

It gets under my skin – How colourist beauty ideals boosted by the cosmetic industry lead to health-damaging consumer behaviours in vulnerable groups

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Abstract:

Skin lightening products (SLPs) are widely used among Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPoC) despite their detrimental side effects and legal restrictions. In an endeavour to investigate the relationship between women's skin tone and their identity, our study aims to explore their deliberation on skin tone, skin care, and (SL) cosmetic product use. Qualitative data from Kenya and Nigeria unveils skin tone to be an existential part of identity linked to mating, professional career and societal status. However, consumers are insufficiently informed about negative side effects and proper product use, and internalise the high trade-off of SLP purchase and use even at the cost of essential products like food. While the SLP market is growing, we suggest that next to those for consumers, there are substantial risks for companies in offering these products and insufficiently informing about their use and side effects. We suggest culturally sensitive measures in the HERO framework, encompassing **H**ealth **E**ducation, **R**egulations and altered **O**fferings, globally ameliorating sustainable long-term outcomes for companies, clients, and the public health sector.

Keywords: Consumer culture theory (CCT), skin lightening products, vulnerable consumers

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