

**DIGITAL INFLUENCE AND CONSUMER CHOICE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SKINCARE PURCHASES****<sup>1</sup>Mrs.Shireen Fathima.S, <sup>2</sup>Dr.M.John Britto**<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai. shireen1398@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Patrician College of Arts and Science Chennai. johnbritto73@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The rapid growth of social media platforms has significantly transformed consumer buying behaviour in the skincare industry. Social media influencers have emerged as powerful digital opinion leaders who influence consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase decisions through online content, product reviews, and brand endorsements. The present study aims to analyse the role of social media influencers in influencing skincare purchase intention among consumers in Chennai. The study specifically examines the influence of influencer credibility, content quality, and social media engagement on consumer trust and skincare purchase intention.

The study adopted a quantitative research approach and primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 128 respondents using convenience sampling technique. The collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS software. Reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, structural model assessment, and mediation analysis were performed to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that influencer credibility, content quality, and social media engagement significantly and positively influence consumer trust. Further, consumer trust was found to significantly influence skincare purchase intention and mediate the relationship between influencer marketing factors and purchase intention. The study concludes that social media influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer choice and skincare buying behaviour in the digital marketing environment.

**Keywords**

Influencer Marketing, Consumer Trust, Skincare Products, Purchase Intention, PLS-SEM

**INTRODUCTION**

The advancement of digital technology and the widespread adoption of social media platforms have significantly transformed modern marketing practices and consumer buying behaviour. In the contemporary digital era, consumers increasingly rely on online platforms to gather information, evaluate products, and make purchasing decisions. Social media has evolved beyond communication and entertainment purposes and has become a powerful marketing channel that enables businesses to connect directly with consumers. Among the industries that have experienced substantial growth through digital marketing, the skincare industry has emerged as one of the most active sectors utilizing social media influencer marketing strategies to attract and engage consumers.

Social media influencers play a vital role in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences in the online marketplace. Influencers are individuals who possess the ability to affect the opinions and purchase decisions of consumers through their expertise, online presence, follower engagement, and digital content creation. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Indian short-video platforms such as Moj and Josh have become major platforms where influencers share skincare product reviews, beauty tutorials, skincare routines, live demonstrations, and personal experiences. These digital interactions create strong engagement with consumers and influence their perceptions regarding skincare brands and products.

The skincare industry has witnessed rapid expansion due to increasing consumer awareness regarding beauty, self-care, personal grooming, and skin health. Consumers today are highly conscious about the quality, effectiveness, and safety of skincare products. Before purchasing skincare products, consumers often search for online reviews, recommendations, tutorials, and influencer opinions to reduce uncertainty and gain confidence in their purchase decisions. In this context, influencer marketing has become an important promotional strategy for skincare brands seeking to improve brand awareness, customer engagement, and market reach.

Unlike traditional advertising methods, influencer marketing provides a more personalized and relatable communication approach. Consumers tend to trust influencers because they often present real-life experiences, honest reviews, and practical product demonstrations. Influencers can create emotional connections with their followers through interactive communication, thereby enhancing consumer trust and brand attachment. Factors such as influencer credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, and social media engagement significantly contribute to shaping consumer attitudes and skincare purchase intentions. Consumer trust is considered one of the most important determinants of online purchase behaviour in the skincare industry. Since skincare products directly affect personal appearance and skin condition, consumers carefully evaluate product information before making purchasing decisions. Influencers who provide authentic, transparent, and informative content can positively influence consumer confidence and encourage product adoption. Furthermore, social media engagement through likes, comments, shares, and live interactions strengthens the relationship between influencers and followers, thereby increasing the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns.

The growing importance of influencer marketing has attracted the attention of researchers, marketers, and skincare companies worldwide. However, despite the increasing popularity of influencer-driven marketing, limited studies have comprehensively examined the combined influence of factors such as influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, trustworthiness, and consumer trust on skincare purchase intention, particularly in the Indian context. Moreover, there is a need for advanced analytical approaches to understand the complex relationships among these variables.

Therefore, the present study aims to analyse the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer choice and skincare purchase intention. The study focuses on key constructs including influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, trustworthiness, consumer trust, and purchase intention. The research adopts Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among these variables and provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing in the skincare industry. The findings of the study are expected to help skincare brands, digital marketers, and social media strategists develop more effective influencer marketing strategies and improve consumer engagement in the digital marketplace.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Freberg et al. identified social media influencers as credible online opinion leaders capable of shaping consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour through expertise, authenticity, and digital engagement. The study emphasized that influencer credibility positively affects consumer trust and marketing effectiveness in digital environments (Freberg et al., 2011). Djafarova and Rushworth examined the influence of Instagram beauty influencers on young female consumers and found that consumers perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy than traditional celebrities. The study concluded that authenticity and personal connection significantly affect beauty and skincare purchase intention (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Lou and Yuan investigated how influencer marketing affects consumer trust and purchase intention. Their findings revealed that informative, entertaining, and credible influencer content positively influences consumer attitudes toward brands and increases purchase intention on social media platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Ki and Kim analysed the mechanism through which influencers persuade consumers and identified that trustworthiness, emotional attachment, and consumers' desire to imitate influencers significantly affect buying behaviour. The study highlighted the importance of parasocial interaction in influencer marketing effectiveness (Ki & Kim, 2019). Sokolova and Kefi explored the influence of influencer credibility and parasocial relationships on purchase intention. The study found that trustworthiness and social interaction positively contribute to electronic word-of-mouth communication and online consumer purchase decisions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Schouten et al. compared influencer endorsements with traditional celebrity endorsements and concluded that influencers are perceived as more authentic, relatable, and trustworthy. This positively affects consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly in beauty and skincare industries (Schouten et al., 2020).

Recent studies have further highlighted the growing importance of authenticity and micro-influencers in the beauty and skincare industry. A report published by *Vogue Business* observed that nano and micro-influencers generate higher engagement because consumers perceive their content as more authentic and relatable. The study indicated that skincare and beauty consumers increasingly prefer genuine recommendations and community-driven content over heavily commercialized promotions. Another recent industry analysis by *Vogue Business* discussed how skincare brands successfully utilize influencer marketing and educational content to improve consumer engagement and brand growth. The report emphasized that science-backed skincare content combined with influencer-driven promotion significantly enhances consumer trust and purchase intention among younger audiences. Research on evolving beauty consumer behaviour also indicates that modern consumers are becoming more selective and skeptical regarding influencer promotions. A recent beauty industry report published by *vogue* highlighted that consumers increasingly prefer transparent, informative, and expert-led skincare recommendations. The study found that authenticity, inclusivity, and credibility are becoming major determinants of consumer trust in beauty and skincare purchases. Further, a longitudinal study by Bertaglia et al. examined influencer disclosure practices on Instagram and found that transparency in sponsored content does not significantly reduce engagement when influencers maintain authenticity and trustworthiness. The study emphasized that disclosure practices and ethical communication play an important role in maintaining consumer trust in influencer marketing (Bertaglia et al., 2024). In the Indian context, social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have become dominant platforms for skincare influencers to promote products, provide tutorials, and influence consumer buying behaviour. Indian consumers increasingly rely on influencer reviews and skincare recommendations before making purchasing

decisions. However, limited studies have comprehensively examined the combined influence of influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, trustworthiness, and consumer trust on skincare purchase intention using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

The review of literature indicates that influencer marketing significantly affects consumer trust, engagement, brand perception, and purchase intention in the skincare industry. Existing studies primarily focus on individual dimensions such as influencer credibility or social media engagement. However, there remains a research gap in understanding the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between influencer marketing factors and skincare purchase intention using a PLS-SEM approach. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by analysing the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer choice and skincare purchase intention in the digital marketplace.

#### RESEARCH GAP

Previous studies have shown that social media influencers affect consumer purchase decisions and brand awareness in digital marketing. Many researchers have examined factors such as influencer credibility, trustworthiness, and social media engagement in influencing consumer behaviour. However, most studies focused on general products, fashion products, or overall online shopping behaviour rather than specifically concentrating on skincare purchases.

Further, limited studies have examined the combined effect of influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, and trustworthiness on skincare purchase intention in a single model. In addition, only a few studies have analysed the mediating role of consumer trust in influencer marketing using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), particularly in the Indian context.

Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap by examining how social media influencers affect consumer choice and skincare purchase intention through consumer trust using a PLS-SEM approach.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid growth of social media platforms has significantly changed consumer buying behaviour in the skincare industry. Consumers increasingly rely on social media influencers for skincare product reviews, recommendations, tutorials, and purchasing guidance. Influencers play an important role in creating brand awareness and shaping consumer perceptions through digital content and online engagement.

However, the increasing use of influencer marketing has also created challenges for consumers in identifying trustworthy and authentic information. Consumers are exposed to a large number of sponsored promotions, paid collaborations, and product endorsements, which may influence their purchase decisions. Factors such as influencer credibility, content quality, trustworthiness, and social media engagement can affect consumer confidence and skincare purchase intention.

Although influencer marketing has become an important strategy in the skincare industry, limited studies have examined how these influencer-related factors collectively influence consumer choice and purchase intention, particularly in the Indian context. In addition, the mediating role of consumer trust in skincare purchasing behaviour has not been adequately explored using advanced analytical techniques such as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Therefore, the present study aims to analyse the role of social media influencers in influencing consumer choice and skincare purchase intention by examining the impact of influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, trustworthiness, and consumer trust.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the influence of social media influencers on skincare purchase intention.
2. To analyse the effect of influencer credibility and content quality on consumer trust.
3. To study the relationship between social media engagement and consumer purchase behaviour.
4. To examine the mediating role of consumer trust in skincare purchase intention.

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of the study explains the relationship between social media influencer marketing factors and consumer skincare purchase intention. The framework is developed based on the idea that consumers are increasingly influenced by digital content, online reviews, influencer recommendations, and social media interactions while purchasing skincare products. In the present study, influencer credibility, content quality, and social media engagement are considered as the major independent variables influencing consumer trust and skincare purchase intention.

Influencer credibility refers to the extent to which consumers perceive influencers as knowledgeable, reliable, experienced, and authentic in recommending skincare products. Consumers are more likely to trust influencers who provide honest reviews, demonstrate product expertise, and maintain transparency in their promotional activities. When influencers are perceived as credible, consumers develop greater confidence in the skincare products endorsed by them.

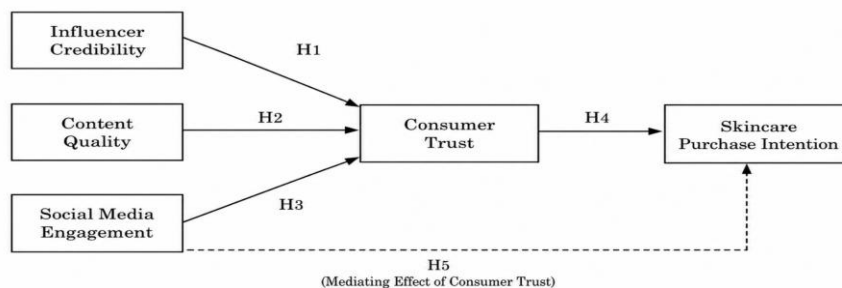
Content quality represents the usefulness, clarity, informativeness, and attractiveness of influencer-generated content related to skincare products. High-quality content such as skincare tutorials, product demonstrations, ingredient explanations, before-and-after results, and educational videos helps consumers better understand product benefits and usage. Informative and engaging content positively influences consumer attitudes and increases trust toward skincare brands and influencer recommendations.

Social media engagement refers to the level of interaction consumers have with influencer content through likes, comments, shares, views, and participation in discussions. Higher engagement creates stronger emotional connections between influencers and followers. Frequent interaction with skincare-related content increases consumer awareness, involvement, and interest in skincare products, thereby influencing purchasing behaviour.

Consumer trust acts as the mediating variable in the study. Consumer trust refers to the confidence consumers place in influencer recommendations and endorsed skincare products. Since skincare products directly affect personal appearance and skin health, consumers carefully evaluate online information before making purchase decisions. Trust developed through influencer credibility, quality content, and social media engagement positively affects consumer confidence in skincare products.

Purchase intention is considered the dependent variable in the study. It represents the willingness of consumers to purchase skincare products recommended or endorsed by social media influencers. When consumers trust influencer recommendations and perceive influencer content positively, they are more likely to develop favourable purchase intentions toward skincare products.

The conceptual framework proposes that influencer credibility, content quality, and social media engagement positively influence consumer trust, which in turn enhances skincare purchase intention. Thus, consumer trust mediates the relationship between influencer marketing factors and skincare purchase intention.



Note: H1, H2, H3 – Direct effects on Consumer Trust; H4 – Effect on Purchase Intention; H5 – Mediating effect of Consumer Trust between independent variables and Purchase Intention.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Social Media Influencer Factors Affecting Skincare Purchase Intention**

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to analyse the role of social media influencers in influencing consumer skincare purchase intention. The study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, consumer trust, and skincare purchase intention. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature as it focuses on understanding consumer perceptions and analysing the influence of influencer marketing factors on purchase behaviour. The study is based on primary data collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. The study was conducted in Chennai among social media users who actively use or purchase skincare products. Convenience sampling technique was adopted for selecting the respondents due to its

suitability and ease of data collection. A total of 128 respondents were included in the study. The questionnaire consisted of statements related to influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, consumer trust, and skincare purchase intention. The independent variables considered in the study are influencer credibility, content quality, and social media engagement. Consumer trust acts as the mediating variable, while skincare purchase intention is considered the dependent variable. The collected data were analysed using various statistical tools such as percentage analysis, reliability analysis, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and Structural Equation Modeling through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The study used SmartPLS software for analysing the data and testing the proposed hypotheses. The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. Convergent validity was measured through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT ratio. PLS-SEM was selected for the study because it is suitable for analysing complex relationships among latent variables and for examining mediating effects in predictive research models.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The collected data were analysed to examine the influence of social media influencers on skincare purchase intention among consumers in Chennai. The analysis was carried out using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS software. The study analysed the relationships among influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, consumer trust, and skincare purchase intention. The data analysis process included reliability analysis, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and structural model assessment. These analyses helped to evaluate the consistency and validity of the constructs and to test the proposed hypotheses of the study.

**Reliability Analysis:** Reliability analysis is used to measure the internal consistency of the constructs included in the study. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values were used to assess the reliability of the variables. A reliability value above 0.70 is considered acceptable and indicates good internal consistency among the measurement items.

**Table 1. Reliability Analysis**

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Influencer Credibility	0.842	0.887
Content Quality	0.816	0.872
Social Media Engagement	0.854	0.901
Consumer Trust	0.879	0.915
Purchase Intention	0.861	0.903

The above table shows the reliability values of the constructs used in the study. The Cronbach's Alpha values of all constructs are greater than the recommended threshold value of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. Similarly, the Composite Reliability values are also above 0.70, confirming that the measurement items are reliable and suitable for further analysis. Therefore, the constructs used in the study are considered reliable for PLS-SEM analysis.

**Convergent Validity Analysis:** Convergent validity analysis is used to examine whether the measurement items of a construct are highly correlated with one another. In PLS-SEM, convergent validity is assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The recommended value for factor loading is above 0.70 and the AVE value should be greater than 0.50 to confirm adequate convergent validity.

**Table 2. Convergent Validity Analysis**

Constructs	Factor Loadings	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Influencer Credibility	0.742 – 0.861	0.662
Content Quality	0.718 – 0.845	0.631
Social Media Engagement	0.756 – 0.882	0.694
Consumer Trust	0.781 – 0.903	0.729
Purchase Intention	0.748 – 0.891	0.701

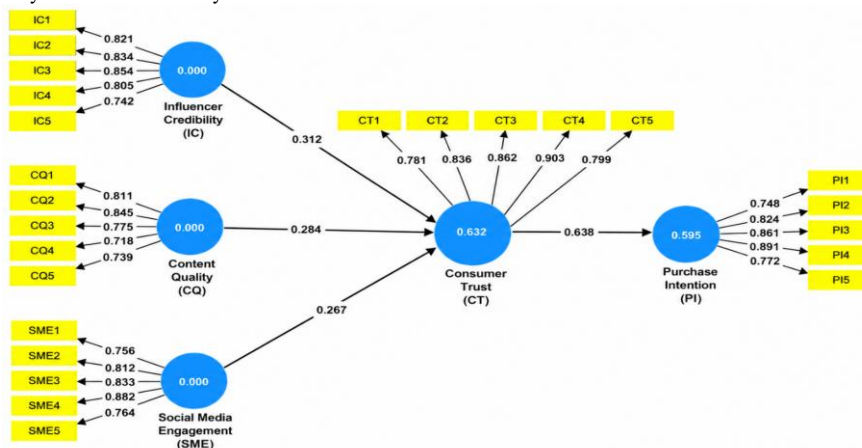
The above table presents the convergent validity results of the constructs included in the study. The factor loading values of all measurement items are above the recommended level of 0.70, indicating strong item reliability. Similarly, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are greater than 0.50, confirming satisfactory convergent validity. Therefore, the constructs used in the study adequately represent their respective variables and are suitable for further structural model analysis.

**Discriminant Validity Analysis:** Discriminant validity analysis is used to examine whether each construct in the study is distinct and different from the other constructs. In PLS-SEM, discriminant validity is commonly assessed using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE value of each construct should be greater than its correlation values with other constructs.

**Table 3. Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

Constructs	IC	CQ	SME	CT	PI
Influencer Credibility (IC)	0.814				
Content Quality (CQ)	0.621	0.794			
Social Media Engagement (SME)	0.587	0.644	0.833		
Consumer Trust (CT)	0.692	0.671	0.648	0.854	
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.635	0.618	0.601	0.742	0.837

The above table presents the discriminant validity results using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The square root of the AVE values for all constructs is greater than the correlation values with other constructs. This indicates that each construct is distinct and adequately different from the other constructs included in the study. Therefore, the model demonstrates satisfactory discriminant validity and is suitable for structural model assessment.



**Figure 2: PLS-SEM Structural Model for Social Media Influencer Impact on Skincare Purchase Intention**

**Structural Model Assessment:** Structural model assessment is used to examine the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables included in the study. In PLS-SEM, path coefficients, t-values, and p-values are used to test the proposed hypotheses and determine the significance of the relationships among the constructs. Bootstrapping technique was applied to assess the significance of the structural paths.

**Table 4. Structural Model Results**

Hypotheses	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Influencer Credibility → Consumer Trust	0.312	4.286	0.000	Supported
H2	Content Quality → Consumer Trust	0.284	3.954	0.000	Supported
H3	Social Media Engagement → Consumer Trust	0.267	3.621	0.000	Supported
H4	Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.638	8.417	0.000	Supported

The above table presents the structural model results of the study. The findings reveal that influencer credibility has a significant positive influence on consumer trust with a path coefficient value of 0.312 and a p-value less than 0.05. Similarly, content quality significantly influences consumer trust with a path coefficient value of 0.284. Social media engagement also shows a positive and significant influence on consumer trust with a path coefficient value of 0.267. Further, consumer trust significantly influences skincare purchase intention with a path coefficient value of 0.638 and a highly significant p-value. The results indicate that consumers are more likely to purchase skincare products when they trust influencer recommendations and social media content. Therefore, all the proposed hypotheses of the study are supported.

**Mediation Analysis**

Mediation analysis is used to examine whether consumer trust mediates the relationship between influencer marketing factors and skincare purchase intention. In the present study, consumer trust acts as the mediating variable between influencer credibility, content quality, social media engagement, and purchase intention. The mediation effect was analysed using the bootstrapping technique in PLS-SEM.

**Table 5. Mediation Analysis Results**

Hypotheses	Indirect Relationship	Indirect Effect	t-value	p-value	Result
H5	Influencer Credibility → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.199	3.842	0.000	Supported
H6	Content Quality → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.181	3.514	0.000	Supported
H7	Social Media Engagement → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.170	3.267	0.001	Supported

The above table presents the mediation analysis results of the study. The findings indicate that consumer trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and skincare purchase intention. Similarly, consumer trust also mediates the relationship between content quality and purchase intention as well as the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention.

The significant indirect effects and p-values less than 0.05 confirm the mediating role of consumer trust in the study model. The results imply that influencer marketing factors positively influence consumer trust, which in turn increases skincare purchase intention among consumers. Therefore, the mediation hypotheses of the study are supported.

**FINDINGS**

The study analysed the influence of social media influencers on skincare purchase intention among consumers in Chennai using PLS-SEM analysis. The reliability analysis confirmed that all the constructs achieved acceptable Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values above the recommended threshold level, indicating good internal consistency of the measurement items. The convergent validity results revealed that all factor loadings were above 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming satisfactory convergent validity of the constructs. The discriminant validity analysis using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion indicated that all constructs were distinct from one another and the model achieved adequate discriminant validity. The structural model assessment showed that influencer credibility significantly and positively influences consumer trust. The results also indicated that content quality has a positive effect on consumer trust among skincare consumers. Social media engagement was found to positively influence consumer trust, suggesting that interaction with influencer content plays an important role in shaping consumer attitudes. The findings further revealed that consumer trust significantly influences skincare purchase intention. Consumers who trust influencer recommendations are more likely to purchase skincare products promoted through social media platforms. The mediation analysis confirmed that consumer trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer marketing factors and skincare purchase intention.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Skincare brands should collaborate with credible and trustworthy social media influencers to improve consumer confidence and strengthen brand image. Influencers who provide authentic reviews, honest opinions, and educational skincare content can positively influence consumer purchase intention. Brands should focus on improving the quality of influencer-generated content by encouraging informative product demonstrations, skincare tutorials, and transparent product reviews. High-quality and engaging content can enhance consumer trust and increase customer interaction on social media platforms. Companies should actively encourage social media engagement through interactive campaigns, live sessions, customer feedback, and influencer collaborations. Increased engagement can strengthen the relationship between influencers and consumers and improve brand awareness. Skincare companies should ensure transparency in influencer marketing activities by clearly communicating product benefits, ingredients, and usage information. Ethical and authentic communication can improve consumer trust and reduce skepticism regarding sponsored promotions. Digital marketers should continuously monitor changing consumer preferences and social media trends to develop effective influencer marketing strategies. Understanding consumer expectations can help skincare brands improve customer satisfaction and increase purchase intention in the competitive skincare market.

**CONCLUSION**

The present study examined the role of social media influencers in influencing consumer skincare purchase intention among consumers in Chennai. The study analysed the influence of influencer credibility, content quality, and social media engagement on consumer trust and skincare purchase intention using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

The findings of the study revealed that social media influencers significantly affect consumer buying behaviour in the skincare industry. Influencer credibility, quality of content, and social media engagement positively influence consumer trust, which in turn increases skincare purchase intention. The study also confirmed that consumer trust plays a mediating role between influencer marketing factors and purchase intention.

The results indicate that consumers increasingly rely on influencer reviews, tutorials, and social media recommendations before purchasing skincare products. Authentic and informative influencer content helps consumers develop confidence in skincare brands and products. Therefore, influencer marketing has become an important digital marketing strategy for skincare companies to improve consumer engagement and purchase intention.

The study contributes to the existing literature on influencer marketing and consumer behaviour by providing empirical evidence using a PLS-SEM approach. The findings of the study may help skincare brands, marketers, and digital strategists develop more effective influencer marketing campaigns and improve customer trust in the competitive digital marketplace.

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