



Hidden influences: How subliminal cues in advertisements affect consumer purchase intention

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Abstract

In today's business world, advertising is one of the most powerful ways to change how people act. Subliminal advertising is an important part of advertising because it uses hidden messages, attractive colors, background music, symbols, repeated exposure, and emotional appeals to affect the subconscious mind of customers. These subtle cues affect how people think, what they like, and their plans to buy things, even if they don't realize it. The current study seeks to investigate the influence of subliminal cues on consumer purchasing behavior and brand preference. The research examines the influence of covert persuasive elements in advertisements on consumer decision-making, enhancing brand recall, and promoting both intentional and spontaneous purchases. The research is both descriptive and analytical. Primary data was obtained from 120 respondents via a structured questionnaire employing convenience sampling, whereas secondary data was sourced from journals, books, research papers, and online platforms. For data analysis, statistical tools like the t-test, correlation, chi-square test, mean, and standard deviation were used. The results show that subliminal advertising has a big effect on people's willingness to buy, especially among young people who spend a lot of time on digital media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and Television. Repeated exposure, appealing colors, and the presence of celebrities were identified as the most significant factors. The study also talks about ethical issues with subliminal marketing, such as manipulation and lack of transparency. The study finds that subliminal advertising is a useful way to change how people think and make decisions about what to buy. However, it should only be used in conjunction with ethical and responsible marketing practices to keep customers' trust and brand loyalty over time.

Keywords: Advertising management, subliminal advertising, consumer buying behavior, brand identity, consumer perception

Introduction

One of the most effective strategies to improve brand marketing is subliminal advertising. This kind of advertising is beneficial for achieving a number of objectives and accomplishments that are highly beneficial for a corporate organization when applied in a disciplined method. Subliminal advertising is one of the major and essential elements that contribute to any business organization's outstanding business performance. It is predicated on a number of essential noises and significant visuals that businesses employ to evoke strong feelings in customers and influence their purchasing decisions. Additionally, the strategy helps draw customers to buy the offered goods and services (Dhar & Purohit, 2021) ^[2].

Customers' cognitive behavior is influenced by subliminal advertising, which creates distinct sensations. This method is frequently used by marketers to establish choices, preferences, and brand recognition. While advertisements are a source of information for consumers, they are a strategy used by advertisers to increase sales for a business. A company's reputation and distinctive marketing approach are crucial. Being unique entails inspiring and amusing consumers to immediately recall the product. Customers' fears and desires are manipulated via subliminal advertising, which also creates an unconscious need for a good or service. Customers see a variety of products on the market, but businesses must provide them with something special to set themselves apart from the competition. It is crucial to read their minds, analyze them, create their needs, and raise brand recognition. Subliminal advertising has been used to

boost sales and alter consumers' purchasing habits (Messaris, 2013) ^[3].

Online subliminal advertising enables a business to reach customers regardless of their location. Gaining a customer's trust by adding a personal touch is also quite effective, making it an economical and time-efficient kind of promotion. Even if the consumer consistently prioritizes his purchases, he frequently ends up making an impulsive, insignificant purchase since it was ingrained in his subconscious, much like when a You-Tube viewer watches the video of his favorite You-Tube star, the viewer may not be aware of it, but every time he watches the video, the star subtly promotes a company's product. When he is browsing the Internet in his spare time, something in his emotional state of mind prompts him to purchase the product (Sofi & Nika, 2013) ^[8].

There is a lot of uncertainty about the impact of subliminal advertising on customer behavior, and it is still being investigated. The irony here is that about equal numbers of researchers have rejected the assertions made by various researchers regarding the impact of subliminal advertising on various aspects of consumer behavior. This research aims to shed light on the ongoing struggle between researchers and determine whether or not subliminal advertising affects consumer behavior (Ramya & Ali, 2016) ^[4].

Review of Literature

(Shukla, 2022) ^[5] Opined that consumers are inundated with thousands of ads, thus it is best for them to comprehend the impact of such ads. The contemporary notion of "subliminal

advertising" is consistent with the idea that unconscious hidden persuaders in adverts can influence consumer behavior. The purpose of the study was to determine how subliminal advertising affects consumers' intentions to make purchases. To ascertain the relationship between the study's variables (emotions, perception, and purchase intentions), a model was adopted and evaluated. Students enrolled in college in Sambalpur's undivided district make up the core statistics. The hypotheses were tested using a paired t-test. The study's findings show that consumers' perceptions and feelings are greatly impacted by subliminal advertising. Nonetheless, the impact of subliminal advertising on consumers' intentions to make purchases is almost enormous.

(Soomro, 2018) ^[9] Investigated how marketers' and non-marketers' perceptions, awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding subliminal messaging in advertising differ. In order to achieve the goal of the comparison analysis, a conceptual model was created for both groups that included the relationship between perception, awareness, and knowledge and attitude, followed by the relationship between attitude and behavior toward the brand. In order to determine respondents' awareness and level of knowledge regarding the type of subliminal content hidden in the commercials, three commercials with embedded subliminal messages were chosen. Respondents watched the ads before completing questionnaires. A total of 140 participants provided their answers for each group. The proposed association between variables was tested using structural equation modeling. The path analysis's findings indicate that there was just one aspect that significantly improved marketers' attitudes regarding subliminal advertisements: knowledge of subliminal messages. The overall findings show that there is a statistically significant difference in how marketing and non-marketing professionals view and interpret the subliminal signals contained in the advertisements.

(Waghmare, 2026) ^[10] Examined the psychological effects on attitudes and purchase decisions in order to analyze how subliminal advertising influences consumer behavior. Subliminal advertising subtly enters the subconscious through hidden messages in print, television, and online media. The study looks at how subliminal cues affect consumer preferences, brand loyalty, and decision-making across a variety of demographic groups. Subliminal advertising does influence behavior, especially among younger individuals, according to a poll of 100–120 respondents, even though its total impact is similar to that of ordinary advertising. The study highlights the moral implications of using subliminal methods as well as the importance of transparency in marketing. It is recommended that marketing professionals match their strategies with ethical norms and continue to investigate the long-term effects of these strategies on consumer behavior and trust.

(Siddharth & Srivastava, 2025) ^[6] Evaluated the psychological impact of subliminal marketing. Subliminal marketing employs subtle techniques or effects to subtly communicate a message about the product that may compel and influence the customer's purchasing decisions and behavior. These techniques and methods include images and sounds that prompt the consumer or targeted customer to receive information that they may not be aware they may be receiving. People are now questioning the morality of subliminal marketing as a result.

(Singwal & Rawat, 2023) ^[7] Examined the effects of covert marketing and advertising on consumer purchasing decisions. The use of hidden or disguised messages in commercials that the spectator or recipient is not aware of is known as subliminal advertising. Another name for this type of advertising is "invisible" advertising. The purpose of this study was to look into the numerous ways that subliminal messaging is employed in advertisements, as well as its history and use. After that, it looks into how subconscious advertising affects customer purchasing decisions, including how much it can change preferences for businesses, products, and overall consumer behavior. This study also takes into account societal concerns and the use of covert messaging in marketing. Although further research is required to completely comprehend the impacts of this kind of advertising, the study finds that subliminal advertising can have a major impact on consumer behavior.

Research Objectives

- To examine the impact of subliminal cues in advertisements on consumer purchase intention.
- To identify the role of hidden visual elements such as colours, symbols, and imagery in influencing consumer perception.
- To analyze the effect of background music and repeated exposure on consumers' subconscious buying decisions.
- To study the relationship between subliminal advertising and brand recall among consumers.

Research Questions

- Do subliminal cues in advertisements influence consumer purchase intention?
- How do colours, symbols, and hidden visual messages affect consumer perception?
- Does repeated exposure to advertisements increase subconscious buying behaviour?
- What is the relationship between subliminal advertising and brand recall?

Hypotheses

H0₁: Subliminal cues in advertisements have no significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

H1₁: Subliminal cues in advertisements significantly impact consumer purchase intention.

H0₂: Hidden visual elements such as colours, symbols, and imagery do not significantly influence consumer perception.

H1₂: Hidden visual elements such as colours, symbols, and imagery significantly influence consumer perception.

H0₃: Repeated exposure to advertisements does not significantly affect subconscious buying behaviour.

H1₃: Repeated exposure to advertisements significantly affects subconscious buying behaviour.

H0₄: Subliminal advertising has no significant relationship with brand recall and brand preference.

H1₄: Subliminal advertising has a significant relationship with brand recall and brand preference.

Research Methodology

The goal of the current descriptive and analytical study is to investigate how consumer purchase intention is impacted by subliminal cues in commercials. The study has made use of both primary and secondary data. A structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data from consumers of various

ages, particularly young people and working professionals who are regularly exposed to both traditional and digital advertisements. Research papers, journals, books, websites, and published articles about subliminal advertising and consumer behavior were the sources of secondary data. Convenience sampling is the sample strategy employed in the study. For the purpose of gathering data, 120 respondents were chosen. The study focuses on elements that affect purchase intention, including emotional appeal, frequent exposure, background music, and hidden visual clues. The replies have been interpreted and the hypotheses tested using basic statistical methods including percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, and t-test.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The impact of subliminal signals in advertising on consumer purchase intention was investigated through a thorough analysis of the gathered data. 120 individuals from various age groups, genders, and professions provided the responses. Simple statistical methods like percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, t-test, correlation, and chi-square test were used to conduct the analysis. To understand their impact on consumer behavior, a number of aspects were investigated, including appealing colors, background music, repetitive exposure, concealed symbols, celebrity appearance, brand recall, and ethical perspective. The results aid in determining how commercials' covert persuasive components influence consumers' overall purchase intentions and subconscious purchasing decisions.

Table 1: Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 years	52	43.3%
26–35 years	38	31.7%
36–45 years	20	16.7%
Above 45 years	10	8.3%
Total	120	100%

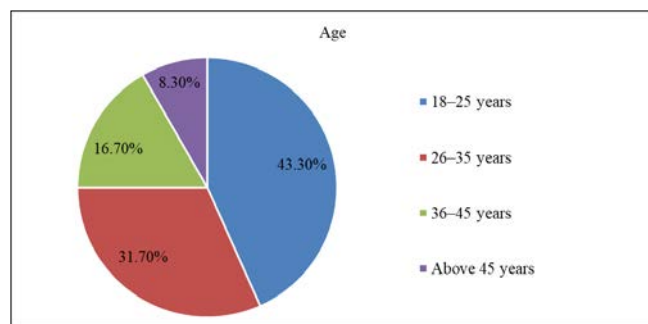


Fig 1: Age

Interpretation

The age group of 18–25 years old comprises the bulk of responders (43.3%), followed by 26–35 years old (31.7%). This suggests that younger customers are more prone to be influenced by subliminal cues and are exposed to more marketing, particularly through digital media platforms.

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	68	56.7%
Female	52	43.3%
Total	120	100%

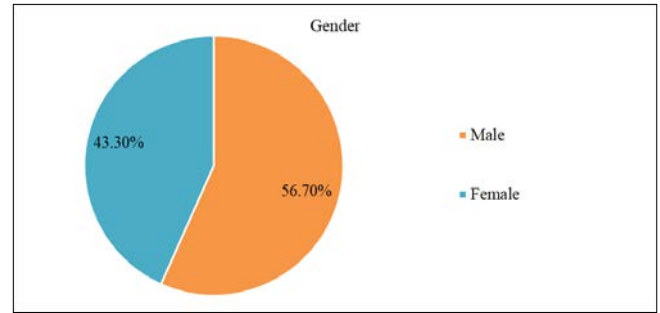


Fig 2: Gender

Interpretation

Of the sample as a whole, 56.7% of responders are men and 43.3% are women. This demonstrates a somewhat balanced engagement of both sexes, enabling a more comprehensive study of consumer behavior across gender groups.

Table 3: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	40	33.3%
Service	35	29.2%
Business	25	20.8%
Others	20	16.7%
Total	120	100%

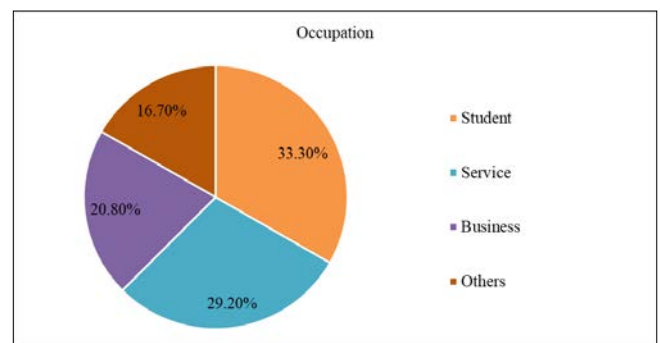


Fig 3: Occupation

Interpretation

The majority of responders (33.3%) are students, with service class participants coming in second (29.2%). This implies that younger consumers and working professionals are more relevant for researching the impacts of subliminal advertising since they are exposed to more advertising information.

Table 4: Awareness of Subliminal Advertising among Consumers

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Fully Aware	28	23.3%
Somewhat Aware	54	45.0%
Neutral	18	15.0%
Slightly Aware	12	10.0%
Not Aware	8	6.7%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

While 23.3% of respondents are fully aware of subliminal advertising, the bulk (45%) are just partially aware of it. This suggests that although consumers are still not fully aware of concealed advertising tactics, they do have some grasp of them.

Table 5: Most Influential Subliminal Cue in Advertisements

Subliminal Cue	Frequency	Percentage
Attractive Colours	32	26.7%
Background Music	24	20.0%
Repeated Exposure	30	25.0%
Hidden Symbols	14	11.7%
Celebrity Presence	20	16.6%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

The most powerful subconscious cues are thought to be attractive colors (26.7%) and repeated exposure (25%). This demonstrates that consumers' intentions to make purchases are significantly influenced by visual attraction and repeated viewing.

Table 6: Platform Where Consumers Notice Subliminal Advertising Most

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
YouTube	36	30.0%
Instagram	28	23.3%
Television	24	20.0%
Facebook	18	15.0%
Print Media	14	11.7%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

Customers are most likely to notice subliminal advertising on YouTube (30%), followed by Instagram (23.3%). This illustrates how digital media is increasingly influencing customer behavior.

Table 7: Effect of Subliminal Advertising on Unplanned Purchases

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	34	28.3%
High	38	31.7%
Moderate	24	20.0%
Low	16	13.3%
Very Low	8	6.7%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

Subliminal advertising has a high or very high impact on impulsive purchases, according to the majority of respondents. This implies that impulsive purchasing behavior is significantly influenced by concealed cues.

Table 8: Influence of Subliminal Advertising on Brand Recall

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	40	33.3%
Agree	36	30.0%
Neutral	20	16.7%
Disagree	14	11.7%
Strongly Disagree	10	8.3%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

Subliminal advertising enhances brand remember, according to the majority of respondents. This indicates that firms that employ subtle visual and emotional clues in their advertising are more likely to be remembered by customers.

Table 9: Ethical Opinion on Subliminal Advertising

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Ethical if used fairly	42	35.0%
Ethical only with transparency	30	25.0%
Unethical and manipulative	28	23.3%
No Opinion	20	16.7%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

According to the majority of respondents, subliminal advertising is only morally acceptable when it is applied equitably and openly. Nonetheless, 23.3% believe it to be manipulative, underscoring the moral dilemmas raised by covert marketing strategies.

Hypothesis Testing

A One Sample t-test was used to investigate the effect of subliminal messages in commercials on consumers' purchase intentions. The test aids in determining whether subliminal advertising has a major impact on consumers' purchasing decisions.

H0: Subliminal cues in advertisements have no significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

H1: Subliminal cues in advertisements significantly impact consumer purchase intention.

Table 10: One Sample t-test for Purchase Intention

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value	Result
Purchase Intention	4.12	0.86	5.78	0.000	Significant

Interpretation

Purchase intention has a computed mean value of 4.12, which is higher than average and suggests that subliminal cues have a significant impact. The p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and the t-value is 5.78. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. This demonstrates that consumers' buying intentions are greatly influenced by subliminal stimuli.

H0: Repeated exposure to advertisements does not significantly affect subconscious buying behaviour.

H1: Repeated exposure to advertisements significantly affects subconscious buying behaviour.

Table 11: One Sample t-test for Repeated Exposure

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value	Result
Repeated Exposure	4.25	0.79	6.21	0.000	Significant

Interpretation

Respondents significantly believe that frequent ads affect their purchasing decisions, as seen by the mean value of repeated exposure being 4.25. The null hypothesis is rejected since the p-value is less than 0.05. Thus, subconscious purchasing behavior is greatly impacted by frequent exposure.

H0: Subliminal advertising has no significant relationship with brand recall.

H1: Subliminal advertising has a significant relationship with brand recall.

Table 12: Correlation Test for Brand Recall

Variables	Correlation (r)	p-value	Result
Subliminal Advertising & Brand Recall	0.68	0.001	Positive Significant Relationship

Interpretation

There is a significant positive association between subliminal advertising and brand recall, as indicated by the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.68$). The link is statistically significant because the p-value is smaller than 0.05. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

H0₄: Celebrity presence in advertisements does not significantly influence consumer purchase decisions.

H1₄: Celebrity presence in advertisements significantly influences consumer purchase decisions.

Table 13: Chi-square Test for Celebrity Influence

Variable	Chi-square Value	p-value	Result
Celebrity Influence on Purchase Decision	14.52	0.002	Significant

Interpretation

Celebrity presence and customer purchasing decisions are significantly correlated, as indicated by the Chi-square value of 14.52 and the p-value of 0.002. The alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected because $p < 0.05$.

Conclusion

The current study comes to the conclusion that consumer behavior and purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by subliminal advertising. In order to affect consumers' subconscious minds, modern advertising employ subtle aspects including appealing colors, background music, repeated exposure, concealed symbols, celebrity endorsements, and emotional appeal. These subtle cues boost product recall, raise brand awareness, and promote both planned and impulsive purchases. The study's conclusions show that young consumers are more susceptible to being swayed by subliminal advertising strategies, particularly if they are exposed to digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and television. The most effective factors influencing customer purchase intention were determined to be visual attraction and repeated exposure. Subliminal cues significantly improve purchasing behavior, brand preference, and brand recall, according to statistical study using the t-test, correlation, and chi-square test.

The ethical issues of subliminal advertising are also highlighted in the study. While many consumers view it as a helpful marketing tactic when applied honestly and openly, others believe it to be deceptive and manipulative. Therefore, in order to sustain consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty, marketers should use subliminal tactics responsibly and communicate honestly. All things considered, subliminal advertising is a successful marketing tactic that has a significant impact on consumer psychology and purchasing behavior. To guarantee long-lasting connections between companies and customers, its success should be counterbalanced with moral marketing strategies.

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