

**AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION INTO ETHICAL MARKETING'S
EFFECTIVENESS IN PREVENTING CONSUMER MANIPULATION**

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ABSTRACT

In today's cutthroat business world, ethical marketing has become more important than ever. Companies have to find the right balance between persuading customers and avoiding manipulation. As businesses work hard to draw in and keep customers, paying attention to ethical issues in marketing has become a top priority. Ethical marketing means promoting products and services in a way that is honest, clear, and respects consumer rights. This approach aims to build trust and create lasting relationships with customers, instead of using sneaky tactics that might bring quick success but can harm customer trust in the long run. Consumer manipulation, which can show up as misleading ads, false promises, or taking advantage of people, raises serious ethical questions. These manipulative tactics not only hurt consumers but can also ruin a brand's reputation and lead to legal trouble. On the other hand, ethical marketing tries to make sure that marketing practices follow ethical guidelines and respect consumer freedom, leading to more responsible and sustainable business actions. This research looks at how ethical marketing can stop consumer manipulation. By studying how ethical marketing affects what customers think, how they act, and how much they trust a brand, this study aims to give businesses valuable advice on how to use ethical strategies to avoid manipulation and build positive relationships with customers.

KEY WORDS: Ethical marketing, manipulation, consumer

INTRODUCTION:

Ethical marketing is essential for creating a pleasant and sustainable corporate environment. It is an approach to promoting their product and services with fairness, honesty and transparency. Ethical marketing is likely to build strong and trustworthy relationship with their consumers rather than manipulating them.

It serves the ethical principles and values to be followed when communicating about marketing. Businesses have adopted a variety of marketing practices that are ethically and morally appealing the audiences.

In today's competitive marketing world, Consumer manipulation can manifest in various ways however, some typical strategies involve bait and switch advertising, where a product is promoted at a specific price or with particular features, only for the consumer to be redirected to an alternative product or price. An alternative strategies involve generating fake reviews or testimonials, in which a business fabricates false reviews or compensate individuals to deliver favourable reviews. Furthermore, businesses might employ aggressive sales techniques, like time sensitive promotion or scarcity strategies, to generate a misleading impression urgency and buyers into completing a transaction.

SCOPE OF STUDY:

This study explores that how ethical marketing preventing consumer manipulations in Chennai. This study seeks to conduct an empirical investigation into the effectiveness of ethical marketing in preventing consumer manipulation. It highlights the role of ethical practices in building trustworthy relationship with consumers.

OBJECTIVES:

- To evaluate the level of consumer awareness regarding ethical marketing practices and how they influence purchase decisions.
- To identify which ethical marketing practices (e.g., transparency, honesty in advertising, respect for consumer privacy) are most effective in preventing consumer manipulation.

- To provide actionable recommendations for businesses to improve their marketing strategies while adhering to ethical principles that reduce the risk of consumer manipulation.

METHODOLOGY:

- Research design: Empirical research
- Sampling technique: Simple random sampling
- Sample area: Chennai city
- Sample size: 220
- Qualitative data: Primary data – a structured questionnaire
- Quantitative data: Secondary data (Books, Journals, websites etc.)
- Analytical tools
 - Percentage analysis
 - Friedman Rank test
 - Chi square test
 - Kruskal Wallis H test

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

1. **Dr. Fazle Malik (2023)** Marketing involves creating, communicating, distributing, and exchanging products and services that provide value to consumers and society. This role emphasizes ethical practices, aligning marketing efforts with modern moral philosophies to ensure fairness, transparency, and responsibility. Ethical marketing ensures integrity in pricing, promotion, and distribution, benefiting both organizations and customers. It also involves critically assessing unethical behaviors, such as unfair pricing, misleading advertising, or discriminatory practices. Marketing ethics highlight the importance of evaluating the morality of marketing decisions, practices, and institutions. Society, as a key stakeholder, is directly affected by marketing initiatives, and its exclusion can damage a company's reputation and success. Ethical marketing serves as a guideline for determining whether marketing actions are positive or negative, reinforcing the need for transparency and accountability to reduce any negative impact on the public and foster trust among all stakeholders.
2. **M. Sri Ram Kailash (2023)** This review paper investigates the rise of ethical consumerism and explores diverse marketing strategies businesses use to appeal to

conscious buyers. It aims to provide a deep understanding of how ethical considerations influence consumer behavior and how businesses can tap into this growing market segment. Through an extensive literature review of scholarly articles, industry reports, case studies, and empirical research, the authors identified key trends and insights into the relationship between ethical consumerism and marketing strategies. The findings highlight the growing importance of ethical considerations in shaping consumer preferences and behaviors. The paper also discusses various effective strategies businesses can use to engage conscious buyers, including cause-related marketing, transparent supply chain communication, eco-friendly packaging, and ethical storytelling. These strategies are crucial for appealing to consumers who prioritize ethical values in their purchasing decisions.

3. **Manoj Kumar Kamila and Sahil Singh Jasrotia (2023)** The study of Ethics and Marketing Responsibility explores the influence of ethics on shaping marketing practices within organizations. It analyzes how ethical considerations affect marketing strategies and assesses the role of responsible marketing in building consumer trust and loyalty. The study seeks to identify the ethical challenges associated with implementing responsible marketing practices. A bibliometric analysis of Ethics and Marketing Responsibility is crucial, as it offers valuable insights into trends and advancements in this area. It highlights the importance of the topic in both academic and business contexts. Through a literature review and bibliometric study, the research emphasizes the need to balance business goals with ethical principles, underlining the advantages of promoting responsible marketing initiatives in modern organizations. In the 21st century, ethical concerns surrounding areas such as 'relationship marketing,' 'social marketing,' 'sustainable marketing,' 'cause-related marketing,' and 'marketing strategy' serve as important warnings for the global community. The findings also support the growing relevance of this concept. By examining patterns in publication and citation data, the study offers a comprehensive overview of research trends and key areas of focus in the field. It suggests that academics and researchers should give greater attention to the fast-evolving marketing landscape to ensure organizations meet their service and marketing commitments, fostering both business growth and stakeholder trust.

4. **Kagendo-Kiarie, R. (2022)** Ethical marketing has gained popularity in recent years due to the increasing participation in ethical consumerism. Today, consumers are more concerned with the impact of their purchases on society and the environment. Furthermore, the responsibility of implementing and pursuing ethical marketing falls on marketing firms and professionals. This chapter's main case study focuses on the food industry, and mini case studies have been used to bring out the ethical misdeeds. The selection of the food industry as the choice case study is based on the fact that it is a global multi-billion industry with long-term health implications for consumers. However, some of the huge profits being reaped by the firms have been associated with unethical marketing practices which have had negative effects on the consumer. The firms that have utilised these unethical marketing practices have provided lessons that their counterparts can take a cue from as they engage in various marketing activities. This chapter has reviewed the scope of ethics in marketing, together with the various concepts and theories that are important in ethical marketing. This chapter further elaborates on the indistinctness between ethical marketing guidelines and government regulations. Guidelines for achieving ethical marketing have been provided by the setting of ethical marketing standards and subscribing to ethical codes of conduct. Although government regulation is a good tool to ensure that marketing is conducted ethically, what may be defined as legal might not be outright ethical or moral from an individual's point of view. In summary, marketers have to strike a balance between using ethical marketing practices and making profit.

DATA ANALYSIS:

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE:

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage
Male	84	38.2
Female	136	61.8
Total	220	100.0

Inference: 61.8 % of the respondents belong to female category.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage
16-27	128	58.2
28-37	22	10.0
38-47	20	9.1

48-57	32	14.5
Above 57	18	8.2
Total	220	100.0

Inference: 58.2% of the respondents belong to the age group of 16-27 years.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage
Higher secondary	36	16.4
Diploma	18	8.2
UG	136	61.8
PG	26	11.8
Professional	2	0.9
PHD	2	0.9
Total	220	100.0

Inference: 63.7% of the respondents are undergraduates.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage
Less than 15000	56	25.5
15000-30000	72	32.7
31000-45000	46	20.9
46000-60000	26	11.8
Above 60000	20	9.1
Total	220	100.0

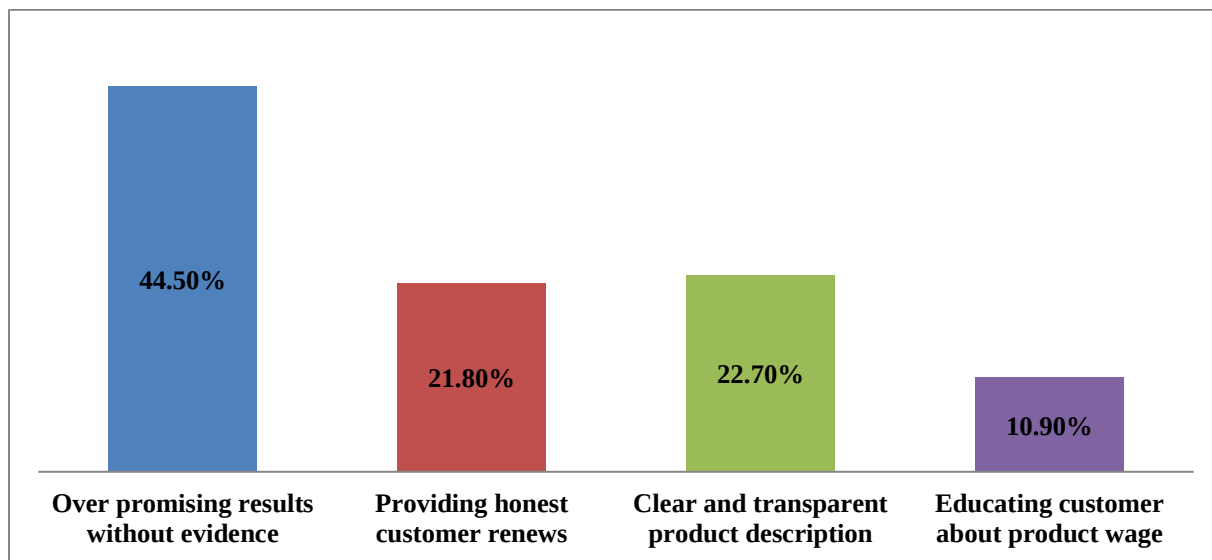
Inference: 70.9% of the respondents resides in Urban area.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage
Urban	156	70.9
Semi-urban	43	19.1
Rural	22	10.0
Total	220	100.0

Inference: 32.7% of the respondents' monthly income falls between Rs. 15000-Rs. 30,000.

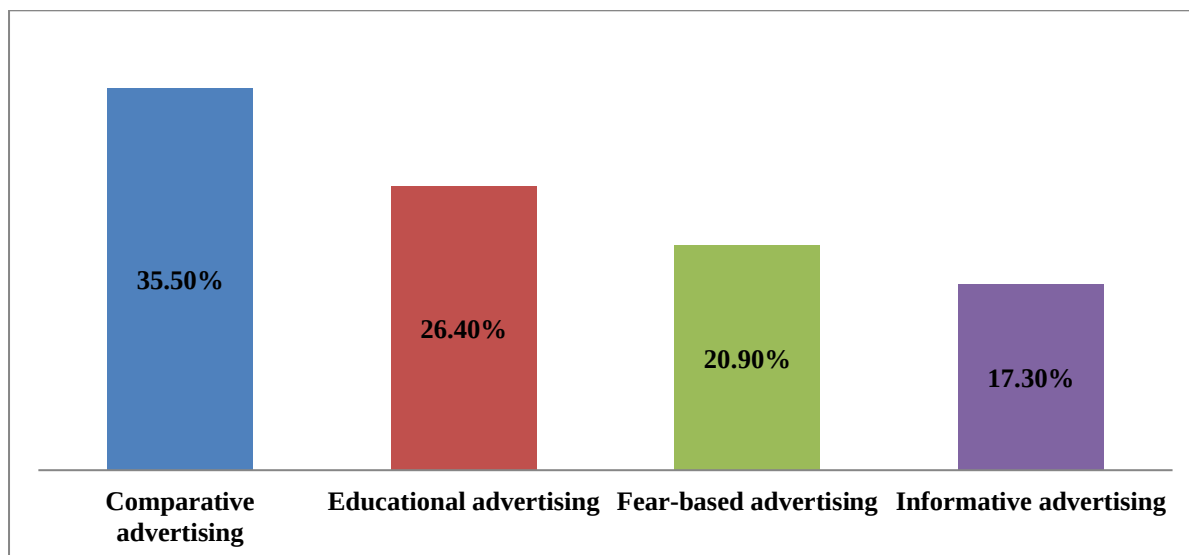
DATA ANALYSIS ABOUT CONSUMER MANIPULATION

MARKETING STRATEGY MOST LIKELY TO MANIPULATE CONSUMERS



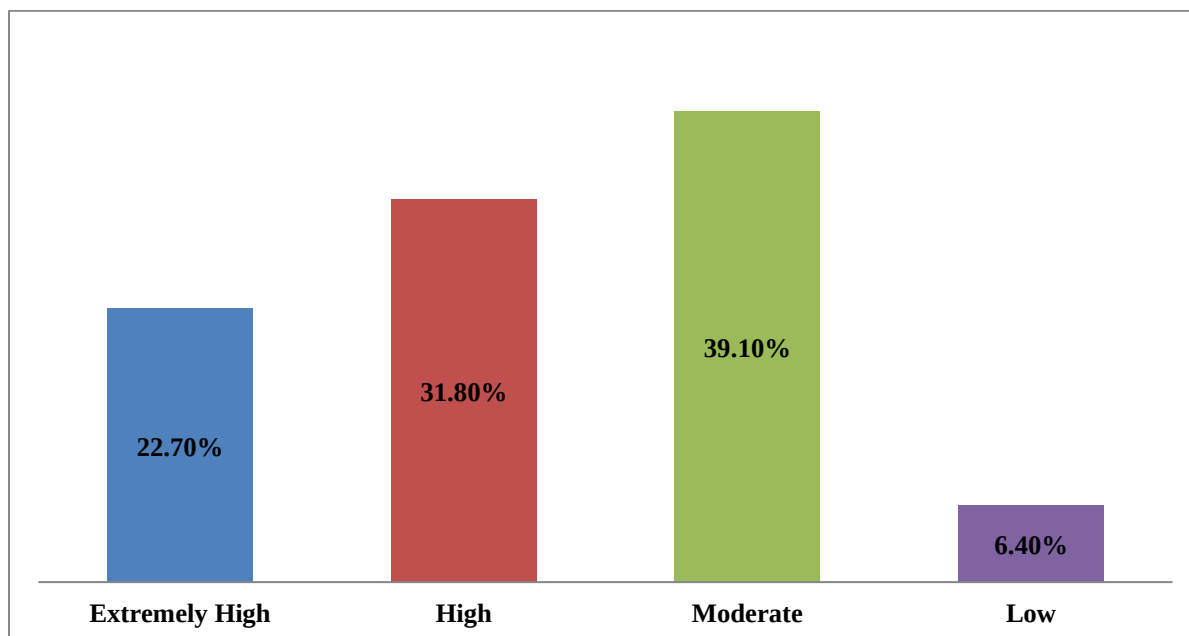
Inference: 44.50% of the respondents' state that over promising results without any evidence is the most used marketing strategy to manipulate consumers.

TYPE OF ADVERTISEMENT THAT IS MOST MANIPULATIVE



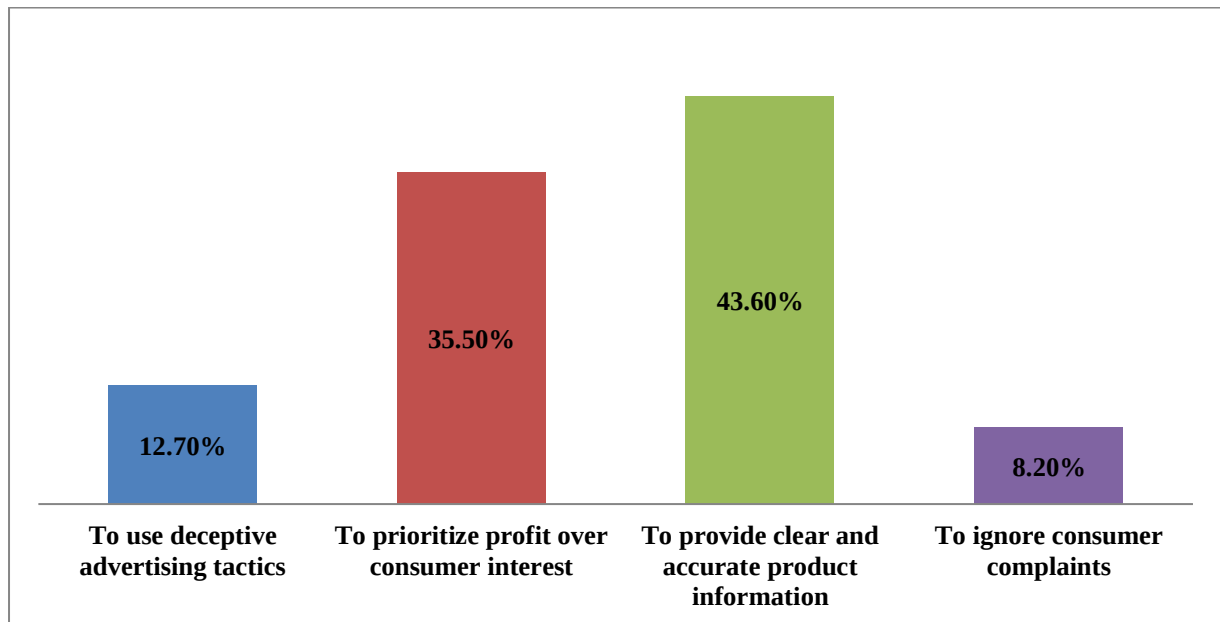
Inference: 38.50% of the respondents' state that comparative advertising is the most manipulative type of advertising.

RATE THE LEVEL OF MANIPULATION IN ADVERTISEMENT TARGETING CHILDREN



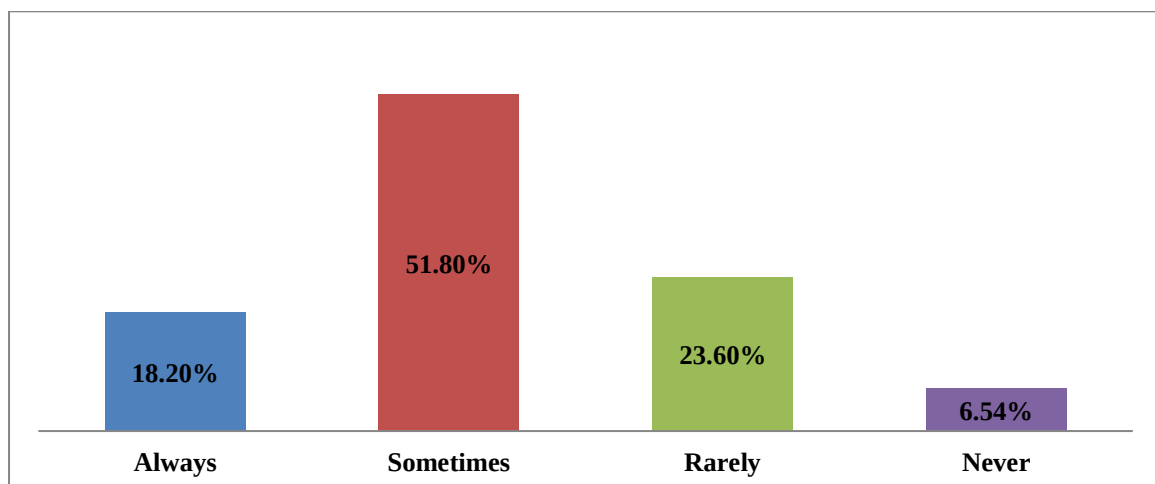
Inference: 39.10% of the respondents rate the level of manipulation in advertisement that target children as moderate.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MARKETERS IN PREVENTING CONSUMER MANIPULATION



Inference: 43.6% of respondents believe that providing clear and accurate product information is a key responsibility of marketers in preventing consumer manipulation.

PREFERENCE FOR PURCHASING FROM BRANDS THAT ADHERE TO ETHICAL MARKETING PRACTICES, EVEN AT A SLIGHTLY HIGHER PRICE



Inference: 51.80% of respondents indicate that they occasionally prefer purchasing from brands that follow ethical marketing practices, even if the price is slightly higher.

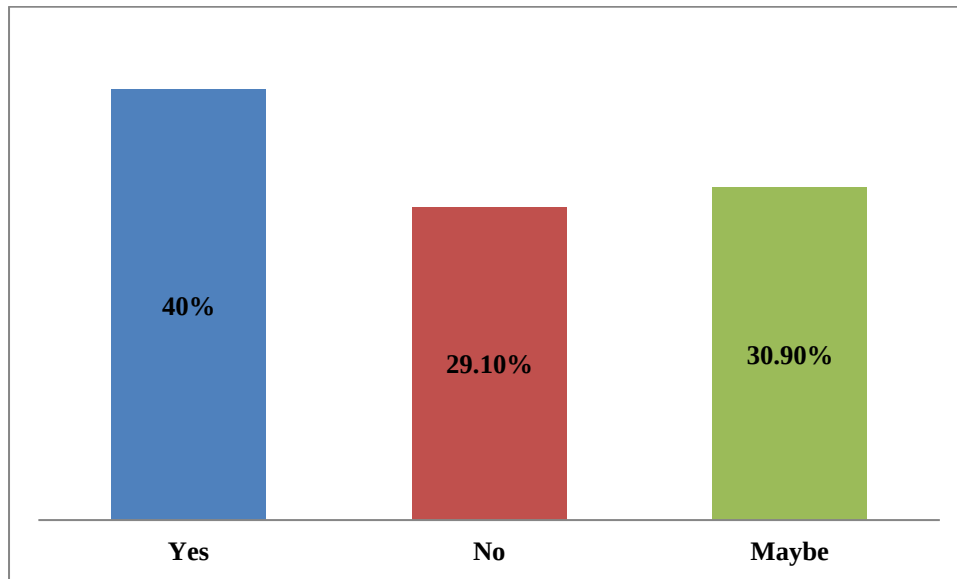
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WOULD CONSIDER SWITCHING BRANDS IF CURRENT PREFERRED COMPANY IS DISCOVERED USING MANIPULATIVE MARKETING TACTICS?



Inference: 40% of respondents would consider switching brands if their current preferred company was found to be using manipulative marketing tactics.

DATA ANALYSIS – FRIEDMAN RANK TEST:

Marketing Strategies Ranked by Their Power to Prevent Manipulation		
Strategies	Mean Rank	Rank
Clear and Honest Advertising	1.79	1
Transparent Pricing	2.38	2
Detailed Product Information	2.96	3
No Manipulative Emotional Appeals	3.7	4
Respect for Consumer Privacy	4.16	5

Strategies such as providing *clear and honest advertising*, ensuring transparency, and avoiding deceptive advertising are likely ranked highest, indicating their crucial role in preventing consumer deception. Lower-ranked strategies, such as price transparency or

respect for consumer privacy, may be viewed as less direct in their ability to prevent manipulation, though still valuable.

DATA ANALYSIS – CHI SQUARE TEST:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between consumer awareness of ethical marketing and their decision-making process.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between consumer awareness of ethical marketing and their decision-making process.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.934 ^a	6	0.063
Likelihood Ratio	12.066	6	0.061
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.872	1	0.009
N of Valid Cases	220		

Inference: Since the asymptotic value (0.063) is more than the table value 0.05, H₀ is accepted and H₁ is rejected. Hence, there is a no significant relationship between consumer awareness of ethical marketing and their decision-making process.

KRUSKAL WALLIS H TEST

H₀: There is no significant difference in perceptions of ethical marketing and its potential for manipulation between different genders.

H₁: There is a significant difference in perceptions of ethical marketing and its potential for manipulation between different genders.

Ranks						
		N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Ethical marketing builds a trust between the consumer and the brand	Male	84	60.51	2.281	1	.131
	Female	136	52.40			
	Total	220				
Ethical marketing practices can reduce consumer manipulation	Male	84	59.48	1.274	1	.259
	Female	136	53.04			
	Total	220				
Consumer awareness campaign	Male	84	56.99	0.185	1	.667

on ethical marketing can reduce manipulation	Female	136	54.58			
	Total	220				
Consumers are aware of I.S.I and Agmark symbols	Male	84	53.37	0.327	1	.568
	Female	136	56.82			
	Total	220				
Consumers are given adequate information voluntarily when they purchase the product	Male	84	50.40	1.849	1	.174
	Female	136	58.65			
	Total	220				
Companies prioritize profit over consumer welfare	Male	84	59.93	1.383	1	.240
	Female	136	52.76			
	Total	220				
Willing to pay a higher price for products from companies that use ethical marketing?	Male	84	53.92	0.178	1	.673
	Female	136	56.48			
	Total	220				
Ethical marketing should be regulated more strictly by the government	Male	84	55.65	0.002	1	.967
	Female	136	55.40			
	Total	220				
Companies that engage in ethical marketing are less likely to manipulate consumers	Male	84	58.67	0.704	1	.402
	Female	136	53.54			
	Total	220				

Since the asymptotic values are more than the table value 0.05, H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected. Hence, there is no significant difference in perceptions of ethical marketing and its potential for manipulation between different genders.

FINDINGS:

- 35.5% of respondents indicated that unethical marketing practices rarely influence their purchasing decisions.
- 44.5% of respondents believe that the marketing strategy most likely to manipulate consumers is making exaggerated promises without providing supporting evidence.
- 35.5% of respondents indicated that Comparative advertising (e.g. "better than competitor X") is most manipulative.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Providing clear and accurate product information is a key responsibility of marketers in preventing consumer manipulation.
- Establish and adhere to a formal code of ethics for marketing activities.

- Businesses should empower consumers by providing educational content that helps them make informed decisions.
- Actively seek and incorporate consumer feedback on marketing practices. Listening to customers allows businesses to adjust their strategies to better meet consumer expectations and avoid manipulative tactics that can harm brand reputation.

CONCLUSION:

The study reveals the significant role that ethical marketing plays in safeguarding consumers from manipulative practices while enhancing trust and loyalty towards brands. The findings indicate that businesses adopting ethical marketing approaches—characterized by transparency, honesty, and fairness—are more successful in earning consumer trust and fostering long-term loyalty. Clear and accurate communication, along with avoiding exaggerated claims or misleading tactics, empowers consumers to make informed decisions, reducing their susceptibility to manipulation.

In conclusion, ethical marketing is not just a moral imperative but a strategic advantage that helps prevent consumer manipulation while promoting sustainable business growth and long-term success.

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