



METHODS OF MANIPULATION USED IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to see how selected methods of manipulation used in advertising affect consumer behaviour. The study was conducted using a diagnostic survey using an original questionnaire posted on social media. The participants included 102 selected individuals. According to the information gathered, the respondents are aware that the use of manipulation is widespread in advertising. The most common methods of achieving this include fragmenting the advertising message and leveraging the authority or popularity of individuals featured in advertisements. Fragmentation has a particularly strong effect. Others of similar importance include making the message appear scientific, idealising it, and influencing human emotions. Manipulation in advertisements often leads to situations when consumers decide to purchase products that they do not, in fact, need. Manipulative tactics, such as creating artificial needs, using psychological tricks, or applying social pressure, can significantly influence consumer decision-making, often resulting in the purchase of products that provide no genuine benefit or satisfaction.

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Abstrakt

Celem badań było zweryfikowanie, jak wybrane środki manipulacji stosowane w reklamie oddziałują na postępowanie konsumentów. Badanie przeprowadzono metodą sondażu diagnostycznego z wykorzystaniem autorskiego kwestionariusza ankiety, który zamieszczono na kilku portalach społecznościowych. Uczestniczyły w nich 102 celowo wybrane osoby. Z zebranych informacji wynika, że respondenci są świadomi tego, że manipulacja jest powszechnie stosowana w reklamie. Do najczęściej spotykanych przez nich form tego rodzaju działań należy zaliczyć fragmentację przekazu reklamowego oraz wykorzystywanie autorytetu lub popularności osób występujących w reklamie. Pierwszy z wymienionych środków wywiera na nich relatywnie silny wpływ. Do innych o podobnym znaczeniu zaliczono: stwarzanie pozorów naukowości, idealizację oraz oddziaływanie na ludzkie emocje. Manipulacja w reklamie często prowadzi do sytuacji, w których konsumenci decydują się na zakup produktów, które w rzeczywistości nie są im potrzebne. Mechanizmy manipulacyjne, takie jak tworzenie sztucznych potrzeb, wykorzystywanie psychologicznych trików czy tworzenie presji społecznej, skutecznie wpływają na wybory konsumenckie. W rezultacie często są nabywane przedmioty, których zakup nie przynosi konsumentom rzeczywistej satysfakcji ani korzyści.

Introduction

“Manipulation involves using information with a view to achieving a hidden goal by the information provider by consciously distorting the image of reality, which limits the possibility of rational evaluation and reflective response from the recipient, affects his attitude in a concealed manner and makes him dependent to a certain extent” (Szulczewski, 1982, p. 52). This definition defines manipulation as a specific method for influencing other people. Its mechanism is hidden from individuals who are treated in this way. It has two main features, i.e. indirect effect on consciousness and the fact that the aim and intention of exerting an impact, which brings benefit to the manipulator, is often concealed from the individuals being manipulated, which suggest that it is not beneficial to them (which is usually true). In other words, manipulation involves controlling someone else’s behaviour in a purposeful and planned manner, which is not

consciously perceived as such by a person being manipulated. The effectiveness of manipulation depends on its imperceptibility (Lepa, 1992, p. 77-87).

There are two types of manipulation: direct (e.g. “brainwashing”) and indirect, based on verbal and nonverbal communication. This form can be effected on two planes: conveying information and emotions. Regarding the former, manipulation involves providing false information in a purposeful and concealed manner, hiding certain facts and emphasising others. It occurs when a person or a group of people is misled and forced to accept a false image of reality. Manipulation, on the other plane, involves evoking specific emotional states and persuasion. In both cases, one uses psychological knowledge, such as psychoanalysis or psychology of motivation (Harwas-Napierała, 2005, p. 247-258).

Manipulation occurs when two conditions are fulfilled. The first condition involves intentional and conscious actions performed by the person exerting influence on others, while the person under such influence does not realise it. In the second condition, the person exerting influence acts in their own interest without considering the interest of the person on whom the influence is exerted (Antosik, 2014, p. 40; Konieczny, 2023, p. 156; Łukaszewski *et al.*, 2009, p. 51).

Rules of Social Influence Used in Advertising

Persuasion, convincing, and recommending are all forms of influencing that are used both in politics and marketing but also in practically all interpersonal relations. Advertising is ubiquitous in our reality – it is difficult to imagine a world without commercials. Every day, consumers are exposed to various marketing techniques. They can be immune to a range of them, but they can be influenced to a various extent by others. Robert Cialdini analysed the effectiveness of influencing people in his studies. In his flagship publication entitled “Influencing people. Theory and practice”, he mentions techniques classified into six groups, determined as “Cialdini’s six rules”. These include:

- rule of reciprocity – it involves invoking a feeling of obligation and gratefulness in another person. It points to the fact that one should always do something in return for what one receives from another person; it obligates one to return the favour, and it is often used in negotiations and in everyday life; it is based on a conviction that if one does something nice to another person, it evokes a natural will to reciprocate (Debczyńska & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021, p. 10);

- rule of involvement and consequence – this is based on the assumption that if one gets involved in a case or one makes a declaration to purchase an item, one will continue, as it will be difficult to withdraw because one will want to “keep face” and be perceived as a person of one’s word (Skorupka, 2023, p. 263);

- rule of social proof of right – according to it, many decisions are often based on what others think and on how they behave; it is associated with the need

to belong to a group and to succumb to the social norms; popular marketing actions in this regard include seeking reviews and recommendations from influencers who can influence other people's decisions (Liber-Kwiecińska, 2023);

– rule of liking someone – according to this rule, whether something is right or not is decided by referring to what other people think about it; it is based on the fact that one does not refuse someone who asks for the sake of friendship or sympathy for something that one does not want to do; it also illustrates the will to be sympathetic towards people who are like us with respect to their appearance or beliefs and opinions;

– the rule of authority – this stems from the fact that it is easier to believe in someone's claims than to formulate rational opinions on them, and if we accept someone's opinions, it is easier to accept them from known and respected authorities; we follow suggestions of people who can be perceived as authorities or who think themselves to be ones; an authority is distinguished by a social position, material status, a scientific title or specialisation in a specific area;

– the rule of inaccessibility – this stems from a limited opportunity for obtaining something that generates emotions associated with being limited by possibilities; such emotions can be unpleasant and thus necessitate quick decisions driven by such emotions; it is easier to persuade a customer to buy an item which is in a limited offer or which is available only for a short time; consumers want what is hard to get, mysterious, or temporarily unavailable.

Apart from the above, there is a rule of maximisation of one's interest, according to which everyone tries to get as much as possible for the lowest possible price. All these rules use automatism in human actions, which makes them effective. Nowadays, we are flooded by information and, in consequence, we have to respond fast and select news. To this end, we often use heuristics, intuition, habits and stereotypical thinking. We often take into consideration one aspect of a situation when making a decision, which often leads to wrong choices. The world of advertising uses this tendency to manipulate buyers' decisions with the above-mentioned rules of social influence (Kliś, 2010, p. 26, 27; Antosik, 2014, p. 41-43; Rychlewicz, 2023).

Types of Manipulation Methods in Advertising

The informative value of an advertisement is one of the key issues in the functioning of the market and influencing buyer behaviour. Advertisements can often be perceived as a tool of manipulation, which makes use of peoples' inclinations, weaknesses and needs in order to achieve the sales goals. Although it is a widely applied method of passing on information, it is often one-sided and irrevocable. The message conveyed in it is often simplified, abbreviated and formulated in such a way as to evoke a specific response in the recipients.

On the one hand, the main aim of an advertisement is to provide information about products and services, but it can also encourage people to buy them. Persuasion is, on principle, a tool for influencing a recipient, which consists of informing in a subtle yet clear manner about the necessity to make a choice which is the right one in given circumstances. Therefore, it consists of encouraging and persuading the advertiser to accept the advertiser's arguments by trying systematically to influence someone else's thoughts, feelings, and actions through conveyed instruments. The message in advertisements is, therefore, persuasive rather than just informative in nature. Its aim is to provide information, but not only that – it is mainly to influence the buyers' behaviour, to persuade them to make a purchase or to change their attitude to the offer addressed to them (material or non-material). Since the aim of advertising is to persuade people to act in a certain way, its informative value has been questioned increasingly often. Persuasion, i.e. influencing the recipient with the message, is a key advertisement tool. By systematic attempts at influencing the person's thoughts, feelings and actions, an advertisement is supposed to persuade the recipient to make a specific choice which meets the advertiser's expectations. Therefore, advertising messages, which are intended to persuade people to act in a specific manner, are instruments of persuasion. Unfortunately, their credibility is highly doubtful. Because of this, they often become tools of manipulation in the hands of advertisers (Nowacki, 2009, p. 339-348).

The effectiveness of advertisements depends on many factors. The key to success is that they should be based on facts and reliable information. However, with the competitive pressure on the market and businesses striving to achieve the highest sales, many advertisers use various manipulation techniques. Advertisement authors often use various measures of manipulation, which are intended to help them achieve the desired results. The most commonly used include: fragmentation, use of evaluative words, use of structures that prevent negation, making the message appear scientific, implicature, presupposition, use of an authority and/or popularity of a person appearing in an advertisement, hyperbolisation, idealisation, influencing people's emotions.

Fragmentation, addressing the message to a small group of recipients in the advertisement, divides the market into smaller but more homogeneous groups of consumers, called market segments. It is an important element of media planning as it helps reach a selected consumer group with a specific advertising message. Selected market segments to which advertisements are addressed have similar needs, preferences, purchasing behaviours and lifestyles. This allows for the message to suit the needs and preferences of individual consumer groups, increasing its effectiveness and improving the efficiency of advertising budget use, eliminating wasting resources intended for the purpose (Belch & Belch, 2014, p. 410-440).

Using evaluative words as one of the most common linguistic manipulation techniques applied in advertising consists of introducing such words into the

advertising text that evoke emotions and valuation instead of describing the object being advertised objectively. Frequently used words include: “best”, “unique”, “perfect”, “ideal”, and “extraordinary”. The aim is to evoke positive emotions and persuade people to act, provoke a reaction – a purchase. These evaluative words are also popular because they help convince consumers that a product or service is unique, that is, the best on the market. This mechanism is also used to build a positive brand image, persuade consumers to buy things, and build loyalty in buyers or consumers towards the goods on offer or a company (Piecychna, 2020, p. 106-108).

The use of structures that prevent negation is a method of manipulation that involves formulating the advertising message in such a way as to make its negation difficult or even impossible. Frequent forms include the use of complex sentences, especially conditional phrases, which exclude the possibility of negation. For example, instead of saying, “Our product is not expensive”, it is better to say, “If you are looking for a product at a good price, our product will be good for you”. The message is formulated in this manner to provide positive information about the offer while minimising the possibility of negative comments or objections (Belch & Belch, 2014, p. 543-560).

Making a message appear scientific is an equally frequently used method of manipulation. The aim of this is to present an offer in a positive light. Examples of such actions include using scientific research to justify claims about the effectiveness or safety of products. In fact, such research is often conducted by hired scientists, which may affect its impartiality. Moreover, the findings of such research are often presented selectively and are not representative of the whole population. The use of scientific or technical language in advertisements is another technique. This is to make an impression that the manufacturing process for the products being advertised is based on advanced technologies and scientific knowledge (Hrycaj, 2007, p. 415-417).

Implicature and presupposition are the two main linguistic instruments used in advertising to influence consumers. Implicature is a method for conveying the meaning of something by implication rather than by an expression itself. This means that an advertisement can contain suggestions or hints which are not expressed directly, but allow for inferring some information or meaning. For example, an advertisement for a car can contain the phrase: “Your family deserves the best car”, which implies that the car being advertised is the best choice for the family. On the other hand, presupposition is an assumption which is accepted as true or irrefutable. Presuppositions are often used in advertisements to stress the advantages of a product or a service. For example, an advertisement for a new car contains the phrase: “Now with a new engine”, which implies that the car is popular and well-known to the consumers, and the engine is its only new element. In this manner, the advertiser conveys the message that the product is well-known, has a good opinion among consumers, and a modification (a new

engine) increases its value, which makes it an even better option compared to competitive offers (Bralczyk, 1995, p. 204-209).

Hiring well-known individuals is popular in advertising. This aims to boost the consumers' interest and trust in the brand or product. Athletes, scientists, celebrities and other famous individuals can positively affect the brand or product perception, attracting attention and increasing the will to buy. The authority of such individuals is built on their image, experience, popularity and specialist knowledge, which can translate into a positive image of the products with which they will be associated.

Hyperbolisation and idealisation are the next two manipulation methods used quite often in advertisements. Hyperbolisation involves exaggerating the product features or its functionality to reinforce its positive image and to persuade potential customers to buy it. According to P. H. Lewiński, "advertisers' propensity to hyperbolise, to exaggerate, is visible everywhere, especially in the choice of evaluative epithets. It is not enough that products are good or even very good – they are ideal or perfect" (Lewiński, 1999, p. 172). Idealisation involves presenting a product that overrates its advantages and minimises its disadvantages. In an idealising advertisement, a product is usually presented in an ideal situation, where its use brings spectacular effects. These kinds of manipulation can mislead the consumer with respect to the actual product features, but they can also act on an emotional level, encouraging the customer to bind up to the brand in a positive and emotional manner (Michalska, 2014, p. 281-285).

Influencing human emotions is one of the key aspects of advertising, and its aim is to evoke positive emotional reactions in consumers to the products or services being advertised. The catalogue, in this regard, includes several methods of influencing consumers' emotions. One of them is the use of sounds, music, images or scenes that are supposed to evoke specific emotions, such as joy, sadness, anxiety or frustration. The background music is intended to build associations with specific emotions; e.g. joyful and energetic music will be used in an advertisement for energy drinks, whereas peaceful and relaxing music will be used in body care cosmetics. There is also a possibility of using "an emotional scenario". This boils down to building a history or a situation, which evokes specific emotions in consumers and provokes a response – making a purchase. For example, an advertisement for coffee can present a romantic situation, which evokes the feeling of love and desire in consumers, and, at the same time, it will persuade them to purchase the brand on offer. A suitable narrative is a relatively often used instrument. Advertisements often tell a story or present scenes that are easy to understand and remember and also evoke specific emotions in consumers. The narrative can concern various aspects of life, such as work, family, friendship or hobby, and its main aim is to show how the product on offer can affect the consumer's everyday experience (Moroz, 2022, p. 110-114).

To sum up, the lifestyle of society nowadays is saturated with the media. Nearly everyone is influenced by them constantly. Its perception of reality, attitudes, and needs are largely shaped and manipulated by the media, which often imposes its models and content. Given all this, consumers often find it difficult to navigate through the abundance of information, distinguish the truth from a lie, and interpret and evaluate the messages objectively. Propaganda and manipulation have become an inseparable element of the modern media system. Individuals who receive the message passively and indiscriminately are particularly susceptible to manipulation. Therefore, it is important to develop in consumers the ability to think critically and to be aware that some advertisers deliberately construct messages in order to influence our needs, preferences, interests, opinions and choices (Biela, 2016, p. 310-311).

Results

In order to verify the issues associated with manipulation, presented in the theoretical part, an experiment was conducted to establish the impact on the consumer of various measures used in advertisements. The necessary data were gathered using the diagnostic survey technique with 102 participants. The original questionnaire was used, and it was shared on social media: Facebook, Instagram, and X (former Twitter). The participating population was diverse with respect to gender, age, education, place of residence and monthly net income per household member.

As stated above, manipulation in advertising can influence the choices, preferences, and actions of a consumer, which makes it a powerful marketing tool. However, it also raises questions about the ethics and honesty of advertising. According to a majority of the respondents (52.9%), persuasion in advertising involves making the consumer take a specific action in an open manner. This means that, in their opinion, advertisements try to convince people to perform certain actions. Furthermore, 40.2% of the respondents see persuasion in advertising as encouraging the consumer in a concealed manner to perform specific actions. This means that it is not always obvious that the aim of an advertisement is to manipulate and influence the consumers' choices but that they are subtly led to perform specific actions. A small percentage of the participants (6.9%) were convinced that there is no such thing as persuasion in advertisements.

Consumers perceive manipulation in advertising in various ways, which results in some of them regarding it as dishonest and misleading. Some advertisements can raise suspicions that the information provided in them is distorted or exaggerated in order to attract attention and persuade the consumer to make a purchase. A small percentage of the participants (3.9%) were convinced

that advertisements always or nearly always tell the truth. They believed that the information presented in advertisements was credible and consistent with reality. A considerable part of the respondents (44.1%) were of the opinion that advertisements were hiding most of the important information. This means that, in their opinion, advertisements did not tell the whole truth and did not reveal all the facts which could influence the consumers' decisions. Every third study participant (33.3%) thought that advertisements told only part of the truth. Those respondents were aware that some information in advertisements could be true but with some manipulations or selective presentation. In contrast, 12.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that advertisements always lied – they were dishonest and could not be trusted. A small portion (5.9%) did not have a clear opinion on this issue.

There are various methods of manipulation used in advertisements, such as the use of emotions, creating idealised visions, use of suggestive words, manipulating information and doctoring photographs. The aim of these techniques is to influence consumers' perceptions, provoke the desired emotional reactions and encourage them to buy products. Famous individuals or experts in a field are often used. Among the methods of manipulation, fragmentation was noticed the most frequently and was mentioned by 40.2% of the respondents. The use of authority and/or popularity of a person appearing in an advertisement was another frequently mentioned method of manipulation (39.2% of the respondents). An authority or a famous person is hired in order to influence the consumers' trust and to persuade them to buy a product. The respondents also mentioned other frequently used methods of manipulation: influencing people's emotions (35.3% of the respondents), idealisation (34.3%), hyperbolisation (25.5%), and making the message appear scientific (22.5%). The least frequently mentioned methods of manipulation included: the use of evaluative words (19.6%), implicature (19.6%), the use of structures that prevent negation (14.7%) and presupposition (11.8%) (Fig. 1).

Various methods of manipulation in advertisements influence consumers' decisions to various extents. Some techniques, like the use of emotions or creating idealised visions, can be more effective in stimulating impulsive buying, whereas others may have a smaller impact on consumers' decisions. Due to the differences in the respondents' perception of and reactions to various manipulation strategies, there is no universal method of manipulation with the same effect on everyone. In the respondents' opinion, four of the forms of manipulation have the greatest impact on consumers' decisions. These included: fragmentation, making a message appear scientific, idealisation and influencing people's emotions. Their impact is high or very high according to 29.1%, 30.4%, 31.4%, and 29.4% of the respondents, respectively (Tab. 1).

One can conclude, based on these results, that the use of evaluative words, the use of the authority and/or popularity of a person appearing in an advertisement, and implicature have a medium impact on the respondents' decisions. It is their

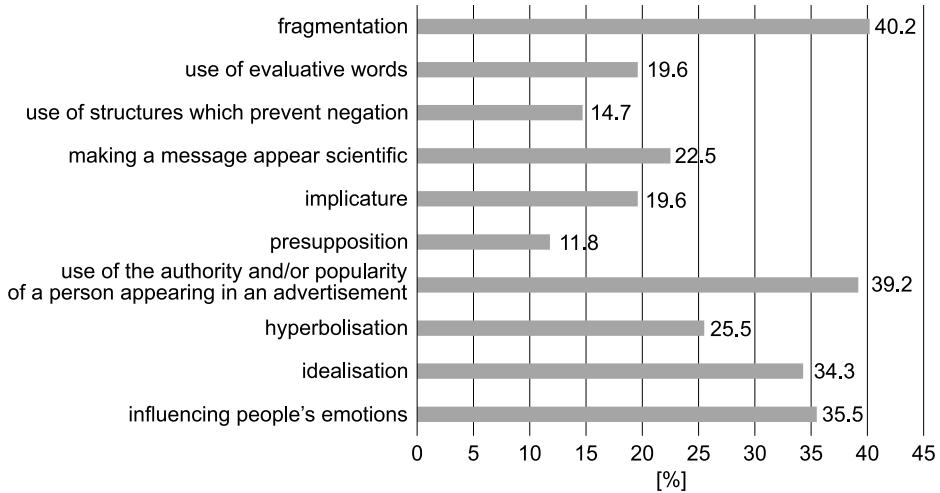


Fig. 1. Methods of manipulation noted in advertisements by the respondents
 Source: based on the author's studies.

Table 1

Impact of the methods of manipulation on the consumers' decisions

Item	Level of importance						
	very high [%]	high [%]	medium [%]	low [%]	very low [%]	insignificant [%]	no opinion [%]
Fragmentation	7.48	21.57	23.53	9.80	10.78	22.55	3.92
Use of evaluative words	5.88	16.67	19.61	23.53	13.73	16.67	3.92
Use of structures which prevent negation	5.88	5.88	28.43	19.61	18.63	16.67	4.90
Making a message appear scientific	8.82	21.57	21.57	15.69	13.73	14.71	5.88
Implicature	4.90	14.71	28.43	19.61	12.75	15.69	3.92
Presupposition	1.96	12.75	27.45	23.53	13.73	14.71	5.88
Use of the authority and/or popularity of a person appearing in an advertisement	10.78	15.69	25.49	11.76	13.73	18.63	3.92
Hyperbolisation	5.88	11.67	23.53	19.61	20.59	14.71	3.92
Idealisation	9.80	21.57	20.59	14.71	14.71	13.73	4.90
Influencing people's emotions	12.75	16.67	17.65	15.69	15.69	12.75	8.82

Source: based on the author's studies.

opinion that the use of structures that prevent negation, presupposition and hyperbolisation have the smallest impact. These methods are believed to have a small or very small impact on 38.2%, 37.3%, and 40.2% of the respondents, respectively. Moreover, a considerable portion of the respondent group regarded each of these methods of manipulation as not being an important factor in the purchase decision process.

Conclusions

The theoretical analyses and the empirical part of this study show that many people are aware of the concept of manipulation, but they do not always precisely understand its importance and impact on their consumer choices. There is often some confusion concerning the definition of manipulation, which leads to succumbing to the manipulation techniques in advertisements. It seems that not fully understanding the concept of manipulation can be a consequence of subtle or hidden methods by which manipulation is used in advertisements. Many people can react to the manipulation techniques unconsciously because they are complicated and well hidden behind apparently convincing advertising messages. In effect, consumers can make purchase decisions that are not fully conscious, and manipulation in advertisements can affect their choices and preferences.

The survey participants acknowledged that manipulation is frequently used in advertising. The most prevalent tactics include fragmenting the advertising message and exploiting the authority or fame of individuals featured in ads. The former had a considerable impact on the respondents, while the latter was also significant. Other methods of similar importance were presenting the message as scientific, idealising products, and influencing human emotions. Manipulation in advertisements often leads to situations in which consumers decide to purchase products that they do not actually need. Manipulative mechanisms, such as creating artificial needs, using psychological tricks or creating social pressure, effectively impact consumers' choices. In consequence, consumers often buy products that do not give them any satisfaction or benefit.

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