

How disinformation affects sales: Examining the advertising campaign of a socially responsible Brand

Abstract

This study explores the effect of disinformation on sales performance in the context of socially responsible brands. Using a case study methodological approach, we examine the advertising campaign of an SR beauty brand, introducing its newest sustainable packaging and its effect on sales through the theoretical lenses of the Expectancy Disconfirmation theory. Our data are collected online and analysed following a thematic analysis technique. Our emerged findings reveal that consumers negotiate dissimilarly in their expectations with regards to the message claims and their truthfulness leading to three proposed directions that ultimately affect product sales differently. These are then discussed with regards to their theoretical and practical implications to SR branding and sales.

Keywords: disinformation, sales performance, socially responsible brand, green advertising

1. Introduction

Sales of products with a purpose are showing a stable increase in recent years (Buckley et al., 2024; Calder, 2022). Consumers seem to show their preference for such offerings, as the nice feeling of serving a greater good becomes influential in their purchase decision and adds to their overall satisfaction (Chan, 2023). The sales of products linked to sustainability and environmental aspirations are soaring, emerging as the top consumer preference. Moreover, when the brand name itself is associated with these noble intentions (Melewar & Skinner, 2020), it further enhances the positive perception and significantly influences sales performance. As a result, and to remain relevant and competitive, brands actively attempt to associate themselves with green efforts and construct their promotional narratives accordingly (Foroudi & Palazzo, 2021).

On one hand, such initiatives make brands stand out in the marketplace, invite positive attitudes from consumers and engage them both online and offline (Melewar, Foroudi, & Jin, 2020), leading ultimately to preference in purchase. On the other hand, they might find themselves overfocusing on such claims, often misrepresenting their practices and commitment to these causes. Such recent examples can be seen with Innocent in their advertising campaign of “Fixing up the planet” and plant-milk brand Oatly in their “Need help talking to dad about milk?” , where both campaigns ended up being banned by the Advertising Standards Authority for making exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims (BBC, 2022¹)². Based on a review by International Consumer Protection Enforcement Network that analysed similar claims of 500 websites, 40% of those were found to be misleading (BBC, 2021)³.

¹ [Innocent drinks ads banned over environmental claim - BBC News](#)

² [Oatly ads banned over 'misleading' environmental claims - BBC News](#)

³ [What is greenwashing and how can you spot it? - BBC Newsround](#)

When communicated claims form consumer expectations that turn out to not align with the brand's performance, the impact can be felt on future brand sales. These misrepresentations can vary in depth, intensity, and a number of other factors. Theoreticians, practitioners and policy makers employ distinct terms to capture these differences along with their various nuances. Different definitions are being put forward for sometimes closely related yet distinct concepts of misrepresented information such as fake news, deceptive, misleading, misinformation, or disinformation (Petratos, 2021; Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023). This can become helpful in expressing underlying differences in meaning but it can also cause confusion and further misrepresentation.

We are therefore interested in examining how consumers navigate through intentional misleading brand claims and their effect on sales. Most studies, to date, examine how disinformation generated by consumers affects brands (Borges-Tiago, Tiago, Silva, Guaita Martínez, & Botella-Carrubi, 2020) in mainly political or health marketing (Hameleers et al., 2021; Petratos, 2021) related contexts, while they neglect to pay attention to when brands themselves produce and spread false and misleading claims. To bridge this gap, we have chosen to explore how consumers react to the intentional misleading claims of socially responsible brands, and the effect this has on the brands' sales, by further answering the call for better understanding of the impact of disinformation on green marketing (Guo et al., 2017; Ioannou et al., 2023) and the offline world (Jordana et al., 2021; Kaur and Gupta, 2023). Our research question is: how does brand disinformation affect consumer expectations and sales performance?, encapsulating our inquiry into this underexplored area. To provide a theoretical basis for our investigation, the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) is being adopted. This theory plays a crucial role in our exploration as it allows us to examine how advertising messages containing false information, and the subsequent discovery of that false information by consumers, affects their responses and ultimately impacts sales. By adopting EDT, we can

analyse in depth how consumers react to intentionally deceptive brand claims, aligning with our overall research goal of understanding the effects of brand disinformation on consumer expectations and sales performance.

We begin by presenting the differences in deceptive communication, including our choice to focus on the role of disinformation because of its clearly identified definition and distinction from closely related concepts in literature along with regularly updated policy guidelines for its use and misuse in, particularly, the online context. We then present our chosen theoretical framework of Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) that allows us to thoroughly explore how consumers navigate their expectations and make purchasing decisions based on the honesty of a brand's messaging. The employed research design of a case study methodological approach is explained and justified next. Our emerged findings are explained under three aggregate theoretical dimensions, followed by the discussion section that critically presents their theoretical and practical implications on SR branding and sales performance. Their contributions shed light on, firstly, how consumers negotiate their expectations and decisions in relation to a brand's message truthfulness, and the effect of their responses to brands' sales performance. Secondly, the identification and understanding of consumers' intricate ways in such situations offers new insights into the brand communication of SR brands and their impact on sales performance. Thirdly, consumers respond differently when exposed to false information about a brand. By understanding these variations, we can identify the underlying mechanisms at play. This knowledge can then be used to create more targeted and effective brand communications, ultimately boosting sales performance. The paper concludes with reference to the study's limitations and ideas for future research in this relatively newly emerged area.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Deceptive Communication– Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation of Socially Responsible Brands

Deceptive communication, defined as any form of seller communication that creates misconceptions about the brand (Olson & Dover, 1978), aims to mislead consumers through the exclusion of important information or other promotional practices that could influence a consumer's decision (Bousch, Friestad, & Wright, 2009). This encompasses techniques used by marketers to promote specific brands or products, potentially causing confusion among consumers (Bae, Liu, & Ng, 2022).

Misleading information categories include poor explanations (e.g., lacking important information or adequate substantiation for the claims), no explanation (e.g., omission of important information), meaningless information (e.g., making no sense at all), and bold confident statements (e.g., superior competitor comparative advertising) (Lellis, 2016; Lim, Chock, & Golan, 2020). Fake news and the dis/misinformation share deceptive communication principles (Lee, Ham, Cantoni, & Koo, 2022). Distinct definitions and characteristics of related terms are outlined in Table 1.

Please insert Table 1 about here

Although all involve disseminating false or misleading information, misleading-deceptive information refers to any information that misleads intentionally or unintentionally (Bae, Liu, & Ng, 2022; Darke, Ashworth, & Main, 2010; Hastak & Mazis, 2011). Fake news specifically pertains to fabricated or misleading news stories (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Gelfert, 2018; Klein & Wueller, 2017), while misinformation involves the spread of false information, often unintentionally, and disinformation involves intentionally spreading false information to

deceive or manipulate (Bran, Tiru, Grosseck, Holotescu, & Malita, 2021; Jowore & Turpin, 2022).

We choose to focus on disinformation because we are highly interested in brands' roles as producers or enhancers of false information and their dissemination online (Ruiz & Nilsson, 2022). This focus is particularly important when examining the intentional exaggeration of green or socially-driven attributes associated with marketed products, a practice that positions brands as contributors to deceptive narratives. Green communications often invite misleading messages, leading to accusations of greenwashing (Seele & Gatti, 2017). Companies tend to engage in deceptive practices when promoting their environmentally friendly initiatives, whether through fake news advertising (Rao, 2022) or misleading comparative advertising (Piccolo, Tedeschi, & Ursino, 2018). These misleading tactics can be based on product, process, image orientation, or environmental facts (Rao, 2022). The deliberate misalignment between a brand's communicated values and its actual actions creates perceptual dissonance for consumers, resulting in perceptions of false advertising and dishonesty (Li & Sun, 2022; Nadanyiova, Gajanova, & Majerova, 2020; Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino, 2014).

Our interest extends beyond merely identifying deceptive practices to encompass the broader phenomenon of brands strategically misleading or falsely marketing their products to appear socially responsible and conscious. In this context, the study of disinformation emerges as the most appropriate theoretical framework for our exploration. By delving into disinformation, we aim to gain a thorough and nuanced understanding of how brands manipulate information channels to create a socially conscious image, even if it does not align with their actual practices. This perspective aligns well with the evolving landscape of online communication, where brands wield significant influence over how information is distributed and received.

Therefore, studying disinformation is crucial to unravel the complexities of this phenomenon. Our focus on disinformation not only provides a solid theoretical foundation for our research but also reflects the dynamic nature of modern brand communication. This approach allows us to examine the impact of intentionally misleading claims on consumer expectations and sales performance more effectively. By concentrating on the advertising message of socially responsible brands for this examination, we can better understand how disinformation is being received by consumers and its potential impact on sales performance.

2.2 Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (ETD)

Our choice to employ the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) in our study is grounded in its well-established utility for assessing customer satisfaction (Taylor, 1997). Derived from cognitive psychology, this theory posits that when brands meet consumer expectations, individuals tend to display more positive attitudes and a higher inclination to make a purchase (Oliver, 1977). Conversely, when consumers encounter a situation that is worse than expected, they tend to develop more negative attitudes, perceive the brand negatively, and ultimately, have reduced intentions to make future purchases (Tangari, Bui, Haws, & Liu, 2019). In essence, consumers form expectations about a brand before engaging with it. After experiencing the brand, they compare its performance with their initial expectations. If the brand exceeds their expectations, they experience satisfaction. Conversely, if the brand fails to meet their expectations, they feel dissatisfied.

Consumers' expectations and satisfaction are subjective measurements, as different consumers perceive and judge their expectations toward the brand differently. However, marketing efforts remain one of the most influential factors in shaping these perceptions (Banerjee, Dutta, Biswas, & Kwak, 2024) . Advertising plays a crucial role in creating such expectations, as it

serves as the popular language of brand communication (Banerjee, Dutta, Biswas, & Kwak, 2024). Consumers often rely on brand communication efforts as cues to form impressions (Sipilä, Alavi, Edinger-Schons, Müller, & Habel, 2022; Tangari et al., 2019). Particularly in the context of socially and environmentally friendly brand messaging, marketing campaigns shape consumer expectations, influencing subsequent evaluations. This is because messaging centered on doing good has a significant impact on consumer expectations regarding social responsibility and ethical practices (Chen, Lin, & Chen, 2024).

EDT becomes particularly pertinent when these expectations are violated, leading to disconfirmation and negative outcomes (Oliver, 1977). Negative expectancy disconfirmation not only leads to feelings of frustration (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2019; Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007) but also generates customer distrust, subsequently influencing biased evaluations of other products offered by the same company (Darke et al., 2010). Accusations of greenwashing typically arise when there is a mismatch between the brand's communication message and consumers' perceptions of the brand's actual commitment and actions, leading to consumer skepticism (Luo, Sun, Shen, & Xia, 2020). This skepticism arises from advertising messages or brand statements that are exaggerated or fabricated to create unrealistic expectations (Nadanyiova et al., 2020; Nyilasy et al., 2014). SCR branding and green messages create specific expectations. Brands that fail to prove through their actions that their higher purpose is genuinely integrated into their character are perceived by consumers as engaging in inauthentic brand activism (Lauchlan & Roberts, 2020). We are specifically interested in studying the phenomenon of brands intentionally spreading misleading messages, particularly when they promote their products as green, eco-friendly, or socially-driven. This behavior positions the brand as a producer or amplifier of disinformation and false information.

EDT has been widely utilized to explain consumer expectations and satisfaction (Chen et al., 2022; Hyun, Kim, & Liu, 2023). It is also often applied to evaluate topics related to buyers'

and sellers' expectations (Ferguson, Girona, & Petrescu, 2021), whether in the role of informational and motivational processes that drive consumption (Tangari et al., 2019), or in perceived price fairness expectations. By adopting the lens of EDT, our research focuses on how disinformation affects socially responsible brands. When false information is intentionally spread, it contradicts consumer expectations and leads to negative confirmation bias, which can significantly impact sales performance.

Despite its widespread use in diverse contexts, the application of EDT to analyze the impacts of disinformation in brand management and communication remains relatively unexplored (Mills, Pitt, & Ferguson, 2019; Mishra & Samu, 2021; Obada, 2019). Previous research has typically focused on brands as victims or purveyors of misinformation, where they unknowingly (Mills et al., 2019) or unintentionally spread misinformation (Chen & Cheng, 2020), or inadvertently place their advertisements alongside fake news (Berthon, Treen, & Pitt, 2018; Visentin, Pizzi, & Pichierri, 2019). However, there is a lack of research exploring the phenomenon of brand management where the brand intentionally disseminates misleading, deceptive, half-truth, or false information. Further study is needed, especially on topics that capture consumer attention, their collective power on sales processes (Akbari, Foroudi, Zaman Fashami, Mahavarpour, & Khodayari, 2022), and influence perceptions towards brands (Ageeva, Melewar, Foroudi, Dennis, & Jin, 2018; Peterson, 2020; Szabo & Webster, 2021).

In summary, our use of EDT provides a robust framework to examine how brand disinformation affects sales, with a focus on online consumer responses to socially conscious brand marketing campaigns. This theoretical approach enables us to analyze conflicts arising from discrepancies between marketing communication and actual practices, which can lead to disconfirmation and foster a perception of inauthentic brand activism driven by deceptive marketing tactics.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Case Study Approach: The Case of the Innisfree Paper Bottle Campaign

To address the research question, a single holistic case study design (Yin, 2018) has been chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon of interest. Single case study can provide valuable insights, especially when exploring complex phenomena in a natural real-life contexts (Allgozine & Hancock, 2011). Additionally, our research lens towards exploratory stance rather than a confirmatory one, with a focus on identifying thematic patterns or behavioral categories rather than empirically testing hypotheses or establishing causal relationships (Baxter & Jack, 2015). This methodological approach is particularly suitable when the research inquiries aim to delve into the intricate "how" and "why" dimensions of a specific phenomenon, a defined cohort, or individual cases (Mondahl et al., 2023). In line with the constructivist paradigm, we delve into the perspectives and experiences of participants related to the brand disinformation, the study aims to uncover how individuals construct meaning and interpret their surroundings within the context of the brand's advertising efforts. This approach allows us to understand not only the content of the advertising messages but also how they are perceived and interpreted by the target audience (Baxter & Jack, 2015).

We follow a hybrid approach that combines Yin's well-defined case study design (Yin, 2018) with Stake's flexible-holistic approach to case studies (Stake, 1995). This combination enables us to benefit from the methodological rigour of Yin's approach while capturing the richness and holism of the case through Stake's interpretive lens. We adhere to Yin's structure for case selection, data collection, and organisation, while incorporating Stake's data analysis inquiry, which encourages categorical aggregation and direct interpretation through thematic analysis. Yin's approach provides a well-structured framework for case selection and a systematic

approach to data collection and organisation. Stake's flexibility allows us the freedom to adapt our research design to the dynamic nature of online consumer reactions. To validate the case study findings, we follow the Merriam (1999) and Stake (1995) approaches since the nature of our research is a qualitative-interpretive case study. The aim is not to emphasize the generalization of findings through the development of 'propositions', as Yin's approach does (Baxter & Jack, 2015). Instead, our aim is to conduct an in-depth investigation of 'the focused issues', allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically from the data. This approach helps us avoid becoming overly deductive (Pratt, 2009).

Our chosen case study is the advertising campaign for a newly introduced package for Innisfree, a South Korean beauty brand. This case include all the important characteristics that define case study research such as phenomenon-level, richly descriptive natural setting, and exploratory in its nature (Hatch, 2002, p.30). The case of the Innisfree paper bottle campaign ⁴was purposely chosen as the brand itself developed this particular type of advertising campaign to show their commitment to be a socially responsible brand by reducing plastic waste. In their advertising campaign to promote the new eco-friendly initiative, the brand clearly labelled their new product package with the following message: 'Hello, I'm Paper Bottle. Skin-loving Formula, Earth-loving Packaging'.

This particular case study was further considered as most suited for such examination, because the brand itself is build on strong SC values of being green and natural, claiming to source most of its ingredients from Jeju island that has a longstanding natural heritage for green tea. As a result, this particular advertising campaign comes to add to an already SC strongly constructed brand positioning. Consumers initially welcomed this initiative that appeared consistent with

⁴ <https://youtu.be/5aZ00jk86eU>; <https://youtu.be/8tpt3UxMPM8>; <https://youtube.com/shorts/rgsGpFI0Saw?feature=share>

the brand's activities to date. The backlash started off by one customer from South Korea showing that there was a plastic bottle inside the paper wrapping in photos they took (bbc.com, 2021). Then, online consumers started to question the brand's true values and commitment, accusing the brand of greenwashing through the use of deceptive-misleading marketing which suggests the product is more environmentally friendly than it actually is. This resulted to a 7 billion South Korean won sales drop within this year that corresponds to over £4 million (Statista, 2023⁵).

To enhance internal validity and data credibility, data sources triangulation, and long-term observation are adopted (Patton, 1990). All three advertising video clips launched promoting the limited edition Green Tea Seed Serum on the brand's official YouTube channel were chosen for the examination. Online data from consumers' posts, including comments on three advertising video clips, as well as posts from their social media channels (e.g., Facebook Page, Instagram, and YouTube), were included in the analysis. All the data generated from these threads was gathered from early August 2020 until the end of August 2022. Overall, three YouTube video clips, eight Instagram posts, and one Facebook post, generated by the brand and influencers, produced 735 comments from 632 unique users across three different platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube).

For the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis, we follow the three steps to thematic analysis (Pratt, 2009), allowing us to present 'a chain of evidence' (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006) from raw data into emerging themes, and insights, and relate themes to existing theories or concepts. Finally, the use of thick description through multi modes of data (e.g., text, visual) guarantees the external validity of the study. Thus, this case study provides

⁵ [Innisfree's worldwide sales revenue 2015-2022: https://www.statista.com/statistics/714037/south-korea-innisfree-sales-revenue/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20sales%20revenue,won%20in%20the%20previous%20year.](https://www.statista.com/statistics/714037/south-korea-innisfree-sales-revenue/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20sales%20revenue,won%20in%20the%20previous%20year.)

an opportunity to examine how brand disinformation manifests in advertising, specifically through the lens of greenwashing. Our study is particularly concentrated on the communicative activity surrounding brand disinformation, a facet which has received little study thus far.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

To analyse the data, we adopted an iterative approach to thematic analysis (Pratt, 2009; Pratt et al., 2006), known as 'Gioia's methodology' (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), to identify patterns emerging from the social media data. Through pattern recognition, we aimed to "construct a representation of meanings as recurring themes, producing an interpretation of interpretations" (Spiggle, 1994). The selection of this method is justified by its capability to offer additional insights into the substance of social media knowledge creation efforts. Gioia's thematic analysis approach within the context of case study research has been chosen based on its proven effectiveness in prior studies examining advertising and brand communication within the realm of social media (e.g., Chandrasapth, Yannopoulou, Schoefer, & Liu, 2022; Nazir, 2023). This method has proven useful in the past for understanding print advertisements, television commercials, product placement in outdoor advertisements, and website content (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Adhering to Gioia et al.'s (1994, 2013), and Pratt et al.'s (2006) iterative method of thematic analysis, we summarise the data analysis process with three categories: first-order categories, second-order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions, as seen in Figure 1. This method of analysis is an effective tool to provide rigorous qualitative analysis by condensing large qualitative datasets into a succinct model to highlight how the key and sub-themes interact with one another (Nag & Gioia, 2012). This involves systematically categorising and analysing the data to uncover recurring themes or patterns that are similar to pattern matching in Yin's approach (2018).

Insert Figure 1 about here

In the initial phase of analysis, we established provisional categories and first-order codes through open coding, capturing the diverse perspectives of our online data. This leads to a large number of diverse categories. This phase allows for a thorough exploration of the data before moving on to more structured analysis. Second, we integrated first-order codes across multiple sources of online data to create theoretical categories. This step marked a transition from open to axial coding, resulting in more theoretical and abstract categories. We used constant comparison techniques in discerning second-order themes that subsumed the first-order categories (Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012). This step helps us relate identified themes to existing theories. Second-order themes were then assembled to aggregate dimensions. This process involved the relatively straightforward task of examining the relationships among first-order categories and second-order themes that could be distilled into a set of more simplified, complementary groupings (Cakiroglu, Caetano, & Costa, 2020). Ultimately, we consolidated the themes into more general dimensions of analysis.

4. Data Analysis & Research Findings

From our viewpoint, disinformation is a sensitive issue due to its direct impact on the reputation of the brand that ultimately drives the sale of its products in the consumer market. Concerns of brand managers about disinformation reaching out to consumers have been increasing in the recent past, irrespective of it being intentional or unintentional, because of the speed at which it spreads, especially via social media. Given this situation, scholars such as Vosoughi et al. (2018) suggest that it is important for managers to understand how they should deal with

situations created due to the spread of disinformation. Authors of this study have reported that disinformation spreads at a rate that is much faster than true information and is used as a tactic by competitors. Disinformation is communicated using audio and video to intentionally initiate a smear campaign against the brand to erode its sales. Therefore, managers of the brand should respond strategically by analysing which aspect of the business is being attacked. The analysis of our data helps managers to answer questions being raised by pointing out that consumers navigate through brand disinformation in three directions, as reflected in our three themes: Result-oriented advocates, Process-oriented Advocates, and Holistic Assessors, alongside the brand's negotiability continuum as seen in Figure 2.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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4.1.2 Result-oriented Advocates


The Result-oriented advocates displays a profound reaction to perceived intentional missteps by brands. This response is characterized by a focus on outcomes and a clear expression of non-negotiable anger. For instance, User 11's intense emotional reaction highlights the significant impact of deliberate missteps on consumer sentiment. Similarly, User 7's use of capital letters and exclamation marks underscores the severity of their anger towards the brand's actions.


'THEY SHOULD BE SUED!!!! 🤔🤔' (User 7)

'The AUDACITY some brands have to just blatantly mislead customers is astounding

 (User 11)

The seriousness of the situation is exacerbated by accusations of criminal behavior levelled against the brand by Users A and B. This suggests that consumers within this segment perceive deliberate missteps not only as breaches of trust but also as potentially illegal actions.

User A: 'Jaw dropping! This is practically criminal, beyond greenwashing. 

User B: 'That is borderline criminally misleading marketing. 

User A: 'Right? My thought was that this should be illegal.'

User B: 'I cannot wait for there to be "Environmental Fraud" so this is a crime.'

The intensity of their negative emotional reactions underscores the urgency for brands to rebuild consumer trust and mitigate the repercussions of deliberate missteps on their reputation and financial performance. This urgency is evident in the conversations below, where consumers discuss boycotting or refraining from purchasing.

'Never buying anything from this company' (User 3)

'Yea no! Don't buy it' (User 1)

'Another reason to not buy from Innisfree. Not that animal testing wasn't enough' (User 5)

Beyond mere dissatisfaction, these consumers feel deeply betrayed and demand significant consequences for the brand's actions. These consumers get really upset and express their upset directly and strongly. They internalise and take disinformation personally, feeling strongly about being lied to. Thus, affect plays a predominant role in determining their responses. The brand's disinformation is non-negotiable, as this group of consumers is aware of the

disinformation being spread by the brand with the intention to deceive, harm, or manipulate them. The intentional misstep by the brand is recognised by these consumers:

'So lies, basically.' (User 6)

'How is this not false advertising?' (User 8)

*'Are you f*****g kidding meeeee!!!!!! 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔'* (User 9)

'Damn this is so infuriating and awful.' (User 10)

To look more closely, this category includes consumers who are aware of the disinformation being spread by the brand with the intention to deceive, harm or manipulate them. They perceived the brand as taking an 'intentional misstep' which refers to a deliberate or purposeful mistake made by a brand with the intention to deceive or mislead.

'I love how there's not only two layers of bottle, two layers of cap, but also an outer box. This was pure fraud and stupid fakery.' (User 15)

The brand knowingly engaged in actions or strategies that resulted in negative consequences or misled consumers. Additionally, the lacking of transparency of brand behaviour caused the moment of confusion, and was frustrating to consumers. By not fully disclosing such information renders perceptions of the brand as 'misleading', 'manipulative', and 'fraud' as seen in the extracted consumer responses here.

'This is infuriating and manipulative. Companies are clearly taking advantage of our good conscience 🙄🙄.' (User 12)

'OMG, Greenwashing is basically the best wave for liars to surf on! Danger, danger 🤔⚠️🙄.' (User 13)

'Oh my god I hate this kind of thing 🙄. So glad your calling it out. I don't like wasteful companies of any kind, but the worst are those who profit off pretending to be green when they're products are actually harder to compost or recycle'. (User 14)

Here, User 1, is more concerned about the labelling of the brand's output, than the brands process. They prioritise the outcomes or results of sustainable practices in their evaluation of SCR branding. They focus on whether the brand meets their expectations regarding sustainability messages being advertised compared to the actual outcome. The central focus revolves around the existence of brand disinformation.

'That's flat out misleading it's not "I'm a paper, on a bottle " it says paper bottle they knew what they were doing >> Haha yup! But, hey it never crossed their mind 🤦‍♀️ "Whoops" is the response ... yea no! Don't buy it.' (User 1)


When it comes to negotiating brand disinformation, consumers who fall into this group (e.g., Users 2,3,4,5) are primarily focused on evidence-based brand outcomes without taking the process or brand's ongoing activities into consideration. These result-based focuses assess the brand based on the evident-based outcome of its actions and hold it accountable for delivering on its promises. If the brand falls short of their expectations, negative expectancy disconfirmation is confirmed, eventually triggering negative emotions. Consumers view this as a significant failure and may no longer trust or support the brand.

'Innisfree rlly disapointed me w this :/' (User 2)

'Never buying anything from this company.' (User 3)

'This is beyond frustrating!! And makes me so angry— 🙄.' (User 4)

'Another reason to not buy from Innisfree. Not that animal testing wasn't enough.'
(User 5)

The claim that a brand is being portrayed as criminal as observed in  indicates a perception of significant harm. This group of consumers escalated their expression of anger and mistrust towards the brand to the extent of accusing the brand of criminal behaviour. At this level, there is no room for negotiation with the brand. The intense accusation goes beyond unethical behaviour into criminal behaviour. There is a distinction between unethical behaviour, which may involve misleading claims, and criminal behaviour, which typically involves more severe and intentional acts that harm individuals or society. Accusing a brand of criminal behaviour suggests that the consumers perceive the brand's actions as being so egregious and harmful that they believe they warrant legal consequences. Below is the extracted conversation between User A and User B, in which they respond to each other, framing the brand as criminal.

Consumers tend to express strong emotions; they also tend to prioritise outcomes and rely on evidence-based evaluations. This aligns with research on how consumers respond to marketing (Olson & Dover, 1978). What is more significant than consumer vulnerability is that when consumers perceive a brand making mistakes they take proactive measures and actively seek opportunities to retaliate against the brand. These consumers become increasingly demanding and sceptical of actions taken by the brand. This assertion is reinforced by the data, including User 19's call, for a more regulations.

'We need more legislative work and focus on language when describing products. And penalties for deliberately misleading customers.' (User 19)

Moreover, consumers' perception of the severity of disinformation is not only reflected in the intensity of emotions but also in accusations of the brand engaging in criminal behavior. However, consumers go beyond that to start questioning the brand's integrity. For example, consumers perceive the aims of the brand's exploitative disinformation are to gain direct

financial benefits (User 16); to amplify socially conscious ideology (User 13); and, to solidify the psychology of their brand value, image, and personality (User 18). Consumers do not perceive the brand as the sincere sustainable brand they advertised. This conversation is reflected in the thread as the business activities did not align with the aim to support the core values of the SCR brand positioning; instead, it was done to serve the brand's sole intention to cut the cost of their production line.

User 16: 'It's literally a plastic bottle wrapped in paper, so not only is it lying, but you get less product and more packaging instead lmao, what a scam.'

User 13: 'OMG, Greenwashing is basically the best wave for liars to surf on! Danger, danger 🌀⚠️👤.'

User 18: 'Do you think we are stupid? Why not just sticker the label On the plastic bottle and not even bother with making/producing the paper cover. If you can't be bothered to do it properly don't do it at all. You've just created more waste than necessary.'

The intensity of negative emotional reactions among consumers, as evidenced by their strong expressions of discontent and calls for boycotting, underscores the urgent need for such brand to address the contradiction between their green-natural heritage brand identity. This sense of betrayal is heightened by the perceived contradiction between brand's portrayal as a socially conscious and environmentally friendly brand and the reality of its deceptive practices. As a result, their reactions are characterized by intense emotional responses and a firm stance against the brand's deceptive behavior, reflecting their deep sense of betrayal and disillusionment with brand's purported values. Managing this team can be quite challenging because of the strong emotional responses and non-negotiable stance which make it difficult to regain trust. It is highly probable that this group will have a negative effect on sales due to consumer boycotts

and negative word of mouth. Brands may experience lasting damage to their reputation resulting in a decrease in sales.

4.1.3 Process-oriented Advocates

This category comprises consumers who encounter disinformation spread by the brand, but the brand's intention was not malicious. They perceive the brand's actions as an unintentional misstep, referring to a mistake or error made by the brand without any intention to deceive or mislead. The brand may have inadvertently disseminated false or misleading information without harmful intent. This particular set of customers navigate by considering brand intentions and processes (e.g., User 20), they are open to negotiations (e.g., User 25), and they actively defend the brand (e.g., User 26).

User 20: 'The plastic used inside is thinner and consume less plastic than the average bottle, which is why they have the paper wrap as an additional layer of defence for the liquid. the mechanism inside for pumping is also different. it's purely plastic with no springs. it's designed to be modular and easy to recycle compared to the original. i have this and I know it's not cut and dry easy to recycle but it's a nice step.'

User 21: 'This idea is super brilliant and excellent! Do continue the effort and do add this concept to other products! Looking forward to it! It's saving the our Mother Earth so, why not.'

As seen from Users 20 and 21, they focus on the processes undertaken by the brand when evaluating SCR branding. They value the brand's dedication, and effort in implementing sustainable processes rather than solely focusing on the achieved outcomes or end-goals. At this stage, the primary focus has transitioned to alternative brand practices rather than brand

disinformation. Consumers value the effort the brand puts in, recognising that it goes above and beyond most other brands.

User 22: 'They reduced the usage of plastic by making the plastic thinner, and using the paper as a extra protection in case someone drops the bottle and it spills, also giving it more absorption of fall damage. Also it says "I'm paper bottle" which can also infer that "paper bottle" is the name of the product, given the fact that it's just description of what the bottle looks like (paper). Anyways this is some actually annoying marketing, by manipulating the ignorance of the customer to gain more money, by using misleading terms. They should've thought more about the idea.'

User 23: 'Okay so I looked this up. The brand responded with this "In Innisfree's defense, the brand pointed out that the colorless plastic bottle is recyclable and eco-friendly as it uses 51.8 percent less plastic than conventional packaging. They also added that the bottle packaging provided users with information on how to separate the paper shell from the inner plastic container and recycle." so like It's still bad marketing did this very poorly. But it uses less plastic and they tell the consumers how to recycle it correctly.'

Users 22, and 23 go beyond evaluating the outcome of the marketing campaign and focus on the overall practices of the brand, such as the reduction of plastic use. If the brand meets or exceeds their expectations in this regard, it surpasses what is considered satisfactory to them. We can see that this consumer did not express a negative emotional response to the advertisement nor towards the brand because he/she perceived honesty in the brand's practices (e.g., the brand's commitment to make it with less plastic) as more important than the presentation of the message (e.g., the brand overlooked the possibility that the naming could mislead people to think the whole packaging is made of paper). This group of consumers evaluate brand SCR not from what they say but from how they act in terms of brand practices.

Even though they may feel disappointed by the brand's mistake, these consumers are willing to have a conversation when they discover instances of the brand spreading information. They understand that the brand aims for a goal, like becoming 100% plastic free even if it may not be easily achievable. They acknowledge that even the good-purpose brands can make errors and are open, to engaging in discussions to resolve the matter.

User 24: 'Wouldnt call it greenwashing. How you are supposed to hold the cosmetics with paper packaging? Also if you already read their notes, you'd know that by doing this they reduce around 50% of plastic consumption and boost recycling of the plastic packaging as well with this line. Firms are making changes within their means to become more sustainable, please dont disregard it with a simple "greenwashing" hat.'

While the brand may fall short of this goal, it still earns appreciation for working towards it. Thus, the brand's negotiability continuum towards disinformation is open to negotiation since a consumer's expectations of a brand or product are exceeded.

User 27: 'If their intent is good which I presume it is, they have some room for improvement on their packaging. "Canceling" them isn't part of this conversation.'

Active defence of the brand is noted by Users 25 and 26; these consumers saw the brand as having positive-goodwill intentions (e.g., it's a nice step) in keeping with their core SCR brand quality, while, at the same time realising that brands that aim to be perceived by target consumers as social responsible need to do more compared to the traditional corporates who do not position themselves as socially-conscious brands.

User 25: 'I think the title would be misleading if it pretended to be entirely paper. But. It has explicit instructions on the package about taking it apart, and more information about how this is a reduction and not an elimination of plastic. Everyone's out here judging based on assumptions of it. Like, you wouldn't expect a product in the US to explain its new packaging

intent in four words plastered on the front, right? Their intentions were good with the change. But now a bunch of people who aren't even into k skincare are like iT's GrEeNwAsHiNg!! CANCEL THEM and ugh. Please don't. Innisfree is one of the better brands at this price range...'

User 26: 'Not greenwashing . Fake term. Soap will leak through cardboard dumb dumbs. They trying their best and companies that do this if you actually read the product it says made with less plastic and tells you to separate the plastic from cardboard and recycle separately. Not everything can be the way you want it . Wokies.'

Another consumer also started to defend the brand against the accusations of malicious intent to gain financial (e.g., It's still the same amount of volume) and ideological benefits (e.g., The point is to create less plastic) from spreading disinformation.

User 28: 'The point is to create less plastic. The inner bottle is made of thin plastic so less energy and plastic resins are needed to create that compared to a the full hard plastic. The paper shell is just there to add extra padding or protection. It's still the same amount of volume.'

Positive Expectancy Disconfirmation plays a role in these consumers' assessments. Similar to previous studies on EDT, positive expectancy disconfirmation results in increased trust and loyalty towards the brand (Darke et al., 2010; Do, Rahman, & Robinson, 2020). This is reflected in the consumers' willingness to negotiate the brand's misstep in communication. Positive Expectancy Disconfirmation leads to forgiveness. This is because when consumers have positive experiences that exceed their expectations they are more likely to maintain a favourable attitude towards the brand and show loyalty by actively engaging in dialogue, defending the brand's reputation, and seeking resolutions for any missteps. While forgiveness is common in literature, in our case, Process-oriented Advocates go beyond mere forgiveness;

they actively defend the brand and engage in discussions, showcasing a unique response to intentional misinformation as seen in User 25's comment.

This particular group has the potential to positively affect sales by fostering trust and loyalty through forgiveness and active defence. The challenge for the brand in managing this group is moderate. While some consumers may forgive and actively defend the brand, others might remain sceptical. Thus, the impact on sales hinges upon finding the balance between forgiveness and scepticism. The brand can seize an opportunity by engaging in communication highlighting the aspects of their processes. However, it is crucial for them to effectively address scepticism to avoid any decline in sales.

4.1.4 Holistic Assessors

This particular set of consumers navigate through a process of in-depth evaluations (e.g., User 29), and take into account factors beyond disinformation (e.g., User 30 and 31). Ambiguity arises due to deliberate missteps and uncertainties regarding the intentions of the brand.

User 29: 'Erm... So you want people to recycle and you decided the best way to make that happen is to come up with the most convoluted process imaginable? Way to go guys. Why not just use the inner plastic bottle? Or use a glass bottle instead? The person who came up with this joke should be fired.'

User 30: 'If they're gonna separate plastic from paper, they should also separate everything else. Or, they should just make an actually eco-friendly bottle by removing the paper entirely or making the whole thing out of paper, instead of lying to everyone.'

User 31: 'All you're doing is greenwashing your product to make it look eco-friendly. Actually being eco-friendly means reducing your carbon footprint in general, not just getting rid of plastic.'

Consumers in this stage are likely to engage in internal deliberation, weighing the positive and negative aspects of their experience. They may reassess their initial expectations, reevaluate the significance of different features or attributes, and attempt to reconcile conflicting information. Their ultimate judgment of the brand will depend on how they reconcile these mixed disconfirmations and justify their perception of whether the brand has met their expectations. For example, instead of directly addressing the issue of disinformation, they shift their focus towards other aspects of the associated product. They may pay attention to the structural design of the bottle or the extent of production and the scheme for reducing plastic.

They have also initiated discussions on subjects like the brand's dedication to its socio-environmental objectives and its practices, the brand's operational cost of being truly environmentally sustainable while also rationalising the brand's actions as greenwashing.

User 32: 'This is a consequence of capitalism, profits are the overreaching goal and there's no profit in making products actually sustainable unless it's cheaper as well, it's much more profitable to pull the wool over people's eyes and make it appear sustainable yet still keeping most of your production line as is.'

These consumers justify their SCR brand's expectation holistically when it comes to purchasing decisions. Their evaluations are more elaborate, meaning they carefully consider various factors and details related to the product. Rather than being primarily concerned with the presence of disinformation, these consumers explore different elements of the product and make assessments based on a more comprehensive analysis. In the context of a mixed-expected disconfirmation scenario, consumers find themselves in a state where their expectations are not

clearly aligned with either positive or negative disconfirmation. During this stage, consumers are actively engaged in a process of self-evaluation and justification, seeking to determine whether the brand has actually met or failed to meet their expectations, as seen in User 33's comment. Consumers actively evaluate their own expectations and the brand's performance against those standard expectations. They may question whether the brand has genuinely met their standards for sustainability and social responsibility, or if their expectations were unrealistic to begin with.

User 33: 'Another reason to not buy from Innisfree. Not that animal testing wasn't enough.'

Holistic Assessors exhibit similarities to consumers in mixed-expected disconfirmation scenarios (Oliver, 1977). This group of consumers are not fully in a stage of positive expectancy disconfirmation or negative expectancy disconfirmation. They are consumers who harbour uncertainty regarding the brand's intentions behind the disinformation. They perceive ambiguity, questioning whether the brand deliberately spreads harmful information or if there is a genuine misunderstanding or miscommunication at play. These phrases indicate that consumers' expectations have not been fully confirmed or disconfirmed, and there is a sense of uncertainty or ambiguity in their assessment of the brand's performance or actions. There is a possibility of a mistake or misleading action by the brand, but it is not certain or definitive. Within the inconclusive-expected disconfirmation stage, consumers experience a blend of emotions and cognitive processes. They may concurrently feel elements of satisfaction and disappointment, as their expectations have been partially fulfilled while also falling short in certain aspects. This creates a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in their overall evaluation of the brand or product.

Effectively managing this group necessitates a thoughtful approach. Brands should address any ambiguity, offer information, and emphasise aspects that go beyond the intentional misstep.

Tailored-customised communication might be required to address the concerns within this group. The impact on sales from this cohort can vary greatly. Given the nature of their evaluations, it is possible that some consumers will continue supporting the brand while others may remain undecided or opt for alternatives.

To capitalize on a scenario where consumers are engaged in mixed evaluation, brands can implement several communication strategies to navigate this complex landscape and potentially mitigate negative impact on sales performance. Consumers within this segment are often more receptive to brand communications, presenting an opportunity for brands to showcase their efforts in addressing the challenges of becoming socially-conscious entities. Brands should emphasize their journey towards becoming socially-conscious and sustainable, leveraging this opportunity to raise awareness about the intricacies involved in striving for industry leadership in sustainability. By highlighting these efforts, brands can distinguish themselves in a market where basic concepts such as transparency and authenticity have become commonplace. This approach not only showcases the brand's commitment to transparency and authenticity but also demonstrates its willingness to continuously improve and evolve. By acknowledging the complexities inherent in sustainability initiatives, brands can foster a deeper connection with consumers who value authenticity and genuine efforts towards positive change.

5. Discussion

Disinformation is a process in which actors strategically and intentionally spread false or misleading information with the purpose of deceiving or manipulating (Bran, Tiru, Grosseck, Holotescu & Malita, 2021; Jowore & Turpin, 2022), alienating individuals that hold a different view (Braddock, 2015). Despite the spread of disinformation on social media (Ruiz & Nilsson,

2022), little research attention has been dedicated to disinformation in marketing with very limited exceptions (Domenico, Sit, Ishizaka, & Nunan, 2021), which primarily report the effects of false information circulated on brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2018; Borges-Tiago et al., 2020). From the branding and sales performance perspective, failing to align the communicated values with a brand's actual deeds and actions would cast perceived brand disinformation because consumers perceive the brand practice as false advertising and dishonesty (Li & Sun, 2022; Nadanyiova, Gajanova & Majerova, 2020; Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla & Paladino, 2014). The literature, however, lacks an understanding of how and why brand disinformation would lead to consequential consumer reactions which subsequently result in impacts on sales.

This article enriches disinformation literature through addressing the above noted knowledge gaps that bear substantial theoretical and practical importance. Our effort represents one of the first which shifts research attention from disinformation generated by consumers (e.g., Borges-Tiago, Tiago, Silva, Guaita Martínez, & Botella-Carrubi, 2020; Hameleers et al., 2021; Petratos, 2021) to brand disinformation, an increasingly prevalent business practice when brands themselves are perceived as the driving force of false and misleading claims for their own interest, such as enhanced sales performance. The findings of this research shed light on how brand disinformation as adversarial narratives on social media is reacted to by consumers. Specifically, the findings of this research identify three distinguishable consumer evaluative orientations when exposed to SCR branding messages which are not strictly aligned to the brand's actual practice. The three evaluative orientations are: result-, process-, and holistic-oriented approach.

This research further provides valuable insights into the impacts of brand disinformation on the associated brand as well as reveals mechanisms underscoring the resultant outcomes. This is achieved through drawing upon the EDT. By analysing and illuminating why consumers negotiate their interpretations of misaligned branding messages with the brand's actual deeds

and actions, this research disetangles the impact of online brand disinformation on consumer expectancy (dis)confirmations, choice of evaluative orientation, and the brand's sales performance. Particularly, this research discloses that attributing to the distinguishable consumer evaluative orientations, disinformation pertaining to SCR branding messages could result in substantial variations in perceived expectancy disconfirmation, such as negative, positive as well as inconclusive expectancy disconfirmations, which would engender distinct impacts on the brand's sales performance. The findings also reveal that although misaligned branding messages with the brand's actual actions are unitedly regarded as misleading, they are not necessarily considered as malicious and/or deliberate except for consumers who take the result-oriented approach in assessing brand disinformation.

Disinformation research has given much attention to the setting up stage of strategic deceptions, specifically how falsehoods are planted on social media (Anspach & Carlson 2020; Baccouche et al., 2020), primarily via fake news (Di Domenico et al., 2021). Most recently, the "echo chamber" (Nguyen, 2020; Crinnion et al., 2024) perspective has also been explored focusing on individuals who would circulate disinformation as their own beliefs (e.g., Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023). However, "echo chamber" participants, who encounter messages that coincide with their own and approve disinformation, may only account for a fraction of the population. This research identifies and investigates other consumers who disapprove of disinformation rather than "echo chamber" participants. The notion of this research is that falsehoods might become collective beliefs to some (e.g., "echo chamber" participants) but not all. This research unwraps how consumers who disapprove (as opposed to who approve) brand disinformation react to what started as deceptions. The findings fill a substantial knowledge void in the fast-emerging disinformation literature. Effort of such is timely and relevant as well as bearing substantial implications because dissemination and diffusion of such information online is prevalent (Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023) while understanding is scarce.

This research may be instructive to brand managers attempting to leverage positive brand image pertaining to sustainability and environmental aspirations. Based on the findings, brands may stand to benefit by implementing communication strategies and tactics that are in line with the brand's commitment to green practice. Brands perceived as proactively associating themselves with green efforts, unless they deliver what it "says on the tin", are likely to be regarded as disinformation or misinformation at least, which could substantially damage the brand image and sales performance. Given our findings, brands are advised to devise their promotional narratives strictly according to the level of commitment and factual practice.

Tailored and customized communication strategies for each group are necessary to effectively engage with these different groups and address their specific concerns. Furthermore, we recognize the potential impact on sales from these different group cohorts, which can vary greatly depending on their specific concerns and evaluations. While some consumers may continue supporting the brand despite reservations, others may remain undecided or seek alternatives. We see a huge opportunity for the brand to capture those who remain undecided or seek alternatives. In light of these considerations, we propose implementing 'brand's effort' as a communication strategy to navigate this complex landscape and potentially mitigate any negative impact on sales performance.

Brands can leverage the receptiveness of consumers within this segment to showcase their efforts in addressing the challenges of becoming socially-conscious entities. By emphasizing the brand's journey towards sustainability and raising awareness about the intricacies involved, brands can differentiate themselves in a competitive market where every brand is pursuing the 'eco-friendly' image. This approach not only showcases the brand's dedication to continuous improvement but also strengthens its credibility and appeal to socially-conscious consumers.

Although this research provides support for the detrimental impact of brand disinformation on brand image and sales performance, variations of impact are also revealed among consumers. By capturing the variations as well as underlying mechanisms in relation to consumer responses to brand disinformation, this research has added potential to provide managers with insight into consumer segmentation strategies that could be developed in concert with the construction of brand promotional narratives to improve effectiveness of brand communication. Such insights might also enable managers to account for consumer differences when dealing with crises resulting from brand disinformation.

6. Implications

Our study reflects on the increasing fake news and misinformation and disinformation being communicated in times when consumers are being empowered with information by internet. Our findings highlight that consumers seek information that is true and would like to be communicated honestly by brands as they would like to believe that information they receive from brands is genuine, true, authentic and credible. Implications of our findings based on the results of our study for researchers, managers and policy makers have been discussed in following sections.

6.1 Practical Implications

This research expands boundary of our current knowledge related to impact of truthfulness in communications, on sales performance of brands that claim to be socially responsible but intentionally use misleading or deceptive claims, by applying the lens of expectancy disconfirmation theory as impact of disinformation on green marketing. Misleading or deceptive communications, specially through advertising can lead to legal or financial implications other than losing trust that consumers may have in the brand. Our findings

recommend that brand should ensure that important information is presented to the customers without any kind of exaggeration about the performance of capacity or capability of the product. All the claims being made by the brand about the product should have authentic evidence without using any generic term in the name of the product, that may mislead the consumers, for example using healthy in products that might have ingredients considered to be healthy, but are full of calories.

For brands aiming to communicate their commitment to social consciousness and sustainability, it is essential to avoid relying solely on hype or direct hard-sell marketing words such as sustainable, greenery, or eco-friendly. Instead, brands should focus on providing detailed information about their sustainability initiatives in a transparent and engaging manner. Rather than merely presenting numerical data or relying on emotional visual cues such as green imagery to evoke an eco-friendly perception, brands should adopt a more immersive communication approach. This entails going beyond traditional methods of conveying sustainability efforts and instead inviting consumers to experience these initiatives through all their senses.

For example, brands can create opportunities for consumers to fully engage and experience their sustainable products in a more interactive and immersive manner. This could involve setting up experiential displays or pop-up shops where consumers can interact with the products firsthand, explore their sustainability features, and learn about their environmental impact. By allowing consumers to see, touch, and experience the products in a sustainable context, brands can effectively showcase their commitment to sustainability and deepen consumer understanding and engagement.

In summary, by providing opportunities for consumers to engage with sustainable products in a hands-on and meaningful way, and moving beyond numerical metrics and emotional visuals,

brands can position themselves as genuine advocates of social and environmental responsibility. This approach goes beyond traditional marketing tactics and emphasizes the importance of creating authentic connections with consumers through tangible experiences.

6.2 Managerial Implications

This study provides recommendations for managers intending to increase sales of their brand through brand communications. Many of the previous studies that discuss brand communications in digital era, have recommended that it is important to draw managerial attention to disinformation because it impacts perceptions of consumers about the brand as they expect brands to be honest, truthful, and authentic. Therefore, focus of brand managers on maintaining identity of their brand around these traits by ensuring transparency in their operations to demonstrate brand's accountability towards customers. Such an identity can improve sales by strengthening brand differentiation and attract customers and potential employees to work with the brand. We offer evidence based recommendation for brand managers to adopt practices of avoiding fake, misinformation and disinformation will create a superior environment of collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders that will build an image of credibility and reliability, which will lead to higher sales because consumers prefer to buy a brand they can trust. Particularly, in times when content marketing is dominating the business turf and it is easy to mislead customers maintaining an identity of a truthful brand becomes important for not only marketing but also sales managers. Our research provides an evidence-based support for managers to strategically work with all the departments for ensuring that communication that goes out as brand communications is not deceptive in any way and is reflective of brand's integrity and credibility.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Our study suffers from lack of extensive empirical evidence. This limitation offers opportunity to other scholars working in similar area of enquiry, to conduct further investigation for extending our research. A follow-up study if done in an international context may highlight different variables that may moderate the sales, for example culture. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study impact of different demographics on absorption capacity of the target market to accept or doubt information that may be misleading. For example, mature citizens might not accept the information from the internet as comfortably as millennials (Yannopoulou et al., 2023). It is likely that studying different generations for understanding how disinformation may drive their purchase behaviour or sale of a product, might reveal challenges related to technology adoption behaviours. We also recommend that researchers focusing on expanding our research may look at it from consumer or a business customer perspective combined with digital technologies (Wang et al., 2023). Given exclusive focus of our study on relationship between disinformation and sales, we may also suggest that researchers interested in this topic and base of the pyramid market might find something interesting related to global challenges.

7. Conclusions

This study extends our understanding of the way consumers interpret and react to disinformation by brands, especially those which are positioned to be SCR. It further breaks down consumers' reactions into three different segmentations and examines their effect on sales performance. The findings of this research are generated from a single case study and, thus, should be read with caution and could be further validated in other research contexts, such as disinformation pertaining to any specific benefits of a product/brand. Furthermore, and given

brands' efforts to engage with brand activism, misinformation or disinformation seems to appear more often than previously noted. Future research can look into addressing how brands incorporate brand activism and critically evaluate how this becomes practice or remains limited to advertised messages to make the brand relevant and increase its sales. Short-term versus long-term impact of such efforts can be examined, drawing lessons for sales performance. Another avenue for research is the study of how disinformation disapproval consumers make their argument persuasive and impactful on fellow consumers and how they negotiate between themselves. Further research could also investigate how consumers respond to justifications or explanations from brands regarding disinformation.

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