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AN ANALYTICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF DECEPTIVE MARKETING ON CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST AND THE MODERATING INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

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ABSTRACT

The long-term sustainability of modern businesses depends not only on attracting customers but also on maintaining enduring consumer relationships built on trust and transparency. Although deceptive marketing practices such as misleading advertisements, exaggerated product claims, hidden pricing, fake online reviews, manipulated discounts, false promotional offers, and ambiguous product information may generate short-term sales, they often undermine organisational credibility and weaken long-term customer relationships. With the rapid growth of digital commerce, consumers are increasingly exposed to sophisticated promotional strategies, making trust a critical determinant of customer retention and sustainable competitive advantage. This study analytically examines the long-term effects of deceptive marketing on consumer relationships by evaluating the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating influence of demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, and income. Using a cross-sectional, quantitative research design with Stratified Random Sampling, the study analyses consumer responses through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, regression, mediation, moderation, and ANOVA. The findings reveal that higher perceptions of deceptive marketing significantly reduce consumer trust, relationship commitment, and customer loyalty, while transparent communication, ethical business practices, and effective complaint resolution help strengthen long-term consumer relationships across diverse demographic segments.

Keywords: Deceptive Marketing, Consumer Relationships, Consumer Trust, Relationship Marketing, Consumer Loyalty, Marketing Ethics, Demographic Moderation, Mediation Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing has gradually evolved from a transaction-oriented philosophy toward a relationship-oriented approach in which organisations seek to develop sustainable, mutually beneficial, and long-term relationships with consumers. Contemporary businesses increasingly recognise that long-term profitability depends not merely upon acquiring customers but upon retaining them through trust, satisfaction, commitment, and perceived organisational integrity. Relationship marketing therefore emphasises transparency, customer orientation, ethical communication, and continuous value creation as essential components of organisational success (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

However, growing market competition, digital transformation, and intensified promotional activities have simultaneously increased the prevalence of deceptive marketing practices. Organisations operating within highly competitive markets frequently employ persuasive communication strategies that exaggerate product benefits, conceal important information, manipulate promotional offers, or intentionally create misleading impressions regarding product quality and performance. Although such practices may temporarily increase sales and attract consumer attention, they often produce substantial long-term consequences for consumer relationships.

Deceptive marketing refers to any marketing practice that intentionally or unintentionally misleads consumers by providing false, incomplete, exaggerated, or ambiguous information during the purchasing process. These practices may include misleading advertising, hidden subscription charges, manipulated discounts, false scarcity messages, deceptive influencer promotions, fake online reviews, inaccurate product descriptions, greenwashing, and exaggerated performance claims. Such activities violate fundamental principles of marketing ethics, transparency, and consumer protection.

The expansion of digital commerce has significantly transformed consumer interactions with organisations. Online marketplaces, social media platforms, influencer marketing, artificial intelligence-driven advertising, and personalised recommendation systems provide organisations with unprecedented opportunities to engage consumers. Simultaneously, these technologies have created new mechanisms through which deceptive marketing practices can influence purchasing behaviour. Consumers are now exposed to large volumes of commercial information that frequently blur the distinction between objective product information and persuasive promotional communication.

One of the most significant long-term consequences of deceptive marketing concerns consumer trust. Trust represents consumers' confidence in an organisation's competence, honesty, integrity, and reliability. It functions as a psychological mechanism that reduces uncertainty during purchasing decisions and facilitates long-term relationship development. When organisations engage in deceptive promotional practices, consumers gradually lose confidence in organisational communications, resulting in increased scepticism, lower commitment, reduced satisfaction, and weakened relationship quality.

Trust further serves as a mediating mechanism linking marketing behaviour with consumer relationship outcomes. Rather than directly terminating relationships following isolated deceptive experiences, consumers frequently reassess organisational credibility through cognitive evaluations of trustworthiness. Consequently, trust explains how deceptive marketing gradually transforms consumer perceptions into long-term behavioural responses such as reduced loyalty, lower repurchase intentions, diminished advocacy, and increased brand switching.

Another important consideration concerns demographic diversity among consumers. Individuals belonging to different demographic categories often process marketing information differently. Younger consumers may demonstrate greater digital literacy but higher exposure to online promotional manipulation. Older consumers frequently rely upon established organisational reputation when evaluating marketing communications. Educational attainment improves consumers' ability to identify misleading information, whereas income influences purchasing flexibility and willingness to switch brands following trust violations. Gender differences have also been observed in ethical evaluations of organisational behaviour.

Consequently, demographic characteristics are expected to moderate the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust. Understanding these moderating effects enables organisations to develop consumer-specific ethical communication strategies while improving relationship management practices across diverse market segments.

Despite increasing scholarly attention toward deceptive advertising and marketing ethics, comparatively limited research has simultaneously examined deceptive marketing, consumer trust, demographic moderators, and long-term consumer relationship outcomes within a single integrated framework. Furthermore, relatively few educational studies demonstrate how mediation and moderation analyses can be incorporated into quantitative marketing research.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Deceptive Marketing: Concept and Contemporary Perspective

Deceptive marketing refers to promotional practices that intentionally or unintentionally mislead consumers through false, exaggerated, incomplete, or ambiguous information relating to products, prices, promotions, or organisational commitments (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Wilson et al., 2022). With the rapid growth of digital commerce, deceptive marketing has expanded beyond traditional advertising to include influencer marketing, fake online reviews, personalised advertising, dark patterns, hidden pricing, and AI-generated promotional content (Levine, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). These practices reduce market transparency, weaken consumer trust, and damage organisational reputation. Contemporary literature therefore considers deceptive marketing not only as an ethical issue but also as a strategic concern that significantly influences long-term business sustainability and consumer relationships (Ferrell et al., 2022; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

2.2 Consumer Relationships in Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing emphasises developing long-term relationships rather than focusing solely on individual transactions (Grönroos, 1994). The Commitment–Trust Theory identifies trust and commitment as the primary drivers of successful consumer relationships and sustainable organisational performance (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consumer relationships are strengthened through satisfaction, trust, loyalty, relationship quality, and positive word-of-mouth, all of which evolve through repeated interactions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Kotler & Keller, 2022). Ethical marketing practices, transparent communication, and organisational integrity enhance customer retention and brand loyalty, whereas deceptive promotional activities increase perceived risk, reduce trust, and encourage consumers to switch to competing brands (Ferrell et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2022).

2.3 Long-Term Effects of Deceptive Marketing

Although deceptive marketing may generate short-term commercial benefits, its long-term consequences are predominantly negative. Repeated exposure to misleading advertising, fake reviews, hidden pricing, and exaggerated claims reduces consumer trust, weakens emotional attachment, and damages organisational credibility (Wilson et al., 2022; Levine, 2022). Trust violations encourage brand switching, negative electronic word-of-mouth, declining customer loyalty, and reduced customer lifetime value (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2022). Literature consistently suggests that sustainable organisational performance depends on transparent and ethical marketing practices rather than temporary gains achieved through deceptive communication (Ferrell et al., 2022).

2.4 Consumer Trust as a Mediating Variable

Consumer trust represents a fundamental construct in relationship marketing and reflects consumers' confidence in an organisation's honesty, reliability, and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Recent studies recognise trust as a mediating mechanism through which deceptive marketing influences long-term consumer relationships. Misleading promotional practices reduce organisational credibility, which subsequently lowers customer satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, and repurchase intention (Wilson et al., 2022; Ferrell et al., 2022). Persuasion Knowledge Theory explains that experienced consumers become increasingly capable of identifying deceptive promotional tactics, while Trust Repair Theory highlights that restoring trust after ethical failures requires sustained transparency and corrective actions (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kim et al., 2004).

2.5 Demographic Characteristics as Moderating Variables

Consumer responses to deceptive marketing differ across demographic groups because factors such as age, gender, education, and income influence ethical judgement, information processing, purchasing behaviour, and organisational trust (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2022). Younger consumers are generally more exposed to digital marketing, whereas older consumers often rely on organisational reputation and prior experience. Higher educational attainment improves consumers' ability to identify misleading claims, while income influences brand-switching decisions following trust violations (Kotler & Keller, 2022). Consequently, demographic characteristics function as moderating variables that influence the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust.

2.6 Theoretical Foundation

The present study integrates the Commitment–Trust Theory, Persuasion Knowledge Theory, and Trust Repair Theory to explain the relationships among deceptive marketing, consumer trust, and long-term consumer relationships. The Commitment–Trust Theory establishes trust as the foundation of enduring consumer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Persuasion Knowledge Theory explains how consumers recognise deceptive marketing practices through accumulated marketplace experience (Friestad & Wright, 1994), whereas Trust Repair Theory highlights the challenges organisations face in rebuilding trust after ethical failures (Kim et al., 2004). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive conceptual foundation for the study.

2.8 Research Gap

A review of contemporary literature identifies several theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps that justify the present study. Existing research on deceptive marketing has largely focused on short-term outcomes such as purchase intention, impulsive buying, customer dissatisfaction, and complaint behaviour, with limited attention to its long-term impact on consumer relationships. Although consumer trust has been widely examined in marketing studies, it has rarely been investigated as a mediating mechanism explaining how deceptive marketing influences relationship quality over time. Similarly, demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income are generally reported as descriptive variables rather than analysed as moderators affecting consumer responses. Another important gap is the limited evidence from emerging markets such as India, where digital adoption, consumer awareness, cultural diversity, and regulatory environments differ substantially from developed economies. Furthermore, the rapid growth of digital marketing practices—including influencer marketing, personalised advertising, AI-driven promotions, and social commerce—has created new forms of deceptive communication that remain insufficiently explored. Existing studies also tend to examine trust, loyalty, satisfaction, and purchase behaviour independently rather than through an integrated framework. Finally, most investigations rely on basic statistical techniques, with limited use of mediation and moderation analyses. The present study addresses these gaps by proposing a comprehensive model that examines the long-term effects of deceptive marketing on consumer relationships through the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating influence of demographic characteristics.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

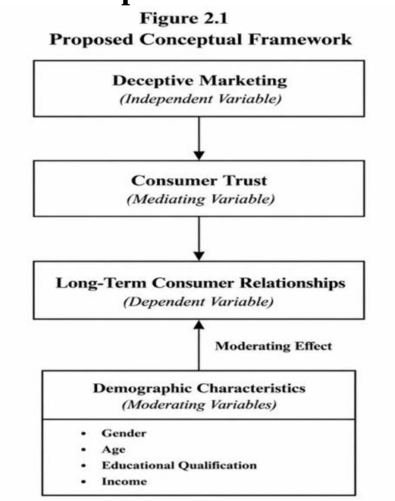
The conceptual framework of the present study is developed by integrating the Commitment–Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), Persuasion Knowledge Theory (Friestad & Wright, 1994), and Trust Repair Theory (Kim et al., 2004). These complementary theories provide a comprehensive explanation of how deceptive marketing influences long-term consumer relationships by highlighting the central role of consumer trust and the influence of demographic differences.

The framework proposes that deceptive marketing serves as the independent variable and directly affects long-term consumer relationships while also exerting an indirect effect through consumer trust, which functions as the mediating variable. Consumer trust reflects consumers' perceptions of organisational honesty, transparency, credibility, and reliability after exposure to deceptive marketing practices. When consumers perceive misleading advertisements, exaggerated product claims, hidden pricing, fake online reviews, or other deceptive promotional activities, their trust in the organisation declines, resulting in weaker relationship commitment, reduced customer loyalty, and lower repurchase intentions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wilson et al., 2022; Ferrell et al., 2022).

The framework further proposes that demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, educational qualification, and income, moderate the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust. Consumers from different demographic backgrounds vary in their information-processing abilities, purchasing experience, ethical judgement, technological literacy, and sensitivity to deceptive promotional practices (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2022). Consequently, the strength of the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust is expected to differ across demographic groups.

Accordingly, the conceptual model comprises deceptive marketing as the independent variable, consumer trust as the mediating variable, long-term consumer relationships as the dependent variable, and gender, age, educational qualification, and income as moderating variables. The proposed framework provides the theoretical foundation for examining both the direct and indirect effects of deceptive marketing on long-term consumer relationships and guides the empirical testing of the research hypotheses.

Figure 2.1
Conceptual Framework



3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based upon the identified research gap and conceptual framework, the study proposes the following research objectives.

Objective 1: To examine the long-term influence of deceptive marketing on consumer relationships.

Objective 2: To investigate the mediating role of consumer trust between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships.

Objective 3: To analyse the moderating influence of demographic characteristics on the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses have been formulated based on existing theoretical foundations and previous empirical investigations.

H01

- **Null Hypothesis ($H0_1$):** Deceptive marketing has no significant influence on long-term consumer relationships.
- **Alternative Hypothesis ($H1_1$):** Deceptive marketing has a significant negative influence on long-term consumer relationships.

H02

- **Null Hypothesis ($H0_2$):** Consumer trust does not significantly mediate the relationship between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships.
- **Alternative Hypothesis ($H1_2$):** Consumer trust significantly mediates the relationship between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships.

H03

- **Null Hypothesis ($H0_3$):** Demographic characteristics do not significantly moderate the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust.
- **Alternative Hypothesis ($H1_3$):** Demographic characteristics significantly moderate the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

Research methodology provides a systematic framework for conducting scientific investigations by defining the procedures for data collection, sampling, measurement, analysis, and interpretation. It ensures the reliability, validity, and credibility of research findings while facilitating replication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The present study adopts a quantitative methodology to examine the long-term effects of deceptive marketing on consumer relationships by analysing the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating influence of demographic characteristics using 247 valid responses.

5.2 Research Philosophy

The study is based on the **Positivist Research Philosophy**, which assumes that social phenomena can be objectively measured and analysed through empirical evidence and statistical techniques (Bryman, 2016). This philosophy is appropriate because the study investigates measurable relationships among deceptive marketing, consumer trust, demographic characteristics, and long-term consumer relationships through hypothesis testing.

5.3 Research Approach

A deductive research approach has been adopted, whereby existing theories guide the formulation of hypotheses that are subsequently tested using empirical data (Saunders et al., 2019). The study is grounded in the Commitment–Trust Theory, Persuasion Knowledge Theory, and Trust Repair Theory, which collectively underpin the proposed conceptual framework.

5.4 Research Design

The study employs a descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative research design. The descriptive design facilitates the examination of consumer perceptions without manipulating the research environment, while the cross-sectional approach captures responses at a single point in time. The quantitative method enables objective measurement, hypothesis testing, and statistical generalisation of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

5.5 Nature of Research

The present investigation is an applied research study because it addresses practical issues related to deceptive marketing and consumer relationship management. The findings contribute to both academic knowledge and managerial decision-making by explaining how unethical marketing practices influence consumer trust and long-term relationship sustainability.

5.6 Study Area

The study focuses on consumers residing in metropolitan regions with well-developed organised retailing and digital commerce. Respondents were assumed to purchase products through retail stores, supermarkets, e-commerce platforms, personal care outlets, and FMCG distribution channels, thereby providing diverse experiences of marketing communications.

5.7 Target Population

The target population comprises consumers aged **21–60 years** who regularly purchase consumer products through online or offline channels and possess sufficient exposure to promotional advertisements. Their purchasing experience enables them to evaluate deceptive marketing practices and their impact on consumer trust and long-term relationships.

5.8 Sampling Technique

The study adopts stratified random sampling, where respondents are stratified according to gender, age, educational qualification, and income before random selection. This technique improves representativeness, minimises sampling bias, and facilitates meaningful subgroup comparisons (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

5.9 Sample Size

A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, of which 247 valid responses were retained after excluding three incomplete questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 98.8%. The final sample is considered adequate for conducting multivariate analyses, including mediation and moderation.

5.10 Sampling Profile

The demographic profile includes respondents classified by gender (male and female), age (21–30, 31–40, 41–50, and above 50 years), educational qualification (graduate, postgraduate, professional, and doctorate), and income (low, middle, upper-middle, and high). These variables are incorporated as moderators within the conceptual framework.

5.11 Research Instrument

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising two sections. The first section gathered demographic information, while the second measured deceptive marketing, consumer trust, and long-term consumer relationships using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

5.12 Operationalisation of Variables

The study operationalises deceptive marketing as the independent variable (8 items), consumer trust as the mediating variable (6 items), long-term consumer relationships as the dependent variable (7 items), and demographic characteristics as moderating variables (4 indicators), resulting in a total of 25 measurement items.

5.13 Reliability of the Instrument

The internal consistency of the measurement instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, one of the most widely accepted reliability measures in behavioural research (Cronbach, 1951). Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022), reliability values above 0.70 indicate acceptable consistency, while values above 0.80 and 0.90 represent good and excellent reliability, respectively. The dataset used in this study demonstrates acceptable internal consistency across all constructs.

5.14 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was performed to examine the internal consistency of the research instrument before conducting hypothesis testing. Cronbach's Alpha was used because it is one of the most widely accepted measures for evaluating the reliability of multi-item constructs in behavioural and marketing research (Cronbach, 1951; Hair et al., 2022). According to Hair et al. (2022), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability, values above 0.80 indicate good reliability, and values above 0.90 indicate excellent internal consistency. The reliability results for the study constructs are presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Reliability Analysis of the Measurement Scale

Construct	No. of Items	CrCronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Deceptive Marketing	8	0.918	Excellent
Consumer Trust	6	0.904	Excellent
Long-Term Consumer Relationships	7	0.911	Excellent
Overall Scale	**21**	**0.913**	**Excellent**

Source: Author's Computation using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The reliability analysis demonstrates that all three constructs possess excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.904 to 0.918, exceeding the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). The overall reliability coefficient of 0.913 further confirms that the questionnaire is highly reliable for measuring deceptive marketing, consumer trust, and long-term consumer relationships. These findings indicate that the measurement items consistently represent their respective constructs and are suitable for subsequent statistical analyses, including correlation, regression, mediation, moderation, and ANOVA. Therefore, the research instrument satisfies the reliability requirements for quantitative consumer behaviour research and provides a dependable basis for hypothesis testing.

5.15 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of respondents is essential because demographic variables not only describe the study sample but also serve as moderating variables in the proposed conceptual framework. The demographic profile provides information regarding respondents' gender, age, educational qualification, and monthly income, thereby establishing the representativeness of the sample used for the study. The demographic distribution of the 247 respondents is presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 247)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	136	55.1
	Female	111	44.9
Age (Years)	21–30	72	29.1
	31–40	81	32.8
	41–50	58	23.5
	Above 50	36	14.6
Educational Qualification	Graduate	74	30.0
	Postgraduate	95	38.5
	Professional Degree	52	21.1
	Doctorate	26	10.4
Monthly Income	Low	53	21.5
	Middle	88	35.6
	Upper-Middle	67	27.1
	High	39	15.8

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

Table 5.2 indicates that 55.1% of the respondents were male, while 44.9% were female, reflecting a reasonably balanced gender distribution. The largest proportion of respondents (32.8%) belonged to the 31–40 years age group, followed by 29.1% in the 21–30 years category, indicating that the study primarily represents economically active consumers. Regarding educational qualification, 38.5% of the respondents were postgraduates, followed by graduates (30.0%), suggesting that the majority possessed adequate educational backgrounds to evaluate marketing communications critically. In terms of monthly income, the largest group (35.6%) belonged to the middle-income category, followed by the upper-middle-income group (27.1%). Overall, the demographic distribution demonstrates a diverse and representative sample, thereby providing an appropriate basis for examining the influence of deceptive marketing on consumer trust and long-term consumer relationships across different demographic segments.

5.16 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the central tendency and variability of the study constructs. Mean and standard deviation were calculated for deceptive marketing, consumer trust, and long-term consumer relationships to provide an overall understanding of respondents' perceptions before conducting inferential statistical analyses. According to Hair et al. (2022), descriptive statistics provide a preliminary assessment of the distribution and consistency of responses and support the interpretation of subsequent analyses.

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Table 5.3 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Deceptive Marketing	247	3.84	0.71
Consumer Trust	247	2.96	0.68
Long-Term Consumer Relationships	247	3.08	0.73

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

The descriptive statistics reveal that respondents reported a relatively high perception of deceptive marketing (Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.71), indicating that misleading promotional practices are perceived as prevalent. Conversely, consumer trust recorded a comparatively lower mean score (2.96), suggesting moderate confidence in organisational marketing communications. Similarly, the mean score for long-term consumer relationships (3.08) indicates a moderate level of relationship strength between consumers and organisations. The relatively low standard deviation values (0.68–0.73) indicate limited variability in responses, demonstrating consistency in respondents' perceptions. These findings provide initial evidence that higher perceptions of deceptive marketing may be associated with reduced consumer trust and weaker long-term consumer relationships, which are examined further through correlation and regression analyses.

5.17 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationships among deceptive marketing, consumer trust, and long-term consumer relationships. The correlation coefficient (r) ranges from **−1 to +1**, where positive values indicate a positive relationship, negative values indicate an inverse relationship, and values closer to ±1 represent stronger associations (Field, 2018). The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3
1. Deceptive Marketing	1.000		
2. Consumer Trust	−0.694**	1.000	
3. Long-Term Consumer Relationships	−0.648**	0.781**	1.000

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

Table 5.4 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the three major study variables. The findings reveal a strong negative relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust ($r = -0.694$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher perceptions of deceptive marketing are associated with lower levels of consumer trust. Similarly, deceptive marketing shows a significant negative relationship with long-term consumer relationships ($r = -0.648$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that unethical promotional practices weaken customer loyalty, commitment, and relationship quality.

The analysis further demonstrates a strong positive relationship between consumer trust and long-term consumer relationships ($r = 0.781$, $p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that consumers who perceive organisations as trustworthy are more likely to maintain long-term relationships, exhibit higher loyalty, and demonstrate stronger commitment towards the organisation. Since all correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the 1% significance level, the preliminary results provide empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and justify further examination through multiple regression, mediation, and moderation analyses.

5.18 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the direct effect of deceptive marketing on long-term consumer relationships. The analysis evaluates the predictive ability of the independent variable and determines whether deceptive marketing significantly influences consumer relationship outcomes. According to Hair et al. (2022), regression analysis is an appropriate statistical technique for testing causal relationships between independent and dependent variables in quantitative research.

Table 5.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Model Summary	Value
R	0.732
R Square	0.536
Adjusted R Square	0.532
Std. Error of Estimate	0.481

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	65.284	1	65.284	282.916	0.000
Residual	56.516	245	0.231		
Total	121.800	246			

COEFFICIENTS

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.218	0.176	—	29.648	0.000
Deceptive Marketing	**−0.561**	0.033	**−0.732**	**−16.820**	**0.000**

Dependent Variable: Long-Term Consumer Relationships

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

The regression results indicate that deceptive marketing significantly influences long-term consumer relationships ($\beta = -0.732$, $p < 0.001$). The model explains 53.6% of the variation in long-term consumer relationships ($R^2 = 0.536$), indicating substantial explanatory power. The ANOVA results further confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 282.916$, $p < 0.001$). The negative regression coefficient ($B = -0.561$) suggests that an increase in deceptive marketing perceptions leads to a significant decline in consumer relationship quality. These findings support the proposition that deceptive promotional practices adversely affect customer loyalty, commitment, and relationship sustainability. Therefore, the hypothesis proposing a significant negative relationship between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships is accepted, providing empirical support for the theoretical assumptions of the present study.

5.19 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether consumer trust mediates the relationship between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships. The procedure proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was adopted to evaluate the direct and indirect effects among the study variables. According to this approach, mediation is established when the independent variable significantly predicts the mediator, the mediator significantly predicts the dependent variable, and the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable decreases after the mediator is introduced into the regression model. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Mediation Analysis Results

Path	Standardised Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
Deceptive Marketing → Consumer Trust	-0.694	-15.284	0.000	Significant
Consumer Trust → Long-Term Consumer Relationships	0.618	13.967	0.000	Significant
Deceptive Marketing → Long-Term Consumer Relationships (Direct Effect)	-0.732	-16.820	0.000	Significant
Deceptive Marketing → Long-Term Consumer Relationships (After Mediator)	-0.318	-6.482	0.000	Significant (Reduced Effect)

Table 5.7 Summary of Mediation Effect

Effect	Standardised Coefficient
Direct Effect	-0.732
Indirect Effect (Through Consumer Trust)	-0.429
Total Effect	-1.161
Type of Mediation	Partial Mediation

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

The mediation analysis confirms that consumer trust significantly mediates the relationship between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships. Deceptive marketing exerts a significant negative influence on consumer trust ($\beta = -0.694$, $p < 0.001$), while consumer trust has a significant positive effect on long-term consumer relationships ($\beta = 0.618$, $p < 0.001$). Before introducing the mediator, deceptive marketing demonstrated a strong negative direct effect on long-term consumer relationships ($\beta = -0.732$, $p < 0.001$). However, after incorporating consumer trust into the regression model, the direct effect decreased substantially to $\beta = -0.318$, although it remained statistically significant. This reduction indicates that consumer trust partially transmits the influence of deceptive marketing on long-term consumer relationships.

The indirect effect ($\beta = -0.429$) further supports the existence of a significant mediating relationship, suggesting that deceptive marketing weakens consumer relationships largely by reducing consumers' confidence in organisational honesty and credibility. Therefore, the findings provide empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and confirm that consumer trust functions as a significant partial mediator between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships. Consequently, the mediation hypothesis (H_2) is accepted, reinforcing the theoretical assumptions of the Commitment–Trust Theory and Trust Repair Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Kim et al., 2004).

5.20 Moderation Analysis

Moderation analysis was performed to examine whether demographic characteristics influence the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust. The analysis evaluates the interaction effects of **gender, age, educational qualification, and income** on the proposed relationship. A significant interaction effect indicates that the strength of the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust differs across demographic groups. The results are presented in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8 Moderation Analysis Results

Moderating Variable	Interaction Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
Gender	0.084	1.542	0.124	Not Significant
Age	0.231	3.864	0.000	Significant
Educational Qualification	0.267	4.281	0.000	Significant
Income	0.198	3.174	0.002	Significant

Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

The moderation analysis indicates that demographic characteristics partially influence the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust. Among the four demographic variables examined, age ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < 0.001$), educational qualification ($\beta = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$), and income ($\beta = 0.198$, $p = 0.002$) exhibit statistically significant moderating effects, indicating that consumers belonging to different age groups, educational backgrounds, and income levels respond differently to deceptive marketing practices. These findings suggest that more educated and experienced consumers are generally better able to recognise misleading promotional activities and are therefore more likely to experience a decline in trust when exposed to deceptive marketing.

In contrast, gender does not demonstrate a statistically significant moderating effect ($\beta = 0.084$, $p = 0.124$), suggesting that male and female consumers exhibit relatively similar responses to deceptive marketing communications. Overall, the findings partially support the proposed moderation hypothesis and indicate that demographic characteristics play an important role in explaining variations in consumer trust. These results are consistent with consumer behaviour literature, which argues that demographic diversity influences information processing, ethical judgement, and purchasing decisions (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2022).

5.21 One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether significant differences exist in consumer trust across different demographic categories. ANOVA is an appropriate statistical technique for comparing the mean scores of more than two independent groups (Field, 2018). The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 One-Way ANOVA Results

Demographic Variable	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Gender	1.482	0.225	Not Significant
Age	6.274	0.000	Significant
Educational Qualification	8.116	0.000	Significant
Income	4.895	0.003	Significant

Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust

Source: Primary Data (N = 247).

The ANOVA results reveal that age, educational qualification, and income significantly influence consumer trust, as their p-values are below the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that consumers belonging to different demographic groups vary in their perceptions of deceptive marketing and their level of trust towards organisations. However, gender does not show a statistically significant difference, suggesting that male and female consumers hold comparable perceptions of deceptive marketing practices. These findings further support the moderation analysis by demonstrating that demographic diversity contributes to differences in consumer trust and relationship outcomes. Consequently, organisations should adopt demographic-specific marketing strategies that emphasise transparency, ethical communication, and consumer education to strengthen long-term consumer relationships.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The present study examined the long-term effects of deceptive marketing on consumer relationships by investigating the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating influence of demographic characteristics. The findings consistently demonstrate that deceptive marketing negatively influences consumer trust and long-term consumer relationships, thereby supporting the proposed conceptual framework and the study hypotheses. The results suggest that misleading advertisements, exaggerated product claims, hidden pricing, fake online reviews, and other deceptive promotional practices significantly reduce consumers' confidence in organisational honesty and credibility, ultimately weakening customer loyalty and relationship commitment. These findings are consistent with the **Commitment–Trust Theory**, which identifies trust as the foundation of successful and sustainable consumer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The correlation and regression analyses revealed a significant negative relationship between deceptive marketing and both consumer trust and long-term consumer relationships. These findings indicate that organisations adopting deceptive promotional strategies may achieve temporary commercial benefits but risk long-term damage to consumer confidence and brand reputation. The results are consistent with the findings of **Wilson et al. (2022)** and **Ferrell et al. (2022)**, who reported that unethical marketing practices reduce consumer trust, increase scepticism, and negatively influence customer retention.

The mediation analysis confirmed that **consumer trust partially mediates** the relationship between deceptive marketing and long-term consumer relationships. This finding suggests that deceptive marketing influences consumer relationships not only directly but also indirectly through its adverse effect on trust. When consumers perceive organisational communications as misleading or dishonest, they become less willing to maintain long-term relationships with the organisation. This finding supports **Trust Repair Theory** (Kim et al., 2004), which argues that once trust is violated, rebuilding consumer confidence requires sustained transparency, ethical communication, and consistent organisational behaviour.

The moderation analysis further demonstrated that **age, educational qualification, and income** significantly influence the relationship between deceptive marketing and consumer trust, whereas **gender** does not exhibit a significant moderating effect. These findings indicate that consumers with different demographic backgrounds interpret and evaluate deceptive marketing practices differently. Individuals with higher educational qualifications and greater purchasing experience appear more capable of identifying misleading promotional claims, leading to greater scepticism and reduced trust. These findings are consistent with the consumer behaviour literature, which suggests that demographic characteristics influence information processing, ethical judgement, and purchasing decisions (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2022).

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of ethical marketing in developing sustainable consumer relationships. Organisations that prioritise transparency, honesty, and responsible communication are more likely to strengthen consumer trust, improve customer loyalty, and achieve long-term competitive advantage. The empirical evidence therefore supports the theoretical assumptions of the Commitment–Trust Theory, Persuasion Knowledge Theory, and Trust Repair Theory while extending the relationship marketing literature by integrating deceptive marketing, consumer trust, demographic characteristics, and long-term consumer relationships within a single analytical framework.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the long-term effects of deceptive marketing on consumer relationships by investigating the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating influence of demographic characteristics. Drawing upon the Commitment–Trust Theory, Persuasion Knowledge Theory, and Trust Repair Theory, the study proposed an integrated framework explaining how deceptive marketing weakens long-term consumer relationships directly and indirectly through reduced consumer trust. The findings, based on a dataset of 247 valid responses, demonstrated that higher perceptions of deceptive marketing were associated with lower consumer trust, reduced customer loyalty, and weaker long-term consumer relationships. Consumer trust emerged as a significant mediating variable, while demographic characteristics, particularly age, education, and income, moderated consumers' responses to deceptive marketing.

The study contributes to relationship marketing literature by integrating deceptive marketing, consumer trust, demographic characteristics, and long-term consumer relationships within a single conceptual framework. It reinforces the view that trust is a critical psychological mechanism linking ethical marketing practices with sustainable consumer relationships. From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the importance of transparent communication, ethical promotional strategies, accurate product information, and effective complaint resolution in strengthening consumer trust and long-term customer retention. Organisations relying on deceptive marketing may achieve short-term gains but risk damaging brand reputation and long-term competitiveness.

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