
IMPACT OF MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS ON CUSTOMERS: PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT

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ABSTRACT

Misleading advertisements have grown widespread in India's digital marketplace, undermining customer confidence and altering purchase behaviours. This study uses psychological reactance theory to better understand how customers react when they recognise fraudulent marketing strategies, notably in the e-commerce sector. Psychological reactance arises when people consider their freedom of choice to be limited or influenced, resulting in resistance, distrust, and unfavourable brand impression. The study investigates how deceptive statements, fraudulent reviews, manipulative pricing techniques, scarcity tactics, and concealed influencer endorsements contribute to customer mistrust. These misleading activities not only influence purchase decisions, but also result in brand boycotts, unfavourable word-of-mouth, and increased regulatory attention.

Using a case study approach and secondary data analysis, this study examines real-world examples of misleading advertising strategies that resulted in customer complaints, legal challenges, or regulatory action. It focuses on notable instances involving e-commerce platforms, companies, and digital influencers that have faced interventions under the Consumer Protection Act of 2019. The research examines customer reactions using news articles, court opinions, and regulatory results to detect trends in consumer resistance, brand reputational damage, and the systemic obstacles of enforcing advertising restrictions. It also looks at how grievance redressal methods including consumer forums, self-regulatory industry efforts, and court processes work to correct deceptive marketing claims and restore consumer trust.

The findings will emphasise critical need for better regulatory enforcement, more transparency in digital advertising, and increased responsibility for e-commerce platforms and the misleading marketing by influencers. By researching consumer psychology and regulatory obstacles, this study sheds light on how deceptive advertisements alter customer perceptions, as well as the legal and legislative responses required to tackle such tactics. Strengthening enforcement procedures and raising consumer knowledge are essential steps towards creating a fair and trustworthy digital marketplace in India.

Keywords: Psychological Reactance, Misleading Advertisements, Consumer Trust, E-Commerce Regulations, Deceptive Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

India's consumer landscape has changed because of digital revolution, which offers unmatched ease through targeted advertising and e-commerce. However, this change is overshadowed by a pernicious problem: the spread of deceptive advertisements that subvert expectations, take advantage of cultural identities, and undermine confidence. The behavioural phenomena known as psychological reactance, which frequently takes the form of mistrust, backlash, or disengagement, is at the core of this problem. The effectiveness of consumer protection laws such as The Consumer Protection Act 2019 is undermined by misleading advertising methods in India, as this paper explores. It makes the case for the immediate incorporation of behavioural insights into legislative procedures to close this gap.

According to Brehm's seminal work, psychological reactance arises when consumers feel that their freedom of choice has been undermined by manipulative narratives. In India's digitally saturated markets, deceptive claims, whether they be unsupported educational guarantees, culturally insensitive product comparisons, or health misinformation, exploit vulnerabilities linked to aspiration and identity. For example, advertisements promising "100% placements" or "superiority" over traditional staples are not just lies but attacks on autonomy, igniting collective resistance and disillusionment. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these dynamics, as limited offline freedoms increased towards digital platforms, demonstrating how reactance escalates in situations of perceived manipulation.

Despite being a significant piece of legislation, the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 is still ill-prepared to handle these psychological undercurrents. Its reactive design ignores the psychological and cognitive costs of autonomy violations in favour of penalising financial harm and requiring the removal of misleading content. Systemic flaws are highlighted by cases involving delayed enforcement against recurrent offenders, when sanctions are ineffective in re-establishing confidence or discouraging such behaviour in the future. On the other hand, transparency-based initiatives, including those that reveal product limitations and scientific data, show how clarity can reduce reactance and imply that regulatory frameworks need to change to put prevention above punishment.

Through an examination of seminal cases decided by the Advertising Standards Council of

India, this paper investigates these conflicts, showing how unsupported claims threaten liberties while evidence-based communication encourages adherence. It challenges the Consumer Protection Act of 2019's dependence on punitive measures that ignore behavioural realities and its shortcomings in combating culturally nuanced deceit. The study emphasises the need to rethink consumer protection as a beneficial partnership between behavioural science and legal rigour by placing these concerns within the larger language of psychological reactance.

Three key dimensions serve as the foundation for the conversation. Use of deceptive advertising to exploit cultural and aspirational freedoms. The reactive enforcement methods of the CPA of 2019 and its psychological blind spots. and the ability to restore trust through openness and evidence-based communication.

By doing this, the study promotes a paradigm change that views customers as active buyers as opposed to inert objects. To ensure that consumer protection transforms from a weapon of redress to a protector of cognitive and cultural autonomy, it urges regulatory frameworks to anticipate reactance by incorporating behavioural insights into their design. This integration is not only strategic, but also necessary to promote fair and sustainable markets as India negotiates the challenges of digital commerce.

CASE ANALYSIS: PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTANCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION IN INDIA

Study 1: Sree Saraswathi Thyagaraja College's "100% Placement" Claim

In 2023, Sree Saraswathi Thyagaraja College, published a print advertisement claiming "100% Placement" for courses in digital forensics, artificial intelligence, and psychology. The advertisement targeted students seeking career stability but omitted critical disclaimers such as batch sizes, student verification details, and qualifying conditions. It also failed to clarify that "past performance \neq future results," a lapse flagged by ASCI's Suo Motu National Advertisement Monitoring Service (NAMS).¹ Despite ASCI's repeated attempts to seek evidence such as appointment letters, third-party audits, or lists of unplaced students - the college ignored inquiries, leading the Consumer Complaints Council (CCC) to declare the

¹ Advertising Standards Council of India, *ASCI Flags Misleading "100% Placement" Claims by Educational Institutions Under NAMS Monitoring* (2023), <https://ascionline.in>.

claim “misleading by exaggeration”.

Legal Framework

The case underscores systemic gaps in India’s consumer protection laws. The Consumer Protection Act 2019 under Section 2(28) prohibits advertisements that “falsely represent the nature or quality of services,” the college exploited loopholes by using vague, aspirational language without factual substantiation. The absence of mandated disclaimers in educational advertisements allowed the institution to weaponize student’s career anxieties, a practice Verma identifies as endemic in sectors with high emotional stakes.

The CCC invoked Section 89 of The CPA 2019 to impose penalties, but delays in enforcement diluted deterrence. Unlike the EU’s Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, which mandates pre-vetting of high-risk claims, India’s framework remains reactive. For instance, the college’s advertisement ran for months before ASCI intervened, highlighting the need for real-time monitoring akin to the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority AI system.²

Psychological Reactance Analysis

The college’s claim triggered psychological reactance, a behavioural response to perceived threats to autonomy.³ By promising guaranteed employment, the advertisement exploited student’s freedom to make informed career choices, creating a “freedom threat feedback loop”.⁴ When graduates discovered the claim’s falsity, their reactance manifested as distrust toward educational institutions and reluctance to engage with redressal mechanisms like the eDaakhil portal. This aligns with Akhtar’s findings during COVID-19, where restricted freedoms amplified scepticism toward institutional promises. Students reported feeling “betrayed” by the college, mirroring Romani’s observation that misleading claims corrode trust in advertisers. Sharma and Chander further note that such exploitation leads to complete disengagement from grievance mechanisms, as victims perceive them as ineffective.

Impact

The fallout extended beyond individual grievances, escalating into collective resistance. Social

² Akhileshwar Pathak, *Comparative Advertising in India: Need to Strengthen Regulations*, 30 *Vikalpa: J. for Decision Makers* 67 (2005).

³ E. P. Torrance & J. W. Brehm, *A Theory of Psychological Reactance*, 81 *Am. J. Psychol.* 133 (1968).

⁴ C. Steindl, E. Jonas, S. Sittenthaler, E. Traut-Mattausch & J. Greenberg, *Understanding Psychological Reactance*, 223 *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* 205 (2015).

media campaigns exposed the college's deceit, with hashtags like Education Scam trending on Twitter. This viral backlash reflects Steindl theory that reactance often evolves into organised dissent in digital spaces. However, The CPA 2019's punitive focus failed to address the psychological harm. While CCPA fined the college, compensation was limited to financial reimbursements, ignoring emotional distress such as anxiety and career derailment.

This also exposed regulatory fragmentation. Unlike the RBI's stringent Digital Lending Guidelines, which mandates transparency in loan terms, educational advertisements face lax scrutiny. The absence of third-party audits for claims like "100% placement" allows institutions to manipulate aspirational narratives unchecked, a gap Patil attributes to India's historical reliance on self-regulation in education.

Study 2: Kellogg's "Breakfast se Badhkar" Campaign

In 2023, Kellogg's India launched a multimedia campaign for Corn Flakes and Chocó's products with the tagline "Breakfast se Badhkar" (More than Breakfast). The advertisement, aired on television and YouTube, depicted a mother's emotional journey feeding her child, suggesting that Kellogg's products transcended nutrition to embody maternal care and aspiration. However, consumers alleged the phrase implicitly positioned Kellogg's as superior to traditional Indian breakfasts like poha, paratha, and idly. The ASCI received complaints arguing that the campaign's ambiguity misled viewers into believing Kellogg's offered unmatched nutritional value.⁵

The Hindi term "badhkar" (more than) and its Tamil counterpart "melaandhu" (superior) became focal points of contention. While Kellogg's claimed the tagline symbolised "maternal love," regional linguistic nuances amplified perceptions of cultural erasure. The CCC ruled the campaign violated ASCI Code which prohibit misleading claims through ambiguity or exaggeration.

Legal Framework

The case highlights gaps in India's regulatory framework for culturally nuanced advertising. Under Section 2(28) of the CPA 2019, misleading advertisements include those that

⁵ Advertising Standards Council of India, *Complaint Outcomes Details*, <https://www.ascionline.in/complaintoutcomes-details> (last visited Apr. 1, 2026).

“misrepresent the nature, substance, or quality of good and services.” However, the law lacks clarity on the subjective claims, relying on subjective adjudication by bodies like ASCI. Kellogg’s submission of creative storyboards and a “creative evaluation test” failed to substantiate nutritional superiority, as the CCC emphasised that metaphorical assertions require unambiguous disclaimers.

The Consumer Protection Act 2019 empowers the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) under Section 21(2) to order the takedown of deceptive advertisements. However, Kellogg’s campaign persisted on YouTube for weeks post-ruling, exposing enforcement delays. Contrast this with the EU’s Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, which mandates pre-vetting of comparative claims and bans “aggressive practices” that exploit cultural sensitivities.⁶

Psychological Reactance Analysis

The campaign’s implicit comparison to traditional breakfasts triggered psychological reactance, a resistance to perceived threats to cultural autonomy. By framing Kellogg’s as “more than” regional staples, the advertisement devalued dietary practices, threatening consumers’ freedom to retain cultural identity. Kellogg’s defence that the tagline celebrated “maternal love” was perceived as disingenuous, heightening scepticism. Romani’s study on price misleading advertisements corroborates this: vague claims erode trust, as consumers feel their autonomy to make informed choices is compromised.⁷

Impact

The backlash transcended mere consumer grievances, morphing into a cultural debate. In Tamil Nadu, “melaandhu” explicitly translates to “superior,” intensifying regional reactance. While the CCPA fined Kellogg’s under Section 89, the penalty focused on financial deterrence, ignoring the emotional toll of cultural marginalisation. Despite ASCI’s ruling, the campaign remained on YouTube, highlighting the CCPA’s limited authority over decentralised platforms. Comparatively, the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) employs Artificial Intelligence tools to enforce takedowns within 48 hours, a system India’s regulators could adopt

⁶ Akhileshwar Pathak, *Comparative Advertising in India: Need to Strengthen Regulations*, 30 Vikalpa: J. for Decision Makers 67 (2005).

⁷ Simona Romani, *Price Misleading Advertising: Effects on Trustworthiness Toward the Source of Information and Willingness to Buy*, 15 J. Prod. & Brand Mgmt. 130 (2006).

to close the compliance gaps.⁸

Study 3: Cipla's Nicotex "24-Hour Relief" Claim

In 2022, Cipla Health Limited advertised Nicotex nicotine patches with two key claims: "A Patch a Day Keeps Cigarette Craving Away" and "24-Hour Relief." The digital display advertisements, targeting smokers seeking cessation aids, emphasised the product's transdermal nicotine delivery system and included disclaimers such as "craving reduction varies" and "patch image for representative purposes only." A complaint challenged these claims as misleading, arguing that "craving" was a subjective psychological state unmeasurable by clinical standards. However, the ASCI dismissed the complaint, ruling that Cipla's evidence-based approach complied with regulatory requirements. This case contrasts sharply with deceptive health advertisements like Patanjali's unsubstantiated Coronil claims, which provoked Supreme Court censure.⁹

Legal Framework

The Nicotex case exemplifies the CPA 2019's efficacy when aligned with sector-specific regulations. Section 2(9) allows health related claims are if "scientifically validated," a standard Cipla met through pharmacokinetic studies and CDSCO approvals. The CCPA mandates such compliance, mirroring the EU's Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, which requires "materially accurate" health assertions.

Psychological Reactance Analysis

Nicotex's transparency mitigated psychological reactance by preserving consumer autonomy. Brehm's theory posits that reactance arises when freedoms are threatened, but Cipla's evidence-based approach respected smokers' agency to manage expectations. By disclosing dosage protocols and variability in craving reduction, the campaign avoided the manipulative tone of advertisements like Kellogg's "Breakfast se Badhkar," which triggered cultural

⁸ Jignesh Vidani, *To Study the Impact of Online Fraud and Scams on Online Purchasing Behaviour of Consumers in Ahmedabad City* (Apr. 30, 2024), SSRN Electronic Journal, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4849843>

⁹ V. Venkatesan, *Patanjali Contempt Case: Blatant Violations, Expanded Scope, Repeated Scoldings and the Flip-Flop on Rule 170*, Supreme Court Observer (May 9, 2024), <https://www.scobserver.in/journal/patanjalicontempt-case-blatant-violations-expanded-scope-repeated-scoldings-and-the-flip-flip-on-rule-170/>

backlash.

Steindl argue that transparency reduces perceived freedom threats, fostering compliance. Nicotex's disclaimers functioned as behavioural "nudges," enabling informed choices without coercion, a strategy Amarnath and Jaidev link to long-term brand loyalty. Conversely, Patanjali's Coronil advertisements, which claimed to "cure COVID-19" without evidence, provoked Supreme Court reprimands for exploiting pandemic anxieties.¹⁰

Impact

The Nicotex ruling reinforced the economic and ethical value of evidence-based advertising. By avoiding absolutist claims, Cipla pre-empted the scepticism that sectors like Ayurveda, where vague assertions like "100% natural" often mask non-compliance. This also highlighted the CPA 2019's potential when integrated with sectoral regulations like the RBI's Digital Lending Guidelines (2022), which mandate transparency in loan terms.

The CCC accepted "24-Hour Relief" based on pharmacokinetic data but acknowledged "craving" remains subjective. This ambiguity mirrors issues in mental health advertising, where terms like "stress relief" are often exploited.¹¹

Cipla's success demonstrates that transparency is not merely ethical but economically viable. By fostering trust, brands can mitigate reactance and build loyalty a lesson. As digital markets grow, India's consumer protection framework must evolve from punitive enforcement to proactive empowerment, ensuring autonomy and accuracy coexist.

Findings

False advertising causes a disconnect between expectations and reality, which leads to regret and discontent. Future purchases are deterred, and trust is damaged by this emotional struggle. When expectations are not fulfilled, too optimistic advertising breeds disappointment, low self-esteem, and emotional pain. Consumers become sceptical of advertising and lose faith in markets and companies when they are repeatedly exposed to misleading commercials. Customers may become reluctant to interact with new items because of stress, worry, and learnt

¹⁰ Saumya Kalia, *Supreme Court's Ban on Patanjali Ads | Explained*, The Hindu (Mar. 3, 2024), <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-courts-ban-on-patanjali-adsexplained/article67917103.ece>.

¹¹ Rishi Raj Sharma & Subhash Chander, *What's Wrong with Misleading Advertising?—An Empirical Investigation*, 7 Asia Pac. Bus. Rev. 191 (2011).

helplessness brought on by repeated exposure to deceptive advertising.

REMEDICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: LEGAL FORMS, ACTION FRAMEWORKS, AND COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

Legal Reforms

To address systemic gaps in India's consumer protection framework, legal reforms must prioritise swift enforcement, accountability, and recognition of psychological harm. Strengthening the collaboration between the ASCI and the CCPA is critical. Currently, the lack of coordination between these bodies' delays justice, as seen in the Patanjali Ayurveda case, where deceptive advertisements persisted for months despite ASCI rulings. Establishing a joint ASCI-CCPA task force with a 30-day resolution mandate for high-reactance sectors like education and healthcare can expedite redressal. Real-time data sharing between ASCI's National Advertisement Monitoring Service (NAMS) and the CCPA's grievance portal can further streamline enforcement.

Mandating third-party audits for comparative claims is another essential reform. Unverified superlatives such as "India's Biggest" or "No. 1" exploit cognitive biases, requiring advertisers to submit audit reports from agencies like Nielsen or Ernst & Young before airing such claims can ensure transparency. Standardised metrics, such as defining "biggest" as enrolment numbers or "No. 1" as market share, can prevent subjective interpretations.

Finally, amending the CPA 2019 to recognise psychological harm is crucial. While Section 89 penalises deceptive advertisements, it overlooks the emotional distress. For instance, students misled by Sree Saraswathi College's "100% placement" claim reported anxiety and career setbacks, yet compensation focused only on economic loss. Expanding Section 2(9) to define "deficiency in service" as including psychological harm can enable courts to award damages for emotional distress. Adopting precedents from the EU's Unfair Commercial Practices Directive which penalises "aggressive practices" causing undue mental pressure, can further strengthen India's legal framework.

Action Frameworks

Action frameworks must focus on empowering consumers, leveraging technology, and reducing reactance through pre-emptive measures. Consumer education campaigns are

essential to bridge the awareness gap. Approximately 12% of Indian consumers are aware of the e-Daakhil portal.¹² Launching CREAT workshops in regional languages, can demystify The CPA 2019 rights.¹³ Digital literacy drives, like informative videos through social media explaining grievance filing, can simplify reporting scams.

AI driven monitoring can revolutionise advertisement regulation by flagging reactance triggers in real time. Machine learning tools, like the UK's ASA (Artificial Intelligence system), which detected 87% of misleading COVID-19 advertisements in 2021, can be adapted to India's e-commerce sector, where 68% of advertisements use fake urgency tactics.¹⁴ Sentiment analysis of social media backlash, such as Boycott Kellogg's trends, can identify the emerging reactance hotspots and prioritise CCPA action.

Pre-litigation mediation with behavioural nudges can address court backlogs and reduce reactance. With more than 42,000 pending cases in the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), delays exacerbate consumer frustration. Training mediators to use "reactance-calming" language, such as framing compensations as "autonomy restoration" rather than "fines," can foster trust.¹⁵ Establishing sector-specific ombudsman committees, modelled after Australia's Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, can resolve disputes within 15 days, ensuring timely justice.

Collaborative Initiatives

Collaborative initiatives between law schools, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), and regulators can amplify the impact of consumer protection efforts. Law school clinics can bridge the theory and practice through moot courts simulating cases defence, where evidence-based claims reduced reactance. Policy labs can draft model guidelines for culturally sensitive advertisements, such as regional disclaimers in Kellogg's Tamil campaign, ensuring compliance with reactance-aware principles.

¹² Nidhi Chawla & Brijesh Kumar, *E-Commerce and Consumer Protection in India: The Emerging Trend*, 180 J. Bus. Ethics 581 (2021).

¹³ Ridhi, *Misleading Patanjali Ads | Supreme Court Orders Personal Appearance of Baba Ramdev, Acharya Balakrishna*, SCC Online Blog (Mar. 19, 2024), <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2024/03/19/misleadingpatanjali-ads-supreme-court-orders-personal-appearance-baba-ramdev-acharya-balakrishna/>

¹⁴ Jignesh Vidani, *To Study the Impact of Online Fraud and Scams on Online Purchasing Behaviour of Consumers in Ahmedabad City*, SSRN Elec. J., at 1 (2024), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4849843>.

¹⁵ Gita V. Johar, *Intended and Unintended Effects of Corrective Advertising on Beliefs and Evaluations: An Exploratory Analysis*, 5 J. Consumer Psych. 209 (1996).

NGO regulator partnerships can enhance the grassroots outreach. NGOs like Consumer Rights Education and Awareness Trust (CREAT) and Consumer Law and Research Centre (CLARC) can launch reactance literacy modules to train rural consumers in identifying autonomy threats, such as “100% placement” scams, using interactive tools. Whistleblower platforms, can empower employees to report deceptive practices anonymously, fostering corporate accountability.

Corporate accountability can be incentivised through ethical branding. Introducing ASCIcertified labels, such as “Transparency Verified,” can reward advertisers complying with reactance guidelines. Industry charters, like a “Reactance Mitigation Code” for e-commerce giants, can ban dark patterns such as false scarcity, aligning business practices with consumer trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2019: Expand the scope of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 to recognise psychological harm (mental distress, loss of autonomy) as a compensable injury. Strengthen Section 89 by introducing graded penalties based on severity and repetition of misleading advertisements.
- Introduce Pre-Vetting of Advertisements: Implement a mandatory pre-clearance mechanism for advertisements in high-risk sectors such as education, healthcare, and financial services through the Advertising Standards Council of India and CCPA.
- Mandate Evidence-Based Claims: Require advertisers to provide documentary substantiation for all claims like “No.1,” “best,” or “100% guaranteed.” Non-compliance should result in immediate takedown and penalties.
- Third-Party Audit Requirement: Make independent verification (e.g., Nielsen, EY reports) compulsory for comparative and superlative claims to ensure transparency and prevent exaggeration.
- Regulate Influencer Marketing: Enforce strict disclosure norms for paid promotions. Impose joint liability on influencers and brands for misleading endorsements and hidden advertisements.

- Enhance Consumer Awareness: Conduct nationwide awareness campaigns on consumer rights and the e-Daakhil portal, especially in regional languages, to improve accessibility and reporting of grievances.

CONCLUSION

India's consumer markets have been completely transformed by the digital era, which has brought about previously unheard-of access to goods and services as well as intricate problems with psychological underpinnings. Psychological reactance, a basic reaction to perceived threats to autonomy, is at the heart of these difficulties. To regain control, people resist deceptive stimuli. Deceptive ads take advantage of goals and identities, causing mistrust and outrage, whether they promise unachievable educational outcomes, culturally insensitive product superiority, or unproven health benefits. These factors highlight a significant weakness in India's consumer protection laws: although the CPA 2019 penalises monetary damages, it does not adequately address the psychological and cognitive costs of autonomy violations. The way forward necessitates a shift in fundamental beliefs, incorporating behavioural insights into legislative frameworks to turn consumer protection from a reactive punitive system into a proactive defender of liberty and confidence.

When people's freedom of choice is restricted, psychological reactance flourishes. Think about the situation where a school makes an unsubstantiated promise of career success. Such statements weaponize aspirational freedoms and entice students to make choices that ultimately lead to disillusionment. Campaigns that portray goods as better than cultural mainstays also cause reaction because consumers view these claims as attacks on tradition. As seen by social media exposes and viral boycotts, digital platforms magnify these responses, transforming personal complaints into mass movements. This situation was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, since a lack of offline freedom increased mistrust of opaque digital methods. These instances highlight how lying damages people's trust in organisations and redressal systems and is not just a pecuniary transgression.

The CPA 2019 is still focused on solving real harm, even with its advanced features like CCPA and e-Daakhil portal. Fines and takedowns, fail to restore autonomy or mend the cognitive scars of treachery. For example, rapid resolutions in support of truthful advertisements show how evidence-based communication may restore trust, whereas prolonged fines against firms that spread unsubstantiated health claims demoralise customers. This contradiction emphasises

the necessity of a two-pronged strategy: behavioural tactics to prevent reaction and legal rigour to discourage dishonesty.

The key to this change turns out to be transparency. Campaigns that respect cultural settings, reveal limitations, and support claims with peer-reviewed research show that ethical advertising is not morally right but also profitable. They align profit with principle, reduce backlash, and cultivate loyalty. On the other hand, harsh punishments such as lengthy court cases against repeat offenders, sometimes exacerbate mistrust without addressing the underlying issues.

Treating people as active partners rather than passive targets is essential to the future of consumer protection in India. This necessitates abandoning punitive enforcement in favour of a comprehensive framework that combines behavioural science, legal procedures, and cooperative innovation. While educators and non-governmental organisations work to close the knowledge gap in both rural and urban areas, regulators must prioritise preventive measures, such as screening high-risk advertisements beforehand and expediting approvals for transparent campaigns.

India's response needs to be just as dynamic in a world where digital deceit is developing more quickly than laws. The CPA 2019 can transform from a reactive instrument into a proactive barrier for cognitive and cultural liberty by incorporating psychological insights into policy formulation. This change would ensure that markets thrive on transparency rather than manipulation by addressing grievances and fostering trust. The message is clear: valuing autonomy is the first step towards lasting consumer rights. Maintaining this independence holds the potential for fair and robust digital marketplaces where the customer experience is determined by trust rather than reaction.