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The Impact of Online Engagement Toward Online Consumer Activism Against Deceptive Advertising in Cebu City: The Case of Cosmetic Brands

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of various deceptive advertising practices employed by the cosmetic industry toward the participation of select cosmetic consumers in Online Consumer Activism (OCA) in Cebu City, Philippines. Existing literature shows a gap with a lack of current studies that delve into understanding how likely cosmetic consumers are to engage in various online consumer activism measures against such deceptive practices within the cosmetics industry. Hence, to address this gap, a quantitative research approach was employed. A two-part online survey questionnaire utilizing a 7-point Likert Scale was distributed through Facebook groups dedicated to Cebu City cosmetic consumers (n=110). Using descriptive statistics, the study revealed that most cosmetic consumers displayed a "neutral" stance across various domains associated with OCA. However, it is revealed that cosmetic consumers mostly react and comment on social media against deceptive advertising by cosmetic brands, among other OCA measures. Additionally, by employing Principal Component Analysis (PCA), it was highlighted that Mislabeling, among other domains, triggered the most OCA. Further, with Path Analysis, the significance of usage of internet platforms as a key factor that facilitates OCA has been solidified. These findings provide valuable recommendations and conclusions relevant to upholding ethical advertising practices within the cosmetics industry and upholding consumer rights in alignment with United Nations' SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

Keywords: Deceptive Advertising, Cosmetic Brands, Online Consumer Activism, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), Path Analysis.

1.0 Introduction

The ever-evolving field of marketing has led companies to introduce new approaches in advertising, along with the integration of deceptive practices to gain more profit at the expense of harming consumers. In a study by Iqbal and Siddiqui (2019), deceptive advertising is an advertising practice employed by companies that utilize misleading, deceptive, or false information to attract consumers to a company's products or services. This practice is highly evident in cosmetic brands as companies use deception to make consumers more inclined to purchase their products (Islam, 2021). Besides being illegal under existing laws, false and deceptive advertising also affects the advertising landscape and harms consumers (Zeng et al., 2020). To impede a company's use of unethical practices, some consumers have started expressing dissatisfaction by pursuing consumer activism, including publicly filing a lawsuit or posting a detailed negative online review to hold the business accountable (Arbel & Shapira, 2020). In recent years, there has been massive pressure on skincare and cosmetic companies to create unique offerings to gain more consumers, leading such businesses to resort to deceptive advertising (Baloch, 2019). Since the Philippines is the second-largest cosmetic market in Southeast Asia, with its total sales being approximately 22% in 2020 (Morel et al., 2023), further research, primarily focusing on this industry, is necessary. As the market for cosmetic products continues to grow, consumer awareness and measures against deceptive advertising in such a market need

emphasis. In 2020, a study by Ukaegbu revealed that 73% of the respondent's "care" about being exposed to deceptive advertising by Delta Soap, a Nigerian soap company. Although the remaining 27% of the respondents stated that they "do not care," the study has noted that these consumers have stopped purchasing the soap, thus proving that consumers, regardless of their level of concern regarding the issue, are more likely to react negatively against the company. Accordingly, a study by Ang et al. (2022) has discovered that Senior High School students from De La Salle University Integrated School (Manila) engage in boycott practices through conscious buying, expressing, and raising awareness on social media, primarily Twitter (now X), and physical protests as means to punish companies for resorting to unethical practices. Although these studies have provided insights on various consumer reactions to deceptive advertising and explored consumer activism involving boycott activities, research specifically focusing on an individual's engagement in online consumer activism remains scarce, explicitly considering the various internet platforms to hold businesses accountable for deceptive advertising.

In the context of cosmetic brands in Cebu City, there is limited existing knowledge concerning a specific industry, population, and the impact of online engagement toward Online Consumer Activism against deceptive advertising, resulting in a research gap. The cosmetic industry, in particular, rarely concentrates on studies concerning deceptive advertising despite the different forms of deception within that line of business. Furthermore, the

chosen respondents also pose a population gap, where there is a lack of existing studies specifically targeting cosmetic consumers from Cebu City. Moreover, there is also a need for studies that provide insights into the mediating effect of using internet platforms usage toward online consumer activism in expressing concerns against cosmetic brands that employ deceptive advertising. Therefore, the researchers intend to offer a better understanding with a more narrowed study, primarily focused on the perceived measures of Cebu City cosmetic consumers against the different forms of deceptive advertising in the cosmetics industry, with a mediating effect of internet platforms usage. Hence, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To determine how likely cosmetic consumers can engage in various online measures against deceptive advertising of cosmetic brands and identify which among the perceived measures against different forms of deceptive advertising is the most susceptible to online consumer activism.
2. To ascertain which among the various forms of deceptive advertising employed by cosmetic brands induces the most online consumer activism.
3. To investigate the mediating role of internet platform usage in enhancing online consumer activism against deceptive advertising within the cosmetic industry.
4. To provide recommendations in promoting ethical advertising in cosmetic brands that empower consumers.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

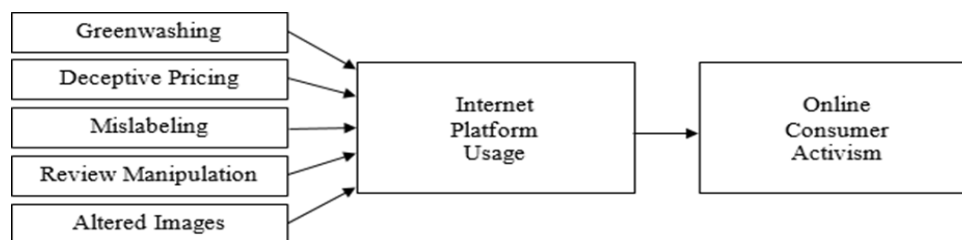


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework.

This conceptual framework aims to determine whether the aforementioned forms of deceptive advertising employed by cosmetic brands have the potential to induce online consumer activism through engagements on Internet platforms. Further, the researchers will assess the mediating effect of internet platforms usage in enhancing online consumer activism against deceptive advertising. Thus, this framework can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of consumer behavior, specifically on online activism that combats deceptive advertising practices in cosmetic brands. Deceptive advertising, upon discovery, usually results in customer dissatisfaction (Gshayyish, 2023) and has been noted as a contributor to consumers' anti-consumption tendencies, which may manifest in different forms, including consumer complaints, boycotts, and negative word-of-mouth (Arslan et al., 2018). Hence, with deceptive advertising being a stimulus to customer dissatisfaction, the Integrated Taxonomy of Consumer Complaint Behavior model by Istanbuluoglu et al. (2017) serves as a guiding framework for understanding how consumers may respond to deceptive advertising within the context of online consumer activism. This model categorized the various responses from dissatisfied consumers into two principal categories: "Action" and "No-Action." The No-Action

category included "Inertia," where dissatisfied consumers refrain from voicing their concerns. On the other hand, under the Action category, various forms of action have been classified, which included (1) "Exit," where consumers terminate their relationship with a company; (2) "Negative Word-of-mouth," where consumers may either publicly or privately engage in negative word-of-mouth, (3) "Exit with Negative Word-of-Mouth," which combined the first two actions, (4) "Public Complaining to the Company," which pertained to consumers directly voicing out their complaints to the company involved, (5) "Public Complaining via Third-parties," where consumers complain to third-party organizations and, (6) "Exit with Public Complaining," which referred to consumers voicing out their complaints publicly alongside the intention of ending their relations with the company. Furthermore, recent technological developments that led to the establishment of new communication channels like social media were considered in this model. In utilizing this theoretical framework, the researchers can, therefore, comprehend the set of actions that cosmetic consumers from Cebu City may take when exposed to various forms of deceptive advertising, primarily in the form of Online Consumer Activism.

3.0 Literature Review

In the cosmetic industry, Pouluse (2020) stated that deceptive advertising in goods such as skin care products has involved false claims on a product's price, benefits, and characteristics to stimulate their consumer's interest in their products. Other forms of deceptive advertising can also be identified through terms manipulation, which refers to the incorrect use of terms that incorporate "organic" or "environmentally friendly" in product labels; photo retouching, which pertains to the practice of editing images found in advertisements to provide consumers with false expectations of the product's benefits; and artificial price increase through hidden fees and surcharges in various types of products (Sharma & Sharma, 2021). Additionally, online fake reviews have also been a persistent ongoing issue within the current digitalized age (Plotkina et al., 2020). The related studies collectively underscore the presence of these forms of deceptive advertising, namely Greenwashing, Deceptive Pricing, Mislabeling, Review Manipulation, and Altered Images, which are the variables of this study. Generally, **greenwashing** is a form of deceptive advertising that pertains to a company's practice of misrepresenting green marketing claims in advertising (Kreitzen, 2022). Within the cosmetic industry, Pande & Rawat (2023) have stated that greenwashing is often observed with the brands positioning themselves as "all-natural" or "ecological," which is contrary to their actual products. According to Kahraman & Kazançoğlu (2019), the personal care sector, which includes cosmetic products, marked an average of 62% rate of greenwashing, thereby acknowledging its existence in the current market for cosmetics. Furthermore, a study by Topal et al. (2019) highlighted that social media creates an ideal communication environment where consumers are able to take part in discussions regarding products that are engaged in greenwashing. Additionally, a study by Giannaki (2021) has determined that greenwashing influences the consumer's intention to participate in eWOM (electronic Word-of-Mouth), particularly through negative responses on social media. Aside from deceptive advertising through false eco-friendly claims, **deceptive pricing** is also a scheme companies use to deceive unsuspecting consumers. According to Rhodes (2023), some businesses mislead customers about the actual cost of products or services by initially advertising their products at lower prices but then adding hidden fees later on. These additional costs—like handling, shipping, and processing fees—are tacked on later to inflate the final price (Bonsu, 2020). This kind of practice is evident in health and beauty products, as stated in a study titled "Estimating the Prevalence and Impact of Online Drip Pricing" by Alma Economics in 2023. However, despite warnings from the Federal Trade Commission, Friedman (2019) noted that deceptive pricing still persists. The study emphasized that consumers receive extra charges without any additional benefits, which then leads to dissatisfaction and prompts complaints. Moreover, the practice of **mislabeling** cosmetic products has also become rampant. In a 2022 study by Lim et al. titled "Cosmetic preservative labeling in Philippine products in accordance with Philippine regulations," there are significant inaccuracies observed on labels between the actual preservative compositions and the respective labeling on the products in the Philippines. It also pointed out that several beauty and personal care products are not

labeled in accordance with the regulations, stressing potential risks to consumers. This is supported by a separate study conducted by Temova Rakuša et al. (2020) as its findings revealed discrepancies between the determined and claimed retinoid amounts, as well as the incorrectly labeled retinoids in the ingredients list of commercial cosmetic goods. Accordingly, in a study by Bauer et al. in 2023, unclear and incorrect information about the product's ingredients, manufacturing processes, and origins found in the packaging are seen as the most prominent concern for consumers to complain. Concurrently, **review manipulation** has emerged as a persistent issue in this digitalized age, among other forms of deceptive advertising. It refers to false or inaccurate opinions in reviews that intend to misguide consumers and lead them into making wrong purchasing decisions (Alsubari et al., 2022). This is particularly true for the cosmetic industry because cosmetics are highly experiential due to the variety of cosmetic brands available, and the effects of the same product can differ from one person to another depending on their skin type, which is why cosmetic customers are very attentive to the opinions of experienced customers (Haddara et al., 2020). Given the essence of online reviews for the purchasing decisions of potential consumers, some businesses resort to fake reviews to improve their brand image or stain that of their competitors (Otero, 2021). Consequently, fake reviews have the potential to harm e-commerce growth by generating a cycle of dissatisfied consumers and competition defamation (Barish, 2018). Lastly, **altered images** refer to the digital retouching of photos in advertisements, which promoted unrealistic beauty standards that had a detrimental impact on consumers aside from posing a threat to public health (McBride et al., 2019). This practice can be seen mostly in beauty, fashion, and other consumer industries. The study also mentioned advertising campaigns by cosmetic companies like Olay Beauty, L'Oréal, and Dior that have been banned after digitally altering the images of their models in an attempt to appear more compelling to their consumers. According to Taylor et al. (2018), an advertising's idealized portrayal of female models has a detrimental effect on body satisfaction because it might make women feel under pressure to live up to the "perfect" standards set forth. This has had unfavorable effects, leading to the implementation of restrictions on the practice in various countries. Essentially, the use of various technical software programs to alter and modify photos has given rise to significant ethical concerns in marketing (Petrescu et al., 2019). Consequently, various internet platforms also play a role in furthering various activism initiatives where individuals are able to express their sentiments to a bigger online audience (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). In 2018, Minocher explored the role of online media in activism, specifically the use of change.org, an online petition site. The same study concluded that 'Change.org' thrives through the collective participation of like-minded individuals to aggregate a cause. Additionally, Muraro et al. (2023) in their study have concluded that through different micro-level action frames (MAFs), consumer activists are able to advance public awareness with the use of internet platforms. Likewise, Tréré and Yu (2021), stated in their paper that consumer activists in China have used hybrid media which encompass various media systems like radio, newspapers, websites, and

internet platforms to advocate for their causes. Customer dissatisfaction, which stems from a negative experience with a product or service, often merits a corresponding reaction. When dissatisfaction involves deception in advertising, consumers are more likely to voice out their concerns through different means, as stipulated in the theoretical model. Accordingly, consumers are assumed to engage in consumer activism to call out businesses, which may now be done in the digital realm, considering the internet platforms available. They express grievances, demand reforms from the companies, or inform the public of their experience. The independent variables of this study represent various forms of deceptive advertising within the cosmetic industry and identify if it drives cosmetic consumers to participate in Online Consumer Activism. Essentially, the theoretical model will serve as a guide that will help in the acquisition of needed information and relevant findings to evaluate the impact of deceptive advertising on consumer activism and ultimately provide valuable recommendations by the end of this study. 211

4.0 Research Design and Methodology

In this study, a correlational quantitative research approach was utilized. Researchers employed a convenience sampling method to administer questionnaires containing a Seven- Point Likert scale for gathering information from participants. The sample size was determined through G*Power statistical software. Throughout the data collection phase, strict ethical standards were upheld to safeguard the safety and privacy of all participants. Prior to the data-gathering procedure, the survey questionnaire was validated by three academe professionals and one industry expert. Consequently, the researchers conducted a pilot test with a sample size of 30. The instrument used to measure the variables exhibited high internal consistency and reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's Alpha Test result of 0.970.

To acquire the necessary data, 110 researcher-made descriptive survey questionnaires were administered online, which aligns with the context of the research as it allows the researchers to directly engage with individuals who are active on internet platforms, where discussions and actions related to deceptive advertising are likely to take place. For

the online survey, the researchers joined various Facebook groups dedicated to cosmetic consumers in Cebu City and sought permission from the group administrators to carry out an online survey, utilizing Google Forms for members who fit the inclusion criteria to respond. The survey participants were cosmetic consumers whose ages range between 18 to 34 years old as this age group, according to Li (2020), are the majority of Facebook users interested in cosmetics in the Philippines. Furthermore, the respondents were residents of Cebu City with access to internet platforms. Regardless of gender, or ethnicity, individuals who fit these criteria are suitable to participate as respondents of this study.

Upon completion of data collection, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine how likely cosmetic consumers are able to engage in various online measures against deceptive advertising of cosmetic brands. The same statistical tool was used to identify which among the perceived measures against different forms of deceptive advertising is the most susceptible to online consumer activism. Moreover, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was utilized to determine which among the forms of deceptive advertising within the cosmetic industry drives the most online consumer activism for cosmetic consumers in Cebu City. Further, Path Analysis was utilized to determine the mediating role of internet platform usage in enhancing online consumer activism against deceptive advertising. Ultimately, this research aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations to cosmetics consumers, relevant regulatory bodies, consumer advocacy organizations, and cosmetic brands to address deceptive advertising practices and promote transparency that safeguards consumer rights.

5.0 Results and Discussions

In this section, the results of the study are presented and discussed with reference to the aim of the study. A thorough evaluation and interpretation of the 110 responses from cosmetic consumers in Cebu City form the basis of this analysis.

Levels of Perceived Measures of the Consumers Against Deceptive Advertising

Table 1: Level of Perceived Measures against Greenwashing of the Consumer Respondents (n=110).

A. Greenwashing	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
1. I react or comment on social media posts concerning greenwashing (a brand lying about being cruelty-free, all-natural, and/or vegan) in cosmetic brands.	4.09	1.77	Neutral
2. I sign online petitions against greenwashing by certain cosmetic brands.	3.57	1.84	More or Less Unlikely
3. I participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of greenwashing in cosmetics.	3.12	1.64	More or Less Unlikely
4. I write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand's greenwashing to raise awareness.	3.91	1.75	Neutral
5. I engage in online movements to boycott cosmetic brands that use greenwashing practices.	3.54	1.77	More or Less Unlikely
6. I coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over greenwashing practices.	3.06	1.56	More or Less Unlikely
Factor Average	3.55	1.72	Neutral

Legend: 1.00-1.85= Extremely Unlikely, 1.86-2.71= Unlikely, 2.72-3.57= More or Less Unlikely, 3.58-4.43= Neutral, 4.44-5.29= More or Less Likely, 5.30-6.15= Likely, 6.16-7.00= Extremely Likely

Table 1 shows the extent to which cosmetic consumers perceived their level of engagement with the different measures against Greenwashing. It can be indicated from

the table that the respondents generally rated a "neutral" level of effort with 3.55 (SD=1.72). This means that there was no clear indication of whether they would engage in

online practices to combat Greenwashing.

From the same table, it is also revealed that the two measures, namely “coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over greenwashing practices” and “participate in online

discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of greenwashing in cosmetics” were the two least rated items with 3.06 (SD=1.56) and 3.12 (SD=1.64) respectively or more or less unlikely to be engaged with.

Table 2: Level of Perceived Measures of the Consumer Respondents against Deceptive Pricing (n=110).

B. Deceptive Pricing	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
1. I react or comment on social media posts concerning deceptive pricing in cosmetic brands.	4.32	1.68	Neutral
2. I sign online petitions to go against a cosmetic brand’s deceptive pricing.	3.81	1.72	Neutral
3. I participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose deceptive pricing in cosmetics.	3.22	1.57	More or Less Unlikely
4. I write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand’s deceptive pricing to raise awareness.	4.12	1.92	Neutral
5. I engage in online movements to boycott cosmetic brands that use deceptive pricing practices.	3.56	1.76	More or Less Unlikely
6. I coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over deceptive pricing.	3.12	1.60	More or Less Unlikely
Factor Average	3.69	1.71	Neutral

Table 2 depicts the extent to which the respondents perceived their level of engagement with the different measures against Deceptive Pricing. It can be validated from the table that the respondents generally rated this domain with 3.69 (SD=1.71) or a “neutral” level of effort. This means that there was no clear indication of whether the respondents would engage in online practices to combat Deceptive Pricing or not at all.

From the same table, it can also be evidenced that the respondents were more or less unlikely to “coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over deceptive pricing” and “participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose deceptive pricing in cosmetics” as these were the two least rated items with 3.12 (SD=1.60) and 3.22 (SD=1.57) respectively.

Table 3: Level of Perceived Measures of the Consumer Respondents against Mislabeling (n=110).

C. Mislabeling	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
1. I react or comment on social media posts concerning mislabeled cosmetic products.	4.74	1.93	More or Less Likely
2. I sign online petitions to go against a cosmetic brand’s practice of mislabeling.	3.82	1.95	Neutral
3. I participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose mislabeling in cosmetics.	3.35	1.82	More or Less Unlikely
4. I write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand’s mislabeling practice to raise awareness.	4.42	2.00	Neutral
5. I engage in online movements to boycott cosmetic brands that have mislabeled products.	3.50	1.85	More or Less Unlikely
6. I coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over mislabeling practices.	3.22	1.70	More or Less Unlikely
Factor Average	3.84	1.87	Neutral

Table 3 illustrates the extent to which the respondents perceived their level of engagement when asked how likely they can combat Mislabeling. It is verifiable from the table that the respondents generally rated this domain with 3.84 (SD=1.87) or a “neutral” level of efforts to combat mislabeling in cosmetic advertisements. This likewise means that it was not clear at the onset of the survey whether the respondents would engage in online practices to combat Mislabeling or not at all.

From the same table, it can also be reiterated that the respondents were more or less unlikely to “coordinate with

cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over mislabeling practices” and “participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose mislabeling in cosmetics” as these were the two least rated items with 3.12 (SD=1.60) and 3.22 (SD=1.57) respectively. On the other hand, the strategy of “react or comment on social media posts concerning mislabeled cosmetic products” was rated the highest with 4.74 or more likely to be engaged with.

Table 4: Level of Perceived Measures of the Consumer Respondents against Review Manipulation (n=110).

D. Review Manipulation	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
1. I react or comment on social media posts about cosmetic brands’ use of fake online reviews.	4.81	1.84	More or Less Likely
2. I sign online petitions to go against a cosmetic brand’s practice of manipulating its brand’s reviews.	3.71	1.92	Neutral

3. I participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of review manipulation in cosmetics.	3.36	1.74	More or Less Unlikely
4. I write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand's use of fake online reviews to raise awareness.	4.48	1.84	More or Less Likely
5. I engage in online movements to boycott cosmetic brands that use review manipulation practices.	3.69	1.86	Neutral
6. I coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over review manipulation.	3.31	1.77	More or Less Unlikely
Factor Average	3.89	1.83	Neutral

Table 4 illustrates the extent to which the respondents perceived their level of engagement when asked how likely they can engage against Review Manipulation. It is verifiable from the table that the respondents generally rated this domain with 3.89 (SD=1.83) or a "neutral" level of efforts to go against Review Manipulation in cosmetic advertisements.

This likewise translates that it was not clear at the onset of the survey whether the respondents would engage in the practices online to combat Review Manipulation or not at all.

From the same table, it can also be reiterated that the respondents were more or less unlikely to "coordinate with

cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over review manipulation" and "participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of review manipulation in cosmetics" as these were the two least rated items with 3.31 (SD=1.77) and 3.36 (SD=1.74) respectively. On the other hand, the strategy of "react or comment on social media posts about cosmetic brands' use of fake online reviews" was rated the highest with 4.81 or more likely to be engaged with. Moreover, "write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand's use of fake online reviews to raise awareness" was also perceived to be more or less likely to be practiced by the respondents at a rate of 4.48.

Table 5: Level of Perceived Measures of the Consumer Respondents against Altered Images (n=110).

E. Altered Images	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
1. I react or comment on social media posts concerning cosmetic brands' digitally altered photos that are deceptive in nature.	4.68	1.89	More or Less Likely
2. I sign online petitions to go against a cosmetic brand's practice of digitally altering photos for its advertisements.	3.66	1.89	Neutral
3. I participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of altered images in cosmetics.	3.38	1.69	More or Less Unlikely
4. I write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand's altered images to raise awareness.	4.58	1.90	More or Less Likely
5. I engage in online movements to boycott cosmetic brands that use altered images.	3.66	1.82	Neutral
6. I coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over altered images.	3.30	1.76	More or Less Unlikely
Factor Average	3.88	1.82	Neutral

Table 5 illustrates the extent to which the respondents perceived their level of engagement when asked how likely they can engage against Altered Images. It is verifiable from the table that the respondents overall rated this domain with 3.88 (SD=1.82) or a "neutral" level of Online Consumer Activism (OCA) against altered imaging in cosmetic advertisements. This likewise translates that it was not clear when the survey was conducted whether the respondents would engage in online practices to go against Altered Images or not at all.

From the same table, it can also be reiterated that the respondents were more or less unlikely to "coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses

accountable over altered images" and "participate in online discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of altered images in cosmetics" as these were the two least rated items with 3.30 (SD=1.76) and 3.38 (SD=1.69) respectively. On the other hand, the strategy of "react or comment on social media posts about cosmetic brands' use of fake online reviews" was rated the highest with 4.68 or more likely to be engaged with. Moreover, "write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand's use of fake online reviews to raise awareness" was also perceived to be more or less likely to be practiced by the respondents at a rate of 4.58.

Table 6: Summary of the Levels of Perceived Measures of the Consumers Against Deceptive Advertising.

Deceptive Advertising	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
A. Greenwashing	3.55	1.72	Neutral
B. Deceptive Pricing	3.69	1.71	Neutral
C. Mislabeling	3.84	1.87	Neutral
D. Review Manipulation	3.89	1.83	Neutral
E. Altered Images	3.88	1.82	Neutral

Collectively, the results across all domains of deceptive advertising indicate a "neutral" level of Online Consumer Activism (OCA). This neutrality further stems from

respondents' lack of awareness and even current practices of various online activism that may be done against deceptive advertising. According to a study by Muccheke et

al. in 2020, consumers had low awareness of their right to truthful advertising information and were unaware of existing organizations that cater to consumer complaints regarding products that did not meet advertised standards. Further, a study by Bae et al. in 2021 revealed that consumers with an interdependent self-construal, those who are highly concerned with the external relationships they have with peers and other social groups, are more tolerant of deceptive advertising employed by larger companies. Thus, these findings may contribute to explaining the neutral participation in OCA in response to deceptive cosmetic advertisements observed among cosmetic consumers in Cebu City. However, it is also significant to consider that other factors beyond self-construal may influence the cosmetic consumers' participation in OCA which may be considered by future researchers and examined more in detail.

The measure "coordinate with cosmetic regulatory organizations online to hold businesses accountable over deceptive advertising practices" received the lowest rating across all five domains. This finding aligns with a study published by Kamlot in 2018 entitled "Reaction to Deceptive Advertising in Brazil," which revealed that a greater number of consumers chose to take no action when confronted with deceptive advertising compared to those who choose to take action, such as lodging complaints with relevant agencies. Another measure that received a low rating is the "participation in online discussions and forums to actively oppose the use of deceptive advertising in cosmetics". Gurgun et al. (2023) highlighted in their study that despite individuals acknowledging the importance of correcting misinformation, many choose to remain silent due to the fear of generating a negative impression. For instance, on Facebook, where everyone's social contacts could see the entire conversation, heated interactions and

public discussions were viewed as norm violations. A 2022 study entitled "Sentiment analysis of cosmetic industry YouTube video campaigns" by Amanatido stated that online communities have been created on social media networks to provide an avenue for users to stay informed about news and trends related to beauty, makeup, and skincare. This means that individuals are exposed to a wide range of information made available online. Accordingly, the same study pointed out that people usually express their opinions on the content they consume digitally, such as by leaving comments on YouTube, as it is the focus of the study. This supports the idea that consumers are easily capable of employing measures related to reacting, commenting, and posting reviews online, hence the two statements "react or comment on social media posts about cosmetic brands' use of deceptive advertising" and "write negative reviews about a cosmetic brand's use of deceptive advertising to raise awareness" have the highest weighted mean among all the perceived level of measures to combat deceptive advertising.

Test of Non-Collinearity of the Factors in the Study

To develop a desired measure for Online Consumer Activism Index (e-ConAct) from the 5 strategic efforts against: Greenwashing, Deceptive Pricing, Mislabeling, Review Manipulation and Altered Images, the test of (non)collinearity was performed first. This is to determine if the 5 factors indeed represent a singular unique measure and not a redundancy with the other factors. Visually, it can be viewed from Figure 1 that there were no overlapping or intersection lines. Hence, each domain of performance represents a unique measure non-redundant from each other and all 5 domains can be utilized in the model to define the desired index.

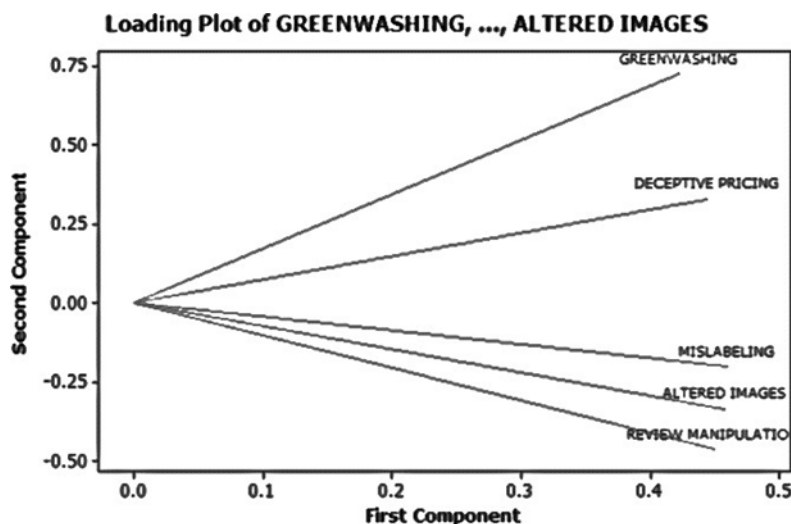


Fig. 1: The Non-Collinearity Diagram.

Principal Component Analysis: Greenwashing, Images, and Review Manipulation, Deceptive Pricing, Mislabeling, Altered

Table 7: Eigenanalysis of the Correlation Matrix.

Eigenvalue	4.3722	0.3228	0.1712	0.0732	0.0605
Proportion	0.874	0.065	0.065	0.015	0.012
Cumulative	0.874	0.939	0.939	0.988	1.000

Using the 5 domains, the model was able to generate an 87.4% cumulative coefficient of

variation. This is indicative that the total variations of e-ConAct can be explained by the 5 factors at a rate of 87.4%. The rest of the explanatory factors can be attributed

to other variables already external to the scope of this study.

Table 8: The Principal Components.

Variable	PC1	PC2	PC3
Greenwashing	0.423	0.725	-0.531
Deceptive Pricing	0.444	0.330	0.724
Mislabeling	0.460	-0.201	0.269
Review Manipulation	0.450	-0.462	-0.287
Altered Images	0.458	-0.334	-0.200

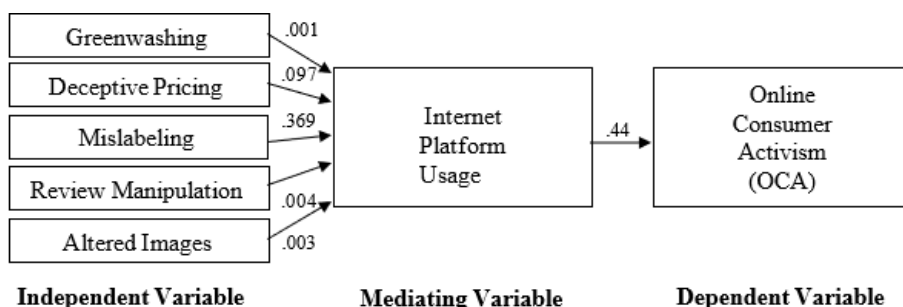
Using the principal components (PC1 having the highest cumulative coefficient of variation at 87.4%), it can be viewed in Table 7 that efforts against mislabeling drive the online consumer activism the most at 0.46 units. This positive weight means that as the consumers perceive that they were able to engage in efforts against mislabeling, the more they also improve their level of online consumer activism. As such, an inaccurately labeled product may result to consumer dissatisfaction as consumers react negatively considering the possible health issues that may arise from the deceptive practice (General Paper Goods, 2023). Additionally, with various social media platforms, individuals are provided with the platform that support online activism, foster community connections and establish norms, and shape collective social perspectives (Greijdanus et al., 2020).

This was then followed by the effect of efforts against

altered images at 0.458 and towards review manipulation at 0.450. These positive weights mean that as the consumers perceive that they are able to engage in efforts against altered images and review manipulation, the more they also enhance their level of online consumer activism. Integrating all the principal components (weights) of each factor, then the Online Consumer Activism Index (e-ConAct) should be defined by the formula as:

$$e - ConAct = 0.423 * Greenwashing + 0.444 * Deceptive Pricing + 0.460 * Mislabeling + 0.450 * Review Manipulation + 0.458 * Altered Images$$

The Mediating Role of Internet Platform Usage in Engaging in Online Consumer Activism Against Unethical Practices of Cosmetic Brands



The Figure above shows the Beta (standardized) coefficients of the multiple linear regressions of the variables. It can be ascertained that all of the perceived efforts against deceptive advertisements in the cosmetic industry all increased (Beta>0) the need for using the internet platform to combat them. Now, with the internet platform (social media pages/accounts) being a mediating factor, it recorded a mediating effect of 0.445 with p-value <0.001 (Significant Moderate effect) on enhancing the online consumer activism of the respondents.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, while respondents generally showed a neutral stance towards engaging in online measures against deceptive advertising by cosmetic brands, they demonstrated greater effort in reacting or commenting on social media posts related to deceptive advertising. On the contrary, coordinating with cosmetic regulatory organizations online and participating in online discussions and forums to actively oppose deceptive advertising in cosmetics were the least rated measures across all domains, indicating the respondents' relatively low likelihood of engagement with these measures. These results align with the Integrated Taxonomy of Consumer Complaint Behavior

model as these illustrate a spectrum of consumer responses against deceptive advertising, ranging from passive to active engagement. Additionally, while consumers may adopt a neutral overall stance, efforts targeting mislabeling have been discovered to impact online consumer activism significantly. These findings align with Bauer et al.'s (2023) study previously cited in the review of related literature, which stated that mislabeling found frequently on a cosmetic product's packaging has been seen as a significant factor that motivates consumers to complain. Finally, the crucial role of Internet platforms usage in enhancing the respondent's online consumer activism has been strengthened, as the results showed that all of the perceived efforts against deceptive advertisements in the cosmetic industry increased the need for using the Internet platform to combat them. Thus, Ertekin & Dilek's (2022) paper, which underscores the significance of Internet platforms in facilitating various consumer activism initiatives, supports these findings. The results, therefore, addresses the limited existing knowledge concerning the cosmetic industry, population, and the impact of online engagement toward online consumer activism against deceptive advertising. The research then contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into cosmetic

consumers' intricate attitudes and behaviors, highlighting effective strategies to combat deceptive advertising, and emphasizing the importance of Internet platforms in fostering online consumer activism against the unethical practices observed within the cosmetic industry.

7.0 Recommendation

This research study investigated the online engagement of cosmetic consumers in Cebu City toward online consumer activism in combating deceptive advertising, contributing to Sustainable Goal Development 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. While the findings revealed that the overall engagement of cosmetic consumers to participate in online consumer activism remained neutral, it identified critical areas for developing a more transparent cosmetic industry and encouraging consumer involvement.

The findings revealed that online engagement is crucial for various stakeholders in the cosmetic industry to address issues of deceptive advertising practices through online consumer activism. Hence, this research suggests the following: (1) Consumers and advocacy groups should be provided with appropriate platforms that will help consumers be more well-informed on various measures to combat deceptive practices and encourage these individuals to make the necessary actions, (2) Cosmetic brands must prioritize honesty and transparency in marketing-related initiatives, ensuring clear information to uphold consumer trust and safety, and (3) Regulatory bodies should enhance enforcement efforts and engage actively on social media to educate consumers about their rights and the importance of truthful advertising. The impact of deceptive advertising to consumers does not only include financial loss, but also emotional distress (Baltzarevic, 2023). Further, deceptive advertising in general can lead to dangerous products that put users at risk (Hoerman, 2023), which necessitates stricter regulation, monitoring, and supervision. Through the abovementioned recommendations, the cosmetic industry may foster a more open and trustworthy environment that prioritizes consumer safety and resolves customer concerns about deceptive practices, especially mislabeling, as results in this paper has pointed out that this form of deceptive advertising has the highest likelihood of consumers to engage in online consumer activism. Further studies may be explored to determine the best ways to promote increased consumer involvement in online consumer activism outside of social media likes and comments. Furthermore, examining the efficacy of the regulatory intervention in conjunction with online consumer activism and behavior in general may yield valuable data in the future.

Ethical Consideration

In carrying out their research, the researchers will uphold a high standard of ethical considerations, particularly during the data gathering. Essential tenets of fairness, respect, and generosity shall also be applied to ensure that no harm is done and that any potential benefits are maximized in alignment with the beneficent principle. The research respondents, additionally, will be treated with respect, fair treatment, and dignity, aside from ensuring that their rights to confidentiality, self-determination, and complete transparency are upheld. To ensure that the respondents are fully informed prior to completing the questionnaire, the researchers shall provide a clear description of the study's

objectives, methodology, and possible advantages aside from ensuring the confidentiality of the respondent's personal information. Furthermore, no respondent will participate unless they have voluntarily given their consent and receive comprehensive information about the study. They will also be notified of their right to decline or leave the research, specifically while answering the questionnaire. The proper ethics commission must also give the researchers permission to proceed before the study is launched. Furthermore, the ethics committee will review the paper to ensure that the study's design, methods, and practices adhere to ethical guidelines. Finally, thorough records of the researchers' ethical records shall also be kept and made accessible for review by the ethics committee or any other pertinent authorities.

A. Documentation of Informed Consent

The Informed Consent Form (ICF) will contain thorough information regarding the paper to ensure that potential respondents are able to completely comprehend the nature and goals of the study. Furthermore, the study's purpose, procedure, as well as the information and the contact details of the researchers are also found on the Informed Consent Form (ICF) aside from clauses explicitly pertaining to the potential benefits of the study to the participants and society as well as the rights of the respondents for confidentiality. Additionally, the potential risks and discomforts that the research respondents may experience while answering the research questionnaire are also included the respondents are given sufficient time to read and comprehend the material found on the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The respondents are also encouraged to ask and, if necessary, seek an explanation for any concerns or doubts they have about the study. Should the respondents agree to participate in the study, they will be asked to sign the form as proof of their voluntary participation in the research. Finally, the researchers will emphasize the confidentiality of the information submitted by the respondents and the protocols to preserve the respondents' anonymity and privacy.

B. Selection of Respondents

To conduct the study, the researchers will choose 110 respondents who are cosmetic consumers residing in Cebu City. Furthermore, Assent will not be utilized in this study as the research participants are only limited to cosmetic consumers aged between 18 to 34 years old who are residing in Cebu City. Nevertheless, a brief and explicit explanation of the study's purpose, risks, advantages, and the participants' freedom to discontinue at any time will be provided. The participant's identity and confidentiality will also be rigorously upheld. Ultimately, the information acquired from the respondents will only be utilized for research purposes, and no potential risks will materialize while the study is being conducted.

C. Incentives and Compensation

Neither monetary nor non-monetary compensation will be provided for the research respondents. The respondents' participation is voluntary, and after gathering the necessary information through the questionnaire, the researchers will appropriately convey their gratitude for the respondent's contribution in person.

D. Vulnerability of the Respondents

The study's respondents are primarily cosmetic consumers residing in Cebu City aged 18 years and above who can grasp the information found on the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and research questionnaire. These respondents are regarded as non-vulnerable members of the study. If any signs of discomfort or distress are observed from the respondents, the researchers shall promptly address the situation. Ultimately, the respondents will be treated with respect and dignity, and stringent confidentiality and anonymity measures will be upheld. Lastly, the respondents will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and any data collected from them will only be utilized for the research.

E. Benefits, Risks, and Safety

The primary benefit of the study is gathering relevant quantitative information that should help the cosmetic industry create focused interventions to address deceptive advertising and safeguard consumer rights. Further, the researchers also intend to empower cosmetic consumers by imparting information as to how they may combat these types of unethical practices. Lastly, to encourage transparency and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field, the study's findings will be made publicly available through the USJ-R library archives and publications.

F. Privacy and Confidentiality

The researchers shall abide by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and its relevant provisions. Furthermore, after the relevant information on the research questionnaire has been processed, the survey forms will be securely discarded, and complete confidentiality shall be carried out in the entirety of the research process. All personally identifiable information from the respondents and key informants will be kept securely and used only for the research. The information gathered from the respondents and key informants will be kept in a secure location where only the researchers are able to access it. Finally, the respondents will be invited to contact the researchers using the contact information provided in the Informed Consent Form (ICF) if they have any concerns regarding the security of their data or the secrecy of the study procedure.

G. Debriefings

The researchers will ensure that upon the gathering of data, the statements found on the research questionnaire are worded respectfully. Following the completion of data collection, a debriefing will be held to provide the respondents an opportunity to express any questions or concerns they may have. After the study, the researcher will convey their gratitude to the research participants for their participation.

H. Data Storage, Retention, and Destruction

The researchers shall take accountability for all data gathered during the research process and ensure that it is stored securely and confidentially to avoid unwanted access, use, or disclosure. The researchers will utilize a cloud-based service offered by Google Drive to safeguard the responses gathered online. Only the researchers will be allowed to keep and obtain the data, and the profile of the respondents will remain confidential and only known

between the participants and the researchers. All information will be password-protected, and only approved individuals will be able to access it. The cloud-based drive will be subject to deletion after five (5) years since the collection of the information to ensure that the data gathered will not be utilized for other purposes besides the study. Further, access requests from external parties must be approved by researchers, who retain the right to view the data. Should the request/s be approved, data sharing should only be done through secure platforms and anonymizing the data to protect the respondent's privacy.

I. Conflict of Interest

To ensure that any potential conflict of interest is extinguished, the researchers shall uphold objectivity to eliminate bias in the study. Furthermore, no organizations or relevant parties will fund any part of the research process to guarantee the impartiality and integrity of the study. The setting and respondents of the study shall not be directly associated with the researchers to ensure that undue influence on the respondent's responses is avoided. To guarantee the legitimacy and dependability of the study's results and recommendations, the researchers will abide by the aforementioned measures.

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