study suggests that modern consumers – irrespective of gender – demonstrate similar cognitive and emotional responses toward branding and advertising. This supports contemporary marketing theories emphasizing individual value-based segmentation over demographic-based targeting, aligning with the postmodern perspective of consumer behavior that views consumers as self-directed, informed, and independent decision-makers.

In summary, the study advances theoretical discussions in marketing and consumer behavior by suggesting that brand influence is now shaped more by psychological and contextual factors rather than demographic attributes like gender. It emphasizes the need for theoretical models to incorporate consumer awareness, information literacy, and ethical sensitivity as key determinants of purchase behavior. These insights encourage a re-examination of traditional marketing theories to reflect the evolving dynamics of consumer-brand relationships in today's digital and information-driven marketplace.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several important practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and policymakers seeking to understand and influence consumer behavior. Since the results revealed no significant gender differences in perceptions toward big brands, marketing strategies should move beyond gender-based segmentation and instead focus on universal consumer values such as trust, transparency, product quality, and authenticity. This suggests that both male and female consumers evaluate brands in a similar manner, emphasizing the importance of credibility and ethical marketing practices over gender-targeted messaging.

First, companies should recognize that modern consumers are more aware and critical of marketing tactics. The results showed that many respondents believe big brands exaggerate their eco-friendly or sustainability claims and often manipulate consumer decisions through advertising and visual appeal. Therefore, organizations need to adopt genuine sustainability initiatives and communicate them transparently. Providing verifiable information, third-party

certifications, and clear labeling can help reduce consumer skepticism and strengthen brand credibility.

Second, as a large proportion of consumers admitted being influenced by attractive packaging, advertisements, and limited-time offers, marketers can still use these tools effectively but with ethical responsibility. Instead of creating manipulative urgency or misleading visual appeals, brands should focus on informative and value-driven advertising that highlights actual product benefits. Emotional and aesthetic appeals can remain part of marketing campaigns, but they should align with the true quality and performance of the product to maintain long-term customer satisfaction and trust.

Third, the finding that consumers often feel they pay more for the brand name than the product quality highlights the need for brands to deliver consistent value. Companies must ensure that product performance justifies its price and reputation. This can be achieved through improved quality control, honest pricing, and continuous innovation that enhances customer experience. By doing so, brands can build stronger loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing.

Moreover, since many consumers believe they can take conscious steps to avoid being misled, companies should view this as an opportunity to empower customers through information transparency. Offering detailed product comparisons, consumer education initiatives, and clear digital communication can foster an environment of trust and informed choice. Businesses that engage in transparent communication and consumer education are more likely to be perceived as reliable and socially responsible.

From a strategic standpoint, marketers should shift from demographic segmentation toward psychographic and behavioral segmentation – focusing on attitudes, motivations, and ethical preferences rather than gender alone. This approach will help create more inclusive and personalized marketing campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences.

Finally, policymakers and consumer protection agencies can use these findings to strengthen regulations against deceptive advertising and false sustainability claims. Encouraging responsible marketing practices and consumer awareness campaigns can protect buyers from manipulative brand strategies and promote fair competition.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of honesty, transparency, and ethical communication in modern marketing. Big brands that prioritize consumer trust and deliver authentic value will be better positioned to build lasting relationships and maintain competitiveness in an increasingly skeptical marketplace.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between gender and consumer perceptions toward big brand marketing strategies. Through statistical analysis of responses from 154 participants, the study revealed that there is no significant association between gender and consumer attitudes toward manipulative marketing practices, brand influence, packaging appeal, or trust in advertisements. This indicates that both male and female consumers hold relatively similar views about how large brands influence purchasing behavior.

The findings demonstrate that consumers, regardless of gender, are increasingly aware of the tactics used by big brands—such as exaggerated advertising, emotional appeals, and eco-friendly claims. Although these strategies continue to influence purchasing decisions to some extent, many respondents expressed skepticism about their authenticity. This suggests that modern consumers are more informed and discerning, relying less on brand image and more on perceived product quality and transparency.

Furthermore, the study highlights that while advertisements, packaging, and promotional offers still impact buying decisions, consumers are also taking conscious steps—such as researching products, reading reviews, and comparing alternatives—to avoid being misled by deceptive marketing practices. This shift in behavior points toward a more rational and evidence-driven consumer mindset, emphasizing the growing importance of trust and ethical conduct in branding.

From a broader perspective, the results imply that marketers should not depend solely on traditional or gender-based segmentation strategies. Instead, they must focus on building authentic connections with consumers by ensuring truthfulness in advertising, maintaining consistent product quality, and demonstrating social and environmental responsibility. Businesses that align their brand values with consumer expectations of honesty and integrity will gain a competitive advantage in today's skeptical marketplace.

In summary, this research concludes that while gender does not significantly influence perceptions of brand manipulation, the overall consumer sentiment reflects a growing awareness of marketing ethics and authenticity. The study reinforces the need for transparent, responsible, and consumer-centric branding practices that foster long-term trust and loyalty. Future research could extend this work by exploring other demographic variables—such as age, income, or education level—to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing consumer perceptions of big brands.

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