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Investigating the Impact of Misleading Information via Social Media Platforms on the Trust and Image of Beauty and Skincare Companies, as Perceived by Customers

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Abstract

The study investigates the impact of misleading information on company trust and image on social media platforms. The study examines misleading information as an independent variable and company trust and company image as dependent variables, with company trust acting as a mediator to investigate the relationship between misleading information and company image. A questionnaire was distributed to 378 social media-active beauty and skincare customers, and hypotheses were tested using quantitative methods, including descriptive statistics, convergent validity, Cronbach alpha, discriminant validity, and fit model, along with a PLS-SEM path for hypothesis testing. The findings revealed that misleading information positively influenced both company trust and company image. Company trust positively affects company image. Additionally, misleading information has been shown to positively impact company image through company trust. The study advises that consumers should be cautious when using social media platforms for information and purchasing products, choose trustworthy companies, and avoid misleading information. Furthermore, the study suggests that companies should avoid unethical practices, as these can undermine trust, damage their reputation, reduce market competitiveness, and adversely influence customer perceptions and purchasing behavior.

Keywords: Misleading Information; Social Media Platforms; Company Trust; Company Image; Beauty and Skincare Industry

Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, market companies must engage in strategic promotional activities to influence consumer perceptions, knowledge, and purchasing behavior (Joudeh et al., 2022; Iqbal & Siddiqui, 2019). Sustainability, customer satisfaction, and loyalty are key marketing strategies for securing a competitive edge (Neama et al., 2024; Nurittamont, 2020; Ahn et al., 2020; Loureiro et al., 2017). Companies must enhance their efforts in attracting customers, boosting profitability, and facilitating effective product sales. Effective communication is crucial in developing and delivering goods and services, allowing businesses to accurately gauge consumer needs and provide tailored solutions (Peña-García et al., 2020;

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Alfityani et al., 2023; Woodall, 2007). As a result, marketing activities have evolved significantly, with organizations rethinking their strategies to engage a wider customer base. The increased competitive pressure necessitates an intensified effort among companies to secure a larger market share and achieve profitability objectives. This dynamic environment requires continuous adaptation and innovation in marketing strategies to ensure businesses remain relevant and successful. Refining marketing approaches, leveraging effective communication, and staying attuned to customer trends and preferences can attract and retain customers, foster long-term loyalty, and lead to enhanced business performance and sustainable growth (Haikal et al., 2020; Joudeh et al., 2020).

The communication industry has seen major changes due to new technologies. Social media platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, and LinkedIn have transformed how people interact. Social media is widely used around the world and has changed how people and businesses talk to each other. Companies use it to promote events, show off products, and advertise their services. Individuals use social media platforms to stay in touch with friends, get news updates, and follow their interests in various areas like activities, business, economy, politics, and trends. These social media platforms make it easy to share thoughts and experiences, promote information, and mobilize communities. These changes have not only transformed the way communication is conducted but have also reshaped broader economic and institutional frameworks on a global scale (Efendioğlu & Durmaz, 2022). As businesses adapt to this increasingly dynamic environment, effective marketing communication is crucial for attracting customers and fostering purchasing intent. Companies are now employing a diverse range of marketing communication techniques. While traditional methods such as advertisements, personal selling, and sales promotions remain vital, contemporary strategies, including direct marketing, public relations, interactive marketing, and social media platforms, are becoming more prevalent. Each technique serves a unique purpose, whether it's introducing new products, enhancing brand identity, or building a positive company image.

Despite the opportunities presented by modern communication tools, businesses face notable challenges due to heightened competition and the evolving landscape of marketing channels. Companies must be agile, responding to new social media platforms and shifting customer preferences to remain relevant (Aljabari et al., 2023). Sharing information on social media platforms itself plays a crucial role in this process; it not only seeks to motivate consumers to purchase or engage with products and services and shapes their perceptions and behaviors but also raises ethical issues regarding privacy and user data. These advancements in social media platforms are redefining marketing strategies, making effective marketing communication indispensable for companies aiming to succeed in competitive markets (Joudeh et al., 2024; Al-Gasawneh et al., 2023). Today, sharing and providing information on social media platforms has become a cornerstone of marketing communication, continuously evolving to address the diverse and changing landscape of consumer needs. This ongoing transformation brings both opportunities and challenges as businesses strive to forge meaningful connections with their customers.

The beauty and cosmetics sector is experiencing a revolution due to the growing demand for youthful, healthy, and elegant products (Lo & Tseng, 2021). The industry includes various types of cosmetics such as creams, lotions, powders, soap, perfumes, toothpaste, and shampoo (Hoang & Quang, 2020; Miremadi et al., 2013). Factors influencing cosmetic consumption include product quality, ease of use, features, diversity, fragrance, and price. Beauty and cosmetics also

help manage social perceptions and improve self-image, as their usage can influence others' attitudes, making the purchase decision more challenging for consumers (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2011). The beauty sector, encompassing perfumes, skincare, haircare, and cosmetics, generated 430 billion dollars in 2022. Despite economic crises, it's growing at a 6% annual rate, expected to reach \$580 billion by 2027. E-commerce, driven by online stores, digital transformation, multi-channel retailers, and social media, is expected to grow at 12% annually (McKinsey & Company, 2023). The chemical and cosmetics industry in Jordan is a leading sector in the economy, known for rapid development, modernization, and innovation. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, its high production capacities are crucial for self-sufficiency. With 754 factories, 17,424 workers, and a total capital of over \$1 billion, it contributes \$1,313 million to foreign currency earnings and is a significant part of the industrial sector (Jordan Chamber of Industry, 2024).

This study explores the impact of misleading information disseminated on social media platforms, a pressing concern that has increasingly taken precedence in scientific studies at both local and global levels. As social media platforms continue to expand and businesses become involved in the propagation of misleading information, it is imperative that we deepen our understanding of this phenomenon. This study specifically examines how misleading information on these social media platforms influences the trust and image of companies, with findings that may provide valuable insights for marketing strategies. As a result, this study was done to try to answer the following questions:

1. How misleading information does provided to the customers on social media platforms influence company trust in beauty and skincare companies?
2. How does misleading information provided to the customer on social media platforms impact a company's image among beauty and skincare customers?
3. How does company trust influence a company's image among beauty and skincare customers?
4. How does misleading information on social media platforms affect company image through company trust among beauty and skincare customers?

Based on the questions presented above, the objectives of this study are delineated as follows:

1. Assess whether misleading information provided to the beauty and skincare customers on social media platforms impacts company trust.
2. Evaluate whether misleading information provided to the beauty and skincare customers on social media platforms affects a company's image.
3. Investigate whether trust in companies on social media platforms influences their image from the perspective of beauty and skincare customers.

Examine whether misleading information provided to the beauty and skincare customers on social media platforms impacts the company's image through company trust.

In order to analyze the relationship between misleading information and company trust and image, the research puts forth these hypotheses:

H1: Misleading information positively impacts on the company trust.

H2: Misleading information positively impacts company image.

H3: Company trust positively impacts company image.

H4: Misleading information positively impacts company image through company trust.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Misleading information

Misleading information is a significant issue today due to the rapid spread of data. It can change how people view situations and affect their decisions. This information can be false, exaggerated, or misleading. Social media platforms provide a lot of data, which makes it hard to tell what is true and what is not. Misleading information practices aim to enhance a product's image or boost profits while often disregarding the potential consequences of disseminating false information, irrespective of whether it is framed positively or negatively (Cai et al., 2024). Companies today grapple with the dual challenges of countering fake news and ensuring the authenticity of their messaging. Innovative strategies are vital for companies to capture consumer attention and maintain credibility in an environment rife with misleading information. The implications of misleading information through social media platforms extend across demographics, affecting children, teenagers, adults, and seniors alike. Such practices exploit consumer trust, luring individuals into purchasing low quality or counterfeit goods through false claims about price, product features, or quality (Belch & Belch, 2024; Waheed et al., 2016; Soroa-Koury & Yang, 2009).

According to Viridi (2020), deceptive communication typically involves the intentional dissemination of inaccurate information, often through misleading advertising, which remains a prevalent concern. Additionally, as Hou (2023) indicates, the obscure commercial intent and branding in advertisements can result in consumer confusion, rendering them unable to distinguish between genuine content and marketing material. The impact of misleading information can also have lasting effects, highlighting that false claims can significantly sway new customers, fostering ongoing purchasing behaviors even after such claims are debunked. In contrast, ethical marketing practices emphasize the importance of fair pricing, accurate product descriptions, and transparent, socially responsible promotion. Businesses that fail to uphold these ethics risk alienating consumers who feel misled, ultimately jeopardizing their reputation and financial stability (Lee & Jin, 2019). While advertising through social media platforms holds the potential for positive influence and engagement with consumers, it is equally susceptible to misuse through deceptive marketing tactics. Addressing these challenges with ethical approaches is crucial for fostering consumer trust and sustaining long-term business success.

Company trust

Company trust is essential for business success. It means that customers and the community believe in an organization's honesty, reliability, and ability to keep promises. Trust plays a key role in how businesses operate, affecting relationships and overall success. When a company builds trust, it can create loyalty and involvement, which leads to long-term growth and profit. Company trust is the belief in a company's ethical practices and safe financial management, which can inspire trust among other corporations and lead to brand loyalty based on customer experiences (Al-Dwairi et al., 2024; Ajina et al., 2023; Abdullah et al., 2015). Trust is an important aspect in both personal and corporate relationships because it determines the type of interaction and information that consumers share with others (Wang et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2019; Mahmud et al., 2020). Company trust reduces doubt and hesitation

when making purchasing decisions and is one of the most powerful variables. Building online trust is one of the most significant methods for preserving customer connections since it is a key factor in the success of an online business (Joudeh et al., 2025; Vongurai et al., 2018). According to Xie et al. (2014) and Xie (2014), deceptive advertising and misleading information can erode customer trust by triggering negative emotions, and customers typically blame misleading marketing on others, resulting in poorer revenue and reputation.

In marketing, trust is honesty, benevolence, and competence, three components of trust (Oscar & Louis, 2021). Trust includes all direct or indirect customer contact points with the brand, such as products, services, salespeople, and the selling and purchasing of goods and services (Joudeh et al., 2024; Wu, 2017; Fan & Miao, 2012; Kamtarin, 2012). Trust is crucial for marketing activities like customer retention and loyalty, and it's built from the first interaction with a consumer (Omeish et al., 2024; Kristina & Sugiarto, 2020). Trust is formed when a product meets expectations, reduces perceived risk, and influences their decision to purchase a particular brand. In the digital era, customers are unable to physically visit a store and analyze the products they desire in real time before making a purchase (Danis, 2017). Customers on social media platforms may easily develop and sustain connections, as well as converse with one another, extending trust to all contacts on the platforms.

Company image

Company image is vital for business success, as it shapes reputation and affects how the public sees the company. It is built through branding, marketing strategies, and customer interactions. Companies strive to create a positive image that attracts their target customers and differentiates them from competitors. A strong company image can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty, improve brand recognition, and lead to better financial results.

Company image refers to the overall reputation of a company. The term "company image" relates to how a relevant group perceives an organization in its external environment. It comprises its name, culture, employees, ethics, customers, goods, and shareholders. A positive image benefits the company and helps it achieve financial success (Rana et al., 2021). Company image has a considerable impact on customer assessment, brand faith, cognition, and attitudes; thus, companies must give appropriate product information to suit consumption demands (Alnaser et al., 2024; Martenson, 2007; Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997). Furthermore, company image is influenced by product and consumer features, and it significantly impacts brand selection and purchase. An impressive image can significantly influence consumer behaviors and attitudes, making it a crucial factor in determining the success of a marketing campaign (Fan, 2019). The market advantage allows consumers to enhance product preferences, strengthen brand awareness, and attract long-term customers, despite intense competition (Kim, 2018).

Social media platforms

Social media platforms have significantly impacted the business landscape, forcing many businesses to adapt and change their practices (Boateng & Okoe, 2015). The rise of social media platforms and the digitization of traditional media have significantly influenced information communication, leading to economic benefits in sectors like news and entertainment. Digital marketing is a crucial aspect of business marketing due to the increasing influence of social media platforms, advanced gadgets, and the need for information. Social media platforms have significantly benefited companies by offering cost-effective communication, feedback, and lower marketing costs; improving competitiveness through sponsored exposure; influencing customer

attitudes and purchasing decisions; and increasing marketing activities targeting diverse customer groups (Mansour et al., 2023; Teo et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2018). Digital marketing through social media platforms offers faster communication than traditional methods due to the ease of receiving orders over the Internet (Newman et al., 2019). Social media platforms enable millions to form online communities, communicate interests, and interact through web-based tools, liberalizing the information landscape (Okocha et al., 2022; Kisyoa et al., 2019).

Web 2.0 is a participatory second-generation internet, enabling users to modify and enhance it as they use it (James & Bradley, 2021). This shift has led to a more diverse and effective advertising strategy. The rise in internet usage has led to increased online sales and purchases by both companies and customer (Greblikaite & Pervazaite, 2014). Social media platforms are crucial for users to access information, but inaccurate information is a concern (Alqahtani & Bukhari, 2021). Customers rely on these platforms for purchasing decisions and sharing experiences, but the credibility of these methods requires investigation. The rise of social media platforms and digitization of traditional media are significantly transforming the way information is communicated. However, inaccurate information is a concern, and customers rely on through social media platforms for purchasing decisions and sharing experiences.

Methodology

Study Model

The model in Figure 1 investigates the impact of misleading information on company trust and image via social networking sites, based on previous literature review studies.

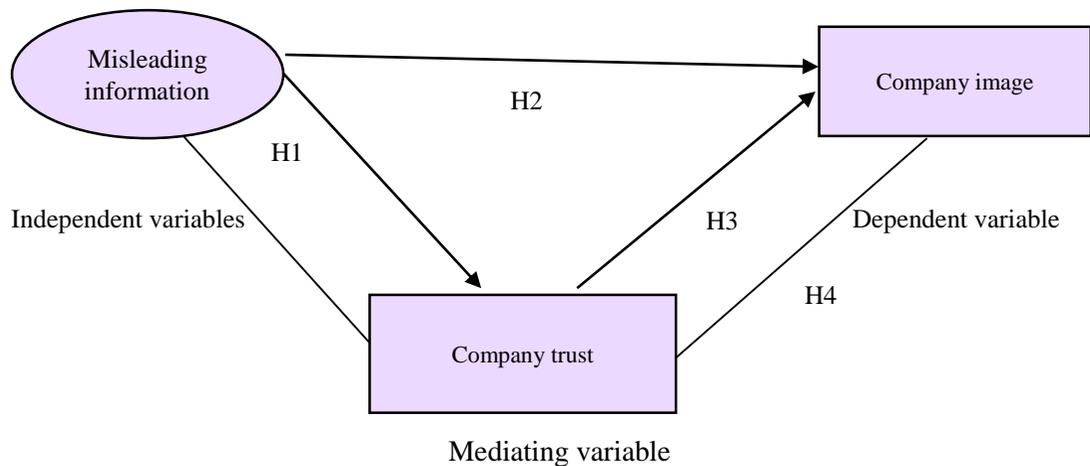


Figure 1. Proposed model

Data Collection

This study surveyed customers who bought beauty and skincare products on through social media platforms. 378 questionnaires were collected. The data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The questionnaires were divided into two sections: one asking demographic information like gender, education, and income, and the other evaluating misleading information, company trust, and company image on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Statistical analysis

Convergent validity was used to examine composite reliability (CR), average variance extract (AVE), and factor loading (FL). Moreover, the study used Cronbach's alpha, discriminant validity, and fit model to assess questionnaire reliability and validity, as well as a PLS-SEM path model to evaluate hypotheses.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the study sample based on gender, study level, and college affiliation. According to gender, 63% of respondents were female, and the remaining 47.3% were male. In terms of education, 38% of respondents were in high school or less, 55% were undergraduates, and 7% were postgraduates. The majority earned between JD 501 and 1000, with 30% earning between JD 500 and less and 47% earning between JD 1501 and more.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Gender	Male	139	37	37
	Female	239	63	100
	Total	378	100	
Education	High secondary school	142	38	38
	undergraduate	208	55	93
	postgraduate	28	07	100
	Total	378	100	
Income	500 and less	112	30	30
	501- 1000	176	47	77
	1001-1500	43	11	88
	1501 and more	47	12	100
	Total	378	100	

Table 1. Demographics sample

Questionnaire analysis

Table 2 shows that participants had positive attitudes toward study statements, with all mean scores higher than the scale mean of 3.00. All variables had mean scores greater than 3.00, indicating positive opinions. The highest mean score was "misleading information " (3.89/5.00), followed by "company trust" (3.68/5.00), while "company image" had the lowest mean score (3.38/5.00).

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Misleading information	3.89	.864
Company trust	3.68	.928
Company image	3.38	1.06

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of variables

Measurement model

This study used convergent validity to evaluate the measurement model. The convergent validity evaluation comprises an examination of composite reliability (CR), average variance extract (AVE), and factor loading (FL). The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below. Table 3 displays item factor loading values ranging from 0.618 to 0.881, which surpass the recommended threshold of 0.50 or above. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) are described as high internal consistency, with CR values ranging from 0.805 to 0.875 and AVE values ranging from 0.503 to 0.638, above the 0.7 and 0.50 requirements, respectively. It found that all constructions met the requirements for convergent validity as per Hair et al. (2016). The study's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with values exceeding 0.70 indicating a reliable scale. Table 3 reveals that the study's Cronbach alpha results are above the standard threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.826 to 0.908, confirming reliability.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of misleading information, company trust, and company image

	Statement	FL	AVE	CR	Alpha
Misleading information	The company is overstating the advantages and benefits of its product.	.759	.642	.834	.796
	The company tried to conceal the product's preservatives and chemical materials.	.731			
	The company hide information about the side effects of its products.	.751			
	The company presented misleading information to raise the products' sales.	.672			
	The information provided on their products is unclear.	.769			
	The company employs misleading information to persuade me to purchase the product.	.832			
Company trust	I will not trust the information issued by the company.	.783	.591	.808	.782
	I cannot rely on the information issued by the company.	.689			
	The company is not honest in its business practices.	.830			
	I will no longer be a customer of the company regardless of anything.	.729			
	I will not deal with this firm anymore in the future.	.759			
Company image	The company cannot be trusted.	.681	.612	.828	.812
	It's an untrustworthy company.	.808			
	The company lacks sincerity.	.771			
	The company is socially irresponsible.	.737			
	I have an unfavorable attitude regarding the information supplied by the company.	.849			

FL = Factor Loading, AVE=Average Variance Extracted, CR= Composite Reliability, Alpha= Cronbach Alpha

Moreover, the study uses various fit indices for PLS-SEM applications to examine its main hypotheses. The model's χ^2/df is estimated at 2.645, indicating accurate data fit. The AGFI is 0.805, exceeding the advised threshold of 0.80, indicating a good match between the models. The RMSEA is 0.073, less than the desired threshold of 0.10. The NFI, CFI, and GFI are above the

usual value of 0.9, indicating the model's adequacy. All indicators fall within the recommended range by Shevlin and Miles (1998), Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), Hu and Bentler (1999), and MacCallum et al. (1996), indicating the model meets the study's requirements as shown in Table 4.

Indicator	AGFI	χ^2/df	GFI	RMSEA	CFI	NFI
Value of recommended	> .80	< 5	> 0.90	\leq .10	> .90	> .90
Value of model	.805	2.645	.927	.073	.921	.922

Table 4. Values of fit indices for the structural equation model

Moreover, the study evaluated hypotheses using the path coefficient analysis. Table 5 presents the direct and indirect impacts of latent variables, all significant at $P < 0.05$, along with the proposed hypotheses and their findings.

Table 5 of the path model indicates that misleading information on social media platforms has a direct and significant effect on company trust. This association has a t-value of 11.133, a standardized coefficient (β) of 0.49, and a p-value of .000, indicating statistical significance. Therefore, hypothesis H1 can be adopted based on these findings. Similarly, the results of hypothesis H2 indicate that deceptive advertising has a significant direct effect on the company image. The t-value for this relationship is 15.259, and the standardized coefficient is 0.56. The p-value is .000, indicating that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, therefore, this finding supports the hypothesis (H2). Additionally, hypothesis H3 examines the impact of company trust on the company image. The t-value for this relationship is 13.838, and the standardized coefficient is 0.55. The p-value is .000, indicating that this relationship is also statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This result supports the hypothesis (H3). Lastly, hypothesis H4 focuses on the indirect effect of misleading information on the company image through company trust. The results indicate that this indirect effect is statistically significant. The t-value for this relationship is 3.1512, and the standardized coefficient is 0.164. The p-value is .001, indicating that this indirect effect is significant at the 0.05 level, thereby supporting the hypothesis (H4).

	Variable		Direct impact	Indirect impact	T-value	P	Results
Company trust	<----	Misleading information	0.49		11.133	.000	Accepted
Company image	<----	Misleading information	0.56		15.259	.000	Accepted
Company image	<----	Company trust	0.55		13.838	.000	Accepted
Company image	Company trust	Misleading information		0.164	3.1512	.001	Accepted

Table 5. Direct and indirect testing results

Discussion

The study provides a better understanding of how customers perceive misleading information about beauty and skincare products. The study investigates how misleading information affects the purchasing habits of 378 Jordanians who frequently use social media platforms to buy beauty products. posthumanism.co.uk

The findings showed that misleading information on social media platforms has significantly impacted company trust and image. Furthermore, the data revealed a positive association between misleading information and company trust and image, with company trust as a mediator. The study's results supported the acceptance of all hypotheses.

The study revealed that misleading information significantly impacted the company's trust and image, directly and indirectly. The company's trust was significantly influenced by misleading information, with a β value of 49% and a p-value of 0.000. Furthermore, the company's image was also significantly impacted by misleading information, showing a β value of 56% and a p-value of 0.000. Additionally, the findings revealed that the company's image was significantly impacted by company trust, with a β value of 55% and a value of 0.000. Moreover, the company image was significantly affected by misleading information through company trust, indicated by a β value of 16.4% and a p-value of 0.001.

The popularity of social networking sites in Jordan has surged in the last five years, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with customers increasingly relying on electronic technologies for information and purchasing products. The study suggests that people should be more conscious when collecting information and buying products through social media platforms, choosing companies with good reputations, and avoiding overstated benefits and unclear information.

Companies that engage in deceptive practices, such as providing misleading information, overstating product benefits, employing deceptive strategies, and exploiting less experienced consumers, can lose their trust and image, ultimately affecting their market competitiveness. Customers may develop a negative attitude toward the company's advertising on social media platforms, purchase products from it, deal with the worst company in the market, feel uncomfortable with the company's activities, and perceive it as unrealistic and insincere.

The study advises consumers to be cautious when using social media platforms for information and purchasing products, choosing reputable companies, and avoiding misleading information to maintain trust and market competitiveness. Companies engaging in deceptive practices such as providing misleading information can lose trust and image, impact market competitiveness, and lead to negative customer attitudes, product purchases, and perceived insincerity.

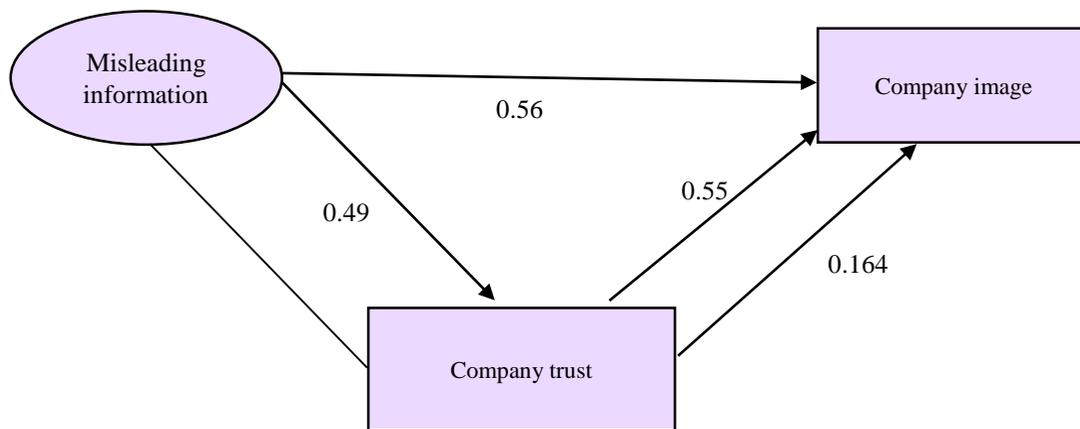


Figure 2. Direct and indirect results between the variables.

Limitation and Future Research

While the current study makes a notable contribution to the literature on misleading information, there are several limitations to take into account. First, our findings were derived from self-administered questionnaires and the perspectives of the participants. Second, the study involved a small sample size, which was gathered within the context of Jordan; therefore, future studies should aim to enhance the sample size to bolster the reliability of the results, and these findings should be interpreted carefully in different contexts. Third, this research utilized questions that incorporated negative phrasing, which could elicit a negative psychological response from the participants, and the replies might vary if the questions had been framed positively; consequently, future studies might consider using positive wording for comparison. Lastly, the current research concentrated on beauty and skincare products; thus, caution should be exercised when generalizing these results to other types of products, as the nature of the product may influence the outcomes.

Conclusion

In recent years, misleading information has been a unethical practice that can lead to a loss of customer confidence and avoidance of future business dealings. Misleading information on social media platforms can also result in the company's reputation being damaged, leading to competitors with better marketing ethics. The rise of deception in online marketing is attributed to the lack of consumer protection organizations and ineffective quality control measures. Misleading information psychologically impacts customers, affecting their satisfaction and potentially leading to frustration or resentment. Companies may face legal accountability and penalties for using unethical methods to change the nature or benefits of their products or services, causing harm to customers. This unethical approach can lead to legal accountability and penalties for companies. Therefore, companies must be aware of and address misleading information to maintain customer trust and satisfaction.

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