



## The Impact of Deceptive Advertisements on Consumer Loyalty towards Skincare Products: Moderated by Age

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to identify the factors which impacts deceptive advertisements in the Malaysian market. Deceptive advertisements harm consumers by causing them to have false beliefs about the nature of the products being advertised and thereby causing them to make different purchasing decisions than they would have made otherwise. This is particularly evident in the skincare industry in Malaysia where various forms of advertising techniques deceptive in nature are increasingly. The sample was chosen using purposive sampling and a total of 600 respondents from Selangor participated in this study. The respondents were selected from the group of individuals known as The Developers, and they have seen deceptive, misleading skincare advertisements. To examine the moderating role of age, the data was analysed using partial least square-structural equation modelling. The results showed that inter-attribute misleadingness and source-based misleadingness does not impact consumers' loyalty. However, omission of material facts, misleadingness due to semantic confusion and intra-attribute misleadingness impacts consumers' loyalty. There is a negative relationship between age and deceptive advertising towards consumer loyalty. Hence, age does not play any influence on the decision to purchase or not to purchase a skincare product. However, the sample for this study was limited to Malaysians from Selangor, limiting the generalizability of the results to the entire Malaysian population at large. Furthermore, this study only examines the moderating role of age. Future studies may include other demographic variables such as gender, education, income, occupation and household size. The findings help skincare manufacturers understand the relevance and influence of various antecedent variables that results deceptive advertisements.

**Key Words:** Deceptive advertisement, misleading, omission of material facts, misleadingness due to semantic confusion, intra-attribute misleadingness, inter-attribute misleadingness, source-based misleadingness.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Millions are spent to personalize marketing messages and to discover new ways to encourage consumers' consumptions and repeated consumptions (Workman & Paper, 2010). One sure way to increase multi-folds number of shopping trips, may it be physical or digital, is via advertisements. Advertisement narrates just sufficient information in order to tempt consumers. The desired result of any advertisement is for consumers to remember the message, crave for the product advertised, and penultimately evoking a change in their purchasing behaviour, which is to persuade consumers to purchase the advertised product. This is feasible as advertisements has the unique knack to infiltrate consumers' minds with desires and beliefs – creating a need to know, taste, touch and wanting to own the product, thus leading to either an urge to purchase or even a craving wanting to discover more (Scheinbaumet al., 2012). Advertisements are used to create curiosity and awareness; stimulate purchase and repeat purchase of products; and also convince consumers that they made the right choice (Belch et al., 2019) without violating any laws. In short, advertisements weave its spell inconspicuously to mesmerize consumers into believing in the product and eventually purchasing it.

An advertisement turns into deceptive, misleading or false when untruthful statements are used in the advertisements to attract consumers towards the advertised product (Nooh et al., 2014). Deceptiveness starts during the advertisement designing stage when creative strategies using misleading or untrue statements are utilized. For example, editing, modifying or photoshopping or airbrushing the appearance of the products or models, in order to deceive consumers and to ensure their products are pleasant to the eyes; hence, providing inaccurate information which are half-truths or no-truths without lying outrightly. These types of advertisements are unsafe as consumers are misled on purpose by the misrepresentation of quality, characteristics or the nature of the product offered. The incorrect visual or statement of the product leads consumers to make bad decisions which they end up wasting money on something that will not fulfil their needs or resolve their problems (Taruna, 2016).



‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?’ – the most quoted words in Snow White. Despite the fact that there is an abundance of dusky beauties, many dream to be fair skinned, as it is a belief that being fair skinned is beautiful; and fair skinned people get better opportunities and are successful and consequently, have a blissful life. Conversely, dusky toned people only face rejection, discrimination and difficulty in landing the job of their choice or a good life-partner (Asad, 2020). Such beliefs are played on by skincare companies, making individuals feel insecure when their skin is not fair or it is tan, has pigmentation or spots. Many skincare companies invariably resort to a ‘before-and-after’ form of comparative advertising to show the efficacy claims of their products. While making an efficacy claim for its product, these companies should ensure such claims are substantiable. For example, when a skincare product claims that usage of its lotion can lighten one’s skin tone by seven shades without any substantiation, this is a misleading by exaggeration claim.

Advertising job is 24/7 in affecting consumer behaviour whether to buy or not to buy a product. Consumers are affected by multiple marketing activities and deceptive advertisings. Moreover, misleading advertising is a responds-based issue because most consumers are unable to comprehend the vague adverts and interpret the adverts correctly. Consumers are unable to decipher what is the truth and what are blatant lies. Sometimes the advertisers over-exaggerate the product’s benefits and advertise them in such a thoughtful way, which confuses customers into making an unintended purchase. Khan et al (2012) states when such misleading advertisements influences consumer to purchase a product; this eventually creates an emotional detachment towards the product, leading to an erroneous understanding that impacts trust, consumer loyalty and the brand name in consumers’ minds. This was further supported by Jahanzeb et al (2011) who elucidate that deception in advertisements will affect consumer behaviour. Skincare companies using deceptive techniques exploit feelings, to bewitch and sway consumers into believing in the falsehood portrayed and it is just like toying with consumers’ affective and cognitive state of mind. Such advertisements generate a belief about the quality of the products which is not true and create the wrong impression about the products, resulting in consumers’ preferences to be distorted. This study will demonstrate how consumers respond after being misled by skincare product advertisements for the product they purchased. The pertinent question raised is whether deceptive advertising would impact consumers’ loyalty.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

### 2.1. Deceptive Cosmetic Advertisements:

Once a company engages in misleading advertising it is not trustworthy as both the new consumers and the existing consumers may feel deceived and may switch to another skincare product. When advertisement messages are distorted as result of cautious distortion or omission of facts, with the intention of convincing and claiming that a skincare product can do something that in reality it cannot, is a clear case of deception (Mitra et al., 2008). The American Marketing Association (2022) defines deceptive advertising as the advertising intended to mislead consumers by falsely making claims, by failure to make full disclosure, or by both. Aydin and Ozer (2005) define deception as “any act, claim or message that (a) causes consumers to make decisions that they would not otherwise make; (b) leads consumers to believe something about the product, brand or manufacturer that is not verifiably true or (c) has the potential to foster distrust of any kind that cause an erosion of ethical values”.

According to Fayyaz and Lodhi (2015) deceptive advertising is the misleading, false and wrong publicizing of a product which may adversely influence consumers’ loyalty. The deceptive information makes consumers unaware of the skincare product’s actual duplicity. Consumers are not informed about the genuine characteristics of the skincare product or exposed to actual skincare product pictures or informed of the restricted characteristics of the skincare product; hence, they are unable to evaluate and purchase the most suitable skincare product that fulfils their actual needs. However, according to Miluwi (2015) if a consumer recognizes the advertisement claim as incorrect and refuses to believe it to be correct therefore the consumer is not being deceived by these advertisements. Unfortunately, some misleading in skincare product advertisements also occurs not because the information was false or ambiguous; there are advertisements that inadvertently create wrong impressions even if everything stated in the advertisements are certifiable and true.

Misleading advertising may affect consumers’ decisions regarding which skincare product purchased; an advertisement can be misleading if the claims made about the characteristics of skincare products contain false statement of the fact, and an advertisement can be misleading if the claims hide important facts. (Cho, 2016). Advertisements nowadays fail to deliver its promises and most of the time false information are silently weaved in to make people purchase the skincare products (Xie et al., 2014). Consumers do feel that most advertisements are made to mislead in order to trick them into purchasing the skincare products. Consumers get caught in a beautiful delusional web of half-truths and lies crafted masterfully by the skincare companies and it is obvious that advertisements are made to portray good image of the various skincare products. Today consumers should not be naïve to believe the



positive aspects of the skincare products that are displayed in advertisements (Roxas & Stoneback, 2004). If consumers begin to evaluate products advertised, even by asking simple questions, consumers will realize the difference between reality and illusion.

Gardner (1975) identified a three-level typology of advertising deception: (1) unconscionable lie, (2) claim-fact discrepancy, and (3) claim-belief interaction. Russo, Metcalf and Stephens (1981) also identified three types of advertising deception: (1) fraud, (2) falsity, and (3) misleadingness. Hastak and Mazis (2011) and Xie and Boush (2011) identified two forms of advertising deception: (1) explicit deception and (2) implicit deception. Explicit deception consists of using false information. However, not all false information has a deceptive effect; when lies are so unreasonably mentioned, inadvertently no one will believe. Hence, to be deceptive, false information should be able to create false beliefs that people believe to be true (Jeong & Yoo, 2011). Implicit deception are claims that are intentionally crafted to mislead consumers to read beyond the literal messages and to draw erroneous inferences about product attributes (Xie & Boush, 2011). Five major types of misleading advertising claims have been identified: (1) omission of material facts, (2) misleadingness due to semantic confusion, (3) intra-attribute misleadingness, (4) inter-attribute misleadingness and (5) source-based misleadingness (Hastak & Mazis, 2011).

### **Omission of Material Facts (OMF):**

The claims in skincare product advertisements are true but it indirectly becomes misleading because one material fact or facts have been omitted. Claims are anything related to performance, price, safety, features and effectiveness of the products. And these omissions can instil destructive impressions on the uninformed minds (Shanahan et al., 2007; Nooh, 2014). For instance, by failing to disclose limiting conditions that are necessary for correct interpretation of the claim, consumers may draw broad inferences from a claim based on prior experience of using the skincare product or based on the physical appearance of the skincare product. For example, if all ingredients for the skincare product are not mentioned or the potential allergies due to the inclusion of certain chemicals are not mentioned or the exact amount of the main ingredient in the skincare product – whether in the form of essential oil or infused oil or extract, is not mentioned; then omission of material facts has occurred, and the advertisement are misleading and deceptive.

H<sub>1</sub>: Omission of material facts does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

H<sub>1A</sub>: Age moderates the relationship between omission of material facts and consumer loyalty towards skincare products

### **Misleadingness Due to Semantic Confusion (MSC):**

Even though consumers may be misled by the use of confusing language or symbols in advertisements. Semantic confusion can occur because a promotional claim uses a word or a phrase that is similar to a more familiar word or phrase. Such confusion is likely to cause consumers to misperceive or to miscomprehend the advertisements claims (Fayyaz & Lodhi, 2015; Taruna, 2016). Since the pandemic, many skincare products are emphasizing on being natural. Natural to some is no chemicals, for others it is organic, and for some it is vegan which is inclusive of vegan chemicals. The 7-lettered word Natural is seen by many in different eyes, different angles, carrying different perspectives. On hearing or reading the claims made in the advertisement, the mind does not pay specific attention to the actual words in the advertisement; then misleadingness due to semantic confusion has occurred, and the advertisement are misleading and deceptive.

H<sub>2</sub>: Semantic confusion does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

H<sub>2A</sub>: Age moderates the relationship between semantic confusion and consumer loyalty towards skincare products

### **Intra-Attribute Misleadingness (IntraM):**

Intra-attribute misleadingness refers to a situation where a claim about an attribute lead to misleading inferences about the same attribute (Khan & Rajput, 2014). There are two types of misleading intra-attribute inferences that consumers might generate when exposed to advertisements. First, attribute uniqueness claims refer to situations where a marketer incorrectly implies that its brand is uniquely associated with a particular attribute or feature. If that adequate proof does not exist to support such uniqueness claims, the consumer may be misled. Second, attribute performance claims refer to situations where a marketer implies incorrectly how well a brand performs on certain attribute or feature. When such inferences are erroneous, consumers are misled (Hayder, 2017). For instance, ingredients like turmeric or aloe vera are known to brighten and soften the skin. In the skincare advertisement, if a claim made is that turmeric and aloe vera powder helps to brighten skin, in reality, aloe vera and turmeric may not even be an ingredient in the skincare product or if it does, it will be in an extremely questionable quantity. Instead, the



product may actually have a bleaching ingredient to lighten the skin; then intra-attribute misleadingness has occurred, and the advertisement are misleading and deceptive.

H<sub>3</sub>: Intra-Attribute misleadingness does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

H<sub>3A</sub>: Age moderates the relationship intra-attribute misleadingness and consumer loyalty towards skincare products

#### **Inter-Attribute Misleadingness (InterM):**

Consumers may rely on a claim for one attribute to infer a claim on another attribute. The inference occurs because consumers believe (rightly or wrongly) that the two attributes are correlated, even though the extent that the inferred claim may be false; therefore, consumers are misled (Ullah & Hussain, 2015; Hazem & Ashraf, 2018). When a consumer purchases a whitening lotion which indicates whitening of the skin within 7 days, the consumer also expects to clear any blemishes on the skin, even though this is not mentioned. Most Malaysians do not want to age fast. Looking young is a vanity that exists but if after the 30 days the skin remains the same tone, and the skin is still jaded with blemishes then this is misleading. Even though these false claims only existed in consumers' minds and was never shown in the any skincare advertisements, yet consumers will blame that the advertisement has given false claims; then inter-attribute misleadingness has occurred, and the advertisement are misleading and deceptive.

H<sub>4</sub>: Inter-attribute misleadingness does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

H<sub>4A</sub>: Age moderates the relationship inter-attribute misleadingness and consumer loyalty towards skincare products

#### **Source-Based Misleadingness (SBM):**

Consumers are exposed frequently to skincare advertisements which are endorsed by celebrities or testimonials by ordinary users of the product. There are many situations where such endorsements may mislead consumers. When the "endorser" is offering an opinion about an issue outside his or her area of expertise, consumers may be misled. Moreover, the endorsers are biased, as they are paid to promote the product, their opinions are impartial on the endorsed skincare product. Finally, only the opinions of satisfied users are used as consumer testimonials in skincare advertisements (Xie & Boush, 2011; Balasubramaniam et al., 2016). This will mislead consumers when the experts provide a one-sided prejudiced opinion; then source-based misleadingness has occurred, and the advertisement are misleading and deceptive.

H<sub>5</sub>: Source-based misleadingness does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

H<sub>5A</sub>: Age moderates the relationship source-based misleadingness and consumer loyalty towards skincare products

#### **Consumer Loyalty:**

Consumer loyalty is defined as firmly held commitments to repurchase a product regularly, regardless of the marketing efforts nor the influence of situational factors which have the ability to generate switching behaviour in an individual (Ahmad et al., 2018). According to Dick and Basu (1973) individuals are considered as loyal consumers are those who repurchase a brand, consider repurchasing only a specific brand and do not get involved in information search about other brands. Loyal consumers are those who repurchase a brand, by considering only that specific brand. Consumer loyalty is the most important factor in order to sell any products, because a consumer will only come back to the same shop or company again to purchase the product/service, if the desired satisfaction level is provided, without misleading the consumers (Lee & Cunningham, 2001).

Consumer loyalty has been examined from various perspectives. For instance, Casidy and Wymer (2016) conceptualized loyalty as a customer's feelings towards specific products and brands. Izogo (2016) indicate that to measure loyalty is by measuring the influences of satisfaction, trust, perceived service quality and brand image. Based on this, the current study intends to evaluate consumer loyalty by measuring how deceptive advertisements impacts their decision to purchase or to switch product. Customer loyalty should be created through credible advertisements and information should be kept up to date without any attempt to mislead and offer false information (Ling & Shahan 2018). When a product does not match to what is depicted and displayed in the advertisements, dissatisfaction occurs and has a long-term negative effect on the company and this negative information affects loyalty (Mitra et al., 2008; Scheinbaum et al., 2012). Customer loyalty level is lowered by using wrong practices and misleading information, which directly impacts trustworthiness. When communication is made in a deceptive manner instead of a fair way, then consumers will not be willing to buy those products and it may also generate consumers' significant negative reaction towards the brand name and company (Ling & Shahan, 2018).

### **3. METHODOLOGY:**

#### **3.1 Construct Measurement:**





This study was descriptive in nature, conducted using quantitative approach. For this study, the author has chosen skincare industry which is largely engaged in deceptive advertising. Both primary and secondary data are used for the study. Primary data are information collected through a structured questionnaire. The study features six constructs as follows: omission of material facts (OMF), misleadingness due to semantic confusion (MSC), intra-attribute misleadingness (IntraM), inter-attribute misleadingness (InterM), source-based misleadingness (SBM) and customer loyalty (CL). The survey questionnaire for this analysis was to measure the impact of deceptive advertisements on consumer loyalty towards skincare products. The research instruments were adapted from Hastak and Mazis (2011) and Xie and Boush (2011); items from each variable were slightly modified to fit the current study. All the measurement items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (i.e. 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) to express the statement of agreement. Using SEM Partial Least Square (PLS) as a statistical analysis method, both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to examine the impact of deceptive advertisements on consumer loyalty towards skincare products and to analyse the relationship between its various constructs.

### 3.2 Data Collection:

A quantitative study was conducted in the Selangor, the most populated state in Malaysia. Five malls which was listed in the Top 20 Malls in Selangor/Kuala Lumpur by TripAdvisor was chosen. To achieve a high response rate, researcher-administered interviews were conducted in Sunway Pyramid Shopping Mall, Setia City Mall, Subang Parade Shopping Centre, Paradigm Mall and The Starling. The target respondents for this study are male and female categorized as “The Developers” (Lai & Comeau, 2014). The Developers are Malaysians born between 1982-2004, who has access to higher education, grew in a much more prosperous environment with better job opportunities and are known to be more receptive towards technological advancements. The sampling technique used in this study was proportionate sampling (Hair et al., 2014), whereby an equal number of respondents were selected from each age group of 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40 who resides in Selangor. A total of 600 questionnaires were collected from consumers (Developers) residing in Selangor who purchases skincare products and has been affected and/or seen misleading, deceptive skincare advertisements between January 2022 and June 2022.

## 4. ANALYSIS:

### 4.1. Measurement Model Analysis:

The measurement model analysis is utilised to identifying the ability of the adopted constructs – OMF, MSC, IntraM, InterM, SBM and CL. Construct validity confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine how well the measured OMF, MSC, IntraM, InterM, SBM and CL represent the conceptual model (Jarvis et al., 2003). For social science studies, Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) classified items with loadings  $\leq 0.32$  as poor,  $\geq 0.45$  as reasonable,  $\geq 0.55$  as good,  $\geq 0.63$  as very good and  $\geq 0.71$  as excellent. For this study, factor loadings are classified as excellent as all are above  $\pm 0.71$  (Table 1) therefore were considered for interpretation and description for this study.

**Table 1 Measurement Model**

	CFA	CA	rho_A	CR	AVE
OMF	0.837	0.981	0.755	0.833	0.655
MSC	0.815	0.807	0.820	0.827	0.627
IntraM	0.775	0.845	0.847	0.875	0.650
InterM	0.758	0.936	0.985	0.984	0.688
SBM	0.762	0.977	0.926	0.806	0.759
CL	0.784	0.819	0.849	0.808	0.647

Convergence validity is a measure of checking whether measures of constructs that theoretically *should* be related to each other are, in fact, observed to be related to each other and those that should not be related to each other are, in fact, observed to not be related to each other. The consistency of the constructs was measured using Dijkstra-Henseler’s rho (rhoA), Cronbach alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Ali et al., 2018). To evaluate convergent validity, the value of both CR and rhoA are suggested to be higher than 0.6, and the value of both CA and AVE to be higher than 0.50.(Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2017). Table 1 shows the test results of this study that indicates all the items of the measurement model have exceeded the recommended cutoff values; therefore, the test result confirms a high level of internal consistency for all the items.



Discriminant validity examines the potential of overlapping of variables between constructs (Hair et al., 2014). The discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio (Ramayah et al., 2018). The confidence interval of HTMT is less than 1 for every construct in this analysis (Table 2), confirming that all constructs differ from each other.

**Table 2 HTMT**

	CL	Age * OMF	Age * MSC	Age * IntraM	Age * InterM	Age * SBM
CL						
Age * OMF	0.081					
Age * MSC	0.058	0.547				
Age * IntraM	0.044	0.601	0.733			
Age * InterM	0.053	0.781	0.555	0.640		
Age * SBM	0.043	0.531	0.480	0.505	0.574	

#### 4.2 Structural Model Analysis:

The structural model reflects the relationship between the constructs that were hypothesized in this study. In evaluating the structural model, the overall fit of the estimated model, the path coefficient estimates, their significance and the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) were examined (Henseler et al., 2016).  $R^2$  is used to assess the extent of variance that all exogenous constructs explained in the endogenous constructs. Table 3 indicates the  $R^2$  value in this model is 53.5% for CL, 37.5% for OMF, 22.8% for MSC, 53.5% for IntraM, 34.5% for InterM and 35.5% for SBM.

**Table 3 R Squared**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
CL	0.535	0.533
OMF	0.375	0.376
MSC	0.228	0.225
IntraM	0.535	0.533
InterM	0.345	0.342
SBM	0.355	0.352

SRMR is a goodness of fit measure to avoid model misspecification. A value less than 0.08 (is said to be a good fit; and a value of zero indicates a perfect fit. Secondly, the fit index is Normed Fit Index (NFI) which computes the chi-square value of the proposed model and compares it against a meaningful yardstick (Henseler et al. (2016). NFI values are between zero and one; yet the closer to one, the better the fit.

**Table 4 Goodness of Fit Model**

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.041	0.110
d_ ULS	4.011	13.758
d_ G	1.334	1.480
Chi-Square	1766.583	1768.122
NFI	0.855	0.844

SRMR shows a value of 0.041, which postulates the path model as acceptable model fit whereas NFI with a value of 0.855 is posited acceptable. All the results of the saturated model (Table 4) deem the proposed model is well suited for confirming and explaining the impact of deceptive skincare advertisements on consumer loyalty.

#### 4.3 Hypothesis Testing:

The hypothesis relationship between the constructs, the significance and standard errors in the study are presented by the path coefficient. The path coefficients are significant if the t-value is larger than the critical values (Hair et al., 2017). The empirical results are in agreement that the hypothesized path model relationships of  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ , and  $H_3$  (Table 5) positively and significantly influence consumers loyalty towards skincare products. On the other hand,  $H_{1A}$ ,  $H_{2A}$ ,  $H_{3A}$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_{4A}$ ,  $H_5$  and  $H_{5A}$  were found to be insignificant.



**Table 5 Hypothesis**

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values	
OMF ->CL	0.440	0.426	0.093	4.729	0	H <sub>1</sub> Supported
Age * OMF ->CL	0.021	0.021	0.058	0.358	0.721	H <sub>1A</sub> Not Supported
MSC ->CL	0.255	0.263	0.072	3.541	0	H <sub>2</sub> Supported
Age * MSC ->CL	0.042	0.035	0.072	0.593	0.554	H <sub>2A</sub> Not Supported
IntraM ->CL	0.665	0.671	0.044	15.132	0	H <sub>3</sub> Supported
Age * IntraM ->CL	0.128	0.125	0.080	1.603	0.110	H <sub>3A</sub> Not Supported
InterM ->CL	0.015	0.016	0.038	0.397	0.691	H <sub>4</sub> Not Supported
Age * InterM ->CL	0.069	-0.072	0.074	0.929	0.353	H <sub>4A</sub> Not Supported
SBM ->CL	0.021	0.021	0.062	0.341	0.733	H <sub>5</sub> Not Supported
Age * SMB ->CL	0.067	0.070	0.056	1.181	0.238	H <sub>5A</sub> Not Supported

**5. DISCUSSION:**

Being the state with the highest population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), and as one of the most prosperous states in Malaysia, Selangor was selected as the main cluster to analyse the impact of deceptive advertisements on consumer loyalty towards skincare products. A total of 600 respondents participated in this study (Table 6). As purposive sampling was conducted, each age category: 26-30 years old, 31-35 years old and 36-40 years old, had equal number of representations (200 each) and no foreigners were included in the study.

**Table 6 Gender of respondents**

		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Age (The Developers)	26 - 30	99	101	200
	31 - 35	78	122	200
	36 - 40	108	92	200
Total		285	315	600

This study aims to explore the impact of deceptive advertisements on consumer loyalty towards skincare product among The Developers living in Selangor. As previously stated, this group of individuals have easier access to higher education and job opportunities. Hence, they grew in a much more prosperous environment and are more receptive towards technological advancements (Lai & Comeau, 2014). The role of omission of material facts, misleadingness due to semantic confusion, intra-attribute misleadingness, inter-attribute misleadingness and source-based misleadingness are key determinants to examine the impact of deceptive skincare advertisements towards consumer loyalty. This study found that OMF, MSC and IntraM impacts consumer loyalty while InterM and SBM does not play any impact on consumer loyalty towards the skincare products. The data collection for this study was conducted between January 2022 and June 2022. This was the period after Malaysians had undergone several levels of lockdowns and semi-lockdowns due to Covid-19; therefore, they are very particular about protecting and having a healthy skin/body. Consumers, irrespective of their age, had to stay away from physical activities due to fear of Covid-19 and regardless of whatever fear they may have had, they had maintained their skincare routine.

OMF happens when skincare product advertisements emphasize on selective information. Certain ingredients are totally eradicated from the list of ingredients, some are written in fonts so small that it becomes blur to the reading eyes. Consumers admit that it is difficult to trust skincare companies as they are often lied regarding the quantity and quality of the ingredient used in the solutions etc. This is the reason why they are not loyal to a particular brand of skincare; brand switching happens whenever a consumer read a review or through word-of-mouth. Consumers are knowledgeable and accessibility to digital media exposes the ingredient names, usage and benefits. Hence consumers are processing advertisement information and claims; and are aware when they are being duped. Therefore, omission of facts in skincare advertisements does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

Consumers acknowledge that MSC creates confusions. Even though the preference for natural skincare is high nowadays, but consumers are wary with the term ‘natural’. Natural carries different connotation for different people. Does natural mean vegan only or it means organic? Is natural halal? Skincare companies are using many kinds of advertising tactics with the aim of distracting consumers by including a variety of certifications without explanation what these certifications is for e.g COSMOS, NATRUE, ISO 16128, Ecolabel, USDA, PETA, ICEA, BDIH, Soil



Association Organic Standard, ECOCERT, GFCO, etc. These abbreviations are used in advertisements to instil trust on the skincare products. Some consumers look at the number of such certification logos in an advertisement to determine if the advertised skincare product is effective and legitimate. This creates confusion as the certification is not to determine how good the advertised skincare product is, only that the ingredients were sourced from natural and/or organic producers. Therefore, misleading due to semantic confusion in skincare advertisements does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products. IntraM is another problem that affects consumer loyalty. Most skincare products advertisements provide a list of ingredients used. The question arising in consumers' minds are all these ingredients really used? Is the quantity the same or just a pinch in a gallon? The chemicals used are they harmful? Moreover, most ingredients are written in scientific names to confuse consumers. Advertisers nowadays are using many kinds of advertising tactics with the aim of attracting consumers regardless of the effect those tactics might bring. Such tactics include qualified certifications, attractive advertising claims, positive cues as well as artificial effects. It is concluded consumers tend to have higher acceptance level towards advertisements that include such deceptive tactics, exaggerating claims such as 'a whiter skin within 7 days' or 'double vitamin C' or 'product X is cheaper and better' successfully lure consumers into false beliefs. It triggers consumers' interest in trying those products, however, a failure to fulfill the advertised promise will lead to loss of future sales. Therefore, intra-attributes misleadingness in skincare advertisements does impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

Consumers do not believe that one skincare product is able to do multiple magic on the skin. Such claims are not believed therefore it does not affect consumer loyalty. It is assumed that a consumer's understanding of an advertisement is mediated by an interaction between content of the advertisement and consumer's cognitive processing of that information; hence InterM does not impact consumer loyalty. Consumers' cognitive processing of the deceptive advertisements is based on consumers' knowledge of the skincare advertisement and their skepticism towards advertisements. Developers are able to process the information thus they tend to have a higher defense level towards deceptive advertising. Therefore, inter-attributes misleadingness in skincare advertisements does not impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products. Endorsers in skincare advertisements do not impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products. In endorsing skincare products celebrities transfer their attributes to the skincare products making them more desired by consumers. Celebrity endorsement is a promotional technique to better integrate brand, product and message as these celebrities has huge fan base. However, due to the influence of social media, celebrities' flaws and stigmas, products weaknesses and attributes are easily found. Consumers today with digital media assistance have a huge encyclopaedia of knowledge at the tips of their finger. Therefore, source-based misleadingness in skincare advertisements does not impact consumer loyalty towards skincare products.

Furthermore, this study found that age has had no influence on OMF, MSC, IntraM, InterM and SBM on impacting consumer loyalty. Irrespective of being of different agegroup of 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40, it did not have any impact on their decision to purchase or not to purchase a skincare product. This is, perhaps, the effect of Developers, meaning they are educated and are exposed to technology. Hence, they are less con-able on fraudulent product usage or false claims in these advertisements. Therefore, as this study was conducted after the multiple lockdowns, consumers' importance had shifted. Age did not play any role on deceptive advertisements impact on consumer loyalty.

## 6. IMPLICATION OF RESEARCH:

From a managerial viewpoint, the theme of deception is of great importance. It enlightens marketers about consumers' reactions to misleading, deception or false claims in advertisements. As a result, marketers are strongly advised to avoid the use of deceptive claims because of its negative impact on consumer loyalty. Consumers today are constantly bombarded with information and are much better informed about the techniques of deception in advertisements, especially via the Internet. This ensures consumers are able to better perceive deceptive promises and claims. Therefore, when designing advertisement messages, it is imperative to give importance to the veracity of the information. In this sense, it cannot be denied the importance of providing consumers with honest and comprehensive information in order to gain their trust and loyalty, which in the long run will increases sales.

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