



Evaluating Advertising Literacy of Youth with reference to Deceptive Practices codified by Advertising Standard Council of India: A Study

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Abstract:

In this paper four dimensions of product and value based deception in seven television advertisements were predefined to measure advertising literacy levels of youth in India between the age group of 18-24 at different levels of formal education (n=330) through a field survey. Results establish the need for advertising literacy interventions amongst the youth to deal with deceptive practices in advertising.

Keywords: deceptive advertising, product based claims, value based claims, advertising literacy

Introduction

Advertising was the direct beneficiary of integration of businesses and liberal policies post 1992 new economic reforms in India. Mazzerella (2003) noted that besides, significant economic impact, advertising played a role in the social and cultural lives of the country. In his book *Truth, Lies and Advertising*, Jon Steel quotes Gossage : advertising is not a right , it is a privilege... Our first duty is not to the old sales curve but to the audiences(p7). Furthermore, I wonder if the words of a Mudra ad executive “only advertising that has an Indian soul and an international feel work in the marketplace in contemporary India” hold good?(p.14) More serious to observe is whether advertising is a manifestation of a hybridity, multiplicity and gratification of consumer(s) or a hidden reinforcement of homogeneity and hegemony of global systems(p.17).

1.1 Television Advertising

Viewers in India not only watch advertising messages on television, but also consume these ads on platforms like mobile and PC's. As the digital footprint increases in India, television campaigns are being complemented with the long format online versions to create additional reach. 'Children consume TV ads at home with implicit parent approval and without parental supervision Issues of ethics and morality crop up w.r.t children and ads...' (Baran ,2012,p 384). Within the media mix, television advertising is more critical to any discourse on ad literacy as television visuals are more powerful than audio media or static media like print (Hodge and Trips , 1986). Significant exposure to advertising affects their product choices in the short term and their attitude towards self and society in the long run. The ability to understand and evaluate advertising in terms of its truthfulness i.e. bias or deception amongst

children has been a subject of research in advertising literacy for several decades. (Rossitor & Robertson, 1974; Roedder John, 1999). Previous researches have noted several influencing factors like age, school and media education, family environment, TV and ad exposure and execution formats in advertising. However, there exist other factors that affect the two constructs proposed by Rozendaal: Conceptual Advertising Literacy and the Advertising Literacy Performance.

1.2 Defining Advertising Literacy

Scholars worldwide have attempted to define advertising literacy and explain its various components O'Donahoe and Tynan, 1998; Malmelin, 2010; Eagle, 2007, and Ritson, 1995). Literacy can be defined as 'literate', in the strict sense refers to the ability to read and comprehend text. (O'Donahoe and Tynan, 1998: 2) Literacy can also be understood as the ability to generate, understand, and use the text in a manner appropriate to the culture. O'Donahoe and Tynan add another definition of literacy, which is a set of skills and competencies, which lead to the consideration of its role in social practice. This definition is a simplification of previous notions about literacy. One last note delivered by O'Donahoe and Tynan is that literacy is not neutral; it can't be separated from the social and cultural context specific, or about ideology and power.

Other understanding offered by Ritson (1995), intellectual debates among many researchers agree that literacy is an individual skill to be 'literate'. Literacy study grew out of the need to define and develop a model based on interactive social phenomena reception. Literacy study was developed from reception analysis model that is used to see how media consumers receive information through advertising and news. Therefore, the study of literacy is inseparably connected with audiences who develop their knowledge based on collective interaction and information reception from media (television) in order to define their own understanding. Finally, Ritson said that literacy is not just the ability to read text, but also to initiate and participate in any particular social interaction (Ritson, 1995). In other words, advertising literacy is an interaction between social context and advertising text. For example: a group of people who understand the advertising message that joking about the role of the Javanese Genie in a cigarettes advertising as a satirical memo that represent corruption and bribery rampant in Indonesia.

Malmelin (2010) formulated traditional literacy, as the ability to read and understand the meanings of written or printed words. In wider understanding, according to Malmelin, literacy has also been used to refer to the skills of producing the text, sometimes used for arithmetic skills or cultural proficiency. In a theoretical perspective, literacy is a basic concept that consists of various forms of reading and interpretation. Malmelin also added that in practice, literacy is the ability of private individuals to understand the different types of signs and symbol systems, and on the other hand is the ability to understand the different types of messages by using the symbol system.

Advertising researcher argue that advertising literacy as consumer awareness about various advertisement type, production aspects, and techniques. (O'Donahoe and Tynan, 1998) Meanwhile the consumer-advertising researchers suggest that advertising literacy's purpose is to understanding advertisement convention, it means that consumers are able to understand advertisement model in their daily life. Furthermore, the consumers are competent to acknowledge the advertisement purpose. In the other word, consumers are capable to understand advertisement message, comprehend their agreement/disagreement to the message itself. Advertising literacy, by enlarge can be defined as a skill to recognize, evaluate and comprehend advertisement or other commercial message. (Malmelin, 2010: 2) Idea of advertising literacy is an extension of media literacy that refers to an ability to read and critically analyze any media representation form and tools. (Malmelin, 2010: 3).Malmelin characterizes advertising literacy as comprising four distinct literacy dimensions: informational, visual/aesthetic, rhetoric and promotional. Informational literacy refers to individuals' ability to evaluate and assess the sources of advertising messages and the content presented. Visual/ aesthetic literacy pertains to interpreting and appreciating advertising for its entertainment and aesthetic value. Rhetorical literacy refers to comprehension of the differential strategies used to persuade and market products to consumers. Promotional literacy refers to understanding the relationships between both commercial partnerships and collaborations and how these associations may impact how the products are placed within the media, who serves as sponsor for these products and the type and form of marketing strategies that may be used to promote them.

1.3 Existence of Advertising Literacy within the Media Literacy Framework

Media literacy can be defined as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts”. (Christ & Potter, 1998, p. 7; see also Hobbs & Frost, 2003) Other associated concepts of media literacy, apart advertising literacy, are internet literacy, computer literacy, film literacy, visual literacy and the like. It's about asking pertinent questions, figuring out what is there, and noticing what is not there. The focus is on pleasure and interpretation, creativity and diversity, originality and quality. (Saphiro and Hughes, 1996).Eagle (2007 p.1) proposed some concepts dealing with media literacy. She said that literacy is a skill to access, analyze and communicate messages in many forms. Eagle recommends that advertising literacy is the ability to understanding the persuasive purpose of advertisement.

Although Mark Ritson (1995) didn't overtly define advertising literacy but he gave his view to comprehend advertising literacy. Ritsonobserved that a capability to read an advertisement not only based on the understanding of advertisement message itself but also proficiency to connect the message with social context.

Discourse on advertising literacy and deceptive practices go beyond ‘what is wrong with this ad’ i.e. ability to recognize the misleading elements to include what they do with that knowledge in terms of action. This paper includes advertising literacy in the context of ads

that have the potential to cause the consumer financial loss, social identity loss and mental agony, the defining principle of Advertising Standard Council of India code.

1.4 Deceptive Advertising

It is important to look at communication effects of advertising beyond purchase behavior because advertising messages are also used in social non purchase based contexts (Donohoe, 1994) of which construction gender is of tremendous socio cultural importance. Construction of women in the existing gender culture includes:

- a) Men as active /Women as passive
- b) Controlling gaze that limits women's opportunities
- c) Men as the viewer; women as objects
- d) Men as providers /women needing help or protection

Hudders (2016) points out that contemporary advertising is created for 'affect' more than cognition thereby lending credence to including non-product elements in creating deceptive advertising literacy

David M. Gardener (1975) emphasized that exploration of deception in advertising should be focused on the consumer more than the advertiser and the regulator so that an empowered consumer can detect various forms of deception. Description of deceptive advertising hence requires a balanced approach to consumer attitude, perception and behavioral response along with the codified law/regulations in advertising practices.

Oslo and Daver (1978) state that deception seems to have occurred when consumers acquire demonstrably false beliefs as a function of exposure to an advertisement. Deception in advertising has been identified in various manifestations. Arens(2008) discussed *Concepts of deception, The subliminal advertising myth and unfair and deceptive practices in Advertising* (pp-65, Ad Lab 3A) by naming sub categories of misleading ways as False Promises, Incomplete Description, False and misleading comparisons, bait and switch offers, Visual distortions and False demonstrations, false testimonials, Partial Disclosures and Small Print Qualifications while Baran (2012) in *Developing Media Literacy Skills Interpreting Intentional Imprecision* emphasized on use of three categories of intentional imprecision by ad people : unfinished statements, qualifiers, connotatively loaded words

1.5 Deceptive Advertising in India

Post 1991, the new economic surge manifested itself in an aspirational social order driven by gratification of wants and desires more than need fulfillment. The mass media explosion coincided with the communication technology revolution in the last two decades. This opened up cornucopia of advertising and promotional media. Thirst for innovation fueled by the hegemonic alignment of market and media propelled the advertising agencies to create an environment of buzz and bombardment blurring the lines of ethics even further. In this

competitive environment, publicity, promotion and propagation established themselves firmly in the producer-consumer relationship. In India, where both the nature and extent of deceptive practices [1] is worrisome, advertising should assume a responsible manifestation. Within the alliance of dominance established by advertising the consumer felt duped and deceived. As this cacophony intensified, so did the clamour against malpractices arising out of it. At the policy level, regulatory practices are being keenly debated, the present mechanism of laws like MRTP, Consumer Protection Act, Drugs and Magical Remedies Act and modalities and code of ASCI are being discussed.



Fig 1 : Advertising Standard Council of India's Code of Ethics
Source : www.ascionline.org

Review of Literature

Elliot (2016) in his paper *Knowledge needs and the 'savvy' child: teenager perspectives on banning food marketing to children* concludes that all teenagers believe ads deceive or mislead.

Valkenburg (2000) relied on the Piaget's theory of cognitive development to show convincingly how children of different ages understand media content. He noted when a child reaches, age 7 to 8, he tends to find the realism of the news more frightening than cartoons. In fact, at this stage, children begin to recognise the persuasive intent of advertisements and after age 8, children become generally competent in "putting the narrative together". Valkenburg (2000, p.2) In addition to this, children after age 8 become more critical of media content and begin to make more subtle comparisons between the world of television and reality. This increases in sophistication between ages 10 and 11 during which time children are able to draw on their own social knowledge to judge the realism of television content. This development peaks at age twelve where the child begins to show awareness of biases and stereotypes; make aesthetic judgments and become more aware of the purpose of advertising and branding, and may become skeptical of advertisements.

2.2 Related Studies

Limited research exists on literacy regarding deceptive advertising in India. However, researches on its subcategories have been done. In a quantitative survey on Indian youth, it found that factors like deceptive practices like misleading ads are common amongst the television viewers (Singh& Sandhu, 2011). As per the KPMG (2016-2017) report , it had been noted that personal care, household goods , telecommunication, education , drugs and pharmaceuticals have been found guilty of misleading the consumers

Objectives

The study aims to explore advertising literacy as a strategic intervention to check malpractices in advertising. It is to critically examine the concept of advertising literacy as a defense mechanism against misleading advertisements and ASCI violations. Following specific objectives have been set for the purpose of the study:

1. To know if the audiences can recall and recognize the nature and extent of deception in television advertisements.
2. To gain insight into the interrelationships, if any between the typology of deception, demography of audience and product categories.
3. To find out the awareness levels of the media consumers about advertising regulations, code of ethics and the functions of ASCI.

Methodology

For the purpose of the study,constructs in advertising literacy were used to develop a theoretical framework.Four dimensions of variables were identified based on Rosendaal' descriptions of Conceptual Advertising Literacy and Attitudinal Advertising Literacy.

Research Design

It is a quasi-experiment set in classrooms where audio visual test stimuli were presented to the respondents.

Test Stimuli

A series of seven television commercials rated as deceptive via a classroom activity in MA (Mass Communication) advertising class (n=60) were used as test stimuli. Use of television ads as test stimuli for examining deception has been previously noted (Hastak& Mazis,2011) . It started with an ad lab activity on deceptive advertising led to identification of 16 TVC's that were often repeated in Indian Television or were recalled the most by the class. Out of which seven were found to be deceptive by more than 90% of the class. These 7 advertisements were presented to the random stratified sample not in any specific



SNo	Measure /Factor /Dimensions	Items	Source of the scale
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order. Television ads were selected for two salient reasons: Firstly, because of their cross mediated consumption by the millennials and Secondly compared to print ads, television commercials are more frequent and use various verbal and visual cues that include sound, sight and the spoken word that increases the potency of deceptive forms and content in an ad when many elements interact with each other. Individual motivation was controlled, since all of them are exposed to the advertisements for the same time and in the same manner.

Method

In the survey conducted on random stratified sample of 9th –Post graduate level students (n=330*) in New Delhi (India) the seven test ads were shown in timed exposures followed by administration of the questionnaire as it is most commonly tool of data collection used to identify factors in social science research. A two part questionnaire was designed (Sawssen, C& Rached, 2014) where Part 1 was a 42 item scale based on the four factors on television advertising literacy and deception and Part 2 contained ten forced choice to gauge the awareness levels of the sample population about Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI). Students from various educational and age segments i.e. (Class IX to Post Graduate Studies) were requested to participate in the study.

Sample distribution

The students were enrolled from the following institutions for the study. Due procedures of school and parental consent were followed before starting the activity. Students from 3 schools, 2 colleges, 2 departments in the University and 1-1 Girls and Boys Hostel GGSIPU participated in the experiment. A total of 330 students completed the activity.

Construction /Development of the Measurement Scale for data collection

The measurement instrument comprised of 43 (on a 5 point Likert scale) statements were distributed under four variables. The four factors for the study are: perceived veracity (product and non-product related deception), relatedness with deceptive practices, attitudinal response and perceived action. The data was submitted to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) for data analysis and interpretation. Descriptive statistics like averages and cross tabulation presented the concentration of sample vis-à-vis the 42 items.

1.	Perceived Veracity		Dimension taken from Sawssen Garbouj Chaouachi and Kaouther Saied Ben Rached. Items have been constructed afresh
a)	Product related deception	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ad does not elaborate on the 100% dandruff free claim made. 2. The ad is making a false claim about its superiority 3. The ad is exaggerating the product benefit 4. The ad is making false promise regarding its performance 5. The ad is making price claims or saving claims that are 6. The ad is making untrue comparisons with rival brands. 7. The ad is not giving complete information on the product use 8. The ad is omitting some information about product composition 9. The ad lies to boast of it being unique or market leader by using selective yardsticks 10. The ad is distorting visuals to make claims about the product's impact 	William A Arens Unfair and Deceptive Practices in Advertising (Ad Lab 3A)
	Value based/Non Product related deception	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I find the presentation of female role in the ad offensive 2. I find the relationship between men and women very conventional in the ad 3. I find woman in the ad being treated as weak and ignorant 4. I find that man as a provider and woman as a facilitator in the ad 5. I think it is a story from a male 	Gilly 1998

		<p>perspective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. I find the ad encouraging bias against dark coloured women 7. I find that ad supports north Indian notions of patriarchy 8. I find the ad targeting only the young urban Indian population 	
2.	Relatedness with deceptive cues/practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This advertisement shows a big advantage that makes me want to buy it 2. This ad is very similar to other ads of this type of product 3. It is amusing to see brands making fun of each other by ad wars 4. It is bold of brand to attack its rival in such an open way. 5. Such spoofs makes everyone in the audience laugh 6. I like seeing fair looking fit women in ads 7. I like that a working woman comes back home and cooks for her family 8. I like to see mothers loving and caring for their children in ads 9. Use of mother in the lead role increases the trust of the brand 10. I do watch long advertisements on fitness , beauty products and sometimes even buy the product 11. The ad reminded me that I am currently dissatisfied with my product and need to change 12. I believe what the ad says because it is favorite brand 13. I know that the advertised brand is a dependable brand as it is an 	<p>Item I&II ,11, 12 are taken from measurement scale on creativity Other items are created from the conceptual references to Gillian Dyer, R. Elliot and Steve Derne</p>

		<p>old brand</p> <p>14. Use of attractive female celebrities spice up a dull brand</p> <p>15. Sexual play in an ad makes me excited</p> <p>16. Sex is always good for an ad even if it is not related to the product</p>	
3.	Consequences	<p>1. I am tempted to buy when I see a factual benefit in the ad</p> <p>2. The ad creates a wrong view of gender roles in society</p> <p>3. The advertisement confuses me and distorts my perception</p> <p>4. The advertisement makes me materialistic(makes me want to buy more and more)</p> <p>5. The advertisement makes me believe in half truths</p> <p>6. The advertisement makes me conscious of my looks and body shape</p>	Dimension from Sawssen Garbouj Chaouachi and Kaouther Saied Ben Rached, 2012)
4.	Perceived Action	<p>1. I will file a complaint against it for misleading me</p> <p>2. I will post my review of the deceptive ad on social media</p> <p>3. I want to give a presentation on bad ads in the class</p> <p>4. Next time when it comes on TV , I will immediately point out its deception</p> <p>5. I don't take ads so seriously</p>	Self-Constructed

Demographic distribution of the respondents

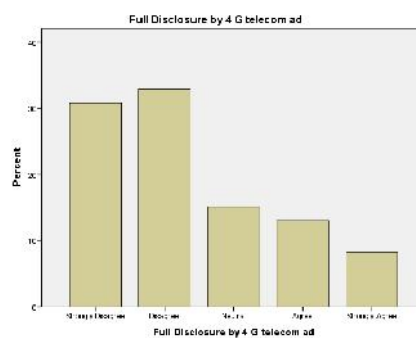
Among the participants, 60.4 % were females and 39.3% were males, no other sex/gender was reported. Age wise, 60.4 % were in the age cohort of 13-19 , 27.5% between 20-25 and 11.8%

were above 25 years of age. Hence we see, large number of participants were school going students (81%). 64% were educated till class Xth , 24.5% has studied uptoXIIth standard and 11.2 % were from Undergraduate courses .

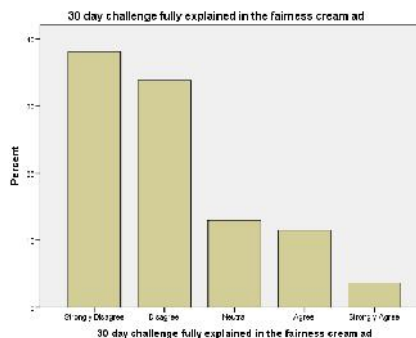
Data Presentation and Analysis

Product Based Deception

High advertising recognition of partial disclosure made by the Telecom ad (Airtel) in launching regarding the speed of the 4 G network was noted . Cumulatively 64 % said that the brand does not fully disclose its scheme.

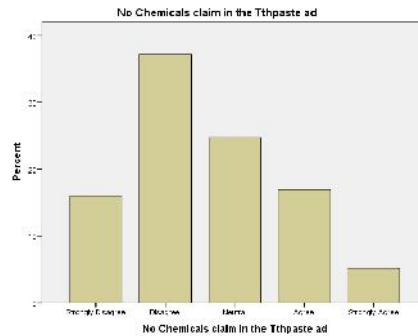


Similarly, 63% respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that Ponds “30 Day Challenge ‘scheme fully discloses all the information in the ad .

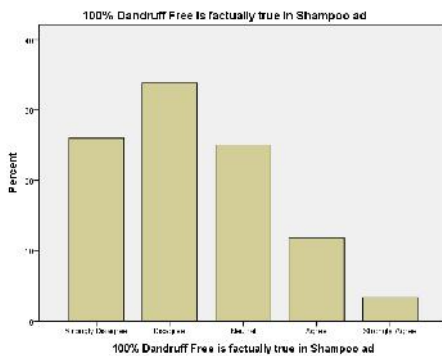


a) High recognition of False or exaggerated claims in product-based deception

A large number of respondents could recognise false and exaggerated claims made by the brands in the television commercials. In the toothpaste advertisement, 22% believed that the no chemical in this toothpaste claim, while 54% strongly disagreed or disagreed with it.

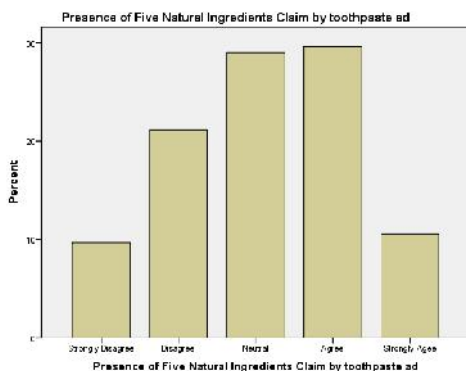


Similarly in the shampoo advertisement shown, exaggerated claim made by the brand that it leads to 100% dandruff free was not believed by 53.3 % percent , a significant proportion remained neutral and only 16% agreed with the claim. It shows high advertising literacy with regards to recognition of false and exaggerated claims made by brands in their advertising messages.



b) Low levels of advertising literacy w.r.t use of scientific terms in brand claims

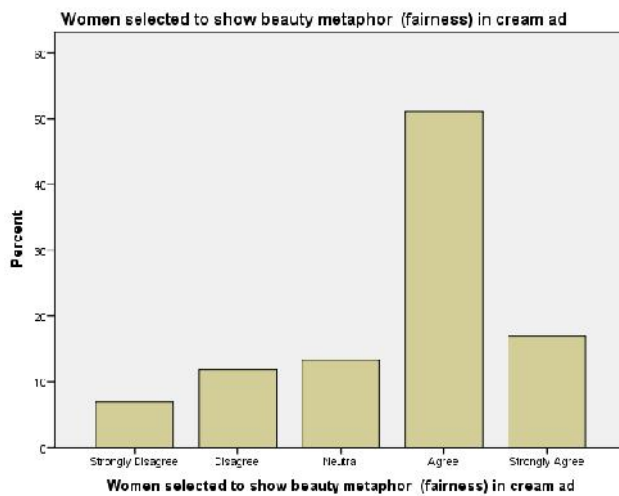
A significant difference in advertising literacy was noted in the case of the tea advertisement. here the tea makes an unproven claim of containing five natural herbal ingredients. The participants agreed with claim , showing vulnerability to use of words like herbal , ayurvedic or natural.



Second aspect in the practices as in the Code of Ethics prescribed by ASCI is the non-product based deception which deals with issues of gender stereotyping and creating an unequal world .

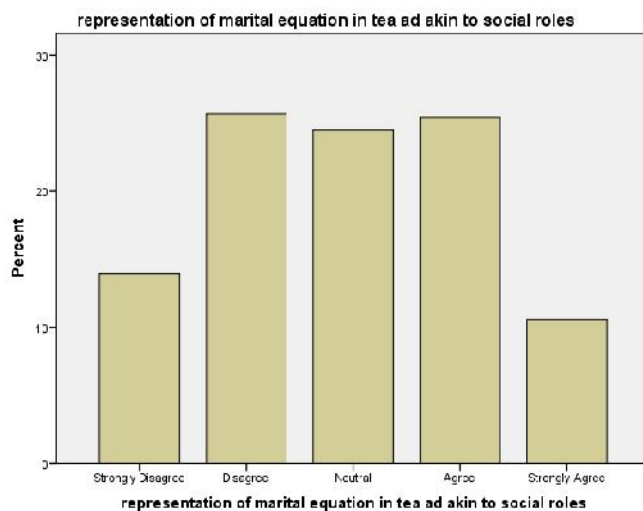
Non-Product Based Deception (Value Based Deception in ads).

It was noted that 68% participants agreed that women are used to depict beauty or that beauty is more of an issue for women than men as shown in the ads. The respondents said that to look good/attractive/appealing is a female need as presented in the advertisements. However, recognition of the larger implications of linking beauty normal and prejudices with women was limited.

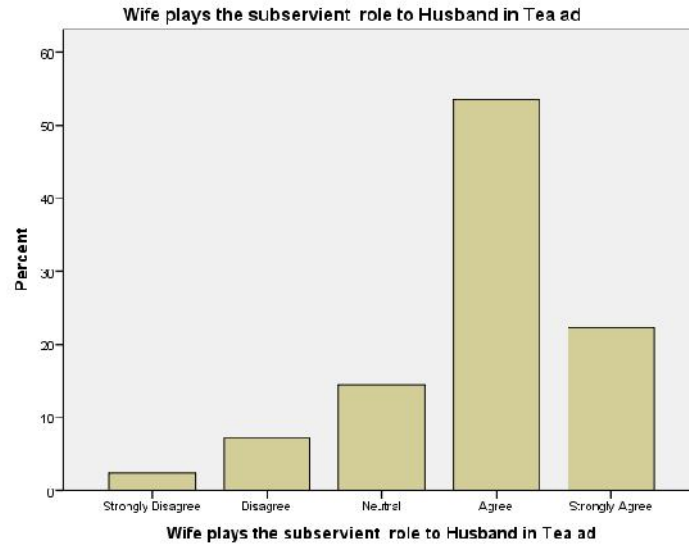


Depiction of sex roles in the advertisements (non-product deception)

A probing inquiry into the relationship between the sex roles depicted in the tea advertisement and their own experiences in society revealed interesting results. In the tea ad, the wife is subservient to her husband, wherein husband is the go-getter, bread winner and an achiever while she is his support system, her achievement is to ensure his success. The results show a split opinion where almost an equal percentage (25%) agrees, disagrees and remains non-committal.



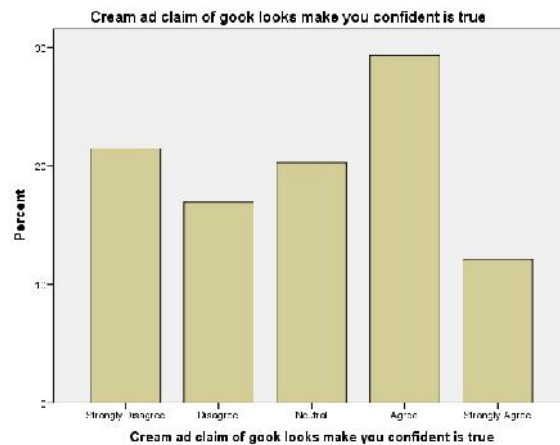
Most of the participants said that the wife is lower in stature to the husband. She plays the supportive role and is not the leader in the relationship.



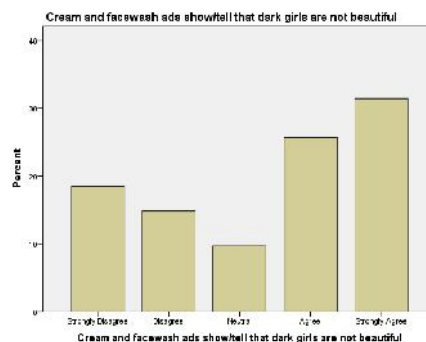
Non-Product Claims /Value Based Deception

The values presented in brand advertising create social beliefs, needs and motivations that create a description of socio-psychological system which is problematic or unreal.

In the cream advertisement shown to the participants, majority agreed with the brand propagating that if you are good looking, you will become more confident in life.

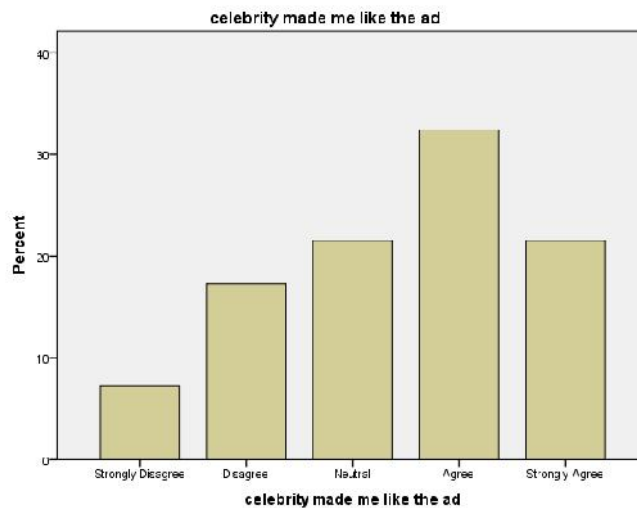


Additionally , brand advertising is reinforcing colour prejudices amongst young audiences.



Celebrities influence brand attitude of the consumers

53.8% participants admitted that presence of celebrities makes them buy or try a product. it shows that famous people from films, sports and entertainment as endorsers, characters or ambassadors have a connect with the people and are able to guide their purchase intent and buying behaviour



Advertising wars entertain the Audience

Explicit comparative advertising has always been an issue of concern w.r.t violation of code of ethics on deceptive practices and misleading prescribed by ASCI in India. While around 50% agree that use of product comparisons in advertising is directly related to buying. That increase in use of comparisons between brands in advertisements stimulates purchase and accentuates buying. However, a significant portion (25.1%) of ad viewers remained neutral.

Comparative Advertising Speeds up Buying

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	27	8.2	8.2	8.2
Valid Disagree	57	17.2	17.3	25.5
Valid Neutral	83	25.1	25.2	50.8
Valid Agree	125	37.8	38.0	88.8
Valid Strongly Agree	37	11.2	11.2	100.0
Total	329	99.4	100.0	
Missing System	2	.6		
Total	331	100.0		

Correlations revealed weak inverse relationship between gender and efficacy of sex in communication($r=-1.94$).

Correlations

		sex always sells	Gender
sex always sells	Pearson Correlation	1	-.194**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	330	329
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.194**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	329	330

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Exploratory Factor analysis was performed where items pertaining to product based claims, disclosure of attributes, and value based deception such as colour prejudices and gender roles load highly .(Fig 3&4)

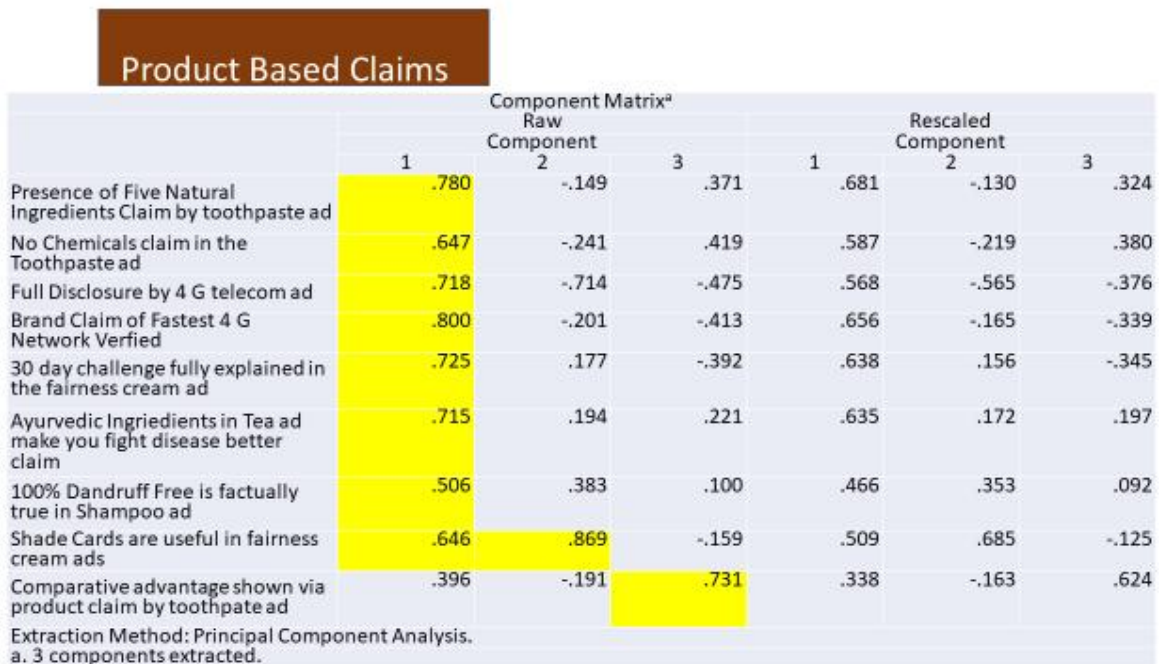


Fig 3: Principle Component Analysis of the product based claims

	Component Matrix ^a			
	Raw Component		Rescaled Component	
	1	2	1	2
Women selected to show beauty metaphor (fairness) in cream ad	.478	.316	.429	.284
representation of marital equation in tea ad akin to social roles	.728		.598	
Wife plays the subservient role to Husband in Tea ad	.291	.173	.314	.186
Cream ad claim of good looks make you confident is true	.930	.248	.692	.184
Cream and facewash ads show/tell that dark girls are not beautiful	-.434	1.418	-.288	.941
All the 8 Ads target urban boys and girls	.203	.241	.179	.212
Smooth and Silky hair for good looks	.494		.437	
celebrity made me like the ad	.695	.207	.575	.171

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 2 components extracted.

Perceived Veracity
 Non Product
 Deception Literacy

Fig 4: Principle Component Analysis of the Non product based claims

Conclusion

Evaluating the advertising literacy levels of deceptive practices reveal dispersed and diffused understanding with absence of recognition of advertising as a hidden inducer of conventional societal norms and gender based inequalities. Therefore, advertising literacy as a subset of media literacy is critical to creation of a shared knowledge based country especially amongst various age cohorts of youth in India. It will provide evidences to begin a rethink on crucial issues of message and media strategies, media ethics and public policy. Have to look into the fact that whether this study is about making a summary judgement about deceptiveness and non deceptiveness or trying to find pointed elements of deception. These are aggregated response to a series of advertisements so that public policy addresses deception in all its forms and not just picks up a cue and makes a law. It also positions advertising literacy as an enabler to empower the media consumers to transform advertising from setting agenda towards advocacy and empowerment on product and value based deception. Advertising literacy can become a key intervention to reduce the causal effect of deception in brand advertising.

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