

" Online advertising : Guiding or Misguiding customer ? "

1) Introduction :-

Thesis statement:

Online advertisements have both negative and positive impacts on customers. However, Online advertisements misguide customers more as compared to guiding them. Using deceptive strategies to promote brands harm consumer trust.

2) How online advertisements can guide or misguide customers.

3) Online advertisements misguide customers (Thesis)

- Ads glorify products by exaggerating their benefits.
- Bait and switch strategy is used to attract customers.
- Influencers usually glorify fraudulent products and opportunities.
- Some brands use deceptive pricing techniques by offering discounts without revealing hidden taxes.
- Emotional appeals are used to manipulate customers.

4) Guiding role of online advertisements (Antithesis)

- Online ads provide detailed information that helps customers make informed decisions.
- Customers have access to multiple options and can compare products to make right choices.
- Online advertisements have helped people get opportunities because ads reach a vast audience.

d) Customers can read reviews about the products.

e) Some ads address real concerns.

5) Misguiding customers via Online advertisements is more common than guiding. (Synthesis)

a) overuse of buzz words like "organic" and "natural" mislead customer choices.

b) Ads use misleading visuals and deceive the customers.

c) The ratio of fraudulent promotions is higher as compared to legitimate ones.

d) Testimonials and reviews are fake most of the times.

e) The line between ~~quine~~ genuine concerns and manipulation is thin.

6) Conclusion :-

Once Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) was passing through the marketplace of Madina. He saw a merchant selling grains. When Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) put his hand in the heap of grains, He discovered that grains on the top of heap were dry; whereas, grains beneath the top layer were wet. He (S.A.W.W) said to the merchant on this act that "He who cheats is not one of us." This shows that honesty is the first thing which matters when it comes to doing business. Nowadays, with the increasing trend of Internet of things (IOTs) various brands and businesses are relying on online advertisements to sell their products and services. Online advertisements have both negative and positive impacts on customers. However, online advertisements misguide customers more as compared to guiding them. Using deceptive strategies to promote brands harm customer trust. Online advertisements usually glorify the benefits of products, use bait and switch strategy, influencers promote fake brands and products, and use deceptive pricing techniques to earn a profit. In addition to this, emotional appeals are effectively used by the brands to attract customers. On the otherhand, online advertisements are helpful as well in some ways as they provide detailed information of products, provide customers with multiple options, and have helped some people to get job opportunities. Customers can read reviews about products to make informed decisions. Also, some ads address real concerns of people. However, overuse of buzz words, misleading visuals, false reviews have heightened the risks of scams as compared to benefits.

Online advertisement encompasses use of social media, websites, TV ads to promote businesses and products. These advertisements are used to attract customers. Ads perform both: the guiding and misguiding role. To sell the product various ads usually portray the product as most efficient than other products of same category while stating misleading facts. Contrary to this, these ads educate customers also about the new technologies and advancements in various sectors.

Exaggerating benefits is one of the most common strategy adopted by the brands to sell products. Puffery is a strategy which is legal in most countries. This strategy allows brands to use various hyperboles to sell products, but this is being excessively used to glorify the products and making fake claims. For instance, in cosmetics industry it is very common to sell the products by overstating the benefits. Fair and lovely is a ~~cream~~ whitening cream which is portrayed in ads as ~~to be~~ a magic cream. Claims are made that it can make the complexion of a person fair in few weeks. People do buy these products and fall a prey to such claims and buy these products. The agenda of such ads to attract customers and make money.

Bait and switch strategy is also followed many brands of cosmetic, textile and electronics industry. To attract customers, sale is the most efficient mean. Brands use this strategy and offer lucrative discounts to customer but when a customer opens the website to check products, the products with discounts appear to be sold out. Instead

of the discounted products similar products with higher price and exaggerated benefits appear in the product list. Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) issued a press release in July 2024 in which 27 brands offering flat discounts were named. They offered flat discounts that didn't apply to all products.

Social media is widely used by the people all across the globe. Social media influencers, which are followed by a large number of people, usually glorify fraudulent products and opportunities. The influencers on the social media handles promote brands do paid promotions. This comes under influencer marketing. As influencers get paid for promotions, they usually don't check the effectiveness of products or validity of products. In Pakistan, various people fell in the trap of company named "Forever Living", which took investments from people to provide them daily paid tasks. This company scammed a lot of young students and other people but was promoted by the influencers. This shows, influencers don't verify the opportunities instead promote them for money.

Some brands use deceptive pricing techniques by offering discounts without revealing hidden taxes. In textile industry, clothing brands usually use this strategy. They lure the customers by providing discounts, but when a customer checks out, various additional taxes and shipping charges are added. Apart from this, some renowned brands usually increase the price of products

few days prior to offering sale or discounts and then sell the products on the original prices, even announcing it as discounted price.

Using emotional appeals to sell products is again a widely followed strategy. Every ad that is on T.V, social media platforms, and websites do have a story attached to it to make an emotional connection with people. For instance, a fizzy drink company, Coca Cola's tag line is "Coca Cola opens Happiness". Now, this tag line leaves an impact on people that during their happy moments such as parties, birthday celebrations, and anniversaries etc they have to make this drink part of their celebrations. Similarly, various other brands use the strategy to connect to people and people do buy the products watching such ads. According to Global Web Index, 71% people buy products based on social media ads.

Online advertisements do have a guiding role as well. It helps people to make informed decisions too.

Online ads provide detailed information of the products that helps customers to make informed decisions. The ads usually do enlist the salient features of products which help customer take a better decision. For instance, when it comes to clothing ads, description is provided about the size, material and texture of cloth. Instead of going to a store and check clothes one by one, people have this ease because to stay at home

and read the description of product and order the product. In Pakistan, the online share of Apparel retail market is 37.6% which will increase by an average of 10.6 to 56% by 2028.

Online advertisements also provide an opportunity to customers to compare the products to make right choices. When a person buys something through online platform, he has the opportunity to compare the products with other brands as well. This is applicable to any industry. For example, for buying electronic or gadgets one can compare the products of various brands by looking at their online ads instead of moving from store to another store to check the products.

Online advertisements have also helped people get opportunities because ads reach a vast audience. According to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), 87.35 million internet users are present. (2023). This shows that social media and other platforms have a reach to larger audience.

Platforms like Rozee.pk, Mustakbil.com, and Baytozgar.com offer the services of job posting and searching for a job is also possible. Such platforms help people get jobs. According to Oxford economics, Gen Z would make up 30% of global workforce by 2030. Generation Z mostly use social media platforms to search for opportunities. In this way, online advertisements are beneficial too for people.

Customers can read reviews about products when they shop from any online store or platform. This is an advantage of online advertisement as reading the reviews before buying a product can allow the customers to make right decision. Online platforms like Daraz and Amazon are widely used by the people. ~~To a for~~ These two platforms have the option of reading reviews about the product before confirming order. This is beneficial as this is available for online platforms only. When people buy products from markets they don't get the opportunity of reading reviews ~~of~~ of other people who have already purchased the same product.

Some online advertisements also address the genuine concerns of people. These advertisements educate people in real sense. During COVID-19, various ~~govest~~ government sponsored ads were played on T.V channels and other social media platforms. These ads were educating people about social distancing and other preventive and corrective measures to protect themselves from the virus. Apart from this, ads like displaying the use of technology for medical purpose also educate people. These ads vary in range from using robotic gloves for physiotherapy purpose to using various supplements for nutrition purposes.

Eventhough, online advertisements have some benefits but the misguiding customers via online advertisements ~~at~~ ~~maneuver~~ out maneuver than guiding customers.

Online ads do provide detailed information about products but most of the times information is not true. Instead buzz words such as "organic" and "natural" mislead customers. In cosmetics, food, and drinks ads, the word organic is widely used. The words like organic, natural, number one catch the attention of customers but in reality products usually don't use organic ingredients. Saeed ghani is one the Pakistani brands which sell products naming them as organic. But in reality it use various chemicals for the production of skincare products.

Despite the fact that people do have options when it comes to online advertisements and they can compare and contrast various options, a common deceptive strategy is adopted by brands. ~~where~~ They display one thing, but when the customer recieves the same thing it usually vary in size and sometimes used products are delievered too. This makes a confusion and trusting any company becomes difficult. Misleading visuals are too used ~~where~~ in food ads. Advertisements display more tempting food than the one which a person order. Ordered products ~~usually~~ food usually vary in proportion and quantity too.

Online advertisements help people to find opportunities but these opportunities are very less as compared to fake ads for work opportunities. In Pakistan, there have a surge in fake work opportunities over the past few years. Online tuitioning, assignment writing and marketing work. Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), 2018-2022 2022 cyber crime report tells that there have been a surge in seven types of cybercrimes among which online scams for work is a common one. Apart from this a study "Stay Secure Pakistan" by VISA reveals that 52% people reported that they were the victim of online scams in the year 2023.

Another point of concern is that the line between genuine concerns and manipulation is very thin. Some advertisements ~~portray as the~~ are portrayed as genuine issues ~~in~~ whereas, in reality those advertisements don't talk about the serious concerns. One such example is the promotion of e-cigarette and vapes over the traditionally used cigarettes. e-cigarettes are not less harmful. They have the equal damaging effects as the other cigarettes have. As of 2024, e-cigarette market size in Pakistan is 77.2 million dollars (Vaping epidemic among youth, Muhammad Abdul Qadeer). Therefore, the ads promoting e-cigarettes don't address the real concerns instead are manipulating young people.

To sum up the argument, online advertisements misguide customers. Even though, online advertisements have both negative and positive impacts on customers. Online advertisements misguide customers more as compared to guiding them. Using deceptive strategies to promote brands harm customer trust. So, with the help of regulations to govern e-commerce and strict implementation of laws, Pakistan can earn a lot of revenue from online advertisements.