



Research Article

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Social Media Influencers and Cosmetic Consumption Patterns: A Study on Youth Demographics of Kolkata

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ABSTRACT

The rapid digitalization of India has increased the popularity of social media influencers, and a new marketing technique, termed influencer marketing, has been introduced. This study examines how social media influencers impact cosmetic choices among Kolkata's youth (16-24 years old). Data were collected from 200 respondents using a structured online questionnaire that investigated factors such as cosmetic purchase habits, preferred sources for obtaining cosmetic-related information, and the credibility criteria of influencers. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms have become the main source of information on cosmetic products compared to traditional marketing platforms. Moreover, influencers' recommendations influence brand attention and perceived trustworthiness. This study identifies three key characteristics of influencers that help build rapport with young consumers: authenticity, expertise, and information quality. Based on these insights, influencer marketing appears to be an effective strategy for enhancing brand visibility and trust, although it lags behind in purchase conversion. Therefore, brands must develop more advanced engagement strategies to connect with the youth demographic by aligning influencer traits. Both brands and influencers need to recognize that today's youth are active and discerning consumers. They critically evaluate social media content and trust in merely reliable and authentic sources.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary digitally driven society, social media platforms have become essential tools for gathering information, disseminating user-generated content, and connecting with people beyond global boundaries. The rapid proliferation of the internet and smartphones has integrated social media into daily life; individuals cannot imagine a day without engagement with social networking accounts. Currently, 66.2% of the global population uses the internet, while 62.3% maintain social media accounts and spend an average of two hours and 23 minutes daily on these platforms (Kemp, 2024). The number of active social media users in India has surpassed 600 million as of 2024 (Statista, 2024). The transformative growth of social media has revolutionized communication patterns and profoundly impacted marketing practices. Consequently, marketers and brands are currently considering social

media influencers as a powerful means of effectively promoting products and brands to target consumers more (Sudirjo, 2023).

The rapid digitalization of India has catalyzed the popularity of social media influencers, leading to the emergence of a novel marketing approach termed influencer marketing. This approach has become a prominent trend as well as an affordable contemporary celebrity endorsement (Hall, 2015; Saima & Khan, 2020). This technique involves marketers collaborate with content creators, referred as influencers, to endorse products and services to specific niche audiences (followers) (Mishra & Ashfaq, 2023). According to a study by Freberg et al. (2011),

"Social media influencers are an emerging group of independent third-party endorsers who use blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms to influence viewers' opinions." (Freberg et al., 2011, p. X)

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Social media influencers consistently post and share their experiences, opinions, knowledge, and reviews directly with end users through various formats, including photos, blogs, vlogs, and videos. Moreover, influencers serve as 'hidden persuaders' and 'trusted advisors' who significantly shape brand preferences, purchase intentions, and decision-making processes among followers, predominantly within the younger demographic (Lal & Sharma, 2021).

Unlike other industries, the cosmetics sector has emerged as a domain where influencer marketing has achieved remarkable success. Previously, cosmetic advertising was restricted to television and print media; however, social media now facilitates more innovative advertising strategies and larger audience reach. Social media platforms provide beauty influencers an opportunity to share their expertise while promoting products (Syawaluddin et al., 2019). Brands can now directly target consumers and market their products in fresh and creative ways with the growth of influencers on platforms like Instagram and YouTube (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019; Pop et al., 2020). Furthermore, consumers can use social media to research, evaluate, and access reviews of products they are considering purchasing (Kalsi, 2024). This shift in advertising practices underscores the vital role that social media influencers play in driving consumer behavior. Therefore, to maintain a strong brand reputation in a competitive market, cosmetic brands must strategically leverage the power of social media influencers (Alamer et al., 2023).

The cosmetics market in India is anticipated to reach USD 20 billion by 2025, with substantial growth driven by young urban consumers. Kolkata, as a prominent metropolitan city in India, represents a unique demographic where traditional beauty standards intersect with contemporary global trends. Through the vast content produced by social media influencers, young consumers are exposed to both local and international beauty standards that shape their behavior, choices, and consumption habits. However, overexposure to innumerable information, product categories, and choices results in confusion and impulsive buying decisions (Singh, 2021).

This study investigates the relationship between social media influencers and cosmetic preferences among young consumers (aged 18-25) in Kolkata. It also focuses on the factors that predominantly influence young consumers' purchase decisions, trustworthiness, brand loyalty, and overall attitudes toward cosmetic product selection. This research provides actionable insights for cosmetic brands, marketers, and influencers seeking to harness the power of social media effectively. By comprehending how young consumers evaluate and respond to influencer content, brands can optimize their marketing strategies, tailor their offerings, and build stronger connections with their target audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Influencers

Balakrishnan et al. (2014) mentioned that social media influencers (SMIs) create content on specific topics across various social media platforms and build plausibility with their viewers. SMIs refer to individuals who have established compelling online identities and are highly visible to their followers through the production of viral content on social media, unlike celebrities or public figures who gain recognition through traditional media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, studies have shown that people tend to trust influencers more than celebrities as influencers share their lives, opinions, and experiences in ways that followers can easily relate to (Abidin, 2016).

Agustian et al. (2023) depicted social media influencers as individuals with influential presence due to their large and widespread audiences. Influencers have the power to persuade viewers through their distinctive communication styles and engaging personalities. Through various content influencers attempt to establish robust emotional connections and trust, which are crucial in shifting consumer preferences, creating brand identities, and boosting sales in the competitive marketplace. People are more inclined to purchase a product if a trusted influencer recommends it. Additionally, influencers can provide options and reduce the cost of reaching intended audience (Tajuden et al., 2018). The number of subscribers and expertise of influencers can make an immense difference. Recent studies indicate that macro-influencers can reach broader audiences and significantly influence consumer decision-making. However, micro-influencer engage with more specialized audiences, allow for pedantic communication and accurate information (Conde & Casais, 2023).

Influencer Marketing

Byren et al. (2017) defined influencer marketing as, "A marketing approach that uses influential leaders to convey a brand's message to a wider audience." (Byren et al., 2017, p. X) Influencer marketing is a crucial digital marketing strategy where companies and brands collaborate with popular influencers to create promotional content (Chopra et al., 2021). It effectively reaches a narrower group of consumers, especially younger demographics who spend significant time on online platforms (Ohara, 2023; Said et al., 2023). Furthermore, as influencers share their recommendations and experiences, followers feel more connected to the brand, which can strengthen emotional ties between customers and brands (Agustian et al., 2023).

Influencer marketing involves four primary steps: first, identifying influential individuals and assigning positions based on their significance; second, informing followers about beneficial brands; third, developing awareness about the target market; and fourth, shaping customer



perceptions of a brand through influencers. Credibility, engagement, and trust are some of core traits of effective influencers (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). Research by A.C. Nielsen indicates that influencer marketing produces greater returns than conventional digital marketing and celebrity endorsements (Tapinfluence, 2017).

Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Behavior

Saima and Khan (2020) stated that social media influencer marketing is an effective, economical, and impactful way to promote brands, products, and services to the target audience. According to researchers, several factors help build consumer trust and credibility toward influencers. They found that the credibility of an influencer depends on trustworthiness, entertainment value, content quality, and information accuracy. However, an influencer alone cannot explicitly convince a consumer to buy a product; rather, they can influence purchase intention when paired with factors such as product needs, perceived value, price, and brand perception.

Agustian et al. (2023) extended this understanding by contemplating the impact of influencer marketing on tangible outcomes, such as increasing sales and brand awareness, particularly in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These findings indicate that influencer marketing is a unique approach that transforms marketing dynamics and provides immense positive benefits to SMEs by increasing sales and recognition. However, brands should also take responsibilities for selecting influencers to promote their products and services. Brands should ensure that influencers' content styles align with their brand values. Vidani et al. (2023) further conducted a study to explore the relationship between influencer marketing and gendered consumer behavior, specifically concerning clothing purchases across various fashion categories. The findings highlight a significant connection between influencers and consumer behavior regarding clothing purchases. Furthermore, researchers have suggested several strategies that brands and influencers can employ to create effective marketing tactics tailored to specific genders.

Meanwhile, Erwin et al. (2023) employed a quantitative approach to comprehend the dynamic interplay between social media influencers and Gen Z consumer behavior with special reference to Indonesia. The study revealed that most participants used social media for more than two hours, with Instagram being the most influential platform in shaping Gen Z's purchase decisions. Moreover, these findings highlighted the importance of authenticity and transparency in building trust among consumers. Dutta and Bhattacharya (2023) argued that rapidly growing social media platforms have become an essential component of marketing. Though, in the digital age, young college students are becoming overly reliant on discounts and reviews, which can lead to impulsive buying decisions.

Influence of Social Media on Cosmetic Preferences

Ringim and Reni (2018) demonstrated that the prevalence of social media platforms significantly impacts individuals' attitudes, perceptions, decisions, and intentions regarding cosmetic purchasing habits. They used the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to elucidate the effect of social media on consumer buying behavior. Nevertheless, external factors such as price, product quality, and recommendations from peers continue to shape consumer dynamics in the digital era. Building on this foundation, Kalsi (2024) found that trends and patterns in social media, visual representation of cosmetic products, and credibility are paramount factors that have a great influence on consumers' cosmetic purchase decisions in the Kolkola region. Moreover, the researcher highlighted how brands leverage these platforms to strengthen their market positions and engage with target audiences in an increasingly competitive environment.

Santos et al. (2023) emphasized the influence of social media in disseminating the concept of vegan product consumption to a broader population. Recently, vegan cosmetic products gained popularity due to their sustainable nature and environmental safety characteristics. Through a cross-sectional survey, this study found that the credibility of social media sources is crucial in driving purchase intentions for vegan cosmetics. Interestingly, even a non-vegan person may become inclined to use vegan cosmetic products after being influenced by endorsements from social media influencers.

Impact of Social Media Influencers on Cosmetic Consumption Patterns

Sharma (2018) conducted a study to comprehend the sway of influencer marketing on Gen Z consumers' cosmetic purchase habits with special reference to Pune City. He found that to attract tech-savvy Gen Z consumers' brands are leveraging the potential of influencer marketing. The results demonstrated that most Gen Z respondents follow beauty influencers and rely on their opinions and recommendations. However, consumers do not trust influencers blindly and prefer to corroborate every piece of information before making a purchase. Moreover, the researcher further emphasized that brands should enforce more campaigns targeting specifically female consumers as they are the prime audience of beauty influencers.

Adding to this perspective, Akshaya and Lakshmi (2024) found a robust relationship between influencer credibility, brand attitude and millennial women's cosmetic purchase behavior. Specifically, this new marketing strategy is more parsimonious and less time-consuming compared to traditional advertising methods. However, they noticed that this strategy enhances brand visibility; though, it does not always lead to increase sales.

Rachman (2024) explained that to thrive in today's competitive market, brands must understand various

approaches to influencer marketing and how consumers perceive this strategy. The findings indicate that in Indonesia, 4 to 6 out of every 10 purchases in the beauty industry are significantly influenced by recommendations from influencers. In the digital age, consumers find influencer marketing appealing, convenient, and easily accessible. However, concerns regarding the authenticity of sponsored content have emerged, which may lead to potential trust issues. This suggests that while influencer marketing is highly relevant in the context of consumer engagement; however, brands should carefully maintain transparency to build a long-lasting impact on the beauty industry.

Through this comprehensive literature review, the author identified social media influencers as the most prominent medium in the current marketing landscape. Collectively, these studies imply that influencer marketing serves not only as an instrument for engagement but also as a driving force behind evolving consumer habits and market trends.

Research Gap

Previous studies have investigated the impact of social media influencer marketing across diverse product categories and markets. Moreover, existing literature predominantly focuses on broader consumer segments or developed markets, thus leaves a knowledge gap to further study the interaction between influencer credibility factors and purchase conversion rates among youth consumers in the Indian context. The impact of influencer marketing within the Indian cosmetics market, particularly focusing young metropolitan consumers of Kolkata remains largely unexplored. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to explore the impact of social media influencers on cosmetic selection habits among young consumers in Kolkata, India. This study also aims to provide invaluable insights for cosmetic brands that are essential for navigating India's rapidly digitizing market.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the impact of social media influencers on cosmetic product selection among the youth consumers of Kolkata.
- To identify key factors that shape consumers' trust, perceptions, and preferences when purchasing influencers' recommended cosmetic products.
- To provide actionable recommendations for cosmetic brands targeting young consumers in metropolitan India to optimize influencer marketing strategies and improve purchase conversions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To examine the influence of social media influencers on the cosmetic selection habits of youth, this study employs

a mixed-methods approach. This methodology integrates the strengths of quantitative surveys with the contextual richness of literature review to provide a holistic view of the topic under study. In particular, this approach allows researchers to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data. For instance, surveys were utilized to collect primary data as part of the quantitative research approach. On the other hand, as part of the qualitative research approach, secondary data were collected and analyzed through an extensive review of published literature, including academic papers, journals, and articles pertinent to the topic (Mishra & Ashfaq, 2023).

Sampling Method and Timeframe

The target population for this study consisted of young consumers aged 16–25 years residing in Kolkata, India. A total of 200 participants were selected for the survey using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure all respondents were suitable for the study's objectives. The sample size was determined based on feasibility, available resources, and prior existing studies that contemplate consumers' purchasing behavior in various industries. The survey was conducted over two months, from December 2024 to January 2025. The response rate was 81%, with 162 participants completing the survey.

Although, the responses were collected through an online survey, this might comprise potential biases, such as self-selection bias, non-response bias, response bias, and exclusion of participants due to internet inaccessibility. However, the researcher made efforts to minimize these biases through explicit survey instructions and the use of diverse platforms for broad outreach.

Data Collection Methods

An online survey was used to gather quantitative data from primary sources. The questionnaires were disseminated to the selected sample via different social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Gmail. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions that focused on respondents' exposure to social media influencers, the credibility criteria of influencers, and influence on cosmetic purchasing decisions. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, respondent anonymity, and voluntary participation were rigorously followed throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was done through graphical representations to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the data collected via surveys. The data were intended for a percentage analysis using bar charts and pie graphs to effectively illustrate patterns and trends.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

Based on the 162 responses received through the online survey, 55.7% (90) of the participants were female and 44.3% (72) were male. This distribution indicates that females exhibit a general interest in topics related to cosmetic products and social media influencers compared to males. The majority of participants (62.9%) were aged 23-25, followed by those aged 19—22 (24.3%) and 16-18 (12.9%) (Figures 1 and 2).

Social Media Usage Patterns

As illustrated in Figure 3, among all respondents (N=162), 47.1% used social media for 1—3 hours daily, followed by 34.3% who reported usage of 4—6 hours. A smaller proportion of youths (11.4%) used social media for 7-9 hours, and 7.1% used it for more than 10 hours.

Figure 4 indicates that Instagram is the most influential social media platform, as 42.9% of respondents selecting it as the most preferred platform. This was followed by an equal percentage of individuals (27.1%) who preferred YouTube and Facebook. However, only a small percentage of respondents (1.4%) prefer to use Twitter and Telegram.

Consumer Behavior

Figure 5 shows that the highest percentages of young consumers in Kolkata (81.4%) purchase cosmetic products on a weekly basis, with 14.3% purchase them monthly and 4.3% make daily purchases.

Figure 6 presents an interesting finding that underscores the prevalence of social media, particularly among the youth. The majority of respondents (81.7%) reported encountering their last cosmetic advertisement on social media. In comparison, only 8.6% of respondents saw last cosmetic advertisement on traditional mass media platforms.

Figure 7 illustrates the frequency with which respondents observed branding and promotion of cosmetic

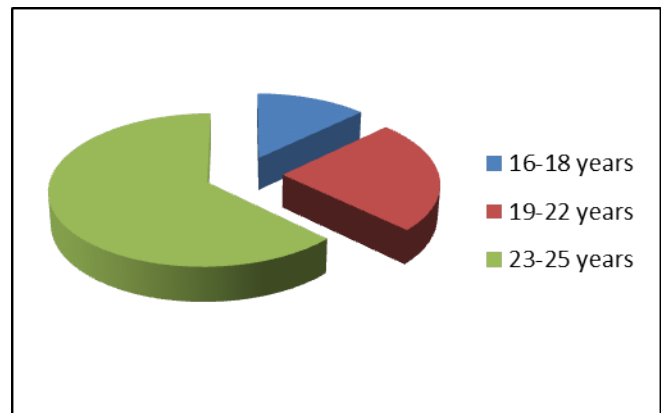


Figure 2: Age of the Respondents

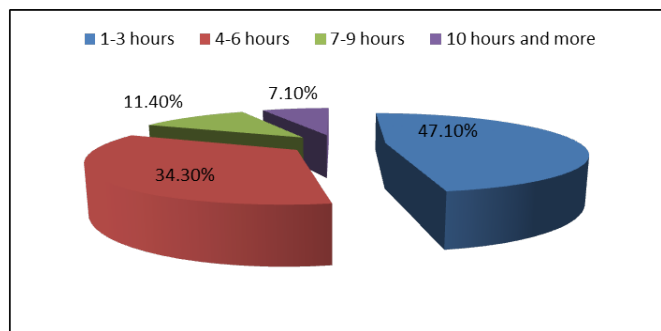


Figure 3: Daily Social Media Usage

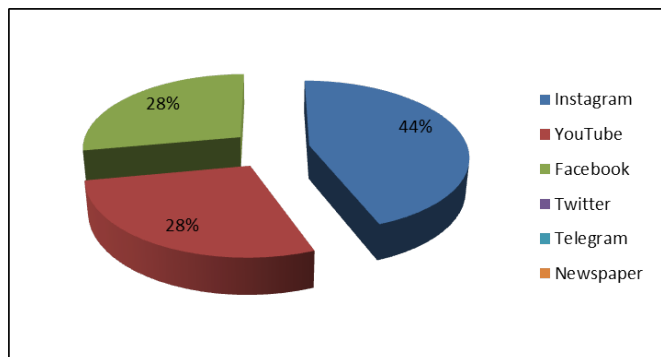


Figure 4: Preferred Social Media Platforms

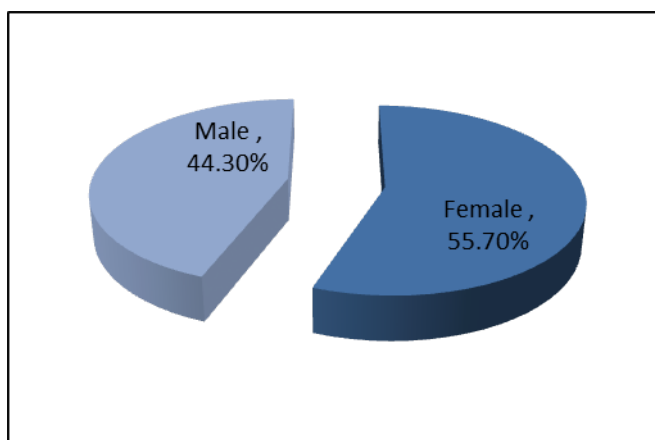


Figure 1: Gender of the Respondents

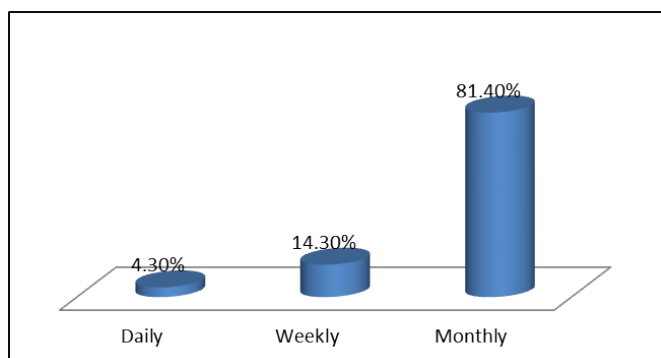


Figure 5: Frequency of Cosmetic Purchases

products on social media. The results indicated that 42.9% of participants observed the branding and promotion of cosmetics to some extent, although 34.3% of respondents agreed that they observed promotions to a large extent. In contrast, 22.9% of individuals reported seeing very few promotions and branding for cosmetic products on social media.

As depicted in Figure 8, a significant number of respondents (72.9%) followed influencers, celebrities, and other popular accounts on social media. In contrast, 17% of respondents stated that they did not follow any specific influencer or popular account, and 10% were uncertain about their followership habits.

Impact of Influencers on Consumers Decision-Making:

Figure 9 demonstrates that the majority of respondents (44.3%) agreed that they followed influencers for their opinions, while a considerable number of respondents (30%) were uncertain regarding this matter. In contrast, 25.7% of the respondents expressed that they did not follow influencers for their opinions.

Following influencers does not necessarily indicate that respondents pay close attention to their reviews and feedback before making an actual cosmetic purchase decision. To address this confusion, the researcher

included a pertinent question in the questionnaire. According to Figure 10, the proportion of respondents who moderately and frequently rely on influencers' reviews to purchase cosmetic products is similar in number (25.7%). However, 18.6% of respondents indicated that they highly rely on influencers' feedback before purchasing cosmetics,

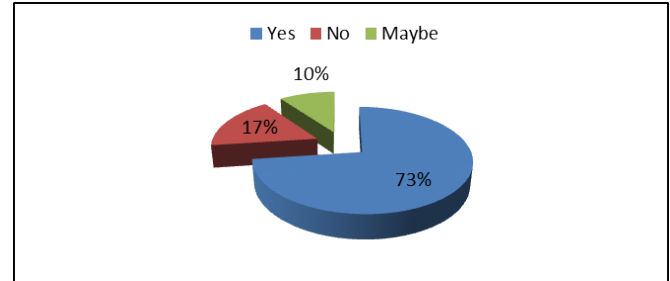


Figure 8: Influencer Followership Habits of Respondents

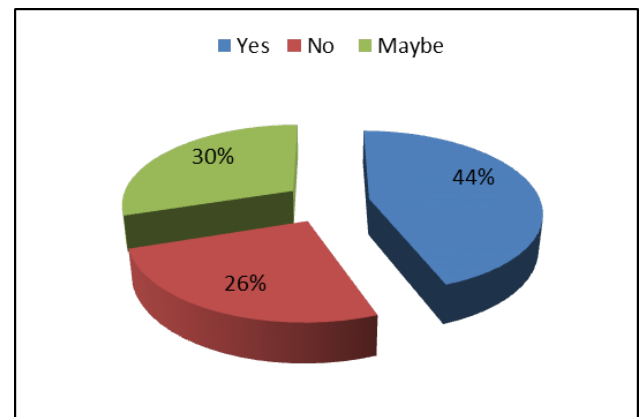


Figure 9: Influence on Opinions

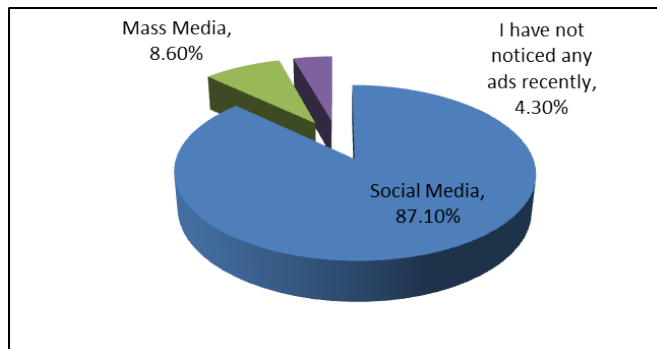


Figure 6: Platform for Observing Cosmetic Advertisements

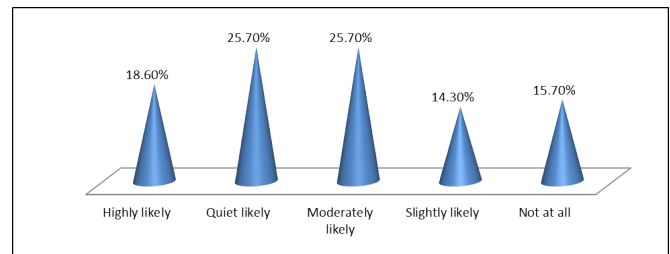


Figure 10: Influence on Purchase Decisions

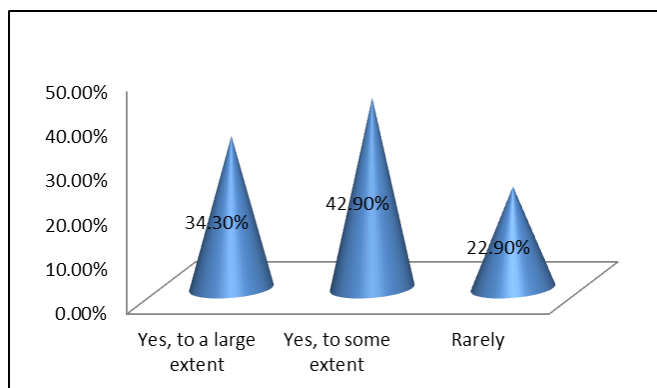


Figure 7: Branding and Promotions Observed on Social Media

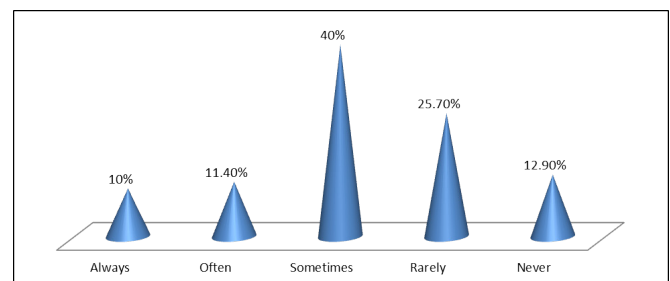


Figure 11: Trying New Products Promoted by Influencers

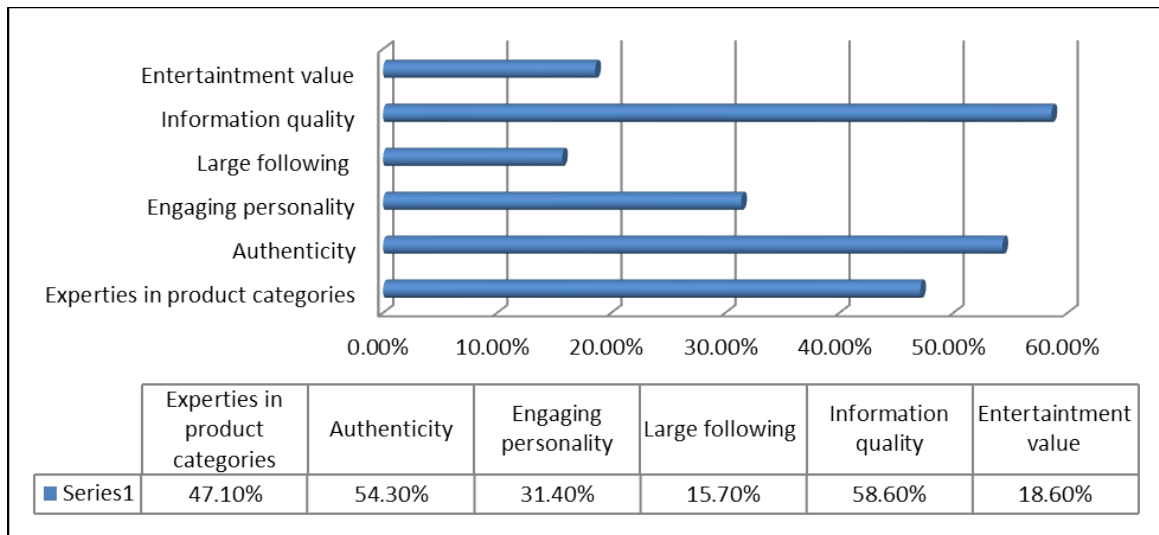


Figure 12: Influencer Traits

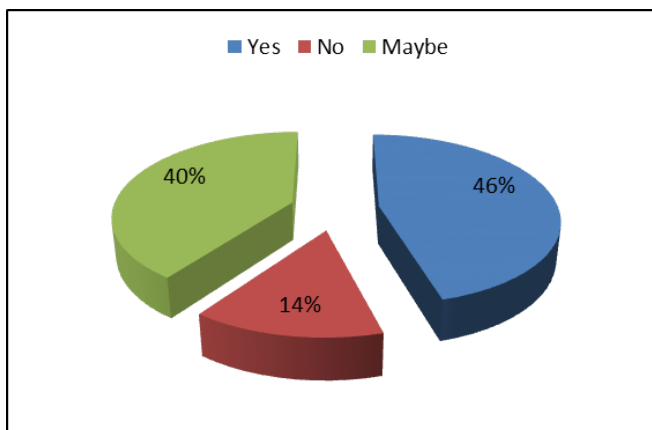


Figure 13: Trustworthiness of Influencer Promotions

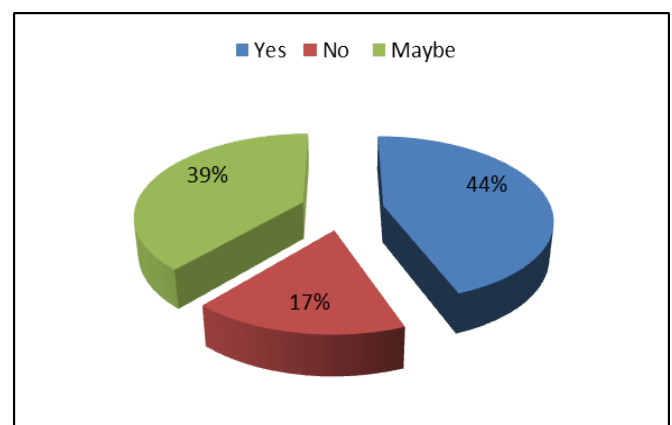


Figure 14: Credibility of Influencers vs. Traditional Advertisements

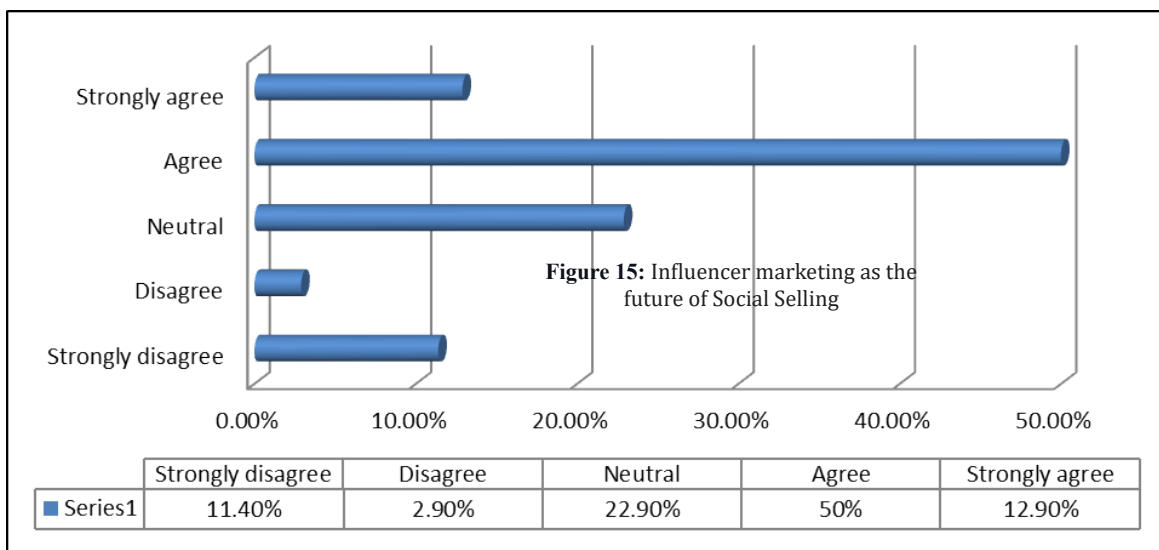


Figure 15: Influencer marketing as the future of Social Selling

followed by 15.7% who rely slightly and 14.3% who do not rely on influencers for making purchase decisions.

It is palpable from Figure 11 that a maximum number of respondents (40%) occasionally try new cosmetic products or brands after being promoted by their favorite influencers. In this context, 25.7% of respondents rarely try new cosmetic brands, while 12.9% of respondents never try new cosmetic brands after seeing promotions from influencers. A small percentage of respondents, 11.4% and 10%, indicated that they often and always, respectively, use brands and products after being promoted by their chosen influencers.

Influencer Traits

The data represented in Figure 12 denotes the qualities that respondents seek in influencers. Here, information quality (58.6%) and authenticity (54.3%) were the two most significant qualities that respondents looked forward. Then third most valued trait was expertise in the product categories, selected by 47.1% of respondents. Some other qualities are as follows: engaging personality (31.4%), entertainment value (18.6%), and popularity (15.7%).

Perceived Credibility and Future of Influencer Marketing

As the data shows in Figure 13, a considerable number of respondents (45.7%) considered that if cosmetic products are promoted by influencers they trust, then the credibility of the particular brand or product increases. In addition, 40% respondents expressed uncertainty regarding whether influencer promotions enhance authenticity, while 14.3% directly stated that influencer promotion does not significantly impact consumers' trustworthiness.

Figure 14 denotes that in today's digital age, a majority of respondents (44.3%) found influencers more credible than traditional advertisements, while 38.6% remained uncertain, and 17.1% disagreed.

Figure 15 indicates that a significant number of youths (50%) agreed, while 12.9% strongly agreed that influencer marketing represents the future of the marketing industry. However, 22.9% of respondents were neutral, and a small percentage (12.9%) strongly disagreed with this assertion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study presents invaluable insights into the transformative role of social media influencers make in the marketing landscape and their influence on cosmetic product choices among the youth demographic in Kolkata. Analysis of data reveals that social media influencers play a pivotal role in youth's decision-making process and fundamentally reshaping how cosmetic products are discovered, evaluated, and purchased. Joshi et al. (2022) demonstrated that with the growth of social media platforms, cosmetic brands are increasingly trying to

leverage this innovative marketing approach to enhance their brand credibility and visibility. Nevertheless, this modern marketing strategy is notably effective in enhancing brand awareness and visibility, as a considerable number of respondents reported that they last saw cosmetic advertisements on social media platforms, corroborating findings from previous study conducted by Alamer et al. (2023).

The study confirms that a significant portion of youths use social media platforms for 2-6 hours daily and Instagram identified as the most influential platform in shaping their purchasing decisions, consistent with existing literature (Erwin et al., 2023). Moreover, social media platforms are now not only limited in providing entertainment; rather, they now serve as a foremost platform for younger demographics to access information, reviews, and feedback related to cosmetic products. The visual storytelling features prevalent on these platforms effectively highlight cosmetic products and capture viewers' attention.

Notably, the results demonstrate that social media influencers influence cosmetic product selection among youths in Kolkata. The majority of respondents follow influencers, celebrities, or popular accounts, and they actively rely on the feedback and reviews of influencers before making cosmetic purchases. The observation aligns with prior study, as Mittal (2023) found that influencers content has a moderate to significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions.

Interestingly, while influencers facilitate product discovery, their impact on immediate purchase decisions appears to be more nuanced. Kalsi (2024) discovered that following social media influencers has become a prevalent practice among youths, although individuals occasionally try new cosmetic brands and products after viewing promotional content. Therefore, this suggests that multiple factors lead to actual buying decisions. Influencers act more as persuaders or catalysts rather than direct motivators for purchases. The findings are consistent with those of previous studies, as most respondents revealed that they sometimes or rarely purchase cosmetics after seeing influencer content. Additionally, it was found that respondents typically buy cosmetics on a monthly basis. These findings emphasize the notion that young consumers are not impulsive buyers; instead, they tend to purchase cosmetics only when necessary.

Authenticity is an inevitable trait of influencers that positively influences consumer behavior (Hayes & Car, 2015). Influencers consistently create and share information to capture attention and keep their followers updated with the happenings of cosmetic market on social media; consequently, the informative value of their content greatly affects the purchase intentions of their followers (Saima & Khan, 2020). Additionally, influencers require expertise and knowledge in the product categories for



which they create content (Zak & Hasprova, 2020; Mishra & Ashfaq, 2023). Similarly, findings of this study highlight authenticity, expertise, and information quality as critical factors in influencer credibility, shaping brand trust but not necessarily leading to direct purchase. In contrast, traits such as an engaging personality and entertainment value are secondary to the establishment of trust and popularity.

Furthermore, the number of followers is not a decisive factor for youths. This finding reveals young consumers are more inclined towards micro-influencers despite their limited reach. Their higher credibility and engaging content build a genuine connection with followers (Kay et al., 2020; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). In contrast, macro-influencers often prioritize broader reach over genuineness (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Trivedi and Sama (2020) found that micro-influencers in the beauty sector had engagement rates 60% higher than those of celebrity influencers. Erz et al. (2023) confirmed that micro-influencers were perceived as 1.7 times more authentic in their cosmetic product recommendations. Therefore, instead of focusing merely on macro-influencers, cosmetic brands should collaborate with both kinds of influencers for the utmost marketing benefits.

In the contemporary digital age, most respondents find influencers more reliable than traditional advertisements. People often perceive advertisements as paid promotions and tend not to pay much attention to them. In contrast, when the same product is endorsed by a favored and trustworthy influencer, consumers feel more connected due to the personal and authentic manner of product promotion. Surprisingly, this finding conflicted with prior research indicating that consumers did not trust influencers because they receive compensation for endorsements, collaborations, and sponsorships, while conventional ads are generally viewed as more honest, understandable, and transparent in their objectives (Vidani et al., 2023). This conflict illustrates that, in the evolving digital landscape, young consumers are becoming increasingly capable of distinguishing authentic influencer content from promotional material. Moreover, traditional advertisements lack interactive engagement opportunities with the consumers; on the other hand, influencer marketing provides an opportunity for interactive two-way communication. This novel marketing approach helps build trust and reliability as well as empowers consumers rather than being passive information seekers and getting isolated exposure. Thus, brands should integrate both strategies simultaneously to ensure effective and wider outreach of their products to target audiences.

IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the impact of social media influencers

on shaping consumers' cosmetic preferences within the specific socio-cultural context of the youth demographic in Kolkata. As digital content consumption continues to rise, social media influencers are expected to become an even more prominent force in the marketing domain. The findings suggest several empirical implications for cosmetic brands and beauty influencers in India. First, cosmetic brands should consider these insights while designing marketing strategies that resonate with the target youth demographic. Moreover, brands should optimize the use of Instagram for influencer collaborations because the interactive visual storytelling feature facilitates utmost reach and engagement. Second, brands must carefully select influencers with immense expertise in the cosmetic category, and unwavering track record of providing authentic, engaging, and informative content. This approach may enhance credibility and foster consumer trust. Third, although consumers generally do not prioritize influencers with a high follower count; cosmetic brands may consider collaborating with micro-influencers, who often maintain strong connections with their audience. This strategy may enable brands to build meaningful connections with target audiences in a cost-effective manner. Fourth, as the findings indicated, influencers help to build trust towards cosmetic brands; however, they struggle with purchase conversion. Therefore, to bridge this gap, brands and influencers may adopt innovative strategies, such as facilitating interactive engagement, sharing unique discount codes, or arranging live sessions regularly. Lastly, social media influencers should focus on producing informative and engaging content, such as providing genuine feedback, unfolding the value of products, and transparently showcasing the pros and cons of cosmetic products. Both brands and influencers must recognize that today's youth are active and discerning consumers, they critically evaluate social media content and place their trust in reliable and authentic sources.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH:

- The study is restricted to the youth population of Kolkata; thus, the findings may not accurately represent the diverse cultural and socio-economic dynamics of various regions in India. Further research can be extended to different regions and a larger sample size, or researchers can incorporate other age groups to comprehend diverse perspectives on social media influencer marketing.
- This study solely focused on the urban population, which restricts its generalizability to rural populations. Future research should investigate the reach and effectiveness of influencer marketing in rural areas, considering the challenges associated with internet accessibility and the digital divide in rural India.
- This study employed a cross-sectional approach;

therefore, it is recommended that future researchers may use a longitudinal research design, which will help to identify evolving patterns, factors, and long-term changes in consumer behavior and decision-making processes that are influenced by social media influencers.

- This study specifically examined the impact of influencers on cosmetic product selection. Future studies can expand by exploring the influence of social media influencers across various product categories to provide a more comprehensive view of influencer marketing across industries.

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