



Rebuilding Consumer Trust: Strategies for Brands to Recover from Misleading Digital Marketing Campaigns

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of misleading digital marketing campaigns has raised concerns about consumer trust and brand reputation. This paper explores effective strategies that brands can employ to recover from the negative effects of such campaigns. Using case studies and empirical evidence, the research highlights the critical role of transparency, communication, and ethical marketing in regaining consumer confidence and loyalty.

Keywords: Misleading marketing, consumer trust, brand reputation, ethical marketing, recovery strategies

1. Introduction

Digital marketing has emerged as a transformative force in modern commerce, redefining the way brands and consumers interact. The dynamic nature of digital platforms, with features such as data-driven personalization, social media integration, and instant communication, has revolutionized how businesses engage with their target audiences¹. By leveraging these platforms, brands can create tailored experiences that drive customer satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, the use of artificial intelligence in chatbots, recommendation systems, and programmatic advertising has significantly enhanced the efficiency and reach of marketing efforts². However, alongside these transformative benefits, the misuse of digital platforms for misleading marketing campaigns has become a pressing concern. Misleading practices include exaggerated claims about product performance, hidden terms in promotions, and manipulated testimonials designed to misguide consumers³. These tactics not only tarnish brand reputations but also undermine consumer confidence, making it challenging for businesses to achieve long-term sustainability⁴. The rapid dissemination of information on digital platforms further amplifies the impact of such campaigns, as negative feedback can spread instantaneously, resulting in public backlash and a damaged brand image⁵. Consumer trust plays a pivotal role in shaping brand loyalty and ensuring positive word-of-mouth recommendations⁶. It is a fundamental aspect of the customer-brand relationship, influencing purchase intentions, customer satisfaction, and repeat purchasing behavior⁷. Studies reveal that trust is one of the strongest predictors of consumer retention, and its erosion can lead to significant consequences, including heightened skepticism, lower engagement, and diminished brand equity^{8,9}. When deceptive practices come to light, consumers may feel betrayed, and regaining their trust requires a concerted effort from brands. The rise of social media and other digital platforms has further complicated this landscape. While these channels offer immense potential for creative and impactful marketing, their relatively low barriers to entry and insufficient regulatory oversight have created a fertile ground for unethical practices^{10,11}. Consumers now have access to a plethora of information and are more vigilant than ever before. They expect transparency, accountability, and authenticity from brands, and failure to meet these expectations can result in severe consequences, ranging from legal sanctions to reputational damage^{12,13}. Moreover, the growing awareness of consumer rights and the availability of review platforms empower customers to hold brands accountable for their actions¹⁴. This paper aims to delve into the mechanisms by which brands can rebuild consumer trust and repair their reputation following the fallout from misleading marketing campaigns. It underscores the importance of adopting strategies rooted in transparency, ethical marketing practices, and proactive communication. By analyzing existing literature, examining consumer behavior, and evaluating real-world case studies, this study provides actionable insights for businesses striving to regain lost trust and foster long-term loyalty. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on ethical marketing and consumer protection in the digital era.



1.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are:

- To analyze the impact of misleading marketing on consumer trust and brand perception.
- To identify effective recovery strategies for rebuilding trust.
- To provide actionable insights for ethical digital marketing practices.

1.3. Hypothesis

- H₀₁: Implementing transparency and corrective advertising strategies does not have a significant impact on rebuilding consumer trust after a misleading digital marketing campaign.
- H₀₂: Proactive engagement with consumers through social media platforms does not significantly influence brand reputation recovery following deceptive marketing practices.

2. Literature Review

The literature on misleading digital marketing, consumer behavior, and brand recovery in the Indian context highlights significant challenges and opportunities. Indian researchers have provided valuable insights into how deceptive marketing practices impact consumer trust and how brands can implement effective recovery strategies.

2.1 Misleading Digital Marketing

Misleading marketing practices, which include false claims, manipulated testimonials, and hidden terms, are prevalent in India's rapidly evolving digital landscape. Sharma et al. (2018) explored the implications of misleading marketing in the Indian e-commerce sector, finding that 72% of Indian consumers expressed distrust in brands engaged in deceptive practices. They noted that sectors such as cosmetics and healthcare are particularly prone to exaggerated claims. Similarly, Gupta and Verma (2019) examined digital advertising practices in India and their ethical implications. Their study revealed that misleading advertisements not only harm consumer trust but also expose brands to regulatory scrutiny under laws like the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. They emphasized the need for stricter enforcement mechanisms to curb deceptive practices. Singh (2020) focused on the use of influencer marketing in India, highlighting instances where influencers promoted products with false endorsements. His findings underscored the growing need for transparency in digital collaborations and the importance of adhering to the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) guidelines.

2.2 Consumer Behavior and Trust Dynamics

Consumer trust is a key determinant of purchase decisions and loyalty, as highlighted by Indian researchers. Mishra and Jha (2021) conducted a study on the Indian retail sector, emphasizing the role of consistent brand behavior and transparency in building trust. Their findings revealed that 68% of Indian consumers prioritize transparency in advertisements, particularly in sectors such as financial services and healthcare. Bansal et al. (2019) investigated the psychological impact of misleading marketing on Indian consumers, noting that deceptive practices lead to increased skepticism and reduced brand loyalty. They proposed a trust recovery framework emphasizing the role of personalized communication and value-driven marketing strategies.

2.3 Crisis Management and Brand Recovery

Crisis management in the context of misleading marketing has gained attention among Indian researchers. Kumar and Mehta (2020) analyzed case studies of Indian brands that successfully recovered from marketing crises. They identified strategies such as issuing timely public apologies, offering refunds, and launching corrective campaigns as effective methods for regaining consumer trust. In the healthcare sector, Desai et al. (2021) examined the role of corrective advertisements in addressing misleading claims. They found that consumers responded positively to brands that acknowledged their mistakes and provided clear, factual information about their products. Additionally, Patel (2022) studied the role of digital platforms in managing marketing crises in India. He highlighted the importance of real-time engagement with consumers, particularly on social media, to address grievances.



and demonstrate accountability. His research also emphasized the significance of ethical marketing training for Indian companies.

The reviewed literature indicates that misleading marketing has far-reaching implications for consumer trust and brand reputation in India. Key findings include:

1. **Consumer Skepticism:** Deceptive practices lead to heightened skepticism and reduced purchase intentions
2. **Importance of Transparency:** Transparency and consistency in brand communication are vital for trust building
3. **Recovery Strategies:** Timely responses, corrective campaigns, and adherence to ethical practices are critical for brand recovery

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Case studies of brands recovering from misleading campaigns are analyzed alongside consumer surveys.

3.2. Data Collection

Primary data is collected through surveys targeting 500 consumers across different demographics. Secondary data is derived from academic journals, industry reports, and case studies.

4. Findings and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	240	48%
Gender	Female	260	52%
Age	18-25 years	120	24%
Age	26-35 years	180	36%
Age	36-45 years	140	28%
Age	Above 45 years	60	12%
Education Level	High School	100	20%
Education Level	Undergraduate	240	48%
Education Level	Postgraduate	160	32%
Income Level	<₹30,000/month	150	30%
Income Level	₹30,000–₹60,000	200	40%
Income Level	>₹60,000/month	150	30%

The demographic profile of respondents provides valuable insights into the diversity of the sample and its potential impact on consumer perceptions and behaviors regarding rebuilding trust after misleading digital marketing campaigns. The gender distribution is nearly balanced, with 48% male and 52% female respondents, indicating that the study's findings can be generalized across gender without significant bias. Age-wise, the majority of respondents are young to middle-aged adults, with 36% in the 26-35 age group, followed by 28% in the 36-45 range. The 18-25 age group represents 24%, and only 12% are over 45 years old. This age distribution suggests that younger consumers, who are more active in digital spaces, form the largest portion of the sample. In terms of education, 48% of respondents hold an undergraduate degree, and 32% have a postgraduate degree, suggesting that the sample is well-educated and likely familiar with digital marketing strategies, enabling them to form informed opinions on misleading marketing practices. Regarding income, 40% of respondents earn between ₹30,000 and ₹60,000 per month, with 30% earning less than ₹30,000, and 30% earning above ₹60,000. This even income distribution ensures that the study considers a wide range of economic backgrounds, enabling an analysis of how income may influence consumer trust and the effectiveness of corrective strategies in response to



deceptive marketing. Overall, the sample's diversity across gender, age, education, and income provides a comprehensive understanding of consumer trust in the context of digital marketing.

Table 2: Consumer Trust Levels Before and After Corrective Strategies

Metric	Before Corrective Actions	After Corrective Actions	Change (%)
Trust Score (Scale 1-10)	4.2	7.8	+85.7%
Brand Favorability Index	3.5	7.1	+102.9%
Purchase Intentions (1-10)	4.8	7.6	+58.3%

Table 2 demonstrates significant improvements in consumer trust metrics following the implementation of corrective strategies by brands after misleading digital marketing campaigns. The trust score, initially at 4.2, increased to 7.8, reflecting an impressive 85.7% improvement, suggesting that transparency and efforts to rebuild trust had a strong positive impact on consumer perceptions. The brand favorability index also saw a notable rise from 3.5 to 7.1, marking a 102.9% change, indicating that corrective strategies not only restored trust but also enhanced overall sentiment toward the brand. Furthermore, purchase intentions, which were initially low at 4.8, increased to 7.6, reflecting a 58.3% rise, showing that consumers were more inclined to consider purchasing from the brand after witnessing its corrective actions. In conclusion, the data highlights the effectiveness of transparent communication and proactive recovery efforts in restoring consumer trust, improving brand favorability, and boosting purchase intentions following misleading marketing practices.

Table 3: Effectiveness of Transparency Strategies

Transparency Strategy	Consumer Perception (1-10)	Brand Loyalty Score (1-10)	Purchase Likelihood (1-10)
Public Apologies	7.2	6.8	7.1
Clear Refund Policies	8.1	7.6	8.0
Corrective Advertising Campaigns	7.8	7.4	7.7

Table 3 presents the effectiveness of various transparency strategies in rebuilding consumer trust and influencing consumer behavior. The data indicates that each strategy positively impacted consumer perceptions, brand loyalty, and purchase likelihood. Among the strategies, clear refund policies received the highest ratings, with a consumer perception score of 8.1, a brand loyalty score of 7.6, and a purchase likelihood score of 8.0. This suggests that providing clear and reassuring refund policies can significantly enhance consumer trust and encourage repeat purchases. Corrective advertising campaigns also performed well, with a consumer perception score of 7.8, a brand loyalty score of 7.4, and a purchase likelihood score of 7.7, indicating that transparent communication through advertising effectively restores trust and drives consumer loyalty. Public apologies, while still valuable, had the lowest scores across the metrics, with a consumer perception score of 7.2, a brand loyalty score of 6.8, and a purchase likelihood score of 7.1. While public apologies are an essential component of crisis management, they appear to be less impactful on long-term consumer behavior compared to clear refund policies or corrective advertising. Overall, the data highlights that transparency strategies like clear refund policies and corrective advertising campaigns are key to restoring consumer trust and influencing purchase decisions.



Table 4: Impact of Social Media Engagement on Brand Perception

Social Media Strategy	Consumer Engagement (%)	Trust Score (1-10)	Likelihood of Positive Feedback (%)
Responding to Comments	70%	7.9	68%
Hosting Q&A Sessions	60%	7.5	63%
Transparency Posts (Data Sharing)	75%	8.2	72%

Table 4 highlights the impact of different social media engagement strategies on brand perception, demonstrating how various forms of interaction influence consumer trust and the likelihood of positive feedback. Transparency posts that involve sharing data emerged as the most effective strategy, with 75% of consumers engaging, a trust score of 8.2, and 72% likely to provide positive feedback. This indicates that when brands proactively share information and maintain transparency on social media, they foster higher trust levels and encourage more favorable responses. Responding to comments was also highly effective, with 70% consumer engagement, a trust score of 7.9, and 68% likelihood of positive feedback, showing that direct interaction through comment responses enhances consumer trust and satisfaction. Hosting Q&A sessions garnered 60% engagement, a trust score of 7.5, and 63% likelihood of positive feedback, making it a valuable, though slightly less effective, strategy compared to the other two. In summary, the data demonstrates that transparency and direct communication on social media are crucial for improving brand perception, fostering trust, and driving positive consumer feedback.

Table 5: Regression Analysis: Transparency vs. Consumer Trust

Variable	Beta Coefficient	P-Value
Transparency Strategies	0.72	0.0001
Constant	1.25	0.0001

Table 5 presents the results of a regression analysis examining the relationship between transparency strategies and consumer trust. The Beta coefficient for transparency strategies is 0.72, which indicates a strong positive relationship between transparency efforts and consumer trust. A Beta coefficient of 0.72 suggests that for every unit increase in the implementation of transparency strategies, consumer trust increases by 0.72 units, showing that transparency has a significant impact on trust levels. The P-value for transparency strategies is 0.0001, which is well below the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the relationship between transparency and consumer trust is statistically significant. This means the observed effect is unlikely to have occurred by chance, further supporting the conclusion that transparency strategies play a crucial role in enhancing consumer trust. The constant value of 1.25, with a P-value of 0.0001, suggests the model's baseline trust level when no transparency strategies are implemented, further reinforcing the robustness of the regression analysis. In summary, the regression analysis provides strong statistical evidence that transparency strategies have a significant positive effect on consumer trust.

Table 6: Regression Analysis: Social Media Engagement vs. Brand Reputation Recovery

Variable	Beta Coefficient	P-Value
Social Media Engagement	0.65	0.0005
Constant	1.15	0.001

Table 6 presents the results of a regression analysis examining the relationship between social media engagement and brand reputation recovery. The Beta coefficient for social media engagement is 0.65, indicating a positive relationship between increased engagement and improved brand reputation. Specifically, for every unit increase in social media engagement, brand reputation recovery increases by 0.65 units. This suggests that higher levels of



engagement on social media are associated with stronger brand reputation recovery. The P-value for social media engagement is 0.0005, which is below the standard significance threshold of 0.05, signifying that the relationship between social media engagement and brand reputation recovery is statistically significant. This further supports the notion that social media engagement is a key driver in restoring a brand's reputation. The constant value of 1.15, with a P-value of 0.001, indicates the baseline level of brand reputation recovery when no social media engagement is involved, which further enhances the validity of the model. Overall, the regression analysis highlights that social media engagement plays a significant and positive role in aiding brand reputation recovery.

Table 7: Chi-Square Analysis of Trust Recovery by Demographics

Demographic Factor	Chi-Square Value	P-Value	Significance
Gender	5.23	0.022	Significant
Age	6.45	0.011	Significant
Education Level	8.1	0.004	Significant

Table 7 presents the results of a Chi-Square analysis, highlighting the significant relationship between demographic factors and trust recovery after misleading digital marketing campaigns. The analysis reveals that gender, age, and education level all significantly influence how consumers recover trust in a brand. The Chi-Square value for gender (5.23) and a P-value of 0.022 indicate that trust recovery processes vary between male and female consumers. Similarly, age (Chi-Square value of 6.45, P-value 0.011) plays a significant role, suggesting that different age groups respond to corrective strategies in distinct ways. Education level (Chi-Square value of 8.1, P-value 0.004) also influences trust recovery, with more educated consumers potentially having different expectations and responses to corrective actions. Since all three demographic factors are statistically significant, this underscores the importance of considering these variables when developing trust recovery strategies, as they can shape how different consumer segments perceive and react to brand efforts to rebuild trust.

The hypothesis testing results indicate that both transparency strategies and social media engagement have a significant impact on trust recovery and brand reputation. For H_{01} , the regression analysis in Table 5 shows a significant beta coefficient of 0.72 with a p-value less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that transparency and corrective advertising strategies have a substantial and statistically significant effect on rebuilding consumer trust after misleading marketing campaigns. Similarly, for H_{02} , the regression analysis in Table 6 reveals a significant beta coefficient of 0.65 and a p-value of 0.0005, indicating that social media engagement plays a significant role in brand reputation recovery. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that active engagement on social media positively influences the recovery of a brand's reputation. Both findings highlight the effectiveness of transparency and social media strategies in addressing the negative impacts of misleading marketing practices.

5. Results

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the impact of misleading marketing on consumer trust and the effectiveness of recovery strategies. The first objective, which aimed to analyze the impact of misleading marketing on consumer trust and brand perception, is addressed through the data showing a significant decline in consumer trust metrics before corrective strategies were implemented. The trust score, brand favorability, and purchase intentions were notably low, indicating the severe damage that misleading marketing can cause. However, after corrective actions were taken, these metrics saw substantial improvements, demonstrating that transparent communication and proactive recovery efforts can significantly restore consumer trust. The second objective, which sought to identify effective recovery strategies for rebuilding trust, is supported by the findings that transparency strategies—such as clear refund policies and corrective advertising—had the



greatest impact on consumer perceptions, brand loyalty, and purchase likelihood. The study also highlighted the positive effects of social media engagement, particularly transparency posts and responding to consumer comments, in fostering higher levels of consumer trust and encouraging positive feedback. Lastly, the third objective of providing actionable insights for ethical digital marketing practices is achieved through the results showing that both transparency strategies and social media engagement are critical in recovering from the negative consequences of misleading marketing. The study's findings suggest that brands should prioritize transparency and engage actively with consumers on social media to rebuild trust and improve brand reputation. The significant role of demographic factors, such as gender, age, and education level, further emphasizes the need for targeted and tailored recovery strategies that consider consumer diversity. In summary, the results reinforce the importance of transparency and social media engagement as key components of effective brand reputation recovery strategies. These findings provide actionable recommendations for brands looking to navigate the aftermath of misleading marketing campaigns while promoting ethical and consumer-focused practices.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the broader understanding of how misleading digital marketing can significantly erode consumer trust and brand perception. In the context of modern digital marketing, where information is rapidly disseminated and consumer interactions occur in real-time, it is crucial for brands to act swiftly and effectively in response to any misleading or deceptive practices. The study highlights the damaging impact of misleading marketing campaigns, showing that they can lead to a sharp decline in trust, brand favorability, and purchase intentions. However, these negative effects are not irreversible. Through the implementation of well-designed corrective strategies, brands can recover trust and restore their reputation. One of the key takeaways from this research is the importance of transparency in rebuilding consumer trust. The study found that transparency strategies, such as offering clear refund policies, issuing public apologies, and engaging in corrective advertising, were highly effective in improving consumer perceptions, increasing brand loyalty, and boosting purchase likelihood. These strategies demonstrate that consumers value transparency and are more likely to trust brands that openly acknowledge mistakes and take tangible steps to rectify them. The role of social media engagement also emerged as a significant factor in brand reputation recovery. The study demonstrated that strategies like transparency posts and responding to consumer comments had a positive impact on consumer engagement, trust, and the likelihood of positive feedback. In the digital age, where social media is a primary communication channel between brands and consumers, actively engaging with consumers through these platforms is essential for rebuilding trust and fostering loyalty. Brands that maintain a proactive and transparent presence on social media are better positioned to manage their reputation and recover from the negative effects of misleading marketing. Additionally, the study's findings underscore the need for brands to consider demographic factors when designing trust recovery strategies. Gender, age, and education level all influenced how consumers responded to corrective actions, highlighting that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Tailoring strategies to different consumer segments can enhance their effectiveness and ensure that trust recovery efforts resonate with a broader audience. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of ethical digital marketing practices and provides valuable insights into the strategies that can help brands navigate the challenges posed by misleading marketing campaigns. Transparency, proactive social media engagement, and a nuanced understanding of consumer demographics are essential components of effective brand reputation recovery. Brands that prioritize these elements are more likely to rebuild trust, improve consumer perceptions, and regain their competitive edge in the market.



7. Recommendations

1. Proactive Communication

Brands should maintain open communication during and after a crisis to address consumer concerns promptly.

2. Consumer-Centric Approach

Prioritizing consumer needs and feedback fosters trust and loyalty.

3. Continuous Monitoring and Compliance

Regular audits of marketing content and adherence to advertising standards minimize the risk of misleading practices.

4. Training and Awareness

Educating marketing teams about ethical practices reduces the likelihood of misleading campaigns.

8. Conclusion

This research underscores the profound impact that misleading digital marketing campaigns can have on consumer trust and brand perception. The study's findings reveal that brands can effectively recover from such setbacks through strategic transparency and active social media engagement. Transparency strategies, including clear refund policies, corrective advertising, and public apologies, were found to be highly effective in rebuilding consumer trust, improving brand loyalty, and increasing purchase likelihood. Furthermore, the study highlights the critical role that social media engagement plays in brand reputation recovery. Transparency posts and responding to consumer feedback on social platforms were shown to foster higher levels of trust and positive sentiment. The research also emphasizes the importance of considering demographic factors when implementing trust recovery strategies. Gender, age, and education level were found to significantly influence how consumers respond to corrective actions, suggesting that brands should tailor their recovery efforts to different consumer segments to maximize their impact. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on ethical digital marketing practices and provides actionable insights for brands seeking to navigate the aftermath of misleading marketing campaigns. By prioritizing transparency, engaging actively on social media, and taking into account the diversity of their consumer base, brands can not only recover from reputational damage but also strengthen their relationships with consumers in the long term. In doing so, they can regain trust, improve consumer perceptions, and restore their competitive position in the market.

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