



## Manipulation in the world of marketing

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**Abstract:** Every day we are participants in various marketing advertisements. Wherever we turn at every turn, we can see at least one bit of marketing and try to communicate businesses to their products or services through marketing activities. Tempting sentences at once distract us and intrigue us to continue reading or watching a commercial or marketing view. The purpose of the research is to look at where and in what marketing activities manipulation is hidden and how and how marketing tricks using manipulation tactics influence the change in our attitude of behavior and attitude of buying certain advertised products or services. Research with a method of experiment has assessed aspects of manipulative advertising, their execution, and expected impacts on consumer behaviour in general about any purchase of a product or service worldwide. Analysis of the collected primary data revealed that manipulation in marketing is quite common and occurs at every step and has begun to be one of the main players when creating marketing ventures and actions.

**Keywords:** manipulative advertising, manipulative techniques, false arguments, emotional persuasion, conscious consumer, conscious advertising

**JEL:** M37

## Manipulacije v svetu trženja

**Povzetek:** Vsak dan smo pod vtisom različnih marketinških oglasov. Kamor koli se obrnemo, na vsakem koraku lahko opazimo vsaj kanček trženja s katerim skušajo podjetja preko marketinških aktivnosti komunicirati s potrošniki. Mamljivi stavki nas hkrati zmotijo in navdušijo, da nadaljujemo z branjem ali ogledom reklamnega oglasa. Namen raziskave je pogledati, kje in v kakšnih marketinških aktivnostih se skriva manipulacija ter kako marketinški triki s taktikami manipulacije vplivajo na spremembo našega vedenjskega odnosa in odnosa do nakupa določenih oglaševanih izdelkov ali storitev. Z metodo eksperimenta smo ocenili vidike manipulativnega oglaševanja, njihovo izvedbo in pričakovane vplive na vedenje potrošnikov na splošno. Analiza zbranih primarnih podatkov je pokazala, da je manipulacija v trženju precej pogosta in se pojavlja na vsakem koraku ter je postala eden glavnih igralcev pri ustvarjanju marketinških podvigov in akcij.

**Ključne besede:** manipulativno oglaševanje, manipulativne tehnike, lažni argumenti, čustveno prepričevanje, zavestni potrošnik, zavestno oglaševanje

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Manipulation in marketing has become a problem for consumers that we meet regularly. This practice moves away from a marketing mission that meets customer needs and expands the asymmetries of power between company and consumer. Many manipulative ads are difficult to prove because of their controversial nature and content. The article talks about how companies use stimuli, advertising mechanisms to manipulate consumers. At the same time, this makes some suggestions on reducing manipulative practices. The effectiveness of these solutions will depend on the observance of some principles by companies that advertise in areas where consumers can find common goals and interests. Manipulation analysis refers to contemporary issues of freedom of speech raised by forced disclosure, especially in the context of marketing backgrounds and international business. It can also help guide the regulation of financial products where consumer choice manipulation is obvious.

The problem we find in manipulation communication is because of the very way in which individual words and the composition of sentences affect our mental and psychological system, looking at all aspects of the very concept of manipulation and how and how marketing tactics and marketing aspects are used by manipulation for their profitable benefit and international business. It is in this way that marketing tries to attract consumers with tempting manipulation tactics to buy certain products or services.

The problem of manipulation is that it is based on the whole field of marketing and all its aspects and links that can be close but also widely linked. Of course, the field of manipulation is also closely related to the psychological system of human thinking, so in this way, we can connect manipulation with the field of psychology, coordination, and biology and see how and how marketing tricks affect our psychological attitude of decision-making.

### 1.1 Characteristics of manipulative advertising

The characteristics of manipulative advertising are all kinds of convincing advertising that involve presenting the product/service in the ultimate practical way to the audience. Non-manipulative advertising displays the exact features and characteristics of the product, while the manipulative form deals with exaggerating the positive features of the product and masking the negative aspects. Advertisers use omitting details, lies, and intimidating customers in future decision-making at the time of purchase. According to (Borba, Julian, Viegas and Associates, 2016) unpopulated advertising is the right form because it provides consumers with compelling information logically and truthfully. On the other hand, the emotional arguments seen in the ads are based on the components of persuasion and information. About (Keller, 2009), informational advertising supplies facts and rational features of the brand, while emotional advertising affects consumers' emotions by manipulating their soft appeals. The next essential element of manipulative advertising is the unethical behavior of advertisers because acquired interests force these advertisers to use manipulation the most (Posel Danes, 2020). Persuasion becomes manipulative when the role of ethics is rejected. Therefore, ethics determines the decisions, behavior, and practices of sellers and advertisers. (Gray, 2004) viragoes that ethics require three principles to be implemented in advertising, and these principles include compliance with the law, acting of common interest, and respecting ethics.

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## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Methodology and sample of research

The method and cause of the research are part of the research paper, and the methods are based on two focus groups of subjects in the volume of twenty participants. The research will aim to describe the situation or prove causal relationships between the components of the motivated focus group and the independent focus group. In statistics, qualitative analysis will consist of procedures that use only dichotomous data - that is, data that can take on a value of 0 (zero) and 1 (one). These techniques are right where events or entities can be more easily counted or sorted than measured. The techniques themselves are, of course, numerically-based and will be analysed as such (Aggarwal & Wu, 2005)

Manipulation on the psychological and emotional basis of the human subconscious and how it is implemented in the form of manipulation within marketing will be further analysed. The results of the research of primary and secondary data on focus groups are to be presented by a graphical example of how much marketing affects the human subconscious and on groups of ten subjects where one focus group will be interviewed with manipulation questions to notice the development of manipulation, which will confirm our hypotheses and ask the main and specific research questions.

## 3 RESEARCH RESULTS

In the study, we were guided by experimental experiments that looked at the strength and the very development of manipulation in manipulation tactics between subjects.

### 3.1 Experimental experiment 1: Itself-belief about a manipulative person

In research study 1, we turn to situational factors that can influence beliefs in marketing manipulation by increasing the glow of consumer reassurance Armor as a result of reduced psychological distance (Aggarwal & Wu, 2005) between consumers and an episode of persuasion. When consumers consider episodes of persuasion from a first-person perspective, they are more likely to recognize introspectively their ability to cope with attempts at persuasion, i.e., to be able to do so. the use of manipulation, reducing beliefs in the power of marketing manipulation. However, we expected this effect to only be seen among consumers with a lower psychic understanding of creating their rights.

Study 2 also examines whether consumers believe in conspiracies of the power of marketing manipulation. Literature suggests that making sense is related to conspiratorial thinking (Tivadar, 2009) Therefore, we have speculated that beliefs in marketing manipulation could be part of a broader spiralling environment of ideas arising from making sense.

For this study, we took a group of 20 participants (total = 45% of women and 55% of men). To simplify the design of the study, we used stimuli from study 1. Her shares were randomly distributed over two conditions. In a first-person state, participants were asked to imagine

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that consumers were in every vignette and answered questions about the effectiveness of marketing tactics from their perspective as consumers.

"Stores sometimes make promotions limited in time just to give customers a greater sense of urgency to buy at sale prices. To what extent do you agree that this is an effective tactic to buy more goods?"

In a third-person state, participants were asked to imagine that some other people (Mark or Laura, manipulated between subjects) were consumers in these scenarios. (In the master's thesis, the experiments were based on the first and third faces, that is, the first person as you are individual and the comparison of the third face, i.e., the third face. Non-impulsive person e. g. Marko or any third person.)

"To what extent do you agree that this is an effective tactic to get Mark or Laura to buy more goods?"

There has been speculation that the sex of the protagonist could influence beliefs about manipulation, as literature suggests that women are believed to be more gullible to meaningful marketing manipulations, we have also measured the target of participants' cognitive motivation (adapted from 5 points  $A=0.77$  (Tivadar, 2009) "I always know how I feel") as a research measure, as we have speculated that a cognition target could potentially mitigate the effect of the condition on bluffing. Finally, we measured the beliefs of the conspiracy with the help of a conspiracy mentality questionnaire (5 items,  $\alpha = .83$ : Bruder et al. 2013). All items were answered on 5-point scales.

### 3.2 Results and discussion

First, we examined whether the results supported our predictions about the persuasiveness of Armor. Yes, marketing tactics seemed effective less to people in a first-person state and/or more effective in a third-person state. The formula is taken from (Kotler, 1990), with the help of which we later obtained mathematical calculations ourselves using the Excel program. This was true of a valid tactic:

$M_{\text{First}} = 1,57, SD = 1,71, M_{\text{Second}} = 2,04, SD = 1,26; t(355) = -2,97, p = .003, d = -0,31$

and dubious tactics, namely manipulated tactics:

$M_{\text{Second}} = -0,59, SD = 2,35, M_{\text{Third}} = -0,12, SD = 2,26; t(355) = 1,92, p = .056, d = -0,20$

This suggests to us that framing first-person persuasion (You independently a person as an individual who has been questioned) can activate consumer beliefs of control over their actions to cope with persuasion and therefore reduce the perceived effectiveness of tactics. We found no effect of the protagonist's gender on beliefs of manipulation (collapsed through valid and suspicious) within the third person (a fictional person with whom a first-person person was manipulated, i.e., a first-person person).

The main effect or effect of interaction with the sex of participants.

$F(1,176) = 0,11, p = .737$   $F(1,176) = 0,31, p = .579, \eta^2 < .01$

So further research was based on a comparison of dubious tactics in the first person i.e., the consumer in person, and on comparing the purchase of "some" consumer, namely a third-person person. Study 3 broadly replicated the results in studies 1, 2, and 3. Meaningful manipulation of marketing significantly predicted beliefs for valid

$b = 0,42, SE = 0,15, p = 0.00$

and dubious tactics

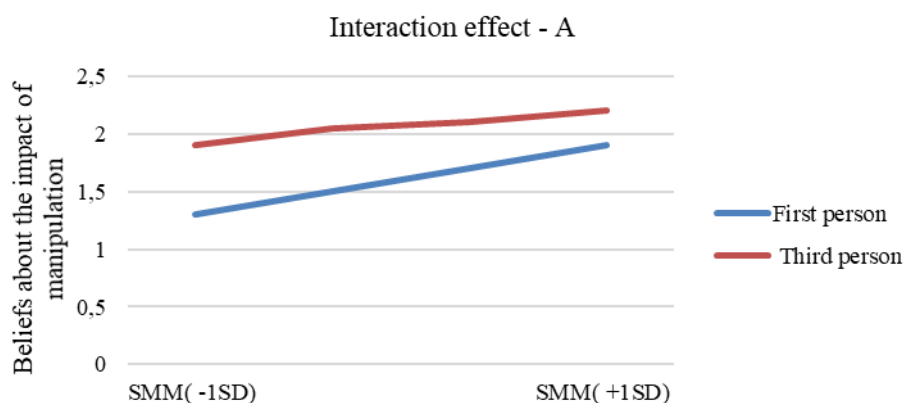
$b = 0,9, SE = 0,22, p = 0.009$

Furthermore, meaningful manipulation in marketing and condition had a significant interaction effect (graph 1) on beliefs for suspicious, but not a valid tactic  $F(1,353) = 3,52$ .  $F(1,353) = 0,062, p = 0.01$

$F(1,353) = 0,3, p = 0.3$  thesis or those consumers be first -person stats of elf-contra psyching cant theist overconsumes with a low percentage self-control in a psyching cant theses or 1 standard deviation below the mean, but it was not significant those who have greater self-control, or 1 standard deviation above the mean.

$B = -0,43, SE = 0,17, p = 0,012$   $b = 0,02, SE = 0,17, p = 0.896$

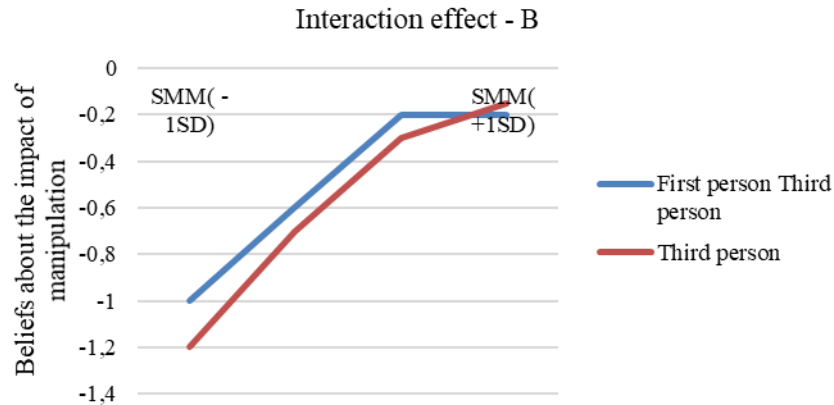
Below we will report on the results of the internal meta-analysis of study three, where we evaluated the same effect using two operationalizations of plausible resistance - the first face about the third person about the abstract.



Graph 1. Interaction effect of meaningful manipulation of marketing and condition on beliefs about the effectiveness of A

Source: author's work (2021)

In the graph, we can see an analytical representation of the results of the interaction effects of meaningful manipulation in marketing and the state of belief about the effectiveness of valid (graph 1 - A tactics) and dubious (graph 2 - B tactics) tactics from the experimental case study 3 with the subjects who were divided into two focus groups.

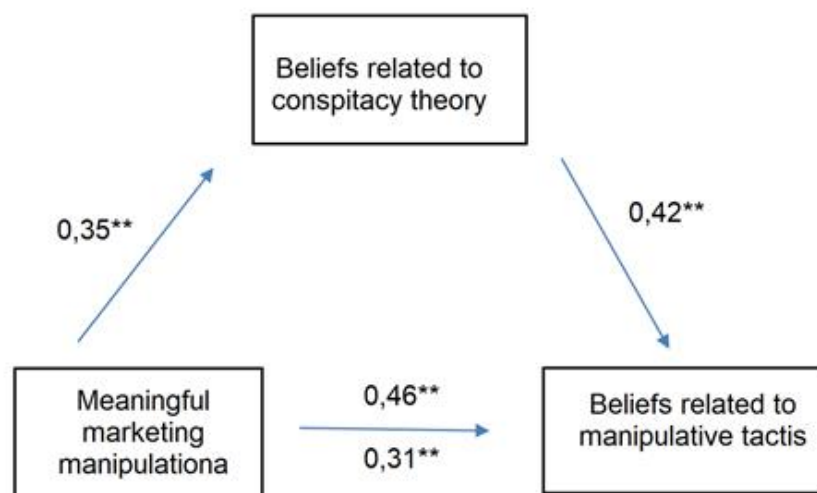


Graph 2. Interaction effect of meaningful manipulation of marketing and condition on beliefs about B effectiveness

Source: author's work (2021)

Next, we measured the correlation between the beliefs of manipulation (the association of valid and dubious tactics for simplicity and statistical power) and the ideas of conspiracy: Beliefs in conspiracies were significantly related to beliefs about marketing manipulation,  $r(355) = 0,25, p < .001$

The court used mediation analysis (Sunstein, 2016) to evaluate whether the conspiracy mentality mediates the relationships between manipulation in marketing and manipulation of beliefs (collapsing over valid and suspicious) (Figure 1). The indirect effect was significant: the conspiracy mentality partly mediated the effect of manipulation in marketing on the manipulation  $0,1,9:CI: 0,65 \text{ do } 0,252$  Thus, beliefs in marketing manipulation may be part of a broader premonition of the conspiracy.



\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Figure 1. Belief mediation model collapsed invalid and dubious study

Source: author's work (2021)

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Overall, study 1 showed that first- and third person thinking reduces beliefs about manipulation, and whether this effect was not equally powerful for all consumers. For consumers of low motivation to make sense, beliefs about manipulation are weakened when consumers think of themselves, and not others in convincing locations, which encourages consumers to recognize their Armor for persuasion.

### 3.3 Experiment 2 - Manipulation interviews with focus groups

After the experiments were done, further research was started by focus groups where the question was further asked in both groups to confirm or reject the fact that the advertisements were intended for the target audience. In an independent variable, we gave participants freedom of speech while in a dependent variable we supplied guidance and wrote down the participant using a sub-question to answer:

The response of participants from the independent i.e., not manipulation groups:

Subject 1.

"Something that reminds me of this is not necessarily related to the place or events, but during advertising. Several times looking at the diary at noon I had the opportunity to see, before the beginning of the diary, advertisements for the treatment of male impotence with various tablets e.g., advertisement African Plum. I saw the same commercial during halftime TV coverage of a football game. Therefore, it is poked at the timing of when certain advertisements will be played, according to previously obtained information when which population sits in front of the TV screen. It is known that men, especially the elderly, pensioners look at the diary at noon and that they have problems with impotence."

We asked the second group of dependent variables a similar question but we gave them concrete guidance and led them to focus with their thinking only on a specific event that was currently associated with the World Cup and thus manipulated the question itself and asked for a strict answer regarding this event With the example of the World Cup i.e. the World football Championship, there is any connection to football everywhere. Respondents did not have the option to cite their examples of ads but were closely related to a specific one and we did not allow them to think "outside of the box or out of the box".

Subject 1:

"I think most of them, if not all of them, are. For example, commercials for March. It is known (or at least considered) that beer is drunk more by men than women, they are still based on the assumption that most of them love football (and there is a Generally Croatian "football fever"), so they try to associate their product with something that is not in itself related to this product to enhance the influence of their brand about others. This is also clear in the fact that, at least in my experience, there are a lot of people who choose March in situations where there is a choice of at least a little higher quality beer (in their opinion) for the same price, and they have only harsh words for March.

The answers to the question asked were varied, interesting, moreover unexpected. This question achieved the highest concentration of responses in the focus manipulative group who are unaware of manipulative strategies involving the link between a particular event/situation and the advertised product. Although an exceedingly small number, some

respondents replied that they did not know how to give an example or did not think in detail about advertisements.

To the focus non-variable group, we asked a simple question about the opinion of the advertisements themselves as the indoctrination of users, especially children (instill attitudes, stereotypes, class differences).

First respondent:

"Indoctrination may be too difficult a word, but they certainly can influence opinion or promote certain attitudes or ideology (e.g., an Erste Bank advertisement that promotes diversity and opposes toxic masculinity)."

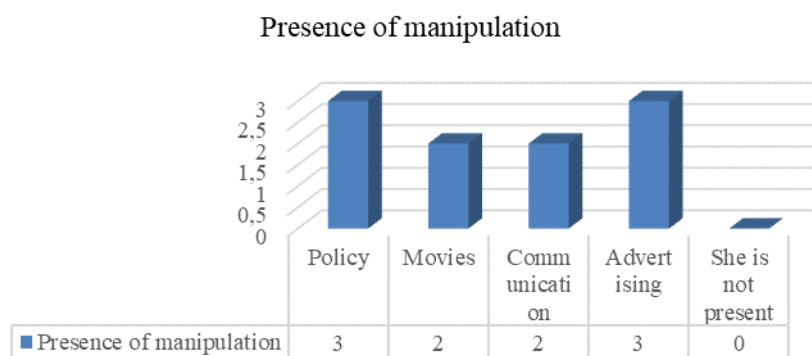
Second respondent:

"Yes, advertisements strongly support pre-existing social stereotypes (for example gender), so much so that it becomes common sense to the viewer. However, I think that recently it has reached this level that advertisements turn themselves into a stereotype (e.g., deliberately caricatured or banal advertisements) which paradoxically somehow raises awareness of their superficiality and those who may not think about it critically."

Subject 3:

"Certainly, advertisements create "needs" in users that may not realistically exist, but with their indoctrination, they influence the creation of a sense of need for something that did not exist before. A message is sent if you do not have perfect skin or use the PERSIL laundry bang that is currently IN and advertising, you are not socially accepted, and consumers are created subject to the trends advertised. Children are an ideal "material" for attracting and manipulating advertisements. And the old and the sick who will try everything to reduce the pain."

The next question in the focus group of respondents was subjective thinking where participants could answer independently: "In which area do you consider manipulation to be the most present?"

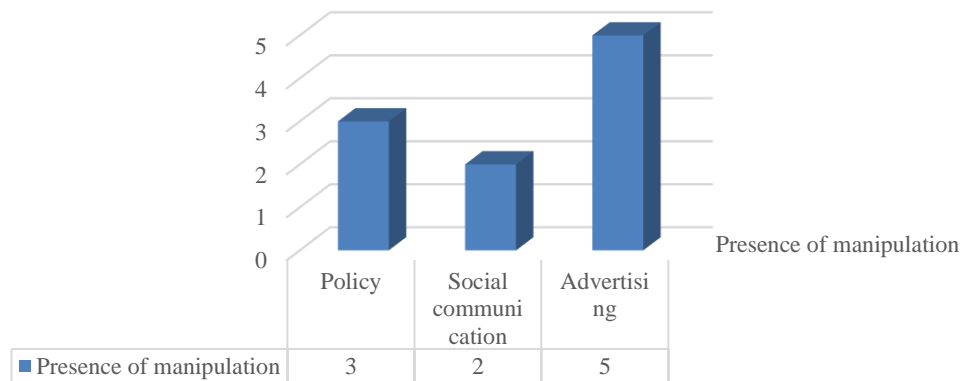


Graph 3. Respondent's position on the area of greatest manipulation

Source: author's work (2021)



We did not give the focus group of respondents with whom we want to manipulate the choice of subjective thinking but limited their limits only to 3 directions: advertising, politics, social communication (graph 3).



Graph 4. The attitude of manipulated subjects on the field of greatest manipulation

Source: author's work (2021)

In graph 4 we can see that ten respondents with only three choices outweighed advertising more, as many as five manipulated respondents decided to add their attitude and voice to advertising, the other three were still facing more towards politics while the other two manipulated subjects still thought that the presence of manipulation in social communication.

## 4 MARKETING TACTICS THAT COMBAT MANIPULATION IN MARKETING

### 4.1 Encourage abundance and patience

When practicing abundance and patience, you will not feel the need to use scant and urgent marketing manipulation tactics to get customers to buy from you. Pop-ups, emails, calls to action, and any other messages that read: "Last day of summer sale!", "Only 2 more places - sign up now!" or "Order now to receive tomorrow!" - such are the messages that give your customers the feeling that they will miss them or that they will not succeed if they do not buy from you or do not hire you now. The tactic of urgency motivates us to act quickly, and scarcity tactics cause anxiety if we do not act at once. Both evoke negative emotions, so why are there many blog posts about how to use scarcity and urgency tactics in your marketing. Since you want to create a more abundant and kinder world, you can consciously decide not to degrade your clients because you do not like it. You are a rare company or business because you care more about people and our planet than you do about profit and your customers love you for it. Therefore, instead of arousing all these negative emotions, evoke with your customers a feeling of abundance and patience. It will also help in the trust and loyalty department. Just say no to the tactics of deprivation and urgency.

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## 4.2 Implement brilliant customer service

Remember, the competition is always so much bigger than the company in which it is working. You should enjoy talking to the "enemy", namely from the marketing director of a competitive company when conferencing. The very act of wanting to "beat the competition" causes anxiety. Another negative emotion, so why is it so important to many business owners?

See Apple vs. Microsoft. MS seemed to be constantly looking for what Apple was doing, and Apple violated the stance: "Do what you want, we don't care, we have a wonderful time playing in our sandbox!" With this attitude, Apple has built the largest long-term group of fans to date. Not because they "beat the competition", but because they paid attention to their own, not to other people's customers. There are also so many things you can learn from the competition. Pay attention to your customers, not someone else's.

## 4.3 Being sociable in business

Let us put social media back on the social network, we do not mean it as Mr. Zuckerberg thought with the change in Facebook's algorithm in 2018. We mean kindness and respectful communication. We live in a world where many people post or comment without first thinking. Since people do not necessarily know the person with whom they communicate on social networks, it is a bit like driving a car because it is easier to hurt a stranger than a friend. However, we see that more anger is exercised on the Internet than on the road. This makes our society more aggressive, anxious, and inefficient, which is why many modern countries are currently split in half. That is why companies should leave their promotion of society on the very advertisements on televisions, posters, leaflets, and social networks for society.

## 4.4 Ethically close sales

What we do know is that customers only buy when the perceived value far exceeds the price. This applies to both the products and services business. So, if you own a product-based company and only have an online store, you face challenges that you have to find the right customers and justify the prohibitive cost of production. If you are service based, you need to prove that your ability will achieve customers 'desired results when there are no or no guarantees. These are difficult challenges for non-sellers. But it is simple. All you must do is help potential buyers make the right decision. This can even mean that you do not rent or buy from you. This is what you want because if the wrong people buy from you and are not satisfied, they will never trust you again, and they can even write a critical review that will damage your reputation. Honesty also helps you gain trust that is vital for the brand. To help them make the right decision, you will need data. To do this, you will need to communicate with your clients. You can do this through surveys, contests, customer insight interviews, surveys, etc. Once you have enough information, design, and present your offer to attract your ideal customers, and if they trust your brand, they will buy from you. First, communicate, create an amazing offer, and then present it.

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## 5 CONCLUSION

Manipulations can occur in different settings and contexts, for a range of purposes, by companies as well as by other entities (including, for example, governments). The development of a permanent legal regulation related to the analysis of manipulations is undoubtedly a major challenge. Even more so because humans are heterogeneous and can react in diverse ways to market manipulations. In the context of consumer markets - which is the focus of our analysis - further research, especially empirical, is key. Nevertheless, we hope that this work, focusing on the nonverbal market of manipulations in the sphere of consumer-seller relations, can contribute to this imperative challenge. The present need for this should not be ignored.

Manipulation in marketing has become an issue that goes with the daily life of consumers. Companies choose to manipulate consumers every time consumers' interests do not align with their interests and goals and do not convince them otherwise. A significant role in consumer manipulation is played by the manipulation of advertising due to its functions and places in the mix of marketing techniques used to fulfill what consumerism requires: higher consumption, more diversity, and better consumption. Advertising manipulation techniques are controversial every time an advertiser wins, and the consumer loses. Critics of manipulative advertising highlight two broad classes of advertising controversies. One type of criticism charges that when manipulating through advertising, moral rules against harm are violated. In other words, advertising has negative financial and health effects, negative impact on efficiency, adverse effects on family ties and community ties. In addition, advertising promotes selfish hedonism and can hurt the environment. Another category of advertising controversy is freedom-based critics. These arguments argue that certain forms of advertising deprive a person of the possibility of free choice when deciding when to buy a product, goods, or service. People are complex customers who make decisions based on a changing combination of rational and emotional components. But it is this complex, controversial, and mixed nature of the individual personality that allows deception and misjudgement of some situations, products, brands, or companies because of manipulative advertising. Misleading advertising is universally thought to be immoral. Consumer accountability is diminished when someone discovers that a salesperson or advertiser is spreading lies. In such cases of fraud, advertisers certainly bear most of the responsibility. When using faulty arguments, it is much more difficult to pin the blame on advertisers. Mature consumers are expected to understand which argument is real and which is bad, and if advertisers use misconceptions, consumers would be expected to know better. In such cases, the burden of liability appears to be primarily on the consumer. More ambiguity exists in the case of emotional persuasion because the main problem consists in the difficulty in assessing how much effect advertisements have on consumer emotions. Therefore, advertising techniques and mechanisms should be used in a way that coordinates the convergence of interests and arguments. Many manipulative acts in advertising are difficult to prove and no one can say whether stricter regulations will reduce natural tendencies towards manipulation through advertising. It, therefore, appears that other solutions should be found in areas where traders and consumers find common interests to improve advertising practices.

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