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**“InvestigatingTheAntecedentsofMLMBrandImage:TheMediatingRoleofCustomer
Trust –AComparative Study of SouthAsian andArab Countries”**



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ABSTRACT

Multi-level marketing (MLM) companies operating in South Asian and Arab markets face persistent challenges in building and sustaining brand image due to ethical controversies, inconsistent service delivery, and fragile consumer trust. The study is based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and examines the relationship between service quality, ethical practices and transparency, marketing practices through word-of-mouth and customer and distributor skills and commitment to customer trust and MLM brand image in the consumer base of South Asia and Arab countries. The survey was conducted using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design and 400 respondents were sampled equally from the six countries in South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh) and the Arab world (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan). The nine hypotheses proposed in the conceptual framework were tested by using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) software. The results show that all four antecedent variables have significant and positive effects on customer trust, with ethical practices and transparency being the most influential variable. The study contributes to the field of Social Exchange Theory by introducing the concept of the MLM brand, addresses the comparative lack of literature in the cross-regional area, and provides practical recommendations for MLM practitioners who want to build brand equity through trust-based governance and development of their distributors.

Keywords: *MLM brand image, customer trust, service quality, ethical practices, word-of-mouth, Social Exchange Theory, PLS-SEM, South Asia, Arab markets.*

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