**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIETAL OPINIONS ON SURROGATE MARKETING: ETHICAL OR MISLEADING – A CASE STUDY OF VIMAL PAN MASALA IN AMRAVATI CITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates societal perceptions of surrogate marketing and its ethical implications, focusing on Vimal Pan Masala in Amravati City. Surrogate marketing, a widely debated strategy, enables brands to promote restricted products through indirect means such as lifestyle events, accessories, and media sponsorships. This research examines whether such strategies are perceived as ethical brand promotion or misleading tactics to bypass advertising norms.

A survey-based methodology was used to collect data from consumers in Amravati City, analyzing their awareness, perceptions, and trust in surrogate advertisements. The study compares consumer opinions on the effectiveness and ethicality of surrogate marketing, identifying key factors influencing public sentiment. Findings reveal that while surrogate marketing enhances brand recall, it also raises ethical concerns regarding transparency and consumer manipulation.

Insights from this study offer valuable guidance for businesses and policymakers in understanding public attitudes toward surrogate marketing. By assessing consumer trust and ethical considerations, brands can refine their advertising strategies to align with societal expectations. Furthermore, this research contributes to academic discussions on the evolving impact of surrogate marketing on consumer behavior and brand perception.

**Keywords:** Surrogate Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Ethical Advertising, Brand Trust, Vimal Pan Masala, Public Perception, Marketing Ethics, Consumer Engagement, Celebrity Endorsements

**INTRODUCTION**

In today's dynamic marketing landscape, brands continuously seek innovative ways to engage their target audience. Surrogate marketing has emerged as both a controversial and influential approach, particularly in industries where direct advertising is prohibited. This strategy, which involves indirectly promoting a product or service through related goods or events, has sparked ongoing debate over its ethicality and impact on consumer behavior. One notable example is Vimal Pan Masala, which employs surrogate marketing to enhance brand visibility and strengthen consumer recall in a highly competitive market.

Surrogate marketing subtly promotes restricted products by leveraging permissible goods or activities such as lifestyle events, accessories, or sponsorships. This method helps brands navigate advertising restrictions while fostering associations with a particular lifestyle or image. However, it also raises important questions regarding consumer awareness and the ethics of such campaigns. By focusing on

Vimal Pan Masala, this study explores societal perspectives on whether surrogate marketing represents a legitimate branding technique or a deceptive means of circumventing advertising regulations.

Marketing ethics and consumer trust play a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions. While surrogate marketing can enhance brand recognition and positive associations, it also has the potential to erode consumer trust if perceived as misleading or manipulative. This research aims to analyze how surrogate marketing influences consumer perceptions and whether it aligns with societal expectations of ethical transparency. Additionally, it investigates the cultural and regulatory factors that shape public sentiment toward this advertising approach.

This study is significant as it provides businesses and policymakers with insights into the societal impact of surrogate marketing. By understanding consumer perspectives, brands can fine-tune their marketing strategies to align with ethical norms and foster stronger relationships with their audiences. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the broader implications of surrogate marketing, contributing to ongoing discussions about its influence on consumer behavior and brand trust.

Looking ahead, this study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for businesses utilizing surrogate marketing while promoting greater consumer awareness of its effects. As marketing landscapes and consumer attitudes evolve, this research offers a structured approach to navigating the ethical and strategic complexities of surrogate marketing. Additionally, it lays the groundwork for future academic studies exploring the long-term effects of this practice on brand perception and consumer loyalty.

**OBJECTIVES**

* To analyze the societal perceptions of surrogate marketing practices used by Vimal Pan Masala in Amravati City.
* To evaluate the ethical implications of surrogate advertising and its alignment with consumer expectations and regulatory standards.
* To examine the role of celebrity endorsements in influencing public opinion and consumer trust regarding surrogate advertisements.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

* Pomal and Bharti (2024) conducted a study on the influence of surrogate advertising on public perception in Chhattisgarh. Their research, titled The Impact of Surrogate Advertising on Public Perception and Awareness in Chhattisgarh, utilized a sample of 200 respondents from Raipur. The findings indicated notable generational differences in awareness levels. Younger individuals, particularly those aged 26–35 years, demonstrated a greater understanding of surrogate advertising techniques. However, skepticism remained prevalent regarding the effectiveness of regulatory measures in limiting such advertisements. The study underscored the necessity for public awareness campaigns to educate consumers on the ethical and social implications of surrogate advertising (Pomal & Bharti, 2024).
* Walia and Gill (2023) explored the role of celebrity endorsements in surrogate advertising through their study, Empirical Assessment of Celebrity-Backed Surrogate Advertising Effectiveness. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze data from Punjab and Haryana, the study revealed that attributes such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise significantly impact consumer purchase decisions. The research emphasized that surrogate advertising enhances brand recall and consumer engagement, particularly when endorsed by credible and relatable celebrity figures (Walia & Gill, 2023).
* Justus (2023), in the study Surrogate Advertising: The Positive Side, examined the strategic function of surrogate advertising in sustaining brand presence within restricted markets. The research highlighted how companies leverage cultural nuances and regulatory loopholes to promote banned products indirectly. It was found that successful surrogate advertising often aligns the advertised product with aspirational themes, thereby fostering greater consumer acceptance of the primary restricted product (Justus, 2023).
* Chavan and Patil (2022) analyzed the marketing strategies employed by Indian companies in surrogate advertising in their study Strategies in Surrogate Advertising: A Study on Indian Companies. The research focused on the effectiveness of surrogate advertising in promoting restricted products like alcohol and tobacco. The findings demonstrated that surrogate advertisements successfully enhance brand recall and consumer engagement through innovative techniques such as promoting unrelated products like music CDs and calendars. Additionally, the study emphasized the role of brand loyalty and celebrity endorsements in reinforcing consumer perceptions, concluding that despite ethical concerns, surrogate advertising remains a crucial marketing approach (Chavan & Patil, 2022).

**METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive research approach to examine societal perceptions of surrogate marketing practices, specifically focusing on Vimal Pan Masala advertisements in Amravati City. Data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed to 100 randomly selected respondents who were familiar with surrogate advertising. The questionnaire included both close ended and Likert scale questions aimed at assessing awareness, ethical opinions, and the influence of celebrity endorsements. Primary data obtained from the survey was supplemented with secondary data from academic journals, reports, and previous studies. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentage analysis, with the results represented through charts and graphs to identify trends and interpret public sentiment regarding the ethicality and effectiveness of surrogate marketing.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINITION**

Marketing strategies for products like tobacco and alcohol have faced increasing restrictions over the years, leading to the rise of surrogate marketing. This practice involves promoting substitute products such as soft drinks, music albums, or lifestyle events as a way to indirectly advertise banned goods. Vimal Pan Masala serves as a significant example of a brand that has successfully used surrogate marketing to maintain its visibility in the market while complying with advertising regulations.

Despite its effectiveness, surrogate marketing has become a controversial topic, sparking debates about its ethical implications and its influence on consumer behavior. The core issue revolves around the blurring of lines between legitimate promotional efforts and manipulative tactics. These advertisements help build brand recognition and consumer recall but often circumvent regulatory frameworks, raising questions about their ethicality, transparency, and intent. The involvement of celebrities in such campaigns further complicates matters, as their endorsements can lend credibility to products that may otherwise face public disapproval.

This research aims to bridge the gap in understanding how society perceives surrogate marketing, specifically within the context of Amravati city. The focus will be on whether such practices are viewed as ethical marketing strategies or deceptive tactics. By exploring public awareness of surrogate advertisements, their impact on consumer behavior, and their alignment with ethical marketing principles, the study seeks to provide insights into the societal implications of surrogate advertising.

Through analyzing key factors such as consumer trust, celebrity endorsements, and cultural and demographic influences, this study will offer valuable perspectives for policymakers and businesses. The findings will help stakeholders navigate the ethical challenges associated with surrogate marketing and aid in making more informed decisions regarding its use in modern marketing strategies.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The survey conducted among 100 respondents in Amravati City provided valuable insights into public awareness and perception of surrogate marketing strategies used by Vimal Pan Masala. The results indicated that approximately 78% of respondents were aware of surrogate advertising techniques, identifying brand placements through music events, bottled products, and celebrity promotions. When asked about the ethicality of such marketing, 64% of participants considered it misleading, expressing concerns that it bypasses advertising laws meant to protect consumers from harmful products.

However, the effectiveness of surrogate marketing was evident 72% of respondents agreed that it increased brand recall, even if they disagreed with the approach. The study also found that celebrity endorsements significantly influenced consumer opinions, with 59% stating that the involvement of well-known public figures enhanced their trust in the advertised product, despite ethical reservations. Interestingly, younger respondents (ages 18–30) were more accepting of surrogate advertisements, whereas older participants (above 40) were more critical and cautious.

These findings highlight a critical tension between marketing impact and ethical responsibility. While surrogate marketing succeeds in maintaining visibility for restricted products, a significant portion of the public questions its moral and legal implications. The discussion underscores the need for clearer advertising regulations and greater consumer education to ensure transparency and protect public interest.

**CONCLUSION**

Perception of Surrogate Marketing: Most respondents view Vimal’s surrogate advertisements as misleading and unethical. While some appreciate the creativity, many feel it violates consumer trust by indirectly promoting harmful products.

Celebrity Influence & Accountability: The majority believe that celebrities strongly influence public opinion and should be held accountable for endorsing surrogate brands. Their involvement raises both trust and ethical concerns.

Need for Regulation: A large number of respondents support stricter regulations to control surrogate advertising. The study highlights the need for transparent and responsible marketing practices that align with public interest.

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