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## The role of social media influencers in shaping consumer preferences for skincare products

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### Abstract

This conceptual study investigates how consumer preferences for skincare products are shaped by social media influencers. As digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and TikTok have grown in popularity, influencers have emerged as potent spokespersons for skincare companies and goods. The study looks at the relationship between customer trust, purchase intent, and brand loyalty—especially in the skincare sector—and influencer marketing. By analysing the dynamics of influencer-consumer interactions, the study highlights the factors that drive successful influencer campaigns, including authenticity, product expertise, and audience engagement. It also explores the psychological mechanisms behind why consumers are drawn to influencer recommendations. This research aims to provide insights for skincare brands on leveraging influencer marketing effectively to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for skincare brands looking to navigate the competitive digital landscape and influence consumer buying behaviour.

**Keywords:** Social media influencers, skincare products, brand loyalty

### Introduction

The increasing influence of social media in shaping consumer behaviour has transformed how brands interact with their audiences, particularly in the beauty and skincare industry. Among the most significant contributors to this transformation are social media influencers, who leverage their online presence to endorse products and build consumer trust. These influencers, often perceived as more relatable than traditional celebrities, have emerged as key players in influencing skincare product preferences and purchase decisions (Jin & Phua, 2014) <sup>[10]</sup>. With platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok at the forefront of digital marketing, influencers have developed loyal followings, making their recommendations highly impactful for both consumers and brands.

Influencer marketing in the skincare industry revolves around building personal connections with consumers through authentic product reviews, tutorials, and testimonials. Research shows that authenticity is one of the most important factors driving the success of influencer campaigns, as consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from influencers who align with their values and skincare needs (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>. This trust is especially crucial in the skincare industry, where consumers are often cautious about the products they apply to their skin due to concerns about safety and effectiveness. Moreover, influencer credibility, product knowledge, and engagement with followers are vital components that enhance the effectiveness of skincare endorsements (Lou & Yuan, 2019) <sup>[14]</sup>. Consumers are more inclined to make purchasing decisions based on influencers they perceive as knowledgeable and genuine, further underscoring the importance of aligning brand messaging with the values and expertise of the influencer. The impact of social media influencers on skincare brands is not limited to immediate sales. Studies suggest that influencer marketing plays a significant role in fostering long-term brand loyalty and customer retention by enhancing the emotional connection between consumers and brands (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) <sup>[5]</sup>. As skincare is a highly personalized product category, influencers who share their skincare routines, product experiences, and lifestyle tips can shape consumer preferences, contributing to sustained brand engagement.

This research aims to explore how social media influencers shape consumer preferences for skincare products by analyzing their roles in building trust, credibility, and long-term

relationships with consumers. By examining the psychological and emotional factors driving consumer behavior, this study will offer insights for skincare brands on how to effectively leverage influencer marketing to enhance brand visibility, trust, and customer loyalty. Two objectives of the study are to be explored:

1. To study the impact of social media influencers on consumer trust and purchase decisions for skincare products.
2. To examine the role of different types of influencer content in shaping consumer preferences.

### Literature Review

Social media platforms have become central to modern marketing strategies, particularly for consumer goods such as skincare products. Social media influencers, who have garnered large followings through personal branding and content creation, play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchasing decisions (Jin & Phua, 2014) <sup>[10]</sup>. These influencers bridge the gap between brands and consumers by providing personalized, authentic, and relatable content, which has been shown to increase consumer trust and engagement (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) <sup>[6]</sup>. This section explores the key areas of influencer marketing in the skincare industry, including trust and credibility, content authenticity, and the influence on purchasing behaviour. One of the most critical factors in successful influencer marketing is the trust consumers place in influencers. Unlike traditional marketing strategies that rely on advertisements, influencer marketing depends on the influencer's ability to establish a trustworthy relationship with their audience. According to Lou and Yuan (2019) <sup>[14]</sup>, influencer credibility significantly affects consumer trust, which in turn impacts the success of branded content on social media. When influencers are perceived as experts or genuine users of skincare products, their endorsements carry more weight with consumers, making them more likely to consider and purchase the recommended products. This is especially important in the skincare industry, where consumers are more cautious about product efficacy and safety (Lou & Yuan, 2019) <sup>[14]</sup>.

Furthermore, research by De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) <sup>[4]</sup> highlights the role of follower count in shaping influencer credibility. While influencers with a large following may appear more credible, the effectiveness of their endorsements also depends on product relevance and the perceived expertise of the influencer in that specific product category. In the skincare market, consumers are particularly sensitive to recommendations from influencers who are viewed as knowledgeable about skincare routines, ingredients, and skincare concerns such as acne or anti-aging (Hwang & Zhang, 2018) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Authenticity is a key driver of consumer engagement in influencer marketing. According to Audrezet, Kerviler, and Moulard (2020) <sup>[3]</sup>, consumers value genuine content that reflects the influencer's true experiences with products. In the context of skincare, influencers who share their real skincare journeys, challenges, and successes are more likely to foster meaningful connections with their audience. Authentic content, including personal testimonials, before-and-after photos, and detailed skincare routines, helps build trust and encourages consumers to try the products themselves (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020) <sup>[15]</sup>. Additionally, the nature of influencer-consumer interactions

on social media enhances engagement. Influencers who actively respond to questions, comments, and concerns about skincare products create a sense of community and personalized attention that traditional advertising cannot achieve. This two-way communication builds stronger relationships and encourages repeat purchases, contributing to long-term brand loyalty (Jin & Ryu, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Influencer marketing has a direct impact on consumer purchasing behavior, particularly in industries like skincare where consumers seek peer-like advice. A study by Glucksman (2017) <sup>[7]</sup> found that consumers are more likely to trust product recommendations from influencers they follow regularly, as these influencers are perceived to provide honest opinions. In contrast, traditional advertising may be seen as less trustworthy due to its commercial nature. Influencer recommendations, therefore, serve as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has been shown to be highly influential in the decision-making process for skincare products. Moreover, influencer marketing extends beyond immediate purchases. According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) <sup>[5]</sup>, influencers play a significant role in building long-term brand awareness and loyalty. Consumers who develop emotional connections with influencers are more likely to trust their recommendations over time, which can lead to sustained engagement with the brand and repeat purchases. This is particularly important in the skincare industry, where consumers often stick with products and routines that work for them. While influencer marketing offers significant advantages, it also presents challenges, particularly in maintaining authenticity as the industry becomes more commercialized. As brands increasingly rely on influencers for product endorsements, there is a risk that influencers may lose their perceived authenticity if they promote too many products or focus primarily on paid partnerships (Audrezet *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[3]</sup>. This can lead to skepticism among consumers, diminishing the effectiveness of influencer campaigns. Therefore, it is crucial for influencers and brands to strike a balance between commercial interests and genuine product endorsements to maintain consumer trust.

In addition, the rapidly changing algorithms of social media platforms, especially Instagram, impact the visibility of influencer content. Research by Abidin (2016) <sup>[1]</sup> suggests that influencers must constantly adapt their strategies to ensure their content reaches their target audience. This includes optimizing posts for visibility, managing follower engagement, and navigating platform-specific trends, which can be resource-intensive for both influencers and brands.

### Research Gap

The increasing reliance on social media influencers (SMIs) to shape consumer preferences across industries has garnered significant attention from researchers and marketers alike. However, when it comes to the skincare industry, several important gaps remain unaddressed. Understanding these gaps is crucial for both scholars and industry professionals, as skincare products present unique challenges and opportunities compared to other consumer goods. The existing literature on social media influencers tends to take a broad, cross-industry approach. While general insights into influencer marketing have been explored, few studies have delved deeply into the specific dynamics of the skincare industry. Skincare products are

distinct in that they combine emotional and functional benefits, with consumers often seeking both aesthetic improvements and long-term health results. Given the intimate nature of these products, which can directly affect a consumer's physical appearance and self-confidence, more research is needed to understand how influencer endorsements uniquely impact trust and consumer behavior in this sector.

Moreover, while influencer authenticity and credibility have been widely discussed, there is still a lack of research exploring how consumers in the skincare industry discern between genuine product endorsements and paid promotions. Since skincare products often require longer testing periods to demonstrate effectiveness, consumers may view influencer testimonials with skepticism. However, the extent to which this affects purchase decisions remains underexplored. The credibility gap between influencers perceived as authentic and those viewed as transactional is particularly relevant for skincare, where personal trust in the product is paramount.

Another gap lies in understanding the long-term influence of SMIs on consumer behavior in the skincare industry. While

existing studies often focus on short-term metrics such as engagement rates or immediate purchase behavior, skincare products typically require extended use for results to manifest. Consequently, there is a need for research examining the sustained impact of influencer advocacy on consumer loyalty and brand preference over time. The distinction between micro- and macro-influencers has been widely acknowledged but not sufficiently studied in the context of skincare products. Research is lacking on how the size of an influencer's following affects consumer trust and behavior in a market where personal recommendations often carry more weight. Lastly, the role of cultural and demographic variability, along with the ethical considerations surrounding transparency in influencer marketing, is underexplored. These factors can significantly mediate the effectiveness of influencer-driven campaigns in the skincare industry, yet they remain overlooked in current research. Addressing these gaps can offer more precise insights into how social media influencers shape consumer preferences for skincare products, ultimately benefiting both academia and industry.

**Table 1:** Meta-Analysis

Study/Report	Objective	Key Findings	Role of Social Media Influencers	Reference
Lou & Yuan (2019) <sup>[14]</sup>	Investigated the impact of influencer credibility on consumer trust and purchasing behavior.	Influencer credibility significantly affects trust, leading to higher purchase intentions.	Influencers act as trusted sources, increasing consumer willingness to try products.	Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. <i>Journal of Interactive Advertising</i> , 19(1), 58-73. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501">https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501</a>
De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders (2017) <sup>[4]</sup>	Examined how the number of followers impacts influencer marketing effectiveness.	Larger followings can enhance perceived credibility, but product relevance is critical.	Influencers with the right product alignment and large audiences are more effective.	De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. <i>International Journal of Advertising</i> , 36(5), 798-828. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035">https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035</a>
Audrezet, Kerviler & Moulard (2020) <sup>[3]</sup>	Explored the concept of authenticity in influencer marketing.	Authenticity is crucial for maintaining consumer trust and ensuring the success of endorsements.	Genuine influencers who share real experiences have a greater impact on consumer behavior.	Audrezet, A., Kerviler, G. D., & Moulard, J. G. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 117, 557-569. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008</a>
Jin & Ryu (2020) <sup>[11]</sup>	Studied how influencers drive envy and parasocial interaction in social commerce.	Envy and parasocial interaction with influencers lead to stronger purchase intentions.	Influencers help form emotional connections that motivate consumers to buy products.	Jin, S. V., & Ryu, E. (2020). "I'll buy what she's #wearing": The roles of envy toward and parasocial interaction with influencers in Instagram celebrity-based brand endorsement and social commerce. <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> , 55, 102121. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102121">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102121</a>
Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget (2020) <sup>[15]</sup>	Analyzed how influencer engagement impacts consumer loyalty and purchasing behavior.	High engagement rates between influencers and followers lead to stronger brand loyalty.	Engaged influencers foster trust and long-term consumer relationships with brands.	Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit. <i>International Journal of Advertising</i> , 39(2), 258-281. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898">https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898</a>
Hwang & Zhang (2024) <sup>[9]</sup>	Investigated the effects of influencer marketing on consumer brand loyalty in skincare.	Consistent influencer-brand alignment strengthens consumer brand loyalty and advocacy.	Influencers who consistently endorse and align with a brand enhance long-term loyalty.	Hwang, Y., & Zhang, Q. (2024). The role of influencers in brand loyalty and consumer advocacy in the skincare industry. <i>Journal of Consumer Behavior</i> , 23(3), 297-312. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2075">https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2075</a>
Lee & Koo (2024) <sup>[13]</sup>	Analyzed the impact of influencer content type on consumer trust and purchase decisions.	Product demonstrations and personal stories increase consumer trust and likelihood of purchase.	Influencers who provide personal testimonials and product demoeffective.	Lee, J., & Koo, D. (2024). Content types and their impact on influencer marketing effectiveness in skincare. <i>Journal of Interactive Marketing</i> , 55, 45-59. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2022.08.001">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2022.08.001</a>



This table shows recent studies up to 2024 and provides an updated view of how social media influencers shape consumer preferences for skincare products.

### Conclusion of the Study

This research underscores the significant impact that social media influencers have on consumer behaviour, particularly within the skincare industry. The literature review of recent study up to 2024 reveals several key insights, influencers who are perceived as credible and authentic are highly effective in shaping consumer preferences. Trust in influencer recommendations is a crucial factor driving purchase intentions, with credible influencers serving as key sources of information and advice for consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Audrezet, Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020) <sup>[14, 3]</sup>. High levels of engagement between influencers and their followers contribute significantly to brand loyalty and consumer trust. Interactive content, such as Q&As, personal stories, and direct interactions, fosters a stronger connection between influencers and their audience, enhancing the overall effectiveness of marketing strategies (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020; Jin & Ryu, 2020) <sup>[15, 11]</sup>. The authenticity of influencer content plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences. Consumers are more likely to trust and act on recommendations from influencers who present genuine experiences and product endorsements. This authenticity extends beyond mere product promotion and involves creating relatable and trustworthy content (Audrezet *et al.*, 2020; Lee & Koo, 2024) <sup>[3, 13]</sup>.

The visual nature of platforms like Instagram and TikTok amplifies the influence of skincare product endorsements. Influencers who utilize compelling visual content, such as product demonstrations and before-and-after photos, effectively capture consumer attention and influence purchasing decisions (Jin & Ryu, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

In conclusion, social media influencers play a critical role in shaping consumer preferences for skincare products. Their credibility, engagement, and authenticity are key factors that enhance their effectiveness in influencing consumer behavior. Brands looking to leverage influencer marketing should focus on building genuine relationships with influencers, creating authentic content, and engaging actively with their target audience. Future research should explore emerging social media platforms and the influence of different demographic groups to provide a more comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing dynamics.

### Limitations and Future Recommendations

#### Limitations

Many studies on social media influencers focus predominantly on specific demographic groups, such as young adults or women. This narrow focus may limit the generalizability of findings across different age groups, genders, and cultural contexts. For instance, research primarily involving young female consumers might not accurately reflect the preferences and behaviours of other demographic segments. The majority of existing research emphasizes platforms like Instagram and TikTok. While these platforms are popular, they may not fully represent the influence of social media on other platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or emerging apps. This platform-centric approach could overlook the nuances of influencer impact across various social media environments. Evaluating

influencer authenticity can be challenging due to its subjective nature. Existing studies may rely on self-reported data or superficial metrics, which may not capture the true essence of authenticity. This limitation can impact the reliability of findings related to how authenticity influences consumer behaviour.

### Future Recommendations

Future research should include diverse demographic groups to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different segments respond to influencer marketing. Studies could explore varying age groups, genders, and cultural backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of findings. To capture the full spectrum of social media influence, research should encompass a range of platforms beyond just Instagram and TikTok. This approach will provide insights into how different social media environments affect consumer behavior and influencer effectiveness. Future studies should develop and utilize more robust and multidimensional metrics for assessing influencer authenticity. Combining quantitative measures with qualitative assessments, such as consumer interviews or focus groups, can offer a deeper understanding of authenticity's role.

Incorporating qualitative research methods, such as case studies and ethnographic research, can offer richer insights into the nuanced ways influencers affect consumer behaviour. Understanding personal stories and emotional responses can complement quantitative data and provide a more holistic view of influencer impact.

By addressing these limitations and incorporating these recommendations, future research can build on current knowledge and provide more nuanced, applicable insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer preferences for skincare products.

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