



Marketing Manipulation in the 21st Century

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Abstract: *The research assessed aspects of manipulative advertising, their execution, and expected impacts on consumer behavior in general regarding any purchase of a product or service worldwide. The research aims to guide quantitative consumer perception research through carefully designed and efficiently conducted research. The analysis of the collected primary data revealed that manipulation in marketing is very common and that it appears at every step and thus began to be one of the main players when creating marketing ads. Furthermore, respondents expressed concern about manipulative advertising of food brands and preferred that this advertising was often practiced on services as well. Research has proven that there is a largely hidden manipulation that at first glance is not immediately noticeable and is hidden in consumers primarily evokes the emotions of the need for the product, the desire to do the same, and ultimately the purchase.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Manipulation in marketing has become a problem for consumers that we encounter almost regularly. This practice moves away from a marketing mission that meets customer needs and expands the asymmetries of power between company and consumer. Many manipulative ads are difficult to prove because of their controversial nature and content. The article talks about how companies use stimuli, advertising mechanisms to manipulate consumers.

Each advertisement of a product or service is based on verbal but also nonverbal communication, independently transmitted through television media or only written advertisements such as posters. Tempting sentences immediately distract us and intrigue us to continue reading or watching a commercial or marketing view. This is just one of the types of power to manipulate the human psychological system of thinking and manipulative wordplay to lead human reflection to further interest in the read and the outcome of the event. The field of marketing has always been an unexplored terrain of the economic field and from year to year, new techniques and development of marketing itself are revealed in step with the new technology. With the growth of marketing itself, the area of manipulation that today records a handful of items and under items is growing, and in a social order that values free markets and consumer sovereignty, it is extremely difficult to regulate manipulation as such. Those who sell products are often involved in at least contentious forms of manipulation. Manipulation analysis refers to new issues of freedom of speech raised by forced disclosure, especially in the context of marketing backgrounds and international business.

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Manipulation communication in marketing deals with tactics and strategies used by traders and affects human cognitive, social, and memory bias and weaknesses that ultimately affect consumer behavior in their favor. (Kamins, 2017) focuses on examples from academic and scientific research where consumers were found to be vulnerable to bias and therefore made fewer optimal purchasing decisions by proving that it is possible to manipulate the perceptions and preferences of individual consumers. The very problem that we find in manipulation communication is because of the very way in which individual words and the composition of sentences affect our mental and psychological system, looking at all aspects of the very concept of manipulation that is reflected in profitable business benefit.

The field of manipulation is also closely related to the psychological system of human thinking, so in this way, we can associate manipulation with the field of psychology, logistics, and biology and see how marketing tricks affect our psychological attitude of decision-making. And by the watchdog, we wanted to find out in what forms manipulation communication is included in certain marketing parts of communication with users.

2. MANIPULATION IN MARKETING ADVERTISING

Nowadays, marketing is increasingly using manipulation into its marketing, promotional, and business activities to facilitate the sale of its services or products. With a graphic collected from secondary data by Lin (2016), we see a percentage of the conscious and strategic use of manipulation in business.

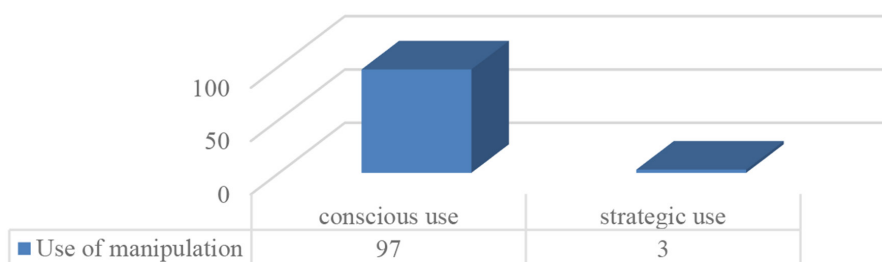


Figure 1. Conscious and unconscious use of marketing in advertising

Source: Self-Creation using Secondary Data (Lin, 2016)

From figure 1 representing the amount of manipulation used in the business and private forms of life, it is evident that manipulation is quite common. 97% of people consciously use it to get more or less aware of what they need or want, regardless of whether they are businesses or a private lifestyle (figure 1). There's nothing to worry about. We can say that manipulation is like lying and beautifying the current state in which we find ourselves. Realistically, *"Who's never lied?"*. On the other hand, for the remaining 3%, manipulation is a systematic strategy, a thoughtful act that gives the manipulator a sense of power, control, that convinces his failed narcissism. So, we can qualitatively say that marketing activities know exactly how to manipulate people's feelings and emotions. Consumers themselves are not aware of manipulation, it is naturally incorporated into our subconscious through emotions and psychological games and thus manipulates our decisions...

2.1. Manipulative advertising

Manipulation through advertising has become a problem that consumers face almost regularly. This practice distances the marketing mission in meeting the needs of customers and expands asymmetric powers between business and consumers. Many manipulative ads are hard to prove

because of their controversial nature and content. The effectiveness of marketing activities through the use of manipulation will depend on compliance with some of the company principles they advertise in areas where they and consumers can find each other's goals and interests.

Fast food ads can be manipulative in several ways, from seductive language that isn't necessarily true ("mouth-watering") to sales that create a sense of urgency (e.g., offering an item for only a limited time). But if this picture shows us nothing else, it is obvious that the sincerest promise made to us by the fast-food industry is the food itself. The images show what their products look like in the ad, relative to what you're receiving. What a great disappointment. In 2016, Duracell (Procter and Gamble) is being sued for misleading consumers into the life of their ultra batteries. The battery market has a longer duration and longer usage times, as they have not proven to be either stronger or more durable than the average Duracell battery. Customers are attracted to the package by the words "ultra" and "advanced" and believe that they are buying a higher quality product, when in fact they are simply seduced.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Methodology and sample of research

The methodology and cause of the research are a major part of analytical and empirical work. In other words, the approach is based on a positivist view, where reality exists independently and is driven by natural laws and mechanisms. Reality is objective and to get a complete picture of the world, the person observing reality must analyze all parts separately (Kuada, 2012). The analytical approach sees the world as stable, very predictable where the only way to create knowledge is to understand every fact. To acquire this knowledge, one should have a neutral position and only observe the process, since it is necessary to have a distance to the subjects so that the current knowledge and values of the observer will not affect the acquired knowledge. The statistical programs we used to process the data were Microsoft Excel.

Thus, a step-by-step research strategy is a plan of action that guides our thoughts and efforts, allowing us to systematically and timely research to achieve quality results and detailed reporting. The research methods will be based on the quantitative method and compare it with the secondary results of scientific research so far to note the difference and increase in manipulation in marketing. The methodology and cause of the research are part of the research work and the method itself was based on 20 interviews with scientific experts where we could get deep interviews to our desired questions related to the use of manipulation in marketing. The tools we used in our research work are based on a quantitative interview question. With quantitative research, relying on probability theory and statistics, the results obtained on the sample of subjects apply to the entire population. The research will aim to describe the situation and analyze the obtained responses of scientific experts to the conscious use of manipulation in marketing activities.

3.2. Research results

The research conducted for quantitative research was based on 20 participants, which will include scientific experts from 2 groups of in-depth interviews where experts from:

- Marketing department (5 public relations experts, 5 experts in the field of marketing market analysts)
- Scientific experts (5 experts in the psychological field and 5 experts in the field of ethics and morality).

Also, before the research started, we should have ranked our experts by gender and age and of course, a very important item is how long they have been doing business on their part. Through quantitative separate interviews with questions and questions as a research instrument, we have shaped an informed questionnaire and due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, all respondents were interviewed using the Zoom Meeting.

The interview and the questions asked were used as a method of verification, using it to collect the data necessary to verify the hypothesis set. To conduct a survey, it was necessary to know the issues under investigation, the relevant characteristics as well as the survey itself. The interview was conducted using Google Docs to manage documents and use Zoom Meeting. The results of the interview were presented and clarified using figures, tables that were made in an Excel program.

Respondents are in positions: brand manager, creative director, marketing manager, agency owner, marketing assistant, and marketing manager, psychologist, head of ethical morals, psychological adviser.

The dating questions are well known to everyone, and we also asked our scientific and marketing experts: “*Gender?*”

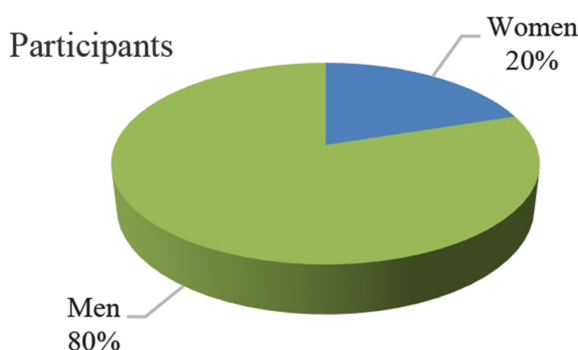


Figure 2. The ratio of exports in interviews

Source: author’s work (2021)

We can see that 16 marketing and scientific experts are male and only 4 women (Figure 2) were present in the entire study. Therefore, we have caught up with the question of how we believe that marketing and manipulation in marketing activities are more present among the male population.

All scientific and marketing experts are of course highly educated people and therefore all of them have highly educated titles and many years of experience in marketing and the direction of the psychology behind them.

General personal questions about the age of the subjects are presented in figure 3. Ultimately, we can see that a higher percentage of scientific professionals are aged 42 years to 48 years of age. This proves that experts have years of experience in the marketing departments or the psychological field itself.

When the in-depth interviews began, another main question was asked so that they could round up questions about the general information about our participants in the survey: “*The area in which you operate?*”

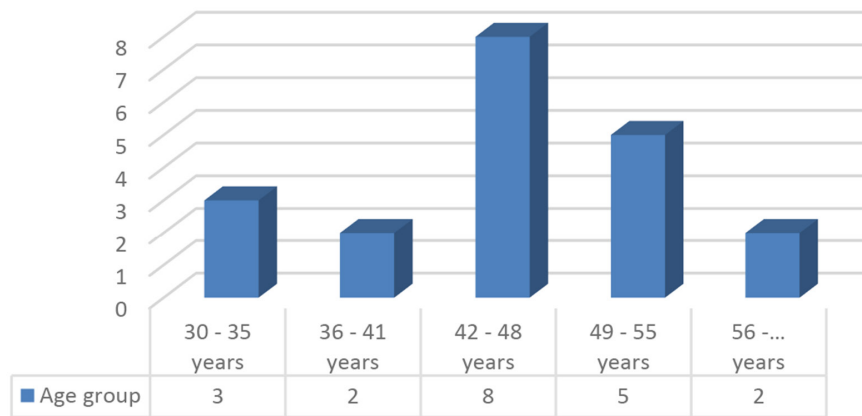


Figure 3. The age group of experts in in-depth interviews

Source: author's work (2021)

68 % of the companies surveyed run within the borders of the Republic of Germany, while 15 % of them operate exclusively in the Republic of Croatia, the other 17 % of professional respondents do their business within marketing in other countries.

In interviews, marketers have declared that they do not consider the manipulation of communication of this use in the business negative (figure 4), while most scientific experts remain neutral or consider manipulation positive, therefore that it has a very big effect on the psychological thinking of customers, consumers and people individually.

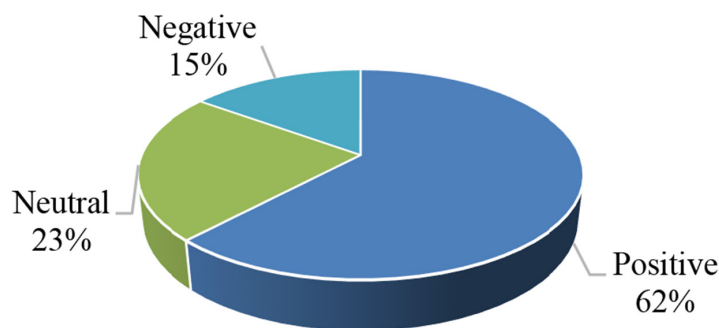


Figure 4. Expert attitude on manipulation

Source: author's work (2021)

One of the answers of a scientific expert in the field of psychology and ethical morality after the question was asked was: *"I don't think most people have an awareness of how thoughtfully marketing affects/manipulates the market/customers. But I also think that because of the internet and the greater volume of information, people are becoming more and more knowledgeable about the facts of manipulation over them."* Furthermore, the largest number of responses claim that people are not, or are little aware of, the manipulation of advertisements."

Manipulation in the communication itself between business and consumers is great, most manipulation in communication is not immediately seen. The question we later asked everyone separately was: "Is there manipulation in your business in the communication itself between the enterprise and customers through marketing activities?"

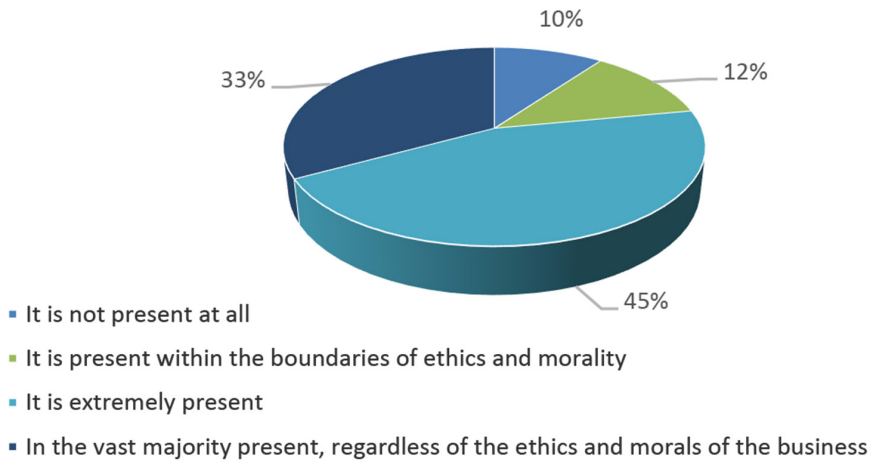


Figure 5. Expert position on manipulation in communication

Source: author’s work (2021)

That manipulation in communication is extremely present is considered by 45% of scientific and marketing experts, while 33% believe that manipulation in communication is present in the vast majority regardless of the attitudes of ethics and morality of business and the very use of manipulation in business (figure 5).

The marketing expert also explained to us the impact of manipulation in communication: *“Every company in any way finds some items to boost its business, so in this direction, it means manipulation itself. If through manipulation with marketing activities such as advertising, we can improve the sales of a particular product, i.e. that we “throw a bug in people’s ear” during the summer than during the same time the body must be dark but that it is a need and protection from the sun and that it is a kind of stereotype in society, of course, with all our strength and manipulation we will insert it into one advertisement to buy a sunscreen product in the middle of summer, I just don’t think that manipulation in business and marketing is a bad thing, we just “push” customers more towards our product!”*

Depending on what business function they perform, we asked the following question: *“Do you attach great importance in your business to digital marketing and the use of marketing manipulation towards the performance of the company’s business and the increase in profits thereof?”*

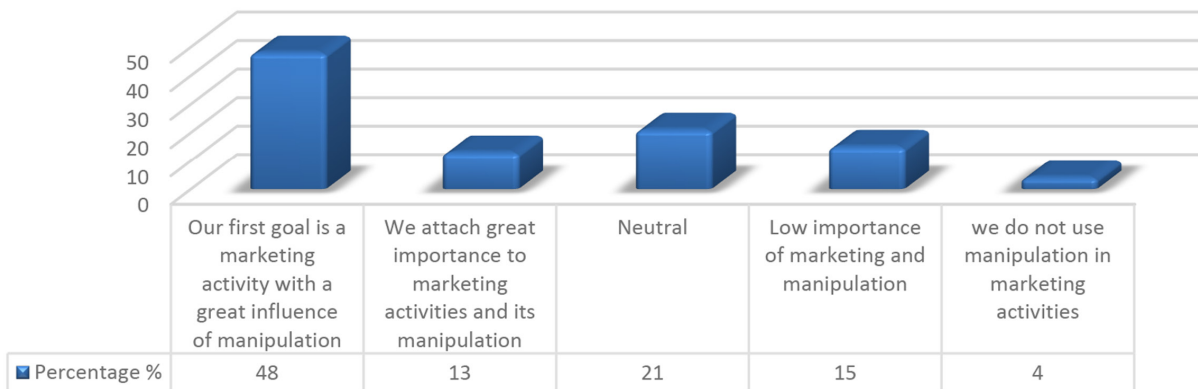


Figure 6. Attaching importance to digital marketing

Source: author’s work (2021)

As many as 48% of those surveyed responded that they attached great importance to digital marketing and the use of marketing manipulation throughout the business, 13% of experts told us that they attach great importance to marketing activities and their manipulation in the overall business, while only 4% of respondents who included ethics and morality experts explained how they try to reduce or not use manipulation in marketing activities in business (figure 6).

Speaking to a strategic expert in the field of public relations and a psychological scientist, we asked them where the most present form of manipulation was and we received a very interesting answer, Department expert with the public: *“Of course, a large part of the marketing activities and the promotion of products or services itself nowadays takes place through the Internet and television. In these cases, we can see that most of the marketing takes place right there. Of course, every product or service is structured according to certain customers and consumers, therefore, for example, children’s products and manipulation over their purchase will be put into television advertisements in the morning before parents go to work and save children for kindergarten. Regardless, whether it’s an advertisement for baby diapers or porridges or maybe even children’s clothes or toys. We all know that parents have a soft spot for children’s wishes and therefore, for example, showing commercials at 7:00 a.m. on television when we know that children are awake with toys. Therefore, we can say that we manipulate children first, so they automatically manipulate their parents.”*

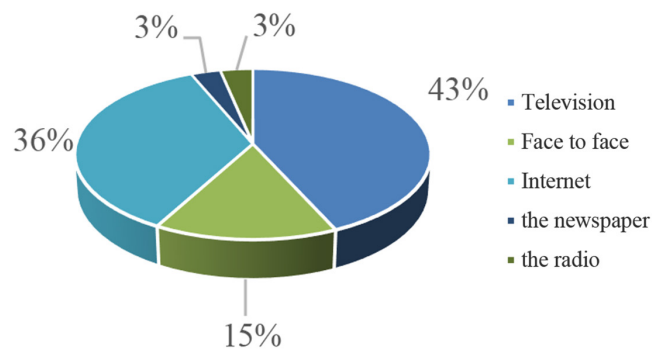


Figure 7. Expert position on the presence of media communication manipulation

Source: author’s work (2021)

All experts believe that manipulation is present in the media. Forty-three percent of respondents believe that manipulation is most present on television, 35% think that manipulation is most present on the Internet, while 15% think that manipulation is most obvious in face-to-face form. live (figure 7).

Although social networks are mostly about communicating with consumers, the results show that face-to-face communication has positioned itself just behind social networks. It is still best to talk directly (face to face) with a potential buyer because this is how the immediate process takes place. Also, marketing experts can get information by communicating face to face that a potential customer might keep from them when chatting online. This means the following: in face-to-face communication, more or less, we are forced to include the full range of linguistic and paralinguistic activities (even what we do not want to communicate in communication often “leaks” due to lapses or facial expressions). That is why one analyst concluded that for the Internet, due to all these reduced elements, a typical “target is communication minimalism”.

The psychological expert also explained to us in an in-depth interview how: *“Social networks dominate the most in the representation of platforms in digital marketing. It should be noted that the advantage of social networks is that with them companies can get feedback on their*

services and products in a very short time. In addition, advertising also includes specific target groups – for example, young people, employees, sports enthusiasts, pensioners and the like.”

Speaking to marketing and scientific experts, one of the psychological experts told us that: *“There is always some purpose and goal of communicating. In interpersonal communication, the goal is always the other person, that is, the recipient of the message. This means that any communication between two people is an interpersonal type of communication.*

Our purpose is to influence the behavior of whoever is the recipient of the message, but it is a multidimensional process of exchanging, sending, receiving, and interpreting information. We can also call it an even better form of manipulation in business. In this type of information exchange, symbols are sent that have a certain meaning, and they can be verbal and nonverbal. In other words, interpersonal communication means verbal or nonverbal behavior that we do with another person.”

Therefore, we started to raise further questions during an in-depth interview with experts from their point of view and business. With the claim that interpersonal communication uses more cunning means, a total of 41% of respondents agree, while 59% of experts disagree with this statement and consider it a normal cognitive phenomenon in the business of the company.

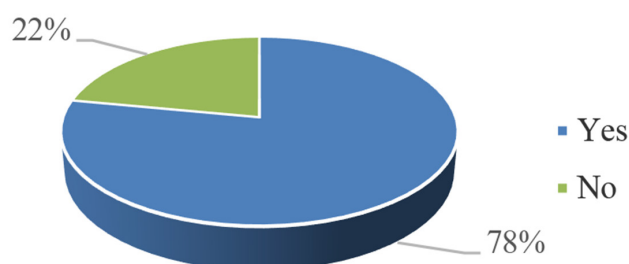


Figure 8. Manipulations in interpersonal communication are not daily

Source: author's work (2021)

That manipulation in interpersonal communication is a daily occurrence is the opinion of 78% of experts who disagree with the above statement, and 22% of experts agree that manipulations in interpersonal communication are not a daily occurrence (figure 8).

The age of the audience does not affect the effectiveness of media or interpersonal manipulation. A total of 32.2% of experts agree that the age of the audience does not affect the effectiveness of media or interpersonal manipulation, and 67.8% of scientific and marketing experts disagree with this statement, i.e. they think that age affects the effectiveness of media or interpersonal manipulation.

That manipulators choose the goals of manipulating the mind narrowly 55.9% of respondents, while 44.1% disagree that manipulators choose their goals.

The view of most respondents is that modern media manipulate their audience, that is, the largest number of respondents, a total of 98.38 cannot agree with the statement that modern and popular media in most cases do not manipulate their audience. Only 1 respondent fully agrees with this statement. Modern and popular media in most cases do not manipulate their audience.

3.3. Proposals to combat marketing manipulation

Ethics is an important part of marketing and marketing laws, but since perspectives vary depending on the society, situation, and culture, it is necessary to understand what ethics are and how it is used in society. This knowledge should be used in the debate of what ethical considerations are behind the development of marketing policies when the objective is consumer welfare and competitiveness.

Proposals to just curb manipulation in marketing are turning to advertisers who should realize that more consumers, especially those aware, recognize that all things are connected. Therefore, they must be in the process of raising awareness of the impact of advertising and seeking mutual benefits from it. Advertisers should be aware that advertising must be authentic. This is all that communication with consumers should be one hundred percent honest and transparent. More than ever, an increasing proportion of consumers value transparency, accountability, and authenticity.

Marketers and the companies themselves and their owners should align their messages with consumer values in all aspects and all advertising components. Companies that align their values with their actions will gain continued loyalty among consumers. If companies follow these principles, they could easily translate them into fair, non-manipulative advertising practices and thus become more reliable.

4. CONCLUSION

Given the growing beliefs in marketing tricks among consumers (Peck et al, 2013, 752), companies need to use them very carefully. With the rise of neuromarketing, some consumers are concerned that marketers know how to control and influence their choice. Since neuroscientific explanations of psychological phenomena undermine faith in free will (Greene et al, 2004), the development of neuromarketing can create an even greater fear of marketing manipulation (Hanson & Kysar, 2009, 412) In reality, most of these fears are exaggerated because they state that neuromarketing is more powerful than it practically is (Donnelly, 2001; Perdue & Summers, 1986).

“Marketing outcomes, trade, and civil unrest are just things that can be controlled.” (Hallinan & Brubaker, 2021, 1084). These feelings, however, do not necessarily lead to a particular withdrawal of behavior - indeed, people’s concerns about privacy and their behavior are often contradicted (Martin & Jeffreys, 2018; Sunstein, 2016; Kamins, 2017; Norberg, 2006), One of the general tips for weakening beliefs about manipulation based on our framework is to increase consumers’ propensity to cope with persuasion regarding the prominence of marketing intentions to manipulate and convince them. This can be achieved by creating a perception where consumers think about themselves and denying the persuasion of companies to choose a product or service, and therefore psychologically will make them think more specifically about persuasion - this will make them aware of their persuasion strategies. Our research also points to marketing segmentation strategies separately for each demographic group. Marketers should be particularly cautious about any tactics that consumer segments might consider manipulative. This difference in the need to make sense could explain why some consumers discover the secretive intent of marketers and politicians where there is none.

In our research and deep interviews with marketing and scientific experts, we have seen how marketing actions themselves use manipulation to facilitate the sale of products or services of

the company in which they are employed. Therefore, marketers and scientists have confirmed to us our thesis that manipulation is:

Predicted by gender and age of consumers where women and younger consumers have greater motivations to understand their environment, leading them to greater beliefs about manipulation as a whole,

Largely present in marketing campaigns to improve the financial condition of the company's business and the success of advertisements and marketing ads,

Hidden manipulations used, by marketers, largely present and consciously used for positive business purposes,

The impact of manipulation in ads itself is constant and scientific experts use them in the everyday business world to manipulate old and potentially new consumers.

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