

Brand Authenticity, Social Media Marketing and Consumer Loyalty Among Gen Z: Evidence from The Nigerian Consumer Goods Sector

Garba Blessed¹, Christy Modupe Oyelola² & Agada Gloria Asabe³

¹Department of Business Administration and

² & ³ Marketing College of Business and Management Studies (CBMS), Kaduna Polytechnic.

E-Mail: blessedgarba@kadunapolytechnic.edu.ng

Abstract

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has reshaped consumer behavior globally, with Generation Z emerging as a pivotal demographic in the marketplace. In Nigeria's consumer goods sector, Gen Z consumers are highly active on social media platforms, where they interact with brands, evaluate authenticity, and form loyalty patterns. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z places a premium on transparency, cultural relevance, and meaningful engagement, making brand authenticity a critical determinant of consumer loyalty. This study investigates the relationship between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria, focusing on how platform-specific strategies influence consumer perceptions and behaviors. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. Out of 300 distributed questionnaires, 250 valid responses were analyzed, complemented by 20 in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that authenticity is the strongest predictor of loyalty, with transparency, trustworthiness, and cultural relevance being highly valued attributes. Instagram emerged as the most effective platform for fostering authenticity and advocacy, TikTok excelled in emotional connection and relatability, while Twitter was less effective in building deep loyalty. These results confirm that loyalty among Gen Z is platform-specific and shaped by both authenticity and engagement strategies. The study supports global theories such as Brand Authenticity, Commitment-Trust, and Uses and Gratifications, while also highlighting contextual differences in Nigeria. Unlike Western contexts where Twitter plays a stronger role, Nigerian Gen Z consumers prioritize visual and interactive platforms. The findings underscore the need for firms to embed authenticity into their digital strategies and tailor approaches to the unique expectations of Gen Z. Policy implications include the need for investment in digital infrastructure to sustain social media engagement, regulatory frameworks that promote transparency and protect consumers, and incentives for cultural branding that reflect Nigerian identity. By addressing these systemic factors, policymakers can create an enabling environment for firms to build sustainable loyalty among Gen Z. This study contributes to both academic discourse and practical strategies, offering insights for managers, marketers, and regulators navigating the complexities of digital engagement in emerging markets.

Keywords: Authenticity, Consumer Goods, Consumer Loyalty, Gen Z, Nigeria, Social Media Marketing.

Introduction

The consumer goods sector in Nigeria has become increasingly competitive, driven by globalization, digital transformation, and the growing influence of Generation Z (Gen Z). As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are highly active on social media platforms, where they interact with brands, share experiences, and

form perceptions that directly influence their purchasing decisions (Smith, 2017; Boateng, 2022). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z places a premium on authenticity, transparency, and meaningful engagement, making brand authenticity a critical determinant of consumer loyalty (Napoli et al., 2014; Morhart et al., 2015).

Social media marketing has emerged as a dominant strategy for firms seeking to connect with Gen Z. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter provide opportunities for brands to showcase their values, engage directly with consumers, and build communities around their products (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on the perceived authenticity of the brand. When consumers believe that a brand genuinely represents its values and delivers on its promises, they are more likely to develop trust and loyalty (Bruhn et al., 2012; Schallehn et al., 2014). Conversely, perceived inauthenticity can lead to disengagement and reputational damage (Okonkwo, 2020; Adeola & Eze, 2021).

In Nigeria, the consumer goods sector faces unique challenges and opportunities. High mobile internet penetration and widespread social media use have created fertile ground for digital marketing strategies (Adebayo, 2021; Eze & Chinedu, 2022). Yet, cultural expectations and economic realities shape consumer perceptions differently than in Western contexts. Nigerian Gen Z consumers often expect brands to reflect local identity, demonstrate social responsibility, and engage authentically with their communities (Adeola & Eze, 2021; Okonkwo, 2020). This makes authenticity not just a marketing buzzword but a strategic necessity for sustaining loyalty.

Despite the growing importance of these dynamics, there is limited empirical evidence on how brand authenticity and social media marketing jointly influence consumer loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria's consumer goods sector. Most existing studies focus on Western markets, leaving a gap in understanding the African context (Bruhn et al., 2012; Ashley & Tuten, 2015). This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the interplay between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty among Gen Z consumers in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian consumer goods sector is undergoing rapid transformation, influenced by globalization, digitalization, and the rise of Generation Z as a dominant consumer group. Gen Z, often described as

digital natives, interacts with brands primarily through social media platforms. Unlike previous generations, they demand authenticity, transparency, and meaningful engagement from the brands they support. This shift has created both opportunities and challenges for companies operating in Nigeria's consumer goods industry.

While social media marketing has become a powerful tool for reaching Gen Z, its effectiveness is closely tied to perceptions of brand authenticity. Brands that fail to project genuine values or that appear inconsistent in their messaging risk losing credibility and consumer trust. At the same time, loyalty among Gen Z is fragile; they are quick to disengage from brands that do not align with their expectations. Despite the growing importance of these dynamics, there is limited empirical evidence on how brand authenticity and social media marketing jointly influence consumer loyalty in Nigeria. Most existing studies focus on Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the unique cultural and economic realities of Nigerian consumers.

This lack of context-specific research creates uncertainty for managers and policymakers. Firms struggle to determine which strategies resonate most with Gen Z, while policymakers lack insights into how digital engagement shapes consumer behavior in emerging markets. Addressing this problem is critical, as consumer loyalty directly impacts profitability, brand sustainability, and competitive advantage in the Nigerian consumer goods sector.

Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria's consumer goods sector. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Investigate how perceptions of brand authenticity influence consumer loyalty among Gen Z.
- ii. Assess the role of social media marketing strategies in shaping brand-consumer relationships.

- iii. Compare the effectiveness of different social media platforms in fostering loyalty.

Based on these objectives, the study will address the following research questions:

- i. How does brand authenticity affect consumer loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria's consumer goods sector?
- ii. What role does social media marketing play in reinforcing or undermining brand authenticity?
- iii. Which social media platforms are most effective in building loyalty among Gen Z consumers?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on brand authenticity and consumer loyalty by providing evidence from Nigeria, a developing economy where cultural and infrastructural factors shape consumer behavior differently than in advanced markets. By focusing on Gen Z, the research highlights the future of consumer behavior in Nigeria, as this demographic will increasingly dominate purchasing decisions in the coming years.

Second, the study offers practical guidance to managers in the consumer goods sector. Understanding how authenticity and social media marketing influence loyalty will enable firms to design strategies that resonate with Gen Z, strengthen brand-consumer relationships, and sustain competitive advantage. For example, firms can learn how to craft authentic narratives, engage meaningfully on social media, and build trust that translates into long-term loyalty.

Third, the findings will inform policymakers and regulators. As digital marketing becomes more pervasive, there is a need for policies that protect consumers while encouraging innovation. Insights from this study can help policymakers understand the dynamics of digital engagement and develop frameworks that support both consumer rights and business growth.

Finally, the study has broader societal implications. By promoting authenticity and meaningful engagement, firms can foster healthier consumer-brand relationships, reduce skepticism toward marketing, and

contribute to a more transparent marketplace. For Gen Z, this means greater trust in brands and more positive consumer experiences. For society, it means stronger economic growth driven by sustainable business practices.

In sum, this research bridges academic inquiry with practical relevance, offering insights that will benefit scholars, managers, policymakers, and consumers alike. It addresses a critical gap in knowledge while providing actionable strategies for navigating the complexities of brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty in Nigeria's consumer goods sector.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Brand authenticity and consumer loyalty can be explained through several theoretical lenses. The Brand Authenticity Theory emphasizes that consumers, particularly Gen Z, value brands that are genuine, transparent, and consistent in their messaging (Napoli et al., 2014; Morhart et al., 2015). The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing suggests that trust and commitment are central to building long-term loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Meanwhile, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains how Gen Z engages with social media platforms to satisfy needs for entertainment, information, and social interaction, making these platforms critical for marketing strategies (Katz et al., 1973; Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity has become a key driver of consumer loyalty, especially among younger demographics. Research shows that Gen Z consumers are skeptical of traditional advertising and instead seek brands that align with their values and demonstrate honesty (Bruhn et al., 2012; Schallehn et al., 2014). In Nigeria's consumer goods sector, authenticity is increasingly tied to cultural relevance and social responsibility, as consumers expect brands to reflect local identity and contribute positively to society (Okonkwo, 2020; Adeola & Eze, 2021).

Social Media Marketing

Social media platforms have revolutionized marketing by enabling direct engagement between brands and consumers. Studies indicate that interactive content, influencer collaborations, and user-generated campaigns enhance brand authenticity and loyalty (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). For Gen Z, platforms like Instagram and TikTok are not just communication tools but spaces where brand identity is evaluated and reinforced (Smith, 2017; Boateng, 2022). In Nigeria, social media marketing has become a dominant strategy for consumer goods firms, given the high penetration of mobile internet and the digital orientation of Gen Z (Adebayo, 2021; Eze & Chinedu, 2022).

Consumer Loyalty

Consumer loyalty is shaped by trust, satisfaction, and emotional connection with brands (Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Authenticity and social media engagement play critical roles in fostering loyalty among Gen Z, who are more likely to remain committed to brands that resonate with their values and provide interactive experiences (Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). Nigerian studies highlight that loyalty in the consumer goods sector is increasingly influenced by digital presence and perceived authenticity (Adeola & Eze, 2021; Boateng, 2022).

Empirical Review

Empirical evidence consistently shows that brand authenticity and social media marketing are central to building consumer loyalty among Gen Z. In Nigeria, Mazeli (2025) demonstrated that interactive content, real-time communication, and user-generated campaigns significantly enhance loyalty in online retail, highlighting responsiveness as a key driver. Similarly, Ekanem and Nwagbara (2025) found that influencer authenticity and cultural resonance strongly shape purchasing decisions among Gen Z, while Oranusi (2025) reported that influencer credibility has a very high positive relationship with brand trust in Awka Metropolis. Adeola and Eze (2021) confirmed that authenticity predicts loyalty in Nigeria's consumer goods sector, emphasizing cultural relevance as a determinant. Okonkwo (2020) reinforced this by

showing that Nigerian consumers expect brands to reflect local identity, linking cultural branding directly to loyalty.

Eze and Chinedu (2022) observed that digital marketing adoption enhances engagement but authenticity remains the differentiating factor for loyalty. Globally, Ashley and Tuten (2015) found that creative social media strategies increase engagement and loyalty, while Bruhn et al. (2012) developed a framework showing that continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism predict consumer trust. Morhart et al. (2015) expanded this by creating a measurement scale linking authenticity to attachment and loyalty, and Napoli et al. (2014) confirmed that perceived authenticity strengthens brand attachment. Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) highlighted that influencer credibility drives trust among Gen Z, while Smith (2017) reported that Gen Z relies heavily on social media for brand evaluation, making authenticity critical. Boateng (2022) found that engagement strategies on Instagram and TikTok significantly enhance loyalty among Gen Z. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) demonstrated that brand trust and affect lead to loyalty, and Oliver (1999) emphasized loyalty as a multi-stage process influenced by satisfaction and trust, both strengthened by authenticity and social media engagement.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite growing scholarship, gaps remain in understanding the interplay between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria. Most studies focus on Western contexts, with limited empirical evidence from African consumer goods markets (Bruhn et al., 2012; Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Furthermore, while global research emphasizes influencer marketing and digital engagement, few studies explore how cultural authenticity and local identity shape Gen Z loyalty in Nigeria (Okonkwo, 2020; Adebayo, 2021). This study addresses these gaps by providing context-specific insights into the Nigerian consumer goods sector.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty among Gen Z. The quantitative component allows for statistical measurement of the strength and direction of relationships between variables, while the qualitative component provides deeper insights into consumer perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences. This design ensures that numerical data is complemented by contextual narratives, enhancing the validity of the findings.

The population of the study consists of Gen Z consumers in Nigeria who actively engage with brands in the consumer goods sector through social media platforms. The sample was drawn using a purposive sampling technique to target individuals within the age range of 18–27 years, as they represent the core of Gen Z. To ensure diversity, respondents were selected across major urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, where social media penetration and consumer goods consumption are highest. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, with a target of at least 250 valid responses to provide sufficient statistical power. In addition, 20 participants were selected for in-depth interviews to capture qualitative insights.

Data collection was conducted using surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis. The survey instrument consisted of structured questionnaires designed to measure perceptions of brand authenticity,

exposure to social media marketing strategies, and indicators of consumer loyalty such as repeat purchase intention and brand advocacy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected Gen Z consumers to explore their experiences with brands on social media, perceptions of authenticity, and factors influencing loyalty. Secondary data, including industry reports and social media analytics, were reviewed to provide additional context and validate primary findings.

Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and general trends, while inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, were employed to test hypotheses and examine relationships between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty. Comparative analysis was conducted to identify differences across demographic subgroups and social media platforms. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to authenticity, engagement, and loyalty. Triangulation of survey, interview, and secondary data enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results
Presentation of Data

Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 268 were returned, with 250 valid responses used for analysis. This represents an effective response rate of 83.3%. In addition, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted to provide qualitative insights.

Table 1: Response Rate

Distributed	Returned	Valid Responses	Response Rate
300	268	250	83.3%

Source: Researchers Computations through SPSS, 2026

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Platform Usage

Platform	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Instagram	110	44.0
TikTok	85	34.0

Platform	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Twitter	55	22.0
Total	250	100

Source: Researchers Computations through SPSS, 2026

Table 3: Perceptions of Brand Authenticity (Mean Scores)

Indicator	Instagram	TikTok	Twitter
Transparency	4.2 / 5	4.0 / 5	3.8 / 5
Consistency	4.1 / 5	3.9 / 5	3.7 / 5
Cultural Relevance	4.3 / 5	4.1 / 5	3.6 / 5
Trustworthiness	4.0 / 5	3.8 / 5	3.7 / 5

Source: Researchers Computations through SPSS, 2026

Table 4: Impact on Consumer Loyalty (Mean Scores)

Indicator	Instagram	TikTok	Twitter
Repeat Purchase Intent	4.1 / 5	4.0 / 5	3.6 / 5
Brand Advocacy	4.2 / 5	4.1 / 5	3.7 / 5
Emotional Connection	4.0 / 5	3.9 / 5	3.5 / 5

Source: Researchers Computations through SPSS, 2026

The findings reveal that Instagram is the most effective platform for fostering perceptions of brand authenticity and loyalty among Gen Z. Respondents rated Instagram highest in transparency, cultural relevance, and advocacy. TikTok followed closely, with strong scores in cultural relevance and emotional connection, reflecting its appeal through creative and entertaining content. Twitter scored lower across most indicators, suggesting that while it remains useful for information sharing, it is less effective in building deep loyalty among Gen Z consumers. Qualitative interviews reinforced these findings. Participants emphasized that Instagram provides a more visual and interactive space for brands to demonstrate authenticity, while TikTok's short-form videos create relatability and entertainment value. Twitter was described as more transactional, with limited emotional engagement compared to other platforms.

Discussion of Results

The results of this study demonstrate that brand authenticity and social media marketing are critical drivers of consumer loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria's consumer goods sector. Instagram emerged as the most effective platform for fostering transparency, cultural relevance, and advocacy, while TikTok excelled in emotional connection and relatability. Twitter, although useful for information dissemination, was less effective in building strong loyalty. These findings confirm that loyalty among Gen Z is platform-specific and authenticity remains the strongest predictor of sustained engagement.

The findings strongly support the Brand Authenticity Theory, which emphasizes that consumers value brands that are genuine, transparent, and consistent (Napoli et al., 2014; Morhart et al., 2015). The high ratings for transparency and cultural relevance on Instagram confirm that authenticity drives loyalty, consistent with Adeola and Eze (2021), who found that authenticity significantly predicts loyalty in Nigeria's

consumer goods sector. Similarly, the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing is reinforced by the finding that influencer credibility and brand trust are strongly linked to loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Gen Z respondents demonstrated higher repeat purchase intentions and advocacy when they perceived brands as trustworthy and authentic, echoing Oranusi (2025), who reported a strong relationship between influencer credibility and brand trust among Gen Z in Awka Metropolis.

The results also align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains how consumers use media to satisfy needs for entertainment, information, and social interaction (Katz et al., 1973). TikTok's strength in emotional connection reflects its role in providing entertainment and relatability, consistent with Boateng (2022), who found that engagement strategies on TikTok and Instagram significantly enhance loyalty among Gen Z. Similarly, Mazeli (2025) showed that interactive content and user-generated campaigns enhance loyalty in Nigeria's online retail sector, supporting the present study's emphasis on responsiveness and engagement.

However, the findings challenge some earlier studies. Research in Western contexts often positions Twitter as a powerful tool for brand engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015), yet this study found it less effective in Nigeria. This divergence suggests that cultural and contextual factors shape platform effectiveness. While global literature emphasizes influencer marketing as universally effective (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019), Nigerian Gen Z consumers appear more discerning, valuing authenticity and cultural resonance over mere popularity, as highlighted by Ekanem and Nwagbara (2025). This indicates that strategies successful in Western markets may not directly translate to Nigeria without adaptation. This study contributes to the literature by confirming that authenticity and social media engagement are critical for loyalty, while also revealing sector-specific and cultural nuances. It demonstrates that while global theories hold explanatory power, their application must be adapted to local realities. For Nigerian consumer goods firms, the implication is clear: authenticity must be embedded in digital strategies, and platform choice should reflect Gen Z consumers' unique expectations.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the interplay between brand authenticity, social media marketing, and consumer loyalty among Gen Z in Nigeria's consumer goods sector. The findings revealed that authenticity is the most critical determinant of loyalty, with transparency, cultural relevance, and trustworthiness being highly valued by Gen Z consumers. Instagram was identified as the most effective platform for fostering authenticity and advocacy, TikTok excelled in emotional connection and relatability; while Twitter was less effective in building strong loyalty. These results confirm that Gen Z loyalty is platform-specific and shaped by both authenticity and engagement strategies. The study supports global theories such as Brand Authenticity, Commitment-Trust, and Uses and Gratifications, while also highlighting contextual differences in Nigeria. Unlike Western contexts where Twitter plays a stronger role, Nigerian Gen Z consumers prioritize visual and interactive platforms. The findings underscore the need for firms to embed authenticity into their digital strategies and tailor approaches to the unique expectations of Gen Z.

The findings of this study carry important implications for policymakers and regulators in Nigeria.

- i. **Digital Infrastructure Development:** Reliable internet connectivity and affordable data access are essential for sustaining social media engagement. Policymakers should prioritize investments in broadband expansion and digital infrastructure to ensure that brands can effectively reach Gen Z consumers.
- ii. **Consumer Protection and Transparency Regulations:** Regulatory bodies should establish clear guidelines that require brands to demonstrate transparency in their digital marketing practices. Policies that discourage misleading advertising and promote authenticity will protect consumers and strengthen trust in the marketplace.
- iii. **Support for Local Content and Cultural Branding:** Government agencies should encourage consumer goods firms to integrate cultural relevance into their branding strategies. Incentives for local content creation and

culturally authentic campaigns can enhance consumer loyalty while promoting Nigerian identity.

- iv. Capacity Building for Digital Marketing Professionals: Training programs and certifications in digital marketing should be supported by policymakers to ensure that professionals are equipped with skills to design authentic, platform-specific strategies. This will enhance industry standards and improve consumer engagement outcomes.

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