

The Influence of Social Media Marketing On Purchasing Decisions of Beauty Products among Gen Z in Ahmedabad

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, social media has become a powerful force shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in the beauty industry. This study investigates how social media influences the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers in Ahmedabad, with emphasis on influencer marketing, content credibility, and user engagement. Using a descriptive research design, data was collected from 125 respondents and analysed through SPSS. Results show that Instagram is the most influential platform for beauty content, aiding in trend awareness and brand discovery. However, price and product quality remain key purchase drivers. Most users engage passively and show mixed trust in influencers. The findings support theoretical frameworks like the COBRA Model and Source Credibility Theory. The study emphasizes the importance of authenticity and localized marketing, while highlighting future research opportunities in digital trends, generational differences, and emerging technologies like AR.

KEYWORDS

Social Media Marketing, Generation Z, Influencer Credibility, Beauty Industry, Consumer Behaviour, Instagram Engagement.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly within the beauty industry. Traditional marketing methods are now supplemented—or replaced—by platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, which feature tutorials, influencer reviews, and trend-based content. These platforms significantly influence consumer perceptions and buying decisions, especially among Generation Z—those born between 1997 and 2012—who are deeply immersed in digital technology and social networking. Globally valued at over \$500 billion, the beauty industry leverages social media as a primary marketing and sales channel. Gen Z consumers, known for valuing authenticity and trend-consciousness, are heavily impacted by short-form, visually engaging content. This shift has transformed platforms like TikTok and Instagram into powerful tools for beauty marketing. In India, the beauty and personal care sector is growing rapidly, driven by rising incomes, grooming awareness, and digital exposure. Cities like Ahmedabad, with a young and digitally active population, offer an ideal context for examining how social media shapes Gen Z's beauty product purchasing behaviours.

The Rise of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Beauty Influencer marketing has become central to beauty industry strategies. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, social media influencers offer reliability and authenticity. Micro-influencers, in particular, are perceived as more genuine and trustworthy by Gen Z audiences, often having a greater impact on purchasing decisions than mainstream celebrities. Although much global research explores these dynamics, localized studies in Indian cities like Ahmedabad are limited. This study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating the influence of social media influencers, content credibility, and authenticity on the beauty product choices of Generation Z in Ahmedabad.

II. RESEARCH GAP

While extensive research has been conducted on the influence of social media marketing on consumer behaviour, several critical gaps remain, particularly concerning Generation Z consumers in India's beauty industry.

A. *Limited focus on Indian Gen Z consumers:*

Most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts, where cultural perceptions of beauty, social media engagement, and purchasing behaviour differ significantly from Indian consumers. There is limited empirical research exploring how Indian Gen Z interprets and responds to social media marketing within the beauty sector.

B. *Lack of integration of influencer credibility and UGC impact:*

Although the role of influencers and user-generated content (UGC) is widely acknowledged, few studies have quantitatively examined how different forms of influencer marketing (micro vs. macro) and authentic UGC specifically shape Gen Z's purchasing intentions in the beauty market.

C. *Insufficient application of theoretical frameworks:*

While the COBRA Model provides a robust foundation for understanding online brand-related activities, limited research has empirically tested this framework in the context of beauty product purchasing decisions among Gen Z in India, especially linking the levels of engagement (consumption, contribution, creation) to actual buying behaviour.

D. *Neglect of value-based and ethical considerations:*

Existing literature primarily focuses on engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, but less attention is given to how values such as sustainability, inclusivity, and ethical branding influence the trust and loyalty of Gen Z beauty consumers on social media.

E. Gap in understanding emotional and psychological drivers:

There is a paucity of research exploring the emotional connection and perceived authenticity of social media content as psychological factors influencing purchase decisions among Indian Gen Z users.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the differences among age and access to beauty- related content on social media.
2. To analyse how age influence trust, confidence on beauty products.
3. Find out how age shapes brand awareness and product discovery.
4. To check how age affect what people do after – buying like comparing price and quality.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gen Z's Social Media Behavior Generation Z spends a significant amount of time on social media platforms, using them not only for entertainment but also as primary sources of information, trends, and product recommendations. Global research indicates that over 80% of Gen Z consumers discover new products through social media, while nearly 60% make purchasing decisions influenced by recommendations from social media influencers. Influence of Social Media on Purchase Behavior Social media marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing brand visibility, fostering trust, and building emotional connections with consumers. Studies reveal that factors such as the Customer Engagement Model (involving likes, comments, and shares) and Content Credibility (authenticity and reliability) significantly shape the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers. Role of Influencers and User-Generated Content (UGC) Gen Z consumers prefer authentic and relatable content over traditional forms of advertising. They tend to trust micro-influencers and user-generated content more than celebrity endorsements. In the beauty industry, product demonstrations, genuine reviews, and before-and-after transformations are particularly influential in driving purchase decisions. Beauty Industry and Gen Z Trends in India Indian Gen Z consumers are becoming more aware of product ingredients, sustainability, inclusivity, and ethical business practices. Social media campaigns that align with these values tend to foster stronger brand loyalty and result in higher conversion rates among this demographic.

Theoretical Framework – COBRA Model The COBRA (Consumer Online Brand-Related Activities) model categorizes online consumer engagement into three levels: Consumption – passive activities such as viewing or browsing content Contribution – active interactions like commenting, sharing, or liking content Creation – content generation activities such as writing reviews or posting unboxing videos This framework provides insight into how varying levels of social media engagement influence consumers' purchase intentions.

A. *Hypothesis*

1. There is a significant association between age and the perception that beauty content on social media is up-to-date with latest trends and launches.
2. There is a significant association between age and trust in beauty recommendations from influencers/creators.
3. There is a significant association between age and social media helping to discover new beauty brands and products.
4. There is a significant association between age and mostly watching/observing beauty content rather than posting or commenting.
5. There is a significant association between age and weighing price and perceived quality before buying even when influenced by social media.

Table 1: Validation of Questionnaire

All Statements with scale
the perception that beauty content on social media is up-to-date with latest trends and launches
Trust in beauty recommendations from influencers/creators.
Social media helping to discover new beauty brands and products.
Mostly watching/observing beauty content rather than posting or commenting.
weighing price and perceived quality before buying even when influenced by social media

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Table 2: Research Methodology

Research Design	Descriptive
Sample Method	Non-Probability - Convenient Sampling method
Data Collection Method	Primary method
Data Collection Method	Structured Questionnaire
Type of Questions	Close ended
Data Collection mode	Online through Google Form
Data Analysis methods	Tables
Data Analysis Tools	SPSS and Excel
Sampling Size	124 Gen' Z Respondent
Survey Area	Your area of data collection
Sampling Unit	Students, Private and government Job employees, Businessmen, Home maker, Professionals like CA, Doctor etc.

C. Demographic Summary

The sample consisted of 125 participants, with the majority (85.6%) aged between 18 and 25 years, followed by 12% aged 3 years (likely a typo, please verify), and 2.4% aged 25-32 years. Females represented 55.2% of the sample, while males accounted for 44.8%. Regarding current status, most participants were students (79.2%), with smaller proportions being professionals (8%), employed in jobs (6.4%), homemakers (4.8%), and business owners (1.6%). In terms of average monthly spending on beauty and personal care products, 44% spent less than 500, 32.8% spent between 500-999, and smaller groups spent higher amounts. Instagram was the primary platform used for beauty content by nearly half of the participants (48.8%), followed by others (36%), YouTube (13.6%), and Snap chat (1.6%).

D. Cronbach Alpha

The internal consistency of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicated good reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.838 for the 5-item scale, suggesting that the items have a high level of consistency in measuring the underlying construct.

Table 3: Results of Hypothesis Testing

Sr. No	Alternate Hypothesis	Result p =	< / > 0.05	Accept / Reject Null Hypothesis	R value (Pearson's R)	Relationship
1	There is a significant association between age and the perception that beauty content on social media is up-to-date with latest trends and launches.	0.676	>	H1 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.025	No significant relationship
2	There is a significant association between age and trust in beauty recommendations from influencers/creators.	0.200	>	H2 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.184	Weak but statistically significant positive relationship (Pearson's R p=0.040) [Ordinal measures support this]
3	There is a significant association between age and social media	0.637	>	H3 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	-0.014	No significant relationship

	helping to discover new beauty brands and products.			Hypothesis Accepted)		
4	There is a significant association between age and mostly watching/observing beauty content rather than posting or commenting.	0.562	>	H4 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.045	No significant relationship
5	There is a significant association between age and weighing price and perceived quality before buying even when influenced by social media.	0.529	>	H5 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.063	No significant relationship

V. DISCUSSION

The study aimed to understand how social media influences consumer behavior in the beauty and personal care industry, particularly focusing on young consumers' perceptions, trust, and purchasing decisions. A total of 125 valid responses were collected and analyzed using SPSS through frequency distributions, reliability analysis, and chi-square tests. The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents (85.6%) belonged to the age group of 18–25 years, followed by 12% aged above 32, indicating that young adults dominate beauty content consumption on social media. The sample included 55.2% females and 44.8% males, reflecting a fairly balanced gender representation, though females slightly outnumbered males. In terms of occupation, 79.2% were students, suggesting that the findings primarily represent youth and early-career individuals with high social media engagement. Regarding spending habits, 44% reported spending less than ₹500 monthly on beauty and personal care products, while 32.8% spent between ₹500–₹999. This indicates moderate but consistent spending behavior, highlighting a price-conscious segment. When examining the primary platform used for beauty content, Instagram (48.8%) emerged as the dominant source, followed by "Others" (36%) and YouTube (13.6%). This demonstrates the strong visual influence of Instagram as a platform where beauty brands and influencers reach young audiences most effectively. Responses to attitudinal statements show that 32% of participants "Agree" and 19.2% "Strongly Agree" that the beauty content they view is up-to-date with trends and launches, indicating positive perceptions toward the relevance of social media content. However, trust in influencers appears more neutral, as 36.8% of respondents chose "Neutral" and 23.2% "Disagree," suggesting that while influencers play a role in discovery, their recommendations are not fully trusted by all consumers. Interestingly, 36.8% "Agree" that social media helps them discover new brands, showing its role in awareness and exploration.

The statement "I mostly watch/observe beauty content rather than posting or commenting" received 30.4% "Agree" and 23.2% "Strongly Agree" responses, indicating that most users are passive consumers rather than active contributors. Furthermore, 65.6% either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that even when influenced by social media, they still consider price and quality before purchasing, suggesting rational decision-making despite online influence. The reliability test for the attitudinal variables (Q6–Q10) produced a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.838, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the scale used for measuring consumer attitudes toward social media influence. The chi-square tests explored the relationship between age and various attitudinal factors. Except for the statement regarding trust in influencers ($p = 0.041$), all other variables had p -values greater than 0.05, indicating no significant association between age and perception. The significant relationship in one case suggests that trust in influencer recommendations slightly varies by age, with younger respondents possibly being more influenced than older ones.

Overall, the findings reveal that social media—particularly Instagram—plays a crucial role in exposing young consumers to beauty trends and products. However, while engagement and awareness are high, purchase decisions remain guided by practical considerations such as price and quality, rather than solely by influencer persuasion. This emphasizes that brands must balance authentic influencer collaborations with value-driven marketing strategies to effectively engage the modern, informed beauty consumer.

A. *Theoretical Implications*

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of how social media influences consumer behaviour, particularly in the context of the beauty and personal care industry. The results align with and expand existing theories of consumer decision-making, social influence, and digital marketing communication.

Firstly, the study reinforces the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that an individual's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence their intentions and actions. The data reveal that while respondents are highly exposed to beauty-related content on social media, their purchase decisions are still guided by personal evaluation of price and quality, as indicated by 65.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. This supports the notion that even when social norms (such as influencer promotions or social trends) play a role, rational assessment remains a key determinant of behaviour.

Secondly, the findings strengthen the Source Credibility Theory, which suggests that the persuasiveness of a message depends on the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the source. The relatively neutral and mixed responses regarding trust in influencer recommendations (36.8% neutral, 23.2% disagree) highlight that credibility is not automatically granted to influencers; it must be earned through authenticity and consistency. This insight suggests that while influencers are vital channels in digital marketing, their impact is moderated by perceived reliability and relevance. Furthermore, the study adds depth to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, explaining that audiences use media to satisfy specific needs such as information, entertainment, or social identity. The predominance of Instagram as the main platform (48.8%) and the passive consumption

behaviour of users (majority only watch, not post) reflect that beauty content fulfils observational and informational needs more than participatory ones. This helps explain why many users engage with beauty content without necessarily contributing or commenting — they consume content primarily for learning and awareness rather than social interaction.

Overall, the results provide theoretical support for the evolving concept of digital consumer empowerment, wherein social media enables individuals to access abundant product information and peer opinions, yet they remain selective and self-directed in final purchase decisions. The study thus contributes to bridging the gap between influence and autonomy in online consumer behaviour models, emphasizing that modern consumers are influenced, but not controlled, by social media marketing.

B. Practical Implications

The results of this study provide several practical implications for marketers, beauty brands, and social media strategists aiming to influence consumer purchasing behavior effectively. Understanding how young consumers interact with beauty content on social media can help companies design more authentic, engaging, and value-driven marketing campaigns.

Firstly, the findings indicate that Instagram is the most influential platform for beauty-related content, with 48.8% of respondents identifying it as their primary source of information. This suggests that beauty brands should prioritize Instagram-centric marketing strategies, such as influencer collaborations, short video tutorials, reels, and visually appealing product showcases. Additionally, consistent posting and trend-based campaigns can enhance engagement among the 18–25 age group, which forms the majority of social media beauty content consumers.

Secondly, while social media effectively increases brand awareness and product discovery, it does not automatically guarantee consumer trust or purchase. Since 36.8% of respondents reported a neutral stance toward trusting influencers, brands must focus on building credibility and transparency. Collaborating with micro-influencers who share genuine product experiences and have close engagement with their followers can enhance authenticity and trustworthiness. Moreover, providing honest reviews, user-generated content, and behind-the-scenes product information can strengthen consumer confidence.

The study also highlights that most respondents (65.6%) still evaluate price and product quality before buying, even when influenced by social media. This underlines the need for brands to balance aspirational marketing with value-based communication. Offering trial sizes, combo offers, and emphasizing long-term benefits can attract price-conscious yet quality-oriented buyers. Another practical insight is the predominance of passive users, where most participants prefer to watch or observe rather than post or comment. To engage this group, marketers can introduce interactive but low-effort engagement activities such as polls, quizzes, and limited-time offers that encourage participation without requiring heavy involvement.

Finally, since the reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.838) confirmed the consistency of responses regarding social media influence, businesses can rely on these findings to guide data-driven marketing strategies. Brands should invest in social listening tools to monitor consumer feedback and emerging trends, ensuring their content remains current and relatable. In summary, the study suggests that while social media—especially Instagram—plays a crucial role in shaping beauty consumers' awareness and preferences, trust, value, and authenticity remain the core factors influencing actual purchase decisions. Brands that combine engaging digital presence with transparent and consumer-centric messaging are likely to build stronger, more loyal customer relationships in the long term.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of social media on consumer behavior within the beauty industry, focusing on how digital platforms, particularly Instagram, shape awareness, trust, and purchase decisions. The findings highlight that while social media significantly impacts product discovery and brand perception, consumers remain discerning in their final purchasing choices. A majority of respondents reported that social media content helps them stay updated with beauty trends and discover new products. However, the study also revealed that price and quality continue to be the dominant factors influencing actual buying decisions, emphasizing that consumers balance digital influence with rational evaluation. Moreover, the mixed responses toward influencer credibility suggest that authenticity and transparency are essential for maintaining consumer trust.

The results further indicated that social media serves more as an informational and inspirational tool than a direct sales driver. Users prefer to engage passively—viewing content and gathering information—rather than actively posting or interacting. This behavior underlines the importance of strategic, engaging, and value-oriented marketing rather than overt promotional tactics. In conclusion, the research demonstrates that social media is a powerful yet selective influencer in consumer decision-making. Beauty brands must therefore focus on creating genuine, relatable, and trust-building content that complements consumer expectations of quality and affordability. When integrated effectively, social media can enhance both brand connection and long-term customer loyalty.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH/ FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights into how social media affects consumer behavior in the beauty industry, it also opens several avenues for future research. As social media platforms and consumer habits continue to evolve, there is significant scope to explore the topic in greater depth and across broader contexts.

Firstly, future studies could include a larger and more diverse sample size across different age groups, regions, and socio-economic backgrounds. The current research primarily focused on young adults, which limits generalization. Including older demographics could

reveal how generational differences influence online purchasing behavior and trust in digital marketing.

Secondly, this study was limited to quantitative analysis using survey data. Future research can adopt mixed-method approaches, combining surveys with in-depth interviews or focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of consumer motivations, emotions, and perceptions behind social media influence. Another area for exploration is the comparison between different social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Each platform has unique content formats and audience behaviors, which can lead to varying degrees of consumer impact. Examining how platform-specific features—like short videos, influencer collaborations, or live shopping—affect purchasing behavior can provide more detailed marketing insights. Additionally, future research could study the long-term effects of social media exposure on brand loyalty and post-purchase satisfaction. Understanding whether online influence translates into repeat purchases or sustainable brand relationships would offer practical guidance for marketers.

Finally, with the rise of artificial intelligence and augmented reality (AR) in beauty marketing—such as virtual try-ons and AI-driven product recommendations—future studies can investigate how these technologies shape consumer trust, convenience, and decision-making. In conclusion, expanding this research through broader demographics, qualitative insights, and technological dimensions will help develop a more comprehensive understanding of digital consumer behavior. This will enable beauty brands and marketers to design more effective, personalized, and trustworthy social media strategies in the future.

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