



Exploring the South African Consumers' Brand Loyalty and Perceptions of Inclusive Global Beauty Marketing

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DECLARATION

I, **Tadiwanashe Vanessa Zezere**, declare that this study titled “Exploring the South African Consumers’ Brand Loyalty and Perceptions of Inclusive Global Beauty Marketing”, submitted for the Master of International Business degree to the Independent Institute of Education, is my own work, and has not been previously submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes. Any assistance that I have received has been duly acknowledged in the study.

Except where reference is made in the text, this study contains no materials published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis or study presented by me for another qualification. Furthermore, no work of any other individual has been used without due acknowledgement in the main body of this study.

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ABSTRACT

The global beauty market has grown over the past decades, with global brands expanding into emerging markets. In response to the growing discourse on inclusive brands and consumer representation, global brands have positioned their marketing strategies to meet the demand. However, there is limited empirical research on how consumers perceive global beauty brands' inclusive social media marketing. While the study is situated in a broader global beauty industry, it's empirical to focus on consumer perceptions of inclusive social media marketing practices of selected global beauty brands. In this study, global beauty marketing refers specifically to the social media marketing practices of selected global beauty brands operating in or engaging with the South African consumers. Inclusivity is conceptualised as multidimensional, encompassing representation of diverse identities and cultural experiences, as well as considerations of accessibility, affordability, and product performance. Social media has become a valuable tool for consumer-brand interactions. The diverse nature of South Africa requires global beauty brands to extend their inclusivity practices on social media beyond face value. The study focused on South African social media users who were consumers of or familiar with global beauty brands and has experience engaging with beauty related content on social media. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative research design and held focus group discussions to capture consumers' perceptions, beliefs, shared meanings, and lived experiences. Data were generated through two focus group discussions. Data were analysed using Creswell's (2014) six-step thematic analysis, supplemented by Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis practices to ensure the research trustworthiness and data saturation. The model of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), Social Identity Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour provided frameworks for understanding how consumer responses and brand perceptions. Findings revealed five key themes: authentic versus performative representation, inclusivity is multidimensional, cultural resonance and localisation, authentic brand messaging improves consumer-brand trust and inclusivity influences brand loyalty. South African consumers are more drawn to global beauty brands that represent them, beyond race and skin tone, as product accessibility, performance, and pricing are part of inclusivity. Inclusive marketing must consider South Africa's socio-economic landscape, enhancing positive brand perceptions; purchases and recommendations; particularly, when consumers' identities, experiences, and cultural nuances are

aligned with brand narratives. The research contributes to international business and marketing literature by providing insights into inclusivity, consumer behavior, brand messaging, and localisation. It recommends global brands implement multidimensional inclusivity strategies to foster brand loyalty.

Keywords: Global Beauty Brands, Inclusivity, Authenticity, Trust, Brand Messaging, Culture, Localisation, Perceptions, Consumers, social media, South Africa, Representation.

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List of abbreviations

ACRONYM	MEANING
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
CBBE	Customer-Based Brand Equity
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
SSI	Subjective Social Inclusion
CCB	Customer Citizenship Behaviour
R&D	Research & Development
VMA	Voice-enabled Makeup Assistant
VTO	Virtual Try-On
UGC	User Generated Content
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction and background

The global beauty market has shifted due to drivers such as the prioritisation of inclusivity in marketing strategies. This change was influenced by consumer demand for representation across all demographics, prompting global beauty brands to reconsider traditional marketing approaches to ensure their campaigns reflect the diversity of their consumers (Annssisse & Develi, 2024). Africa, characterised by its rich tapestry of cultures, ethnicities, and skin tones, offered a distinct opportunity for global beauty brands to build meaningful connections with consumers (Chimhanda, 2021). In this context, global beauty brands, such as Maybelline, MAC, L'Oréal Paris, Fenty Beauty, Estée Lauder, among others, have successfully used social media marketing to relate with beauty consumers, celebrate diverse beauty standards, and promote an inclusive approach to beauty (Saviolo, 2025).

According to McKinsey and Company (2024), the global beauty market has potential to grow, with the market value reaching \$590 billion by 2028, at an annual growth rate of 6%. In this case, representation is a key driver of this growth, making inclusivity a central marketing strategy (Daykin, 2022). Emerging markets are the drivers of this growth, as well as the increasing influence of Gen Z consumers pushing for diversity and inclusion (McKinsey & Company, 2024). The Middle Eastern and African beauty markets are key drivers of expected growth, as demand is increasing and consumer purchasing power is growing for global beauty brands' products in these regions (McKinsey & Company, 2024).

South Africa, with its diverse and multicultural consumer base requires, the need for inclusive marketing initiatives that address diversity. According to a study conducted by Unilever (2021), there is no 'one size fits all' amongst South African consumers, as reflected in a study of 10,000 consumers, which found that 71% advocated for inclusivity in packaging and advertising. In this context, local and global beauty brands face challenges in addressing the unique preferences and identities that the South African consumers seek in inclusive brands. There has been an increasing debate globally about diversity and inclusion, but there is limited focus on African diverse markets. Consumers in Africa are a growing population actively purchasing beauty products at scale, with expectations of continued growth (McKinsey & Company, 2024). According to Santana (2022), South Africa has a growing middle class that

expects brands to have inclusive products. In the Africa-Middle East beauty market, South Africa accounts for \$4.5 billion in market share (Stiehler & Jordaan, 2019). Such a development underscores the need to understand how consumers perceive global beauty brands, to improve their inclusive social media campaigns, which will, in turn, influence consumers' positive attitudes and loyalty, towards those brands.

According to Morett, one of the important tools being used by brands to communicate with consumers is social media platforms, increasing the likelihood of global beauty brands engaging with consumers in real-time and receiving instant feedback (Morett, 2022). Furthermore, it enables global beauty brands to effectively reach diverse consumer segments across geographic and cultural boundaries (Morett, 2022). In response to a competitive, saturated market, global beauty brands such as Fenty Beauty, MAC, Maybelline, Garnier, and others have embraced inclusivity through social media marketing, aiming to foster deeper connections with South African consumers (Saviolo, 2025). Inclusive marketing campaigns highlight a range of makeup and skincare products suited to various skin tones and conditions, while highlighting the narratives of local influencers, beauty, and skincare content creators (Cheung, Pires, & Rosenberger, 2020).

Inclusivity has become a popular term in marketing, with Millennials and Gen Z leading the way in advocating for campaigns and initiatives that represent diverse audiences (Miller, 2022). By definition within the beauty industry, inclusivity is the practice of ensuring diverse representation in brands' products, marketing, and messaging (Miller, 2022). Race, gender, age, body type, skin tone, and abilities are crucial to representing the diverse consumers. Creating an environment that ensures individuals feel represented and valued, enhancing positive perceptions from consumers and contributing to brand loyalty (Nassereddine, Ramadan, & Farah, 2025).

It is important to distinguish between inclusive global beauty marketing and inclusive social media marketing. Despite the concepts being closely related, they are not interchangeable. Inclusive global beauty marketing represents the broader framework through which global beauty brands incorporate inclusivity across their marketing activities, product development, packaging, brand positioning, communication, accessibility and representation (Miller, 2022). In contrast, inclusive social media marketing refers to the application of inclusive marketing practices through social

media platforms, where brands communicate, represent diverse consumers and collaborate with influencers (Morett, 2022). Therefore, inclusive social media marketing represents a component of the broader inclusive global beauty marketing. In this study, the distinction is important as the focus is on how global beauty brands utilise social media to communicate inclusivity.

The South African beauty industry has significantly improved over the years due to market development drivers such as technological advancement, innovative marketing practices, and constantly changing consumer needs (Kumar & Singh, 2025). Leading to inclusive social media marketing strategies being put into place by brands to meet consumer demands and develop the beauty industry (Nassereddine, Ramadan, & Farah, 2025). The diverse groups are categorised by body image, ethnicity, gender, and race. Therefore, in South Africa, it has become a social expectation and a business marketing strategy to be inclusive, as it shapes consumer perceptions and purchasing power (Kumar & Singh, 2025). The history of inequality, multicultural groups, and the country's social structure have led to inclusivity being a commonly utilised strategy.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook are effective for global beauty brands to interact with consumers and build consumer-brand relationships (Khwela, Msosa & Ntshangase, 2024). Most research has shown that Millennials and Gen Z tend to reciprocate social media marketing content that is dependable and authentic, in the form of tutorials and reviews from influencers they are mostly familiar with (McClary, 2025). To support this notion, 71% of young South African women reported that they are most likely to purchase products recommended by influencers they trust and whose content they are familiar with (Khwela et al., 2024), indicating the importance influencer marketing has in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioural intent towards the brand.

Online debates surrounding global beauty brands tend to focus on the representation of diverse consumers (Clark, 2023). This has led to consumers having different perceptions of global beauty brands' inclusive marketing strategies. Some scholars argue that influencers are critical to how consumers accept and perceive a brand's authenticity and trustworthiness (Ramela, de Villiers, & Chuchu, 2022). These perceptions extend beyond promoting a brand's product to how global beauty brands

represent diverse groups and foster brand loyalty. South Africa's influencer and digital celebrity culture shapes how consumers perceive global beauty brands and seek inclusive beauty standards (Roux, 2020). However, inclusivity goes beyond Eurocentric ideas of diversity, as consumers require products that suit the local demography and cater to their different skin tones, skin types, and hair textures (Clark, 2023).

Inclusive social media marketing among global beauty brands highlights diverse genders, which is relatable to South African consumers (Clark, 2023). A discourse of research has asserted that the online presence of brands that are inclusive of identities in their campaigns builds loyalty and trust between brands and consumers (Coetzee, de Villiers & Chuchu, 2023). To align with South Africa's demographics, brands use digital analytics to curate inclusive campaigns. However, despite their intentions, global brands in South Africa are viewed as tokenistic in their marketing campaigns (Coetzee, et al., 2023). This reflects how consumers seek authenticity, as global beauty brands market their products to diverse markets. Inclusivity is not limited to consumers' appearances, but also extends to their preferences, that include product accessibility and affordability (Beauty Streams, 2025).

Beyond the inclusive social media marketing initiatives that South African consumers call for, there are cultural and socio-economic implications (Sheikh, van Rooyen & Mazzei, 2023). Furthermore, social media marketing campaigns shape consumers' identities and self-esteem through racialised beauty standards imposed on African markets (Khwela et al., 2024). Brands are held accountable for the narratives they put out about inclusivity that need to reflect authenticity. There has been a significant shift towards more local brands curating products that cater for local consumers' preferences. These brands include Pastry Skincare, Silki, Switch Beauty, Standard Beauty, Portia M, among others. Within South Africa's digital economy, there is a growing presence of influencers that shapes how consumers perceive global beauty brands when they make use of local influencers in their campaigns (Khwela et al., 2024). Inclusivity is regarded as transformative rather than a social media trend, as it shapes consumer perceptions and expectations, redefines beauty standards, and fosters a positive brand identity.

Overall, exploring consumer inclusive marketing expectations from global beauty brands in multicultural markets such as South Africa, is important, as it helps brands align with their target consumers (Khwela et al., 2024). In South Africa, social media marketing initiatives need to be inclusive, as consumers actively challenge brands for how they approach the diverse realities (Sheikh et al., 2023). Social media is used within South Africa, making it an important digital tool for brands to reach consumers (Khwela et al., 2024). Therefore, inclusive social media marketing becomes a marketing priority and a social responsibility that shapes how global and local brands can compete in culturally diverse markets.

This study explored how global beauty brands, primarily in the makeup and skincare industry, use inclusivity in their social media marketing campaigns to shape consumer perceptions, build brand loyalty, and remain competitive in South Africa. As inclusivity has become increasingly significant among global beauty brands, understanding how South African consumers perceive these initiatives is essential for global brands seeking to succeed in diverse markets. Consumers now seek inclusive representations that go beyond their racial identities but align with their preferences, affordability, and lifestyle.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite inclusive marketing now being common in the global beauty industry, there is a significant gap in understanding whether inclusivity drives brand loyalty among South African consumers. Brands such as Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty have set the pace in the beauty industry by offering a wide range of products for diverse markets. Still, the effectiveness of these initiatives in fostering brand loyalty requires further exploration (Park & Hong, 2024). Additionally, there is limited research on global beauty brands, such as Maybelline, L'Oréal Paris, and Estée Lauder, using social media platforms to convey inclusivity and how this influences consumer loyalty in their respective regions (Park & Hong, 2024). By investigating consumer responses to global beauty brands' marketing efforts, this research sheds light on how these brands can effectively leverage inclusivity to relate with consumers across diverse cultural contexts, build loyalty, and gain a competitive advantage.

Existing research in South Africa focuses on social media as a tool for brand engagement and influencing purchasing intentions, without exploring inclusive

marketing practices and their influence on consumer-brand loyalty (Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023). As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, social media is an important platform for two-way communication between consumers and global beauty brands. These platforms, such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter), have created spaces for consumers to criticise and review marketing campaigns that brands put in place (Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023). However, most research on South African consumers focuses on their purchasing intentions influenced by social media marketing campaigns. Lacking empirical insights into how consumers define and evaluate inclusivity, leaving a void in understanding how consumer perceptions shape trust and brand attractiveness that contributes to loyalty.

1.3 Research Aim

The research aim was to investigate how South African consumers perceive inclusive social media marketing initiatives by global beauty brands and the influence these initiatives have on brand loyalty. The aim was to understand which aspects of inclusivity South African consumers consider important and authentic, and to motivate inclusive social media marketing, as these perceptions shape consumers' loyalty to a brand and their purchasing intentions for its products. This study aimed to provide best practices for inclusive global beauty marketing, based on insights into consumer expectations for inclusivity and the factors that influence their loyalty to a brand. The global beauty brands used as examples were identified by name because their publicly available social media content was used as research stimuli. Brand names mentioned by participants during data collection and within participant quotations were retained, as participants referred to these brands when describing their experiences and perceptions. However, participant names were anonymised to protect participant confidentiality.

1.3.1 Research Objectives

To address the research goal, the study focused on the following primary and secondary objectives:

Primary objective:

To investigate how inclusive social media marketing initiatives by global beauty brands influence brand loyalty among South African consumers.

Secondary objectives:

1. To define the concept of inclusivity within the context of social media marketing and global beauty brands.
2. To explore how selected global beauty brands use social media marketing strategies to promote inclusivity and engage with South African consumers.
3. To understand how South African consumers perceive selected global beauty brands' inclusive social media marketing campaigns.
4. To investigate how consumer perceptions of inclusivity influence brand loyalty towards selected global beauty brands.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Main research question:

How do inclusive social media marketing initiatives by global beauty brands influence the perceptions and brand loyalty of South African consumers?

Sub-questions:

1. How do selected global beauty brands use social media marketing to promote inclusive messaging to South African consumers?
2. How do South African consumers interpret the inclusive social media marketing strategies of selected global beauty brands?
3. What role does inclusive marketing play in shaping brand loyalty among South African beauty consumers?

1.3.3 Research theoretical foundation and propositions

This research is grounded in the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, the Social Identity Theory (SIT), and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). These theories serve as the theoretical foundations for exploring and explaining how consumers perceive brands and interpret their messaging, which influences their attitudes and behavioural intentions towards global beauty brands. This study uses these established frameworks to interpret the qualitative data collected from South African consumers.

The CBBE Model is relevant because it focuses on consumer perceptions of brand awareness and associations, which build the loyalty pyramid (Keller & Brexendorf, 2019). In relation to the research study, it illustrates how consumers' perceptions of inclusivity and representation create brand attractiveness, allowing them to form an emotional attachment to the brand and pledge their loyalty (Keller & Brexendorf, 2019).

To further supplement this model, the Social Identity Theory explains how consumers have a sense of belonging to social groups that identify them (Farivar & Wang, 2022). In this case, being represented in social media inclusive marketing initiatives by global beauty brands will lead consumers to support the brands and be willing to try their products and services (Park & Hong, 2024). The Theory of Planned Behaviour, proposed by Ajzen (2012), explores the behavioural intentions derived from consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards global beauty brands (Ajzen, 2012; Taghavi & Maharati, 2024). The theory posits that positive evaluations of inclusive beauty marketing on social media can lead consumers to advocate for the brand, engage with it, and remain loyal to a brand.

Based on the interconnected theoretical foundation, the following propositions guided the exploration of the subject matter:

1. The consumer's perceptions of inclusive global beauty marketing on social media will influence emotional connection and positive brand attitudes.
2. Diverse representation of consumers on social media and inclusive marketing campaigns will lead consumers to identify with the brand.
3. Consumers' perceptions of inclusivity are key factors of consumer-brand trust and brand authenticity.

These propositions suggest that inclusivity in global beauty marketing extends beyond representation, as it shapes consumer-brand relationships and influences purchasing intentions. In the context of South Africa, the propositions allow exploration of how social identities in multicultural markets on social media shape consumer responses to these efforts to foster positive perceptions and brand loyalty.

1.4 Research Motivation and Significance

Over the years, noticeable shifts towards more inclusive beauty standards, highlighted by global beauty brands like Fenty Beauty, have revolutionised the beauty sector through their inclusive product ranges that cater to every skin tone; as well as their visual representation on social media platforms (Miller, 2022). Following in these footsteps, global beauty brands such as L'Oréal, Maybelline, MAC, Essence, Estée Lauder, among others, are effectively harnessing social media marketing to promote inclusivity and meet the rising consumer demand for diversity (Miller, 2022). This

research investigated how global beauty brands' use of inclusive marketing strategies on social media influences consumer perception and brand loyalty in South Africa.

This topic was selected for several reasons and motivated by a knowledge gap. Firstly, inclusivity in global beauty marketing is underexplored, particularly on social media and in African markets (Keller, 2020). Most research has focused on Western markets rather than on culturally diverse markets such as South Africa (Keller, 2020). Secondly, brands are using social media for communication and brand presence, making it a powerful tool (Miller, 2022). By scrutinising global beauty brands' approaches, this study provides important insights into how they can resonate with South African consumers through well-implemented inclusive social media marketing strategies.

A study by UN Women (2024) found that brands with stereotype-free marketing and advertising have greater potential for long-term sales. Based on their research, inclusive marketing contributes to the growth of businesses that practice stereotype-free marketing, with long-term sales increasing by 16% and short-term sales by 5% (UN Women, 2024). However, growth is not limited to increasing sales; customer loyalty and brand preference also reflect inclusive marketing. In South Africa, surveys conducted by Bodine (2021) show that 66% of young people aged 16-25 are more attracted to inclusive marketing campaigns that influence their purchasing decisions. It is an indication to global beauty brands of the competitiveness that comes with inclusive marketing practices. Akin and Gürbüz (2024) further assert that consumer-based brand equity requires brands to foster emotional connections with consumers, which shape their loyalty and trust.

However, the academic relevance of this study is to add more insights into the theory of brand loyalty and consumer perception in relation to inclusive social media marketing. There is a need for global beauty brands to understand consumers' inclusivity expectations in South Africa, and how perceptions of the brand influence their views and purchasing intentions. In practice, this study's aim is to offer actionable recommendations for global beauty brands aspiring to expand within the South African market, allowing them to curate authentic and relevant inclusive marketing strategies, and underscoring the importance of inclusivity and its ability to enhance consumer-brand loyalty in the beauty industry, when communicated effectively on social media. Addressing these research gaps will generate new knowledge on the intersection of

inclusivity, consumer perception, and brand loyalty, providing a blueprint for future marketing strategies in global beauty brands.

1.5 Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions

Delimitations ensure that data are managed appropriately and analysed in depth, as this is a key process in a qualitative study (Lim, 2025). The research focused on consumers' experiences and perceptions of inclusive beauty marketing rather than on quantifiable measures used in quantitative research, such as brand engagement. To ensure the data were sufficiently deep and manageable, the research was limited to makeup and skincare brands rather than other sectors such as personal care and fashion. To avoid generalised findings, the research was confined to a certain geographical location, in this case, South Africa. Lastly, the research was limited to Gen Z and Millennial consumers, as they have a massive social media presence, interact with global beauty brands, and understand inclusivity in beauty marketing.

Limitations of a study play a crucial role in the research's credibility and transferability, as they contribute to an in-depth analysis of the collected data (Lim, 2025). In this case, one limitation was the small number of participants, which might limit the generalisability of the findings to the wider population. The collected data varied as participants had different lived experiences, backgrounds, and understandings of inclusivity. Unexpected events could have occurred that could have interrupted the data collection method, because focus group discussions needed to be organised and flexible for participants.

Assumptions are important for creating the foundation of the research, as they guide the research, methodology, and outcomes (Lim, 2025). The study assumed that participants were already aware of inclusive beauty marketing and had interacted on social media. In most research, brand loyalty is quantified by examining participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards global beauty brands' inclusive marketing strategies. The study also assumed that participants would share their honest opinions and that these would reflect their lived experiences of inclusivity, despite their perceptions and understandings differing.

1.6 Research design and methodology

1.6.1 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design to gain in-depth understanding of the meanings, interpretations and experiences South African consumers derive from marketing messages (Creswell, Poth & Rawlins, 2023). As inclusivity is a social construct and subjective, a broader understanding of consumers' perceptions of brands and the factors that influence consumer-brand loyalty relies on qualitative research methods for depth rather than quantitative measures (Creswell et al., 2023).

The methodology ensured the research was grounded in the authentic lived experiences of South African consumers. Overall, a qualitative research methodology provides the flexibility, credibility and in-depth understanding of inclusive beauty marketing, consumer perceptions, and brand loyalty (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

1.6.2 Paradigm and Approach

The research aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which asserts that knowledge and perceptions are socially constructed and shaped by cultural identities (Creswell & Clark, 2023). This paradigm is specifically embedded in Social Identity Theory (SIT), which serves the purpose of exploring how consumers interpret inclusive marketing to develop their self-concept (Farivar & Wang, 2022). The aim of the research was to explore South African consumers' perceptions of inclusive global beauty marketing on social media, which showed the relevance of the interpretivist paradigm in uncovering participants' expectations of inclusivity among global beauty brands that shape their loyalty. Some studies assert that the interpretivist approach seeks to understand individual experiences from a social and cultural lens rather than generalising experiences across individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022), which allows the researcher to have a broader understanding of participants' experiences and attitudes towards inclusive global beauty marketing on social media. The interpretivist paradigm explores complex social issues, such as consumer representation and perceptions of global beauty brands (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

While the data collection follows an inductive approach to capture participant voices without perceived bias, the study employs a hybrid approach for analysis (Swain, 2018). According to Swain (2018), the approach balances the empirical discovery

(inductive) with theoretical relevance (deductive), allowing the findings to be grounded in the South African context and align with established theories such as SIT and the CBBE model.

The study was further underpinned by a subjective epistemology that recognised participant's interpretations being shaped by their lived experiences and social settings. Ontologically, the study took a social constructionist position which viewings participant's perceptions of inclusivity in global beauty marketing as socially constructed and influenced by cultural and interpersonal backgrounds. The study acknowledged an axiological position recognising that the values of the participants and researcher may influence the research process. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to ensure credibility and accurate representation of participant's contributions (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

The research strategy employed qualitative focus groups over a three week period. Ensuring in-depth data collection of South African consumers' perceptions of inclusive social media marketing by global beauty brands. The study followed a cross-sectional time horizon, as data was collected at a single and specific point in time over the three week period (So, Li & Kim, 2025). Chapter 3, provides further details regarding the methodological choices mentioned above.

1.6.3 Data Collection Method

Focus groups capture consumers' perceptions by examining how they negotiate and communicate collectively, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm (Saunders et al., 2019). The discussions lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours, allowing the in-depth exploration of the topic in discussion and maintaining engagement amongst the participants (Geampana & Perrotta, 2025). Research shows that focus group discussions can trigger deeper meanings and articulations through different perspectives, which is a limitation in individual interviews (Geampana & Perrotta, 2025). The data collection method aligned with the study, as the aim was to learn about and interpret consumers lived experiences that shape their perceptions of global beauty brands. It led to the development of diverse ideas and meanings around inclusivity in global beauty marketing, thereby contributing to richer data collection in markets like South Africa.

1.6.4 Population and Sample

The research sample consisted of consumers aged 18 to 34 who use social media and engage with global beauty brands' marketing content (Unilever, 2021). This age group was appropriate, as they are in the Gen Z and Millennial categories, who use digital platforms, advocate for inclusivity, and are most likely to respond to brand messaging.

1.7 Justification of the research

The research was motivated by theoretical, practical, and contextual considerations. From a theoretical perspective, the study aimed to address the gap in international marketing literature by exploring how inclusive social media marketing by global beauty brands influences consumer perceptions and brand loyalty. Research has shown that there is limited exploration of South African diverse markets and most focus is on Western markets, so the context remains under explored (Keller, 2020). By analysing the role that inclusivity plays in influencing brand loyalty, the study contributes to expanding existing frameworks on inclusivity and consumer behaviour.

From a practical perspective, South African consumers, specifically Millennial and Gen Z, are a conscious consumer segment whose purchasing intentions and attitude are influenced by a brands performance and inclusivity (Khwela et al 2024). Marketers and international managers, therefore, require empirical insights to determine the effectiveness of inclusive marketing in generating long-term loyalty. The research findings may provide practical guidance for international managers within marketing, brand management, and social media management, by recommending strategies and approaches that may improve their brands' presence and competitive advantage in a constantly growing beauty industry.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

This research followed strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants, guided by the Independent Institute of Education, Monash South Africa (IIE MSA) postgraduate research policy. As the study involved human subjects, the researcher addressed core ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA Act) in South Africa.

1. Informed Consent

Participants in the focus groups provided informed consent. The process involved clearly explaining the research objectives, how the participant's collected data would be used, their rights, and their withdrawal options without consequences (Swales, 2022). In line with POPIA, consent was specific, informed, and voluntary, particularly when managing personal information.

2. Data Protection and Privacy

The confidentiality of participants' identities and responses was strictly maintained throughout the research process. Personal information that identifies participants was anonymised before analysis, in accordance with POPIA requirements (Donnelly & Thaldar, 2024). This ensured participants' data was protected and managed responsibly.

3. Data Minimisation

The researcher collected relevant and necessary data to achieve the research objectives. According to POPIA, excessive data collection increases the risks associated with data handling. Therefore, the focus was limited to data that directly informs the study (Swales, 2022).

4. Cultural Sensitivity

The researcher ensured there was fairness and respect amongst the participants during the focus group discussions. It is essential to recognise how inclusivity is perceived across groups and to ensure that discussions remain inclusive and respectful of one another (Staunton, Tschigg & Sherman, 2021).

5. Avoiding Harm

The researcher prioritised participants' well-being by fostering a positive and supportive environment to avoid potential harm or distress. To ensure participants' safety and comfort, the focus groups were conducted at a convenient place and online. According to Staunton et al. (2021), discussions regarding sensitive issues related to identity and representation in marketing require a safe approach.

6. Transparency

The researcher clearly communicated the aims of the study and the purpose of the findings prior to the discussions. It ensured participants understood how their contributions would influence the research and any potential implications from the global beauty brands under discussion (Thaldar, Edgcumbe, & Donnelly, 2023).

7. Approval from the Ethical Board

Prior to data collection, the research proposal was submitted for review and approved by the IIE's Higher Degree Committee. Mardani et al. (2019) asserted that it is a vital step to ensure compliance with ethical standards outlined in local and international guidelines.

8. Monitoring and Feedback

The researcher journalled the research process and member checking allowed the participants to review their responses in relation to the study. This was done because it promotes transparency, accountability, builds trust, and shows respect for participants' contributions (Thaldar et al., 2023).

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the study ensured compliance with legal obligations under POPIA and upheld the integrity and ethical standards of qualitative research involving human participants.

1.9 Definition of Key Concepts

To ensure clarity and precision in this study, it is imperative to define and operationalise the following key research concepts:

- **Authenticity:** refers to perceived sincerity and genuine intentions of brands commitment to inclusivity in marketing strategies (Clark, 2023). In the beauty industry authenticity either regarded as performative or tokenistic (Parsons et al., 2023).
- **Inclusivity:** refers to the intentional representation of diverse groups in marketing communications. It includes various demographic factors, such as ethnicity, skin tone, gender, and body type. Inclusive marketing reflects social responsibility and a strategic approach to engaging diverse consumer segments (Li, 2022).
- **Representation:** refers to the practice of ensuring diverse audiences that include different ages, races, body types, skin tones, genders, and abilities are visibly reflected in a brand's product, marketing, and messaging (Miller, 2022). As representation is a key driver of creating a sense of belonging and consumer-brand emotional attachments (Daykin, 2022)

- **Social Media Marketing:** refers to the use of digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X by global beauty brands to engage with targeted consumers. This is characterised by its interactive nature, real-time communication, and the ability to harness user-generated content and influencer partnerships (Babics & Jermolajeva, 2024).
- **Influencer:** refers to digital content creators who use social media platforms to provide interactive content such as reviews and tutorials which consumers either find relatable or authentic (Makhathini, 2023). They are important within the beauty industry they are critical to how consumers perceive a brands authenticity and trustworthiness (Ramela, Venter de Villiers & Chuchu, 2022).
- **Consumer Perception:** refers to consumers' interpretations and responses to global brands' marketing advertisements and messages, and to ascertain if they are of relevance and reflect authentic inclusivity efforts by brands. They are important in shaping consumers' purchasing behaviours and loyalty towards global beauty brands (Wang et al., 2023).
- **Brand Loyalty:** refers to how consumers consistently prefer a certain brand instead of their competitors, which is influenced by their emotional connections and optimistic attitudes. Digital engagement and positive consumer perceptions of inclusivity foster brand loyalty (Nguyen, Tran, & Nguyen, 2024).
- **South African Beauty Consumers:** refers to the South African Gen Z and Millennial consumers who actively advocate for inclusive representation (Miller, 2022). They are conscious consumers whose perceptions of a brand and attitudes are shaped by a brand's inclusive initiatives (Khwela, Msosa & Ntshangase, 2024)

1.10 Research Chapter Outline

Chapter	Title	Description
Chapter 1	Introduction and Background	• Provides an overview of inclusivity in global beauty marketing. • States the research problem, questions, and objectives. • Research motivation and significance. • Research methodology.

		• Research delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. • Ethical considerations.
Chapter 2	Literature Review	• Reviews existing literature on social media marketing, inclusivity, consumer perception, and brand loyalty. • Highlights the issues in the literature that the research aims to address. • Discusses theories and frameworks applicable to the study.
Chapter 3	Research Methodology	• Outlines the qualitative, exploratory research design. • Details the interpretivist paradigm, sampling method, focus group procedures, data collection tools, and data analysis. • The research's validity and trustworthiness are illustrated in detail to demonstrate the study's rigour. • Ethical considerations
Chapter 4	Data Analysis and Findings	• Presents the focus group data findings as key themes and sub-themes. • Includes quotes and narratives from participants to illustrate findings. • Presents the findings aligned to the research questions and objectives. • Summarises their implications for beauty marketing initiatives.
Chapter 5	Summary of Key Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion	• Summarises the key findings in relation to the research questions.

		• Draws theoretical and practical conclusions and offers recommendations for global beauty brands on enhancing inclusivity in their marketing strategies. • Acknowledges research limitations and suggests areas of improvement for both global brands and research.
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1.11 Conclusion

This study investigated how inclusive social media marketing efforts, by global beauty brands, influences consumer perception and brand loyalty among South African consumers. Using an exploratory qualitative research design and focus group discussions, the research addressed the main research questions and objectives above. The findings aimed to inform global brands of the applicable marketing practices and fill a gap in South African international business management research, while recognising the research limitations related to sample size. Research methodology, ethical considerations that included participants signing informed consent and anonymity were described. Chapter 2 now reviews the existing literature and the theoretical foundations of consumer perceptions, inclusivity, social media marketing, and brand loyalty, and establishes the theoretical and empirical foundations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Inclusivity in Social Media Marketing for Global Beauty Brands in South Africa.

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, inclusivity in beauty marketing has significantly shifted the industry, with brands using social media to engage consumers from diverse backgrounds. This shift has been significant in multicultural markets like South Africa, where diverse skin tones, cultural backgrounds and beauty standards call for tailored marketing strategies (Smith, James & Griffiths, 2021). While research on inclusive beauty marketing has been the focus, substantial gaps in the literature necessitate further investigation into its effects on consumer perception and brand loyalty across diverse cultural landscapes (Williams, Escalas, & Morningstar, 2022). This chapter situates inclusivity in social media marketing within the broader field of international marketing, highlighting how global beauty brands use inclusive narratives to expand reach across diverse cultural markets. This positions inclusivity as a strategic lever in international business, not limited to being a branding tactic.

Social media is a powerful tool for brands to target potential customers, communicate with them, and increase their presence, as it is key to their growth and competitive advantage (Smith et al., 2021). With global brands integrating social media into their marketing strategies, social media has transformed how brands communicate with consumers and how consumers perceive that communication (Miller, 2022). However, the game has changed over the years, with consumers now seeking representation in brands' marketing, communication, messaging, visuals, and products. This has led to the evolution of "inclusivity" in global beauty marketing standards, where global beauty brands such as Fenty have proven to revolutionise the beauty market through being inclusive (Miller, 2022). Inclusivity fosters emotional connections with consumers and enhances brand loyalty (Temitope & Omolade, 2024). As for inclusive marketing campaigns, they have proven to be powerful tactics for brands to resonate with their consumers, represent them effectively, and align with their values (Miller, 2022).

Research has shown that consumers are more attracted to brands that effectively reflect their social identities and values (Henderson, Mazodier & Khenfer, 2025). An example is beauty campaigns that represent people with different skin tones, body

types, races, ages, and cultural backgrounds, and that tend to create an inclusive space for consumers, contributing to building brand value and equity (Clark, 2023). However, the fact that most brands are using social media platforms to highlight their inclusive narratives has raised a few ethical concerns about inclusivity and representation (Trivedi et al., 2025). A lot of research has shed light on authenticity and tokenism, exploring how inclusivity can be miscommunicated and shape consumer perceptions of global brands (Clark, 2023).

There is evidence that inclusive marketing strategies have benefits. However, brands still need to be aware of the complexities of authentically representing diverse communities, as failure to be authentic in representation can lead to backlash, low customer retention, criticism, and reduced competitiveness, as some brands have faced (Lakshmi, Pavithra & Keerthana, 2024). Given these outcomes, there is a need to explore inclusivity in global beauty marketing in multicultural markets such as South Africa, which are underexplored, and where most global beauty brands have a presence. Consumer bases differ, and most literature focuses on Western markets; there is a need to study African markets, as they offer a rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds (Keller, 2020). Through the use of theoretical frameworks such as CBBE, Social Identity Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, more light may be shed on how consumers perceive inclusive global beauty marketing; and on their self-conceptualisation as well as their positive and negative attitudes and towards global beauty brands (Okeke, Chukwunonso & Oranusi, 2024).

This chapter aims to explore the connections among social media marketing, inclusivity, consumer perceptions, and how they collectively enhance brand loyalty within the global beauty industry. An in-depth exploration of local and global perspectives provides a better understanding of consumers, as they have different perspectives. Furthermore, the social media landscape explored demonstrates how inclusivity is implemented among global brands, its influence on consumer perceptions, and how it enhances brand loyalty. Lastly, there is a need to explore what brand loyalty looks like from a consumer perspective through their interactions with brands and representation.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

Keller (2018) defines brand equity as the extent to which customers respond to a brand's marketing activities. It is a notion that underscores the need for brands to develop marketing strategies that elicit positive thoughts, feelings, and perceptions from customers (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). To better understand how brands can implement these strategies, Keller (2018) identifies six elements illustrated in Figure 1: brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand feelings, brand judgements, and brand resonance or relationships. These elements are crucial for brands to facilitate deeper emotional connections with consumers and enhance brand loyalty. In the case of global beauty brands, inclusivity strengthens brand salience and resonance, which are critical for building loyalty in culturally diverse international markets (Temitope & Omolade, 2024).

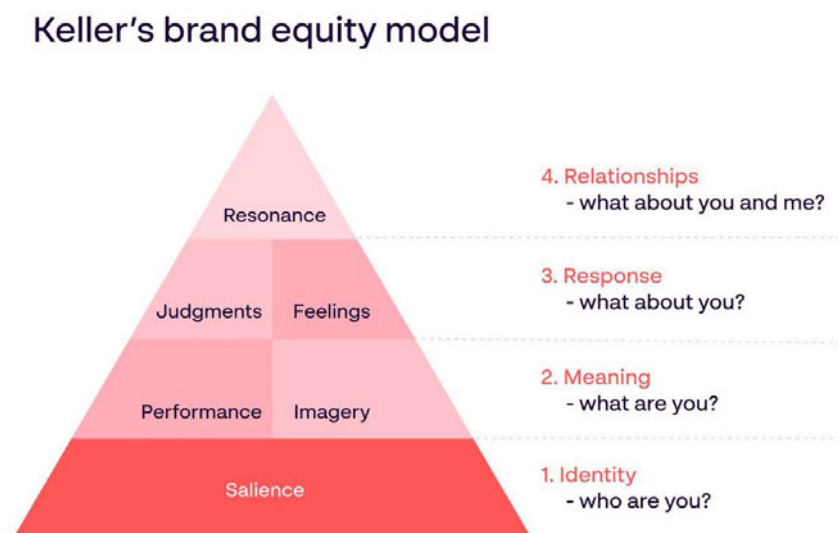


Figure 1 Keller's Brand Equity Pyramid Model

Source: Diagram reproduced from Keller (2018)

2.2.1.1 Brand Awareness: Salience

The first stage of brand salience aims to improve brand awareness, where consumers can recall and recognise the brand and its relevant category (Keller, 2003; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). The link between the brand name, logo, and symbol that consumers can easily remember, for instance, brands such as Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, and Gucci, have managed to imprint that memory (Saviolo, 2025). In the context of global beauty marketing, brands should convey inclusivity in their brand awareness by

ensuring consumers understand their product and service offerings, which is the first building block of brand loyalty. Farjam and Hongyi (2015). assert that to build a strong brand, it needs a strong identity that consumers can easily associate with a specific class or brand, and that this identity is associated with inclusivity and is effectively highlighted in their product offerings and marketing to enhance purchasing intentions and loyalty.

2.2.1.2 Brand Meaning: Imagery and Performance

The second stage focuses on establishing brand meaning, derived from tangible and intangible associations (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). The two characteristics of brand meaning are either abstract, through brand imagery: or functional, through brand performance. Brand imagery refers to the visual and symbolic representations the brand associates with itself. Anssisse and Develi (2024) assert that when consumers identify with the brand, it serves the purpose of inclusivity in marketing strategies. Looking at global beauty marketing campaigns and strategies that reflect diverse consumers in terms of skin tone, body types, and cultural backgrounds creates positive associations that consumers notice (Anssisse & Develi, 2024). These associations are important because they shape consumers' emotions and attitudes towards the brand and create products that reflect the identities of potential consumers (Anssisse & Develi, 2024).

Brand performance explores the functional aspects of a brand's products that fulfil and satisfy consumers' expectations and needs (Keller, 2009; Kumar, Townsend & Vorhies, 2015). These are rated in terms of their quality, satisfaction, economic, aesthetic, and utilitarian needs for consumers in each product category (Keller, 2009; Kumar, Townsend & Vorhies, 2015). For a global beauty marketing brand, performance should align with consumers' expectations, shaped by brand imagery. Global brands that effectively communicate and commit to inclusivity in their product delivery boost consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Kumar, Townsend & Vorhies, 2015).

2.2.1.3 Brand Responses: Consumer Feelings and Judgements

Brand response is the third step that highlights consumers responses to brands marketing initiatives and activities (Keller, 2003; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Responses are either feelings or judgments that expose what consumers think and feel about a respective brand. As for brand feelings, they are emotional responses and reactions of consumers towards a brand, which Keller (2001) identified as six types: excitement,

fun, warmth, security, self-respect, and social approval. Furthermore, brand judgements focus on overall quality, credibility, consideration, and superiority (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Feelings tend to influence consumers' attachment and loyalty towards brands, and through inclusive marketing strategies that validate consumers' identities and experiences, emotional connections can be made with them (Ohemeng & McGrandle, 2021). Emotional resonance can be a key driver of consumer-brand relationships, as studies show that emotionally invigorating advertising enhances customer retention (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Research has found that brands perceived as genuinely inclusive tend to receive more favourable judgments of trustworthiness and credibility, which influences consumers' purchasing decisions (Jerak, 2023). However, for global beauty brands to navigate consumers' responses, they need authentic, heartfelt inclusive social media marketing strategies that value consumers and make them unforgettable in consumers' minds.

2.2.1.4 Brand Resonance and Relationships

The final stage is the brand resonance, which alludes to the nature of the relationship between the customer and the brand (Keller, 2003; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Elements used to describe the relationship are behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community, and active engagement (Keller, 2001; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). To reach these elements, global brands need an identity that resonates with consumers. In the context of inclusive social media marketing, global brands that resonate with consumers and foster a sense of belonging prompt them to share their experiences, enhance brand loyalty, and gain new customers (Temitope & Omolade, 2024).

2.2.2 Social Identity Theory and its dimensions

Social Identity Theory (SIT) asserts that individuals construct their self-concepts through their associations with social groups, which shape their behaviours and perceptions (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Farivar & Wang, 2022). This indicates that consumers' preferences are for brands that resonate or align with their identity (Islam, 2014). When global beauty brands authentically represent diverse ethnicities, cultures and skin tones, consumers with shared attributes feel included, reinforcing their connection to the brand (Anssisse & Develi, 2024). In South Africa, where racial and cultural identity are significant, inclusive marketing can strengthen consumer-brand relationships (Makhathini, 2023). Enforcing SIT in global beauty marketing strategies will influence consumer behaviour and loyalty towards global beauty brands. As

authentic representation of diverse identities aligns global beauty brands with consumer self-concepts, a key driver of acceptance in international marketing (Farivar & Wang, 2022).

SIT asserts that people define themselves through social and individual experiences, which shape their self-concept (Farivar & Wang, 2022). According to Jerak (2023), personal identity reflects a person's traits and abilities, while the social aspects refer to a person's perceptions of belonging to a human group, as social groups influence their self-concept. Social identity has three key dimensions, which are cognitive, evaluative, and affective, which are important in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours (Farivar & Wang, 2022). This is illustrated in Figure 2:

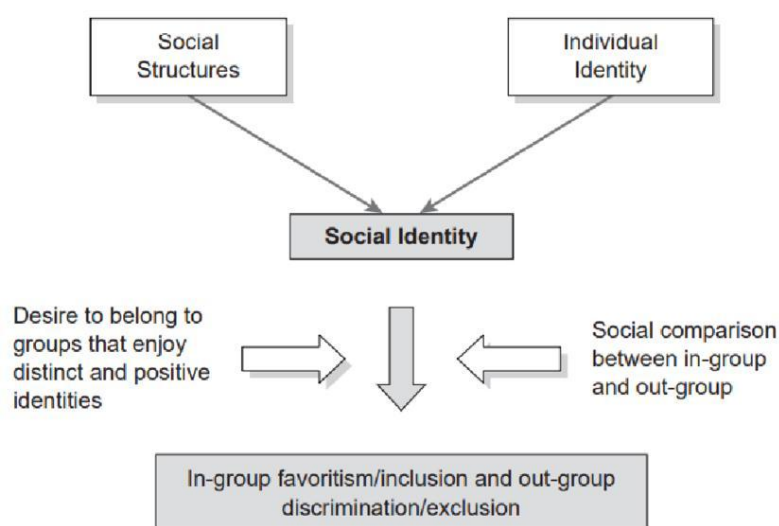


Figure 2 Conceptual diagram of the Social Identity Theory

Source: Irene et al., 2023

2.2.2.1 Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension shapes consumers' awareness of belonging to a social group by categorising themselves. These categories are characterised by gender, nationality, or profession (Wang, 2018). McGowan, Shiu & Hassan (2017) assert that consumers develop cognitive associations through their group memberships, shaping their perceptions about brands and their offerings. For instance, South African beauty consumers may align with global beauty brands that promote diversity in their marketing campaigns or social media content (Anssisse & Develi, 2024). This allows global beauty brands to be recognised and successfully integrated into consumers'

social identities. Due to high market saturation in the beauty industry, global brands must prioritise inclusive imagery and representation to better position themselves and resonate with consumers (Anssisse & Develi, 2024).

2.2.2.2 Evaluative Dimension

The evaluative dimension shows how group memberships shape attitudes and perceptions towards brands that are aligned with the group's values and self-esteem (Wang, 2017). Depending on how important or positive one's group affiliation is, it can lead to collective self-esteem, which in turn influences brand advocacy and engagement (Wang, 2017). If consumers perceive global beauty brands as being inclusive in their social media marketing strategies and product representations, it fosters positive attitudes towards the brand (Rhee & Jung, 2019). Through this dimension, brand perceptions are evoked and are crucial to driving consumer-brand loyalty. In the context of inclusivity, consumers tend to align more with brands that display their identities and values.

2.2.2.3 Affective Dimension

The affective dimension resembles the emotional attachments that individuals have towards their groups and brands that represent them. Wang (2017) asserts that they can reflect as pride, belonging, and commitment to group values and goals. Furthermore, the affective dimension influences consumer behaviours that allude to loyalty and advocacy (Lam, Ahearne and Schillewaert, 2010). At the same time, the emotional bonds created also tend to work effectively online to foster brand engagement (Shahid et al, 2022). In inclusive global beauty marketing, brands that can create emotional connections can enhance brand loyalty as consumers lean towards those that represent them. This emotional engagement can shape consumer decision-making processes by influencing which brand they choose over others (Lakshmi et al., 2024).

2.2.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour

Despite its age, Ajzen's (2012) theory remains relevant in exploring how attitudes and subjective norms influence behavioural intentions. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) holds that behavioural intentions drive positive and negative attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ohemeng & McGrandle, 2021). This study explored a dual perspective on positive and negative attitudes formed through consumers' engagement with global brands, their experiences of inclusion

and exclusion, and the outcomes of fostering consumer-brand loyalty. Current studies have used this theory to explain how consumer attitudes towards inclusivity in digital content shape their purchasing intentions and brand loyalty (Xiaohui & Ghosh, 2023). Collectively, the theory alludes to how consumer attitudes towards global beauty brands shapes their behavioural intentions that translate into loyalty.

2.2.3.1 Dual Perspective of Positive and Negative Attitudes

Consumers perceive a brand as either positive or negative, through their brand messaging and marketing activities (Licsandru, 2019; Licasandru & Cui, 2018). Licsandru (2019) asserts that when brands represent marginalised groups or identities, it triggers positive attitudes and the consumer's sense of Subjective Social Inclusion (SSI). One of the brands that has successfully represented diversity is Dove, through its campaign celebrating diverse bodies. Its success shows how consumers prefer advertisements, brands, and products that embody characteristics of their self-concepts (Clark, 2023). Through representation by other brands such as Fenty Beauty, Garnier, and L'Oréal, among others, it breaks down the barriers created by social prejudices (Henderson et al., 2025).

Negative attitudes, on the other hand, perceive brands as 'diversity washing' or tokenism (Lakshmi et al., 2024). Millennials and Gen Z are the main observers and critics of performative inclusion, where brands use representation during important periods such as Heritage Day or Pride Month (McClary, 2025). These performative acts lead to scepticism and distrust, which influence the negative outcome of consumer-brand loyalty (Lakshmi et al., 2024). It can also lead consumers to distance themselves from brands because of associations they might not want to be associated with (Lakshmi et al., 2024). However, some researchers found that authentic inclusivity can increase consumer loyalty by 15%, whereas inauthentic representations can lead to about 86% of consumers not willing to be identified with the brand (McClary, 2025).

2.2.3.2 Subjective Norms and Social Influence

Subjective norms are determined by social pressures from the people around us, such as family, peers, and cultural groups (Farivar & Wang, 2022). The perceptions formed from these interactions influence consumers to either support or avoid certain brands. Subjective norms correlate with the Social Identity Theory (SIT), which asserts that group affiliations shape consumer behaviour. (Farivar & Wang, 2022). However, they are also 'cosmopolitan' consumers who are known for being open to global cultures

and are associated with social groups that value diversity (Mohamed, Ibrahim & Fouad, 2025). These different pressures are indicators of consumers' purchasing intentions that vary across cultural settings (Henderson et al., 2025). For instance, collectivist cultures might have stronger social expectations and preferences than individualistic cultures (Henderson et al., 2025). These aspects are crucial for identifying how consumers of global beauty brands perceive global brands' inclusive marketing initiatives on social media from a collectivist and individualistic perspective.

2.2.3.3 Behavioural Intentions and Brand Loyalty

For inclusive marketing to be successful, behavioural intentions must translate into brand loyalty (Lakshmi et al., 2024). When global brands resemble authentic inclusivity in their social media marketing, these behavioural intentions tend to create genuine consumer-brand loyalty (Ramela et al., 2022). Through emotional commitment, brands gain a stronger competitive advantage in diverse markets (Shahid et al., 2022). Marketing campaigns that are authentic in their inclusive representation increase brand pride and contribute to Customer Citizenship Behaviour (CCB), which occurs when consumers voluntarily function as brand ambassadors (Chen, White and Yu, 2025). For instance, consumers will frequently recommend and advocate for global brands through their social media platforms. Through successful inclusive marketing, there is greater consumer-brand loyalty and increased long-term sales. Most research indicates that inclusive marketing campaigns can generate 15% higher consumer-brand loyalty and a 16.5% increase in long-term sales goals (UN Women, 2024). Grounding an inclusive beauty marketing initiative in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is crucial to increasing brand loyalty and driving commercial success.

2.2.4 Theoretical model

Figure 3, theoretical model illustrates how inclusivity in social media marketing functions as a strategic driver of consumer perceptions, leading to international marketing outcomes such as brand loyalty, diverse market reach, and global competitiveness. The model integrates three key frameworks: Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), to explain the multidimensional relationship between inclusive marketing practices and consumer responses. Inclusivity plays crucial roles that include brand resonance (CBBE), creates a sense of belonging and identity alignment (SIT), and shapes consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions (TPB). Collectively, these theoretical

lenses demonstrate how inclusivity in social media marketing strategies strengthens global beauty brands' positioning in multicultural markets like South Africa.

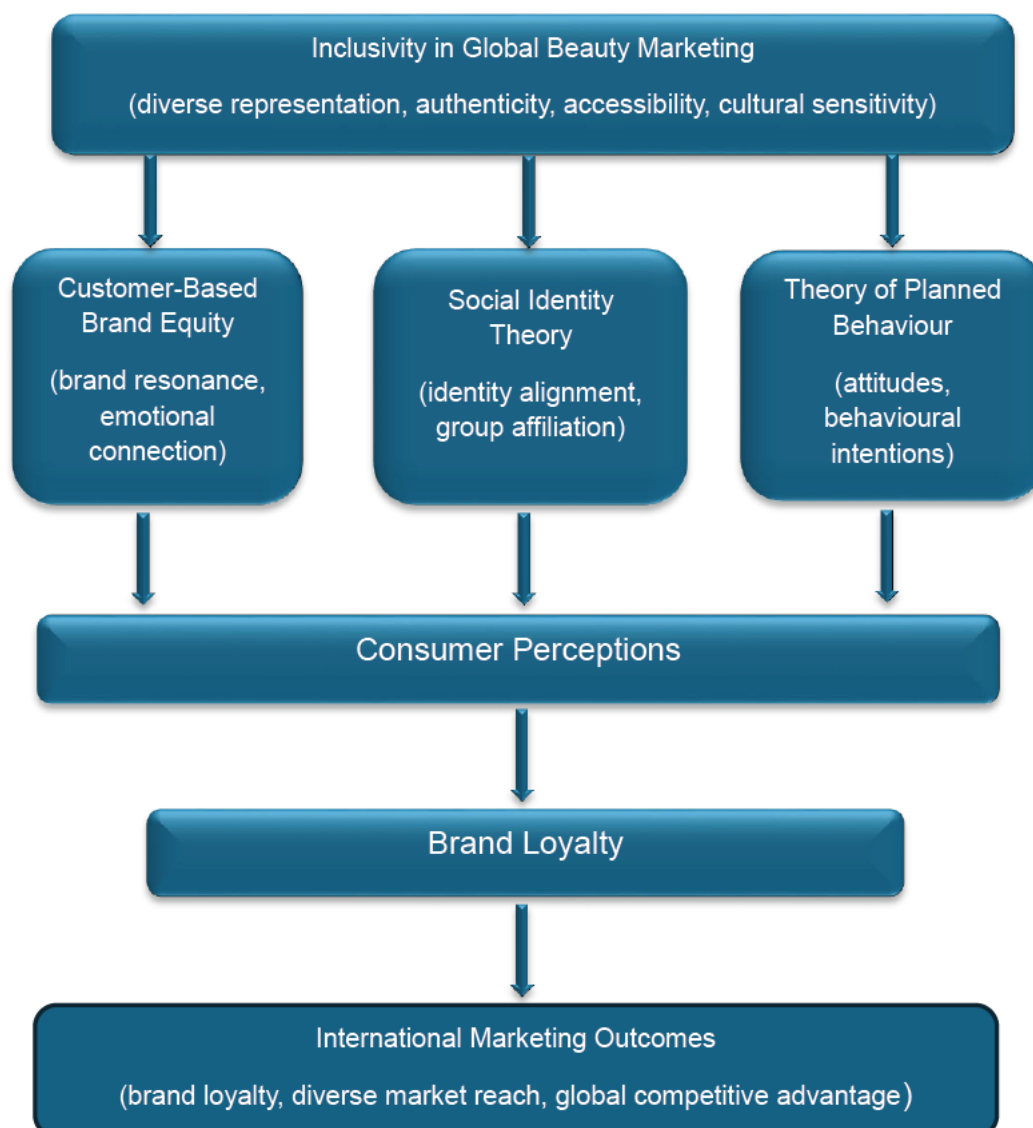


Figure 3: Theoretical model integrating CBBE, SIT and TPB

Source: Researcher's construction

2.2.4.1 Justification for the Integration of CBBE, SIT and TPB

The integration of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is justified by the multidimensional nature of inclusivity in social media marketing and its influence on consumer responses. CBBE serves as the primary theoretical framework because the study is fundamentally focusing on how consumers perceive and build relationships with global beauty brands through brand resonance and emotional connection. However, CBBE does not fully explore the social and behavioural practices that

inclusive social media marketing influences consumer's perceptions. SIT is therefore positioned as a complementary theoretical lens to explain how authenticity, diverse representation and cultural sensitivity contributes to consumers sense of belonging, identity alignment and group affiliation in multicultural markets such as South Africa. TPB further provides the behavioural perspective, by explaining consumer attitudes and perceptions that influences behavioural intentions towards global beauty brands. Although these theories have different theoretical traditions and make different assumptions regarding consumers, in this study their differences complement each other. CBBE emphasises consumer-brand evaluations, SIT focuses on social identity and group affiliations, and TPB justifies attitudes and behavioural intentions. They are not treated as a single theory but rather cater for the distinct dimensions of the research problem. CBBE providing the consumer-brand perspectives, SIT explains the identity-based processes that contribute to perceptions of inclusivity and TPB provides the behavioural side of consumer responses. The integration of the theories allows a comprehensive explanation of how inclusive social media marketing shapes consumer perceptions and contribute to brand loyalty. Chapter 4 of the study further provides how these theoretical frameworks justify the research findings.

2.3 Key Research Themes

The key themes reviewed in the literature focus on the connections among social media marketing, inclusivity, consumer perception, and brand loyalty. However, most recent studies have highlighted how beauty marketing has shifted from homogenous representations to celebrating diversity (Henderson et al., 2025). Miller (2022) asserts that inclusivity is now the backbone of brand messaging, as illustrated by campaigns featuring models of different skin tones, body types, and ethnicities. Brands such as Fenty Beauty have set the tone for inclusivity by offering products that cater for their diverse target market and diversifying their advertising initiatives (Morett, 2022). This approach also aligns with evolving consumer values and represents the new beauty standards. For instance, Maybelline Africa, Garnier, Essence, among others, have been at the forefront of this trend in South Africa by reflecting the diverse landscape through their marketing strategies (Henderson et al., 2025). Moreover, inclusivity is a marketing strategy and an ethical indicator of a brand's commitment to social responsibility (Anssisse & Develi, 2024). Consumers also favour brands perceived as

socially conscious and representative (Nguyen et al., 2024). Integrating inclusive elements in marketing campaigns fosters brand authenticity and trust.

2.3.1 Inclusivity in Global Beauty Marketing

The concept of inclusivity has been sidelined and treated as an afterthought in marketing strategies for the past few decades (Clark, 2023). However, in today's marketing strategies, it is a top priority, as consumer's demand and reward brands that represent them. For global beauty brands to improve inclusivity, their marketing initiatives, product Research and Development (R&D), retail execution, visual storytelling, and technology need to reflect this (Clark, 2023). The drivers of inclusivity are the digitally active, who are knowledgeable and vocal about brand equity. Bakare (2024) asserts that the transition to prioritising inclusivity is not only a trend or philanthropic gesture but a critical requirement in marketing strategies. However, due to the change, some global beauty brands have become catalysts for diverse representation in product development and marketing (Frisby, 2019). The 'Fenty Effect' in 2017 was the main driver of future development of inclusive initiatives, such as expanding product ranges to suit the diverse consumer base (Frisby, 2019). The brand's ability to generate \$100 million in sales in its first month demonstrates how inclusive marketing drives high returns and fosters consumer-brand loyalty (Frisby, 2019). Inclusivity has shifted social media posts from being performative to economic reforms and prioritising diversity (Bakare, 2024). In international marketing, inclusivity is not only an ethical conduct but a competitive advantage that allows global beauty brands to sustain long-term loyalty (Frisby, 2019).

2.3.2 Accessibility as a frontier of inclusivity

One of the frontiers of inclusivity is accessibility for people who live with disabilities. According to Beauty Streams (2025), 1.3 billion people globally live with disability and are part of an ageing population expected to increase to 2 billion by 2050. Through adaptive beauty initiatives, global beauty brands are utilising AI and advanced packaging to meet the needs of the people living with disabilities (Tamminen & Androic, 2025). Estée Lauder is one of the global beauty brands that has built a Voice-enabled Makeup Assistant (VMA) to assist visually impaired consumers in applying makeup accurately (Beauty Streams, 2025). The use of AI has also extended to bridging gaps in inclusivity, as consumers demand realism (Tamminen & Androic, 2025). Technology can bridge the gap whereby global beauty brands have introduced

Virtual Try-On (VTO) and AI Shade Finders (Islam et al., 2024). These systems can build consumer trust that can convert into consumer-brand loyalty. The VTO reduces the risk of underserved skin tones purchasing the wrong shade, and the AI Shade Finder assists consumers in matching their complexion and undertones to product offerings (Islam et al., 2024). However, for technology-supported inclusivity to succeed, global beauty brands need to be genuine and accountable (Tamminen & Androic, 2025).

2.3.3 Gender-inclusive marketing

Gender-inclusive marketing has become a major topic among consumers, particularly among Gen Z. Traditionally, women have been positioned as the key beauty consumers, resulting in marketing being predominately associated with female consumers and their beauty needs. In the South African context Millennials and Generation Z female consumers are the largest and most powerful consumers of beauty brands (Pillay, 2020). This shows the historically female-centered nature of the beauty industry, where marketing communications have predominately focused on women's identities, preferences and relatable products. Eurocentric standards of beauty are now shifting toward more gender-fluid initiatives (Licsandru, 2019). These new beauty frontiers advocate for authenticity and accommodate diverse identities. The evolution is driven by social imperatives and the contribution to consumer preferences, which research has indicated that inclusive marketing strategies can lead to the likelihood of brands being consumers' first choice (Li, 2022). Most global beauty brands have shifted to featuring non-gender conforming identities and catering for the LGBTQ+ community (Boyd, Ritch, Dodd & McColl, 2020). In practice, this theme includes the normalisation of men wearing make-up and the development of gender-fluid products as there are a rise in male self-care (Boyd et al, 2020). Ultimately, moving beyond the one-size-fits-all approach in global beauty marketing contributes to building deeper consumer-brand loyalty as underserved communities will feel seen and served (Li, 2022).

2.3.4 Social Media Marketing Strategies

Digital platforms are transforming traditional marketing channels, making social media key for brand communication with consumers. Gupta et al. (2020) assert that social media is efficient and fast to reach targeted consumer segments in real time. Social media marketing bridges the communication gap between consumers and brands

(Gupta et al., 2020). This offers personalised experiences different from traditional marketing channels. In the context of global beauty brands, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have become crucial for highlighting the diverse product ranges brands offer, and for initiating inclusive marketing campaigns (Ramela et al., 2022).

Global beauty brands such as Maybelline Africa, Fenty Beauty, Estée Lauder, Huda Beauty, L'Oréal Paris, Lancôme, and Revlon have incorporated inclusivity into their social media strategies. By leveraging user-generated content, influencer partnerships, and interactive campaigns, brands can create dynamic narratives that resonate with South African consumers (Makhathini, 2023). Chen et al. (2022) argue that the digital environment makes inclusivity efforts more visible to consumers, thereby influencing how they engage with and perceive the brand's authenticity. These strategies when effectively used enhance visibility and authenticity in multicultural markets.

2.3.5 Consumer Perception of Inclusivity

Consumer perception is a multifaceted concept that includes beliefs, attitudes and emotions elicited by brand communication (Clark, 2023). A study by Johnson and Chattaraman (2021) found that consumers respond positively to brands that resonate with their self-identity and demonstrate authenticity and commitment to social responsibility. Similarly, Rhee and Jung (2019) assert that when consumers see themselves represented in advertising, they develop a positive attitude toward the brand. In diverse markets like South Africa, representation becomes critical.

Moreover, research has shown that inclusive marketing initiatives can foster consumer perceptions of authenticity by fairly representing consumers and making them feel relevant (Henderson et al., 2025). Shahid et al. (2022) show that positive consumer perceptions are entwined with increased emotional attachment and lead to a higher likelihood of consumer engagement with the brand. In diverse markets like South Africa, representation is critical for building trust and resonance. However, the challenge lies in perceptions of inclusivity as either a genuine or a superficial marketing scheme (Clark, 2023). Research studies examining the risks of performative inclusivity demonstrate how inauthentic representation erodes consumer trust (Hasan, Qayyum, and Zia, 2023).

2.3.6 Brand Loyalty in the Digital Age

Brand loyalty has traditionally been a key performance indicator in marketing, but its dynamics constantly evolve in the digital age (Taleghani & Taleghani, 2024). Loyalty in the context of social media shapes community engagement, shared values, and beliefs, and highlights the interactive nature of digital communication (Taleghani & Taleghani, 2024). In the digital age, brand loyalty is increasingly influenced by the quality of consumer-brand relationships created by personalised communication and effective engagement, rather than solely depending on repeat purchases (Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023). Brands that effectively communicate inclusivity build stronger consumer relationships, which contribute to brand loyalty (Nguyen et al., 2024). This insight is relevant for global beauty brands in South Africa, such as Maybelline, Fenty Beauty, Garnier, Estée Lauder, Essence, and L'Oréal, as diverse beauty standards are designed to create an emotional bond with a multicultural consumer base (Henderson et al., 2025).

Recent research indicates that inclusive social media marketing initiatives can foster brand loyalty by fostering a sense of belonging among consumers. For example, Temitope & Omolade, (2024) found that consumers in the beauty industry are loyal to brands which mirror their norms, values, and cultural identities. However, research in the South African retail sector found that social media presence alone is not sufficient enough to influence loyalty, as active consumer engagement is important in strengthening the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty (Kiran, Lodhi, Shabbir & Zubair, 2024). To sustain this loyalty, ongoing authentic engagement is required, which is constantly shaped by the fast-evolving nature of digital trends (Taleghani & Taleghani, 2024).

2.3.7 Authenticity versus Performative Inclusivity

In the literature, there is a recurring debate focusing on the authenticity of inclusive marketing initiatives. While most studies highlight the benefits of inclusivity, others point out the risks of tokenism and performative practices (Clark, 2023). Clark (2023) argues that when consumers perceive inclusivity as a mere trend or a superficial tactic, the anticipated positive outcomes, such as stronger brand loyalty and improved consumer perceptions, are undermined in practice. In contrast, authentic inclusivity is

marked by a brand's constant commitment to diversity, reflected in its actions, product offerings, and corporate values (Hasan et al., 2023).

This theme is important for understanding the potential challenges faced by global beauty brands in South Africa, such as Maybelline, L'Oréal Paris, Lancôme, and Fenty Beauty. Chen et al. (2022) note that the effectiveness of inclusive marketing depends on how sincere a brand's efforts are perceived to be. When inclusivity is authentically aligned and integrated into a brand's identity, it is a powerful driver of consumer trust, positive brand perceptions, and long-term loyalty (Miller, 2022).

2.4 Synthesis and Gaps in the Literature

The existing literature explores the role of inclusivity in social media marketing strategies, but several gaps remain underexplored. First, while most studies have explored the benefits of inclusive advertising in Western markets, there is limited research focusing on multicultural markets such as South Africa (Henderson et al., 2025). Second, most existing research tends to view inclusivity as a fixed concept rather than a fluid one, as digital marketing practices continue to evolve (Nguyen et al., 2024). As social media platforms are revolutionising consumer engagement, it is important to update research methodologies and approaches to capture these changes effectively (Nguyen et al., 2024). Additionally, studies have linked inclusive marketing to improved consumer perceptions and brand loyalty (Miller, 2022). The specific mechanisms driving these relationships remain insufficiently explored. For instance, the role of social media influencers in eliciting consumer responses to inclusive content warrants further investigation (Moodley & Machela, 2022).

Lastly, there is a need for a critical assessment of the balance between authenticity and performative inclusivity. While inclusive marketing has acknowledged benefits, potential drawbacks of inauthentic practices that diminish consumer trust and loyalty have not been thoroughly examined in South African markets (Hasan et al., 2023). Addressing these gaps will advance theoretical understanding and provide practical guidelines for global beauty brands seeking to develop meaningful, effective, and inclusive social media marketing strategies.

2.5 Global and Local Perspectives

International research consistently demonstrates that inclusive marketing can significantly improve brand image and consumer engagement (Anssisse & Develi,

2024). For instance, studies conducted in Western markets indicate that brands incorporating diversity into their marketing campaigns tend to experience higher consumer trust and loyalty (Li, 2022). However, applying these insights to local contexts, such as South Africa, requires careful exploration due to the cultural differences that shape consumer perceptions and responses (Makhathini, 2023). South Africa's complex history and multicultural society present unique opportunities and challenges that shape how consumers receive inclusive marketing (Makhathini, 2023).

Recent research in South Africa emphasises the growing influence of digital technologies in shaping consumer behaviour (Ramela, de Villiers & Chuchu, 2022). Most local consumers are highly engaged on social media platforms, where authentic representation and culturally relevant content are presented (Okonkwo, Mujinga, Namkoisse & Francisco, 2024). This body of literature suggests that while global trends in inclusive marketing on social media are informative, the insights need to be tailored to local contexts (Ramela et al., 2022). Focusing on global beauty brands with a primary emphasis on makeup and skincare, this research aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how inclusivity is implemented and perceived in South African markets.

2.6 Conclusion

The reviewed literature highlights the transformative potential of inclusivity in social media marketing for global beauty brands. Integrating the Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, Social Identity Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour with empirical studies on digital engagement makes it evident that inclusive marketing strategies significantly shape consumer perceptions and foster brand loyalty. Despite substantial advances in understanding these in Western markets, a significant research gap remains regarding the implications of inclusive marketing in multicultural markets such as South Africa.

This review has identified key themes, including the implementation of inclusive marketing, effective social media marketing strategies, consumer perceptions, brand loyalty, and authenticity versus performative inclusivity. By addressing these themes and existing research gaps, this study's aim was to generate actionable information

and data for global beauty brands, enabling them to effectively refine their social media marketing strategies to engage and retain diverse consumer groups in South Africa.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research adopted a qualitative, exploratory approach to explore how inclusivity in social media marketing influences brand loyalty and resonates with South African consumers. Qualitative research focuses on understanding and exploring human experiences, perceptions, motivations, behaviours, social contexts, and meanings, whereas quantitative research focuses on numerical data (Lim, 2025). The research aimed to understand consumers' attitudes, experiences, and behaviours of inclusivity, as it is a complex concept (Bilgin, 2018; Roy, 2025). Table 1 below outlines the key strengths of the qualitative research method compared to that of quantitative research.

Table 1: Strengths of qualitative research

Strengths	Description	References
Deeper understanding	It allows the exploration of consumers' thoughts, feelings, and motivations towards global beauty brands. This method generated rich data crucial to understanding consumer perceptions of inclusive global beauty marketing.	(Lim,2025).
Flexibility and Reflexivity	The qualitative approach offered the researcher flexibility and reflexivity, enabling the revision of questions in response to participants' responses and new insights that emerged throughout the research process. The collected data were rich and relevant to the study.	(Lim, 2025).
Contextual insights and relevance	It captured consumer attitudes and behaviours, as well as the cultural and social connotations often overlooked by the quantitative approach. This study enabled the understanding of the social identity theory (SIT) and its influence on consumer	(Lim, 2025).

	perceptions and loyalty towards global beauty brands.	
Exploratory nature	It is an ideal approach to explore a particular study or topic. Therefore, this allowed the researcher to develop a hypothesis from the collected data rather than from preexisting theories typically used in quantitative research. In this case, South African consumer perceptions of inclusivity among global beauty brands' marketing initiatives are a limited area of exploration.	(Lim, 2025).
Cultural Sensitivity	The approach allowed the researcher to explore and draw conclusions on how cultural factors influence consumer behaviour and perceptions. This study provides insight into how consumers perceive inclusivity in global beauty marketing.	(Ohemeng & McGrandle, 2021).
Interpersonal Interactions	The focus groups fostered interactive discussions by creating a space where participants could share their views and experiences. In spaces where inclusivity is the main topic, there is a need for effective discussion.	(Lim ,2025).
Rich Descriptive Data	A qualitative approach yields rich, descriptive data that may explore the complexities and subtleties of consumer behaviours and experiences. Comprehensive insights could make connections between emotions shaping brand loyalty.	(Ohemeng & McGrandle, 2021).

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Conducting qualitative research was more feasible for this study as it allowed the collection of South African consumers' perceptions about inclusivity in global beauty

marketing, specifically on social media. The method enabled deep exploration of consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, including how they feel and interact with the types of content and campaigns global beauty brands showcase.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The study focused on the interpretivist paradigm embedded in Social Identity Theory, which shows how individuals develop their self-concept. The research remained subjective, as behaviours, attitudes, and experiences are social constructs. It allows for understanding participants' narratives on consumer perceptions of inclusivity in global beauty marketing, without being limited to a single understanding, and recognises that consumer experiences and interactions with global beauty brands are fluid. Table 2 further highlights the research philosophy and its importance in the study of South African consumers' feelings and behaviours towards inclusivity, as well as their experiences and interactions with global beauty brands on social media that foster their brand loyalty.

Table 2: Description of the research philosophy

Description		References
Paradigm	The interpretive paradigm acknowledges that knowledge and perceptions are shaped through human experiences and interactions. Interpretivism allowed the researcher to explore consumers' perceptions of inclusivity in social media marketing strategies of global beauty brands in South Africa's makeup and skincare industry. This paradigm was particularly suited for examining how consumers interpret and find meaning in inclusive marketing messages, aligning with the qualitative research focus on subjective experiences.	(Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).
Epistemology	Aligned with interpretivism, the epistemological position in this study highlighted subjectivity. The research relied on collecting personal narratives and subjective interpretations from South African consumers regarding inclusive social media	(Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

	marketing by global beauty brands in the makeup and skincare industry. This approach enabled the study to uncover deeper insights into inclusivity and its influence on brand loyalty, as previously emphasised in the literature.	
Ontology	The research's ontological stance viewed reality as a societal phenomenon. Consumer perceptions of inclusivity are fluid, continually shaped by individual experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts. Focus groups captured evolving constructions and yielded in-depth perspectives on diverse consumer perceptions.	(Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).
Axiology	This study acknowledges that the researcher and the participants brought inherent values and biases. To ensure the researchers' interpretations were unbiased, a record of the research process and their interpretations were added to the research journal. This reflexivity was crucial to ensure that data interpretation was credible and accurately represented participants lived experiences.	(Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

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3.3 Research Approach

Following Swain (2018), this study employed a hybrid coding approach that blends both inductive (data-driven) and inductive (theory-driven) approaches, and provided a comprehensive analysis, illustrated in Chapter 4. The data collection phase followed an inductive orientation to capture participant voices without preconceived perspectives; the analysis phase adopted the hybrid coding approach to balance the theoretical relevance with empirical discovery (Naeem et al., 2023). The inductive coding approach allowed the generating of new insights; and the deductive coding approach assisted with generating themes based on pre-existing theories (Kumar & Ujire, 2024). The goal was to explore consumer perceptions of inclusive marketing by global beauty brands in South Africa and understand how consumer perceptions

influence brand loyalty. The approach was critical to the research as there is limited research on South African consumers' perceptions of inclusive global beauty marketing on social media. This opened opportunities to develop new concepts and themes from the collected data, and adding knowledge to pre-existing theories. The stages below illustrate the inductive process that guided the transparency and rigour of the research.

Stages of the inductive research process as illustrated by Kumar and Ujire (2024):

1. Observation – the first step involved making detailed observations of consumer perceptions. The focus group discussions allowed participants to have the opportunity to share their perspectives on inclusive marketing by global beauty brands and whether it fosters their loyalty to the brands.

2. Pattern recognition – after data collection, the next step required analysing the data for patterns, themes, and relationships. The researcher identified recurring themes regarding inclusivity, perceptions, and brand loyalty.

3. Concept development - after identifying the patterns and themes, the researcher developed categories or concepts that explained how inclusive consumers perceive marketing by global beauty brands and foster brand loyalty in South Africa.

3.3.1 Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population were South African Millennials and Generation Z consumers aged 18 to 34 actively using social media (Statista, 2024). The selected participant age group showed high digital engagement and tendency to interact with beauty-related content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The research's limitations limited the consumer population to private education institutions in Gauteng as it provided a feasible and accessible pool of participants who fit the inclusion criteria.

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select potential participants. The method allows the selection of participants that can provide valuable information about the phenomena under study (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The selected sampling method aligns with qualitative research, as it allowed the researcher to select individuals who met a specific criterion and align with the research objectives (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021). For this research, the targeted participants

were individuals who had been exposed to inclusive marketing strategies by global beauty brands, and the exploration provided in-depth insights into how these campaigns and social media posts have influenced their brand perceptions and loyalty.

The study involved 2 to 3 focus group discussions, with 5 to 8 participants per group, yielding a total sample of 10 to 16 participants. This sample size aligned with qualitative research norms and allowed the collection of rich thematic insights while aiming to achieve data saturation (Wild & Diggines, 2010).

3.3.1.1 Participant Inclusion Criteria

Participants were recruited from two private higher education institutions in Gauteng, as this was a key space where there are targeted consumers who use social media, interact with brands, and can identify inclusive marketing strategies. To be included in the study, participants needed to:

- Reside in South Africa.
- Be aged between 18 and 34 years.
- Be active social media users, limited to Instagram, TikTok, and X.
- Have had active engagement with any of the following global beauty brands' social media platforms: Maybelline Africa, L'Oréal Paris, Estée Lauder, Garnier, and Revlon.
- Have willingness to participate and openly discuss their perceptions of inclusivity in beauty marketing during the focus group sessions.

3.3.1.2 Units of Analysis

- **Consumer Narratives:** consisted of individual opinions, perceptions and experiences of South African consumers engaging with social media content of global beauty brands (limited to only Maybelline Africa, Estée Lauder, L'Oréal Paris, Revlon, and Garnier).

3.4 Data Collection Methods

3.4.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups were selected as the primary data collection method because they contributed to interactive dialogues and participants constructing meanings around inclusivity in social media marketing. This aligns with the interpretivist paradigm collective narratives shape how inclusivity is socially received and negotiated (). They are an effective qualitative research technique, which involve organised discussions

lasting 40 minutes to 2 hours, during which participants share their opinions, feelings, and insights on a specific topic, allowing researchers to capture the dynamics of collective conversations (Wild & Diggines, 2010). The two focus group interviews were conducted both online and face-to-face to accommodate all participants. It created a diverse, safe space for participants to interact with one another and share their views, meanings, and different thoughts and perspectives. It contributed to rich, thick data collection and descriptions.

The focus group interviews were conducted with participants who met the established inclusion criteria, ensuring the discussions highlighted the diverse range of perspectives among South African beauty consumers. Each focus group consisted of 5 to 6 participants to foster an interactive environment that encouraged dialogue and the sharing of individual experiences related to global beauty brands and their inclusive social media marketing strategies.

The focus groups explored the following:

1. Consumers' personal interpretations of inclusivity in global beauty marketing.
2. Elements of campaigns that resonated with or alienated consumers.
3. The perceived link between inclusive marketing and brand loyalty.

To increase the researchers' credibility, drawing on the ideas of Wild and Diggines (2010), a moderator guided the discussions using a discussion guide with open-ended questions that ensured no relevant topics were left out and that the conversation remained open. The moderator played a critical role in guiding discussions, ensuring all voices were heard and captured to ensure rich thick data collection and credibility. This methodology yields rich data by capturing not only individual viewpoints but also interactions among participants (Nyumba et al., 2018). The focus group discussion provided nuanced insights into how consumers perceive inclusivity in global beauty marketing and how their perceptions might influence their loyalty to a specific brand.

3.4.2 Data Collection Instruments

3.4.2.1 Focus Groups Discussion Guide

Open-ended questions guided the discussion on inclusivity, global beauty marketing, social media, and brand loyalty. The guide ensured the exploration of key areas, leaving room for participants' responses to come naturally. Appendix 3 shows the open-ended questions and probing concepts.

3.4.2.2 Use of Social Media Content to Stimulate Focus Group Discussions

In this study, social media posts and campaigns from global beauty brands were used as stimuli to facilitate focus group discussions among participants. Presenting participants with actual social media content leads to discussions anchored in real-world examples that evoke genuine responses, emotions, and thoughts (Greenwood, Ellmers, & Holley, 2014). This interactive format encourages the exploration of collective narratives and personal beliefs that might otherwise remain undisclosed (Femdal & Solbjor, 2018). Including specific social media posts that met the criteria below was crucial, as it created a direct connection to the contemporary marketing initiatives shaping consumer perceptions of global beauty brands. Additionally, the specific posts painted a more vivid picture of global beauty marketing strategies in the focus group discussions. Appendix 4 shows the different exhibits that were selected in accordance with the criteria illustrated in Chapter 3 and used for the sessions.

3.4.2.3 Criteria for selecting social media content.

1. Relevance to Inclusivity

Content must explicitly highlight inclusivity, diversity, and representation. Social media posts highlight the efforts of global beauty brands to engage with and promote diverse identities, thereby stimulating constructive discussion.

2. Variety of Content Types

Incorporated a range of content types such as promotional images, advertisements, influencer collaborations, and user-generated content (UGC), to offer a well-rounded perspective on how brands communicate inclusivity.

3. Recent and Relevant Campaigns

Focus on recent marketing efforts ensured that discussions were grounded in current trends and consumer expectations in the beauty industry. It fostered relevant participant feedback on contemporary practices.

4. Engagement Metrics

Selected content had high engagement levels (likes, shares, comments) as it indicated resonance with audiences. Prioritising popular posts guided a meaningful focus group discussion on effective inclusivity strategies. According to Maniou and Papa (2023), social media engagement reflects audience attitudes towards brand messaging and visuals, making it an essential criterion for selection.

5. Balance Representation (positive and negative examples)

Included both successful and less effective inclusivity representations. Using both successes and shortcomings encouraged critical conversations about which marketing strategies work and why, fostering deeper, richer insights.

6. Visual Appeal

Chose visually appealing posts to evoke emotional responses, as this prompted more engaging discussions. According to Adaval, Saluja and Jiang (2019), attractive imagery influences consumer perceptions and behaviours, making it an important selection criterion.

7. Target Audience Consistency

Selected content was tailored to demographic groups, such as participants' ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds. It encouraged relevant, relatable, and meaningful discussions.

8. Promotional vs Informative Balance

Promotional content highlights brand messaging, while informative posts educate and address inclusivity initiatives or diversity in the beauty industry. Maintaining a mix of the two was effective and created more comprehensive dialogue around marketing strategies. Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger and De Oliveira (2020), assert that informative content influences consumer perceptions and engagement, making it an essential element for stimuli. The use of real social media posts enhances the ecological validity that guides the research.

3.4.2.3 Audio Recording and Field Notes

As suggested by Greenwood et al. (2017), to capture both verbal and non-verbal data, the focus group discussions were recorded with participants' consent to provide triangulation and enhance trustworthiness. It ensured that participant voices were authentically represented and individual narratives were captured. The researcher served as the moderator of all focus group discussions and had no prior personal or professional relationship with the participants. The moderator informed participants that the session was being recorded and obtained their consent before the recording commenced. The moderator facilitated the discussions by asking the predetermined questions, encouraging participation, and ensuring that the discussion remained focused on the research objectives.

Following each focus group discussion, the audio recordings were uploaded to Otter.ai transcription software to generate an initial transcript. The researcher then listened to each focus group audio recording while reviewing the corresponding transcript to verify its accuracy. Any errors, omissions or incorrectly transcribed words identified during the process were manually corrected by the researcher. This ensured accuracy in representing participant's contributions. Participant's names were anonymised in the transcripts and replaced with codes to maintain confidentiality. In addition, throughout the data collection phase, detailed field notes were kept to document observations, contextual insights, and emerging themes, ensuring a deeper understanding of the findings.

3.5 Pilot Study

Drawing on Lowe (2019), a pilot study was important to the study as it identified practical issues that may have limited data collection and refined research data collection methods before the main study. As suggested by Pearson et al. (2020), the evaluation of the research design examined the participant recruitment strategies, the data collection methods, and the reliability of the discussion questions and guide. In relation to this study, the pilot study conducted aimed to evaluate the reliability and feasibility of collecting data through focus group discussions rather than other methods, and the effectiveness of the social media content selected by global beauty brands to stimulate the focus group discussions. The pilot study indicated that the selected social media posts were relevant to the research topic, sufficiently clear and appropriate for stimulating discussion among participants. The discussion questions were also found to be relevant, contemporary, understandable and aligned with the research objectives, with no concerns regarding clarity. The pilot study therefore confirmed that the visual stimuli and discussion guide met the required research standards and suitable for the study, no substantive changes were required before the main focus groups discussions were conducted.

3.6 Data Saturation

Data saturation in qualitative research refers to the point at which no additional information, themes, or insights emerge during data collection and analysis (Bradshaw, Atkinson, and Doody, 2017). To identify the saturation point, repetitions in responses and the lack of additional points were key elements, as these may affect the validity and feasibility of the study (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). Participants raising

the same issues, such as the same perceptions of inclusivity in global beauty marketing, recurring themes and brand preferences, signalled the end of the focus group discussion.

3.7 Data Analysis

The study used Creswell's (2014) six-step qualitative data analysis process that ensured the trustworthiness and rigour of the study. Reflexive practices were used following Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis to account for data saturation as research was done on a small population. The approach was well-suited to thematic analysis as it uncovered patterns and insights from participants' views on inclusivity in the social media marketing strategies of global beauty brands. To meet the standards of reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher's subjectivity was used as a tool to make meaning without bias. The analysis allowed the researcher to explore the diverse participant experiences that may have been sensitive and complex.

According to Zarei and Bahadorinezhad (2024), thematic analysis in social identity contexts can shed light on how consumers relate to brands that represent them. To further show the importance of Creswell's (2014) six-step process, it provided systematic transparency to ensure the research remained aligned with the research objectives. The following steps were important to uncovering the definitions of inclusivity and consumer perceptions, and how they influence brand loyalty.

Step 1: Preparing data for analysis.

The step involved organising the qualitative data collected during focus group discussions. Transcribed audio recordings and field notes were organised into a structured format for analysis (Creswell, 2014). Transcripts were anonymised to protect participant confidentiality and replaced names with codes (P1, P2). This ensured consistency and created reliable data for analysis. This preparation stage created clean and well-documented data that reduced the risk of the researcher misinterpreting participants' accounts. This contributes to a clear process (dependability) and reflects participants' lived experiences rather than researchers' bias (confirmability).

Step 2: Read through all the data.

After organising the data, the researcher read and became familiarised with all transcripts to gain a general understanding of the data and to unpack the meaning. As outlined by Creswell (2014), this step involved noting initial impressions, recurring ideas, and the tone of participants' contributions; and preliminary notes were made in the margins of the transcribed audios used in Chapter 4. By repeatedly familiarising with the transcripts, the researcher gained an understanding of the subtle meanings, contradictions, and recurring ideas. That contributed to identifying early patterns of inclusivity and loyalty that might be overlooked. Reflexive journaling was used to record the researcher's positionality and reduce bias. This enhanced the coding credibility and laid the foundation for trustworthy coding and theme development.

Step 3: Begin coding the collected data.

It involved coding the data to identify significant statements or phrases. Atlas.ti 2025 Web Version, a coding software, was used to analyse the collected data. Chapter 4 presents the coding process used for the research. The codes assisted in the foundation of theme development (Creswell, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2016). In accordance with the hybrid approach, two coding approaches were applied. Inductive coding created codes directly from participants' language (authentic, representation, inclusion, exclusion, accessibility). Deductive coding, guided by the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and inclusivity to ensure relevance. To ensure transparency, reflexive notes were captured throughout the researcher's thought process. An audit trail of coding decisions that included reasons behind merging codes ensured dependability.

Step 4: Generate themes and categories.

Related codes were clustered into categories that reflected shared meanings. For example, inductive codes such as "authentic representation" and 'seeing myself in campaigns were grouped under a broader category of representation. Deductive codes linked to Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) ensured theoretical grounding. Table 4 in Chapter 4 shows the categorised codes and themes that reflected participants' shared experiences and perceptions. Five key themes emerged that aligned with the research questions and objectives. The grounded theory provided a complex analysis that connected different themes to a narrative or storyline (Creswell, 2014).

Step 5: Data representation

The key findings are presented in a rich descriptive narrative in Chapter 4, supported by direct quotations from participants. Visual aids such as tables accompany this narrative to enhance clarity and support the key findings. The aim was to present multiple perspectives and ensure that participants' voices and perspectives are accurately represented (Creswell, 2014).

Step 6: Data interpretation

The last step ensured the interpretation of the collected data by comparing the findings with existing literature, identifying new and unexpected insights and contributions to the knowledge around inclusivity in marketing. The researcher reflected on their own positionality and how it may influence interpretation, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis guidelines.

3.7.1 Validity Strategies

Triangulation was used to ensure research validity, using focus group discussions, field notes, and audio recordings. Member-checking was done by inviting participants to review and validate the summary of findings. A rich, thick description is provided to the reader, ensuring transferability of the research. Following Creswell (2014), to justify transparency, the researcher clarified personal bias through peer debriefing sessions conducted with academic peers to enhance the rigour of the research.

3.7.2 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the strategies used to demonstrate that the study's findings are worthy of confidence and effectively and accurately represent participants' perspectives (CohenMiller, Saban, & Bayeta, 2022). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were the key procedures used to enhance the research trustworthiness (Krefting, 1991; CohenMiller et al., 2022).

- **Credibility** – was enhanced through triangulation of data sources by comparing participant transcribed audio recordings and existing literature. Member checking allowed participants to review the discussion summaries and confirm the accuracy and authenticity of their shared perceptions. This was done at the end of each focus group, whereby participants were asked to confirm whether their responses reflected their perspectives and were encouraged to add, clarify or correct any details. The changes made were recorded in the researcher's

journal and integrated into the transcripts to ensure validation of participant voices.

- **Transferability** – was supported by the rich, thick descriptions that provide detailed contextual information on the research setting, participant demographics, and the broader study context of consumer perceptions towards inclusive marketing strategies by global beauty brands. Direct quotations from participants in Chapter 4 further illustrate the lived experiences of South African consumers. These details allow readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings (Krefting, 1991; CohenMiller et al., 2022).
- **Dependability** – was established by an audit trail that documented all research decisions, processes, and changes throughout the study, to ensure transparency and future replication. Each stage of analysis was recorded in Atlas.ti to enable transparency. The conducted pilot study, it ensured refinement of the focus group discussion questions and social media content used for stimuli.
- **Confirmability** – was promoted by reflexive field notes that captured the researcher's perspectives throughout the focus groups and academic peer debriefing sessions. It verified that conclusions were grounded in participants' own words and perspectives rather than the researcher's preconceptions (Lincoln, 1985; Cypress, 2017). Direct quotations in Chapter 4 further ensured that findings authentically represented participants' voices rather than the researcher's assumptions.

3.8 Conclusion

Chapter 3 has provided a clear and comprehensive methodological foundation for the study by aligning with interpretivist approaches to qualitative research. The chapter justified the use of exploratory qualitative methods that provided an in-depth understanding of how inclusive social media strategies by global beauty brands influence consumer perceptions and brand loyalty. Adopting the hybrid approach assisted in grounding the research in an interpretivist theoretical position, as it acknowledged data to be derived from both the participants and the researcher. Participants lived experiences, subjective interpretations and new insights were captured through the selected research design, which allowed for exploration and avoided the limits of quantitative research.

The selection of focus group discussions to formulate rich thick data was explained and defended, as they enabled the generating of shared and new perspectives on authenticity, representation, and loyalty. The chapter discussed the participant recruitment process, criteria, population, and sampling to ensure these were within the standards of focus group structures and maintained the scope of the study. To maximise the depth of the research and reduce bias, facilitation techniques were used to guide the flow of the discussion.

Ethical considerations were pointed out in the process; these included informed consent and maintaining participant confidentiality. The research credibility was justified through reflexive thematic analysis, careful transcription, triangulation, and member checking.

Chapter 3 has demonstrated that the chosen methodology was aligned with the research objectives, which were to gain an understanding of consumer perceptions of inclusivity and how these influence their loyalty towards global beauty brands. Chapter 4 will present the empirical findings and thematic analysis generated from the focus group discussions and their link to the research questions and theoretical framework.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of focus group data exploring how South African consumers perceive global beauty brands inclusive marketing efforts on social media, and how these perceptions shape consumer-brand loyalty. The data analysis employs the six step qualitative data analysis outlined by Creswell (2014) and further supported by Braun and Clarke's (2023), reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). The comprehensive analysis of the chapter is structured to explain the sampling rationale and participant selection criteria; to articulate the analytic procedures; outline five themes with demonstrative participant quotations; and explain how the research trustworthiness was implemented. The concluding section of the chapter summarises how the thematic map focuses on the research questions.

4.2 Data Collection Process

4.2.1 Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

The study adopted a purposive sampling approach to select participants to ensure alignment with the qualitative research approach and ensure rich data collection (Douglas, 2022; Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). The aim was to gain insight into South African consumers' interpretations and responses to global beauty brands' inclusive social media marketing. Eligible participants were Gen Z and Millennial consumers residing in South Africa, exposed to global beauty brands products, social media presence, and brand communications. Recruitment prioritised participant diversity in representation across gender, skin tone, language, and level of engagement with global beauty brands' social media content.

The data collection process consisted of two semi-structured focus group discussions conducted in September 2025. The focus group discussions included 11 South African consumer participants split into two groups of six online and five face-to-face, to accommodate participant availability and explore both digitally and face-to-face mediated interactions. A sample size of 11 participants was methodologically appropriate for RTA as core themes are developed within a population that has shared experiences (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2023). Repeated themes were observed across focus groups sessions highlighting the main analytic aims of the research. At the same time, RTA prioritises the researcher's process of

constructing themes through keeping reflexive notes that develop an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

4.2.2 Participant Profile

Participants were South African consumers aged 18 - 34, representing the Gen Z and Millennial consumer population. The selected participants showed familiarity with global beauty brands such as L'Oréal, Maybelline, Fenty, Garnier, and La Roche-Posay. To enrich the data, participants were active social media users, on Instagram and TikTok. Participants were knowledgeable and able to provide rich thick data; they were early-career professionals in the marketing and business sector; and students in the brand management, business management, and design industries. The participant profile and demography are further illustrated in Table 3, which shows participants based in Gauteng and the diversity of the focus groups across age, gender and language. These were key elements to collecting rich data on how consumers perceive global beauty brands' inclusive marketing activities.

Table 3: Participant Profile and Demography

Participant	Age Group	Gender	Primary Languages	Geographical Location (Province)
P1	18 – 24	Female	English, isiZulu	Gauteng
P2	18 – 24	Female	English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa	Gauteng
P3	25 – 34	Female	English, IsiZulu	Gauteng
P4	18 – 24	Male	English	Gauteng
P5	18 – 24	Female	English, Setswana, isiXhosa	Gauteng
P6	18 – 24	Male	English, Afrikaans	Gauteng
P7	18 – 24	Female	English	Gauteng
P8	18 – 24	Female	English	Gauteng
P9	25 – 34	Male	English, isiXhosa, isiZulu	Gauteng
P10	18 – 24	Female	English	Gauteng
P11	18 – 24	Male	English, Afrikaans	Gauteng

4.2.3 Focus Group Structure and Response Analysis

Social settings and dynamics played a significant role in shaping the depth and richness of the collected data and how participants related to each other. According to Myrnes-Hansem and Skeiseid (2022), it is helpful to set the scene of the focus group using pictures. Social media content from global beauty brands' marketing campaigns were used to create the social settings of the discussion. At the beginning of each session, both online and face-to-face, participants adopted a formal communication style, which allowed them to control the questions posed by the moderator by taking turns in responding and engaging with one another (Chand, 2025). In the preliminary stages of focus group discussions, this pattern is common as participants are still familiarising themselves with the research setting and negotiating their identities and social norms (Gandy, 2024; Myrnes-Hansem & Skeiseid, 2022).

As participants became increasingly comfortable with each other, the interaction shifted to a much more natural discussion. They shifted from conversing in a structured, turn-taking manner to a spontaneous flow with agreements, disagreements, moments of questioning, and elaboration. The transition contributed to richer data and new insights as participants challenged their assumptions in real time and shared experiences (Hu & Chen, 2022). These characteristics show the effectiveness of focus group discussions, as they allow the researcher to make meaning of the observations and treat the discussion as a social process rather than as individual responses (Braun & Clark; 2023).

Both online and face-to-face sessions were guided by ten questions, divided into four sections, to guide the flow of the conversation. The first category of questions consisted of icebreakers that introduced the participants and assessed their familiarity with global beauty brands in South Africa. The second category focused on the conceptual development of inclusivity, highlighting participants' understanding in the context of beauty marketing. The third category aimed to understand consumers' perceptions and thoughts, probing topics such as authenticity and affordability. The last phase of the discussion questions aimed to address consumer expectations and the recommendations they had for global beauty brands to meet consumer expectations effectively. These focus group discussion categories aligned with the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

Features that guided the focus group discussions included probing questions outlined in Appendix 3 and assessed through the pilot study conducted prior to the research. Social media posts were used as conversation stimuli for participants, and participants indicated that this approach was a success, as reflected in the generated codes in Table 4. Probing questions were key to the deeper explanations participants gave which led them to reflect on and share their experiences. As indicators of group engagement, topic interests, and the construction of meanings, participants began posing probing questions amongst themselves (Guest et al., 2019). This development contributed to the generation of complex ideas and themes from participants' conversations and different suggestions, as indicated in Table 4.

The nature of the focus group discussions led participants to construct collective meanings around authenticity, accessibility, inclusivity, and brand loyalty. As the discussion developed through participants challenging their assumptions, elaborating on their perceptions, and agreeing with one another, it generated deeper insights. Participants shared valuable information and points of tension that shaped how they perceive inclusive global beauty marketing. The themes and links to the research questions, presented in the following sections, were shaped not only by individual viewpoints but by the group's shared experiences and social interpretations.

4.3 Data Analytic Approach and Rationale

The data analysis followed a combined approach that drew on Creswell's (2014) qualitative data preparation steps and Braun and Clarke's (2022) RTA. Creswell's (2014) framework guided the initial stages of organising and preparing the data, including transcription, cleaning, and familiarisation. These steps ensured that the dataset was accurate, coherent, and ready for deeper interpretive analysis.

Building on this foundation, as previously mentioned, the study employed RTA as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2023). RTA involves six iterative phases: familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the final report. This approach was selected for its flexibility and its suitability for exploring participants' perceptions of inclusivity, authenticity, representation, brand loyalty, and trust. As Clark (2023) notes, RTA is particularly effective for exploratory research that seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning.

A hybrid coding approach was used, combining both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were informed by the research questions and existing literature, while inductive codes emerged directly from participants lived experiences and narratives (Gupta, 2024). Deductive codes emerged from the research questions and literature review discussions on authenticity, inclusivity, representation, brand loyalty, and trust. Inductive codes were generated from participant collected data that consisted of their perceptions, unexpected or context related issues such as brand community building and multilingual engagement. The hybrid approach addresses the different participant perspectives and enables the researcher to capture participants' views, framings, perceptions, and priorities regarding inclusive global beauty marketing (Gupta, 2024).

Coding was conducted using Atlas.ti 2025 Web Version, ensuring systematic management of sensitive data, coding transparency and generate key findings (Sharma, 2024). The cleaned focus groups transcriptions, research questions and objectives were uploaded into Atlas.ti for the coding process. The researcher developed manual code groups based on the data familiarity and pre-existing research literature. Braun and Clarke (2023) asserted that limited focus groups through RTA require the researchers' reflexive notes and existing literature to add to the construction of themes and develop a rich understanding of participants. The coding process required the researcher to read and analyse the transcriptions to generate code groups. The software was able to refine the data, develop participant identifier, code names, quotations, and code frequency. The system generated an excel sheet which was used by the researcher to identify patterns and develop themes.

4.3.1 Coding Reliability and Reflexivity

The research coding was conducted by a researcher with experience in qualitative research methods, marketing research, familiar with inclusivity and South African consumer culture. To ensure consistency with the research process, a collaboration exercise was conducted in which the researcher exchanged sample transcripts and discussed discrepancies with a research colleague. This process led to theme development that aligned with the research, and the generation of a systematic codebook, illustrated in Chapter 4.3.2, that explains the themes in the following section. Developing a codebook strengthens the research reliability as each code and theme is justified and defined (Coleman et al., 2024).

Reflexivity acknowledges researchers as active participants as they contribute to the creation of the research themes (Braun et al., 2022). The approach identifies and interprets thematic meanings rather than recognising them as “pre-existing” as reflexivity regards themes as contextual interpretations (Braun et al., 2022). The researcher kept reflexive notes which assisted in codebook development, as assumptions, responses and positionality of participants were captured for reference purposes. South Africa’s diverse landscape including politics and socio-economic structures requires understanding of the consumer identity as these shape perceptions about inclusivity (Omodan, 2025). To maintain reflexivity, acknowledging the researcher’s background was important as it shapes interpretations. The prioritisation of reflexive practices contributed to the credibility of the data analysis, collection, and ethical considerations.

4.3.2 Development of Codebook and Structure

The generated codes were categorised into interconnected concepts, forming the broader themes derived from 18 developed codes. For instance, high-frequency codes such as local faces representation (C01) and skin tone range representation (C05) are central to participants sharing their narratives that allude to the same concept. Lower-frequency codes, such as corporate and safety response (C16), and heritage and culture (C17), provided insights into how interactions with other participants shaped participants' beliefs and perceptions. Table 4 illustrates the four selected code families that supported the development of the theme.

Table 4: Summary of Selected Codes

Code Family	Code ID	Code Name	Focus
Authenticity	C02	Tokenism / Performative	Perceived superficial or quota-based inclusion.
	C07	Real People, Real Results	Preference for unfiltered, real-user content.
	C08	Fit Influencer Selection	Align influencer identity and product category.

	C18	Visual Realism	Scepticism about filters, editing and unrealistic representations
Multidimensional	C03	Broad Inclusivity	Inclusivity beyond skin colour, include body shapes, gender, and average income.
	C11	Male Inclusion	Availability and affordable pricing of products for male-targeted beauty.
Representation	C01	Local Faces	Including more relatable South African identities in campaigns.
	C04	Hair Texture	Need for 4C hair/textured to be represented.
	C05	Skin Tone Range	Inclusive shade depths and undertones.
	C17	Heritage and Culture	Local relevance, cater for diverse languages and cultural nuances.
Accessibility	C09	Price and Accessibility	Affordable product offerings and socio-economic inclusion.
	C10	Local Language and Culture	Enhance the use of home languages and adhere to culturally relevant messaging.
	C13	Packaging Accessibility	Easier use for people with disabilities or dexterity disabilities.
	C14	Local Distribution and Availability	Availability in peri-urban areas and township retailers.

Product and Safety	C06	Product Performance and Effectiveness	Product effectiveness and suitability with diverse skin and hair needs.
	C12	Medical or Reactive Skin Needs	Sensitivity, allergies, and dermatological concerns.
	C15	Brand Loyalty Drivers	Factors influencing consumer-brand trust and repeat purchases.
	C16	Corporate and Safety Response	Brand recalls, transparency, and effective safety testing.

4

4.3.3 Coding Process and Quality Assurance

To manage data analysis within Atlas.ti the researcher used three stages. The first stage, deductive coding, required the researcher to start with ‘parent nodes’ generated from the research questions, literature, and existing theories (Bihu, 2024). This stage provided a framework for the coding process to remain within the perimeters of the research objectives (Bihu, 2024). The second stage, inductive coding, required the researcher to use open coding that generated subcategories that were insights from participants’ direct quotations. The final stage, theme development and abstraction, required the researcher to combine subcategories that exhibited the same meaning into themes (Kaur et al., 2025). Through the process of “conceptualisation” and building theories selected codes were conceptualised to answer the research questions (Sharma, 2024; Kaur et al., 2025).

To ensure quality assurance, the researcher kept a reflexive journal to document the research process and address potential bias (Braun et al., 2022). An audit trail was used by saving different versions of the research data analysis, allowing another party to map the analysis. Where arguments and conflicts occurred, transcripts were revisited to ensure relevant interpretations were generated in line with the grounded analytic approach (Lim, 2025). Memos of theme development contributed to dependability and confirmability.

4.4 Thematic Findings

The data analysis generated five key themes that collectively address how South African consumers interpret inclusivity, receive global beauty brands inclusive social media campaigns, and how these shape brand loyalty behaviours. The following section discusses these themes in detail, focusing on authentic and performative representation; inclusivity as multidimensional; culture and localisation; authentic brand messaging; and brand loyalty, which reflect consumer experiences. For each theme, the researcher outlined the theme's context; codes governing the theme development; participant direct quotations; the research questions; and objectives addressed.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Authentic versus Performative Representation

The theme reflects the high demand for authentic representation by participants within the global beauty brands. Participants showed the ability to spot authentic and performative inclusive social media campaigns by global beauty brands, as they shape how consumers perceive a brand, and influence emotional consumer-brand relationships (Bolioni & Meda, 2025). Interpretations of authenticity in marketing by participants alluded to inclusive practices that reflect on consumers lived experiences, identities, and interaction with the beauty products. Conversely, performative representation was described as lacking depth in their commitment to inclusion, with superficial consumer brand engagement (McClary, 2025).

Participants required authenticity to be the use of real people, unfiltered content, visible product results, and influencers who are relatable and possess category features. Whereas performative representation is characterised by over edited visuals and unaligned posts with the brand's narrative. The derived perceptions from the participants questioned global beauty brands' intentions with inclusivity and their influence on consumer-brand loyalty.

The theme indicates how consumers interpret inclusive representation in visuals and narratives. Identifying tokenistic or performative intentions that global beauty brands put across as diversity practices shapes consumer perceptions (Bolioni & Meda, 2025). Influencers play a critical role by signalling whether a brand is sincere or insincere (Okonkwo & Namkousse, 2023). The explored factors provide insight into how consumers define and expect authentic representation, and how it influences

trust, engagement, and the end goal of consumer-brand loyalty. Taking the initiative to understand these dynamics is important for global beauty brands operating in, or planning to operate in, South Africa. As the consumer demographic, Gen Z and Millennials value brands that are transparent, inclusive, sincere, and consistent with their brand narrative (McClary, 2025).

4.4.1.1 Interpretation and Representative Quotations

Participants highlighted both authentic and performative inclusion, with global beauty brands that use everyday users and transparently report product results. They expressed their interest in global beauty brands that document product results in real time. A key debate was around influencer endorsement being misaligned with the product category and appearing transactional. Lack of diversity in products and distribution was defined as global brands missing the inclusion criterion. The different participant views of global beauty brands' social media content and campaigns show how these shaped their trust towards the brand.

The interpretations are represented by the following quotations and their initial codes that generated the theme:

Code C02 focuses on performative representation, which *Participant 5* alluded to as, *"They are being paid to say nice things"*. This illustrates how global beauty brands are viewed as being performative in their inclusion initiatives.

Code C06 represents product performance, which *Participant 5* recapped as, *"They sat people down, gave them products to use for 6 weeks, and recorded the actual results."* This shows that participants regard product transparency as a reflection of a global beauty brand's authenticity.

Code C07 focuses on authenticity, which *Participant 3* mentioned as, *"Use real people. Use people with actual acne to market acne products. I have acne and oily skin, often anti-acne ranges aren't formulated for oily skin and leave my face feeling itchy and irritated"* The statement shows the importance of authentic representation for participants to feel included in global beauty brands' marketing efforts and product formulation.

Code C08 addresses influencer fit, which was exemplified by *Participant 3* who stated that, *"Brands often miss the mark with influencer marketing. They choose someone*

solely based on their follower count, even if that influencer's personal brand has nothing to do with beauty or the product itself." The statement correlates with participants advocating for global brands to align their products with relevant influencers.

4.4.1.2 Literature Integration and link to research questions and objectives

These findings resonate with Clark (2023) and Hasan, Qayyum & Zia (2023), who assert that tokenism and performative inclusivity erode consumer trust. Miller (2022) and Chen et al. (2022) highlight that authentic inclusivity embedded in product offerings and brand values strengthens consumer perceptions and loyalty. The participants' emphasis on transparency and influencer fit directly supports the literature's distinction between marketing practices that are authentic and performative.

Moreover, it is important to look at the link to the research questions and objectives. The theme addresses **RQ1**, which questioned how global beauty brands use social media to promote inclusivity, and **RQ2**, which questioned how consumers perceive their strategies. The research objectives met include **SO2**, which aimed to "explore global beauty brand strategies", and **SO3**, which aimed to "understand consumer perceptions".

4.4.2 Theme 2: Inclusivity is multidimensional.

The theme deals with how participants defined and perceived inclusivity, which they saw as having many layers beyond the traditional categorisation of inclusivity based on race or skin tone. The full acknowledgement of inclusivity involves brands looking at consumer's socio-economic realities, diverse cultures and languages, diverse human features such as hair texture and body shape. Understanding the overall constructs of inclusive marketing helps brands to limit their focus on a specific stereotypical representation (Eisend & Kanevska, 2020).

One of the criticisms was that global beauty brands use a surface-level approach to inclusivity, focusing on racial diversity while overlooking the multidimensional nature of the concept. The participants mentioned how global beauty brands show Black women in their campaigns, while following Western beauty standards that excluded dark skin tones, natural hair textures, and common features. These insights, constructed by the participants, align with recent studies that found that consumers

expect brands to demonstrate intersectional inclusivity and cater to multiple identity markers (Boyd et al.,2025). South Africa is a culturally diverse country, which needs more attention to be paid to this when global beauty brands are negotiating their presence. Exploring this theme provided insight into how consumers receive global beauty marketing campaigns and pledge their loyalty to the respective brands.

4.4.2.1 Interpretations and Representative Quotations

Participants' definitions of inclusivity extend beyond skin-tone representation. Body diversity, gender inclusivity (male ranges), hair texture (4c hair textures), medical and reactive skin conditions such as psoriasis, and socio-economic accessibility are all regarded as important components of effective and meaningful inclusion. There were criticisms of brands that expanded their shade ranges but failed to address product affordability, formulation, or hair care guidance. This shows how global beauty brands are being perceived as limiting their inclusive strategies to only skin tone; whereas the multidimensional view of inclusive marketing addressed by participants suggests that global beauty brands should align their inclusive initiatives with their product development and distribution strategies.

The following participant quotations and codes were the different interpretations and perspectives expressed by participants:

Code C03 addresses how inclusivity is broad, as participants required global beauty brands to extend beyond race and skin tone. Intersectional experiences, socio-economic realities, and linguistic and cultural representation all formed what participants described as the multi-layered dimension of inclusive practice.

To support the above Code C03, *Participant 3* stated that, *"I think many people 'get lost in the sauce' with this word because they limit inclusivity to just skin colour. To be truly inclusive, brands need to consider hair texture, different skin types, and body shapes."* It shows that participants consider inclusivity to be multidimensional, beyond skin colour. *Participant 4* asserted that *"Brands tend to market from an 'umbrella' or generalised point of view."*

Code C09 represents accessibility, in which participants discussed how product affordability, availability, and the inclusion of people from different socio-economic backgrounds shape their perceptions of global beauty brands' inclusivity efforts. Some of the key points participants mentioned under this code included the need for global

beauty brands to consider the financial realities of South African consumers, as this is part of inclusivity.

Participant 8, justifying the accessibility code, asserted that, “*Estee Lauder is known to be an expensive brand and is not accessible to every single person. Most people go for drugstore brands, though even those can be expensive for the average South African.*” The above statement shows how participants want products to be accessible to the average South African consumer as part of global beauty brands' commitment to inclusivity.

Code C11 focuses on male inclusion; participants expressed their expectations for male representation in the beauty marketing industry, given the growing interest in male grooming. Some of the key factors they mentioned included greater visibility of men in beauty marketing, normalising male grooming, addressing the stigma around men using beauty products, and the affordability of male products.

The supporting quotes included *Participant 5*, who mentioned that “*There is a very limited selection for men, and what is available is often astronomically expensive*”, and *Participant 2* stated that “*I am straight but would wear foundation if it were tailored for men*”. Both participants' statements highlighted different areas of male inclusion that consumers expect, from pricing to accessibility, and the need to address the stigma around men using beauty products.

Code C12 addresses sensitive or reactive skin needs, in which participants asserted that global beauty brands should consider dermatological diversity, as they feel excluded when brands fail to address these needs. This code further illustrated how participants view the inclusion of dermatological realities as part of global beauty brands' active inclusivity.

For example, *Participant 3* shared how they can distinguish products that suit their conditions, “*When I see 'cruelty-free or 'organic' labels, I assume the product is safe and will not cause a reaction.*” This statement addressed the kind of formulations that participants expect to meet the needs of their skin conditions.

4.4.2.2 Literature integration and link to research questions and objectives

The findings strongly align with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Bakare (2024) argues that inclusivity is no longer treated as a philanthropic gesture but as a

requirement in marketing strategies and requires intersectional approaches. Similarly, Beauty Streams (2025), highlights inclusivity as accessibility for people living with disabilities, as they are AI-driven tools and adaptive beauty initiatives, such as virtual make-up assistants, which are drifting from traditional categories.

Participants' views on affordability and socio-economic realities resonate with Patel (2023) and Mokoena & Smith (2024), who assert that inclusivity must address the cultural diversity and financial accessibility. Licsandru (2019) emphasises male inclusion as an emerging gender-fluid initiative that fits the evolving consumer identities.

This theme directly aligns with **RQ2**, which aimed to explore consumer perceptions of global beauty brands' inclusivity efforts. Participants described how they expected global beauty brands to treat inclusivity as multi-layered. **SO1** addressed defining inclusivity, and **SO4** focused on how consumer perceptions influence their loyalty towards global beauty brands, as multidimensional inclusion shapes how consumers perceive a brand.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Cultural Resonance and Localisation

This theme exposes how South African consumers responded to global beauty brands' marketing efforts that culturally resonated with them and to what extent they were localised to suit the South African market. Resonance is defined as creating an emotional connection with consumers and echoing their lived experiences (Sastrina et al., 2023). Localisation is the adapting of marketing campaigns, product offerings and services to local languages, culture, and customs (Bai, McColl & Moore, 2021). This is important as culturally relevant content increases consumer-brand loyalty and the perceived brand authenticity (Chinomona, 2016; Sastrina et al., 2023).

The categories derived from the theme show how participants expect brands to localise across several dimensions, such as using the diverse South African languages and representing local cultural practices without cultural stereotypes. Participants pointed out that some efforts by global beauty brands to localise during national holidays, such as Heritage Day, appear superficial or performative. According to Makhathini (2023), South African consumers consistently seek culturally sensitive brands rather than symbolic gestures that lack sincerity and alignment with the brand.

According to participants, the cultural landscape of South Africa cannot be represented by a single aesthetic or language, given its diversity. For example, they expressed their frustration with some social media marketing campaigns that look generic, as they rely on non-contextual 'African' imagery or 'Western' filtered beauty standards. These opted initiatives fail to meet South Africa's diverse cultural landscape. However, the participants indicated that they are more drawn to and value social media marketing content that features authentic local faces, linguistic inclusivity, and heritage representation, as these elements respectfully mirror their identities and are relatable.

Localisation and cultural relevance are important for South African consumers. Understanding how it is required is beneficial for global beauty brands, as it shapes how consumers perceive their inclusive marketing initiatives, and influences consumer-brand loyalty. Therefore, the theme offers insights into how marketing that understands culture strengthens brand-consumer relationships, improves engagement and inclusivity.

4.4.3.1 Interpretations and Representative Quotations

The following codes were generated to formulate the themes, and participants' shared experiences that support them are provided:

Code C01 explains how participants expressed their need for local representation in the form of local South African people, identities, and familiar faces in beauty marketing. It means representing local demographics, limiting Westernised beauty standards, and using local influencers who are still in their growth phase rather than global celebrities.

To support the code, *Participant 10* stated that, *"I follow influencers who look like me because I created a space where I consume what I look like."* *Participant 3* made another statement, *"La Roche Posay...you do not see many people who look like me on their packaging."* These views show how participants expect global beauty brands to use local personas that resonate with the consumers.

Code C10 contributes to the theme by addressing the use of South African languages and cultural relevance in global beauty brands' marketing initiatives. The code shows participants' views on linguistic inclusivity as part of representation and its importance in consumers' views of inclusion.

To support the narrative, *Participant 2* was of the view that, *"Brands should market in local languages and include our various cultures and heritages. If an advertisement is in someone's home language, they can actually understand and benefit from the product."* The statement indicates the need for the global brand to use local languages to be inclusive in their marketing and increase brand resonance.

Code 17 alludes to cultural and heritage representation in global beauty brands' inclusive marketing practice. Participants expressed their desire for inclusive marketing campaigns that are authentic when involving culture, and refrain from stereotypical portrayals.

Participant 3 asserted that, *"I want to see something traditionally Coloured, or Cape Malay representation. We have 12 official languages now; brands should use more than just two or three of them."* To further support the code, *Participant 10* mentioned that *"I am noticing...there is a lot of integration of Black women, but they often have conventionally beautiful features based on Western standards. I am not seeing deep black skin or features like a big nose."* These statements echo participants' requirements for authentic, culturally inclusive representations that are not stereotypical.

4.4.3.2 Literature integration and link to research questions and objectives

These findings directly connect to the literature on consumer perceptions of inclusivity. Rhee & Jung (2019), demonstrate how consumer positive attitudes are derived from representative advertising that reflects on individual identities. Similarly, Johnson & Chattaram (2021) found that consumers prefer brands that resonate with their cultural values and individual identities. Nguyen, Tran & Nguyen (2024), emphasises on language and heritage as resonates that must be recognised and embedded in social responsibility and authenticity. In the South African context, Henderson et al. (2025) highlight the need for culturally diverse campaigns that differ from Western beauty standards. Participants in their responses justify the need for localisation which addresses the gap identified in Chapter 2.4, of limited research on multicultural markets such as South Africa. Theme 3 provides empirical evidence that localisation is important for inclusivity in diverse markets, as they are different cultural nuances and linguistic diversity.

The theme addresses the research question **RQ1** and research objective **SO2** in **Chapter 1.3.2**, showing how global beauty brands can create inclusive social media campaigns that resonate with consumers by bringing cultural resonance and localising their content.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Authentic Brand Messaging Improves Consumer-Brand Trust

The theme reveals how participants perceive global beauty brands' inclusive marketing initiatives on social media, and how these initiatives shape consumer-brand trust. Brand messaging tone is important to driving consumer engagement as consumers are more attracted to consistency in brand narratives that are representative (Jeong, Kim & Chung, 2022). Millennial and Gen Z consumers advocate for inclusivity and value brands that demonstrate transparency in their inclusion strategies as it builds the trusts towards brands (Miller, 2022). This links with how participants reflected on the credibility of global beauty brands' inclusivity as there is a tendency of being performative. Participants evaluated brand behaviour to understand how global brands respond to consumer criticism, request for product adjustments, and engagement with consumers on their social media platforms. According to participants, consumer feedback is important to helping brands navigate the diverse South African market. Brands that can use consumer feedback to improve their inclusive initiatives have a better chance of building consumer-brand trust (Kartomo, 2024).

4.4.4.1 Interpretations and Representative Quotations

There are several codes linked to the theme; Code C06 captures how participants expect to see product performance through visible results, which increases their trust in the brand. The participants expressed that trust is built on evidence-based messaging, such as product trials, demonstrations of how to use the product, and before and after results. This code shows that performance is the first point in brand messaging that increases consumer-brand trust.

Participant 5 related one of their interactions with a brand that increased their trust in the brand, *"I respect Garnier because they came to our school to find real people for their ads. They sat people down, gave them products to use for 6 weeks, and recorded the actual results."* This comment shows how consumers value brands that are transparent about their products' performance and provide evidence through testing.

Code C16 focuses on brands' safety response to build trust with consumers. This response involves taking responsibility, being transparent and effective communicators when mitigating consumer disputes, concerns, and safety issues. This code suggests that brand trust is strengthened when brands acknowledge, investigate, and communicate action plans to consumers. Global beauty brands that give public updates on their product formulation and provide safety checks signal their brand integrity and prioritise consumers (Gupta, 2024).

Participant 4 stated that *"I appreciate when brands show the testing or the science behind their products."* This comment indicates how evidence-based content and brand messaging enhance brand credibility. *Participant 11* highlighted how a brand's responsiveness drives their trust by highlighting a brand campaign, *"It reminded me of my childhood, I grew up using Vaseline."*

4.4.4.2 Literature integration and link to research questions and objectives

These findings connect with the literature on social media marketing strategies. Gupta et al. (2020) argue that social media increases the visibility of inclusivity as it bridges the communication gap between brands and consumers. Chen et al. (2022) further suggest that visibility alone is insufficient as inclusivity must be perceived as sincere and genuine to influence consumer-brand loyalty. The participants' demand for transparency in product messaging resonates with Miller (2022), who justifies authenticity as the backbone of effective brand messaging and communication. Nguyen, Tran & Nguyen (2024), found that consumer relationships and loyalty are built from socially conscious and representative campaigns.

The theme addresses **RQ1**, as Code C16 shows that consumers value transparency, responsible brands, and safety. These values construct how consumers perceive global beauty brands' inclusivity initiatives in their social media marketing strategies, as social media is the common place where consumers and brands engage (Kartomo, 2024). The research objectives are explored in this theme, as **SO2** examines how selected global beauty brands use social media marketing strategies to promote inclusivity and engage with South African consumers. Participants justified the objective by stating that they value transparent safety messaging because it makes them feel included and builds trust. **SO4** is also justified as it examines how consumer perceptions of inclusivity influence brand loyalty towards selected global beauty brands. Code C15 and C16 show that trust, transparency and effective safety

communication are factors that can influence consumer-brand loyalty. **SO3** is addressed as transparency, accountability, and effective communication are the key factors that shape South African consumers' perceptions of inclusive social media marketing.

4.4.5 Theme 5: Inclusivity Influences Brand Loyalty

This theme highlights how South African consumers are loyal to brands that are inclusive. Consumer trust, support, and recommendations are signalling factors of their response to valuing global beauty brands that are inclusive. Kartomo (2024), asserts that for brand credibility and long-term loyalty, brands need inclusive practices that create an emotional connection with consumers. South Africa's diversity requires global beauty brands to be authentic in their inclusivity strategies.

Participants mentioned that their loyalty is shaped by a brand's consistency with its inclusivity initiatives, by using local faces and real people, and highlighting product results. Long-term efforts are what participants value the most, as they show global beauty brands' commitment to inclusivity, South African identities, and influencers whose content aligns with the brand's product categories used in marketing campaigns. This was one of the features participants mentioned that influences their loyalty towards a brand, indicating that consumers reward brands that adhere to their long-term values, and do not just make symbolic gestures or reflect social media trends.

4.4.5.1 Interpretations and Representative Quotations

Code C01 represents consumers' expectations of local faces being used in marketing campaigns. Recent research has supported the notion, as consumers are more likely to be loyal to brands that resonate with their cultural and social identities (Henderson et al., 2025).

To emphasise participants' loyalty, *Participant 3* stated that, *"To be truly inclusive, brands need to consider hair textures, different skin types, and body shapes."* This statement shows the kind of identity mirroring that consumers expect from global beauty brands.

Code C08 focuses on influencer fit. Global brands are expected to align their brand narrative and product category with the influencers they partner with for campaigns (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023). This was confirmed when participants mentioned how

brand credibility is missed when brands select influencers based on their follower counts instead of brand alignment. To support the interpretation, *Participant 3* stated, *"Brands miss the mark with influencer marketing. They choose someone solely based on their follower count even if that influencer's personal brand has nothing to do with beauty or product itself."* This perception reduces the likelihood that consumers will engage with the brand.

Code C15 focuses on the drivers of brand loyalty, which explain how they shape loyalty. These include brand product performance, how they portray themselves as trustworthy, and their inclusivity initiatives. *Participant 11* summarised the code by saying, *"My loyalty is based on performance and how the product impacts my life."*

4.4.5.2 Literature integration and link to research questions and objectives

The findings align with how brand loyalty in the digital age is achieved. Taleghani & Taleghani (2024) assert that loyalty in the digital context is shaped by consumers' values and willingness to engage and communicate with brands. Participants' emphasis on accessibility and affordability aligns with Temitope & Omolade (2024), who found that consumers are more inclined to be loyal to brands that mirror their socio-economic realities and cultural identities. The social consciousness of participants requiring product performance and safety as part of inclusivity resonates with Nguyen, Tran & Nguyen (2024), who assert that socially conscious consumers and representative brands lead to stronger consumer relationships. By highlighting affordability and accessibility, its empirical evidence that brand loyalty requires inclusive practices.

The theme answers **RQ3** of the research, by showing that consumer's value brands that mirror their identities and incorporate them into their marketing and product development. **SO4** is addressed through the theme by illustrating how inclusivity influences consumer trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement. The findings show that inclusivity is a central driver of brand loyalty in the South African beauty industry.

Table 5: Linking objectives, propositions and themes

Research Objective	Proposition	Themes addressed
SO1: Define the concept of inclusivity within the context of social media	P1: Consumers' perceptions of inclusive global beauty marketing	Theme 2: Inclusivity is multidimensional

marketing and global beauty brands.	on social media influence emotional connection and positive brand attitudes.	
SO2: Explore how selected global beauty brands use social media marketing strategies to promote inclusivity and engage with South African consumers.	P2: Diverse representation of consumers on social media and inclusive marketing campaigns lead consumers to identify with the brand.	Theme 1: Authentic vs Performative Representation, Theme 3: Cultural Resonance and Localisation, Theme 4: Authentic Brand Messaging
SO3: Understand how South African consumers perceive selected global beauty brands' inclusive social media marketing campaigns.	P3: Consumers' perceptions of inclusivity are key factors of consumer-brand trust and brand authenticity.	Theme 2: Inclusivity is Multidimensional, Theme 3: Cultural Resonance and Localisation, Theme 4: Authentic Brand Messaging
S04: Investigate how consumer perceptions of inclusivity influence brand loyalty towards selected global beauty brands.	P1 & P3: Emotional connection and trust from inclusivity contributes and sustain loyalty.	Theme 5: Inclusivity influences brand loyalty

5

To ensure coherence between empirical findings and the study's theoretical foundation, Table 5 highlights the link between the research objectives, propositions and themes generated in Chapter 4. This alignment addresses the study's aims, linking back to the theoretical frameworks (CBBE, SIT, TPB) and the literature review in Chapter 2. The connection made between the objectives, propositions and themes in the table indicates an audit trail that highlights the study's contribution to international marketing and consumer-brand loyalty in South Africa.

4.5 Linking Study Themes to the Theoretical Framework

The themes discussed in the chapter go beyond merely reflecting participants lived experiences, as the theoretical frameworks explored in Chapter 2 are key to supporting them. To further consolidate the findings, **Table 6** illustrates how the themes correspond with the Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, Social Identity Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Table 6: Connection between Themes and Theories

Theme	Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model	Social Identity Theory (SIT)	Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)
Authentic vs Performative Representation	Improves brand credibility and perceived authenticity. Influences positive brand judgements, whereas performative reduces brand equity and consumer-brand trust.	An authentic representation gives consumers a sense of belonging. Performative representation misaligns brand identity.	Shapes consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions, regardless of whether the representation is authentic or performative.
Inclusivity is multidimensional	Global beauty brands that are multidimensional in their inclusivity, demonstrating their ability to recognise and cater to diverse consumers, strengthen their brand imagery and meaning. Strengthens perceived brand relevance and improves brand imagery and meaning.	Recognises diversity, creating a sense of belonging for consumers (categories such as body type, culture, and skin tone).	Inclusive brands shape consumer attitudes towards them. Accepts subjective norms around representation and fairness. Enhances consumer behavioural intentions to support or recommend the brand.

Cultural Resonance and Localisation	Localised, culturally relevant brand content and messaging enhance brand imagery and associations, making the brand more relatable to consumers.	Localisation prioritises consumer cultural identities and deepens emotional connection to the brand.	Cultural resonance shapes consumers' positive attitudes toward global beauty brands and increases purchasing or supporting intentions.
Authentic Brand Messaging Improves Consumer-Brand Trust	Brand credibility, brand performance, and brand judgements are derived from transparent, sincere brand messaging. That contributes to the brand's equity.	Trusted brand messaging creates a sense of belonging and identity-based trust that aligns with consumers' values and identity.	Authentic messaging makes consumers more confident in their brand choices. It also improves consumer attitudes towards the brand and perceived behavioural control.
Inclusivity Influences Brand Loyalty	Inclusivity drives brand loyalty and brand resonance, and it promotes the CBBE model by creating long-term commitment and emotional attachment with consumers.	Consistency in brands' inclusivity and affirmation of consumers' diverse identities leads to loyalty and commitment.	Inclusive brands are associated with positive attitudes that increase consumer behavioural intentions, such as repurchase or recommendation of the global beauty brand.

6

4.6 Conclusion

Across two focus groups discussions, both online and face-to-face, participants showed an understanding of inclusivity, representation, and authenticity. The five themes revealed how inclusivity is a valuable tool for building consumer-brand loyalty, when grounded in authentic representation, localisation, and effective brand messaging. South Africa's complex diverse market requires global beauty brands to move from performative to authentic approaches to meet the standards of the consumers and foster deeper emotional connections that lead to consumer brand loyalty. The last chapter explains the different approaches that global beauty brands

can use to mitigate inclusivity within diverse markets. Addressing the relevance of the findings to the research questions and objectives in Chapter 5, justifies the research purpose for future practices and research.

Chapter 5: Summary of Key Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the overall research findings and recommendations of the study entitled *“Exploring the South African Consumer’s Brand Loyalty and Perceptions of Inclusive Global Beauty Marketing.”* The research addressed the growing problem in international management and marketing. Global beauty brands have positioned themselves to be inclusive (Morett, 2022). However, consumers in emerging markets such as South Africa, are sceptical of their actions, as questions arise about their authenticity and relevance.

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the research questions, objectives, literature, and findings. The first section will reintroduce the research problem and summarise the key findings generated by the Braun and Clarke’s (2022) reflexive thematic analysis outlined in Chapter 4. The second section provides a critical analysis of the interconnectedness of these findings with the existing research literature, global marketing, and international consumer behaviour. The third section focuses on the research-based recommendations for global beauty brands operating in South Africa or planning their market expansion. The last section discusses the research's trustworthiness, and its contribution to theory, methodology, and managerial practice, while acknowledging the research limitations and highlighting potential areas for future research.

By integrating ideas with contemporary studies, this chapter shows that inclusive marketing in diverse markets requires attention, as it operates across diverse cultural and socio-economic zones that require strategic implementation rather than the generalisation of practice.

5.2 Integration of the research problem and objectives

Global beauty brands operate in culturally diverse markets with socio-economic inequalities, which influence consumer purchasing intentions (Omodan, 2025). In response to the landscape, with consumers actively using social media to engage with brands and participate in consumer activism, inclusivity has become the centre of marketing strategies. However, existing literature asserts that performative inclusivity misaligned with brand narratives leads to consumer backlash (Hassan, McGowan & Shiu, 2025).

The research problem underlying this study was the lack of understanding of how inclusivity drives brand loyalty among South African consumers, given the saturated, competitive beauty market. To address this gap, the study focused on the following objectives:

1. To define the concept of inclusivity within the context of social media marketing and global beauty brands.
2. To explore how selected global beauty brands use social media marketing strategies to promote inclusivity and engage with South African consumers.
3. To understand how South African consumers perceive selected global beauty brands' inclusive social media marketing campaigns.
4. To investigate how consumer perceptions of inclusivity influence brand loyalty towards selected global beauty brands.

5.3 Summary of Key Findings

The study revealed that South African consumers are overly critical of global beauty brands' inclusivity efforts, analysing them at both the visual and messaging levels. However, the analysis goes beyond accepting brand messaging at face value; participants actively questioned the credibility and motives behind global beauty brands' inclusive campaigns. Five interrelated findings from the participants' reflections on global beauty brands' approaches to inclusivity emerged: authenticity, multidimensional perspective, cultural resonance, representation, and influence on brand loyalty.

First, the notion of authenticity related to how global beauty brands' inclusive marketing efforts were perceived. Participants differentiated between inclusivity aligned with the brand's values, narratives and practices; and performative inclusivity that is trend-driven and used for reputational gain. Recent research has suggested that organisations that rely on superficial diversity may face backlash when their practices and product offerings are not aligned with it (Hassan et al., 2025). Brands that demonstrate long-term commitment to ensuring product development, testing, and representation are consistent with the brand's inclusive efforts.

Second, representation was understood as multi-layered or multidimensional, as it requires various aspects for its success. These aspects were mentioned by participants, emphasising the need to pay more attention to body types, hair textures,

male inclusion, skin undertones, and visible skin conditions. Participants further asserted that inclusivity should be treated as structural, as it involves product accessibility and pricing, to help consumers feel represented. Brands that limit multidimensional inclusivity will fail in their efforts. Studies have shown that the cognitive dimension enhances consumers' perceptions of the brand and influences their loyalty to it (Yang, 2022). The findings showed that representation was evaluated not only in terms of symbolic features but also in terms of functionality, as consumers assess product compatibility.

Third, the findings revealed that cultural resonance and localisation strongly shape consumer perceptions of inclusivity. Participants mentioned that they value global beauty brands' campaigns that reflect South African languages, cultural practices, and social realities, rather than, for instance, merely focusing on performative Heritage Day content. This finding is supported by international marketing literature emphasising localisation as an important strategy for multinational firms operating in culturally diverse markets (Okonkwo et al., 2023).

Fourth, authentic brand messaging improves consumer-brand trust. Participants expressed that they value brand responses to consumer criticism, preferences, or requests, as this shows them that a brand is committed to consumer representation. Consumers prefer brands that are authentic and consistent with their messaging, as they can highlight their products' performance through social media content. Other brands are good at safety response, which attracts consumers to prefer and support their products.

Lastly, the study found that inclusive perceptions influence brand loyalty when reinforced by consumer identities and product performance. Inclusivity enhances consumer trust and loyalty to the brand when it aligns with the quality, performance, and value of the product.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that South African consumers perceive inclusivity in global beauty marketing as a multidimensional practice that extends beyond visual representation. Despite diverse representation being important, consumers assess the credibility of inclusive social media marketing through aligning with authentic brand behaviour, cultural relevance, product accessibility and performance. The findings therefore suggest meaningful inclusivity occurs when

global beauty brands are consistent in their communication, consumer interactions and the overall product experience. This addresses the research problem by illustrating how inclusive social media marketing cannot only rely on symbolic representation and messaging. As it requires global beauty brands to respond to the cultural and functional needs of the South African beauty consumers. The findings further highlight the existing understanding of inclusivity being symbolic and functional dimensions. Symbolic inclusion focusing on who is represented and how, while functional inclusion relies on accessibility and suitability of products to the consumers (Shahriar & Ulver, 2025). Ultimately, inclusivity when supported by authentic practices and meaningful product value it consumer-brand trust and lead to consumers pledging their loyalty.

5.3.1 Discussion of findings in relation to research questions

The first research question explored how global beauty brands use social media marketing to promote inclusivity. The findings show that global beauty brands rely on visual representation, cultural cues, and influencer partnerships on their social media platforms. However, consumers showed the need for global beauty brands to assess the gap between representation and lived experiences. Research has shown that inclusion needs an in-depth understanding and aligns with the brand's values and product offerings (Chen et al., 2022). From an international management perspective, standardised campaigns undermine brand credibility, as consumers feel less represented in the absence of local relevance (Bai, McColl & Moore, 2021).

The second research question examined how South African consumers perceive the inclusive social media marketing efforts by global beauty brands. The study revealed that participants prioritised authenticity, relatability, access, and resonance. Participants demonstrated understanding of inclusive marketing by providing a critical evaluation of global beauty brands' inclusive campaigns, consistent with their product offerings, pricing, and lived experiences. In emerging markets, socio-economic inequality exists; inclusivity is understood as representation and accessibility (Campbell et al., 2025). Brands perceived to meet the standards influence consumer trust, loyalty, and recommendations.

The third research question investigated the role of inclusivity in influencing brand loyalty. The findings demonstrate that inclusivity does not, by itself, influence brand

loyalty; rather, it plays a facilitative role. A facilitative role acts as a catalyst, contributing to building brand loyalty. The facilitative role can shape how consumers perceive global beauty brands, influencing their emotional connection, trust, and willingness to engage with the brand. Inclusivity is an entry point to the consumer-brand relationship that will influence long-term brand loyalty.

5.3.2 Contribution to international management theory and practice

This study contributes to international management and marketing by extending the theory beyond Western contexts, assessing brand loyalty theory and the dimensions of inclusivity. The findings support the existing importance of consumer trust and perceived product fit in influencing brand loyalty. The study extends the existing theory by highlighting the importance of inclusivity in facilitating loyalty mechanisms that showcase global beauty brands responsiveness to consumer preferences, needs and identities. Demonstrating how the interpretation of inclusivity across diverse emerging markets, which differ in socio-economic inequalities and cultures, is the main theoretical point presented, as it shapes consumer behaviour. Adding to the brand loyalty theory, inclusivity is a facilitative concept that enhances loyalty by fostering perceived consumer trust and product fit. This suggests that inclusivity should not be limited to brand communication and marketing practices , but as a contextual factor that plays an important role in influencing consumer-brand loyalty. The findings provide a contextualised conceptualisation of the relationship between multidimensional inclusivity, authentic brand practices and consumer brand loyalty. As demonstrated in Table 5, which links the research objectives and propositions to the themes emerging from the findings, and Table 6, which connects these themes to the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study. These tables illustrate how the empirical findings contribute to understanding brand loyalty within the diverse markets such as South Africa. From an international management perspective, this challenges the assumption that inclusivity can be applied uniformly across international markets, highlighting the need to adapt to cultural and socio-economic environments of different international markets while maintaining authentic brand representation and practices.

Methodologically, the study shows the importance and value of reflexive thematic analysis within commerce and international management research. Qualitative methods are underused in management; this study shows how focus group discussions and reflexive analysis identify shared consumer meanings, lived

experiences, and perceptions that influence consumer-brand loyalty. Adhering to reflexive practices during the research, by generating a codebook and audit trail, increases research rigour and contributes to management research practices (Braun et al., 2022).

5.4 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research study, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, was accomplished in line with qualitative research standards (Lincoln, 1985; Alexander, 2019). The research credibility was achieved through frequent engagement with the research data, a pilot study at the beginning of the research, and two focus group discussions. The rich quotations from participants were used to interpret their lived experiences and ground the research themes. Reflexive thematic analysis was applied in all stages to ensure the themes were coherent with the research study and exhibited substantive analysis.

An audit trail was maintained to support dependability. Keeping detailed analytical notes throughout the research process, as well as a detailed codebook and drafts, ensured the research's trustworthiness through dependability. Confirmability was increased through the researcher reflecting on their positionality and bias during analysis, in accordance with reflexive practices as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This ensured the research findings were derived from participants' accounts, and not the researcher's perceived assumptions. Transferability was addressed through the participants' understanding of the research topic, viewed through the lenses of diverse markets and an international management context. This contributed to thick, rich descriptions which enhanced the findings of the research.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Recommendations for managerial practice

Based on the research findings, the following practical recommendations are proposed for global beauty brands operating in South Africa or planning to expand there.

- Brands should prioritise influencer credibility over their follower count and reach. Partnerships with Nano and Micro influencers who reflect consumer realities, suit the product category, and authentically use the products, are likely to enhance consumer-brand trust. The recommendation is based on participants' emphasis on relatable influencers, authentic product use, visible

product results, and influencer alignment with brand narrative. Therefore is need for brands to have influencers that reflect the lived experiences of South African consumers.

- Brands should invest in utilising diverse cultures and languages in their marketing activities. Campaigns developed from a local perspective enhance the brand's relevance and legitimacy, which will contribute to consumer engagement. This is relevant within the South African market given the diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics identified by the participants. Therefore brands should prioritise collaborating with local consumers, creators and market experts to ensure cultural references, imagery, languages and narratives that represent the local consumer instead of depending on standardised global campaigns guidelines.
- Brands should align their product development with inclusivity and not limit it to brand communication and messaging. This recommendation reflects participants' perceptions that inclusivity extends beyond racial representation to include skin tones, hair textures, body features, accessibility and suitability of products for diverse consumer needs. Brands should use local consumer research to identify gaps in product suitability before expanding products in the markets. As diverse markets such as South Africa require understanding of the consumer needs and issues to target for better product response and contributing to brand loyalty.
- Brands should correlate their brand positioning in terms of pricing and distribution with inclusivity. The availability of products in accessible retail locations and competitive pricing that align with the market's socio-economic background exemplify an inclusive product. This recommendation reflects participants' understanding of inclusivity encompassing accessibility and socio-economic realities of South African consumers. Requiring brands to assess the different barriers created by the pricing and distribution strategies that could be mitigated and consider accessible retail channels.

5.5.2 Recommendations for future research

Building on the findings of this study, future research could broaden the scope by including more participants from different provinces, linguistic groups, and age groups to increase transferability. Research could focus on how the new era of Artificial

Intelligence (AI) will influence inclusivity, as it is centred around identity, and, over time, how brand perceptions are going to change, due to the influx of contemporary brands and shifting socio-economic structures. Quantitative or mixed-method studies can be conducted to assess the impact of authenticity on inclusivity and loyalty across different diverse markets.

5.6 Limitations of the study

The research study was limited to the qualitative scope and focus group methodology. This limited some voices from expressing their views due to group dynamics and settings. The use of focus groups may have also influenced participants' responses, as some individuals might have been less willing to express views that differed from the wider group. Therefore the findings should be understood as reflecting the perceptions and experiences of the participants rather than being representative of the wider South African consumer population.

The sampling approach limits transferability of the findings, as the participants were selected based on the specific criteria of the study and may not reflect the broader South African population. As a result, the findings give contextual insights into participants' perceptions of inclusivity and brand loyalty, rather than being transferable to all South African consumers or other international markets.

The findings reflect consumer perceptions at a given point in time, as markets shift due to AI and ever-changing business operations. Brand practices evolve as consumer needs, interests, and behaviours change, limiting the scope of the study. Furthermore, the study's focus on global beauty brands in South Africa limits the transferability of the findings to emerging markets, as characteristics of markets differ in culture, socio-economic and consumers influencing interpretations and perceptions of inclusivity.

5.7 Conclusion

The findings of this research study show that inclusivity is important to driving consumer brand loyalty among South African consumers of global beauty brands. The study identified five interrelated factors that shape consumer perceptions of global beauty brands: authenticity; representation; culture and localisation strategies; accessibility; and product performance. These factors explain how inclusivity influences consumer trust, and engagement with the brand, driving brand loyalty within

the South African beauty market. Based on the findings, clearly, South African consumers do not rely on the face value of marketing but rather evaluate the alignment of brand communication with its practices and consumer lived experiences.

These findings correspond to the propositions outlined in Chapter 1, particularly the argument that inclusivity is often limited to one dimension which is race, instead of looking at other categories that make it sufficient to secure brand loyalty. Regarding the role of inclusive marketing influencing brand loyalty, the study shows that inclusivity is a facilitating tool, rather than a determining factor.

By aligning inclusive marketing within international management discipline, this research offers theoretical and practical contributions, assisting international managers and marketers with points of improving their marketing and brand management strategies and serving their consumers. A better understanding of how global brands can navigate diverse emerging markets, and align with consumers social expectations, were clearly articulated in the research.

The significance of this study shows that inclusivity within global beauty marketing cannot be solely justified through visible representation, but relate to consumer's cultural, socio-economic and lived experiences. The originality of the study conceptualises inclusivity as multidimensional and facilitative concept that influences consumer-brand loyalty through building trust and engagement. By focusing on South African consumers' perceptions of global beauty brands, the study extends existing discussions of inclusivity and brand loyalty beyond Western contexts. Highlighting the importance of prioritising local market conditions when building consumer-brand relationships.

The broader implications of the study highlights the need for global brands to consider local contexts when operating in diverse emerging markets. The findings emphasise the need for global beauty brands to move beyond standardised approaches to inclusivity and develop marketing practices that are authentic, locally relevant and respond to consumer needs. As a result successful adaptation and consistent inclusive marketing practices towards local consumers contributes to consumer-brand loyalty.

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Appendix 1: Research Approval Letter



Our Ref: M. 1330825

Enquiries: [REDACTED]

06 August 2025

Outcome of Ethical Clearance for Master of International Business.

Student name: Tadiwanashe Vanessa Zezere

Student number: [REDACTED]

Brand and campus: IIEMSA

Dear Tadinawashe,

Thank you for submitting ethics clearance for the study titled: *Exploring the South African Consumers' Brand Loyalty and Perception of Inclusive Global Beauty Marketing*:

We are pleased to inform you that the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee considered and granted ethics clearance, with minor revision to satisfaction of the Supervisor. This means you may proceed with data collection once the required changes have been addressed.

You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research studies.



Dr Reza Hosseini

Chair: Higher Degrees Committee



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Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form



Annexure H – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is VANESSA ZEZERE, and I am a student at The IIE MSA. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Yathika Gowpall and Marlene Bogaards about South African consumers' perception of inclusive global beauty marketing and its influence on brand loyalty. The aim is to explore how consumers define inclusivity and if they feel represented in global beauty brands marketing initiatives. The second aim is to explore how global beauty brands use social media marketing to promote inclusivity and engage with South African consumers. Lastly to explore the consumer's perceptions of these initiatives and if they shape consumer behaviour and loyalty towards global beauty brands, I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of how consumers perceive inclusivity in global beauty marketing on social media and how it can be improved and influence brand loyalty. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you are a consumer in South Africa, who is exposed to global beauty brands marketing campaigns and initiatives on social media. Your exposure to these marketing initiatives will contribute to the rich knowledge sharing of how you feel and perceive inclusive global beauty marketing initiatives and if they align with your identity in a diverse community. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to invite you to an in person focus group discussion which will be made up of 5 to 8 participants. The focus group discussions will be 45 minutes to 60 minutes long with a facilitator to make sure a safe space for discussion is created. The session will also be recorded, to allow the collection of clear and correct responses from the participants and capture every detail. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your perceptions and feelings towards inclusive global beauty marketing on social media. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by VANESSA ZEZERE about understanding how South African consumers perceive inclusive global beauty marketing and if it influences ones loyalty towards global beauty brands.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

Appendix 3: Focus Groups Discussion Guide

Annexure 1: Data Collection Instrument

Focus Groups Discussion Guide

Ice-breaker questions:

1. Introduce yourself and tell us a little about your background?

Prompt: Most purchased beauty product and brand.

Probe:

Local Brand

Global Brand

2. How familiar are you with global beauty brands in South Africa?

Probe:

L'oreal Paris

Maybelline

Garnier

Estee Lauder

Revlon

Main Questions:

Section A: Develop concept definition and understanding

3. How do you define inclusivity in beauty marketing?

Probe:

Gender

Race

Skin tone

Body Type

Interests

Values

4. Can you recall a time when you felt represented or not represented by a global beauty brand in South Africa on social media?

Prompt: Would you purchase from those brands?

Probe:

Yes - Elaborate more

No - Elaborate more

5. What does it mean to you when a global beauty brand includes diverse models in their social media marketing campaigns?

Probe:

Represented

Seen

Included

Humiliated (body and skin type)

Section B: Consumer Perceptions and Thoughts

6. How does seeing inclusive social media marketing from global beauty brands influence your perception of the brand?

Probe:

Affordable

Authentic

Sustainable (Cruelty free)

Worth trying

7. Would you say inclusive marketing influences your loyalty to a beauty brand? Why or why not?

Prompt: What makes you loyal to a brand on social media?

Probe:

Authenticity

Relevant Campaigns

Pricing of their products

Visuals or Visual Representation

8. Which global beauty brands do you think are doing inclusivity well on social media, and why?

Probe:

L'oreal Paris

Maybelline

Fenty Beauty

Garnier

Revlon

Section C: Challenges and Concerns

9. What expectations do you have from global beauty brands operating in South Africa in terms of representation and inclusivity on social media?

Probe:

Culture

Languages

Relevance

Visual Relevance

10. What recommendations would you make to global beauty brands to enhance their inclusivity in marketing efforts?

Probe:

Age

Race

Gender

Skin Tone

Body Type

Disability

Relatable Backgrounds

Appendix 4: Social Media Content Posts

Social Media Content Posts for Discussion Stimulation

EXHIBIT 1

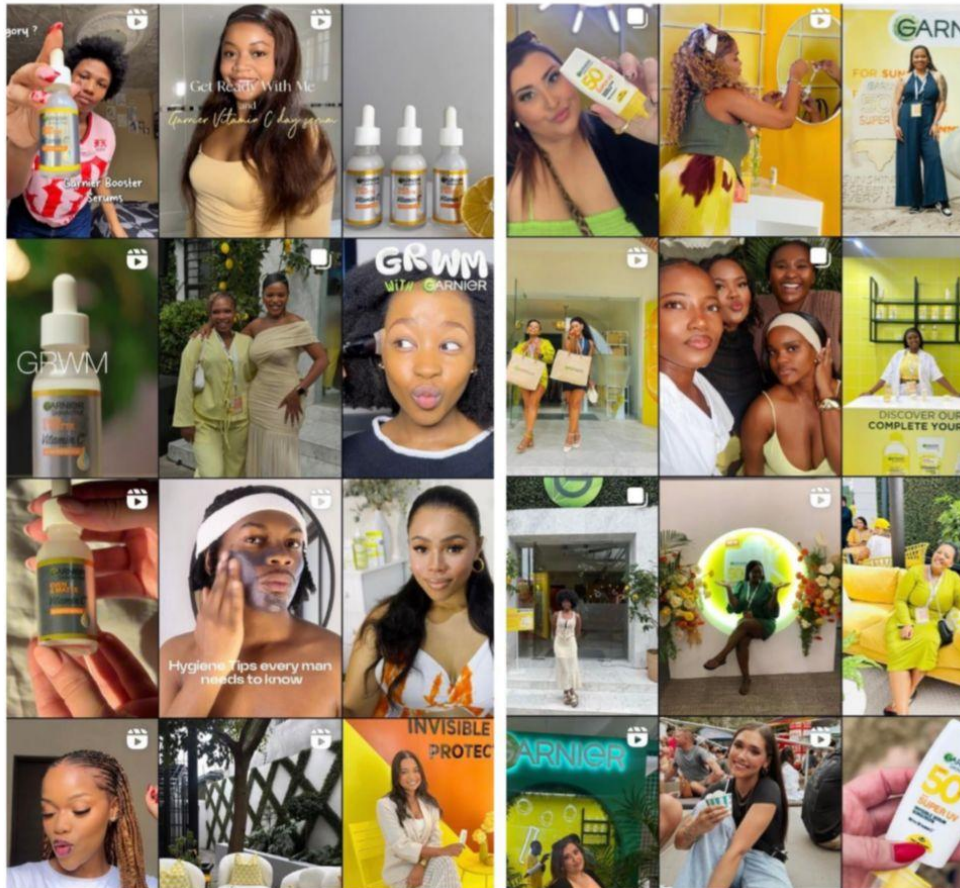


EXHIBIT 2

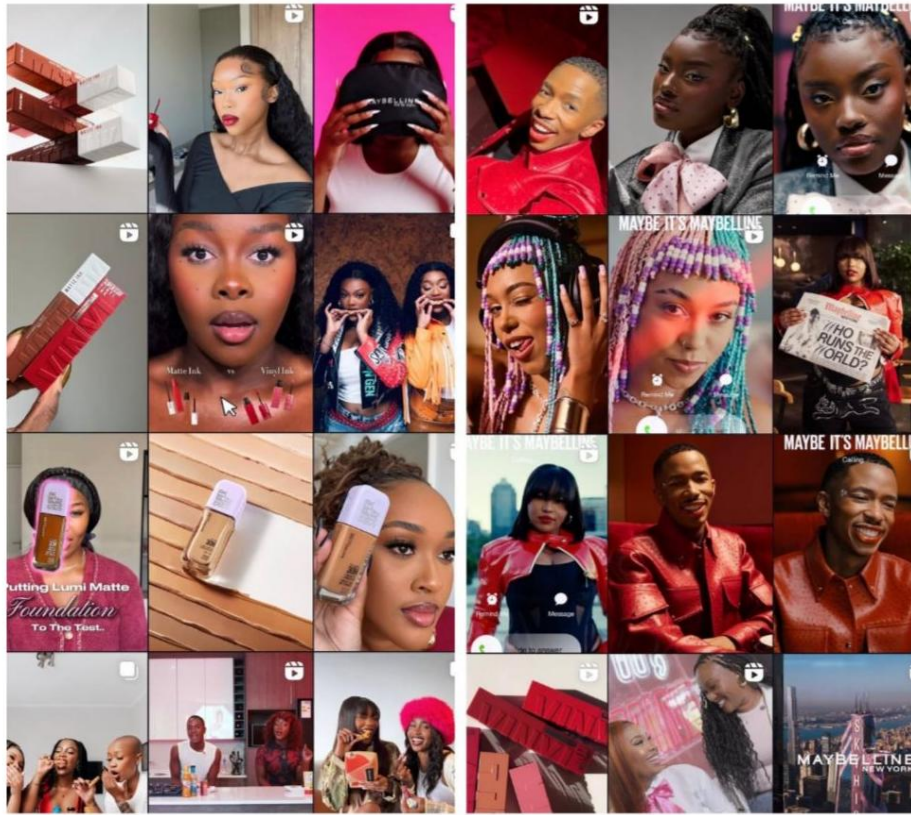
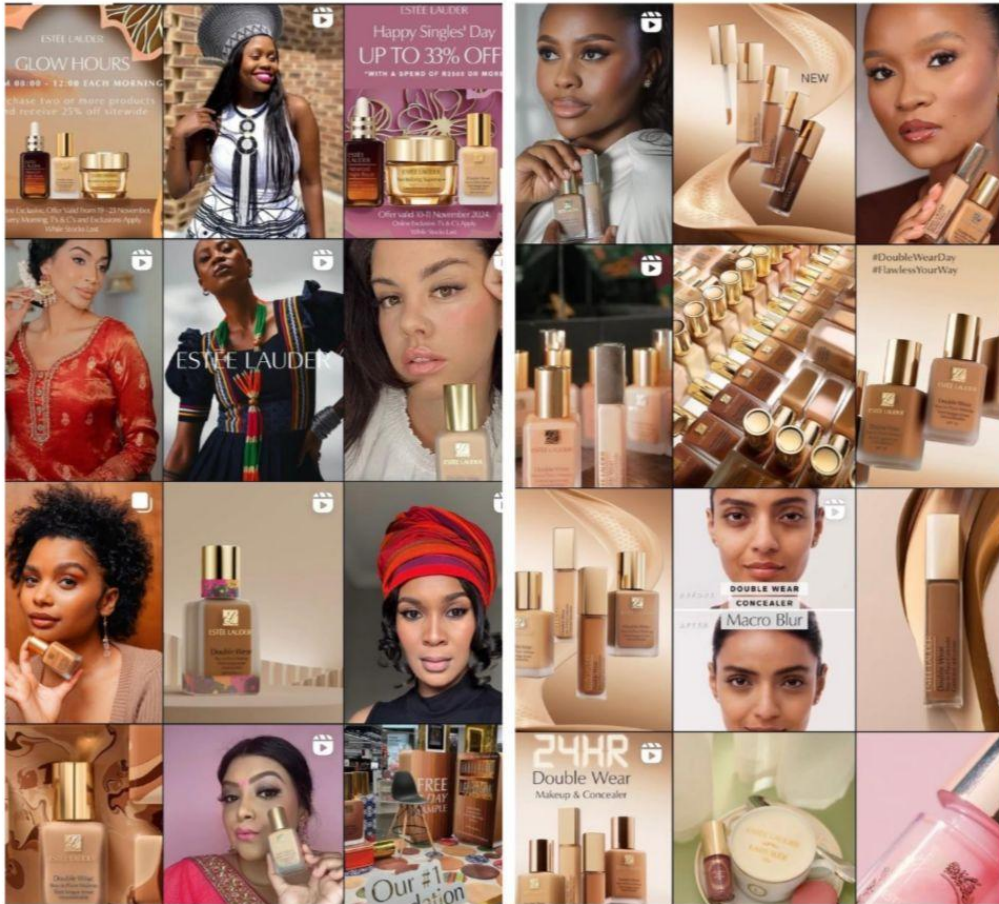


EXHIBIT 3



Appendix 5: Focus Group 1 Transcript

Focus Group 1 Transcription

Moderator: How familiar are you with global beauty brands currently operating in South Africa?

Participant 5: There is Catrice Beauty, which has recently seen a massive surge in popularity—everyone seems to be raving about it. Essence is another big one, along with Makeup Revolution 6].

Moderator: We are looking at these brands through the lens of social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram. Before we dive into the visuals, I want to know: how do you personally define inclusivity?

Participant 4: I see inclusivity as a mirror or a reflection. It is the act of seeing yourself in something; it is true representation.

Participant 3: I think many people "get lost in the sauce" with this word because they limit inclusivity to just skin colour. To be truly inclusive, brands need to consider hair textures, different skin types, and body shapes.

Participant 5: It goes even deeper than physical traits. It should include medical skin conditions and financial inclusivity. Just because of my skin tone, brands shouldn't assume I fall into a specific financial bracket. There is a disconnect when brands ignore the economic reality of their consumers.

Participant 2: I would add that it is about being open to every single person, including different sexualities and the gender spectrum. It's about catering to any type of person without judgment.

Moderator: That is a great point. Africa is a diverse continent, and focusing on only one "type" is a strategic mistake for a brand. Regarding the financial aspect, many people are judged for using simple products like Sunlight soap or Vaseline, even if it works for them, because it isn't a high-end brand like Estée Lauder. From a marketing perspective, what do you need to see before you feel comfortable purchasing a product?

Participant 5: If you are marketing in South Africa, you should use South African people. While we might admire global icons like Kendall Jenner, she isn't necessarily

Participant 5: For the longest time, beauty ranges were specifically tailored for women. There is a very limited selection for men, and what is available is often astronomically expensive. It becomes inaccessible, which is why you'll find many of us just sticking to Sunlight soap.

Participant 2: I am straight, but I would wear foundation if it were tailored for men. I really appreciate the Korean market and how dedicated they are to skincare; their market is tailored so that regardless of gender or skin tone, there is something for everyone.

Moderator: When you see these inclusive campaigns, do they feel authentic?

Participant 5: Not really. I've been to influencer events for brands like Maybelline and Revlon, and it's the same people every time. They are being paid to say nice things. A regular person being honest about a product would influence me more, but that doesn't serve the brand's capitalistic goals.

Participant 4: I would be sold more by seeing common people in the malls. The celebrities they use likely don't even use the products—they probably just donate them to their cousins!

Participant 3: When I see "cruelty-free" or "organic" labels, I assume the product is safe and won't cause a reaction. But a brand can be cruelty-free and still fail at inclusivity. Look at La Roche-Posay; it's high-class and sustainable, but you don't see many people who look like me on their packaging.

Participant 5: Brands need to wake up; it's 2025. We remember the backlash from the TRESemmé ad. More recently, Gucci released a foundation line with only six shades. They "slapped on" a dark brown shade as if all black people have the same skin tone. Compare that to Fenty Beauty, which changed the game by launching with 40 shades.

Moderator: Which brand do you think is actually trying to be inclusive in South Africa?

Participant 3: Garnier They are "fighting for their life," and their products actually work for different ranges, like oily or acne-prone skin. They popularized the Vitamin C trend that everyone is now trying to copy.

Participant 5: I respect Garnier because they actually came to our school to find real people for their ads. They sat people down, gave them products to use for six weeks, and recorded the actual results. It shows that other brands are just being lazy.

Moderator: What are your final recommendations for these global beauty brands?

Participant 3: Use real people. Use people with actual acne to market acne products. I have acne and oily skin; often, "anti-acne" ranges aren't formulated for oily skin and leave my face feeling itchy and irritated.

Participant 2: Brands should offer in-store skin analysis. A store called Beauty on Tap does this. Not everyone knows their skin type or what products will work best for them.

Participant 5: They need to stop thinking that products will only sell in places like Sandton City. People in areas like Mamelodi want these products too, but they aren't offered locally. Brands need to push into different communities.

Participant 2: They also need to consider better packaging. Someone with arthritis or a disability needs packaging that is easy to open. Some makeup is so hard to open that you end up breaking the product.

Participant 3: Finally, I want to see what they do for Heritage Day. I don't want to see the same "main" traditional dances. I want to see something traditionally Coloured, or Cape Malayan representation. We have 12 official languages now; brands should use more than just two or three of them.

Moderator: Thank you all. This has been an incredibly insightful conversation.

Appendix 6 : Editorial Letter

Delia Layton (PhD)

Language editing, proofreading, curriculum development

Associate member: Professional Editors Guild (PEG) #LAY002

Associate member: South African Freelancers' Association (SAFREA) #SAF03765



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10 May 2026

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that I have edited and proofread the manuscript entitled *"Exploring the South African Consumers' Brand Loyalty and Perceptions of Inclusive Global Beauty Marketing"* by Tadiwanashe Zezere (Student # 10067046) for the degree of Master of International Business at IIEMSA.

My involvement was restricted to language usage and spelling, completeness, consistency, and referencing style.

All changes were indicated by Track Changes (MS Word) for the author to verify. As the editor I am not responsible for any changes not implemented, any plagiarism or unverified facts. The final document remains the responsibility of the author.

Yours faithfully



Dr Delia Layton