

## The role of deceptive advertisements and ethical decision outcomes in determining buying behavior

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### Keywords

Buying behavior, deceptive advertising, ethical decision-making outcomes, moral intensity, moral judgements, and perceived risks.

### Abstract

*The study was conducted to identify the opinions of consumers' regarding deceptive advertisements and the extent to which they considered it immoral. It aimed to collectively examine the impact of deceptive advertisements on consumers' perceptions and their ability to make an ethical decision regarding buying behavior. A cross-sectional design is conducted in order to gather data from respondents. The digital advertisements were shown to 378 respondents through web survey designs. SEM (structural equational modelling) was used to analyze the data. The results depicted that advertiser make use of moral decoupling strategies in developing countries as it becomes easier for the consumers to get influenced by a transgressor. After identifying the deception in an advertisement, it becomes necessary to analyze the role of consumers' ethical decision-making abilities in order to determine their buying behaviors. Moral intensity, perceived risks and moral judgements have a significant impact on consumers' ethical decision-making abilities. However, consumers' perception regarding a deceptive claim was not found to have any significant impact on their buying behavior. The relation only becomes significant in the presence of consumers' ethical decision-making abilities.*

### Introduction

Research on consumers' ethical attitude has been a focus of concern for marketing scholars due to the globalization and technological developments taking place around the world (Wilkins, Beckenuyte & Butt, 2016; Armstrong, Gurol & Russ, 1979). Due to these developments, it becomes a challenge for the marketers to ensure consumers are communicated advertising messages effectively (Cania, 2014). Nowadays there is a dilemma faced by both advertisers and consumers. On one hand, advertisers make use of deceptive content to influence consumer-purchasing decisions. On the other hand, consumers' have to make use of their moral and ethical abilities to make an appropriate decision regarding the deceptive content delivered to them. The difficulty faced by consumer's are to develop their knowledge regarding the deceptive advertisements and be able to morally and ethically act upon it. According to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), an individual's knowledge acquisition is influenced through their social interactions and social experiences. This enables them to develop their moral abilities, which seem appropriate to oneself. Based on this influence, in a marketing context a consumer tends to make use of their moral abilities to evaluate deceptive advertisements. Although marketing scholars have conducted research on deception of advertisement through the Internet (Grazioli & Jarvenpaa, 2003; Darke & Ritchie, 2007) and deception in packaging (Aditiya, 2001; Naylor, 1962), but the marketing concerns regarding deception of digital advertisements have held the greatest interest for consumers and practitioners. This is because digital advertisements depict the maximum extent of immorality in order to influence consumer's purchase decisions. Moral and ethical concerns are prevalent within every kind of decision-making processes which enables consumers to make judgements regarding attributes of a product (Tan, 2002). Therefore, the study aimed at exploring the impact of a consumers' ethical decision-making abilities regarding a deceptive advertisement, which will further influence their buying behavior.

While analyzing a consumers' moral abilities there are a series of internal analysis that have to be conducted (Kim & Johnson, 2014; Sparks & Pan, 2010). These analyses revolve around consumers' moral judgements and moral reasoning abilities. A moral judgement is a consumer's personal evaluation of the extent to which a conduct of action is ethical or unethical according to every individual's perception. However, moral reasoning is the explanation provided by a consumer for their specific moral judgement made. According to Bhattacharjee, Berman & Reed (2012), there are certain moral reasoning strategies adopted by consumers in order to explain their judgements regarding a moral action. One of these moral reasoning strategies are moral decoupling. Moral decoupling is a psychological dependence on a transgressor to support an immoral action. Collectively moral decoupling strategies are a process of searching, understanding and arriving at a decision regarding a moral or immoral practice through the influence of a celebrity or a transgressor (Bargh, 1994). This procedure for analyzing a consumer's moral action has been established by Rest (1980) which specifically highlights the relevance of moral judgements and moral reasoning's of consumers' that influence their decision-making abilities.

According to the social cognitive theory when a consumer has to make a decision regarding a deceptive advertisement, they have to make use of certain knowledge acquisitions that they acquire through social interactions and experiences (Bandura, 1991). This depicts that a consumers' knowledge streams are gained through judgements and reasoning's from their surroundings. In this research study emphasis is laid on the ways a consumer gets influenced by their environments which ultimately leaves an impact on their moral values. Therefore, while making a decision whether to purchase a product consumers' have to analyze their moral abilities and then make an appropriate ethical decision regarding their buying behaviors. The study aimed at exploring the following goal; firstly, the extent to which consumer's make use of moral decoupling strategies to consider an advertisement deceptive through the presence of a transgressor in influencing their buying behavior. Secondly, to analyze consumers ethical decision-making outcomes for deceptive advertisements through moral intensity, perceived risks and moral judgements.

The significance of study is that it highlights factors that persuade consumers' for making a relevant ethical or unethical decision regarding the deceptive claim. Therefore, it becomes mandatory to conduct research in this domain in developing country for three reasons. Firstly, addressing the immoral concerns has been an integral area of research in developing countries where the advertisers and marketers are not held accountable for immoral considerations. Secondly, it is necessary to highlight the impact of moral decoupling strategies in influencing the consumer decision-making procedures. The role of a transgressor or a public figure is of utmost relevance while persuading a consumer regarding a brand. Thirdly, managerial implications make organizational members aware of the ethical decision-making processes followed by consumers' that determine their perceptions regarding the brand.

## Literature Review

### Moral Decoupling Strategy

According to Mazar, Amir and Ariely (2008), consumers tend to follow a set of moral judgements based on which they develop their positive or negative perceptions regarding deceptive advertising. Moral psychology highlights the role of "intuition" in creating moral judgements. These intuitions are influenced by certain moral reasoning's that are developed by the consumers themselves in order to support their intuition (Haidt, 2007; Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum & Ditto, 2009). The moral reasoning process includes moral decoupling strategies. Moral decoupling strategies make use of certain influential factors supporting immoral actions and performance (Bandura 1991).

Bandura (1986) emphasized on the social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. According to this theory, an individual's knowledge acquisition is influenced through their social interactions and social experiences. In the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991), a consumer's moral reasoning is translated into actions by observing others and determining the judgements which seem appropriate to oneself.

Bhattacharjee et al. (2012) asserted that moral decoupling "is a psychological separation process by which people selectively disassociate judgements of performance of the transgressor from your judgements of morality." Some scholars considered moral decoupling to be the "motivation of a consumer to support a public figure whose transgression may adopt a different reasoning strategy to resolve the tension between

the desired outcomes and moral standards" (Ditto, Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2009; Tsang, 2002). Moral decoupling involved the support of a transgressor or immoral actor to influence their ethical decision. Therefore, it is always considered easier for the consumer to justify their decision either right or wrong in the hindsight of another person; instead of compromising on their own moral standards (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003).

H<sub>1</sub>: Moral Decoupling has a significant positive impact on deceptive advertising.

### **Deceptive Advertising**

Marketing scholars considered deceptive advertising to be an integral source of immoral practices that hampered a consumer's decision-making abilities (Gao, 2008; Armstrong et al., 1979). The primary concern of many regulators has been to define deceptive advertising. There has been a considerable amount of disagreement prevalent within the elements, which constitutes of deception (Wilkins et al., 2016; Armstrong et al., 1979). The main elements comprised of fraud and misleadingness (Russo, Metcalf & Stephens, 1981). However, more emphasis has been given on the component of "misleading" as being a determinant of deceptive advertising (Gao, 2008; Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007). According to Petty and Kopp (1995), misleading advertisements included tactics such as exaggerated significance, omission of information, ineffective qualifications, confusing presentation and promises of proof. Many scholars preferred the term misleading as appropriate to define deceptive advertising because it takes into consideration the manipulation depicted by the advertiser and the moral values displayed by the consumer while making a decision (Jacoby & Small, 1975; Russo et al., 1981; Darke & Ritchie, 2007). Therefore, Grazioli & Jarvenpaa (2003) asserted deception as "a cognitive interaction between two parties under conflict of interest, where the deceiver manipulates the environment of the other party, the target, to intentionally foster an incorrect cognitive representation of the target's situation and instigate a desired action, one the target would be unlikely to take without manipulation."

Deception in advertisements show the ability of an advertiser to over exaggerate in such a manner that it psychologically affects consumers' buying behavior (Smith et al., 2006). According to Ahmad and Ashfaq (2013), deceptive advertising enforces a consumer to prefer material objects rather than other morally or socially oriented alternatives. Advertisers make use of this misleading content according to the beliefs of their target market in order to influence consumers' buying behaviors. Therefore, deceptive advertising is not solely a representation of advertiser's manipulative techniques but instead it is greatly influenced by the consumers' own perception, mindsets and judgements between moral or immoral practices (Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007).

H<sub>2</sub>: Deceptive Advertising has a significant positive impact on a consumers' buying behavior.

### **Ethical Decision Making**

The ethical attitude of a consumer is considered a major factor determining their buying behavior (Taylor & Shim, 1993; Swinyard, Rinnie & Kau, 1990). The study of ethical decision-making process in consumer research relates to the "social cognitive theory." Accordingly, the moral values of individuals are determined through self-regulatory mechanism in which personal standards determine the ways to anticipate, monitor and judge actions (Detert, Trevino & Sweitzer, 2008). Manipulative persuasion of advertisers highlights the need to study ethical decision-making procedures in consumer behavior. Ethics in advertising emphasized on the appropriate behavior, decisions and practices that fit certain rules and principles of good conduct. According to Danciu (2014), there are three principles of ethics specifically in the advertising context. These include obeying the law, act in your self-interest and comply with rules and regulations. The difference arises when there is a lack of alignment between the advertiser's self-interest and customer's interest.

While being exposed to deceptive advertising the consumers are invoked with an ethical dilemma, which requires certain processes of inquiry leading towards making an ethical decision. The certain inquiries made by a consumer are components of ethical issues including moral development (Kohlberg, 1984; Rest, 1980, Trevino, 1986), perceived risks (Fraedrich & Ferrell, 1992) and ethical concerns (Jones, 1999).

Rest's (1980) four-component model highlighted an individual's ethical decision-making procedures. The components of the model included recognizing the moral issue, making a moral judgement, establishing a moral intent and implementing moral actions during the decision-making process. This model incorporated the emotional and cognitive aspects of the ethical decision-making process, which enabled the individual to have an effective buying behavior. Therefore, this study takes into consideration the impact of ethical decisions on consumers' buying behavior after being exposed to a deceptive claim presented by the advertiser.

H<sub>3</sub>: Deceptive advertising has an impact on consumers' buying behavior through a mediating effect of ethical decision-making.

### **Moral Intensity**

Jones (1991) asserted that an individual's moral intensity "captures his/her extent of issue-related moral imperative in a given situation," This determined that moral intensity varies in different situations and also influenced every stage of the ethical decision-making process model as proposed by Rest (1980). According to Jones (1991), the utmost significance of an ethical decision laid at the evaluation of the characteristics of an ethical dilemma that lead towards identifying the moral intensity required which is greatly influenced by their moral behavior (Tan, 2002).

According to Singer and Singer (1997), moral intensity drew the attention of individuals involved in ethical situations as well as those who observe the consequences of the decision made. Moral intensity related to ethical decision-making as firstly, an ethical issue is recognized, then ethical judgements are established, intentions are formed to act on the ethical dilemma and lastly ethical behavior occurred (Cohen & Bennie, 2006; May & Pauli, 2002). According to Barnett (2001), moral intensity not only motivated individuals to reason ethically but also influenced their ability to recognize ethical issues and then form their behavioral and purchase intentions appropriately. Moral intensity influenced the ambiance for decision makers to analyze the ethical dilemma in such a manner that created recognition and awareness regarding the relevant buying decisions. It not only provided a direction to consumers about the ethical decision-making but also makes them aware of the magnitude of consequences associated with a particular decision (Valentine & Bateman, 2011; Vitell & Patwardhan, 2008). Similarly, Valentine and Godkin (2019) determined that stronger moral intensity in analyzing the ethical dilemma, in terms of the seriousness of consequences or social consensus were associated with greater individual ethical decision-making.

H<sub>4</sub>: A higher moral intensity of a consumer will lead towards ethical decision-making outcomes, which furthermore influences their buying behavior.

### **Perceived Risk**

Featherman and Pavlou (2003) asserted that perceived risks are "the potential for loss in the pursuit of a desired outcome of using a product or service." Prior research emphasized on risks as being an integral factor influencing an ethical decision-making process. Consumers tend to alter the ethical decision-making process according to the risk associated with the purchase of product (Tan, 2002). The amount of risk preferred by a consumer is also dependent upon their certain personality traits. For example, a risk averse individual would try to avoid any such purchase including even the slightest amount of risk involved. According to Tan (2002), there is an effect of perceived risks on ethical decision-making and moral philosophy that is also determined by different types of risks.

According to Kim, Ferrin and Rao (2008), perceived risk is considered one of the major barriers that make consumers' reluctant regarding their buying decisions. When a consumer buys a product based on the advertisement, it created many discrepancies in their mind regarding the pre-product evaluation including the quality and attributes of the product (Yang and Zang, 2009). These are all kinds of performance risks associated with a buying decision. Law and Leung (2000) explained the extra burden on a consumer to search for extensive information regarding the product as solely decisions made on a mere advertisement can have more perceived risk associated with them. Moreover, advertisements become a greater source of increase in perceived risks as it makes the consumer uncertain whether the product will be able to fulfill their expectations (Weathers, Sharma & Wood, 2007). Similarly, limited product

information given in an advertisement will increase the chances of perceived risk in terms of product quality and price that will lead towards a low level of consumer self-confidence while making an ethical decision regarding their buying behavior. According to Pavlou and Gefen (2004), advertisers have a potential to engage in opportunistic behaviors, which might include hiding certain relevant product information or exaggerating on the benefits of a product. This generated a certain type of information asymmetry that created a lot of uncertainty in consumers' leading towards increase in perceived risks associated with the buying of the product (Pavlou, Liang & Xue, 2007). In addition, Hong (2015) also explored on this relationship by emphasizing that an increase in consumers perceived risks regarding a product would negatively affect their decision and buying behavior.

H<sub>5</sub>: A higher perceived risk of a consumer will lead towards less ethical decision-making outcomes, which furthermore influences their buying behavior.

### **Moral Judgements**

Morality is a main foundation of ethical decision-making process, which takes into account the inquiry of the nature and grounds of moral judgements, standards and code of conduct (Taylor, 1975). Moral judgements are a sub-set of moral philosophy that can be classified into "deontological" or "teleological practices." Deontological theories emphasized on the individual characteristics that determined their specific action or behavior. Whereas teleological theories emphasized on the consequences of an immoral action or behavior. According to Dubinsky and Loken (1989), moral judgements play a vital role in influencing a consumer's perception regarding a product. There is a significant difference between judging an action, which is morally unacceptable, and the willingness to perform that particular act.

According to Haidt (2012), a social intuitionist approach greatly dominated a consumer's moral judgement ability. This approach takes into consideration certain emotions and intuitions that directly leave an impact on moral judgements. Intuition plays a vital role in influencing moral judgements more than any explicit reasoning processes. This approach also specifically lays emphasis on providing analytical reasoning's to convince others regarding moral judgment decisions. A study presented by Ratnasingam and Ponnu (2008) discussed that moral judgements of a consumer critically effects their perception regarding an ethical decision-making, which influenced buying behavior. Moreover, Lau (2006) researched that an ethical dilemma faced by a consumer is significantly influenced by their moral judgements which overall affects their buying behavior as well. For example, when a consumer is faced with a dilemma whether to purchase a pirated software, it is completely the role of his/her moral judgements to analyze and make an appropriate ethical decision regarding their buying behavior (Tan, 2002). Similarly, Pennycook, Cheyne, Barr, Koehler & Fugelsang (2014) elaborated on the significance of moral judgements as a major analytical thinking tool, which directly affects individual's decision-making abilities.

H<sub>6</sub>: A higher moral judgments of a consumer will lead towards ethical decision-making outcomes, which furthermore influences their buying behavior.

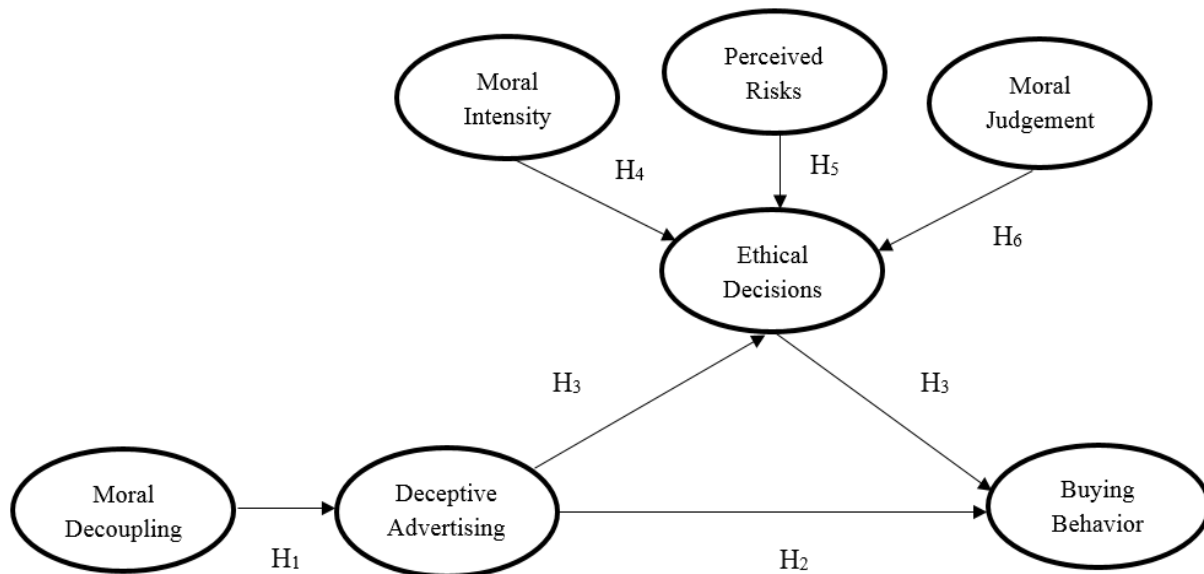


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

### Methodology

The data for the current study is collected through web surveys in which the respondents were shown a deceptive advertisement from the beverage industry of Pakistan on which they gave their views using snow balling sampling technique. A certain status group was targeted, which firstly included internet users and then consumers of beverage industry. Mostly the middle and upper middle class of Pakistan consumes beverages, as they are the ones who can afford it. Questionnaires were distributed through google doc platforms and other social networking websites including Facebook and LinkedIn. The total number of responses collected were 378 out of which 361 respondents had tasted soft drink and were eligible to be a part of the research study.

### Target Advertisement

A product depicting immoral standards was selected based on the deceptive print ad claims developed by Shabbir & Thwaites (2007). The deceptive claims included false/outright lie, in which the advertisement was falsely presenting the benefits or features of a product been endorsed. Beverage industry was selected in order to depict these deceptive claims such as energy drinks, soft drinks, juices and herbal tea etc. All the other research studies conducted in developing countries specifically Pakistan and Bangladesh emphasized on telecommunication and skin care industries (Iqbal & Siddiqui, 2019; Shahzad & Kausar, 2016). None of these research studies have analyzed the extent of deception in beverage industry.

A focus group was conducted in order to generate more insights regarding consumers' perception of a deceptive claim in a digital advertisement.

### Results

**Demographic information was analyzed to understand our sample more thoroughly. 55% of the sample was male while 45% was female.**

### Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to analyze the measurement model. Through CFA, the study determined whether the constructs were related or unrelated according to the consistency between them. Table 1 shows the results of the measurement model. The factor loadings lower than 0.6 were dropped in order to get appropriate results. The table also shows t-statistics for all of these factor loadings. Convergent validity and composite reliability hold for all constructs.

Constructs	Sources	Standardize d Loadings	Boot sample
			t values
Moral Decoupling	(Bhattacharjee et al., 2012)	0.899***	16.708
The celebrity's personal actions do not change my opinion of his/her job performance.		0.791***	10.661
There should not be a distinction between judgements of celebrity's actions versus judgements of consumers.		0.862***	17.135
A celebrity's wrongdoing should not change our view of their achievements."			
AVE=0.726			
CR= 0.888			
Deceptive Advertising	(Gardner & Leonard, 1990)		
Whether the information given in the ad is factually incorrect		0.813***	37.075
Are the advertisers guilty of omitting relevant information?		0.867***	48.27
Whether the ad displayed is true or the proof is false.		0.874***	58.238
AVE=0.726			
CR=0.888			
Ethical Decision Making	(Beard, 2003)		
There is a critical need for more truth in advertising		0.852***	37.34
Too much of today advertising is false and misleading		0.880***	72.347
There is too much exaggeration in advertising today"		0.906***	91.131
AVE=0.774			
CR=0.911			
Moral Intensity	(Singhapakdi et al., 1996)		
There is a very small likelihood that the advertiser's action will actually cause any harm.		0.737***	19.665
The advertiser's action will not cause any harm in the immediate future.		0.742***	25.289
The overall harm (if any) done as the result of the advertiser's action would be very small.		0.729***	21.267
The advertiser's action will harm very few people (if any)."		0.648***	13.169
AVE=0.511			
CR=0.807			
Perceived Risk	(Deering and Jacoby, 1972)		
Can most viewers guess ahead of time how dependable this product will be if it is use repeatedly?		0.497**	5.515
In general, does this product tend to fulfil your expectations?"		0.873***	47.594
AVE=0.509			
CR=0.748			

Moral Judgment	(Tan, 2002)		
In my opinion, the act of using this product rather than any other one is wrong		0.910***	83.828
In my opinion, it is morally wrong to use this product		0.903***	77.768
There are moral allegations and concerns against this product"		0.894***	73.207
AVE=0.815			
CR=0.930			
Buying Behavior	(Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1996; Grewal et al., 1998)	0.637***	4.394
25. Even though different products are available; I tend to buy the same product		0.660***	4.867
26. I would stick to a product I usually buy than try something I am not sure of		0.795***	7.306
27. If I like a product, I rarely switch from it just to try something different.		0.804***	9.278
28. The probability that I will be considering is less"			
AVE=0.530			
CR=0.817			

Note: \* $p < .1$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ , Average Variance Extracted (AVE) $>0.5$  indicates convergent Validity and Composite Reliability (CR) $>0.7$  indicated internal consistency.

Table 1: Results of Measurement Model

Table 2 shows results of discriminant validity using Heterotrait - Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. This approach determined whether the constructs are from same or different leading factors. The HTMT measure also holds valid, as the values are less than one for each construct. This shows that these are different factors from each other holding discriminant validity.

Constructs	Buying Behavior	Deceptive Advertising	Ethical Decisions	Moral Decoupling	Moral Intensity	Moral Judgement	Perceived Risk
Buying Behavior							
Deceptive Advertising	0.229						
Ethical Decisions	0.305	0.825					
Moral Decoupling	0.068	0.203	0.122				
Moral Intensity	0.239	0.675	0.763	0.343			
Moral Judgement	0.360	0.676	0.670	0.272	0.567		
Perceived Risks	0.270	0.562	0.606	0.154	0.404	0.374	

Table 2: Heterotrait - Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio of Correlations

### Structural Model

Table 3 shows the structural parameters estimates (path coefficients) for the study. Bootstrapping was conducted on 2000 samples in order to determine the significance of the path coefficients (Zhu, 1997). The path leading from moral decoupling to deceptive advertising shows a highly significant relationship. Furthermore, the path from ethical decision-making to buying behavior also depicts a significant relationship. Collectively, these two paths form mediation that is tested further. The effect sizes show the size of differences between two sets of variables in order to determine the extent to which an independent



variable contributes to the explanation of a dependent variable. Effect sizes also help to analyze the impact size different paths have on each other (Cohen, 1988). An f-square value less than 0.2 shows a small effect, value of 0.15 shows a moderate effect and value of 0.35 shows a large effect (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009). The path leading from deceptive advertising to ethical decision-making shows a moderate effect size of 0.173 and the path leading from moral intensity to ethical decisions also has a moderate effect size of 0.127. Ethical decision-making is an integral component of the theoretical framework as it leaves an impact on many constructs based on their effect sizes. Besides this, there are other paths, which have a significant relationship with each other but leave a small impact. The R square values measure the predictive accuracy that represents the amount of variance prevalent in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables.

Hypothesis	Paths	Standardized Coefficients	Effect Sizes (F-Square)	P-Values	R-Square	Results
H1	Moral Decoupling → Deceptive Advertising	0.366	0.033 Small Effect	0.00***	0.114	Accepted
H2	Deceptive Advertising → Buying Behavior	0.486	0.001 Small Effect	0.627	0.032	Rejected
H3	Deceptive Advertising → Ethical Decisions	0.738	0.173 Moderate Effects	0.00***	0.611	Accepted
	Ethical Decisions → Buying Behavior	0.483	0.078 Small Effect	0.00***	0.032	Accepted
H4	Moral Intensity → Ethical Decisions	0.646	0.127 Moderate Effect	0.00***	0.611	Accepted
H5	Perceived Risks → Ethical Decisions	0.426	0.067 Small Effect	0.00***	0.611	Accepted
H6	Moral Judgements → Ethical Decisions	0.424	0.066 Small Effect	0.00***	0.611	Accepted

\*p < 0.1, \*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.01

Table 3: Structural Model

### Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping techniques were used to determine the mediation effects of ethical decision-making in influencing the relationship between deceptive advertising and buying behavior. Table 4 shows the direct, indirect and total effects that aimed at analyzing the mediating impact of ethical decision-making on deceptive advertising and buying behavior, which tests hypothesis H3.

Paths	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	P-Values	Results
Deceptive Advertising → Buying Behavior	-0.043			0.639	
Deceptive Advertising → Ethical Decisions		0.358		0.000	
Ethical Decisions → Buying Behavior		0.372		0.000	
Deceptive Advertising → Buying Behavior (mediated by Ethical Decisions)		0.135		0.000	Indirect Only Mediation
			0.090	0.157	

\*p < 0.1, \*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.01

Table 4: Mediation Results – Bootstrapping Matrices

## Discussion

The key findings of the study addressing the research objectives show that moral decoupling tends to have a significant positive relationship with deceptive advertising, which makes it one of the integral strategies influencing consumers' buying behavior. Through moral decoupling consumers are easily able to justify their decision either right or wrong in the hindsight of a transgressor, instead of compromising on their own moral standards. Hritek Roshan (transgressor) was considered an influencer of the deceptive claim, which manipulated the essence of the advertisement by promoting inappropriate actions and energy associated with Mountain Dew. This depicted that moral decoupling strategies were progressive and applicable in the Mountain Dew advertisement shown to respondents. It did leave an impact on their interpretation of a deceptive claim.

Ethical decision-making tends to have a significant positive impact on buying behavior. Ethical decision-making outcomes were measured in the presence of moral intensity, perceived risks and moral judgements. The results depicted that moral intensity has utmost significance while evaluating the characteristics of an ethical dilemma as it influenced a consumer's moral behavior. It captures the extent to which consumers considered an ethical dilemma to be of importance in order to influence their buying behavior. Perceived risk has a significant negative impact on ethical decision-making outcomes as it highlighted the risk associated with the purchase of a product. The less risk associated with a purchase decision will lead towards the consumers to make ethical decision regarding their buying behavior. For example, a performance risk included the probability of something being wrong with Mountain Dew ingredients. So, if the performance risk is lower then there are more chances for the individuals to prefer the product and make an ethical decision regarding its purchase. Lastly, moral judgements also have a significant positive impact on consumers' ethical decision-making outcomes as the standards and code of conduct on which a consumer makes a decision plays a vital role in influencing their buying behaviors.

Deceptive advertising tends to leave an impact on a consumer's buying behavior through an indirect mediation effect of ethical decision-making outcomes. This shows that there is no direct relation prevalent between deceptive advertising and buying behavior. The relation will only exist in the presence of a consumer's ability to make an effective ethical decision regarding a product. The role of emotional and cognitive aspects of ethical decision-making provides insights of a consumer's mindsets and their interpretations of deceptive advertising, which furthermore, influenced buying behavior. Without the presence of ethical decision-making abilities of consumer, deceptive advertisements do not separately leave an impact on consumers' buying behaviors.

## Implications

Some theoretical implications of this research are that firstly, the role of deceptive advertising in Pakistani context seemed to be of great relevance because of the lack of understanding of consumers' in identifying a deceptive claim and the manipulative techniques adopted by advertisers for creating deception. Secondly, it is important to identify the impact of ethical decision-making in persuading a consumer to buy a product in the presence of a deceptive claim. Moral intensity, perceived risks and moral judgements are constructs that are existing in the minds of consumers', but they are not consciously aware of them. This provides insights for consumer psychology research in order to determine the extent of cognitive distortions in consumers' mindsets. Thirdly, the collective role of deceptive advertising and ethical decision-making abilities of consumers' will enable us to understand their moral considerations and ethical dilemmas. A collective analysis will provide the scholars with multiple perspectives that derive a consumer's behavior towards a product.

Some managerial implications of this research are that firstly, advertisers will get sufficient number of insights regarding the moral judgements and reasoning based on which, consumers interpret deceptive advertising in certain ways. Secondly, brand managers will also get feedback regarding the brand position and brand image in the minds of consumers based on digital advertisements. They can identify whether brand loyalty has authenticity even in the presence of a transgressor promoting deceptive claims. Thirdly, marketing managers can develop strategies according to the response they might get from the deceptive advertisements shown. If a consumer showed great amount of resilience towards their adopted moral

decoupling strategies, then marketing managers can predict their buying behaviors accordingly based on those strategies. On the other hand, if a transgressor has great celebrity fan following then marketing managers can see the pattern of consumers' buying behaviors for that specific product. Lastly, advertising agencies would get insights regarding moral intensity, perceived risks and moral judgements that determined the extent to which a consumer initiates to make an ethical decision keeping in view their perceptions of the product.

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