

# How Marketing Ethics Drives Customer Loyalty Through Consumer Empowerment in the Skincare Industry

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the effect of marketing ethics on customer loyalty with consumer empowerment as a mediating variable in the skincare industry. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this research adopts a quantitative approach using survey data collected from 206 respondents who have used skincare products. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate both measurement and structural models. The results indicate that marketing ethics has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty and consumer empowerment, while consumer empowerment also significantly influences customer loyalty. Furthermore, consumer empowerment is found to act as a complementary mediator, suggesting that ethical marketing strengthens loyalty both directly and indirectly by enhancing consumers' sense of autonomy and control. These findings highlight the importance of transparency, honesty, and responsible communication in fostering long-term customer relationships. In conclusion, ethical marketing practices not only strengthen customer-brand relationships but also empower consumers, ultimately leading to sustainable customer loyalty.*

**Keywords:** Marketing Ethics; Consumer Empowerment; Customer Loyalty; Skincare Industry; Self-Determination Theory

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has fundamentally transformed various aspects of human life, particularly in business and marketing practices (Azizah et al., 2022; Herrero-Crespo, 2022; Yu et al., 2025). Digitalization and globalization have reshaped communication patterns, consumer interactions, and lifestyles, leading to increasingly competitive markets (Buhalis et al., 2023; Mugoni et al., 2023). In such an environment, firms are required not only to deliver high-quality innovations but also to build trust and sustain long-term relationships with consumers (Gazi et al., 2024). Individual behavioral changes and lifestyle dynamics play a crucial role in determining business sustainability (Lee et al., 2021; van Riel et al., 2021), while technological progress continuously reshapes consumer needs and expectations (Alexander & Kent, 2022; Kumar & Shankar, 2024).

One industry significantly affected by these shifts is the beauty sector, particularly the skincare market. Although the global beauty industry experienced a decline of approximately 8% during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it has shown strong recovery, with projected revenues expected to exceed \$703 billion by 2026 (Howarth, 2026). This recovery is accompanied by evolving consumer behavior. Consumers are no longer limited to basic skincare routines but have adopted more complex practices such as skincare layering, involving multiple products including cleansers, toners, serums, essences, sunscreens, moisturizers, and night creams. This trend reflects a growing awareness of self-care and personal well-being among consumers.

Recent data further indicate that purchasing behavior in the skincare segment is relatively frequent and habitual (Handayani, 2025). A significant proportion of consumers purchase skincare products monthly (33%) or every two to three months (26%), while others purchase based on product depletion or promotional incentives. Nevertheless, a segment of the population (13%) still does not use

skincare products, indicating untapped market potential. These patterns highlight both the intensity of competition and the opportunities for firms to capture and retain customers in this expanding market.

As competition intensifies, companies are not only required to ensure product quality and safety but also to adopt responsible marketing practices (Laczniak & Murphy, 2019). Marketing ethics has emerged as a critical determinant of brand success, particularly in building trust and long-term customer relationships (Kamila & Jasrotia, 2023). Marketing ethics refers to the application of moral principles and standards to ensure that marketing activities are conducted fairly, responsibly, and without causing harm to consumers (Ikonomou et al., 2023). Ethical marketing practices emphasize honesty, transparency, and consumer welfare, which are increasingly important as modern consumers become more informed and socially aware. Conversely, unethical practices—such as exaggerated claims, misleading advertisements, and the promotion of unrealistic beauty standards—can severely damage brand reputation and negatively affect long-term performance (Satrio et al., 2023).

The relevance of marketing ethics is particularly evident in the skincare industry, where product claims directly influence consumer trust. A recent case involving five brands attracted public attention due to allegations of overclaiming in its promotional content (Salsabila, 2024). Laboratory testing indicated discrepancies between advertised and actual product composition, particularly regarding the concentration of active ingredients (Rahmawati & Permana, 2025). Such inconsistencies raised concerns about the credibility of marketing messages and highlighted the risks associated with unethical promotional practices (Lim et al., 2023). The case further triggered widespread consumer dissatisfaction, as reflected in negative reviews and critical discussions on social media platforms. These responses demonstrate how ethical violations can lead to a substantial erosion of trust, diminished repurchase intentions, and ultimately, weakened customer loyalty (Oh et al., 2023).

In the digital era, consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages (Shirisha, 2018). Instead, they actively seek, evaluate, and share information through various online platforms (Jiang & Stylos, 2021). This shift is conceptualized as consumer empowerment, defined as a positive psychological state arising from increased control over decision-making processes (Mishra, 2021). Furthermore, consumer empowerment involves enhancing individuals' capabilities to achieve their goals through access to information and participation in market interactions (Gegen tana et al., 2024). Platforms such as online review communities enable consumers to exchange experiences, assess product effectiveness, and make more informed decisions.

As digital platforms continue to expand, online reviews have become an essential informational resource guiding consumer decision-making process, with approximately 97% of consumers engaging with reviews before making a purchase. Notably, in 2026, 41% of consumers reported that they “always” read reviews when evaluating businesses, representing a substantial increase from 29% in the previous year. This sharp rise indicates a growing reliance on peer-generated content, suggesting that digital word-of-mouth is not only pervasive but increasingly influential. Consequently, businesses must prioritize review management and online reputation strategies, as consumer trust and purchase intentions are increasingly shaped by the visibility, credibility, and valence of online feedback (Murphy, 2026). Self-Determination Theory (SDT), formulated by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, has emerged as a leading framework for understanding the motivational processes that govern human behavior and decision-making across numerous disciplines, including marketing and consumer research. Self-Determination Theory maintains that individuals are naturally driven toward self-development, integration, and optimal functioning, and that these outcomes are facilitated through the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

A central premise of SDT is that the quality of motivation matters more than its quantity. Specifically, intrinsically motivated behaviors—those driven by internal values, enjoyment, or personal endorsement—are more persistent, stable, and associated with positive outcomes compared to extrinsically motivated behaviors, which rely on external rewards or pressures. In consumption contexts, this distinction is critical, as it explains why some customer–brand relationships evolve into long-term loyalty while others remain transactional and short-lived.

Within marketing literature, SDT has increasingly been used to explain how firm-controlled factors can shape internal consumer motivations (Frank & Kohn, 2023; Kelley & Alden, 2016; Rai & Narwal, 2025). In particular, marketing practices that support psychological need satisfaction are more

likely to generate meaningful engagement and sustainable behavioral outcomes (Tweneboah-Koduah et al., 2022; Yeh et al., 2025). Self-Determination Theory proposes that individuals are more likely to exhibit sustained motivation when the essential psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfactorily fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Ethical marketing practices foster a sense of relatedness by creating trust and fairness in firm–consumer relationships (Liu et al., 2021). Simultaneously, consumer empowerment reflects the fulfillment of autonomy and competence, as consumers gain greater control and understanding in their decision-making processes (Chen et al., 2023). When these psychological needs are satisfied, consumers are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, which translates into stronger and more enduring customer loyalty.

Despite extensive research on marketing ethics and customer loyalty, the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining how ethical marketing translates into loyalty remain insufficiently understood, particularly in the skincare industry. Previous studies have largely focused on trust, satisfaction, and perceived value as mediating variables, while limited attention has been given to consumer empowerment as a self-determined psychological outcome. Furthermore, empirical evidence from emerging markets such as Indonesia remains scarce. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining consumer empowerment as a mediating mechanism linking marketing ethics and customer loyalty within the context of the skincare industry.

This study extends this perspective by positioning Marketing Ethics (El-Sherbiny et al., 2022; Laczniaik & Murphy, 2019) and Consumer Empowerment (Cambier & Poncin, 2020; Gegen tana et al., 2024) as key drivers of need satisfaction, ultimately influencing Customer Loyalty. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study advances a conceptual framework that seeks to explain how Marketing Ethics fosters Customer Loyalty through both direct effects and indirect effects operating via Consumer Empowerment.

The framework assumes that marketing activities are not merely transactional but also psychological in nature. Consistent with SDT, the present study contends that consumer behavioral outcomes are shaped by firms' capacity to nurture and satisfy individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

First, Marketing Ethics is positioned as an exogenous construct that directly influences both Customer Loyalty and Consumer empowerment. Ethical marketing practices—such as transparency, honesty, and fairness—create a trustworthy environment that fulfills consumers' need for relatedness, as they feel respected and valued by the firm. This psychological connection encourages the development of a positive emotional bond, which directly enhances customer loyalty.

Second, Marketing Ethics also plays an indirect role by fostering Consumer Empowerment. When firms provide clear, accurate, and accessible information, consumers become more capable of evaluating alternatives and making independent decisions. In line with SDT, this reflects the fulfillment of autonomy (freedom of choice) and competence (perceived ability to make effective decisions). As a result, ethical marketing practices enhance consumers' sense of control and confidence in the consumption process.

Third, Consumer Empowerment is conceptualized as a mediating variable that translates ethical marketing practices into stronger Customer Loyalty. Empowered customers are more actively engaged, more confident in their choices, and more emotionally connected to the brand. From an SDT perspective, the fulfillment of autonomy and competence generates intrinsic motivation, which leads to more enduring and self-determined loyalty behaviors.

Therefore, the framework posits both direct and indirect effects of Marketing Ethics on Customer Loyalty. The direct effect is explained through the fulfillment of relatedness, while the indirect effect operates through Consumer Empowerment as a psychological mechanism that satisfies autonomy and competence.

In essence, the framework argues that sustainable customer loyalty stems from more than the provision of external incentives. Rather, loyalty is cultivated when consumers develop intrinsic motivation through the satisfaction of their core psychological needs. Through the application of Self-Determination Theory, this study advances a theoretical perspective that clarifies how marketing ethics and consumer empowerment interact to foster enduring loyalty relationships between consumers and firms.

Marketing ethics refers to a set of moral principles that guide marketing practices to ensure honesty, fairness, and responsibility toward consumers (Kamila & Jasrotia, 2023). In increasingly competitive and digitalized markets, the role of ethical marketing has become more critical in shaping consumers' perceptions and fostering long-term relationships. When companies prioritize openness in their communications and avoid practices that may mislead consumers, such as exaggerated advertising or unsubstantiated claims, they are more likely to cultivate perceptions of trustworthiness and corporate responsibility. This perception enhances customer satisfaction and strengthens emotional attachment, ultimately leading to higher customer loyalty. Prior studies have confirmed that ethical marketing significantly contributes to sustainable brand relationships and long-term loyalty (El-Sherbiny et al., 2022). However, Clara & Angel (2025) suggest that ethical marketing alone may not always directly influence consumer behavioral outcomes, as consumers can be more strongly driven by social influence and personal motivations than by ethical messages themselves. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1: Marketing ethics has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty**

In the digital era, where consumers are exposed to abundant information, ethical marketing also plays a crucial role in enhancing consumer empowerment. Transparent and honest communication enables consumers to make informed decisions, increasing their confidence and control over purchase choices (Yoganathan et al., 2019). Ethical marketing practices that emphasize education and accurate product information not only build trust but also raise awareness of consumer rights, encouraging more critical and active evaluation of products (Gegen tana et al., 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that ethical and informative marketing enhances consumer awareness and empowerment, particularly in industries where product safety and quality are essential, such as skincare (Dai, 2018). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H2: Marketing ethics has a positive and significant effect on consumer empowerment**

Consumer empowerment reflects the extent to which individuals possess control, knowledge, and active participation in decision-making processes related to products or brands. In the modern marketplace, empowered consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages; instead, they actively seek, evaluate, and share information (Park & Kim, 2021). This heightened level of involvement fosters stronger engagement and confidence in chosen brands (Mishra, 2021). When consumers feel knowledgeable and capable of making autonomous decisions, they are more likely to develop trust and exhibit repeat purchase behavior (Lim et al., 2023). Prior research indicates that consumer empowerment positively influences customer engagement and value creation, which subsequently strengthens customer loyalty (Negm, 2024). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3: Consumer empowerment has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty**

Furthermore, consumer empowerment serves as a critical psychological mechanism linking marketing ethics and customer loyalty. Ethical marketing practices provide accurate and transparent information, which enhances consumers' sense of autonomy and control (Nadeem et al., 2023). This empowerment, in turn, fosters intrinsic motivation and strengthens long-term commitment to a brand (Lim et al., 2023). In this context, consumer empowerment functions as a mediating variable that amplifies the impact of marketing ethics on loyalty. Previous studies have highlighted that empowered customers tend to exhibit higher satisfaction, stronger emotional bonds, and greater loyalty (Batat, 2025; Gegez & Sims, 2014; Harvey et al., 2022; Odoom, 2025). Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4: Consumer empowerment mediates the relationship between marketing ethics and customer loyalty**

Against the backdrop of the growing skincare market, this study examines how marketing ethics contributes to customer loyalty and whether consumer empowerment functions as a mechanism through which this effect occurs. The investigation focuses on four key objectives: evaluating the direct association between marketing ethics and customer loyalty, analyzing the impact of marketing ethics on consumer empowerment, assessing the contribution of consumer empowerment to customer loyalty, and

testing its mediating role within the proposed framework. The study offers both theoretical and practical value by integrating ethical marketing and empowerment perspectives, thereby enriching the understanding of loyalty formation and providing guidance for firms aiming to strengthen long-term customer engagement in the digital environment.

## METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the relationships among marketing ethics, consumer empowerment, and customer loyalty in the skincare industry. A survey method is utilized, with data collected through an online questionnaire distributed to skincare consumers in Indonesia. This approach is considered appropriate as it enables the collection of numerical data and the application of statistical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses, while also allowing for broader generalization (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The use of online surveys is particularly relevant given the increasing engagement of consumers in digital environments.

The population of this study consists of all skincare users in Indonesia. Given the large and unbounded nature of the population, a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling approach was employed (Norin & Mike, 2014). Respondents were selected based on specific criteria, namely: residing in Indonesia, having used skincare products for at least six months, having made at least two purchases, and being at least 17 years old. In addition, the sampling process was operationalized by targeting followers of the official Instagram accounts of five leading skincare brands in Indonesia. Potential respondents were identified based on their observable engagement behavior, particularly those who actively interacted with the brands' posts through likes and comments. These individuals were subsequently approached via direct messages (DM) on Instagram and invited to participate in the survey. This approach ensures that respondents possess relevant experience and genuine involvement with skincare products, thereby enhancing the suitability of the sample for the research objectives. The minimum sample size was determined based on the rule of thumb proposed by Kock and Hadaya (2018), which recommends a sample size of at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a latent variable. Accordingly, this study requires a minimum of 170 respondents. The final sample size of 206 exceeded the minimum requirement, ensuring adequate statistical power for SEM-PLS analysis.

To obtain empirical evidence, primary data are gathered through a questionnaire developed from previously validated constructs. The instrument is designed to assess marketing ethics, consumer empowerment, and customer loyalty, corresponding to the independent, mediating, and dependent variables in the proposed framework. Participants indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores representing stronger levels of agreement. Marketing ethics is operationalized through the dimensions of fairness, freedom, and well-being (Laczniak & Murphy, 2019), while consumer empowerment is measured using consumer skills, legislative awareness, and participation (LeRouge et al., 2022; Odoom, 2025). Customer loyalty is evaluated through repurchase intention, word-of-mouth recommendation, and emotional attachment (Cankül et al., 2024; Matsuoka, 2022). The proposed research model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) implemented through SmartPLS software (Hair et al., 2019). The analytical process was carried out in two stages, consisting of an assessment of the measurement model followed by an evaluation of the structural model.

The measurement model was first examined to ensure the quality of the constructs and indicators. Convergent validity was verified by reviewing indicator loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) criterion. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated through Composite Reliability (CR). Furthermore, potential multicollinearity issues among indicators and constructs were investigated using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values.

Once the measurement properties met the recommended thresholds, the structural model was assessed to determine the strength and explanatory power of the proposed relationships. This evaluation included the examination of path coefficients, coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and

predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). The significance of the hypothesized relationships was tested through a bootstrapping procedure, with statistical significance established when the t-value exceeded 1.96 and the corresponding p-value was below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019).

To investigate the intervening mechanism proposed in the framework, mediation analysis was performed using specific indirect effects. The direct and indirect pathways were compared to determine the nature and extent of the mediating influence of consumer empowerment. Through this comprehensive analytical procedure, the study ensures a robust evaluation of both direct and indirect effects, thereby providing reliable evidence regarding the factors that shape customer loyalty in the skincare sector.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 206 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis using SmartPLS within the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling framework. All respondents met the predefined inclusion criteria, namely having purchased skincare products at least twice and having used skincare within the last six months. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with an informed consent statement outlining the purpose of the study, and their voluntary agreement was obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected or disclosed.

In terms of gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female (71.8%), while male respondents accounted for 28.2%, indicating that the sample is predominantly composed of women, which is consistent with the typical demographic profile of skincare users. Regarding age, most respondents were between 29 and 44 years old (41.3%), followed by those aged 17–28 years (33%), and 45–60 years (25.7%). This suggests that the sample is largely dominated by individuals in the productive age group, who are generally more engaged in skincare consumption and personal care routines.

Overall, the respondent profile reflects a relevant and appropriate sample for examining consumer behavior in the skincare industry, particularly among active and experienced users. The test results (Table 1 and Figure 1) confirmed that all measurement items met the criteria for convergent validity (outer loading  $> 0.70$ ; AVE  $> 0.50$ ), discriminant validity (HTMT  $< 0.90$ ), reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability  $> 0.70$ ), and absence of multicollinearity (VIF  $< 5$ ), indicating that the instrument was suitable for further analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	HTMT	VIF	Outer Loading	P Values	Cronbach $\alpha$
Marketing Ethics (X)	0.658	0.915	X→Z (0.590)	X→Z (1.000)	X1-X6 (0.772- 0.826)	0.000	0.865
Consumer Empowerment (Z)	0.638	0.897	Z→Y (0.666)	Z→Y (1.463)	Z1-Z6 (0.755- 0.790)	0.000	0.897
Customer Loyalty (Y)	0.641	0.886	X→Y (0.531)	X→Y (1.463)	Y1-Y5 (0.730- 0.849)	0.000	0.886

Source: 2026 processed original data

Table 2 shows the model fit. The results indicate that the values of SRMR,  $d_{ULS}$ ,  $d_G$ , and NFI are identical for both the saturated and estimated models, suggesting that the proposed structural model closely approximates the saturated model (Hair et al., 2019). This implies that the model does not suffer from substantial misspecification and demonstrates an acceptable level of global fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value is 0.059, which is below the recommended

threshold of 0.08. This suggests that the model demonstrates a good fit, with a relatively small discrepancy between the observed and predicted correlations.

The values of  $d_{ULS}$  (0.541) and  $d_G$  (0.344) represent the discrepancy between the empirical and model-implied correlation matrices. Although there are no strict universal cut-off values for these indices, lower values generally indicate better fit. In this case, the values suggest an acceptable level of model fit, particularly when interpreted alongside SRMR.

The Chi-square value (360.347) is reported; however, in PLS-SEM, this statistic is not the primary criterion for model fit due to its sensitivity to sample size. Therefore, it should be interpreted with caution and not used as the sole indicator of fit.

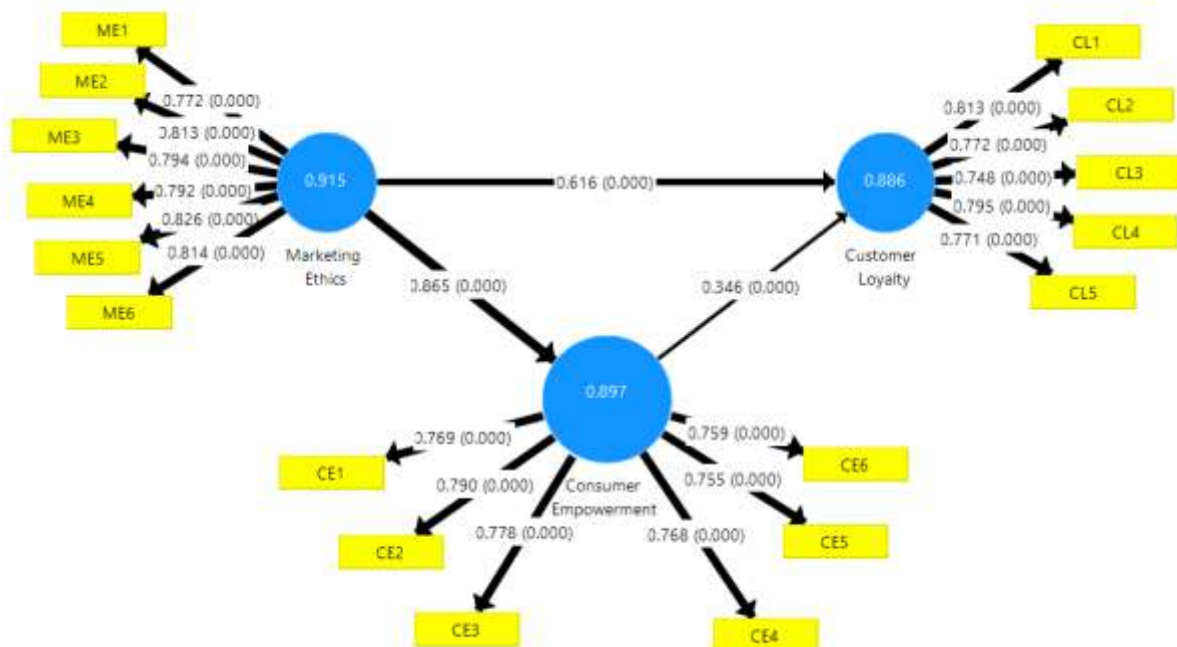
Finally, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is 0.846, which is slightly below the commonly suggested threshold of 0.90. This indicates that while the model demonstrates a moderate fit, there is still room for improvement in capturing the observed data structure.

Overall, the model can be considered to have an acceptable to good fit, primarily supported by the SRMR value. However, the NFI suggests that further refinement of the model—such as re-examining indicator loadings or structural relationships—may enhance its overall fit and explanatory power.

Table 2. Assessment of Model Fit in PLS-SEM (Saturated vs Estimated Model)

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.059	0.059
$d_{ULS}$	0.541	0.541
$d_G$	0.344	0.344
Chi-Square	360.347	360.347
NFI	0.846	0.846

Source: 2026 processed original data



Source: 2026 processed original data

Figure 1. Results of the PLS-SEM Analysis: Outer Loadings, Composite Reliability, Path Coefficients, and Significance Levels

The structural model was assessed by examining the path coefficients, their statistical significance, and the strength of relationships between constructs (Table 3). The results indicate that all hypothesized relationships are positive and statistically significant, as evidenced by T-statistics exceeding the critical value of 1.96 and p-values of 0.000.

First, *Marketing Ethics* has a significant direct effect on *Customer Loyalty* ( $\beta = 0.616$ ,  $T = 9.981$ ), suggesting that ethical marketing not only empowers customers but also directly strengthens their loyalty (H1 accepted).

Second, *Marketing Ethics* demonstrates a very strong and significant influence on *Consumer Empowerment* ( $\beta = 0.865$ ,  $T = 38.418$ ). This indicates that ethical marketing practices play a crucial role in enhancing customers' sense of empowerment, making it the strongest relationship in the model (H2 accepted).

Third, *Consumer Empowerment* has a positive and significant effect on *Customer Loyalty* ( $\beta = 0.346$ ,  $T = 5.820$ ). This suggests that higher levels of consumer empowerment lead to increased customer loyalty, (H3 accepted).

Fourth, the indirect effect analysis reveals that *Marketing Ethics* exerts a positive and statistically significant indirect influence on *Customer Loyalty* through *Consumer Empowerment* ( $\beta = 0.300$ ,  $T = 5.524$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding confirms the presence of a mediating effect, indicating that *Consumer Empowerment* serves as an important mechanism through which ethical marketing practices translate into increased customer loyalty (H4 accepted).

Moreover, when comparing the magnitude of effects, the indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.300$ ) complements the direct effect of *Marketing Ethics* on *Customer Loyalty* ( $\beta = 0.616$ ), suggesting a partial mediation rather than full mediation. This implies that while ethical marketing directly strengthens customer loyalty, it also enhances loyalty indirectly by fostering a sense of empowerment among consumers. Consequently, *Consumer Empowerment* not only acts as an outcome of ethical marketing but also as a strategic pathway that amplifies its impact on customer loyalty.

Overall, these findings highlight that *Marketing Ethics* is a key driver in the model, both directly influencing *Customer Loyalty* and indirectly through *Consumer Empowerment*. This also implies the presence of a partial mediation effect, where *Consumer Empowerment* partially mediates the relationship between *Marketing Ethics* and *Customer Loyalty*.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Direct Effect	Path Coefficient	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
H1: Marketing Ethics → Consumer Loyalty	0.616	0.608	0.062	9.981	0.000
H2: Marketing Ethics → Consumer Empowerment	0.865	0.865	0.023	38.418	0.000
H3: Consumer Empowerment → Customer Loyalty	0.346	0.355	0.059	5.820	0.000
Indirect Effect	Path Coefficient	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
H4: Marketing Ethics → Customer Empowerment Customer → Loyalty	0.300	0.307	0.054	5.524	0.000

Source: 2026 processed original data

The strong positive influence of marketing ethics on customer loyalty indicates that skincare consumers increasingly value transparency and honesty in marketing communications. Ethical marketing practices reduce uncertainty and reinforce positive brand perceptions, encouraging consumers to maintain long-term relationships with the brand. This finding supports previous studies by (El-Sherbiny et al., 2022) and aligns with SDT, where ethical treatment fulfills consumers' need for relatedness.

The significant effect of marketing ethics on consumer empowerment suggests that consumers feel more capable of making informed decisions when firms provide accurate and transparent product information. This finding confirms that ethical marketing not only protects consumers but also enhances their perceived autonomy and competence (Nadeem et al., 2023; Tran, 2026).

Consumer empowerment emerged as an important predictor of customer loyalty. Empowered consumers are more likely to engage actively with brands, evaluate information critically, and develop stronger commitment toward brands that support their decision-making autonomy (Odoom, 2025). The mediating role of consumer empowerment highlights that ethical marketing influences loyalty not only directly but also indirectly through psychological empowerment (Zhao et al., 2018). This finding extends SDT by demonstrating that ethical marketing serves as an external condition that nurtures internal motivational processes, ultimately fostering sustainable loyalty.

The structural model was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure to examine the significance and stability of the estimated relationships, following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2021). The evaluation encompasses effect size ( $f^2$ ), coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$  Predict), providing a comprehensive assessment of the model's explanatory and predictive capabilities.

### Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

The effect size ( $f^2$ ) was examined to determine the relative impact of each exogenous construct on the endogenous constructs (Table 4 Panel A). According to Hair et al. (2021),  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively.

The results reveal that Marketing Ethics exerts a very substantial influence on Consumer Empowerment ( $f^2 = 2.979$ ), highlighting its dominant role in explaining variations in consumer empowerment. In addition, Marketing Ethics demonstrates a large effect on Customer Loyalty ( $f^2 = 0.725$ ), suggesting that ethical marketing practices contribute meaningfully to the development of loyal customer behavior. Consumer Empowerment also exhibits a meaningful effect on Customer Loyalty ( $f^2 = 0.229$ ), indicating a moderate contribution to explaining customer loyalty. These findings reinforce the importance of both ethical marketing and consumer empowerment in shaping loyalty outcomes within the skincare industry.

### Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was used to evaluate the model's explanatory power (Table 4 Panel B). Based on the guidelines of Hair et al. (2021),  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are interpreted as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. The coefficient of determination (Adjusted  $R^2$ ) was examined to assess the explanatory power of the structural model. The results indicate that Consumer Empowerment achieved an Adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.747, suggesting that approximately 74.7% of the variance in Consumer Empowerment is explained by Marketing Ethics. This reflects a substantial level of explanatory power. Furthermore, Customer Loyalty attained an Adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.867, indicating that 86.7% of its variance is jointly explained by Marketing Ethics and Consumer Empowerment. According to Hair et al. (2021), these results demonstrate substantial explanatory power, suggesting that the proposed model is highly effective in explaining variations in both endogenous constructs.

Table 4. Summary of Structural Model Evaluation

Panel A. Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

Relationship	$f^2$	Interpretation
Marketing Ethics → Consumer Empowerment	2.979	large
Marketing Ethics → Customer Loyalty	0.725	large
Consumer Empowerment → Customer Loyalty	0.229	medium to Large

Notes:  $f^2$  values: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large (Hair Jr. et al., 2021)

Panel B. Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)

Endogenous Construct	R <sup>2</sup> (Adjusted)	Interpretation
Consumer Empowerment	0.747	moderate to substantial
Customer Loyalty	0.867	substantial explanatory power

Notes: R<sup>2</sup> values: 0.75 = substantial, 0.50 = moderate, 0.25 = weak

Panel C. Predictive Relevance (Q<sup>2</sup> Predict)

Construct	Q <sup>2</sup> Predict	Predictive Power
Consumer Empowerment	> 0 (all indicators)	Moderate
Customer Loyalty	> 0 (all indicators)	Moderate

Source: 2026 processed original data

**Predictive Relevance (Q<sup>2</sup> Predict)**

The predictive relevance of the model was assessed using the PLSpredict procedure, which evaluates out-of-sample predictive performance (Table 4 Panel C). A model is considered to have predictive relevance if Q<sup>2</sup> values exceed zero (Hair Jr. et al., 2021). The results show that all indicators of Consumer Empowerment and Customer Loyalty yield Q<sup>2</sup> values greater than zero, confirming that the model possesses adequate predictive relevance.

Furthermore, Table 5 shows a comparison of the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) between the PLS-SEM model and the benchmark Linear Model (LM) indicates that the majority of indicators exhibit lower RMSE values in the PLS model. According to established criteria, this demonstrates that the model achieves a moderate level of predictive power.

Overall, these findings indicate that the proposed model is not only theoretically sound and empirically supported but also capable of generating reliable predictions for new observations. Taken together, the results underscore the pivotal role of consumer empowerment as a central mechanism through which marketing ethics translates into customer loyalty, transforming a relatively weak direct relationship into a substantially stronger indirect effect.

Table 5. PLSpredict Results (Q<sup>2</sup> Predict and Prediction Errors)

Construct	Indicator	Q <sup>2</sup> Predict	PLS_RMSE	LM_RMSE
Consumer Empowerment (Z)	Z1	0.302	0.516	0.503
	Z2	0.232	0.656	0.662
	Z3	0.210	0.635	0.638
	Z4	0.240	0.593	0.601
	Z5	0.273	0.548	0.558
	Z6	0.207	0.571	0.577
Customer Loyalty (Y)	Y1	0.119	0.589	0.574
	Y2	0.222	0.574	0.580
	Y3	0.127	0.621	0.617
	Y4	0.173	0.578	0.576
	Y5	0.292	0.644	0.648

Source: 2026 processed original data

Notes: Q<sup>2</sup> Predict > 0 indicates predictive relevance

Predictive power classification based on RMSE comparison with Linear Model (LM)

Conceptually, these findings support Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which suggests that ethical marketing practices, such as transparency and honesty in product information, enhance consumers' sense of autonomy. This sense of autonomy fosters consumer empowerment, which in turn strengthens customer loyalty. Thus, loyalty is not only directly influenced by ethical practices but also indirectly through the psychological mechanism of empowerment. These findings are consistent with prior studies highlighting that transparency and ethical marketing practices play a crucial role in building trust, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty (Chen et al., 2023; Nadeem et al., 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that marketing ethics plays a pivotal role in shaping customer loyalty in the skincare industry, both directly and indirectly through consumer empowerment. The findings confirm that marketing ethics has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty and consumer empowerment, while consumer empowerment itself also significantly enhances customer loyalty. Furthermore, consumer empowerment acts as a complementary mediator, indicating that ethical marketing not only directly influences loyalty but also strengthens it by fostering a sense of control, knowledge, and autonomy among consumers. These results are consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), where ethical marketing practices fulfill consumers' psychological needs—particularly autonomy and competence—thereby encouraging intrinsic motivation and long-term loyalty. The primary contribution of this study lies in demonstrating consumer empowerment as a psychological mechanism that links ethical marketing practices with customer loyalty, thereby extending the application of Self-Determination Theory in marketing ethics research.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the extension of SDT by demonstrating that ethical marketing serves as an external stimulus that facilitates internal psychological empowerment, ultimately leading to sustained loyalty. It reinforces the notion that customer loyalty is not solely driven by product attributes but also by meaningful psychological processes in which consumers feel respected, informed, and empowered.

Practically, the findings suggest that companies should prioritize transparency, honesty, and educational marketing strategies to strengthen consumer empowerment. By avoiding misleading claims and promoting informative content, firms can build trust, align with consumers' values, and foster deeper emotional connections. This approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also encourages long-term loyalty driven by intrinsic motivation rather than external incentives.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. The sample is predominantly composed of urban consumers from Generations X, Y, and Z, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to rural populations or different socio-economic contexts. Additionally, the use of a purely quantitative approach restricts deeper exploration of the psychological processes underlying consumer empowerment.

Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the sample to more diverse geographical and demographic contexts, particularly rural areas, and to adopt mixed-method approaches. Incorporating qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews would provide richer insights into how customers experience empowerment in response to ethical marketing practices. Such efforts would further strengthen the robustness and applicability of research in this domain.

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