



RESE8419

RESEARCH REPORT

***The use of Deceptive Advertising on Weight Loss Products and its Impact on
Generation Z's Purchase Behavior***

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*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree BA Honours in
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DECLARATION

I, Kristi Hamann, hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the qualification BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

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Signature

29 November 2021

Date

ABSTRACT

Deceptive advertising is widespread in the weight loss product market (Cawley et al, 2013). Gradual weight loss is not predominantly appealing to individuals as they usually want faster results; therefore, some people consume products that promise fast weight loss with hardly any physical effort by brands who put misleading information on the product label. (Blanck et al, 2007). Most consumers are unaware of the facts on how to realistically lose weight and are instead drawn into deceptive advertising by companies who advertise false claims (Cawley et al, 2013). Brands are misleading consumers by creating false possibilities of weight loss by using visuals and semiotics on their product advertising.

Furthermore, Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980, with 1.9 billion adults being overweight, thus resulting in a plethora of individuals who want to lose weight (World Health Organization, 2020), and brands are taking advantage of this by gaining profit from ineffective, cheap products (Ethan et al, 2016).

Research that has been done on Generation Z's purchase behavior reiterates that the generation wants transparency, authenticity, and honesty from brands. The generation is said to not hesitate to boycott companies over unethical business practices and false advertising (Bapna, 2021). This study will identify whether deceptive advertising in terms of weight loss products will have an impact on Generation Z's purchase behavior, particularly with regards to how Generation Z are affected by visual and semiotic codes within weight loss product labelling and advertisements.

The methodology of this research study took a qualitative approach, where exploratory data was obtained through an online questionnaire, as well as an online focus group. The data findings from both data collection methods provided the researcher with data rich text and audio consisting of opinions, experiences and perceptions which allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth insights. These insights led to a deeper understanding of Generation Z's purchase behavior with regards to weight loss products, specifically with Generation Z's opinions and experiences with weight loss product labelling and advertisements.

From the research conducted, it was evident that deceptive advertising in the weight loss product market has a moderate effect on Generation Z's purchase decisions. This

is since Generation Z are educated enough around deceptive advertising and how brands use this tool for profit, as they are aware they are being subjected to deceptive advertising; however, they claim they would continue to purchase weight loss products that communicate false claims in hopes that they might lose weight.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The weight loss product market is a 33-billion-dollar industry (World Health Organization, 2020), paired with the doubling of world-wide obesity since 1980, creates a plethora of individuals who want to lose weight, but do not particularly know how to (Cawley et al, 2013). This results in individuals looking for weight loss products, thus being drawn in by deceptive advertising by companies who promote false claims. Brands are becoming misleading by creating false efficacy claims through their product labelling and advertisements, resulting in consumers' behaviour being altered through tools such as visuals and semiotic codes.

Research shows that deceptive advertising does have an impact on consumers in general through these advertising tools. This study, however, investigates whether deceptive advertising has an impact on specifically Generation Z's purchase behaviour, since there is a lack of knowledge and deep understanding into Generation Z's perceptions towards deceptive advertising in the weight loss product market.

1.2 RATIONALE

As mentioned previously, the weight loss product market is rampant with deceptive advertising (Cawley et al, 2013), additionally, The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found 55% of advertisements for weight loss products contained false or unsupported efficacy claims, considering many individuals do not know how to lose weight, these weight loss products can be potentially harmful, especially if not used in the correct way (Cawley et al, 2013). Therefore, it is important that consumers can distinguish between what is false and what is factual to ensure that their time or money is not misused, as well as prevent themselves from ingesting harmful products (Muris et al, 2003).

There have been several research studies done on deceptive advertising on weight loss products, however, a few that include Generation Z's purchase behaviour specifically. Generation Z in general have not been sufficiently investigated in terms of their consumer behaviour in relation to weight loss products. Extensive research has been done on Millennials in terms of needs, preferences, and priorities, however, little is known about Generation Z (Laura, 2018). Generation Z are well educated, knowledgeable and experienced consumers, therefore, it has enabled them to understand strategies that marketers use to lure customers into purchasing something, making them sceptical of certain products/services (Laura, 2018). This is reason to investigate whether deceptive advertising within the weight loss product market will have an impact on them or not.

Additionally, this current research study will fill the gaps in existing consumer behaviour studies with regards to Generation Z, as well as provide readers with information to help distinguish between what is deceptive and what is factual with regards to weight loss product advertisements and product labels.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are currently eight claims that are not feasible currently for non-prescription weight-loss products (Muris et al, 2003), which include: “The advertised product causes substantial weight loss without diet or exercise. Users can lose weight while still enjoying unlimited amounts of high calorie foods. The advertised product causes permanent weight loss. The advertised product causes substantial weight loss through the blockage of absorption of fat or calories. The user of the advertised product can safely lose more than three pounds a week for time periods exceeding four weeks. The advertised product that is worn on the body or rubbed into the skin causes substantial weight loss. The advertised product causes substantial weight loss for all users. Users of the advertised product can lose weight from only those parts of the body where they wish to lose weight” (Muris et al, 2003).

This statement made by The Federal Trade Commission suggests that deceptive advertising is in fact widespread and is having a huge impact on individuals and the subject needs to be addressed, as loosely regulated products have dangerous side effects, which can potentially cause harm to the consumer. This research will be identifying the use of deceptive advertising on weight loss products and what impact it has on Generation Z’s purchase decisions.

1.4 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to identify what impact deceptive advertising has on Generation Z’s purchase decisions in terms of weight loss products by assessing the use of visuals and semiotics on weight loss products and advertisements. This study will allow readers and consumers to understand why and how brands use deceptive advertising within weight loss products to manipulate consumer purchase behaviour.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the impact of using deceptive advertising on weight loss products on Generation Z?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research objective 1:

Assessing the relevance and purpose of deceptive advertising on weight loss products.

Research objective 2:

Describing the impact that deceptive advertising has on Generation Z's purchase behaviour.

Research objective 3:

Identifying what Generation Z's motives are for deciding to purchase weight loss products.

Research objective 4:

Identifying and describing the type of semiotics and visuals used on product labels and advertisements that affect Generation Z's purchase behaviour.

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter one: Introduction and overview of research

This chapter highlights the background and problem of the research topic, whereby the rationale, the research question and objectives, and the purpose of the research is discussed.

Chapter two: Literature review

Three theories which aim to heighten the understanding of various concepts are presented: deceptive and misleading advertising, weight loss products, Generation Z, Semiotic codes, and visuals, and buying behaviour. A review of secondary research relating to the study is provided and relevant studies from authors of research papers are discussed; this forms the basis of a theoretical framework linking to the research study.

Chapter three: Research design and methodology

This chapter introduces the methodological process of the research study, which consists of the research approach and design, as well as the population and sampling parameters. Various data collection and data analysis methods are explained in relation to the research paradigm.

Chapter four: Research findings and interpretations

Chapter four includes the presentation and interpretation of the findings from the research conducted using an online questionnaire and an online focus group. The four research objectives are used to guide the collection of data, which is presented in the form of tables and explanations.

Chapter five: Conclusion and recommendation

This chapter draws on the conclusions and recommendations from each objective by looking at the findings that were revealed in both the literature as well as the primary research. Further suggestions and recommendations for each finding are discussed.

1.8 CONCLUSION

It is evident that deceptive advertising is widespread within the weight loss product market, and it is having an impact on consumers' purchase behaviour, as well as it poses risks to both their mental and physical health due to the false efficacy claims found by the Federal Trade Commission. This study aims to investigate whether specifically Generation Z will be impacted by deceptive advertising in the weight loss product market, seeing as they are a generation that is well educated and knowledgeable when it comes to strategies used by marketers, such as deceptive advertising.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will be expanding on the conceptual and theoretical frameworks to provide grounding behind the current research. The literature review will be providing an analysis on five main research themes in conjunction with relative research papers, such as the relevance and purpose of deceptive advertising on weight loss products, consumers' motives for purchasing weight loss products, the impact that false advertising has on consumer purchase behaviour, Generation Z's purchase behaviour and the role that semiotics play in the world of advertising.

2.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.2.1 The Freudian Motivation Theory (Sigmund Freud, 1923).

The Freudian Motivation Theory, developed by Sigmund Freud, hypothesizes that forces such as desires and motives, shape an individual's purchase behavior. This theory is applied to sales and marketing to help understand consumer's motivations

when it comes to making purchase decisions (Ganti, 2020). It emphasizes how the elements of a product can cause an emotional response from the consumer.

The human psyche is divided into the conscious and unconscious mind. The conscious mind being thoughts, memories, and feelings. For example, the way in which an individual that purchases weight loss products lives their life. The unconscious mind, which are biologically determined instincts that someone possesses from when they were born (Ganti, 2020).

The theory explains the sales process by identifying consumer's conscious and functional needs (Ganti, 2020), for example, needing a product to help an individual lose weight, as well as unconscious needs, such as the potential feeling of being happier by ultimately losing weight.

This theory can be used in this study to determine why an individual is drawn to purchase a particular weight loss product by focusing on their conscious and unconscious motivations (Ganti, 2020). To uncover what type of emotional triggers and motivations individuals have, techniques such as role-playing, picture interpretation, sentence completion and word association can be done to discover deeper meanings.

2.2.2 *Semiotic Theory (de Saussure, 1907).*

Semiotics is the study of sign and sign-using behavior and was defined by de Saussure in the 1900's (Britannica, 2020). They are the main element of communicative behavior (Johnson, 2020). De Saussure identified two roles of signs and symbols, a signifier which is an object, image, or text, and the signified which is what the signifier was referring to and can only be defined by the recipient (Johnson, 2020).

For example, a weight loss product that is shown in an advertisement: the signifier would be the text showing what the actual product is, and the signified would be the mental concept that each viewer experiences. Marketers make use of both visual and verbal cues such as logos, colors, tag lines, text, or famous individuals to achieve a positive outcome from the consumer.

Linking this theory with the research at hand will reiterate how marketers significantly advertise their products in a deceiving manner by using signs and symbols to entice consumers to purchase it. Semiotics often encourage individuals to believe that a product or service will give users certain results by creating an emotional response when the claims are often false and misleading.

2.2.3 Reasoned Action Theory (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1960).

Reasoned action theory was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in the late 1960's. It states that consumers act on behavior based on their intention to create or receive a particular outcome, and therefore choose to act in their best interests (Riserbato, 2019). A consumer will only make a specific purchase decision when there is a specific result expected. (Riserbato, 2019).

If marketers are stating claims on the label of the product that are misleading in anyway, the individual cannot make an informed decision as their decision-making process is being distorted. For example, if they choose to purchase a product that claims they can lose a specific amount of weight in a period, without anything else, they are expecting that result, of which will not be true according to the Federal Trade Commission (Muris et al, 2003).

Consumers need accurate and relevant information when deciding to purchase a product, as they make use of this information to decide whether they want to purchase it or not. Integrating this theory into the current research will stipulate the fact that consumers potentially purchase weight loss products because they want a certain result, thus emphasizing the important of identifying deceptive advertising.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEWS IN LINE WITH OBJECTIVES

a) The Relevance and Purpose of Deceptive Advertising in Marketing and Weight Loss Products

According to the European Commission, misleading advertising is a profitable activity that includes giving dishonest information, lying, or deceiving consumers to make them choose what they would otherwise not have chosen (Nuseir, 2018). The

representation of false information has been adopted as a major marketing strategy by some.

Marketers manipulate the quality of the product to deceive the consumer to generate high profits by increasing their sales (Gaber et al, 2018). Advertising in general, and deceptive advertising, can be helpful due to increasing total consumption, competitive rivalry and increasing market share (Cawley et al, 2013). This displays the truth that deceptive advertising is useful and relevant in the market as it can be used to benefit companies that are profit driven, however, not the consumer.

The weight loss product market is also characterized by incomplete information, consumers are not being informed about government regulations (Cawley et al, 2013), therefore, when deceptive advertising is practiced, consumers are unaware of how to distinguish between what is false and what is true.

Furthermore, the market failure for inadequate information allows for deceptive advertising to be potentially profitable (Cawley et al, 2013), as it is generally more advantageous to firms that are selling experience or weight-focused goods, as mentioned above.

To reiterate how rampant the weight loss product market is and the relevance of deceptive advertising within the industry, The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) staff released a report in 2002 that analysed the trends of weight loss marketing and found 55% of advertisements for weight loss products contained false or unsupported efficacy claims (Muris et al, 2003).

The study consisted of three panels: science, industry, and media to document false and deceptive weight loss advertisements. There are currently eight claims that are not feasible currently for non-prescription weight-loss products (Muris et al, 2003). This claim suggests that deceptive advertising is in fact widespread and is having a huge impact on individuals and the subject needs to be addressed (Muris et al, 2003).

To address the issue of deceptive advertising, the study first needs to identify what consumer's motives for purchasing weight loss are, and why they are so drawn into deceptive weight loss advertisements in the first place.

b) Identifying what consumers' motives are for deciding to purchase weight loss products.

As mentioned in the problem statement, gradual weight loss is not particularly appealing to those who want to lose weight, therefore individuals purchase weight loss products that promise rapid weight loss that does not require effort (Cawley et al, 2013).

Muris, Thompson, Swindle, Leary and Harbour (2003) identified that there is a growing epidemic of obesity in the US, thus the emergence of the ever-growing market of weight loss products as individuals are trying to lose weight as quickly as possible (Muris et al, 2003). Furthermore, this displays one aspect of the motivations for purchasing weight loss products, obesity.

The issue of consuming weight loss products is that they are loosely regulated and have a history of dangerous side effects, which can potentially cause harm to the consumer, this leads to the next objective of the current research study which is to determine the impact that false advertising has on consumer purchase behaviour.

c) Describing the impact that deceptive advertising has on consumers' purchase behaviour.

It has been established that the market for weight loss products is riddled with deceptive advertising, which will ultimately have an impact on consumers, whether it be negative, positive, or neutral. A study done by Cawley, Avery and Eisenburg (2013) estimated the impact of exposure to deceptive advertising on the consumption of weight loss products and found that when individuals are exposed to deceptive advertising, they are less likely to consume weight loss products (Cawley et al, 2013).

Cawley, Avery and Eisenburg (2013) found evidence that deceptive television advertising of weight loss products caused women to consume less products, thus, deceptive advertising discouraging consumption. Their results suggested that exposure to advertisements have an impact on consumer behaviour.

Hayder (2017) also conducted a study to identify the practices of deceptive advertising and the impact it has on business and consumer buying behaviour. Through his

research, he identified that the use of tampering tactics in advertisements can be thwarting to the individual (Hayder, 2017). He also found that deception and unethical experiences of advertising inversely effect the response towards the advertisement. His research concluded that there is a significant correlation between deceptive advertising and consumer buying behaviour, thus recognizing that deceptive advertising is a problem and can cause potential damage.

It was identified in the FTC study (Muris et al, 2003) that deceptive advertisements damage the industry as well as consumers' money and confidence in the industry, thus causing the entire weight loss industry to suffer.

Nuseir (2019) explored the importance of being “buyer aware” through the buyer decision process, as well as the impact deceptive advertising can have on the process. Consumers behave in certain ways to satisfy their desires through purchasing, choice, consuming, and evaluating products, according to the Freudian Motivation Theory (Ganti, 2020), and therefore go through a process when purchasing a product.

This process is obstructed when the individual is exposed to misleading advertising. Consumers are unfairly persuaded to believe the claims that the advertisers are presenting, hence resulting in consumers judgement being affected (Nuseir, 2018). They become vulnerable and less likely to make rational choices (Nuseir, 2018) when they cannot recognize deceptive messages. Once consumers become aware of misleading advertising, they become more sensitive to any form of advertising allowing them to be wary of trusting other brands (Nuseir, 2018).

Thus, Nuseir (2018) identified that participants may switch brands if they are exposed to deceptive ads as they are likely to suffer emotional and financial losses, consequentially feeling hopeless, lonely, and having low self-esteem (Nuseir, 2018).

A study done by Gaber, Labib and Salem (2018) also investigated the effect of marketing deception on consumer behaviour. Their paper aimed to investigate the deceptive marketing practices and its effect on the buying behaviour of students.

Their overall findings identified that deceptive marketing practices have a negative effect on the consumer buying purchasing process. Deceptive advertising has impacted the relationship between the organization and the consumer negatively, both in the short and long-term (Gaber et al, 2018). Consumers become more sceptical

about the marketing practices of various organizations because of deceptive advertising.

d) Generation Z Purchase Behaviour

There has been limited studies on Gen Z's purchase behaviour as they are said to be unique due to them being the first generation to be born in the digital world (Laura, 2018). Generation Z's knowledge about the market, their confidence in technology and social connectivity is assumed to be higher than other generations, thus an analysis of their consumer behaviour is important (Kahawandala, and Peter 2020).

The purpose of the study done by Kahawandala, and Peter (2020) was to develop a research model based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour by incorporating constructs of market mavenism, technology self-efficacy and social identity to identify the specific factors that influence the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z.

Kahawandala, and Peter (2020) concluded that the addition of market mavenism, technology self-efficacy and social identity are the three main constructs that need to be added to the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This new model will be able to determine Gen Z's purchase behaviour factors more accurately.

The aim of a study done by Laura (2018) was to identify which drivers of consumer purchase behaviour can influence willingness to buy of Generation Z consumers in Russia. The first evident need that was realized about Gen Z is their need for information to be instant, as they have a shorter attention span of 8 seconds (Laura, 2018), therefore, it is important to not overload Gen Z consumers with a lot of information, messages should be given in visual format and as short as possible (Laura, 2018).

Laura (2018) also identified that Gen Z are independent, less manipulatable and have a high sense of respect, thus making deceptive advertising strategies useless to get their attention. The 'Trend' driver is also not an influential purchase decision driver on Gen Z, as they do not feel the desire to buy something everyone else has, thus linking back to their attribute of being independent (Laura, 2018).

Gen Z are also well educated, knowledgeable and experienced consumers, therefore, it has enabled them to understand strategies that marketers use to lure customers into purchasing something, making them sceptical of certain products/services (Laura, 2018). Before purchasing a product, Gen Z always access peer-reviews and product specification information, which makes them empowered smart shoppers. It can be said that marketers will be challenged with earning Gen Z's respect, loyalty, and purchase.

From this research, it can be concluded that deceptive advertising might not have an impact on Gen Z's purchase behaviour, or it might have a negative impact on them in the context that they will not respond to it.

e) The Role that Semiotics Play in Deceptive Advertising Techniques

Advertising semiotics is one of the richest areas to study communication and meaning within the marketplace. Semiotics provide marketers with tools that will allow them to introduce new advertising concepts through using meaningful signs and symbols (Faizan, 2019). Semiotics in advertising identifies how signs are used to represent something, such as: a wish, a need, a desire, or a worry to be solved. The research paper done by Dzanic (2013) identified the switch from denotative to connotative meanings of contemporary advertisements.

Semiotics is important in advertising as it helps identify the target market, as well as determining the success or failure of the campaign by implementation of verbal and visual elements. Semiotic theories also allow marketers to identify trends in popular culture, understand consumer behaviour and how to meet their needs by improving their communication (Dzanic, 2013). Faizan (2019) also states that semiotics play an important role in cultural processes.

However, it can be noted that persuasion dominates the language of advertising. Consumers are persuaded and manipulated that the product or service advertised can provide them a desired idea.

During a communication process, the message (signal) creates an interpretive reaction in the receiver (consumer), thus a signification taking place. During the

decoding process, for example, in a printed advertisement for weight loss products, semiotics is used to analyse the images and the slogan (Faizan, 2019).

Semiotic analysis reveals that advertisements construct individual's identities and influence culture (Dzanic, 2013). Some have perceived advertising as manipulative and persuasive that causes consumers to not be able to decide what is best for them, thus linking this definition to deceptive advertising (Nuseir, 2018). The dialogue in advertising makes the interaction between campaign and consumer personal, emotive, and uncertain (Dzanic, 2013).

According to Barthes (1957), 'advertisements use tricks of imagistic arrangement to claim for their products meanings which they have no right to attach to them' (Dzanic, 2013). By using connotative associations in advertising, it allows readers to see what they themselves try to be/achieve, for example, a weight loss advertisement may have an image of a woman that has a desirable body to the viewer.

Readers are not likely to read images without reading the verbal text, as well as less likely to read the verbal text without looking at the image (Dzanic, 2013). It can be also said that writing in print advertising is a form of image-making in the consumer's mind. The image and text are created in such a way by studying human groups, motives, and attitudes, and linking their behaviour (Dzanic, 2013), therefore, showing the role of text and image semiotics in advertising as consumers will have different ideas in their minds depending on their cultural processes. For example, one individual may feel an advertisement is deceptive, and one may feel it is just a simple advertisement.

Dzanic (2013) analysed an example of a perfume advertisement called 'Beauty' (2000) by using a semiotic analysis. An image of a beautiful girl is the sign, and the sign connotes youth, beauty, slimness, and health. These have positive connotations. The signifier is the mythic feminine beauty, a concept that is associated with society's positive myths concerning the characteristics of a sexually desirable woman (Dzanic, 2013). Thus, the ad presents a model (the sign) which signifies feminine beauty (a concept). This analysis describes how an image and text in an advertisement can affect what the consumer/viewer understands about the advertisement, thus showing the role semiotics play in advertising.

Dzanic (2013) identified that targeting people's insecurities is a commonly exploited strategy for creating an advertisement. Marketers try to show the image of what the

consumer strives to be by using images and text that create a message, such as a desirable female body on a bottle of weight loss pills. The images and representation of the construction of advertisements is extremely important as images are usually the essence of what is being communicated, as it sets the mood, conveys information, persuades, and makes strong claims (Dzanic, 2013).

Furthermore, advertising power relies on people's weaknesses (Dzanic, 2013), for example, the never-ending human need for solutions and magic products that provide 'hope', in this case, a quick solution to lose weight. It can be concluded that consumers are central in an advertisement's structure.

Chang (2013) studied the importance of cognitive processes that are associated with processing narrative advertisements, and the subjective experiences that go along with it, such as: perceptual/conceptual fluency (the ease at which consumers process different meanings), comprehension fluency (the ease at which consumers can comprehend the advertisement), and imagery fluency (the ease at which consumers generate related imagery when processing information).

Chang's (2013) experiments found that human judgements reflect the content of information on the advertisement, as well as subjective experiences with processing the information of advertisements. The study identified that subjective experiences are significant when evaluating an advertisement, and generating mental images is assumed to be a unique, important process when looking at an advertisement. It is also identified that imagery fluency influences brand attitudes (Chang, 2013).

2.4 KEY CONCEPTS

The key terms that are significant in administering a total understanding of this research are as follows:

a) Deceptive and Misleading Advertising

Misleading advertising is a profitable activity that includes giving dishonest information, lying, deceiving, or cheating consumers to make them choose what they would not otherwise have chosen (Nuseir, 2018). Deceptive advertising will

be measured by researching false claims about how to lose weight (Muris et al, 2003).

b) Weight loss products

Weight loss products are categorized as dietary supplements. In the case of this research study, weight loss products are referred to as a tablet or capsule that contains chemical substances that claim to aid in reducing body weight (Medical Dictionary, n.d). Several weight loss pill brands will be used throughout the study.

c) Generation Z

This refers to the population that the current research is targeting. Generation Z or “Gen Z” refer to the generation that was born between 1997-2012, following millennials (Business Insider, n.d). They are the youngest and most ethnically diverse generation. They grew up with technology, the internet, and social media.

d) Semiotics

Semiotics are the interpretation of signs and symbols to interpret subconscious elements. Semiotics can help improve brand messaging, communicate desired meanings, and influence consumers’ subconscious decision-making (Vos, 2020). This research study will be interpreting the semiotics of visual and text elements of advertisements and labels of weight loss pills.

e) Buying Behavior

Buying behavior refers to the decision and acts individual’s take on to buy a product or service. It is the driving force behind any marketing process (Sydorenko, 2021). The research study will be identifying what semiotic elements influence consumers’ buying behavior for weight loss products.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned theories, linked with relevant objectives to the current research, provide background to potentially expand the current research on Generation Z's purchase behaviours, as well as in what manner semiotic codes and visuals are used to motivate or alter their motives when purchasing. Using behavioural theories, as well as semiotic theories, will help investigate if deceptive advertising has an impact on Generation Z.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter introduces the research methods that will be used to conduct qualitative research, outlining the entire research strategy. This chapter consists of the research paradigm, the population and sampling, the data collection methods, as well as the data analysis methods that will be used.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is looked at through the interpretivist paradigm as it aims to understand and describe meaningful social actions and experiences (Intgrty, 2016) through exploring consumer purchase behaviour. This is done by collecting qualitative data that provides feelings and opinions around the factors that affect the purchasing behaviour for weight loss products. Interpretivism emphasizes that social reality is viewed and interpreted by the individual according to the ideological positions that she or he holds, therefore, knowledge is personally experienced rather than acquired (Intgrty, 2016). Interpretivism pays attention to and values what people say, do and feel, and how they make meaning of the phenomena being researched.

The relevance of collecting feelings and opinions allows the researcher to identify what visuals and semiotics on weight loss product labels influence whether the individual decides to purchase the product or not, as well as what type of buying motives are used when deciding to purchase weight loss products, either emotional or rational (Chand, n.d).

The Epistemology position of interpretivism states that knowledge is subjective and depends heavily on context and a persons' interpretation of information. Through the Epistemology position, deeper insights around the topic are generated (Stanford, 2005). Giving consumers more knowledge on deceptive advertising allows them to make informed decisions in the future. Subjective knowledge is best obtained through qualitative data collection such as focus groups (Stanford, 2005).

In terms of Ontology, reality is subjective and socially constructed. This position creates the framework for how individuals in society make sense of the reality in which they live in. It is the study of beings, matters, concepts, experiences, and words. Humans actively construct identities, realities, and knowledge (Edelheim, 2014). One product may be deceptive to one person but not the other, and different visuals and semiotics may affect individuals differently within the study.

Axiology position states that the value of something can be seen as having intrinsic properties, valuable, or to have extrinsic properties, valuable for the sake of something else, thus having intrinsic properties (Edelheim, 2014). The position aims to understand what makes a product deceptive and why people are misled to believe something that is not completely true.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

This research was conducted through a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was chosen for this research study as it deemed applicable in addressing the purpose of this study as well as the objectives of the research study. The reason being is that qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio to understand concepts, opinions of experiences to gather in-depth insights into the current problem (Bhandari, 2020). This research approach supported

this research study by exploring the use of deceptive advertising and its impact on Generation Z's purchase behaviour by identifying opinions and experiences of the population sample.

This research is exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is defined as a type of research used to investigate a problem which is not clearly defined and will allow readers to have a better understanding of the existing problem, but will not provide conclusive results (Question Pro, 2021). A focus group is a widely used method in exploratory research, as it allows individuals to express their insights on the topic being studied. Using this research design allowed the researcher to understand Generation Z's purchase behaviour, and what motives drive them to purchase deceptive weight loss products by conducting in-depth focus groups.

The study being conducted made use of an ethnography approach, as it is a qualitative method where the researcher can interact with the participants of the study in their real-life environment, such as through focus groups and questionnaires. Researchers make use of these instruments to support the researcher's deeper understanding of the research problem (Logan, 2021). The benefit of using ethnography is that it delivers a detailed and faithful representation of users' behaviours and attitudes as the research approach is subjective in nature. This approach can be useful in uncovering and analysing relevant user attitudes and emotions. Using this research approach allowed the researcher to display product labels and advertisements to the focus group and get insight on how the visuals and semiotics affect their buying choice.

The unit of analysis can be defined as the crucial entity which forms part of the study, and which is being analysed within the study, the main parameter that is being investigated. Such units could be individual people, groups of people, objects, cities or countries, or social parameters such as births, deaths, or divorce (Discover PhD's, 2020). In the case of this research, the unit of analysis is individuals, specifically Generation Z.

3.4 POPULATION

The research parameters of this study include both male and female individuals who are part of Generation Z. However, since Generation Z are between ages 9 and 26, only those between 18 and 26 will be chosen to participate, as those that are under 18 will need to provide parental consent to participate, which will limit the timing of this research study.

The accessible population within this study are Generation Z individuals that are from ages 18 to 26 that the researcher has been able to contact. The population had access to the internet, a microphone, and a camera, as well as can complete online questionnaires. The participants are fluent in English and have an interest in health and fitness.

3.5 SAMPLING

This research study used non-probability sampling. From this, quota sampling was used for focus groups. Participants that the researcher knows personally were included to collect information through online focus groups due to COVID-19. These participants are South African and reside in Kwa-Zulu Natal, and are between the ages of 18 and 26 years old, which fall into the category of Generation Z. The researcher contacted these participants through social media and asked if they would be interested in participating in the focus group, as the researcher knew these individuals were interested in health and fitness due to being acquaintances with these individuals. By ensuring that the participants have background knowledge of the topic, as well as having a relatively small sample size of 6 individuals, the researcher was able to gather data-rich and in-depth narratives from all participants.

For the questionnaires, there were possible international respondents, as well respondents within South Africa due to the online nature of the questionnaire. For this study, the set characteristics that were considered for all respondents are that they need to be over the age of 18, up until 26 years old, which is the age range of Generation Z. All respondents have an interest in health and fitness, as they

understood what weight loss products are. All respondents have purchased weight loss products before or have wanted to purchase them in the past.

The unit of analysis for this study included the perceptions and experiences held by individuals who are part of Generation Z. This study aims to gain insights into Generation Z's purchase decisions with regards to how it is impacted by deceptive advertising specifically within weight loss products.

Extent:

The research data collection was carried out during July 2021. It took place online due to COVID-19, allowing for a safe and effective data collection.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The methodology of data collection is an especially important and crucial part of any research. Qualitative research methods do not only collect the data, but also help researchers to understand the process behind observed results by considering thoughts, feelings, and expressions of participants. The data collection methods that were used to collect the research study's data are online focus groups and questionnaires.

3.5.1 Focus Group

The data collection process was conducted by the researcher, Kristi Hamann. The researcher identified potential participants and contacted them via WhatsApp and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. The message was: "Hi (participants name), I hope you are well. I am currently conducting a research study on the topic of deceptive advertising on weight loss products and its impact on Generation Z's purchase behavior. I have noticed that you are interested in health and fitness and would like to know if you are able to participate in my focus group?".

The researcher gathered six participants and added them to a WhatsApp group where all further information was given, as well as allowed for participants to get familiar and comfortable with each other before the discussion focus group. The group was given

a participant consent form (Annexure A), as well as a consent form for audio or video recording (Annexure B). All participants sent through their documents. Participants were then given a date and time of the focus group. On the day of the focus group (1 August 2021), a meeting ID and passcode was sent to the WhatsApp group for the participants to join at 5pm. There were three females and three males that joined the focus group, all between the ages of 18 and 26.

Once all participants joined, the researcher uploaded the online presentation, as well as started the recording process. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured focus groups (Annexure C) via Zoom, as this allowed the researcher to present visual open-ended questions to the participants while also interacting with the group which allowed for freedom during the session as well as assisting the participants with guiding the discussion. This enabled the researcher to understand the feelings, opinions, and experiences held by the participants. The researcher first introduced the topic by getting the participants familiar with what types of weight loss products are being discussed by displaying pictures of them. Participants were also encouraged to give their opinion, as well as comment on others' opinions. The types of questions asked were directly associated with trying to find out why and what affects their purchase decisions.

The researcher probed the responses of the participants in the effort to draw out a more elaborate response from them. This allowed the participants to provide more clarity about their ideas and feelings around their answer. The participants also decided that each of them would answer the question one by one in an order, so that everyone had a chance to speak, as some found that they were not sure when to answer as they did not want to disrupt anyone. Halfway through the focus group, two individuals were disconnected due to technical difficulties, causing a limitation to the data collection. The focus group gathered data-rich experiences and perceptions for the research study.

The researcher adhered to safety guidelines by conducting the focus group through Zoom. This focus group was kept to a forty-minute time frame in order to ensure that the participants attention was maintained throughout the group session. From the beginning of the session, an audio and visual recording was taken on both Zoom as well as a cellphone to allow the researcher to go over the interview and transcribe the

data and start the data analyzing process. The recordings were conducted ethically as the researcher received consent from all participants to record the interview.

3.5.2 Online Questionnaire

The other data collection method that was used within this research study was an online questionnaire (Annexure D). The researcher structured an online open-ended questionnaire on Google Forms to gain more insights into Generation Z's opinions and experiences.

Participants of the questionnaire were made aware of the fact that there will be no benefit or risk in participating in this study, and their identities remained confidential throughout the study and were able to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

The online questionnaire was sent out to Facebook groups, WhatsApp, as well as put on Instagram to gain a relatively valuable number of participants. The questionnaire was filled out by those between the ages of 18-26 and are interested in health and fitness. There were fifteen both close and open-ended questions that assisted the researcher in answering research objectives. The questionnaire was sent out and within a week the researcher obtained 52 responses.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

A Thematic content analysis (TCA) was used in this study to analyse the data that has been collected. TCA can be used widely across a range of epistemologies and research questions, and is a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Lorelli et al, 2017). This type of analysis strives to identify patterns of themes within the focus group data, as well as the themes within the questionnaire answers.

TCA is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data, such as the data collected through focus groups and questionnaires. An effective TCA identifies common themes in the texts provided. It is the most foundational analytic procedure within qualitative research (Anderson, 2007). The analysis can be used when working with research

themes, such as those within this study, as well as analysing large qualitative data sets, such as the 52 questionnaire respondents. The TCA produces trustworthy and insightful findings.

Thematic content analysis process included six steps that map out the raw data of both the focus groups as well as the questionnaire by sorting through the most important themes within the data. This analysis method was used to find common patterns throughout the collected data by getting familiar with the data, coding, searching for themes with broader patterns of meaning, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and doing the write-up.

Now that the focus group has been conducted, and the questionnaire has responses, the next step was to analyse what the respondents have discussed and what they have answered to the questions. The first phase was familiarizing the data. This was done through listening to the recording of the focus group as well as going back and reading written notes and writing out several themes found in the data. The questionnaires were also looked at and read thoroughly.

The second phase was when codes were assigned to the data. A code is a brief description of what is being said in the focus group and within the questionnaire (Mortensen, 2020). Each time the researcher writes something interesting in the data, a code is written down. This organized the data into meaningful groups. Once the data was coded into important segments, the next step was to collate all the sections that fit into each code.

The third phase consisted of searching for themes whereby the researcher sorted the codes into themes. Themes were broader information as opposed to codes. The researcher looked at the list of codes and their associated extracts and then collated the codes into broader themes (Mortensen, 2020).

Once the themes were decided and set, the fourth phase was refining and reviewing the themes that have been identified. The researcher read through the extracts from the focus groups and questionnaires related to the codes to explore if they support the relevant theme, or if there are contradictions, or if themes overlap. The themes should be coherent and distinctive. Phase 4 was an iterative process that involved going back and forth between codes, extracts and themes to perfect them (Mortensen, 2020).

During phase 5, the researcher named and described each of the themes that were identified in the previous steps. The themes were now descriptive and possibly engaging. Underneath the themes a description of what the theme is about and how and why the theme is interesting was written down. This allowed the theme to tell a story, and how it relates to other themes within the same context (Mortensen, 2020).

The last phase of TCA consisted of producing the report. When writing up results, there should be enough information about the data collected and the process of it being collected for the reader to evaluate the quality of the research. The description of the themes was used as a basis for the final report with quotes from respondents being used to demonstrate the findings (Mortensen, 2020).

3.8 CONCLUSION

The research process that was shown in this chapter adopted an interpretivist paradigm to gain deeper understanding into the research problem, which was to find opinions, experiences, and behaviours with regards to Generation Z's purchase behaviour with weight loss products. Qualitative primary research was conducted to find rich data pertaining to this, despite the limitations of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data which was collected from Generation Z respondents and participants through online focus groups and online questionnaires. The data collection methods that were used were appropriate and made data collection more efficient during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative data has been analysed and interpreted using thematic content analysis using four research objectives to guide the collection of the primary data.

The following findings will be related to the objectives that the current study has identified by presenting them as relevant themes found within both secondary and primary research by displaying them in graphs and tables, as well as explanations.

4.2 INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.2.1 Key Findings – Focus Group Discussion: Key questions and relevant answers

What are your reasons for purchasing or wanting to purchase weight loss products?

Participants claimed that they started taking weight loss products as they were not completely happy with themselves and wanted to either lose weight or gain muscle. Three participants stated that their peers at the gym kept recommending products to them, as well as the fact that the products “boosted” their results in the gym, making the process of losing or gaining muscle faster as they were impatient. One of the participants stated that the reason they purchased products was due to external validation. Once they started losing weight, others would comment and congratulate them, and therefore they would want to lose more weight. Another participant stated that they had an eating disorder, and therefore needed appetite suppressants to not binge eat.

From these answers, it can be stated that the main reasons for Generation Z purchasing weight loss products would be to speed up the process to get desired results, recommendations from peers, as well as other sensitive reasons such as eating disorders or societal pressures.

Did you purchase these products more than once? Please explain why you did or why you decided not to buy it again.

One of the participants had only purchased the weight loss products once as they started experiencing stomach cramps and realized that the products were not actually working, they were just eating well. The rest of the participants stated they had

purchased products again as they felt they did work and produce results; however, they were aware that these products were giving them negative side effects, but they just kept taking them. One participant said that some of the products they had tried caused them to become prediabetic, and therefore stopped purchasing those, but still purchased ones that were sustainable enough to take.

It can be said that the reason the participants purchased these products again was because they felt they were getting results because they experienced side effects that claimed made them lose weight such as making them sweat by increasing their core temperature. It can be said that there is no direct link between the product and their results from their answers. Those that did not purchase certain products again, did not do so due to negative side effects on their health.

*Do you believe that the packaging of weight loss products influences your buying decisions with regards to the text and the visuals on the packaging of the product?
And how do you think it does this and why?*

Participants believe that packaging is effective when influencing the buying decision due to the persuasive text and impactful imaging on the packaging. Participants claimed that the text on the packaging could influence their buying decision by “promising” results. Participants also state that they are aware of the type of subconscious marketing they use by using certain images on the packaging, as they do not realize in the moment that they are being drawn to the product through emotive language. One participant also stated that they understood they use certain colors and words to make a person feel a certain way.

Overall, participants understand that the packaging is used to influence them to purchase the product, because they are educated. Someone who does not know about marketing, fitness or health would not understand that products alone cannot make you lose weight. In conclusion, it can be said that participants know that packaging can affect a person’s buying decision, but because of their education and knowledge on the industry, they know what is true and what is false on the packaging. However, even though they know about deceptive advertising on the product, they stated that they would still be influenced to purchase a product subconsciously.

Do you believe that weight loss products work? If you think they do not, would you still purchase them even though you know that they don't work?

Participants stated that they believe weight loss products do work to a certain extent. This is because, one participant stating that “you are putting something foreign into your body, therefore enhancing the functions of the body”. One individual also stated that they do believe they work to a certain extent, however, they understand that they are not entirely good for you and are not sustainable for a long period of time. Most respondents understand that weight loss products alone will not work, it must be taken with a healthy lifestyle. One participant also said that they know some ingredients work in weight loss products, but others do not.

Generation Z understand that weight loss products do not work entirely, without a healthy lifestyle. This shows that this generation does have knowledge on deceptive advertising on how brands claim that weight loss products make you lose weight, when in fact it is a healthy lifestyle that does provide the majority of the results, however, they would still purchase these products even though they know most of their claims are false.

Which advertisement appeals to you more in terms of the text and visuals and why?

Half of the participants claimed that advertisement A appeals to them more considering the text and visuals of it as they feel as though it has less information on it, therefore less time to read. One participant said that A appeals to them as the image displayed to them is the same body type that they want to achieve, the image on the advertisement is their goal now. The other half chose B due to the fact that it displayed people with “abs” and they wanted to look as “lean” as those in the advertisement. They also stated that they were drawn to it because of the before and after photos displayed on the advertisement.

From these answers, it can be said that image and text is very important when using deceptive advertising as it has a major effect on how it appeals to consumers. These participants were clearly drawn to certain advertisements due to the imaging shown on the advertisement.

Which advertisement appeals to you more and which do you believe is more accurate, A or B?

All participants agreed that they find both advertisements appealing, but in different ways. Majority said A appeals to them due to the simplicity of the advertisement since it is easy to read. However, in advertisement A it states, “lose weight without dieting”, all participants knew that this was not necessarily true and that a simple weight loss product will not make you lose weight. Two participants noted that advertisement B is more accurate in terms of how to lose weight, however, it is harder to read.

It can be identified that although deceptive advertisements can be appealing to Generation Z, they understand that the message the brand is sending out through the advertisement is not entirely true. Since participants knew that advertisement B was accurate but not appealing shows that brands need to start marketing correct claims on their products in a more appealing way.

Do before and after photos on either the packaging or the advertisement influences your purchasing decision of the product and why?

All participants stated that they agree that before and after photos influence their purchasing decision as it motivates them because they feel as though if that person can do it, so can they. However, all participants knew that these before and after photos are not always completely true, as the brand will not always say the exact time frame the person lost the weight in, one participant therefore said that these photos can be “deceiving”.

From this, it could be said that using techniques for deceptive advertising such as before photos do influence Generation Z’s purchase decisions, however, they do understand that it may not be completely correct with how they will look after using the product, the photos merely just motivate them to want to use the product.

Would you say that text or images are more influential when it comes to product labels and advertisements and why?

Majority of participants stated that they believe images are more influential. One participant stated that they would rather visually look at something they were going to buy rather than must read the product label to know what they are purchasing. Another also said in terms of weight loss products specifically, images are more influential as usually when people purchase weight loss products, they want to lose weight, so if they see that they will be more drawn to buy it. They “personally” want to see how they might look like. One participant stated that images draw them to the product, but text is what sells them on their final decision.

From these answers, both images and text are important when advertising a product as both are needed to complete the purchase decision of the consumer. Overall, it can be said that text and images play a significant role in the use of deceptive advertising in marketing, as brands are able to dramatize both the texts and visuals to make it more appealing to the target market.

4.2.2 Key Findings: Online Questionnaire

Characteristics of Respondents – Screening Questions 1 & 2:

A total number of 52 respondents took part in this online questionnaire with 86% of respondents having purchased weight loss products. All were between the ages of 18 to 26, being Generation Z, and 61% being between 21-23 years old.

Purchasing Decisions – Questions 3-5:

Those who had not purchased weight loss products were asked why they had not purchased them. Majority of the respondents claimed they had negative side effects as well as they do not believe they work. Those that did purchase weight loss products identified what type of product they purchased, being fat burners, pills, appetite suppressants and teas/drinks, majority, 72% being fat burners. Respondents were then asked what factors affect their purchasing decisions when wanting to purchase weight loss products, and majority, 75%, stating due to “personal wants and needs”

Weight Loss Products & Deceptive Advertising – Questions 6-15:

Respondents were asked whether these weight loss products have worked for them, with yes and maybe accounting for half of the responses, and the other half claiming that they have not worked for them. Respondents were then asked if they are aware of what deceptive advertising is and 80% said they do know what it is, followed by asking them for a brief description of what they think it is. Respondents were then asked if they had been subjected to advertising and majority said yes and maybe.

They were then asked how they think they had been deceived by explaining their experiences with deceptive advertising. Individuals were then asked if they were aware of the false claims that weight loss products produce, and 80% said yes. Following that, they were asked if they were aware of the type of side effects weight loss products produce, with then asking if they could say if they had any side effects and which ones. Only 34% of respondents then stated that they would still consider purchasing weight loss products knowing that the claims are false, as well as the fact of side effects, these people then explained why they would continue to purchase them.

4.2.3 Key Themes and Coding

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Codes (Main Ideas)</u>
The relevance and purpose of deceptive advertising on weight loss products.	- The deceiving text and images influence their buying decision - Subconsciously influences them even know they know it is deceiving - Creates unattainable goals for individuals - Communicating false ideas to make profits off of products that do not work

	- Creates a sense of motivation and hope for individuals to lose weight
The impact that deceptive advertising has on Generation Z's purchase behavior.	- Extreme deceptive advertising (purchased schedule 6 weight loss pills) - Continue to purchase even though they were aware of the side effects - Does have an impact – however they are aware of deceiving information regardless of purchasing or not - Deceptive weight loss ads are more appealing than correct weight loss ads - 80% are aware of deceptive advertising & the false efficacy claims - Would still continue to purchase products even knowing they do not work. - Half of respondents are aware they have been subject to it
Generation Z's motives for purchasing weight loss products.	- Not content with their appearance - Peers recommending products - Impatient to see results - To control eating disorders - External validation - Personal wants and needs - Product reviews - Advertisements (only 23%) - Desperate to fit into society's ideals

Semiotics and visuals that affect Generation Z's purchase behavior.	- "Promises" of results - Emotive language causes them to be drawn to the product - Colors and words affect their feelings thus influencing them - Images catch their eye - More text = more appealing - Appealing images draw Gen Z in more even though it may be false claims - Drawn to before and after photos - Images are more influential than text initially - Text creates the decision to purchase
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4.2.4 Findings & Interpretations on Key Themes (Objectives) and Linking Theories:

Theme 1: *The relevance and purpose of deceptive advertising on weight loss products.*

The relevance and purpose of using deceptive advertising on weight loss products is to subconsciously influence buyers by using appealing texts and images that may or may not be completely correct. This is done to make profits off products that do not work by creating unattainable goals for individuals by claiming that the product will help them achieve these goals. deceptive advertising/information creates a sense of motivation and hope for individuals as they think purchasing these products will make their process of gaining results quicker and easier.

This theme links with the theory of Semiotics (de Saussure, 1907), as marketers are using signs and symbols to entice their products in a deceiving manner in order to entice consumers to purchase it. Semiotics in this case is being used to encourage

individuals to believe that a weight loss product will provide complete results through creating an emotional response, even though the claims are misleading (Johnson, 2020).

Theme 2: *The impact that deceptive advertising has on Generation Z's purchase behavior.*

Deceptive advertising, specifically on weight loss products, have impacted Generation Z's purchase behavior to a moderate extent. Majority of the population used in this study understand what deceptive advertising is, as well as that they are subject to it. Some Gen Z consumers have gone as far as to purchase schedule 6 weight loss pills, as those that were in retail stores were not working therefore, they felt the need to find ones that do "promise" results. Gen Z also continue to purchase these products even though they are aware of the side effects they produce, as well as the fact that they do know the products do not completely work. Deceptive advertising is appealing to Gen Z; however, they do understand that the false efficacy claims communicated by brands are not always true. Regardless of purchasing weight loss products or not, they are still aware that the information provided by these brands are deceiving. It can also be seen from this focus group that deceptive weight loss advertisements are more appealing to Generation Z than factual correct weight loss advertisements.

This theme links with the Reasoned Action Theory by Fishbein and Ajzen, 1960, which states that consumers act based on their intention to create or receive a particular outcome, and therefore choose to act in their best interest. If Gen Z are wanting to lose weight, they will decide to purchase a product that claims it will make them lose weight. They are expecting a specific outcome of losing weight and will therefore make the decision to purchase the product as that's what the product states. If marketers are stating false claims that are misleading, Gen Z cannot make an informed decision as their purchase decision process is being distorted (Muris et al, 2003).

Theme 3: *Generation Z's motives for purchasing weight loss products.*

There are numerous reasons as to why Generation Z are wanting to purchase weight loss products such as: not being content with their appearance, impatient,

recommendations from peers, eating disorders, external validation, personal wants and needs, product reviews, advertisements and wanting to fit into society's ideals.

These motives for Gen Z's purchase decision link with the Freudian Motivation Theory (Sigmund Freud, 1928) which states that forces such as desires and motives, shape an individual's purchase behavior. This theory shows that those motives that were identified in the data collection is what draws Gen Z to purchase specific weight loss products by tapping into their conscious and functional needs. For example, needing a product to help an individual lose weight, and the potential feeling of getting external validation (Ganti, 2021).

Theme 4: *Semiotics and visuals that affect Generation Z's purchase behavior.*

It is evident that text and images are the signs and symbols that are influencing Gen Z's purchase decisions with regards to weight loss products. The emotive language on the packaging causes them to be drawn to the product due to the colors and words (signs and symbols) affecting their feelings and influencing their subconscious mind. Respondents identified that images catch their eye and are immediately drawn to the product, and then text is what creates the decision to purchase the product. Appealing images draw Gen Z in more regardless of whether or not the information/images are false or deceiving.

This theme also links with de Saussure's Semiotic theory (1907). The signifier is the object, image or text, for example the image or text on the weight loss product packaging, and the signified would be the mental concept that each viewer experiences, such as the feelings they feel when reading the emotive language or looking at different images/colors (Johnson, 2020).

4.3 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

A good research study is based on trustworthiness of the data, as informed decisions cannot be made when data is not trustworthy. The trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis was presented by credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity (Elo et al, 2014). Two concepts, validity, and reliability are based on the trustworthiness of qualitative data. The validity of the data refers to how accurate and trustworthy the data is (Elo et al, 2014).

The researcher ensured credibility in the research by allowing for possible member checking and included a deep description of data. Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and under different conditions. The researcher made the study dependable by providing transparent reporting of the questionnaires, audio recordings, and transcription of the focus groups, these were made available to the supervisor via Google documents. Conformability refers to the objectivity, that is, the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning. This was done through the inclusion of raw data and research triangulation. Transferability refers to the potential for extrapolation, it relies on the reasoning that findings can be generalized. The study was made transferable by including contextual information about the study methods and participants. Authenticity refers to the extent to which researchers fairly and faithfully show a range of realities (Elo et al, 2014). This was shown by including all opinions and experiences of the sample group.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The research that was conducted through an online focus group and online questionnaire displayed several detailed findings and insights. These insights were unique; however, the majority of the insights were supported by the literature of various authors that were researched in this study, with regards to Generation Z's consumer behavior.

There are eight claims that are not feasible that brands are using on their weight loss products. This fact suggests that deceptive advertising is widespread and is having a huge impact on individuals. This research specifically tried to identify the impact of deceptive advertising within Generation Z's purchase decisions, with regards to weight loss products. Various themes were created in order to answer this research question, and it can be stated that the use of deceptive advertising on weight loss products has a moderate impact on Generation Z's purchase behavior, as Generation Z are educated enough to be aware that they are being subjected to deceptive advertising, however, they claim that they would still purchase these products regardless of whether the claims being communicated are false or not, even knowing they are being subjected to deceiving information.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The conclusions and recommendations of this research study are discussed in this chapter to sum up the key points of the research. The significance of each finding, linked with the various objectives, will be highlighted.

5.2 OBJECTIVE ONE: *The relevance and purpose of deceptive advertising on weight loss products.*

5.2.1 Findings from the research

Deceptive advertising serves a major purpose in the weight loss product market, as it has been clearly identified within this research. It was evident that the use of this marketing tool influences Generation Z's purchase decisions by using appealing texts and images that may or may not be factually correct in order to make a profit. Deceptive advertising creates unattainable goals for individuals through appealing semiotic codes and visuals, making Generation Z feel a sense of motivation and hope.

Participants stated that semiotics used on weight loss products influence their buying decision, even though they are aware of the type of marketing tools that are used to influence them.

5.3 OBJECTIVE TWO: The impact that deceptive advertising has on Generation Z's purchase behaviour.

5.3.1 Findings from research

There was a lack of a deeper understanding around the impact of deceptive advertising on Generation Z from secondary research findings. It was evident that Generation Z are more knowledgeable and prefer transparency from brands, however, little was known whether the marketing tool has an impact on the generation.

From the research conducted, it can be said that deceptive advertising, specifically on weight loss products, have impacted Generation Z's purchase behaviour to a moderate extent. Majority of the population used in this study understand what deceptive advertising is, as well as that they are subject to it. The sample group claimed that they may continue to purchase these products even though they are aware of the side effects, making them aware of deceptive advertising, but still being actively affected by it in terms of purchase decisions. In conclusion, Generation Z have the knowledge to make informed decisions before purchasing weight loss products as they understand and notice deceptive advertising, however, they may be psychologically being influenced through appealing advertisements which may overpower their logical thinking.

5.4 OBJECTIVE THREE: *Generation Z's motives for purchasing weight loss products.*

5.4.1 Findings from research

There are both internal and external motives for Generation Z purchasing weight loss products. Generation Z purchase weight loss products due to their own personal factors such as not being content with their appearance, having eating disorders, wanting external validation, as well as wanting to fit into society's ideals., Generation Z also seem to get impatient with trying to lose weight, therefore wanting a product to speed up their weight loss. Generation Z also purchase weight loss products that they hear about from their peers, displaying the fact that Generation Z purchase weight loss products through word of mouth and reviews, as they trust their peers.

5.5 OBJECTIVE FOUR: Semiotics and visuals that affect Generation Z's purchase behaviour.

5.5.1 Findings from research

From the research conducted, signs and symbols are influencing Generation Z's purchase decisions with regards to weight loss products. The emotive language on the packaging causes them to be drawn to the product due to the colours and words (signs and symbols) affecting their feelings and influencing their subconscious mind. Appealing images draw Generation Z in more regardless of whether the information/images are false or deceiving.

5.6 ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTION

The primary contribution of this research will be to identify the use of deceptive advertising on weight loss products and its impact on Generation Z's purchase behavior specifically. The research study will provide an in-depth understanding of what Generation Z's motives are for purchasing weight products, and whether deceptive advertising of these products influences their purchase behavior. The

research study will also be identifying the visuals and semiotics of weight loss advertisements and product labels, and how they affect Generation Z's buying decisions, therefore gaining insights into Generation Z as a consumer.

By identifying all these factors, both readers and weight loss product brands will be able to benefit from the research conducted. Readers will be able to identify how weight loss product brands are deceiving consumers and prevent them from wasting their time and money on products they would have usually purchased in the past. Weight loss product brands will gain insight into Generation Z's purchase behavior patterns and identify which methods of advertising work best, and whether they need to alter their marketing strategies to a more transparent outlook, rather than deception.

5.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It should be noted that it is vital for this study to be conducted in an ethical way as it influences participants, respondents, researchers, and the academic institution. Within this research, the researcher will be interacting with participants, therefore it is imperative that the researcher does not harm them in any way. The researcher needs to ensure that no harm is being done whether it is in the form of stress, pain, anxiety, diminishing self-esteem or invasion of privacy. For example, the researcher should not display any harmful advertisements within the focus groups that may upset them, as well as ask any personal questions relating to weight loss that may cause offence (Polonski, 2004).

Individuals that are participating in the study will also be given informed consent. Those that are in the focus group will be given consent forms for participation (Annexure A), as well as audio and video consent (Annexure B). Participants will also be made aware of the fact that there is no benefit or risk participating in this study, and their identities will remain confidential throughout the study. They will also be allowed to withdraw from the research study at any time.

5.8 LIMITATIONS

This research study is subject to a few limitations. There are two main categories of limitations, those that result from the methodology, and those that result from issues with the researcher. The first limitation of this study is a shift in conditions due to the global Coronavirus pandemic. This has resulted in the researcher not being able to engage with participants face-to-face. This will affect the nature of the focus groups and the data collection process, as the data collection will be online (Dodds et al, 2020). In addition to this, some participants that have been chosen for focus groups may not have access to electronic platforms and WIFI and will therefore not be able to participate in the study. This creates a limitation of accurate data collection.

Another limitation of this study is time constraints. This research study needs to be completed within this year (2021); therefore, it limits the time available to carry out the data collection and data analysis process. This limitation will hinder the amount of data collected for the purpose of identifying the use of deceptive advertising on weight loss products and its impact on Generation Z's purchase decisions (WordVice, 2021).

In addition to these limitations, there may be an issue with the sample group and selection. The sample chosen may not necessarily reflect the general population or the population concerned as the researcher may have "sample bias" (WordVice, 2021). As the researcher is choosing the sample from her personal peer groups, as he or she may have limited ability to gain access to the appropriate type of participants.

5.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The weight loss product market is a 33-billion-dollar industry (World Health Organization, 2020), paired with the doubling of world-wide obesity since 1980, creates a plethora of individuals who want to lose weight, but do not particularly know how to (Cawley et al, 2013). This results in individuals looking for weight loss products, thus being drawn in by deceptive advertising by companies who promote false claims. Brands are becoming misleading by creating false efficacy claims through their product labelling and advertisements, resulting in consumers' behaviour being altered through tools such as visuals and semiotic codes.

This research study showed that although deceptive advertising does have an impact on the general consumer, the impact that deceptive advertising has, specifically with weight loss products, on Generation Z, is only moderate. This is due to their extensive knowledge, especially with brands and marketing tools being the technology natives that they are. However, individuals are still affected by semiotic codes and signs, as well as deceptive tools such as emotive language, and will therefore continue to purchase weight loss products, even though they are aware that they are being deceived by the brand.

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ANNEXURE A: CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Kristi Hamann, and I am a student at Vega School. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Clive Greenstone about Deceptive Advertising on weight loss products and its impact on Generation Z's purchase behaviour. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of what motivates Generation Z's purchasing behaviour patterns with regards to deceptive advertising. 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 your opinions will help me gain deep insights into your experience and opinions. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct a focus group where you express your experiences and opinions on weight loss products. 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 own experiences. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Vega School will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my **BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication**. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Kristi Hamann

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Clive Greenstone

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by **Kristi Hamann** about **Deceptive Advertising with regards to weight loss products and its impact on Generation Z's purchase behaviour**.

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

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- 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

ANNEXURE B: CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Kristi Hamann to audio record my interviews as part of the research about Deceptive Advertising with regards to weight loss products and its impact on Generation Z's purchase behaviour. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE C: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Pictures to give context will be shown in the introduction to familiarize individuals participating with what type of weight loss products that will be mentioned such as fat burners and weight loss pills.

1. Have you purchased weight loss products before such as weight loss pills, fat burners, appetite suppressants, teas/drinks, or others? Please name what you have purchased.
2. What are your reasons for purchasing or wanting to purchase weight loss products?
3. Did you purchase these products more than once? Please explain why or why not.
4. Do you believe that the packaging of weight loss products influences your buying decisions, with regards to text and visuals on the product packaging?
 - How?
 - Why?
5. Do you believe that weight loss products work? If you think they do not, would you still purchase them?
6. Which product appeals to you more in terms of packaging?

- Why?

Product A:



Figure 1: Product A

Product B:



Figure 2: Product B

7. Which advertisement appeals to you more in terms of the text and visuals?
- Why?

Advertisement A:



Figure 3: Advertisement A

Advertisement B:



Figure 4: Advertisement B

8. Which advertisement appeals to you more, and which do you believe is more accurate?

Advertisement A:



Figure 5: Advertisement A

Advertisement B:



Figure 6: Advertisement B

9. Do before and after photos on either the packaging or the advertisement has an effect on your purchasing decision?
- Why?



Figure 7: Before & After

10. From these pictures, would you say that text or images are more influential when it comes to product labels and advertisements?
- Why?

ANNEXURE C: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How old are you? If you are not within these categories, please refrain from completing the questionnaire.

☐ 18-20

☐ 21-23

☐ 24-26

2. Have you purchased weight loss products before? If not, why?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Because:

3. From the previous question, if you selected no, please give your reasoning as to why you have not.

4. What types of weight loss products have you purchased?

☐ Fat burners

☐ Weight loss pills

☐ Appetite Suppressants

☐ Teas/Drinks

5. Which of the following factors affect your purchase decision of weight loss products?

☐ Personal wants and needs.

☐ Advertisements of weight loss products

☐ Pop Culture trends

☐ Product reviews

☐ A health professional's recommendation

☐ Recommendations from peers

6. Have weight loss products worked for you?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

7. Are you aware of deceptive advertising?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Unsure

8. If yes, please provide a brief explanation of what you think it is.

9. Do you believe you have been subjected to deceptive advertising in terms of purchasing weight loss products?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

10. If you have been subjected to deceptive advertising, how were you deceived?

11. Are you aware of the false efficacy claims that weight loss products communicate on their packaging/advertisements?

☐ Yes

☐ No

12. Are you aware of the side effects of weight loss products?

☐ Yes

☐ No

13. What side effects have you personally experienced?

14. Would you still consider purchasing weight loss products if you knew that the claims stated by the brand are not always 100% true, as well as are aware of the side effects? If so, why?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. If you answered yes in the previous question, please explain why you would continue to purchase these products.

ANNEXURE D: VEGA ETHICS CHECKLIST



Vega Ethics checklist: RESE8419/p/w

Student Details												
Title	Prof	☐	Dr	☐	Ms	☒	Mrs	☐	Mr	☐	Mx	☐
First name(s)	Kristi											
Last name(s)	Hamann											
Title of study	Research (RESE8419)											
Qualification	BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication											

Supervisor Details												
Title	Prof	☐	Dr	☒	Ms	☐	Mrs	☐	Mr	☐	Mx	☐
First and last Names	Clive Greenstone											

Co-supervisor Details (if applicable)												
Title	Prof	☐	Dr	☐	Ms	☐	Mrs	☒	Mr	☐	Mx	☐
First and last Names	Corolanda Du Toit											

Explaining your research process						
Philosophical Paradigm	Positivism	☐	Interpretivism	☒	Constructivism	☐
	Realism	☐	Objectivism	☐	Pragmatism	☐
	Functionalism	☐	Subjectivism	☐	Humanist	☐
Other:						

Research design:	Interview	☐	Questionnaire (self administered)	☒	Focus group	☒
	Ethnography/ Observation	☐	Artefact analysis/website/ social media analysis	☐	Action Research	☐
	Case Study	☐	Design Research (Practice based)	☐		☐
	Other (if so, state)	☐	Click or tap here to enter text.			
Brief explanation of the population and number of participants/items	3 males and 3 females between ages of 18 and 26 interested in health and fitness for focus group. 50 participants for questionnaire between ages 18 and 26 interested in health and fitness.					
Target group sampling methods/artefact (No under 18's or vulnerable groups allowed)	Purposive	☒	Random	☐	Snowball	☐
	Convenient	☐	Stratified	☐	Census	...
	Explain selection Process		Individuals that I know personally that are interested in fitness and health will be chosen for the focus groups. I will be sending out the questionnaire on fitness/health facebook groups.			

Ethics		
Documentation submitted with proposal	Gatekeeper's letter (institutional consent)	☐
	Completed Annexure E if you conduct research on IIE sites/students/staff	☐
	Instrument(s) (interview schedule or questionnaire)	☒
	Participant or respondent consent form	☒
	Audio-visual consent form (if applicable)	☒

Campus ethics committee recommendation

Proposal has been reviewed by the supervisor and necessary ethics considerations have been included. ☐ Accepted as is and provide letter ☐ Accepted with provisions: Nature of provision: e.g. Instrument is not sufficient / included and need to be signed off by the supervisor ☐ Major issues: Student should not continue with fieldwork. Actions to be taken: Click or tap here to enter text.	
Supervisor signature	
	2021/07/06
Co-supervisor/Campus ethics panel member signature	
	2021/07/06

ANNEXURE E: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Date: 04/07/2021

Student name: Kristi Hamann

Student number: 

Campus: Durban

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: Clive Greenstone

Signature:

Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC): Carolanda Du Toit



Signature:

6 July 2021

ANNEXURE F: CONCEPT TABLE

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
Identify what impact deceptive advertising has on Gen Z's purchase decisions in terms of weight loss products by assessing the use of semiotics	The impact deceptive advertising on weight loss products has on Gen Z's purchase decisions	Deceptive advertising is rampant. 8 false claims that brands use to mislead consumers. Not much Research done on Gen Z.	Mohammed T. Nuseir Muris, et al. Chang, C.	Theme 1: The Relevance and Purpose of Deceptive Advertising in Marketing and Weight Loss Products Theme 2: Consumers' Motives for Purchasing Weight Loss Products Theme 3: The Impact that False Advertising has on Consumer Purchase Behaviour Theme 4: Gen Z Purchase Behaviour Theme 5: The Role that Semiotics Play in Advertising.	Paradigm Interpretivism Epistemology Generate deeper insights around the topic Ontology The reality is subjective and socially constructed, one product may be deceptive to one person but not the other.	Qualitative Exploratory	focus groups and online questionnaires	Informed consent, do no harm, confidentiality, and anonymity	Deep insights into the factors that affect Generation Z's purchase behaviour for weight loss products	https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/deception-weight-loss-advertising-workshop-seizing-opportunities-and-building-partnerships-stop/031209weightlossrpt.pdf https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328067596_Impact_of_misleadingfalse_advertisement_to_consumer_behaviour_International_Journal_of_Economics_and_Business_Research_2018_Vol16_No4_pp453-465 https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/7247/the-effect-of-deceptive-advertising-on-consumption-of-the-advertised-good-and-its-substitutes-the-case-of-over-the-counter-weight-loss-products
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Population				
						Male and female Generation Z. Ages 18-26.				
						Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution	
There are currently eight claims that are not feasible Deceptive advertising is in fact widespread and is having an impact on individuals.	Secondary Questions: What impact does deceptive advertising have on Generation Z's purchase behavior? What are Generation Z's motives for purchasing weight loss products? What semiotics are being used to effect Generation Z's purchase behavior?	Deceptive and misleading advertising The weight loss product market Generation Z Visuals and semiotics	The Freudian Motivation Theory (Sigmund Freud, 1923). Semiotic Theory (de Saussure, 1907). Reasoned Action Theory (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1960).		Axiology This study is aiming to understand what makes a product deceptive	Non-probability	Unit of Analysis <i>Gen Z</i>	Population characteristics, research environment, data collection method Cultural bias, personal bias, time constraints	More knowledge on what makes advertising deceptive and how it can affect purchase decisions using misleading visuals and semiotics	
						Sampling method Quota sampling	Data Analysis Method(s) Thematic content analysis			
					Size 52 respondents 6 participants					