Are Skincare Brands Turning Gen Z's Loyalty into Profitable Ventures in Africa? A PLS-SEM Analysis of Deceptive Marketing Practice on Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

The skincare market reached $154.4 billion in 2023, with projected growth of $262.5 billion in 2032 at a 6.0% growth rate. This led skincare brands to compete for dominance, using deceptive marketing tactics in advertising, labelling, product ideas, and packaging. Despite short-term financial gains, deceptive marketing practices have neglected people and planet considerations. Gen Z, raised by world-marked environmental concerns, prioritises social activism and environmental sustainability in their purchasing behaviour. The Internet has amplified these trends, disseminating deceptive ideas widely and leading to consumer confusion and complex purchase decisions. The study explored how skincare brands exploit Gen Z's loyalty for profitability by assessing the impact of deceptive marketing on consumer purchasing decisions in the cosmetics industry. The study conducted an online survey targeting Gen Z skincare consumers in economically diverse African countries, including Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda, and Lesotho, obtaining 352 responses worth 92% of the sample size. The survey, analysed using the PLS-SEM approach, showed high predictive power between research variables, with R2 coefficients of 55.1% for Gen Z's loyalty and 5.9%, 6.9%, and 5.6% for advertising, labelling and packaging, and product ideas, exceeding the 5% threshold. Findings suggest deceptive marketing impacts Gen Z's loyalty as a measure of purchase behaviour in Africa's cosmetics industry. Research recommends prioritising ethics in marketing practices, developing unique labelling and packaging, enforcing regulations, and investing in consumer education to empower consumers to make informed decisions. The study notes biases in data collection due to unequal online access among Gen Z consumers.

Keywords: Advertising, Consumer Behaviour, Deceptive Marketing, Gen Z's Loyalty, Labelling.

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1. Introduction

The skincare market, valued at $154.4 billion in 2023 and projected to reach $262.5 billion by 2032 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.0%, has transitioned from a niche industry to a significant global player (Econ Market Research, 2024). In today's business dynamics, companies strive to become market leaders by investing heavily in short-term goals, which grew by approximately 5% to over $1.65 trillion in 2023 (Navarro, 2024), often overlooking the people, planet, and long-term profitability impact. This pursuit is driven by the desire to influence consumer thoughts, knowledge, and purchasing behaviour, as stated by Sun, Leng, and Xiong, (2022). To succeed in the 21st-century marketing environment, characterised by the need to build and maintain lasting customer relationships, firms must adapt to organic factors, including technological advancements, product innovations, and unexpected events like the COVID-19 pandemic, which influence emerging marketing trends. Information asymmetry, a key theme in the academic literature, has reshaped globalisation, affecting Gen Z's loyalty to skincare products. Despite Gen Z's growing brand awareness and consciousness, product quality, performance, advertising, and social influences continue to shape their purchasing decisions (Abbas et al., 2023).

However, predicting Gen Z's loyalty and purchase decision responses to a tailored marketing mix is challenging due to diverse information sources. The internet's proliferation has significantly escalated this by facilitating access to, reproduction, imitation, redistribution, re-performance, and re-display of copyrighted ideas, knowledge, and product attributes, including packaging, colour, flavour, and symbols. Newaz, (2017) coined these practices as "deceptive marketing," where skincare brands exploit these tactics for rapid revenue growth, profitability, and competitive advantage in a fiercely competitive market. This raises the question of whether skincare brands are effectively transforming Gen Z's loyalty into profitable revenue. This necessitates the use of survey-based research to understand the consumer's perspective, a crucial step in understanding the complex effects of unethical practices on both individuals and the planet's financial performance.

Deceptive marketing practices, including false advertising or misleading claims, significantly distort consumers' perceptions of products, leading to confusion, dissatisfaction, and distrust (Fowler, Reisenwitz, & Carlson, 2015). This results in consumers making purchasing decisions based on false information, leading to negative buying experiences. While these practices may initially increase revenue through patronage, they harm brand reputation and erode customer loyalty, risking legal consequences and long-term success (Wu & Geylani, 2020). Deceptive marketing, particularly through misleading advertising and fraud, is widespread in the global market, notably in the cosmetic industry, where customer expectations often

exceed the actual benefits of the product. For example, in the UK, 17.8% of ad impressions were fraudulent in 2023, compared to 1.9% in Japan, highlighting the scope of the issue (Statista, 2023). In Nigeria, over 60% of consumers report encountering deceptive marketing, which erodes trust and distorts market competition (Ezeonu, 2018). Taiwan has also seen a surge in advertisement fraud cases, with 2,074 cases reported, underscoring the importance of ethical considerations in marketing practices (Textor and Statista, 2023).

Moreover, in 2023, global digital advertisement fraud amounted to $65 billion, roughly half of all digital advertising expenditure worldwide and over 85% of the USA's annual advertising spending, equivalent to the entire GDP of Croatia. This surpassed the value of fraudulent transactions made by payment cards worldwide, with bad bots accounting for nearly 18% of internet traffic in the marketing industry (Statista, 2024). However, the United States, China, and the United Kingdom, despite having the largest ad markets, experienced the largest economic losses due to ad fraud, while India and Colombia had the highest ad fraud rates. Skincare brands often depict their products using images of exceptionally beautiful women, creating expectations that the product may not meet. These misleading practices contribute to a decline in company sales, tarnishing its reputation and dissuading customers from recommending the company based on their negative experiences.

From an academic perspective, the literature presents diverse findings on the impact of deceptive marketing on a global scale. Modi and Sharma, (2021) suggest that while deceptive ads can attract additional customers, they also negatively influence consumers by creating false beliefs about promoted products, ultimately affecting their purchasing decisions. This is consistent with Fathy, AbouAish, and El-Sharnouby's (2013) assertion that deceptive advertising, particularly in the Malaysian market, is a significant factor influencing firms' behaviour and contributing to their overall revenue performance.

Furthermore, Qureshi and Gopal, (2023) argue that deceptive advertising has a significant impact on women's buying behaviour, especially regarding various social and health-related variables such as lifestyle, stereotypical roles, social class, side effects, unfulfilled service promises, and the consequences of using cosmetic products. This increased business patronage leads to more reviews, aligning with Al-Zyadat's (2017) findings that deceptive practices not only deceive customers but also promote unfair competition, damage the reputations of honest businesses, and create ethical and legal challenges. However, Rasheed, Baqir, and Ullah, (2024) argue that marketing organisations often ignore deceptive advertising practices towards consumers, focusing instead on the firm's impact on profit maximization. Moreover, studies have primarily focused on sustainable food consumption, overlooking the

beauty and cosmetics industries, which generated $1.94 billion in 2023 with an annual growth rate of 14.97% (Kolling, Ribeiro, & De-Medeiros, 2022), of which Statista, (2024) suggests that approximately 92% of Nigeria's cosmetics market sales arise from skincare products. This showcases that the rise of natural beauty products in Nigeria reflects consumers' prioritisation of supporting domestic brands and embracing their cultural heritage.

Despite the valuable insights provided by existing literature, there is a lack of research on skincare brands, particularly concerning the relationship of deceptive marketing practices with Gen Z's loyalty (Al-Heali, 2020; Nuseir, 2018; Gshayyish, 2023). Moreover, previous studies have mainly focused on Western and Asian countries, neglecting contexts within African countries, including Nigeria (Fathy et al., 2013; Rasheed et al., 2024). Additionally, most existing research has primarily relied on norm activation and planned behaviour theory (Khan et al., 2015; Song et al., 2019). However, this approach may not be ideal as it only focuses on behaviour and profits, neglecting the opinions of the planet and people, which are crucial in today's business environment, making social judgement theory an ideal for this research. Finally, the majority of global and national studies, accounting for over 80%, have used content analysis in this behavioural field (Lock & Seele, 2015; Kumar et al., 2023), leaving the survey research perspective of Gen Z consumers largely unexplored. Consequently, the research explored how skincare brands exploit Gen Z's loyalty into profitable business ventures. The specific objectives of the paper include to:

I.   assess the current deceptive marketing strategies employed by skincare brands;

II.   analyse how deceptive marketing practices affect consumer purchasing decisions in the cosmetics industry using partial least squares structural equation modelling; and

III. develop action plans to address deceptive marketing practices in a way that suppresses complex purchase behaviour effectively within the cosmetics industry.

2. Review of Literature

Generation Z, or Gen Z, comprises individuals born from the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s and is often referred to as Zeners or Zers. In 2019, this generation accounted for 32% of the global population and was projected to make up 40% of all consumers by 2020, with a significant portion residing in emerging countries undergoing rapid development (Miller & Lu, 2018; Taha et al., 2018; Business Insider India, 2020). Representing 27% of India's total population, Gen Z in India reflects

broader global trends (Business Insider India, 2020). Unlike their predecessors, Gen Y and Gen Z grew up amidst rapid change and environmental concerns, shaping their worldview and priorities. Social activism and environmental sustainability are central to this generation, with a strong emphasis on corporate social responsibility (BBMG, 2020; 2021). Peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z's attitudes towards cause-related marketing, distinguishing them from Gen Y (Pandey et al., 2020). This generation's unique upbringing has led to the blurring of boundaries between their online and offline lives, creating a hyper-cognitive cohort that seamlessly integrates information from various sources (Haller et al., 2018; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z is known for their engagement with social media, propensity to challenge societal norms, and inclination to question generational stereotypes (Dentsu, 2020), making them susceptible to deceptive marketing practices.

Since the industrial revolution, characterised by the dominance of big data in operations, deceptive practices have become increasingly common in the marketing discipline. This trend has been facilitated by the widespread accessibility of product information through the Internet of Things (IoT), often without copyright permission (Abdulsalam et al., 2024; Goo et al., 2021). Deceptive practices are not confined to product marketing alone but also extend to the academic sphere, where plagiarism has become a prevalent issue. Marketing scholars have long recognised deceptive practices in consumer marketing research as a significant source of unethical behaviour, potentially impairing consumers' ability to make informed decisions (Peng et al., 2016). While regulators have sought to define deceptive marketing practices, there is considerable disagreement regarding their elements. Deception is typically associated with fraud and misleadingness, with an emphasis on the concept of "misleading" as a crucial factor. Scholars such as Wu et al., (2020) describe misleading tactics as including exaggerated claims, omission of information, weak disclaimers, confusing presentations, and promises of evidence. In the marketing field, the term "misleading" is preferred to describe deceptive practices because it acknowledges both the manipulation by marketers and the ethical considerations of consumers in decision-making. Grazioli and Jarvenpaa, (2003), as noted by Virdi, (2020), view deception as a cognitive interaction between two parties with conflicting interests, where the deceiver manipulates the target's environment to create a false understanding and elicit a desired action that the target would be unlikely to take without such manipulation.

Over the past two decades, skincare marketers have increasingly shown their ability to exaggerate in a way that psychologically impacts consumers' purchasing behaviour (Masood & Salman, 2023). According to Kousheshi et al., (2020), deceptive marketing can lead skincare consumers to prioritise material objects over morally or socially oriented alternatives. Marketers often use misleading content based on their

target market's beliefs to influence buying behaviour. Thus, deceptive marketing is not just about manipulative techniques used by marketers but is also influenced by consumers' own perceptions, mind-sets, and judgements regarding moral or immoral practices (Rynarzewska, 2019). Deceptive marketing involves the use of false or dishonest practices to promote products or services, change consumer perceptions, and boost sales. This concept encompasses various strategies and practices employed by businesses to create a misleading or exaggerated image of their offerings, hide important facts, or exploit consumer vulnerabilities for profit (Kauffmann et al., 2020). Consequently, deceptive marketing tactics are documented for their violation of consumer protection laws and regulations, undermine customer trust and relationships, and damage the company's brand.

Empirical studies showcase the statistical effect of deceptive marketing issues on consumers from various perspectives, including marketing, legal, financial, and reputational perspectives. For instance, Ott et al., (2012) used computational methods to estimate the prevalence of fraudulent or misleading reviews in online communities, shedding light on the extent and consequences of such practices. This study did not explore characteristics that make reviews particularly deceptive or the mechanisms that online platforms can employ to mitigate their prevalence effectively. Peng et al., (2016) conducted a systematic review to understand how consumers in the Chinese market perceive dishonest activities in online reviews, focusing on how consumer trust and decision-making are affected by counterfeit reviews. The research left out the tailored-made strategies that cosmetic companies use to influence consumer behaviour. Román et al., (2019) employed quantitative methods to examine the different aspects of perceived deceit in online consumer reviews and their impacts on consumer attitudes and behaviours, providing insights into the complex dynamics of online customer behaviour and trust in deceptive marketing environments. This study ignores the role of brand loyalty in consumer responses to deceptive marketing practices. Rynarzewska, (2019) conducted content factor analysis to investigate the ethical implications of reviewers receiving incentives, offering valuable insights into the ethical considerations of online customer feedback and its impact on trust in review platforms. The research left out the relationship between deceptive marketing practices and consumer trust in the African market.

Wu et al., (2020) conducted a study on fraudulent internet reviews and their impact on buying decisions, emphasising the government's role in overseeing sustainable business practices through law and order. Alsubari et al., (2022) utilised data analytics methodology to investigate the use of supervised learning methods in detecting fraudulent reviews, offering valuable insights into the influence of deceptive internet reviews on buying decisions. Azimi et al., (2022) explored the influence of false reviews on consumer decisions using a correlational approach, highlighting how

these factors contribute to the spread of misleading reviews in consumer decision-making processes. Barbado et al., (2019) employed a literature survey framework to identify fraudulent reviews in online stores of consumer goods, emphasising the need for collaborative approaches to detecting fraudulent reviews to improve the genuineness and dependability of online consumer feedback in the electronics sector. Cao et al., (2021) investigated techniques for detecting collaborative efforts among fake reviewers aiming to manipulate ratings and mislead consumers, offering insights on improving the credibility of online review platforms. Gourkar, (2023) examined the impact of deceitful and unscrupulous marketing on consumer behaviour, highlighting its significant influence on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchase choices. While these studies offer valuable insights for behavioural research, there is still much to explore in the cosmetic market, particularly regarding the consumer perspective of deceptive marketing's impact on Gen Z's loyalty.

Martínez-Otero, (2021) utilised a case-based methodology to examine the legal and regulatory frameworks aimed at combating fraudulent reviews in the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, offering insights into the effectiveness and challenges of legislative interventions. However, the study leaves room for discussion on the effect of deceptive marketing practices on consumer behaviour within the skincare industry. Hunt, (2015) explored the intersection of fraudulent online reviews and consumer legislation, highlighting the legal consequences and measures to address such reviews, but did not directly address their influence on skincare brands' marketing strategies. He et al., (2022) analysed the motivations and processes behind deceptive reviews, shedding light on their economic and behavioural aspects, including their impact on customer choices and market dynamics. However, the study underexplored how deceptive marketing practices impact purchase decisions in the skincare sector. Finally, Kauffmann et al., (2020) proposed a comprehensive strategy for leveraging big data analytics in commercial social networks, including sentiment analysis and false review detection, to enhance marketing decision-making. Nevertheless, the study did not explore how skincare brands utilise false advertising to profit from Gen Z's loyalty. To address the identified policy and variable gaps, the study intends to statistically test whether:

H_0 Deceptive marketing practices have no significant influence on Gen Z's purchase behaviour in the cosmetic industry,

The main hypothesis led to the following sub-hypotheses, as illustrated in Figure 1:

H_{0a} Deceptive advertising has no significant effect on Gen Z's loyalty to skincare brands,

H$_{0b}$ There is no significant relationship between deceptive product ideas and Gen Z's loyalty towards skincare brands,

H$_{0c}$ Deceptive packaging and labelling have no significant influence on Gen Z's loyalty towards skincare brands.

By adopting the **PLS-SEM** approach to establish the construct path of the research variables, it offers prescriptive value for several reasons. Firstly, it helps to understand the influence of marketing strategies on consumer behaviour, which is vital for developing effective marketing campaigns for sustainability and business survival. Secondly, it can reveal insights into the ethical considerations of marketing practices, guiding companies to adopt more responsible strategies. Thirdly, the findings can inform regulatory bodies about the need for stricter guidelines to protect consumers. In overall, it contributes to advancing knowledge in marketing ethics and consumer behaviour, benefiting both businesses and society at large (Bag et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2024).

3. Theoretical Framework

The research is guided by the social judgement theory, developed by Muzafer Sherif and Carl Hovland in the 1960s, which posits that understanding consumers' attitudes towards a marketing practice can offer insights into how to effectively approach persuasive efforts in an evolving business landscape (Bajaj, 2017; Aghakhani & Main, 2019). This theory centres consumer evaluation of persuasive messages on "anchors," emphasising the importance of their pre-existing beliefs (Ramos, 2017). While behavioural research often examines cognitive processes, the theory's implications anchor on communicators' intentions to seek to persuade others. According to social judgement theory, as noted by Ramos, (2017), consumers assess messages based on their attitudes, categorised into "acceptance, which encompasses ideas that the consumer finds agreeable; rejection, which includes ideas that the consumer finds disagreeable; and non-commitment latitude, which comprises ideas that the consumer has no strong opinion, implying neither accepting nor rejecting them.

Consequently, the academic literature suggests that marketers and their advocates often engage in various forms of deception when creating product awareness (Krafft & Saito, 2015). However, measuring deceptiveness in marketing requires a detailed assessment of information on ads, product quality, and inventories, which is challenging to conduct through surveys (Teng et al., 2015). This is because deception is a common phenomenon in communication, particularly in contexts involving conflicts of interest. It can manifest in different forms beyond outright lies,

distinguished by factors such as the amount and sufficiency of information, truthfulness, clarity, relevance, and intent (Alhabash et al., 2015). Regardless of the form it takes, social judgement theory suggests that deception raises ethical questions and concerns for companies, consumers, and policymakers.

The study adopted the "Social Judgement Theory" due to its comprehensive nature, which applies to all variables that form the construct of the hypotheses. Academic literature argues that the "Social Judgement Theory" is ideal because it suggests that deceptive marketing practices influence skincare users' behavioural intentions for several reasons (Ham et al, 2014). Firstly, in line with the theory's emphasis on anchor points, Gen Z's loyalty depicted an anchor point affected by societal pressures and beauty standards. Brands exploit this by promoting products as crucial for meeting these standards, leveraging consumers' social judgements on beauty. This means skincare brands use this concept to their benefit by creating marketing messages that align with Gen Z's acceptance range, making deceptive claims appear more believable (Majid et al., 2019).

Secondly, the theory indicates that attitude change is more probable if the message falls within the latitude of acceptance. This means Gen Z is susceptible to buying products promising to meet their beauty ideals, even if these claims are deceptive. This underscores the importance of their ego-involvement, where Gen Z is more receptive to messages relevant to their self-image (Ahmed & Raziq, 2018). Skincare brands exploit this by linking product use to self-enhancement and confidence, prompting Gen Z to invest in their products. Lastly, as the theory recognises that consumers have varying levels of commitment to their anchor points, Gen Z's brand loyalty may differ, but deceptive marketing can manipulate this loyalty, leading to repeat purchases. This highlights that messages within the latitude of acceptance are more persuasive when perceived as credible (Lee et al., 2013). Consequently, skincare brands may employ influencers or pseudo-scientific claims to bolster the credibility of their deceptive marketing messages, further influencing Gen Z's purchasing behaviour.

4. Research Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling Approach

The research hypothesis was tested using quantitative data gathered from an online survey directed towards Gen Z consumers of skincare products in major countries across Africa, including Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Egypt, and the DR Congo. These countries were selected based on their economic diversity and the presence of the millennial population, aligning with Maziriri et al.'s (2023)

observations. The study selected Gen Z as the sample participants due to their significant buying experience with skincare products in sub-Saharan Africa. The internet plays a crucial role in their lives, leading them to value authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility in brands. This provides an opportunity to explore their perspective on the impact of deceptive marketing practices through product information and opportunities.

Due to the lack of scientific data on the actual Gen Z population in Africa, the research relied on Bill Golden's sampling techniques for generalizability to a wider population (Sadler et al., 2010). This sampling choice was influenced by constraints such as security issues, financial limitations, time constraints, and the need for efficient data processing, resulting in a sample of 384 ethnic African Gen Z consumers aged 18 or above and born between 1991 and 2010, randomly estimated for the study:

$$SS = Z^2 x \ (p) \ x \ (1 - p)/C^2 \qquad \text{Equation (1)}$$

Where; SS = Sample Size, Z = Z-value (1.96 for 95% confidence interval), P = Population percentage (expressed as 0.5), C = Confidence interval (expressed as 0.05 = +/- 5 percentage points)

$$SS = 1.96^2 x \ 0.5 \ (1 - 0.5)/0.05^2 \qquad \text{Equation (2)}$$

$$SS = 3.8416 \ x \ 0.5 \ x \ 0.5/.0025 \qquad \text{Equation (3)}$$

$$SS = 384 \ Gen \ Z \ consumers \qquad \text{Equation (4)}$$

The research focuses on African Gen Z skincare brand users who have encountered deceptive or imitation products, either online or in-person, over the past few years. Africa was chosen due to the high incidence of such practices, with Egypt experiencing the highest number of cases (30.61%), followed by South Africa (20.71%), Morocco (10.31%), Nigeria (5.92%), Uganda (4.18%), and Lesotho (3.98%), according to Peacock's (2019) documentation. This prevalence highlights the significance of the issue on the continent. Due to the lack of comprehensive statistical data on internet-using Gen Z skincare brand users, a non-standardised sampling method was employed. The infinite Borden sampling model was used, with the sample size distribution based on the percentages of deceptive practices reported by Peacock (2019), as computed in Table 1: Sample Size Distribution. This approach ensures that the sample reflects the prevalence of deceptive practices in each country, allowing for a more accurate representation of the issue among Gen Z skincare consumers in Africa.

Table 1: *Sample Size Distribution*

Country	Deceptive Practices (%)	Sample Size	Questionnaire Collection	Data Lapses
Egypt	30.61	30.61/75.71 * 384=155	138	17
South Africa	20.71	20.71/75.71 * 384=105	92	13
Morocco	10.31	10.31/75.71 * 384=52	50	2
Nigeria	5.92	5.92/75.71 * 384=30	30	0
Uganda	4.18	4.18/75.71 * 384=22	22	0
Lesotho	3.98	3.98/75.71 *384=20	20	0
Total	75.71	384	352	32

Source: Authors (2024)

According to Table 1, the research administered 384 questionnaires across the top six countries with deceptive practices in Africa. The selection was proportionate to the percentage of deceptive practices reported by Peacock (2019). Egypt received 155 questionnaires, South Africa 105, Morocco 52, Nigeria 30, Uganda 22, and Lesotho 20. Discrepancies between administered and collected responses significantly impact the findings. In Egypt, 17 questionnaires were lost due to participants wrongly filling out the survey question, reducing the sample size to 138. Similarly, in South Africa, 13 were lost, reducing the sample to 92. These gaps can introduce sample biases and reduce the reliability of the results, potentially misrepresenting perceptions of deceptive practices. In Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda, and Lesotho, the data gaps were minimal, with only 2, 0, 0, and 0 questionnaires lost, respectively, suggesting more reliable data collection in these countries. This discrepancy might skew the overall analysis. The higher data lapses in Egypt and South Africa may lead to an underestimate of the true prevalence of deceptive practices in those regions. Despite this perceived limitation, the research provides valuable insights into the current landscape of deceptive marketing practices in Africa and their impact on Gen Z's purchase behaviour, allowing for more accurate conclusions and recommendations.

Construct Measurement

The researcher developed a questionnaire comprising questions with predefined response options called assessment scales, allowing respondents to express their preferences. The survey measures were initially derived from a thorough literature review conducted by Abdulsalam et al. (2024), chosen as the current leading forensic research that combines a triple (people, planet, and profit) bottom line perspective in the African marketing field. These measures were further refined based on insights from three expert researchers and a pre-test involving 80 Gen-Z African consumers. The questionnaire was translated into languages understood by each respondent to ensure comprehension among native African speakers. Thus, linguistic equivalence was ensured through back-translation, of which the items were coined as guided by Chan et al. (2024), to assess four ethically questionable deceptive marketing practices:

"active (A), passive (P), deceptive (D), no harm (NH), and harm (H)," ranging from 1 = 'A' to 5 = 'H.'

The constructs were measured using a Likert-type scale with five response levels, from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" for deceptive marketing practices and from 1 = "unimportant" to 5 = "very important" for Gen Z's loyalty. This approach aligns with Toti et al. (2021) in that it is advantageous to accommodate a large and diverse participant pool across Africa, facilitating comprehensive data collection, albeit with time, financial, and implementation investments during the design phase. Despite the availability of other valid measurement methods, these variables were chosen because they encapsulate the triple bottom line dimensions: people, planet, and profit, previously validated for internal consistency in the marketing field (Narayanan, 2022; Dabija, Bejan, & Dinu, 2019; Antoniades, 2023; Dabija & Bejan, 2019). This selection allows for the incorporation of various deceptive marketing practices by contributing to the community (people), fostering transparent management (profit), and protecting the environment (planet) in forensic marketing research.
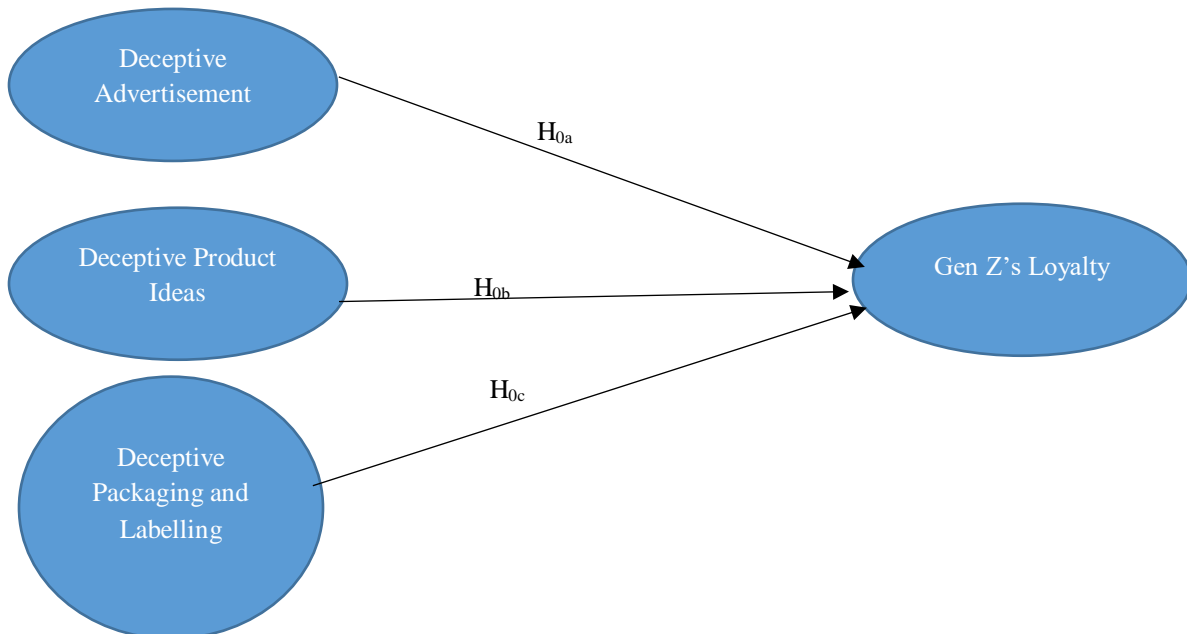

Figure 1: Adapted Research Construct (Abdulsalam et al., 2024)

PLS-SEM Analysis Method

The research model, consisting of four composite variables, utilises partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) as the analysis method, chosen over traditional structural equation modelling (SEM) due to its suitability for estimating composite models, according to Rigdon, (2016) and Hair et al., (2019). PLS-SEM is

a variance-based technique (Henseler, 2018) that is particularly adept at estimating multiple relationships between latent constructs, especially those involving mediation (Segarra-Moliner & Moliner-Tena, 2016). Additionally, PLS-SEM is preferred when dealing with large samples (Hair & Sarstedt, 2019). The model was analysed using Smart-PLS software 3.3 following Ringle's (2015) recommendation, and a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 sub-samples was conducted to test the hypotheses, as suggested by Henseler et al., (2014). PLS-SEM offers the advantage of simultaneously analysing multiple structural equations, accommodating numerous dependent and independent variables, and being particularly useful for examining direct and indirect impacts, including the presence of mediating variables in consumer research (Ali et al., 2018).

5. Results Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The research findings are based on 352 electronic responses, representing 92% of the total sample size of 384, forming the foundation of this study's analysis and results. This corresponds with Russo and Stol's (2021) assertion that a 70% sample size can effectively represent PLS-SEM results. Table 1 illustrates that Egypt (39.2%) and South Africa-based (26.1%) Gen Z dominate the demographic composition of Gen Z skincare consumers, with 58.2% being female and 41.8% male. This indicates that females are more likely to be influenced by skincare brand preferences and loyalty. The majority of the Gen Z respondents fall within the 21–25 age group (63.4%), followed by 15-20 years (18.8%). This aligns with the study's focus on Gen Z, suggesting that skincare customers are predominantly homogeneous and highly concerned about beauty and its impact on their purchasing intentions.

Furthermore, a large portion of respondents are from a bachelor's degree background (86.6%), with varying levels of disposable income and purchasing power, which can influence their choices in skincare products. Most respondents hold a BSc/HND (65.9%) as their highest educational qualification, indicating a relatively educated Gen Z population with potentially higher levels of consumer awareness and critical thinking, which could affect their responses to deceptive marketing practices.

Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents have 1–5 years of beauty product experience (42.0%), followed by 11 years and above (20.5%). This indicates a diverse range of experience levels, offering insights into how consumer behaviour may evolve over time, suggesting that the younger segment of Gen Z is actively using beauty products. The findings suggest that skincare brands have the opportunity to turn Gen Z's loyalty into profitable ventures by understanding and leveraging their market segment composition and consumer behaviour patterns. By aligning marketing

strategies with these insights, brands can potentially increase their influence and profitability among Gen Z consumers in Africa.

Table 2: *Gen Z's Demographic Analysis*

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Response Rate	Egypt South Africa Morocco Nigeria Uganda Lesotho **Total**	138 92 50 30 22 20 **352**	39.2% 26.1% 14.2% 8.5% 6.3% 5.7% **100%**
Gender	Female	205	58.2%
	Male	147	41.8%
	Total	**352**	**100%**
Age	15-20 years	66	18.8%
	21-25 years	223	63.4%
	26-30 years	42	11.9%
	31-35 years	12	3.4%
	35 years and above	9	2.6%
	Total	**352**	**100.0%**
Marital Status	Married	44	12.5%
	Single	305	86.6%
	Widow	3	0.9%
	Total	**352**	**100.0%**
Highest Educational Level	ACA	6	1.7%
	BSC/HND	232	65.9%
	Masters	3	0.9%
	O'Level	75	21.3%
	OND/NCE	24	6.8%
	PhD	3	0.9%
	Undergraduates	9	2.6%
	Total	**352**	**100.0%**
Product Experience	1-5 years	148	42.0%
	6-10 years	60	17.0%
	11 years and above	72	20.5%
	No Experience	72	20.5%
	Total	**352**	**100.0%**

Source: SPSS Output, (2024)
Model of Construct Measurement

Table 3: *Descriptive Analysis*

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness	α	AVE	ρC
Advertising					0.756	0.890	0.803
AD1	3.093	1.315	-1.147	-0.265			
AD2	3.483	1.376	-1.061	-0.488			
Customer Loyalty					0.828	0.896	0.745
CL1	3.788	1.327	-0.510	-0.838			
CL2	3.627	1.254	-0.889	-0.515			
CL3	3.042	1.298	-1.074	-0.056			
Packaging-Labelling					0.714	0.866	0.764
PS1	3.076	1.290	-1.120	-0.192			
PS2	3.551	1.338	-1.075	-0.465			
Product Idea					0.884	0.945	0.896
PI1	3.356	1.211	-0.745	-0.397			
PI2	3.517	1.240	-0.701	-0.579			

The above calculations were determined through a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 repetitions, with α abbreviated as Chronbach's alpha, ρC as Jöreskog's composite reliability, and AVE as average variance extracted, of which all loadings were significant at the 0.005 percentage rate (Author, 2024)

Table 3 demonstrates a significant association among the variables, as all values exceed 3.288, with low standard deviations ranging from 1.397 to 1.240, indicating limited variability of the latent variable. This suggests a need for substantial policy reform to promote ethical practices. Furthermore, the normality of the data is confirmed, as all variables fall within the threshold of the absolute value of ±1.0 for peakedness and within the absolute value of ±3.0 for kurtosis (Matore & Khairani, 2020). Additionally, the reliability of the indicators was assessed through loadings, with all variables surpassing the established minimum value of 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha (Shrestha, 2021). Notably, the two loads related to deceptive marketing and customer loyalty are reliable, with values close to this minimum threshold. Further reliability is demonstrated by Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and the Dijkstra–Henselerrho ratio, ranging from 0.731 to 0.925 (Haji-Othman & Yusuff, 2022). Convergent validity, assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), confirms the internal consistency of the reflective scales, as all values exceed 0.5 (Kennedy, 2022).

Table 4: *Discriminant Validity and Multicollinearity*

Construct	Advertising	Customer Loyalty	Labelling and Packaging	Product Idea	VIF
Advertising	0.896				2.772
Customer Loyalty	0.676	0.863			
Labelling and Packaging	0.743	0.677	0.874		2.651
Product Idea	0.744	0.670	0.731	0.946	2.663

Source: Smart PLS-SEM, (2024)

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      The discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, ensuring that the correlations between each pair of constructs did not exceed the square root of the AVE for each construct variable (Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Table 4 then presents the results, indicating that all correlations meet this criterion. Additionally, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was calculated, with all values falling below the conservative threshold of 0.850 (Dirgiatmo, 2023). These results confirm the adequate discriminant validity of all latent variables. This suggests that the constructs in the study are distinct and measure unique aspects, reinforcing the robustness of the research model and enhancing confidence in the study's results. However, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which indicate the degree of correlation between independent and dependent variables, demonstrate that the variables are not highly correlated with each other. With values ranging from 2.651 to 2.772, all well below the threshold of 10, as suggested by Shrestha (2020), Ahmad (2021), and Gokmen, Dagalp, and Kilickaplan, (2022), there is no evidence of multicollinearity among these latent variables. This suggests a healthy relationship between the independent and dependent variables, further strengthening the validity of the results.

Hypothesis Testing
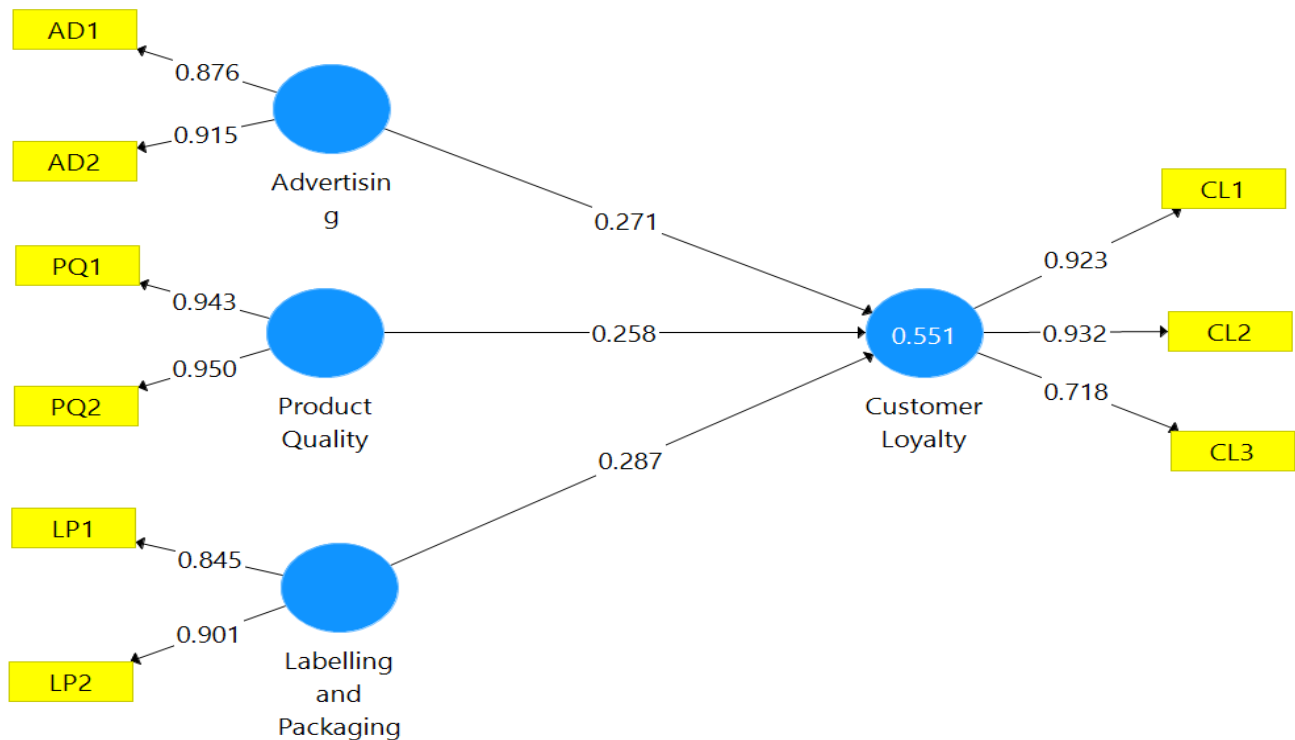
Note: p<0.05, p<0.01, p<0.001, **Figure 2**: Path Construct Measurement (Smart PLS-SEM, 2024)

According to Fey, Hu, and Delios, (2023) and Ibrahim and Shariff, (2016), the contribution of each independent variable to the R^2 values of a dependent variable is measured through F^2. The F^2 level with values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicates small, medium, or large effects, respectively. As shown in Figure 2, all dimensions of the independent variable exceed this minimum value, demonstrating that deceptive marketing practices have a significant impact on Gen Z's loyalty, as a construct of purchase behaviour. This highlights the importance of guarding against deceptive marketing for skincare businesses, as it can enhance customer loyalty. Specifically, deceptive labelling and packaging have the strongest effect on customer loyalty, suggesting that skincare firms should focus on developing unique and innovative labelling and packaging for their products to increase customer loyalty.

Also, deceptive advertising has a moderate effect, emphasising the need for memorable and distinctive advertising messages to positively influence customer memory and enhance loyalty. Lastly, deceptive product ideas have a weak effect on customer loyalty, indicating that skincare firms should develop innovative ideas that are easily identifiable and protected from easy public copyright violations to ensure customer loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of ethical marketing practices in the skincare industry to build and maintain customer trust and loyalty.

Table 5: *Bootstrapping and Correlation Coefficient Results*

	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F^2	Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-value	P-value	Result
CL	0.551	0.539							
AD->CL			0.059	0.271	0.282	0.107	2.536	0.012	Reject
LP->CL			0.069	0.287	0.279	0.116	2.467	0.014	Reject
PI->CL			0.056	0.258	0.258	0.092	2.815	0.005	Reject

Source: Smart PLS-SEM (2024)

Table 5 demonstrates a direct and significant impact by rejecting the null hypothesis and revealing a positive relationship between deceptive marketing dimensions (advertising, labelling, packaging, and product idea) and purchase behaviour (Gen Z's loyalty) with R2 coefficients of 0.551 and adjusted R2 coefficients of 0.539, respectively. The R2 coefficient values indicate a high predictive power of the model, with 55.1% variance explained for Gen Z loyalty and 5.9%, 6.9%, and 5.6% for advertising, labelling and packaging, and product idea, respectively. These values exceed the 5% threshold established by Chicco, Warrens, and Jurman, (2021). The T-values for AD->CL (2.536), LP->CL (2.467), and PI->CL (2.815) are all statistically significant with corresponding P-values below 0.05, further supporting the P-values of 0.012, 0.014, and 0.005, which are all below the typical threshold of 0.05, further supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis. The results suggest that deceptive marketing practices have a strong influence on customer loyalty as a measure of Gen

Z's purchase behaviour within the skincare industry, highlighting the importance of ethical marketing strategies to maintain customer trust and loyalty.

6. Discussion of Findings and Results Implication

Gen Z's upbringing in a world marked by rapid change and environmental concerns has deeply influenced their worldview and purchasing behaviour, placing a strong emphasis on social activism and environmental sustainability. This generation prioritises ethical practices in marketing. However, some skincare brands targeting Gen Z in Africa are resorting to deceptive marketing practices, such as fraudulent ads, to enhance loyalty and profitability. Engaging in such practices is unethical and can negatively impact Gen Z's purchasing decisions, despite potentially increasing revenue and patronage for skincare firms. Research indicates that skincare brands have a significant opportunity to capitalise on Gen Z's loyalty in Africa by understanding their market segment composition and consumer behaviour patterns. For example, the research path measurement analysis revealed high predictive power, with R^2 coefficient values of 55.1% for Gen Z's loyalty and 5.9%, 6.9%, and 5.6% for advertising, labelling and packaging, and product ideas, respectively. These values exceed the 5% threshold established in the study and are consistent with previous research on deceptive marketing and millennials (Alqaysi & Zahari, 2022; Thomas, Bhatt, & Patel, 2024; Al-Heali, 2020; Khan et al., 2015; Gaber, Labib, & Salem, 2018).

The T-values for advertising to customer loyalty (2.536), labelling and packaging to customer loyalty (2.467), and product ideas to customer loyalty (2.815) are all statistically significant, with corresponding P-values below 0.05, further supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that skincare brands should focus on developing unique and innovative labelling and packaging to increase customer loyalty, highlighting the importance of ethical marketing strategies in the skincare industry.

The study makes significant contributions to marketing research by enhancing the theoretical and empirical understanding of Gen Z's consumer behaviour. It emphasises the importance of ethical practices in marketing and sheds light on factors such as advertising, labelling, packaging, and product ideas that influence Gen Z's loyalty. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of the drivers behind their purchase decisions. From a managerial perspective, the research underscores the need for skincare brands targeting Gen Z in Africa to adopt ethical marketing practices, focusing on developing unique labelling and packaging. This approach, rather than unethical practices, can foster customer loyalty and profitability. Managers can leverage these insights to tailor marketing strategies that resonate with Gen Z's values, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and financial performance. Additionally, the study

highlights the significance of regulations and guidelines to prevent deceptive marketing practices in the skincare industry. Policymakers can utilise these findings to advocate for stricter regulations and enforcement mechanisms, ultimately protecting consumers, especially Gen Z, from fraudulent advertising and unethical marketing practices. By promoting ethical standards in marketing, policymakers can contribute to a fair and transparent marketplace for consumers.

Although the study makes significant contributions to academic literature with its insightful findings, it has several perceived limitations. Relying on self-reported survey data introduces the risk of social desirability bias (Arezzo et al., 2024), where respondents may provide favourable rather than truthful answers, especially in sensitive areas like perceptions of deceptive marketing practices. However, the study's geographical focus on Africa, while offering valuable regional insights, may limit generalizability to other contexts. The cultural, economic, and regulatory environments in Africa can differ significantly from those in developing regions, restricting the broader applicability of the findings.

Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design, which captures consumer behaviour at a single point in time without accounting for changes over time, is criticised for its non-wider scope of applicability (Woodside, 2011; Spector, 2019; Islam, & Hossain, 2018). Therefore, it can limit the establishment of the study's causal relationships. The **PLS-SEM** methodology offers a robust approach to handling complex models and small sample sizes and assumes linear relationships between variables, which may oversimplify the complexities of the study's relationship (Zeng et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2021). Moreover, the study's focus does not fully account for all factors influencing Gen Z's loyalty and purchasing behaviour, such as peer influence, social media impact, and individual psychological traits, which are challenging to measure comprehensively. Finally, the focus only on deceptive marketing practices as a factor in sustainability marketing issues could introduce a negative bias, potentially overlooking positive marketing strategies that also drive consumer loyalty and profitability. This narrow focus limits the study's ability to provide a holistic view of the factors contributing to brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers in the skincare industry.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research provides valuable insights into Gen Z skincare consumers in Africa, highlighting their demographic composition, consumer behaviour patterns, and the impact of deceptive marketing practices on customer loyalty. The research concludes that skincare brands targeting Gen Z in Africa have a significant opportunity to enhance customer loyalty by understanding and leveraging their market segment

composition and consumer behaviour patterns. However, engaging in deceptive marketing practices can undermine trust and negatively impact purchasing decisions. Therefore, it is imperative for skincare brands to adopt ethical marketing strategies, focusing on developing unique and innovative labelling and packaging to increase customer loyalty. As a result, the below recommendations are offered:

I.   *Ethical Marketing Practices:* Skincare brands should prioritise ethics in their marketing practices to build and maintain customer trust. This includes being transparent in advertising, avoiding deceptive claims, and ensuring that product information is accurate and reliable.

II.   *Focus on Unique Labelling and Packaging:* Developing unique and innovative labelling and packaging can help skincare brands differentiate themselves in the market and increase customer loyalty. Brands should consider eco-friendly and sustainable packaging options to align with Gen Z's values.

III. *Comply with Copyright Regulations:* Policymakers should enforce regulations and guidelines to prevent deceptive marketing practices in the skincare industry. This includes monitoring advertising claims, ensuring product safety, and protecting consumers from false or misleading information.

IV.   *Investment in Consumer Education:* Stakeholders, like competing firms, should invest in consumer education, as educating consumers, especially Gen Z, about deceptive marketing practices can empower them to make informed purchasing decisions. Brands can play a role in educating their customers about the importance of reading labels and understanding product claims.

V.   *Longer-term Focus on Sustainability:* Given Gen Z's emphasis on environmental sustainability, skincare brands should align their marketing strategies with sustainable practices. This could involve using eco-friendly packaging, sourcing ingredients responsibly, and supporting social and environmental causes. Moreover, skincare brands can enhance their appeal to Gen Z by promoting their social responsibility efforts. This includes supporting local communities, advocating for social causes, and ensuring fair labour practices.

VI.   *Further Enquiry:* Future research should explore the impact of other factors, such as corporate dimension, institutional performance, social media influence, and brand loyalty programmes, on Gen Z's purchasing behaviour

in the skincare industry. Additionally, studying consumer perceptions of ethical marketing practices and their willingness to pay for ethically marketed products could provide valuable insights for skincare brands.

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