The Effect of False Advertising on Consumer Online Purchase Behaviour with the Mediating Effect of e-WOM: Consumers' in Malaysia

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Abstract. Advertising is one of the main contributors towards the rising number of online shoppers worldwide. The use of advertising in this digital era has become a powerful tool towards the persuasion of consumers. However, some organizations have adopted false advertising as their marketing strategy. The purpose of this proposed study is to analyse the factors that influence consumers' online shopping behaviour The study will focus on the three independent constituent factors of false advertising, namely, unethical advertising, misleading information, and deception, with the mediating effect of electronic word of mouth and moderating effect of trust. The dependent variable is online purchase behaviour. The sample size for this proposed research is 588 persons.

Keywords: Online Shopping, Purchase behaviour, False Advertising, E-WOM, Trust.

1. Introduction

Advertising is the mean of communication used to encourage an audience to form a purchase decision towards a product or service. The purpose of an advertisement is to present consumers with information about a product or service. Advertising is taken into account as an important and essential component for the growth of economic process of marketers and businesses [1]. Advertising is a paid type of exposure or promotion by a sponsor that is distributed through numerous media channels [2]. Brands are constantly trying to influence considerations, evaluations and purchase decisions [3]. The shoppers buying behaviour has always been a vital element in the literature of advertising [4].

The common drawback of advertising is the fast methods of displaying products over the internet, making advertising even more prone to misleading or deceitful acts where advertisers control the features of a product or promotional method that leads to high profits and tend to result in loss of financials of purchasers [5]. Advertisers may also manipulate consumers by making them vulnerable and less likely to make rational choices. According to [6]. the fields of false advertising commonly focuses on the product, price, and promotion.

This research focuses on the issues of unethical, misleading and deception in advertisements that affect the buying behavior of consumers. This study attempts to discover how false advertising affects consumers' online purchase behavior and how the electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) mediates the relationship between them. Previous studies that have been conducted mainly focused on service quality and consumer satisfaction and limited

researches were done on false advertising that affect consumer purchase behavior with the mediation effect of e-WOM and moderating effect of trust. The issues of false advertising have been overlooked, which bring confusion to consumers and leaves room for investigation. This study will also look into consumers' knowledge or past experiences with service providers and their future purchases based on the fulfilment and satisfaction. This research will also look into the types of false advertisement that are used by marketers.

1.1 Significance of Study

The research aims to identify the influence of factors such as e-WOM, trust perspectives, and variables of false advertising on customers' online purchase behaviour as previous researches had mixed results. The research will also look into the types of practices such as manipulation, misguiding and confusion that are used to deceive consumers into performing a purchase. Through this research, the factors that determine consumers' online purchasing behaviour can be determined. This research presents a hypothesis through an elaboration of stimulus-organism-response theory (S-O-R). Past similar studies will also be reviewed. This research also aims to gain knowledge on problems faced by consumers when shopping online. Knowledge of consumers' online shopping problems can create an awareness among consumers on the issues that occur through false advertisements, thus they are more alert and aware when purchasing online. A better understanding of this issue would also provide vendors and online shoppers solutions to the issues that might have been overlooked. Online vendors would also be able to attain more efficient and effective service.

2. Literature review

The development of innovation has made online advertising a significant channel of communication around the globe. The aim of an advertiser is to create the awareness of a company's brand, website or event, as advertising stimulates sales and increased profits. Researchers who studied advertising have all agreed that advertising is a vital tool for a business to grow [7]. However, the exaggerations from advertising agencies have been proven to be outright lies. Agencies promise of things that a product cannot deliver causing consumers to be easily wrongly influenced. Many have reported that majority of shoppers are being gullible and simply swayed by the misdirection of advertisement claims. Shoppers are misdirected by the creativity and presumptuous messages created by advertisers that come across as believable [8].

Recent studies have shown that false advertising being commonly used among organizations to gain or attract consumers' attention. As these organizations continue to use these methods to misguide or misinform consumers, repurchases will be limited. False advertising methods that are mostly used in the pictures, price, description and quality of the products or services, and it can be extended to the expiry date for some products. This research investigates whether consumers who are exposed to advertisements containing false claims and mixed messages change their behavioural purchase decision. This research will also be testing the three factors of false advertising practices which are, unethical advertising, misleading information, and deception. The target audience for this research will be tested based on their knowledge, and experience with online shopping followed by their awareness of methods used. The e-WOM and trust have been added to the research to extend the outcomes of online purchase behaviour.

2.1 Consumer Online Purchase Behavior

The consumer buying behavior is a sum of attitudes, preferences, intentions and decisions. These four factors are what motivate a consumer to make a purchase. The act of purchasing goods or services over the internet constitutes as online shopping behaviour [9]. The buying process comes in a few forms similar to regular shopping behaviors [10]. There are five steps in a typical over the internet purchase. The first one starts with the identification of the required product or service, after which turning towards the internet and search engine for information. Followed by, the evluation and comparision of whats available and what fits the required criteria. Once the product or service have been chosen the individual makes a transaction for the selected item and recieves a post purchase experience [11].

According to [12]. the shopping behaviour of a customer is impacted by four significant mental factors, inspiration, recognition, convictions and disposition. Consumer traits like personality, demographics, and perceptions of the advantages of online shopping have been found to have an impact on consumers' online shopping behaviour [13], [14]. [15] asserted that as a predictor of behavioural intents, perceived behavioural control affects the incidence of a behaviour. Additionally, an individual's attitude toward engaging in the behaviour as well as their sense of its benefits impact the behavior's intention.

2.2 False Advertising

False advertising is a form of advertising that is used in a false, misleading or unproven way to attract customers, where advertisers do not disclose the full truth about product features or information. In most countries, the use of false advertising is illegal. It is illegal to misrepresent a product's quality, specification, composition, manufacturer, price or place of origin [16]. It is said that there are three approaches of false advertising, and these approaches are what shapes a consumer mind globally. The three means or approaches are fraud, falsity, and misleading. The common views concerning components of advertising communication are that they consist of the advertiser, the message itself and resultant consumer beliefs regarding a false advertisement [16].

Early contributors like [17] stated that false advertising is a contest among marketers. [18] defined false advertising as an activity of lying, deceiving and give out false information. When advertisements suggest a customer what to buy then a customer is considered vulnerable [19]. False advertisements that engages in the act of untruthfulness affects a consumer's choice. The consumer's choice is affected due to the fact that these consumers were unfairly convinced and misinformed by the message that advertisers displayed and that affects their judgments [20].

2.3 Unethical advertising

Unethical advertising is the distribution of cultural qualities and standards built up by strict, legislative, or political establishment where one searches for moral direction [21]. Unethical advertising manipulates consumers in a material way of generating and misstating incorrect content in a way that damages a competitor's image, conveying overstated claims that effect people's lives in a negative manner. The viewers of unethical advertisements are compelled to a negative emotions and confusion [22]. Unethical advertising revolves around discrimination and vilification. Advertising that is discriminatory treats people differently based on their colour, ethnicity, country, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, or political

beliefs. It also acts unfairly, bigotically, or with intolerance. Additionally, vilification advertising degrade, terrorise, arouse scorn for, or ridicule an individual or a group of individuals because of their colour, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, and/or political beliefs [23].

Unethical advertising creates a negative thought in the minds of consumers and the creation of manipulation affects the values and environment in a negative way. Unethical advertising influences consumers' buying behaviour by using socio-demographic and cultural factors [24]. The moral principles and values have a significant impact on consumer's attitude of unethical advertising [25]. [21] stated that unethical advertising creates negative attitudes, moral principles, values, age, gender and religion which affects consumer's buying behaviour due to the implementation of what a consumer could look like or how better they can be. Unethical advertising is a destructive and immoral action which may harm people. Advertising shouldn't damage people, tell lies, or transgress moral principles, according to [26] who also noted that advertising affects how people perceive themselves and the world around them. Untrue beliefs are inserted into people's heads via unethical advertising, leading to unneeded product consumption. Due to advertisers' immoral behaviour, advertising will always be surrounded by unethical difficulties [27].

2.4 Misleading Information

Misleading information is the creation of false claims of a product or services such as characteristics of data, subtle data truth and development suggestions [18]. Misleading advertisement aims to showcase an advertisement to be the best in the market in order to increase sales. One of the most common methods is product exaggeration, but it cannot be little exaggeration it has to be full on otherwise the advertisement would not get the expected attention [28]. It is mostly misleading claims that have been differentiated form puffin. Puffing refers to exaggerated claim of a product based on the sellers' opinion or taste [29], for example, when an advertisement promotes and exaggerates the benefits of a health supplement and downplays the side effects.

Advertisements that are recognized as misleading by customers make them sensitive to all forms of advertising [30]. [31] stated that young adults are better at spotting misleading information than the old people. [32] stated that the misrepresentation of information in advertising can be oral or written. Misleading advertisements encourage irresponsible behaviour or represents people in an irresponsible way [33] claimed that it is very difficult to assess the impact of misleading advertisement on consumer's behaviour due to the complexity of features and consumers' purchase for a variety of reasons. [34] argued that sometimes advertisements may try misleading two different people, but this will only affect one's economic behaviour while the other economic behaviour will not be affected.

2.5 Deceptive Advertising

Deceptive advertising is the dishonest practices of false statements and impressions created by advertisers to convince consumers into performing a purchase. Deceptive advertisements focus on the manipulation of price and hidden charges, the misuse of the terms like going out of sale or free, incomplete or inconsistent comparison, false colouring, angel dusting, bait and switch, and no risk acceptance by default [35]. [36] said that deception in advertising only occurs when marketers' introduced expectations are not fulfilled and the general type of disconfirmation occurs in all kinds of unfulfilled expectations. [37] mentioned

that when a consumer consumes or experiences the performance of a service or product then only deception outcome would appear to be subjective due to the different expectations from consumers. [38] definition of deceptive advertising comes in a few conditions, the first condition focuses on the believable claims that are obvious or unconscionable lie, followed by the encouragement that varies between what the consumers believe the claimed to be in the advertisement and what the fact is and lastly the held belief of a consumer that is encouraged by a previous purchase belief from other advertisements. When consumers already believe that an advertisement is true when it is actually false, they may be harmed [39].

Deceptive advertising, according to [40] incorporates the element of lying and fosters incorrect assumptions that may have an impact on a customer's behaviour. The consumer's behaviour is shown as they attempt to compare the features of the product with the claims made in deceptive advertising and note any discrepancies. [41] claim that the consumer's behaviour and intentions to make subsequent purchases as well as his or her level of product loyalty are both impacted by the feeling of being misled. According to [36] deceptive advertising causes the consumer to incur costs, face social disbelief, and experience mental pain.

2.6 Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM)

The e-WOM is considered to be an evolution from interpersonal traditional communication towards new generation of cyberspace. Where consumers search for information about products or services they intend to buy via the internet [42]. [43] defined e-WOM as positive or negative statements that are made by existing, potential, or ex customers about a particular product or company and this type of statements are made available online for others to see. e-WOM is any constructive or contrary articulation made by potential, real, or previous clients about an item or organization, which is made accessible to a huge number of individuals and establishments by means of the Internet [43].

[44] defined the electronic word of mouth as a development of word of mouth communication that utilizes the power of digital persuasion from consumers about a product or service. [45] stated that the e-WOM is positive or negative communication towards brand information via the web. Communicators are non-commercially motivated to communicate yet it is perceived as unbiased, genuine and honest type of communication messages. The e-WOM can take place on all types of platforms on the internet such as social platforms, ecommerce website, email, mobile device and etc., and the forms of information passed on could be in a written text, images or videos [46]. The electronic word of mouth is considered a reliable source of information that shapes the expectation of consumers and their desires and influences on a post purchase decision [47] . [48] stated that consumers are increasingly giving, seeking and sharing their brand related experiences via online channels.

2.7 Trust

Assured reliance, confident dependence, and confident anticipation are the three components of trust. Throughout history, the idea of trust has been regarded as essential to the efficient operation of all spheres of human relations, including those between nations, organisations, groups, and individuals [49]. Trust has been acknowledged as a crucial component of interpersonal relationships, communication, and business dealings [50].

The diverse definitions given by previous studies focus on perceived competence, objectivity, fairness, and faith [51]. Meanwhile, [52] said that trust includes ability,

benevolence and integrity. [53] definition was on accuracy, knowledge, and public face and [54] definition was on concern and care, openness and honesty, and knowledge and expertise. But [52] produced an integrated model that offers a definition of trust that others are prepared to accept. According to this definition, trust is the willingness of one person to be open to the acts of another person in exchange for the possibility of controlling or monitoring that person's performance of a specific activity that is significant to the trustor.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework reflects the assumptions, expectations, beliefs, theories and concepts that support the research [55]. Based on the literature review the conceptual frame work proposed is shown in the figure below. The SOR model is assumed in assisting the prediction of consumers online purchase behavior.
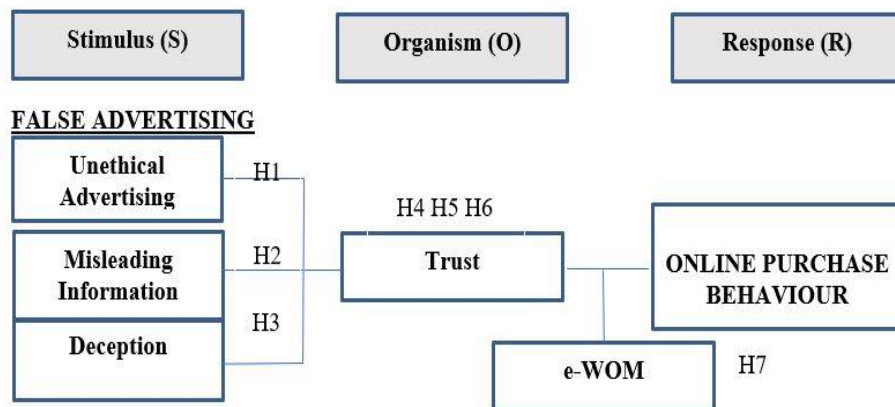
Stimulus, Organism and Response Model (SOR) - Russell and Mehrabian (1977)

Research Questions
- To what degree does unethical advertising affect customers' online purchase behaviour?
- To what extent does misleading information affect consumers' online purchase behavior?
- How does deceptive advertisement affect customers' online purchase behavior?
- How does e-WOM mediate the relationship between false advertising and customers' online purchase behavior?
- How does trust moderate the relationship between e-WOM and consumer's online purchase behavior?

Proposition
- Unethical advertising leads to the change of consumers' online purchase behavior.
- Misleading information predicts consumers' online purchase behavior.
- Deception changes consumers' online purchase behavior.
- Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) is a bridge between unethical advertising, misleading information, deception and consumers' online purchase behavior.

-     Trust is the buffer between false advertising and consumers' online purchase behavior.

3. Conclusion

Based on the researches mentioned above, it can be determined that advertising motivates a consumer to perform a purchase. Additionally, a creative advertisement can alter or create a consumer's perception of a product, which influences their decision to buy that particular product. An advertisor will use an advertisement to appeal to the consumer's psychological reasons for making a purchase. This will involve both intellectual and emotional appeals. An emotional appeal satisfies the psychological, emotional, and social needs of the consumer while a rational appeal focuses mostly on the advantages and issues that a product can solve [56]. According to [57] the qualities of online advertising and customer attitudes have an indirect impact on purchasing decisions. [58] discovered that there is a direct link between online advertisements and the making of purchases or purchase decisions. Advertising strategies provide a major tool in creating awareness and condition in the mind of potential consumers to decide on what to buy [59].

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