

# DECEPTIVE POINT-OF-SALE MARKETING TACTICS IMPACT ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS WITH AN ATTITUDE AS A MEDIATOR

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**Abstract:** The study examines how misleading sales techniques, such as deceptive point-of-sale practices, affect customers' willingness to buy things or their purchase intention in Iraq, where laws protecting consumers are weak and uncontrolled. The researchers also looked at how a customer's overall impression (attitude) of a product plays a role in this connection. The surveyed 400 shoppers at various supermarkets in Erbil, Iraq. 382 valid responses were received. A Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data and test the study's hypothesis. The findings show that deceptive sales tactics hurt a customer's desire to buy. Additionally, a customer's perspective on a product plays a part in the link between those tactics and purchase intention. These results suggest that honest marketing practices benefit both businesses and customers by creating positive feelings towards products and ultimately increasing sales.

**keywords:** Deceptive practices, point of sale deceptive marketing, consumers' attitude, buying behavior, purchase intention.



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# LAS TÁCTICAS ENGAÑOSAS DE MARKETING EN EL PUNTO DE VENTA IMPACTAN EN LAS INTENCIONES DE COMPRA DEL CONSUMIDOR CON UNA ACTITUD COMO MEDIADORA

**Resumen:** El estudio examina cómo las técnicas de venta engañosas, como las prácticas engañosas en los puntos de venta, afectan la disposición de los clientes a comprar cosas o su intención de compra en Irak, donde las leyes que protegen a los consumidores son débiles y están incontroladas. Los investigadores también observaron cómo la impresión general (actitud) del cliente sobre un producto juega un papel en este sentido. Encuestaron a 400 compradores en varios supermercados en Erbil, Irak. Se recibieron 382 respuestas válidas. Se utilizó un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales de mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS-SEM) para analizar los datos y probar la hipótesis del estudio. Los hallazgos muestran que las tácticas de venta engañosas perjudican el deseo de compra del cliente. Además, la perspectiva del cliente sobre un producto juega un papel en el vínculo entre esas tácticas y la intención de compra. Estos resultados sugieren que las prácticas de marketing honestas benefician tanto a las empresas como a los clientes al crear sentimientos positivos hacia los productos y, en última instancia, aumentar las ventas.

**Palabras clave:** Prácticas engañosas, marketing engañoso en el punto de venta, actitud de los consumidores, comportamiento de compra, intención de compra.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has brought immense challenges to marketing, with social media heavily influencing consumer behavior everywhere (Sima et al., 2020). While digital marketing offers powerful tools, some marketers resort to deceptive practices to mislead customers. These tactics, however, can backfire, damaging a business's reputation in the long run (Wang et al., 2023).

Research indicates that employing deceitful tactics, as highlighted by Wilson et al. (2022), is not a viable long-term strategy. Such practices have been shown to prompt consumers to seek alternatives, thereby undermining a company's competitive edge and tarnishing its reputation as ethically dubious. Consequently, this translates into diminished profits. Deceptive marketing, as underscored by Baltezarević (2023), is widely recognized as a significant drawback in the marketing field. When businesses disseminate misleading information, it leads to ill-informed purchasing decisions, adversely affecting both parties involved. The primary objective of branding and marketing is to cater to consumer needs; hence, the dissemination of deceptive information results in financial and temporal losses for customers. Employing detrimental marketing and advertising strategies instigates confusion among consumers, ultimately culminating in dissatisfaction. Frequently, such

misleading advertisements obscure critical details, potentially contradicting the promises conveyed in the ad. Fabricated warranties may be advertised, only to be disavowed when consumers attempt to make claims. Additionally, concealing hidden costs and repercussions poses significant health risks to consumers.

Furthermore, deceptive marketing practices inflict harm not just on consumers, but also on businesses and their employees. Consumers stand to lose money on products or services that fail to meet their expectations. Moreover, dissatisfied consumers often resort to negative word-of-mouth publicity and social media comments, and may even initiate legal action (Arruda Filho et al., 2021). This can result in significant damage to a company's reputation and financial standing. Additionally, customers may directly hold company employees accountable for faulty products, creating an unfavorable work environment. Such adverse circumstances can lead to employee layoffs or decreased productivity (Fallah Shayan et al., 2022).

Deception in Iraqi marketing seems very different compared to other places. There are a few reasons for this, like weak laws, bribery being common and the way the government is structured. (Al-dinouri, 2022). Alazzabi et al. (2020) points to corruption and deception being fueled by a lack of strong faith and inadequate teachings of Islamic principles among many Iraqi businesses. Similarly, the absence of ethical standards in businesses to a prevailing culture of greediness in the business environment. Abbott & Snidal (2021) blame the issue on two things: a lack of government oversight such as regulatory agencies and consumer protection groups that don't have much power. Bar Lev et al. (2022) point out that Iraqi consumers are more likely to tolerate deceptive practices for two reasons: First, they generally expect to be tricked in business dealings resulting in consumer pessimism. Second, they don't know how or are hesitant to report such activities such as cultural illiteracy regarding reporting. This environment makes it easier for deception to become widespread. Educating consumers to assert their rights by seeking legal action and demanding punitive damages for marketing deception is suggested as a means to combat the issue. Therefore, Iraqi government needs to take quick action to deal with this problem and protect its citizens from getting hurt by misleading marketing tactics. This study investigates deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale (POS) in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdistan Region. It highlights the lack of government regulations and enforcement to curb such practices.

A review of existing research (Al-Rabaiwi & Al-Bayati, 2020; Al-Heali, 2020; Aljaburi & Mohammed, 2020) revealed a gap in understanding the mediating role of consumer attitudes. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the impact of deceptive POS marketing practices on the attitudes and purchase intentions of Iraqi consumers in Kurdistan.

This study is structured in the following manner: Introduction section gives an overview of the prevalence of deceptive marketing tactics at the point of sale and their impact on consumer behavior and attitudes. Review of literature in section two will present an overview of deceptive marketing practices, review of empirical studies on the effects of deceptive marketing tactics on consumer behavior and conceptual model outlining the relationship between deceptive marketing, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions. In the third section, methodology will explain the sampling method and sample characteristics and measurement instruments for deceptive marketing tactics, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions and data analysis techniques. In section four, the findings will show description of the sample characteristics, presentation of statistical results regarding the impact of deceptive marketing tactics on consumer purchase intentions and discussion by interpretation of findings in the context of existing literature. Finally, conclusion will summarize the key findings.

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## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature of this study focuses on existing previous research. It highlights two key areas of research: The link between deceptive marketing practices and consumer attitudes. Also, the influence of these practices on consumer purchase intentions.

Deceptive marketing entails a disingenuous approach employed by marketers to augment sales and maximize profits. However, the gains from such practices are often short-lived, as consumers who uncover these deceptive tactics tend to be deterred from future purchases (He et al., 2022). Aditya (2001) identified several ways that marketing can be deceptive at the point of sale, including misleading packaging, fake pricing, and deceptive sales techniques. This study builds on that idea by looking at how these deceptive practices impact customers' willingness to buy things.

### 2.1 *Point-of-sale marketing deception*

Deception at the point of sale when customers are paying isn't random, it's a planned strategy that marketers use in stores to convince customers to buy more (Heidekamp, 2021). Through point-of-sale marketing campaigns, marketers aim to craft immersive buyer experiences, increase brand awareness, and boost sales through deceitful means. There are many ways marketers can deceive customers at the checkout (point of sale), including: Misleading packaging: This could involve things like making a product look bigger than it is, using unclear labeling, or hiding important information. Also, fake sale prices: This could involve things like displaying a higher "original" price that was never actually charged or using confusing price tags. In addition to, deceptive interactive marketing: This could involve things like salespeople giving false information about a product or using high-pressure tactics to rush a customer into a purchase.

Deception in packaging is a big way marketers trick customers at the store. They might design the package to look like a more famous brand, hoping you'll grab it without noticing the difference. It is commonly found in many countries and implemented frequently (Alqaysi & Zahari, 2022). This packaging trickery is called brand confusion. There are three main reasons why customers might fall victim to it: Firstly, customer characteristics such as how familiar they are with different brands. Secondly, environmental factors including how crowded the store is or how well-lit the shelves are. Thirdly, marketing activities like how the deceptive packaging is designed and displayed in the store (Qayyum et al., 2023). The distinction between deception and simple brand misperception often hinges on the advertiser's intent. However, in the case of generic brands, companies often attempt to imitate a reputable brand with the aim of capturing market share (Cox, 2023). Nevertheless, the similarity in packaging can unintentionally lead to confusion in consumer cognitive processing, this trickery with packaging leads to customers accidentally buying a lesser-known brand because they think it's a more famous one. The packaging itself is the main culprit for this confusion about which brand the product actually belongs to. (Otto et al., 2021).

The second POS practice is the price. Price is widely recognized as an essential component of the marketing mix crucial for achieving firm goals. Crafting a pricing strategy is a delicate matter, as it profoundly impacts company revenue and growth (Subrahmanyam & Arif, 2022). Pricing deception encompasses any pricing scheme likely to deceive consumers and influence their attitudes or behaviors towards purchasing a product or service. Not all pricing tricks are obviously deceptive, some stores use small text (fine print) or confusing price differences to mislead customers. For example, a common tactic is to show the current price next to a higher price with a line through it (strike-through pricing). This might make you think the higher price

was the original price and is no longer offered. But if the higher price wasn't actually charged recently, then this is a misleading way to advertise the discount.

Unlike traditional marketing campaigns that blast a one-size-fits-all message, interactive marketing flips the script and puts the customer at the center. It uses technology to track what customers do and what they're looking for, then tailors marketing messages directly to those needs and desires. Interactive marketing is all about having a conversation with your customers, responding to their actions, and actively working to solve their problems (Kovalenko, 2022). The practice of interactive marketing clearly identifies the concept, recognized as event-driven marketing, is a strategy that emphasizes the two-way communication aspect and accurately details what triggers interactive marketing efforts. While it has been utilized in electronic marketing for over a decade, it has evolved to become more refined and tailored to address consumer's individual needs and preferences. Traditionally, marketing campaigns involved creating advertisements and distributing them through various media channels, then waiting for consumers' responses. As technology keeps getting better and new ideas emerge, older marketing methods are being replaced by more successful ones that allow for back-and-forth communication between businesses and customers (Rehman et al., 2022).

When comparing Iraq to regions with similar market dynamics and consumer protection laws, it's crucial to consider the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Countries within this region often share similarities in terms of economic structures, cultural norms, and regulatory frameworks. Countries like Jordan and Egypt share some similarities with Iraq in terms of market dynamics and consumer protection laws (Harvey & Riedel, 2021). These countries also have emerging market economies, where consumer protection laws are in place but may not be rigorously enforced. Similar challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic hurdles, and a lack of transparency might be present in these economies. A study by Elsayad (2024) examine customers' attitudes and intentions in Egypt and showed that social influence, perceived usefulness and perceived trust are significant antecedents of attitude and attitude directly influence behavioral intention. Similarly, Sayed et al. (2021) showed that there's a significant positive indirect impact of green brand knowledge on consumers' green purchasing intention via attitude towards green brands. Likewise, a Jordanian study by Hashem & Al-zyoud (2020) showed that deceptive marketing has a major impact in pushing consumers towards adopting immediate, unplanned, purchase decisions in order to reach a stage where they are certain that the behavior they have taken is justified.

## **2.2 Consumer's Attitude**

According to the theory of Planned Behavior: People are more likely to buy a product they believe is ethical (Sun, 2020). Conversely, Un Nisa et al. (2022) asserted that unclear and deceptive information within marketing campaigns can alter a customer's perception of the information received, subsequently influencing attitudes towards any advertisements related to the promoted brand. Research undertaken by Wong & Tzeng (2021) regarding consumer attitudes and purchase intentions concerning organic food unveiled a notable correlation between attitude and the intention to purchase organic food products. Additional studies that focus on consumer attitudes towards sustainable and ethical consumption such as Garcia-Orozco et al. (2021), it concluded that variables like education, income and culture have positive effect on consumer behavior of sustainable food products. Further studies by Madhani (2020) and Iqbal & Siddiqui (2019) determined that utilizing unethical and deceptive marketing strategies can lead to different outcomes among consumers, ultimately resulting in financial setbacks and the loss of customers.

The adverse repercussions of deceptive practices result in a decline in the intention to repurchase a product. Findings from a study conducted by Rocklage & Fazio (2020) indicate that deceived consumers' sentiments yield unfavorable outcomes for deceptive marketers. Systematic investigations regarding consumers' perceptions of deception and their buying intentions remain limited. Several research studies have also shown a negative relationship between deceptive marketing practices and consumer loyalty (Iqbal & Siddiqui, 2019), alongside a decline in sales (Sadiqe, 2023). Moreover, misleading consumers through deceptive pricing tactics can have detrimental effects on any company employing such marketing strategies (Gourkar, 2023). However, there is a scarcity of literature that investigates the connection between deceptive marketing practices and consumer purchasing intentions, particularly considering the mediating role of consumer's attitudes toward deception.

### **2.3 Consumers' Purchase intention**

Several researchers, including Wijekoon & Sabri (2021) and Peña-García et al (2020), highlight that a customer's desire to buy something (purchase intention) is the final key stage in the buying process, both online and offline. This is because it directly influences their buying behavior, making it a crucial factor for marketers to understand. Purchase intention reflects a customer's readiness to buy (Tilahun et al., 2023). It arises when a customer is willing to accept a seller's offer and is driven by a desire to fulfill their wants and needs through the product's benefits (Li et al., 2022). Likewise, Peña-García et al. (2020) described purchase intention as the predisposition of a consumer to engage in a purchase following behavioral stimuli. In their study, the authors defined purchase intention as the readiness of consumers to buy a specific product or service, either online or from a physical store. However, they noted that the actual decision to make a purchase is contingent upon the consumer's behavior.

### **2.4 Hypothesis Development**

#### **2.4.1 Deceptive Point of Sale marketing and purchasing intention**

In this article, the author aims to stimulate readers' curiosity regarding the impact of deceptive marketing practices on consumers' purchasing behaviors. Additionally, it delves into customers' expectations regarding products and their attitudes towards businesses' marketing practices. The proposed model seeks to capture the cognitive and emotional states of customers during the product purchase process and their subsequent buying intentions following encounters with deception or awareness of misleading tactics employed by sellers. In a prior study conducted by Yakin et al. (2023) it was suggested that customers are prone to fostering brand loyalty if they encounter no deception during the purchase process, consequently decreasing their propensity to switch brands. Conversely, encountering deception may prompt customers to return the product, switch to an alternative brand, and permanently abandon their intentions to repurchase (Wang, 2021).

Despite the numerous studies focusing on addressing dissatisfaction, to the researcher's awareness, no article has yet delved into customers' post-purchase behavior stemming from cognitive dissonance associated with deceptive packaging or underfilled products. Customer dissatisfaction presents a substantial challenge to businesses, as complaints from customers indicate dissatisfaction, and the chance to rectify and regain consumer trust may be forfeited. This missed opportunity can lead to negative word-of-mouth and undermine customer loyalty (Leal & Ferreira, 2020). A study by Zhao & Yao (2021) found that customers' attitudes towards filled packages were positively correlated with their purchase behavior. Additionally, higher levels of deception were associated with negative attitudes towards repurchase intentions. Consequently, customers may switch brands and express negative opinions about them.

Consumer price awareness, as discussed by Cakici & Tekeli (2022), is indicative of value perception by customers. Prior research has emphasized the crucial role of price in influencing customers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Bhutto et al., 2022; Matin et al., 2021; Fortagne & Lis, 2024). According to Fortagne & Lis (2024) for many buyers, higher prices signal superior quality, attracting a certain segment of customers while deterring others. Some studies suggest that luxury brands typically command higher prices to convey their prestigious status (Ho et al., 2023). Conversely, lowering the price of a brand can be detrimental as it may diminish the brand's perceived value (Qiao & Xing, 2022). One study by Toni et al. (2021) suggests that the general price of a product can affect a customer's impression of its attitude. Another study by Fraccaro et al. (2021) proposed specific pricing strategies, like using odd prices for luxury items. However, no research has yet looked at how deceptive pricing tactics, like misleading displays, affect a customer's willingness to buy something or purchase intention.

Several studies have shown a clear link between ethical practices in marketing and positive customer sentiment. Unethical tactics, as noted by Un Nisa et al. (2022), can hurt a customer's impression and ultimately their desire to buy. Research by Chaffey & Smith (2022) suggests that clear and honest advertising in both traditional and online marketing builds trust and leads to positive customer feelings. Massoudi's work (2020, 2023) explored how ethical treatment during interactions with customers fosters positive attitudes and a greater willingness to buy. Yuniarti et al. (2022) further solidify this connection by demonstrating that ethical behavior by online retailers directly influences customer purchase intention, with a positive attitude acting as a bridge between the two. Based on these findings, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

*H1: Point-of-sale marketing deceptive practices have a negative effect purchase intention*

#### **2.4.2 Deceptive Point of sale marketing and consumer attitude**

As marketing deception becomes increasingly widespread, customers must be vigilant to avoid falling victim to deceit, particularly in the realm of online shopping. There's a risk that customers might unintentionally disclose sensitive information to scammers or fraudulent entities, leading to identity theft. Therefore, the gathering of personal data should be approached cautiously, as the integrity of a company plays a pivotal role in its business success (Aldboush & Ferdous, 2023). In this context, consumer engagement with any business, whether physical or online, significantly hinges on the trustworthiness of the firm. Consequently, if consumers harbor doubts about the credibility of a physical or online store, their inclination to purchase products from that store may be hindered. Thus, the researcher proposes a hypothesis grounded in aspects of point-of-sale marketing deception.

Shoppers might be confused these days - groceries seem to disappear faster than before, even though the packages look the same size. This is because some companies are shrinking the amount of product in the package without lowering the price. They might also change the package design to hide this transaction (Patel et al., 2020). When companies face rising costs, they have a few choices: raise prices, use cheaper ingredients or give you less product. One sneaky tactic is called slack filling. This is where the package stays the same size, but the company puts in less of the actual product and fills the rest with air. Research by Yao et al. (2020) even suggests people care more about the size of the package than the price on it!

Deceptive packaging, where the package looks bigger than the actual contents, has been a concern for a while, with researchers like Alqaysi & Zahari (2022), Steenis et al. (2023), and Sun & Li (2023) studying its impact on how likely people are to buy something or their purchase intention. Study by Dong & Elashkar (2021) showed people are more likely to buy

something if they expect the package to be full, and Veeramangala & Anitha (2021) found that design elements on the package, both how it looks (visual cues) and what it says (verbal cues), can also influence how likely someone is to buy it.

In understanding how consumers make choices (consumer behavior studies), price is a major factor for companies selling products around the world (global marketing), especially for brands that are recognized everywhere (universal brands), as indicated by research conducted by Negm (2023), Zhao & Yao (2021) and Toni et al. (2021). According to Ramadania et al. (2023), when prices of universal brands increase due to deception, consumers' attitudes towards purchasing local brands tend to improve. Conversely, Costa et al. (2021) found in their study that higher prices have a negative effect on attitudes towards purchase intention. Similarly, research by Bhutto et al. (2022) suggested that the price of a product is a significant factor influencing attitudes towards purchase among young Australian apparel consumers.

Instead of relying solely on traditional sales techniques, marketers are increasingly turning to interactive marketing. This approach focuses on engaging consumers directly and responding to their specific actions and preferences (Schweidel et al., 2022). The rise of online shopping, with consumers spending significant time browsing the internet, creates a new landscape for potential deception. This digital environment offers businesses vast opportunities to reach customers, but also raises questions about how marketing strategies should be adapted for this crucial space (Shaw et al., 2022). While previous studies have shown the positive impact of traditional advertising on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Brolin & Spångby, 2020; Soti, 2022), the effectiveness of these strategies in the interactive online realm needs further exploration.

One particular type of interactive marketing is advertising within video games, commonly referred to as "advergaming." These games can result in continuous exposure to the promoted brand, potentially leading to deception. Although players may encounter the brand's messaging and image, this exposure might not accurately reflect the brand's true essence. Studies indicate that interactivity itself can contribute to deception, especially when it is closely linked to the product being advertised (Chadwick & Stanyer, 2022). Based on these points, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis.

*H2: Deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale negatively impact consumers' attitudes towards the product.*

### **2.4.3 Consumer Attitude and purchasing intention**

There's a well-established link between a customer's impression of a product (attitude) and their willingness to buy it (purchase intention). This connection is supported by theories of consumer behavior, like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Several studies back this up. Chiu & Leng (2015) investigated the TPB and showed that attitude significantly impacts purchase intention. Similarly, Xue et al. (2021) found that attitude is a major factor influencing buying decisions, although other emotions like positive feelings can also play a role. This link between attitude and purchase intention has been confirmed in various contexts, including brand awareness (Duarte & Silva, 2020), clothing purchases (Abrar et al., 2021), and even organic food buying (Ayaviri-Nina et al., 2022). Interestingly, the researcher behind this study proposes the opposite: that deceptive marketing tactics might actually increase purchase intention. To investigate this idea, they formulated a hypothesis:

*H3: Iraqi consumers who have a more negative attitude towards deceptive marketing practices are less likely to have a high purchase intention.*



#### 2.4.4 Attitude and its mediating effect

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), attitude is considered to be a learned characteristic rather than an innate trait (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). This perspective aligns with marketers' belief that attitude can be influenced by marketing efforts. The TPB also supports the notion that attitude can impact consumers' intentions. Previous research, such as studies by Liu et al. (2020), Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2021) has demonstrated that marketing deception has a negative effect on attitudes towards advertisements. Additionally, various studies have highlighted the impact of negative attitudes towards a product particularly when customers have had unfavorable past experiences with marketers. Conversely, Huthasuhut et al. (2022) investigated attitude as a mediator of brand purchase intentions. The researchers built on the idea that a customer's overall impression of a brand (attitude) affects their desire to buy the brand's products (purchase intention). They proposed that there's a key difference, however: a customer's feelings about a brand's use of deception (attitude towards brand deception) and their feelings about deceptive marketing practices in general (attitude towards deceptive marketing) have separate effects on their purchase decisions.

Najar & Hamid (2021) established a strong correlation between customer attitude and purchase intentions when acquiring energy-efficient household appliances. Moreover, a positive attitude was associated with customers' intentions to adopt energy-efficient practices. Similarly, a study by Almrafee & Akaileh (2023) demonstrated a significant impact of attitudes on the intention to purchase renewable energy technology.

A study conducted by Costa et al. (2021) uncovered a significant association between ethical products and consumers' attitudes towards purchasing intentions. They proposed that customers' awareness of an ethical product elicits a favorable attitude towards the product, consequently leading to positive intentions to purchase. Similarly, another study by Chetioui et al. (2020) identified that trustworthiness in marketing campaigns creates a positive attitude among consumers, thereby fostering positive purchase intentions. Consequently, the authors suggest that attitude could serve as a mediator in linking deceptive marketing practices and consumer purchase intentions. This suggests that deceptive marketing strategies can influence purchase intention through their impact on attitude. The researcher proposes that a customer's attitude of the product itself can act as a mediator to explain the connection between deceptive marketing tactics at the point of sale and a customer's desire to purchase. They formulated a hypothesis to investigate this idea:

*H4: Attitude towards the product mediates the relationship between point-of-sale marketing deception and purchase intention.*

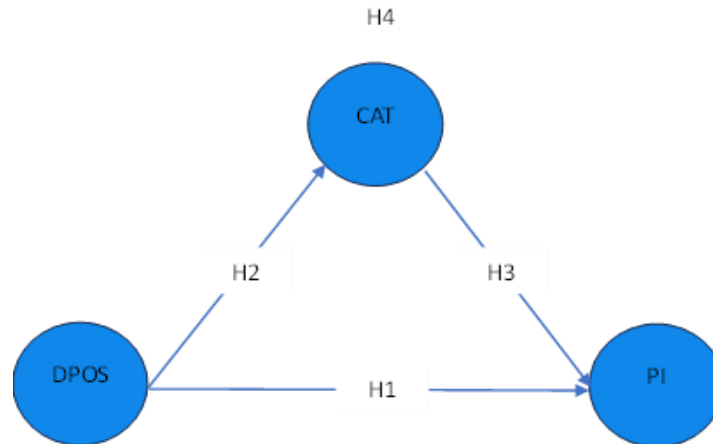


Figure 1. Research Model

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample and Data Collection

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate how point-of-sale deceptive marketing practices influence consumers' purchase intentions, with their attitude towards the product acting as a mediator. The participants in this study were consist of adult consumers aged 18 and above residing in various areas in Erbil, Iraq. The sample was diverse and targeted different demographic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Data were collected through structured surveys administered in-person to insure the feasibility and accessibility of the target population. The research randomly surveyed 400 consumers at local supermarkets in Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq. After excluding incomplete questionnaires, the analysis utilized 382 valid responses. The study adapted the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by modifying it to fit the specific context of deceptive marketing practices, as compared to the original TPB (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). This revised framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

#### 3.2 Measure

The questionnaire was divided into two section, demographic section providing insights into the sample features in terms of gender, age, income and frequency of shopping. The second section, dependent and independent variables represented by 15 statements with 5 items for each variable. Point-of-sale deceptive marketing as an independent variable was adapted from Zarazua de Rubens et al. (2018) with 5 statements. Participants were asked to rate the frequency and types of deceptive practices they encounter during their shopping experiences, using a Likert scale. Attitude as a mediating variable was adapted from Alqaysi & Zahari (2022) with 5 statements. Consumer attitudes toward products, brands, and shopping experiences was assessed using established scales, capturing dimensions such as trust, satisfaction, and perceived value. Purchase intention as a dependent variable was adapted from Peña-García et al. (2020) with 5 statements. Participants indicated their likelihood of purchasing products or services under various conditions, including scenarios involving deceptive sales tactics.

A pilot test involving ten marketing experts was conducted to obtain feedback on the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, no modifications were deemed necessary for the final version. Also, ethical guidelines were applied throughout the research process to ensure the confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent of the participants. All personal information collected will be anonymized and stored securely.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed and the hypothesis were tested using Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This technique is well-suited for investigating complex relationships between unobserved (latent) variables, like those used in this research. PLS-SEM is popular among researchers for its ability to handle complex models and its flexibility in data requirements (Hair et al., 2019). The demographic variables are presented in Table 1, providing insights into the sample features in terms of gender, age, income and frequency of shopping.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of respondents

Variable	Label	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	184	48.17
	Female	198	51.83
Age	18-30 years old	159	41.64
	31-40 years old	77	20.17
	41-50 years old	88	23.02
	Above 50 years	58	15.17
Income	Less than \$1,000	177	46.33
	\$1,000-2,000	119	31.15
	More than \$2,000	86	22.52
Frequency of shopping	Once every week	142	37.18
	Once every 2 weeks	181	47.38
	Once per 1 month	59	15.44
Total		382	100

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

In the context of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), outer loadings analysis is a critical step that assesses the strength of the relationship between individual measurement items and their corresponding latent variables. Outer loadings are essentially correlation coefficients that indicate how well each measurement item reflects the latent variable it's supposed to represent. They range from -1 to 1. According to Hair et al. (2019), strong relationships between individual survey questions (measurement items) and the underlying concepts they represent (latent variables) are essential for reliable results. They recommend a minimum outer loading of 0.70, which indicates a strong connection. As shown in Table

2, all items in this study exceed this threshold, ranging from 0.898 to 0.922. This suggests the survey questions effectively capture the intended concepts, demonstrating good construct validity.

The study then assessed the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scales using two common methods: composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha (CA). According to Hair et al. (2019), both measures should ideally be above 0.70 to indicate good reliability. As presented in Table 2, all the CR and CA values exceeded 0.70, demonstrating that the measurement scales possess strong internal consistency and reliability. Subsequent, the study then evaluated the convergent validity of each construct, which assesses how well the measurement items capture the intended underlying concept. A common measure for this is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which ideally should be above 0.5 according to Hair et al. (2019). As shown in Table 2, all AVE scores in this study exceeded 0.5, indicating that the measurement items successfully capture their respective constructs. Table 2 shows below the factor loading.

**Table 2.** Factor Loading

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Consumer Attitude (CAT)	CAT1	0.921	0.903	0.949	0.859
	CAT2	0.912			
	CAT3	0.889			
	CAT4	0.921			
	CAT5	0.969			
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	0.795	0.898	0.923	0.638
	PI2	0.783			
	PI3	0.732			
	PI4	0.833			
	PI5	0.881			
Deceptive Point of sale (DPOS)	DPOS1	0.843	0.922	0.954	0.745
	DPOS2	0.885			
	DPOS3	0.854			
	DPOS4	0.881			
	DPOS5	0.878			

Moreover, the author assessed the discriminant validity of the constructs, which ensures they are distinct and capture unique aspects. As Hair et al. (2019) suggest, two methods are commonly used: Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Fornell-Larcker criterion: This method requires the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct to be higher than its correlations with all other constructs. As shown in Table 3, every construct’s AVE is indeed higher than its correlations with others, indicating no issue with discriminant validity based on this criterion.

**Table 3.** Fornell & Larcker Criterion

	CAT	PI	DPOS
Consumer Attitude	<b>0.905</b>		

Purchase Intention	0.664	<b>0.779</b>	
Deceptive Point of sale	0.588	0.656	<b>0.873</b>

Another criterion for assessing discriminant validity is the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Hair et al. (2019) suggests that an HTMT value below 0.90 indicates good discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values in this study are lower than 0.90. Based on the results from all four phases (reliability, convergent validity, and both Fornell-Larcker and HTMT criteria for discriminant validity), the study concludes that the measurement model exhibits good psychometric properties (reliability and validity). This allows the analysis to proceed to the structural model in the next section, where the hypothesized relationships between the variables will be tested.

**Table 4.** Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	CAT	PI	DPOS
Consumer Attitude			
Purchase Intention	0.728		
Deceptive Point of sale	0.624	0.689	

#### 4.2 The Structural Model

To assess the significance of the hypothesized relationships and test the model's explanatory power, the study employed bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2019). Bootstrapping is a statistical technique that helps estimate the standard errors of the model's coefficients. One key measure used is the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (purchase intention - PI) explained by the independent variable (attitude towards product - CAT) and any other factors included in the model. According to Lasaiba & Arfa (2023),  $R^2$  values can be interpreted as follows: Less than 0.19 is weak explanatory power. From 0.19 to 0.33 is considered a moderate explanatory power. Range from .33 to 0.67 is considered a strong explanatory power. Above 0.67: is said to be a very strong explanatory power. As shown in Table 4, the  $R^2$  values for attitude towards product (CAT) and purchase intention (PI) are 0.305 and 0.278, respectively. These values suggest a low to moderate explanatory power for the model. Also, to assess the model's ability to predict purchase intention (PI) in new situations, the study employed the  $Q^2$  value. This value is calculated using a blindfolding procedure in SmartPLS software (Sarstedt et al., 2022). A positive  $Q^2$  value (greater than zero) indicates that the model has predictive capability.

As shown in Table 5, the  $Q^2$  value in this study is 0.324, which is indeed greater than zero. This suggests that the model has some predictive relevance, meaning it can potentially predict PI beyond the data used to develop it.

**Table 5.** Coefficient of determination

	<i>R Square</i>	<i>R Square Adjusted</i>	<i>Q<sup>2</sup></i>
Attitude	0.305	0.352	0.281
Purchase Intention	0.278	0.281	0.324

### 4.3 Hypothesis testing and result

The study investigated the hypothesized relationships using the data presented in Table 6. The results indicate that point-of-sale marketing deceptive practices have a negative effect purchase intention. This is supported by  $\beta = 0.566$ , the p-value of  $0.00 < 0.05$  besides t-values of  $9.618 > 1.96$ . Hence H1 is supported. Stating that point-of-sale marketing deception influences negatively impact consumers' purchase intention is confirmed.

Furthermore, the results in Table 6 reveal that deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale negatively impact consumers' attitudes towards the product. This is evident from the following result where  $\beta = 0.621$ , the p-value of  $0.00 < 0.05$  besides t-values of  $10.329 > 1.96$ . Hence H2 is supported. Consequently, its stats that point-of-sale marketing deception directly influences consumer attitude is confirmed.

The study further examined that Iraqi consumers who have a more negative attitude towards deceptive marketing practices are less likely to have a high purchase intention: As shown in Table 6, This is supported by  $\beta = 0.491$ , the p-value of  $0.00 < 0.05$  besides t-values of  $5.711 > 1.96$ . Hence H3 is supported. Finally, Table 5 reveals that Attitude towards the product mediates the relationship between point-of-sale marketing deception and purchase intention where  $\beta = 0.366$ , the p-value of  $0.00 < 0.05$  besides t-values of  $4.975 > 1.96$ . Hence H4 is supported. Figure 2 illustrates the structural model result.

**Table 6.** Hypothesis testing

Proposed Path	Beta	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
DPOS → PI	0.566	0.578	0.071	9.618	0.000	Confirmed
DPOS → CAT	0.621	0.648	0.072	10.329	0.000	Confirmed
CAT → PI	0.491	0.452	0.061	5.711	0.000	Confirmed
<b>Specific Indirect Effects</b>						
DPOS → CAT → PI	0.366	0.267	0.075	4.975	0.000	Confirmed

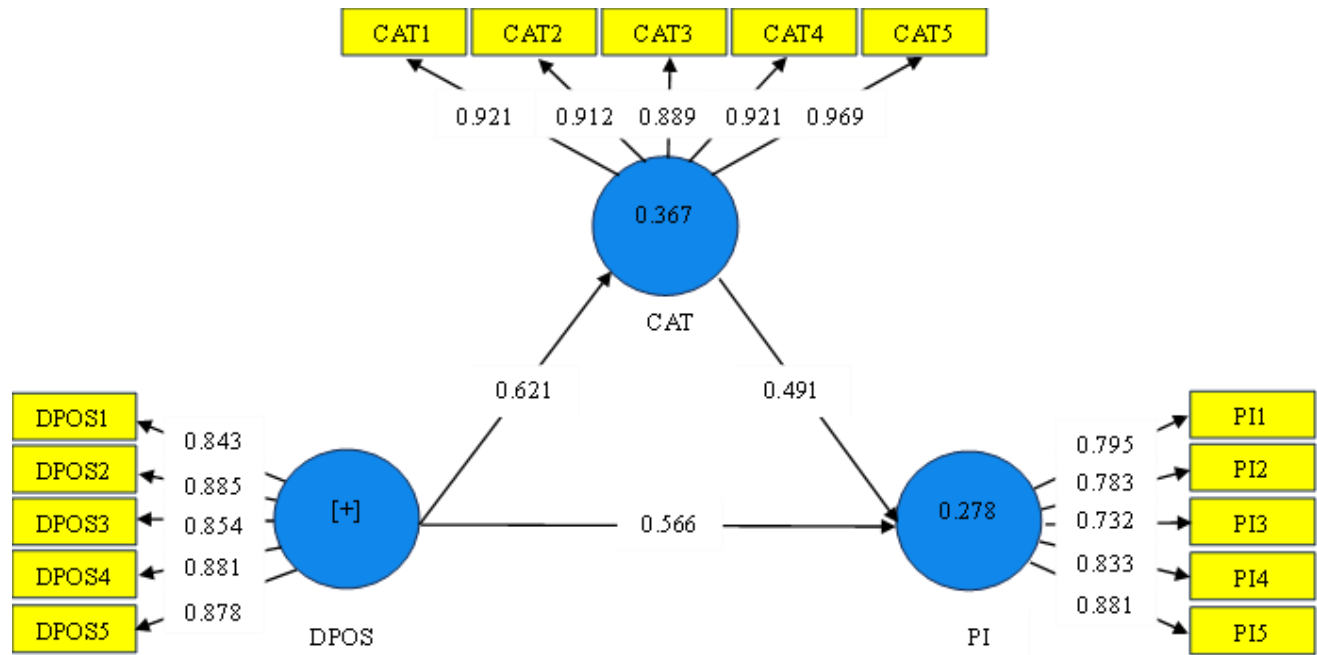


Figure 2. Structural model

## 5 DISCUSSION

This study investigated the impact of deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale (DPOS) on consumer behavior in Iraq. The findings support the following hypotheses: Deceptive POS practices positively influence consumers' attitudes towards the product, aligning with previous research (Chawla & Joshi, 2019; Bladt et al., 2024). This suggests that neglecting ethical marketing practices could lead to customer loss and reduced future purchases. The finding underscores the power of marketing tactics employed at the point of sale. Deceptive practices, although ethically questionable, may effectively sway consumer attitudes, possibly through mechanisms such as enhanced perceptions of product value or attractiveness. While deceptive POS practices may yield positive attitudes towards the product in the short term, their long-term impact on consumer trust and brand loyalty should be considered. Consumers who eventually realize they have been deceived may develop negative associations with the brand, leading to potential long-term consequences for the company's reputation.

Deceptive POS practices significantly influence purchase intention, consistent with studies by Miftahuddin et al. (2022), and Bladt et al. (2024). This highlights the importance of brand characteristics in shaping purchase intentions. The consistency of this result with prior research underscores the robustness and reliability of the relationship between deceptive POS practices and purchase intention. It reaffirms the notion that deceptive tactics employed at the point of sale can effectively influence consumers' willingness to purchase products or services. The finding raises ethical concerns regarding the welfare of consumers. Deceptive practices may lead consumers to make purchasing decisions they would not have otherwise made, potentially resulting in buyer's remorse or dissatisfaction when they realize they have been misled.

Consumers' attitudes have a significant positive effect on purchase intention. The finding corresponds with findings from Jung et al. (2020), Charton-Vachet et al. (2020), Ho et al. (2022). This emphasizes the crucial role of attitude in consumers'

buying decisions. This result aligns with theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posit that attitudes significantly influence behavioral intentions. According to these theories, positive attitudes towards a product or brand are likely to lead to a higher intention to purchase. Consumer attitudes are shaped by both emotional and rational factors. Positive emotions, such as satisfaction with previous experiences or brand loyalty, can enhance attitudes towards a product. Additionally, rational considerations, such as perceived quality, value for money, and alignment with personal values, also play a crucial role in shaping attitudes. Finally, Understanding the relationship between attitudes and purchase intentions enables marketers to develop more effective strategies. By focusing on improving consumer attitudes through product innovation, service enhancements, and targeted communication campaigns, marketers can positively influence purchase intentions and drive sales.

Attitude mediates the relationship between deceptive POS practices and purchase intention, confirming the hypothesis and aligning with Canova et al. (2020). This demonstrates that deceptive practices can alter customer attitudes, which in turn influence buying intentions. The identification of attitude as a mediator highlights the psychological process through which deceptive POS practices influence purchase intention. Consumers' attitudes, shaped by their perceptions and evaluations of the deceptive tactics, serve as an intermediary step between exposure to deceptive practices and their intention to purchase. Attitude also plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions of value. Despite the presence of deceptive tactics, positive attitudes towards the product may lead consumers to perceive it as valuable or desirable, thus increasing their intention to purchase.

Other psychological theories related to consumer behavior such as Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Information Manipulation Theory. Cognitive dissonance theory implies that when consumers encounter deceptive marketing practices and realize they have been misled, they experience cognitive dissonance. This discomfort motivates them to resolve the inconsistency by either changing their attitudes or behaviors (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Also, information manipulation theory, a theory of deceptive discourse. IMT argues that when deceiving others, people play with or "manipulate" relevant information in numerous ways within their discourse (Howard et al., 2022). Both have significant implications for consumer behavior, affecting attitudes, perceptions, and purchase decisions.

Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale and their influence on consumer behavior in the Iraqi context.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale (DPOS) influence consumer behavior in Iraq, with attitude acting as a mediating factor. The findings suggest that such deceptive tactics negatively affect consumer attitudes towards products, ultimately reducing purchase intentions. This highlights the importance of ethical and truthful marketing practices in building positive consumer attitudes, which in turn, increase the likelihood of purchase. As such, ethical considerations should be prioritized by marketing managers and sales personnel to maximize sales effectiveness. Furthermore, this study contributes to the limited research exploring the relationship between deceptive marketing and purchase intention, demonstrating how such practices can negatively impact business outcomes.



Building on existing literature, this study contributes valuable insights into the impact of deceptive marketing practices at the point of sale (DPOS) on Iraqi consumers. The findings echo previous research, highlighting the detrimental effects of such practices on consumer behavior. This study specifically addresses the gap in understanding how deceptive POS practices, after being discovered by consumers, influence their purchasing decisions. This crucial information can empower the consumers to make more informed and ethical purchasing choices by recognizing and responding effectively to deceptive marketing tactics. Also, to marketers by developing and implementing an ethical marketing strategy that build trust and avoid negative consumer consequences like complaints, lost business, and reputational damage. Finally, to policymakers also by providing evidence supporting the need to enforce existing consumer protection laws and consider establishing new regulations to combat deceptive marketing practices in Iraq. By integrating these findings into their respective practices, consumers, marketers, and policymakers can contribute to a fairer and more ethical marketplace in Iraq.

The findings may be limited to specific contexts, such as certain industries or demographics, and may not be applicable universally. Reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, such as social desirability bias or recall bias, affecting the accuracy of the results. The study might employ a cross-sectional design, limiting the ability to establish causality or track changes over time. Longitudinal studies could provide more robust insights. The sample may not represent the broader population accurately, leading to potential sampling bias. Ensuring diversity in demographics and consumer behaviors could enhance the validity of findings. Finally, the measurement of consumer attitudes may not capture the complexity and nuances of their beliefs and emotions accurately. Utilizing more comprehensive and validated scales could improve the reliability of results.

Investigate potential moderators that could influence the strength or direction of the mediated relationship, such as individual differences, cultural factors, or product characteristics can be another topic for future research. Also, conducting longitudinal research to examine how consumer attitudes and purchase intentions evolve over time in response to deceptive marketing practices, can offer some insights into the sustainability of such effects. In addition, future research could delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms through which deceptive POS practices influence consumer attitudes towards products. Understanding the psychological processes at play could inform more targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of deceptive marketing tactics.

#### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Aram H. Massoudi and Sahar J. Fatah.

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#### **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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