

The Role of Misleading Digital Advertisements in Shaping Consumer Buying Behaviour for FMCG Products

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of digital advertising in India's Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector has created unprecedented opportunities for brands to reach consumers, yet it has also ushered in an era of sophisticated deceptive marketing practices. This paper examines the role of misleading digital advertisements in shaping consumer buying behaviour for FMCG products, drawing upon regulatory frameworks, recent enforcement actions, and empirical evidence from the Indian marketplace. The research demonstrates that misleading digital advertisements operate through multiple mechanisms including exaggerated product claims, manipulative design patterns, celebrity endorsements without substantiation, and the deliberate concealment of material information to influence consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Drawing upon the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Signalling Theory, this paper analyses how consumer trust, scepticism, and purchase intentions are shaped by deceptive marketing practices in the digital sphere. The findings reveal that while digital advertising violations now account for the vast majority of regulatory complaints, enforcement

mechanisms are evolving through the Central Consumer Protection Authority's recent actions, including the landmark '100%' ruling. However, persistent challenges including low consumer recall of digital ads, pervasive dark patterns, and jurisdictional complexities in cross-border digital advertising continue to undermine consumer protection. The paper concludes that addressing misleading digital advertisements requires a multi-pronged approach combining robust regulatory enforcement, enhanced platform accountability, consumer education, and industry self-regulation.

Keywords: Misleading Digital Advertisements, FMCG Products, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Dark Patterns, Central Consumer Protection Authority, Consumer Trust

1. Introduction

India's FMCG sector, one of the largest in the world, has undergone a profound transformation with the advent of digital advertising. The shift from traditional to digital media has enabled brands to target consumers with unprecedented precision, leveraging social media platforms, influencer marketing, programmatic advertising, and data-driven personalisation. According to the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), digital media now accounts for a staggering 98% of advertising violations, highlighting the extent to which deceptive practices have migrated to the online space .

The significance of this issue extends beyond regulatory compliance. Misleading digital advertisements fundamentally distort consumer decision-making, creating an informational environment where consumers struggle to distinguish between genuine product claims and deceptive marketing. This is particularly consequential in the FMCG sector, where purchase decisions are frequent, often made with limited cognitive investment, and significantly impact household budgets and well-being.

The Indian regulatory landscape has responded to these challenges through multiple mechanisms. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 established the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) with suo motu powers to investigate and penalise misleading advertisements. The CCPA's Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements, 2022 provide detailed standards for truthful advertising. The Supreme Court's intervention in the Patanjali case further reinforced the importance of stringent enforcement, directing advertisers to submit self-declaration certificates before publishing advertisements.

Despite these developments, misleading digital advertisements remain widespread. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) recorded 91 cases of misleading claims in food advertising in 2024-25 alone, with penalties raised amounting to significant sums. This paper examines the mechanisms through which misleading digital advertisements shape consumer behaviour, the regulatory responses to these practices, and the persistent challenges in ensuring effective consumer protection in the digital advertising ecosystem.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Defining Misleading Digital Advertisements

Under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, a "misleading advertisement" is defined as any advertisement which falsely describes a product or service, gives a false guarantee, is likely to mislead consumers as to the nature, substance, quantity, or quality of such product, or conveys an express or implied representation that would constitute an unfair trade practice. In the digital context, this definition encompasses a wide range of deceptive practices, from exaggerated claims on product websites to manipulative design patterns on e-commerce platforms.

The CCPA's recent ruling on '100%' claims has established binding principles that apply to all digital advertising in India. The Authority held that '100%' is an absolute numerical expression that leaves no scope for approximation or marketing interpretation. Consumer perception is the decisive standard: an advertisement is misleading if an ordinary consumer is likely to be misled, regardless of the advertiser's intended meaning. Fine print disclosures do not neutralise misleading headline claims, and good faith is not a defence where consumer perception is likely to be misled.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a valuable framework for understanding how misleading digital advertisements influence consumer buying behaviour. TPB posits that behaviour is driven by behavioural intentions, which are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Research applying TPB to consumer behaviour in the digital marketplace demonstrates that deceptive design elements such as urgency cues, perceived scarcity, and social proof significantly influence consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions.

Studies grounded in TPB reveal that consumers' attitudes toward green products partially mediate the relationship between greenwashing perception and green purchase intention. Similarly, credibility signals such as third-party certifications and transparent ingredients make consumers more likely to purchase products, while vague, low-cost signals generate scepticism, especially among digitally literate or experienced consumers.

Signalling Theory

Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) offers complementary insights into the role of misleading digital advertisements. The theory suggests that information asymmetry exists between sellers and buyers, with sellers possessing superior knowledge about product quality. To overcome this asymmetry, sellers send signals to indicate product quality, and buyers interpret these signals in their decision-making.

In the context of misleading digital advertisements, deceptive signals such as exaggerated health claims, nature-inspired imagery without substantiation, or fabricated user testimonials create a false impression of product quality or authenticity. The dual-axis model of signalling, incorporating signal cost and delivery medium credibility, helps explain why low-cost signals generate scepticism among discerning consumers.

3. Mechanisms of Misleading Digital Advertisements

3.1 Exaggerated and Deceptive Claims

One of the most prevalent forms of misleading digital advertising in the FMCG sector involves exaggerated or deceptive product claims. The CCPA's recent action against Storia Foods and Beverages illustrates the nature of these practices. The company marketed its coconut water as "100% Tender Coconut Water" and "100% Natural Tender Coconut Water" on its website, product packaging, and third-party e-commerce platforms. The ingredient declaration, however, disclosed that the product was made using coconut water concentrate at 9.6%, reconstituted with water. The term 'reconstituted' was printed in fine print—a disclosure the CCPA held was insufficient to alert an ordinary consumer to the material discrepancy.

Similarly, Mrs. Bectors Food Specialities marketed its English Oven bread as "100% Atta Bread," "100% Whole Wheat Bread," and "Taste of 100% Goodness". During proceedings, the company

admitted that the bread contained only 87% whole wheat flour. The company's argument that "100% Atta" was intended to mean that the sole grain source was wheat flour, with no refined flour or other cereals, was rejected by the CCPA. The Authority held that consumer perception is the decisive standard: an ordinary consumer reading "100% Whole Wheat Bread" would understand that the product is composed entirely of whole wheat flour.

3.2 Digital Dark Patterns

Dark patterns—manipulative design elements that guide users toward outcomes they may not have chosen freely have emerged as a significant concern in the FMCG digital marketplace. According to a 2024 study across 26 countries by the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network, 76% of websites and apps employed some form of customer choice manipulation. For India, the figure was as high as 98%.

Research examining dark patterns in social media commerce found that urgency cues, perceived scarcity, and social proof significantly influence consumer buying behaviour by creating psychological pressure and fear of missing out. These deceptive design elements effectively drive impulsive buying but undermine consumer autonomy and long-term loyalty. Hidden costs and confirm shaming were found to have weaker effects but negatively impacted trust and post-purchase satisfaction.

Examples of dark patterns in the FMCG digital ecosystem include:

- **Subscription Traps:** Platforms deliberately use easy subscription techniques but make cancellation difficult through multi-step processes or hidden settings. Quick-commerce unicorn Zepto was recently fined for auto-enrolling buyers into premium subscriptions.
- **Basket Sneaking:** Online marketplaces add ancillary costs disclosed only at the point of payment or pre-tick add-on upgrades that users need to opt out of. These designs capitalise on information asymmetry to manipulate user behaviour.
- **Drip Pricing:** Hidden fees that appear only at checkout, wiping out the discounts advertised on the product page. Flipkart and other platforms have faced scrutiny for such practices.
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3.3 Influencer Marketing and Endorsement Issues:

The rapid growth of influencer marketing has created new avenues for misleading advertising in the FMCG sector. ASCI data indicates that digital media now accounts for the vast majority of violations, with influencer content being a primary source of non-compliance. Many influencer posts require modification due to non-disclosure of paid partnerships or misleading claims.

The CCPA's Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements, 2022 require that endorsements reflect the genuine, reasonably current opinion of the endorser and must be based on adequate information about the identified product or service. The Supreme Court has further directed that celebrities endorsing products must ensure endorsements are based on evidence backing product claims. Despite these requirements, compliance remains inconsistent.

3.4 Health and Wellness Misrepresentation

The FMCG sector, particularly in the food and beverage category, has witnessed significant misleading advertising related to health and wellness claims. The Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPi) report, '50 Shades of Food Advertising,' examined 43 food advertisements and

concluded that the majority were misleading in nature. The report revealed that advertisements for food products classified as high in sugar, salt, and/or fat (HFSS) and ultra-processed foods (UPFs) rely on emotional appeals, celebrity endorsements, visually appealing imagery, and sensory stimuli to position products as sought-after options.

The deliberate use of images showing fruits, grains, and nutritious ingredients is an attempt to make consumers believe the products have health benefits they do not possess. As Dr Nupur Bidla of NAPI noted, "Emotional manipulation is found in every advertisement. By masking harmful ingredients behind emotional appeals and glamorous imagery, they prioritise profits over our wellbeing".

3.5 Visual Deception and Performative Authenticity

Modern digital advertising increasingly relies on visual cues that create an implicit claim of environmental benefit or authenticity. This "performative authenticity" the deliberate coordination of visual "green" cues with unsubstantiated eco-labels is particularly prevalent in the FMCG sector, where packaging and product imagery shape consumer perceptions. The CCPA's '100%' ruling addressed this issue by establishing that consumer perception is the decisive standard in determining whether an advertisement is misleading, regardless of the advertiser's intended meaning.

4. Impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour

4.1 Consumer Trust and Purchase Intentions

The relationship between misleading digital advertisements and consumer trust has been extensively documented. Research on consumer trust and purchase intentions for household cleaning products in urban India found that trust links authenticity cues to green purchase intention and acts as a central mediator. Credible signals such as third-party certifications, transparent ingredients, and performance guarantees make consumers more likely to purchase green products. Conversely, vague, low-cost signals generate scepticism, especially among digitally literate or experienced consumers.

This has significant implications for the FMCG sector. When consumers perceive greenwashing, they develop negative attitudes towards both the advertisement and the advertised brand, harming purchase intentions. The development of scepticism and "green fatigue" can lead to indifference towards the idea of sustainable consumption altogether.

4.2 Low Recall and Advertising Effectiveness

A striking challenge in the digital advertising landscape is the extremely low recall of digital ads by consumers. A study by the R K SWAMY Centre for Study of Indian Markets (CSIM), based on interviews with 3,000 respondents across 10 major cities, revealed that while consumers collectively recalled more than 600 brands, each individual could remember just about 1.5 brands. Only 11 brands, including Zepto, Zomato, Meesho, Nescafé, Flipkart, and Amazon, managed to cross even a 3% recall mark.

The study found that 78% of respondents skip digital video ads whenever they can, 50% mute ads if skipping is not possible, and 57% say most ads served to them are irrelevant. This indicates that the sheer volume of digital advertising has created an environment of consumer indifference and aversion, undermining the effectiveness of even legitimate advertising.

The weak recall, according to the report, stems from the nature of India's digital video environment. Consumers watch an average of 2.17 hours of video daily, mostly on mobile phones, across platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, but the experience is

fragmented and non-appointment-led. Personalised impressions, inconsistent ad frequency, and the absence of a shared primetime reduce the chances of brands breaking through.

4.3 The Attitude-Behaviour Gap

Misleading digital advertisements contribute to the gap between consumers' stated preferences and their actual purchasing behaviour. Despite growing awareness of sustainable and health-conscious consumption, there remains a significant "intention-behaviour gap". While consumers may express positive attitudes towards eco-friendly products, they are not always investing their money in such products.

This gap is exacerbated by misleading advertisements that create confusion about product authenticity. When consumers cannot distinguish between genuine and deceptive claims, they may default to the easiest path often the familiar, less scrutinized item. The cognitive effort required to discern genuinely sustainable or healthy products from superficially marketed ones becomes too high, leading to behavioural inertia.

4.4 Scepticism and Green Fatigue

A significant consequence of widespread misleading digital advertisements is the development of consumer scepticism and "green fatigue." When consumers are repeatedly exposed to misleading claims, they develop cognitive dissonance mental discomfort arising from the conflict between the desire to support sustainable products and the uncertainty about whether a particular purchase is genuinely sustainable.

This scepticism is not merely a psychological inconvenience; it represents a market failure where genuine sustainable businesses lose the trust premium they have earned through real environmental investment. As one study noted, trust-deficit landscapes require that "authenticity must not merely be declared. Instead, authenticity must be demonstrated now".

5. Regulatory Framework and Enforcement

5.1 The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and CCPA

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, provides the primary statutory framework for regulating misleading advertisements in India. Section 2(28) of the Act defines a misleading advertisement as one that falsely describes a product, gives a false guarantee, is likely to mislead consumers as to the nature, substance, quantity, or quality of such product, or conveys an express or implied representation that would constitute an unfair trade practice .

The establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) under Section 10 of the Act represented a significant enhancement of regulatory oversight. The CCPA is designed to intervene for preventing actions detrimental to consumer interest arising from unfair trade practices and to initiate class action(s), including the enforcement of recalls, refunds, and return of products. Since its inception, the CCPA has realized penalties to the tune of Rs. 1,33,35,500 with respect to violation of rights of consumers, unfair trade practices, and false or misleading advertisements in various sectors .

The CCPA's Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022, notified on 9 June 2022, provide detailed requirements for advertising claims. These guidelines inter alia provide for: (a) conditions for an advertisement to be non-misleading and valid; (b) certain stipulations in respect of bait advertisements and free claim advertisements; and (c) duties of manufacturer, service provider, advertiser, and advertising agency.

5.2 The Landmark '100%' Ruling

The CCPA's June 2026 order in cases against Storia Foods and Beverages and Mrs. Bectors Food Specialities established several binding principles with wide application to digital advertising. These include:

- **'100%' is an Absolute Expression:** The term '100%' is an absolute and precise numerical expression that leaves no scope for approximation, qualification, or marketing interpretation. A product described as '100%' of something must be exactly and verifiably 100% of that thing.
- **Consumer Perception is the Decisive Standard:** An advertisement is misleading if an ordinary consumer is likely to be misled by it regardless of what the advertiser intended by the claim.
- **Fine Print Does Not Neutralise Headline Claims:** A brand cannot make an absolute claim in large type on the front of a pack and then qualify it in small print on the back or side.
- **Good Faith is Not a Defence:** A brand that has used a misleading claim in good faith cannot rely on that belief as a defence.
- **Cumulative Effect of Claims Matters:** Advertising claims must be assessed not only individually but in their cumulative effect on consumer perception.

5.3 Self-Regulatory Mechanisms: ASCI

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) plays a complementary role in regulating misleading digital advertisements. According to ASCI CEO Manisha Kapoor, digital media now accounts for 98% of advertising violations, highlighting the dominance of online platforms in compliance issues. Unlike traditional media, digital advertising is high-volume and influencer-driven, often blurring the line between editorial and paid content.

ASCI addresses unethical digital advertisements through proactive monitoring and consumer complaints. Non-compliant ads are reviewed by its Consumer Complaints Council, and advertisers or influencers are required to modify or withdraw them. Consumers can file complaints directly with ASCI through its online complaints portal or by tagging ASCI on social media platforms.

ASCI has also launched initiatives to address emerging challenges. Its Guidelines for Online Deceptive Design Patterns in Advertising, 2023, identified manipulative tactics commonly used in digital advertising. A nationwide influencer-led consumer awareness campaign aims to educate the public about greenwashing and dark patterns.

5.4 Platform Accountability and Digital Intermediary Regulation

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 cast specific legal obligations on intermediaries, including social media intermediaries and platforms, to ensure accountability towards a safe and trusted internet. These rules include provisions for time-bound removal of unlawful information and a time-bound grievance redressal mechanism.

The Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020, notified under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, outline the responsibilities of e-commerce entities and specify the liabilities of marketplace and inventory e-commerce entities, including provisions for consumer grievance redressal.

However, enforcement challenges remain significant. While Flipkart and other platforms submitted self- or third-party audit declarations regarding dark patterns in November 2025,

the CCPA is currently verifying their claims. The effectiveness of platform accountability measures remains a subject of ongoing scrutiny.

6. Challenges and Limitations

6.1 Jurisdictional and Enforcement Challenges

Despite the robust legal framework, enforcement of regulations on misleading digital advertisements faces significant challenges. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) reported 91 cases of misleading claims in food advertising in 2024-25, with penalties raised to significant sums. However, the NAPi report observed that "weak implementation of regulations and lack of sanctions or fines often lead to rampant misleading advertisements, especially in the food and beverage domain".

The grievance redressal process is often one-sided, with complainants rarely updated on the status of their complaints. Authorities typically seek an explanation from the company and close the case without further action. Cross-border advertising, particularly advertisements originating from foreign jurisdictions targeting Indian consumers, presents additional jurisdictional challenges.

6.2 Low Consumer Awareness and Digital Literacy

Low consumer awareness and digital literacy remain significant barriers to effective consumer protection. The FICCI survey of industry stakeholders revealed that despite the presence of ASCI, 56% of respondents felt the existing self-regulatory framework was ineffective, with one of the reasons being insufficient knowledge among various stakeholders regarding the regulatory mechanism. Around 80% of respondents were also of the view that misleading advertisements need to be well-defined and proactively monitored, especially beyond electronic media, and increase visibility outside metros and urban consumers.

The CSIM study's finding that 57% of consumers find most digital ads served to them irrelevant suggests that consumer engagement with digital advertising is minimal. This creates a paradox: consumers are exposed to misleading advertisements but often do not have the attention or motivation to critically evaluate them.

6.3 The Rapidly Evolving Digital Landscape

The rapid evolution of digital advertising presents ongoing challenges for regulators. Programmatic advertising, AI-driven content, and influencer marketing operate at a speed and scale that traditional regulatory systems struggle to monitor effectively. ASCI's use of an AI-based tracking system called "NINA" (National Interest Natural Intelligence Advertising) represents a response to this challenge, but the scale of digital advertising continues to outpace monitoring capabilities.

The emergence of generative AI tools and synthetically generated information (deep fakes) has further complicated the regulatory landscape. The potential for misuse of such technologies to spread misinformation or impersonate individuals requires continuous adaptation of regulatory frameworks.

6.4 Enforcement Limitations of Self-Regulation

ASCI's enforcement mechanisms, while having indirect impact through public accountability and governmental support, lack direct legal authority. The Bombay High Court has held that ASCI is neither a statutory body nor a governmental regulator; therefore, it lacks the power to restrict commercial advertisements of sellers, especially non-members. Compliance with ASCI

Guidelines does not immunise an advertiser if, on independent judicial assessment, the overall communication is misleading.

6.5 The Cost-Benefit Imbalance for Misleading Advertisers

A fundamental challenge in regulating misleading digital advertisements is the cost-benefit imbalance for deceptive advertisers. As noted in the context of dark patterns, regulators often impose fines that companies consider a "cost of doing business" rather than a meaningful deterrent. Zepto's fine was ₹700,000—an amount that, for a venture-backed unicorn, represents negligible financial consequence.

When fines are perceived as a cost of doing business rather than a meaningful deterrent, the regulatory framework fails to achieve its preventive function. The Supreme Court's concern in the Patanjali case was not the absence of a legal framework regulating misleading advertisements but rather the inadequate enforcement of such laws.

7. Recommendations

7.1 For Policymakers and Regulators

Strengthen Enforcement Resources: Increase funding and technical capacity for consumer commissions and regulatory authorities to enable proactive monitoring and timely enforcement action. The FSSAI's data showing 91 cases of misleading claims in 2024-25, compared to 947 cases in 2022-23, suggests either improved compliance or reduced enforcement. Greater transparency in enforcement action is needed.

Enhance Penalty Structures: Consider legislative amendments to increase penalties for misleading advertisements to levels that serve as meaningful deterrents. The current fines are frequently viewed as a cost of doing business rather than a sanction.

Address Digital Advertising Specifically: Develop specific regulations for programmatic advertising, AI-driven content, and influencer marketing that address the unique challenges of digital advertising. The IT Rules, 2021, and E-commerce Rules, 2020, provide a foundation, but further refinement is needed.

Strengthen Platform Accountability: Enhance the accountability of digital platforms for misleading advertisements hosted on their services, including requirements for verification of advertiser claims. The platform-level accountability measures currently being enforced require continued strengthening.

Promote Consumer Education: Expand consumer education initiatives focused on digital literacy and advertising awareness. ASCI's AdWise school education program and influencer-led consumer awareness campaigns represent positive steps.

Standardise Front-of-Pack Labelling: Implement mandatory front-of-pack labelling specifying the amount of salt, sugar, and fat in products, as recommended by the NAPi report. This would empower consumers to make informed choices based on nutritional content rather than marketing claims.

7.2 For Businesses and Advertisers

Adopt Proactive Compliance: Implement pre-publication verification systems to ensure all digital advertising claims are substantiated, truthful, and verifiable. The Supreme Court's directive requiring self-declaration certificates before advertisements are published creates a compliance mechanism that should be embraced.

Avoid Reliance on Fine Print: Ensure headline claims are literally true and that material information is prominently disclosed. The CCPA's '100%' ruling established that fine print does not neutralise misleading headline claims.

Maintain Claim-Specific Evidence: Retain robust evidence supporting all advertising claims, including visual and endorsement claims. The Emami case established that expert substantiation must be claim-specific and based on actual product evaluation.

Train Marketing Teams: Ensure marketing professionals understand the legal and regulatory requirements for digital advertising, including the consumer-perception standard for determining misleading advertisements.

Eliminate Dark Patterns: Conduct self-audits of digital platforms to identify and eliminate dark patterns. The CCPA's advisory urging e-commerce platforms to self-audit and give self-declarations should be followed proactively.

7.3 For Consumers

Be Informed: Familiarise yourself with consumer rights and regulatory mechanisms, including the CCPA's complaint portal. Consumers can file complaints about misleading advertisements directly with ASCI through its online complaints portal or by tagging ASCI on social media platforms.

Report Misleading Advertisements: Actively report suspicious advertising claims to the CCPA or ASCI to facilitate enforcement. The GAMA (Grievances Against Misleading Advertisements) portal launched by the Department of Consumer Affairs provides a mechanism for online complaints.

Be Skeptical of Absolute Claims: Approach claims like '100%' with healthy scepticism, particularly where they appear on digital platforms. Verify product claims through multiple sources.

Check for Disclosures: Look for proper disclosures in influencer promotions and digital advertisements. Scrutinise exaggerated claims and check for evidence supporting product claims.

8. Conclusion

The role of misleading digital advertisements in shaping consumer buying behaviour for FMCG products represents a critical challenge in India's rapidly evolving digital marketplace. This paper has demonstrated that deceptive digital advertising operates through multiple mechanisms exaggerated product claims, manipulative dark patterns, unsubstantiated influencer endorsements, and visual deception to influence consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase decisions.

The regulatory framework in India has responded through the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the establishment of the CCPA, and the notification of detailed guidelines for preventing

misleading advertisements. The CCPA's landmark '100%' ruling has established binding principles that apply to all digital advertising in India, including that '100%' is an absolute numerical expression, consumer perception is the decisive standard, and fine print does not neutralise misleading headline claims .

However, persistent challenges remain. Digital advertising violations now account for 98% of ASCI complaints. Low consumer recall of digital ads undermines even legitimate advertising effectiveness. Pervasive dark patterns manipulate consumer choice across e-commerce platforms. Enforcement resources remain constrained, and the cost-benefit imbalance for deceptive advertisers undermines the deterrent effect of current penalties.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach: strengthening enforcement resources and penalty structures, enhancing platform accountability, promoting consumer education, and encouraging industry self-regulation. As the FICCI survey revealed, 64% of respondents believed that consumer awareness regarding complaint mechanisms was low. The NAPi report concluded that "weak implementation of regulations and lack of sanctions or fines often lead to rampant misleading advertisements".

For the FMCG sector, the implications are clear: trust is a currency that once eroded is difficult to rebuild. As one study noted, "in a trust-deficit landscape, authenticity must not merely be declared. Instead, authenticity must be demonstrated now" . For consumers, the message is equally clear: in an environment of pervasive misleading advertisements, informed scepticism and active reporting of deceptive practices are essential tools for protecting consumer rights.

The future of digital advertising regulation in India will depend on the continued evolution of regulatory frameworks, the commitment of businesses to ethical marketing practices, and the empowerment of consumers to make informed choices in an increasingly complex digital marketplace. As India becomes one of the world's largest consumer markets, the effectiveness of legal remedies and regulatory enforcement will define the quality of consumer protection in the digital age.

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