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 Research Paper

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The twenty-first century has been defined, above all else, by the speed at which information travels and the channels through which human attention is captured. What once took months to diffuse through a population — a new product, a lifestyle trend, a cultural moment — now spreads within hours, propelled by an intricate ecosystem of social platforms, smartphone cameras, and the very human desire to share, perform, and seek validation. It is within this context that influencer marketing emerged: not as a calculated invention of any marketing department, but as an organic consequence of the way millions of people began using social media to document their lives and share their enthusiasms with like-minded strangers.

At its core, influencer marketing is a descendant of word-of-mouth communication, which sociologists and marketing scholars have long recognised as the single most persuasive form of product endorsement. When a trusted friend recommends a moisturiser or a nutritional supplement, the recommendation carries a weight that a television advertisement simply cannot replicate — not because it is louder, but because it is personal, credible, and free from the obvious commercial motive that makes institutional advertising so easy to dismiss. Influencers, by cultivating communities of followers who regard them as knowledgeable, relatable, or aspirational figures, effectively scale this intimate dynamic to thousands — and in some cases, millions — of people simultaneously.

Health and beauty products represent one of the most fertile grounds for this phenomenon. Cosmetics, skincare, haircare, and personal wellness items are deeply personal purchase categories. Consumers do not merely weigh price and functionality when choosing a serum or a foundation — they consider how a product will make them look, feel, and be perceived by others. The promise of transformation, whether subtle or dramatic, drives intense emotional engagement. In such a landscape, an influencer who demonstrates real, visible results on their own skin, in the natural lighting of their bedroom or bathroom, holds extraordinary persuasive power. The intimacy of the medium is, paradoxically, its greatest commercial asset.

Instagram, YouTube, and more recently platforms such as TikTok have become the primary stages on which beauty and wellness influencers perform their craft. A makeup tutorial watched by three million viewers can, within a single week, elevate a niche skincare brand from relative obscurity to sold-out status. This commercial potency has not gone unnoticed: brands ranging from indie direct-to-consumer start-ups to multinational giants such as L'Oréal, Estée Lauder, and Procter & Gamble have redirected significant portions of their marketing budgets toward influencer partnerships, often at the expense of traditional above-the-line advertising.

Yet this enthusiasm has not always been matched by analytical rigour. Many brand managers continue to invest in influencer campaigns based largely on intuition, competitive imitation, or follower counts — a metric that, as this research demonstrates, does not reliably predict actual purchase behaviour. There is, therefore, a genuine and pressing need for empirically grounded research that dissects which characteristics of an influencer truly move consumers from passive viewing to active purchasing.

This dissertation is a direct response to that need. Drawing on primary survey data collected from 99 active social media users across India and situating those findings within a broad body of academic literature on digital marketing, persuasion theory, source credibility, and consumer behaviour, the study seeks to identify the specific influencer attributes that drive purchase intention in the health and beauty segment. The findings are intended to be of practical utility to brand managers, marketing researchers, and influencer talent agencies operating in this space.

1.2 The Influencer Ecosystem in India

India occupies a unique and increasingly important position in the global influencer marketing landscape. With over 700 million active internet users as of 2024, and a social media population that continues to grow at one of the fastest rates in the world, the country has become both a critical market for global beauty brands and an incubator for a new generation of domestic direct-to-consumer brands that have built their entire market positions through social media-driven content.

The Indian influencer marketing industry has grown from a nascent, largely experimental practice in the early 2010s into a structured, professionally managed sector. Reports from Zefmo Media and Social Samosa estimated the industry at several hundred crore rupees at the end of the 2010s; by the mid-2020s, that figure had grown substantially, with health and beauty emerging consistently as one of the highest-spending categories alongside food, fashion, and technology.

Several domestic brands — Mamaearth, Plum Goodness, WOW Skin Science, and Dot & Key, among others — built their initial customer bases almost entirely through influencer-driven content strategies, offering compelling real-world evidence of the commercial effectiveness that this study seeks to examine in a more systematic and empirically rigorous manner. Their success has influenced marketing strategies across the sector, creating a feedback loop in which more brands enter the influencer space, more content creators build careers around beauty and wellness, and more consumers come to expect the kind of peer-validated product information that influencers provide.

Within this ecosystem, the classification of influencers by follower tier has become a standard industry practice. The table below summarises the most widely accepted classification framework, which distinguishes between nano, micro, macro, and mega (or celebrity) influencers on the basis of audience size and associated characteristics.

		Typical
		Highly extremely rates, strong community feel, perceived as a trusted peer rather than a public figure
Micro Influencer	10,000 – 100,000	Subject-matter experts, strong audience trust, niche focus, cost-effective for targeted campaigns
Macro Influencer	100,000 – 1 Million	Broad reach, lower engagement per follower, professionally managed, higher cost per post
Mega / Celebrity	Above 1 Million	Mass awareness potential, premium cost, often perceived as less authentic; best for brand visibility

Table 1.1: Classification of Social Media Influencer Types

Source: Own Analysis

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite the exponential growth of influencer marketing as a commercial practice, academic literature has struggled to keep pace with practitioners' need for specific, actionable, empirically validated guidance. A great deal of what is known about influencer effectiveness is either anecdotal — drawn from case studies of viral campaigns or testimonials from brand managers — or is based on platform metrics such as engagement rates and view counts, which capture attention but not necessarily purchase intent.

The health and beauty industry presents particular challenges in this regard. The purchase decision for a skincare product or a cosmetic item is rarely impulsive in the way that, say, a snack food purchase might be. It involves a complex set of considerations: skin type compatibility, ingredient science, brand reputation, price sensitivity, value-for-money perception, and increasingly, concerns about ingredient ethics, sustainability, and authenticity of brand values. Consumers in this category are often highly informed and actively sceptical of sponsored content, having been exposed to a long history of over-edited advertising imagery that bears little resemblance to everyday reality.

Against this backdrop, a specific and important research gap becomes apparent. While a substantial body of work has examined influencer marketing in general terms, very few studies have systematically isolated the particular characteristics — trustworthiness, credibility, physical appearance, and domain expertise — that matter most specifically for health and beauty

purchase decisions. Furthermore, the role of gender in moderating consumer responses to influencer content remains underexplored in the Indian context, as does the question of whether sponsored versus organic content produces meaningfully different outcomes when demographic variables are controlled for.

This study is designed to bridge that gap by providing empirically supported answers to these questions, using a structured research methodology and a battery of rigorous statistical analyses applied to primary survey data collected from Indian social media users.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This research was guided by three primary objectives:

- To examine the impact of product endorsements by social media influencers on consumers' buying decisions in the health and beauty segment, with specific attention to how influencer characteristics mediate this relationship.
- To study the effect of influencer marketing on brand awareness and brand among active social media users in India.
- To explore the role of influencer credibility, domain expertise, physical appearance, and experience on consumer purchase intention, and to determine which of these attributes exercise the strongest and most statistically significant influence.

1.5 Scope and Delimitations

The study was geographically focused on urban Indian consumers who are active on at least one major social platform and who follow at least one influencer operating in the health and beauty niche. Data were collected through an online questionnaire disseminated via social media and personal networks, which introduced a self-selection bias that is acknowledged as a limitation.

The product categories considered under 'health and beauty' included skincare (cleansers, toners, serums, moisturisers, and sunscreens), colour cosmetics (foundation, concealer, lipstick, and eye makeup), haircare products, and personal wellness items such as supplements, vitamins, and protein products marketed through social media channels.

The study deliberately did not seek to evaluate the commercial effectiveness of specific named brands or individual influencers, in order to avoid the complications of brand-specific equity effects and to ensure that findings are broadly generalisable. The focus throughout is on the general attributes that make influencer endorsements effective or ineffective, regardless of the specific platform, product, or campaign format involved.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic conversation around influencer marketing sits at the intersection of several well-established bodies of knowledge: persuasion theory, source credibility models, electronic word-of-mouth research, and consumer behaviour frameworks. This chapter traces the most significant contributions to each of these areas and situates the present study within the broader scholarly dialogue, identifying the key theoretical anchors and the empirical gaps that motivated the current research.

2.1 The Rise of Digital Word-of-Mouth and Influencer Marketing

The foundational insight behind influencer marketing is neither new nor digital in origin. Communication scholars have long observed that people are more persuaded by messages that originate from sources they trust than by messages from institutions or strangers. The classical two-step flow model of communication, proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), suggested that mass media messages first reach a subset of highly engaged, informed individuals — whom the authors termed 'opinion leaders' — who then relay and interpret those messages to their peers within social networks. Social media influencers are, in a very real and historically continuous sense, the twenty-first century embodiment of this opinion leader concept, scaled exponentially by platform algorithms and the global reach of the internet.

The proliferation of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has added important nuance to this picture. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth communication, which was ephemeral and geographically bounded, eWOM is persistent, searchable, shareable, and capable of reaching audiences across time zones

and cultural contexts. Research consistently demonstrates that consumers place greater trust in peer recommendations — even from strangers on review platforms — than in brand-originated advertising (Jang, 2018). Influencer endorsements occupy a compelling middle ground: they are not strictly peer-to-peer communications, since influencers are recognisably public figures with commercial relationships, but they are nonetheless perceived as more authentic, personal, and relationally grounded than conventional institutional advertising.

This perceived authenticity is, arguably, the most commercially significant characteristic of the influencer format. Research by Bratu (2019) demonstrated that online followers' trust in an influencer — operationalised as a belief that the influencer's recommendations reflect genuine personal experience rather than commercial calculation — was a significant positive predictor of both purchase intention and brand value creation. The implication is that the influencer's role is not merely amplificatory (reaching large audiences) but genuinely transformative (changing attitudes and dispositions in ways that conventional advertising cannot).

2.2 Source Credibility Theory and Its Application to Influencers

The theoretical backbone of the present study is the source credibility model developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), which remains one of the most widely applied frameworks in persuasion research. The model proposes that the persuasive impact of any communicator depends principally on two dimensions: expertise — the extent to which the source is perceived as knowledgeable about the topic at hand — and trustworthiness — the degree to

which the audience believes the source is providing information in their best interests rather than for self-serving reasons.

Subsequent researchers, most notably Ohanian (1990), extended this framework to include physical attractiveness as a third dimension of source credibility, arguing that a communicator's perceived attractiveness independently influences audience attitudes and behavioural intentions. This tripartite model — expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness — forms the conceptual core of the variable set examined in the present study.

The application of source credibility theory to influencer marketing contexts has been consistently productive. Bognar's research on influencer communication strategies demonstrated that promotional approaches that create favourable perceptions through secondary associations — for example, demonstrating a product in the context of one's everyday life rather than reading from a prepared script — produced significantly higher levels of credibility attribution among followers. The implication is that authenticity, a quality closely linked to trustworthiness in the Hovland model, is not merely a stylistic preference but a statistically significant predictor of persuasive outcome.

Jang's work (2018) on consumer resistance to sponsored eWOM added an important and practically relevant complication to this picture. Consumers, the research found, engage in active motivational inference when they encounter sponsored influencer content: they ask themselves, implicitly or explicitly, why the influencer is saying what they are saying. When the inferred motive is primarily financial — what Jang terms a 'money motive' — consumer resistance increases and persuasive impact diminishes markedly. When the

inferred motive is genuine enthusiasm or a desire to share personally valuable information — a 'love motive' or 'sharing motive' — resistance decreases and trust increases. This suggests that the mere legal disclosure of a commercial relationship is not sufficient to undermine credibility; what matters, rather, is how the disclosure is contextualised and whether the influencer's overall communication pattern signals authentic engagement with the category over time.

2.3 Influencer Characteristics and Purchase Intention

Several empirical studies have sought to isolate the specific characteristics of influencers that most effectively drive consumer purchase intention. Physical attractiveness has been identified as one such factor, consistent with the broader social psychology literature on the 'halo effect' in social perception (Morgan, 2017). In the beauty and skincare sector specifically, this finding carries additional intuitive force: consumers routinely use an influencer's visible physical appearance as implicit evidence of the efficacy of the products they endorse. A skincare content creator with visibly healthy, clear, luminous skin provides a more convincing product demonstration than one whose complexion appears unaffected by, or inconsistent with, the products being promoted.

Domain expertise emerges consistently across the literature as the most powerful individual driver of purchase intention. Madumere (2017) conducted a study that found approximately ninety per cent of consumers reported greater trust in peer recommendations than in conventional advertising — a finding that held with particular strength when the recommending party was perceived as having specific, demonstrable knowledge of the product category in question. In the health and beauty space, this premium on domain expertise

translates into a measurable commercial advantage for influencers who can explain ingredient science with accuracy, meaningfully compare product formulations across brands, identify potential contraindications for specific skin types, and offer guidance grounded in their own extended, documented experience with particular products and product categories.

The relationship between follower count and purchase intention is more nuanced and counterintuitive than conventional industry wisdom might suggest. Research by Probstnerova on micro-influencers found that content creators with relatively modest audiences — in the range of ten thousand to one hundred thousand followers — were consistently perceived as more trustworthy and more personally relevant than their macro-counterpart peers. The explanation is structurally compelling: micro-influencers typically maintain a sharper niche focus, have not yet attracted the volume of brand partnerships that can visibly saturate and commercialise their content feeds, and interact more personally and consistently with their communities. These characteristics matter especially in health and beauty, where purchase decisions are often highly personal and contingent on very specific product suitability concerns.

2.4 Generational Differences in Influencer Response

Kadekova and Holienčinova (2018) conducted a systematic examination of the relationship between generational cohort membership and influencer marketing receptivity, comparing the responses of Generation Y consumers (born approximately 1981–1996) with those of Generation Z (born from 1997 onward). Their findings revealed meaningful differences not only in platform preference — Generation Y gravitating toward Facebook and longer-form content, Generation Z toward Instagram, TikTok, and short-form video — but

in the specific types of influencer content that each cohort found credible and persuasive.

Generation Z consumers, having grown up in an era of widespread and often poorly disclosed sponsored content, demonstrated a considerably more sophisticated scepticism about influencer-brand commercial relationships. They responded more positively to influencers who adopted an unscripted, conversational tone — who appeared to be sharing genuine opinions in real time — and responded more negatively to content that bore the hallmarks of professional production: studio lighting, scripted delivery, and high production values that signal commercial rather than organic origin. This generational dynamic has direct and important implications for brand strategy in the health and beauty sector, where the target demographic skews heavily toward younger consumers, and where a one-size-fits-all approach to influencer selection and content briefing is likely to be sub-optimal.

2.5 Gender and Influencer Marketing

The relationship between respondent gender and influencer marketing responsiveness has been examined in the literature with somewhat inconsistent results. Kozusnikova (2019), studying Instagram's effect on fashion spending behaviour among college students, found no significant relationship between active Instagram use and elevated spending behaviour once income patterns were controlled for — a cautionary finding that suggests research designs which do not account for potential confounding variables may systematically overstate the magnitude of influencer impact on purchase behaviour.

The health and beauty sector has historically been assumed to skew heavily toward female consumers both in terms of product usage and influencer marketing responsiveness. The present study directly tests this assumption by examining whether gender moderates three specific behavioural outcomes — trend discovery, product satisfaction, and purchase behaviour — using chi-square analysis. The gender-neutral findings reported in Chapter 4 add meaningful empirical weight to an emerging academic consensus that gender differences in influencer marketing responsiveness may be considerably smaller than previously assumed, with important strategic implications for brands that have historically directed their influencer marketing investments exclusively toward female-oriented content creators and female audience segments.

2.6 The Indian Context

India represents a uniquely dynamic and rapidly evolving environment for influencer marketing. The combination of a very large and growing digital population, a highly active and engaged social media user base, and a beauty and wellness consumer market expanding rapidly on the back of rising disposable incomes and growing product awareness has made the country one of the most commercially significant influencer marketing environments in the world.

Within this context, health and beauty have emerged as among the most actively contested and rapidly evolving product categories. Domestic brands such as Mamaearth, Plum, WOW Skin Science, and Minimalist built their initial market positions primarily through influencer-driven social media content rather than through conventional television or print advertising, offering compelling real-world evidence of the commercial return on

investment that this study seeks to examine empirically. Their success has attracted increasing regulatory attention: the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) issued detailed guidelines for influencer marketing disclosure in 2021, reflecting a broader societal concern about the transparency and authenticity of commercially motivated influencer content.

Scholar(s)	Key Finding	Relevance to Present Study
Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955)	Two-step flow model: opinion leaders relay and interpret media messages to their peer networks	Influencers as the digital-era embodiment of the opinion leader concept
Hovland et al. (1953)	Source credibility = expertise + trustworthiness; both dimensions independently predict persuasive impact	Theoretical framework for the influencer attribute analysis
Jang (2018)	Consumer resistance to sponsored eWOM depends critically on inferred motive (financial vs. genuine enthusiasm)	Explains the empirically lower trust associated with paid endorsements
Morgan (2017)	Physical attractiveness produces a measurable halo effect on product and brand perception	Physical appearance as a predictor variable for purchase intention
Madumere (2017)	~90% of consumers report trusting peer recommendations over conventional advertising	Validates the eWOM premise underpinning the study
Kadekova & Holiencinova (2018)	Gen Z prefers unscripted, conversational influencer content; responds negatively to high-production commercial content	Supports age-based campaign differentiation recommendations
Kozusnikova (2019)	No significant gender-spending relationship when income levels are controlled	Supports the gender-neutral hypothesis tested in Chapter 4

Table 2.1: Summary of Literature Review Findings

Source: Own Analysis Based on Literature Review

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the backbone of any empirical inquiry. It establishes the logical and procedural framework within which data are collected, analysed, and interpreted — ensuring that the findings are not merely the product of chance variation or researcher bias, but of a systematic and replicable process of investigation. This chapter outlines all key methodological decisions made in designing and executing this study, including the statement of the research problem, the objectives guiding the investigation, the sampling strategy, the data collection instruments employed, and the statistical tools applied in the analysis.

3.1 Statement of Problem

The central problem addressed by this research is the insufficient empirical understanding of which specific influencer characteristics most effectively drive purchase intention among consumers of health and beauty products in India. Despite the rapid and sustained commercial growth of influencer marketing as a practice, many brand-level decisions in this space continue to be made on the basis of follower count, visual aesthetics, and competitive imitation rather than evidence-based criteria. This study was designed to provide a more rigorous, data-driven, and theoretically grounded foundation for such decisions.

3.2 Research Objectives

The study was guided by three primary **research objectives:**

- To examine the impact of product endorsements by social media influencers on consumers' buying decisions in the health and beauty segment.
- To study the impact of influencer marketing on brand awareness and brand among social media users in India.
- To explore the role of influencer credibility, experience, and physical appearance on consumer purchase intention, identifying which attributes exercise the strongest statistical influence.

3.3 Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of active social media users in India who follow at least one influencer operating in the health and beauty product space. Given the practical impossibility of defining a precise and enumerable sampling frame for this population, a non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted. The questionnaire was disseminated through online platforms — primarily WhatsApp and Instagram — and all responses were collected digitally. The final sample consisted of 99 respondents who completed the questionnaire in full, with no missing responses.

The sample skews toward younger, urban, digitally active consumers — a demographic characteristic that is itself a reasonable reflection of the primary audience for health and beauty influencer content in India. While the sample size of 99 is adequate for the statistical techniques employed — chi-square tests, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression — it is acknowledged as a limitation with respect to the external generalisability of the findings. Future research using larger, demographically stratified samples

would provide greater confidence in the representativeness and external validity of results.

3.4 Data and Sources of Data

The study drew on both primary and secondary sources of data:

- **Primary Data:** A structured questionnaire administered to 99 respondents via online platforms. The questionnaire comprised four sections covering demographic information, social media and influencer usage patterns, influencer marketing behaviour (measured on a five-point Likert scale), and self-reported purchase behaviour.
- **Secondary Data:** Peer-reviewed academic journals, published conference proceedings, industry reports from organisations including Social Samosa and Zefmo Media, and standard marketing management textbooks. These sources informed both the literature review in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework presented below.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in Hovland, Janis, and Kelley's (1953) Source Credibility Model, which proposes that the persuasive effectiveness of any communicator is determined principally by the audience's perception of their expertise and trustworthiness. This foundational model was extended to incorporate physical attractiveness — a dimension added to the source credibility framework by Ohanian (1990) and subsequent researchers — and domain expertise as a construct empirically distinct from general experience or tenure in a field.

2

The conceptual framework of the study identified four independent variables — trustworthiness, credibility, physical appearance, and domain expertise — and one dependent variable: purchase intention, operationalised as the respondent's reported frequency of influencer-driven purchases in the preceding twelve months. Gender was introduced as a potential moderating variable to be examined through chi-square analysis applied to three specific behavioural outcomes.

3.6 Statistical Tools

The following statistical tools were employed in the data analysis phase:

4

- Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha): Applied prior to the main inferential analysis to assess the internal consistency of the twelve questionnaire items, confirming that the scale reliably measured the theoretical constructs it was designed to capture.
- Descriptive Statistics: Frequency distributions and cross-tabulations were used to profile the sample and describe patterns in social media usage and influencer-following behaviour.
- Chi-Square Test of Independence: Applied to test whether gender moderated three behavioural outcomes — trend discovery, product satisfaction, and purchase behaviour. Three null hypotheses were tested the conventional 0.05 significance level
- Pearson Correlation Analysis: Used to examine bivariate linear relationships between individual influencer characteristics (trustworthiness, credibility, physical appearance, and expertise) and the purchase intention variable.
- Multiple Regression Analysis: Applied to assess the collective explanatory power of the nine questionnaire items measuring

7

influencer characteristics over the purchase intention dependent variable, controlling for inter-item correlations.

Hypothesis	Description	Test Applied
H ₀₁	significant gender and through	Chi-Square ($\alpha =$
H ₀₂	There no significant relationship between gender and Net Promoter Score for influencer-recommended products	Chi-Square ($\alpha =$ 0.05)
	no purchase behaviour based on influencer recommendation	Chi-Square ($\alpha =$ 0.05)

Table 3.1: Chi-Square Hypothesis Framework

Source: Own Analysis

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Expected Direction
H ₀₁	Trustworthiness	Purchase Intention	Positive (+)
H ₀₂	Credibility	Purchase Intention	Positive (+)
H ₀₃	Physical Appearance	Purchase Intention	Positive (+)
H ₀₄	Domain Expertise	Purchase Intention	Positive (+)

Table 3.2: Correlation Hypothesis Framework

Source: Own Analysis

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study in a structured and sequential manner, proceeding from reliability testing through descriptive profiling before moving to the inferential statistical tests — chi-square, multiple regression, and Pearson correlation — that form the core of the empirical contribution. Each analysis section is followed by a substantive discussion of what the findings mean in both theoretical and practical terms, with implications for brand strategy in the health and beauty sector.

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Prior to conducting any inferential analysis, the reliability of the questionnaire scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient — a widely used measure of internal consistency that indicates the degree to which a set of items measures the same underlying construct. In social science research, a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable, indicating that the items within a scale are sufficiently intercorrelated to be treated as a coherent measure of a single latent construct.

N	Percentage	
Valid	99	100.0%
Excluded	0	0.0%
Total	99	100.0%

Table 4.1: Case Processing Summary

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.724	12

Table 4.2: Reliability Statistics – Cronbach's Alpha

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.724 confirms acceptable internal reliability for the twelve-item scale. This result indicates that the questionnaire items collectively and consistently measure the same underlying theoretical construct — namely, consumer receptivity to influencer marketing and the resulting intention to purchase — and that the scale is therefore appropriate for use in the subsequent inferential analyses. The value is above the conventional 0.70 threshold, though not high enough to suggest redundancy among items, which would have implied over-measurement of a single narrow facet rather than appropriate coverage of a multidimensional construct.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Sample Profile

The sample consisted of 99 respondents drawn from India's urban, digitally active population. The age distribution was concentrated in the 18–25 and 25–35 brackets — a finding that is consistent with both the demographic profile of active social media users in India and with the expected primary audience for health and beauty influencer content. The oldest age brackets (35–45 and above 45) were represented but constituted a relatively small proportion of the sample, reflecting the convenience sampling methodology and the digital distribution of the questionnaire.

Gender distribution in the sample showed 56 female respondents (56.6%) and 43 male respondents (43.4%), a roughly balanced split that supports

meaningful gender-based comparative analysis. This near-parity is itself a noteworthy descriptive finding: it reflects the genuine and growing male presence in health and beauty product consumption in India, challenging the assumption that this is an exclusively or even predominantly female purchase category.

Instagram emerged as the most widely used platform among respondents, followed by YouTube and Facebook — a finding consistent with Instagram's acknowledged dominance in the Indian beauty and lifestyle influencer ecosystem. TikTok was not included in the platform list due to its regulatory status in India at the time of the study.

Influencers Followed			
	18	14	32
5–10	22	17	39
	9	8	17
15–20	5	3	8
Above 20	2	1	3
Total	56	43	99

Table 4.3: Cross Tabulation – Number of Influencers Followed vs. Gender

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

The cross-tabulation reveals that the majority of respondents follow between five and ten influencers in the health and beauty segment — a finding suggesting active but not excessive influencer engagement. Female respondents constitute a slightly larger proportion of the sample (56 vs. 43), but the distribution across follower count categories is broadly similar for both

genders, providing a balanced and reasonably comparable basis for the subsequent gender-based chi-square analysis.

4.3 Chi-Square Tests of Independence

Three chi-square tests of independence were conducted to examine whether gender significantly moderated specific influencer marketing outcomes. All tests were conducted at a conventional significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The null hypothesis in each case posited no significant relationship between gender and the outcome variable in question.

Test 1: Gender and Awareness of New Trends

The first chi-square test examined whether exposure to new trends and new brands through influencer content was moderated by respondent gender. The test produced a Pearson chi-square statistic of 2.103, with 4 degrees of freedom, yielding a p-value of .717 — substantially above the 0.05 significance threshold. The null hypothesis was therefore retained. Both male and female respondents were equally likely to report discovering new brands and product trends through the influencers they follow on social media.

	2.103	4	.717
Likelihood	2.146	4	.709
	99		

Table 4.4: Chi-Square Test – Awareness of New Trends and Gender

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

This result carries meaningful implications for brand marketing strategy. It suggests that campaign managers do not need to develop separate influencer

discovery campaigns for male and female audiences — both groups are similarly exposed to, and engaged by, trend-oriented content delivered through influencer channels. The finding challenges the assumption, common in the health and beauty industry, that trend-driven influencer content resonates primarily or disproportionately with female consumers.

Test 2: Gender and Net Promoter Score (Satisfaction Proxy)

The second test examined whether satisfaction with influencer-recommended products — measured through a proxy Net Promoter Score question assessing respondents' willingness to recommend influencer-endorsed products to their friends and family — differed significantly by gender. The Pearson chi-square was 1.510, with 4 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.825. The null hypothesis was retained for the second time.

	1.510	4	.825
Likelihood	1.531	4	.821
	98		

Table 4.5: Chi-Square Test – Net Promoter Score and Gender

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

While gender did not moderate the NPS outcome, the absolute satisfaction level merits attention. Only approximately 41 per cent of respondents recorded a clearly positive satisfaction response, while more than half fell into a moderate-to-low satisfaction band. This signals a meaningful opportunity — and indeed a strategic necessity — for influencers and their brand partners to invest more deliberately in post-purchase engagement and follow-through

communication, in order to convert satisfied customers into active brand advocates.

Test 3: Gender and Purchase Behaviour Based on Influencer Recommendation

The third chi-square test examined whether actual purchasing behaviour driven by influencer recommendations was moderated by gender. The Pearson chi-square value was 1.797, with 4 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.773. The null hypothesis was retained for the third consecutive time, confirming and strengthening the overall finding that gender does not significantly moderate consumer responsiveness to influencer marketing in the health and beauty segment.

	1.797	4	.773
Likelihood	1.808	4	.771
	99		

Table 4.6: Chi-Square Test – Purchase Behaviour and Gender
Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the collective influence of nine predictor items — spanning trustworthiness, credibility, physical appearance, expertise, and influencer experience — on purchase intention, operationalised as the self-reported number of influencer-driven purchases made by the respondent in the preceding twelve months.

4

1	.367	.135	.046	.969

Table 4.7: Model Summary – Multiple Regression

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

2

		9			
Residual	82.68	8	.940		

Table 4.8: ANOVA Table

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

The overall regression model yielded an R value of 0.367, indicating a moderate positive association between the nine-predictor set and purchase intention. The adjusted R squared of .046 reveals that these predictors collectively explain approximately 4.6 per cent of the variance in actual purchase frequency — a modest figure that reflects the multifactorial and complex nature of purchase decisions in the health and beauty category. The ANOVA F-statistic of 1.521 ($p = 0.153$) indicated that the model as a whole did not reach conventional statistical significance.

This does not render the model findings unimportant. Rather, it confirms that purchasing behaviour in this sector is influenced by a wide array of factors beyond influencer characteristics — including product price, personal skin or health concerns, peer recommendations from non-influencer sources, brand familiarity, and previous personal experience with the product category. When

the standardised beta coefficients were examined individually, credibility (reliable source: $\beta = 0.233$) and domain expertise ($\beta = 0.226$) emerged as the strongest individual predictors, while follower count ($\beta = 0.095$) and experience as a credential ($\beta = 0.093$) were the weakest.

Variable	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Trustworthiness (Sponsored Content Trust)	.089	.113	.789	.432
Trustworthiness (Try New Brand)	.112	.108	1.037	.302
Trustworthiness (Seek Reviews)	.078	.115	.678	.499
Credibility (Reliable Source)	.233	.121	1.926	.057
Credibility (Follower Count)	.095	.107	.888	.377
Credibility (Best Interest)	.226	.114	1.982	.050
Physical Appearance	.172	.109	1.578	.118
Expertise (Years of Experience)	.093	.114	.816	.416
Expertise (Domain Expert)	.226	.116	1.948	.054

Table 4.9: Multiple Regression Coefficients

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data)

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine bivariate relationships between individual influencer characteristics and purchase intention. Four sets of correlations were computed, corresponding to the four independent variable constructs in the theoretical framework.

4.5.1 Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention

The correlation analysis for trustworthiness examined three related questionnaire items against the purchase intention variable. The analysis identified one statistically significant relationship: trustworthiness operationalised as willingness to try a new brand on the basis of an influencer recommendation yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.251$ ($p = 0.012$, significant at the 0.05 level), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis for this specific facet.

By contrast, reduced trust in sponsored content ($p = 0.245$) and the tendency to seek influencer reviews before making a purchase ($p = 0.234$) did not show statistically significant relationships with purchase intention. The null hypothesis was retained for these two sub-items. The finding suggests that trustworthiness operates as an entry mechanism — it encourages consumers to take the risk of trying products they would not otherwise have considered — but does not override accumulated personal category knowledge in the review and evaluation stages of the purchase journey.

Item	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Decision
Sponsored Content Trust	.118	.245	99	H ₀ Retained
Try New Brand (Influencer Rec.)	.251*	.012	99	H ₀ Rejected
Seek Reviews Before Purchase	.121	.234	99	H ₀ Retained

Table 4.10: Correlation – Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention

*Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data) | * Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

4.5.2 Credibility and Purchase Intention

The credibility analysis produced two statistically significant findings and one notable non-finding. The perception that an influencer has the genuine best interests of their followers at heart showed significant positive correlation with purchase intention ($r = .283$, $p = .005$, significant at the 0.01 level). Similarly, the perception of influencers as a reliable source of product information correlated significantly with purchase intent ($r = 0.255$, $p = 0.011$, significant at the 0.05 level). Both null hypotheses were rejected.

The non-finding is perhaps the most commercially significant result of the entire analysis: follower count — treated by many brand managers as a de facto proxy for influencer credibility — showed no significant relationship with purchase intention ($r = .161$, $p = .111$). This finding directly and empirically challenges one of the most pervasive assumptions in influencer marketing practice and reinforces the academic literature's growing consensus that perceived authenticity and demonstrated domain relevance matter far more to consumers than the raw size of an influencer's audience.

Item	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Decision
Reliable Source of Information	.255*	.011	99	H ₀ Rejected
Follower Count (Credibility)	.161	.111	98	H ₀ Retained
Best Interest of Followers	.283**	.005	99	H ₀ Rejected

Table 4.11: Correlation – Credibility and Purchase Intention

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data) | * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

4.5.3 Physical Appearance and Purchase Intention

The correlation between physical appearance and purchase intention yielded a Pearson coefficient of $r = 0.203$ ($p = 0.044$), just below the 0.05 significance threshold. The null hypothesis was rejected: physical appearance does exercise a statistically significant, though modest, positive influence on consumer purchase intention in the health and beauty sector.

Item	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Decision
Physical Appearance Impact on Purchase Intent	.203*	.044	99	H ₀ Rejected

Table 4.12: Correlation – Physical Appearance and Purchase Intention

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data) | * Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The significance of this finding is particularly relevant in the health and beauty context, where the influencer's own body functions as a living demonstration of the product's efficacy. A skincare creator with visibly healthy, clear skin; a haircare influencer with lustrous, well-maintained hair — these are not merely aesthetically pleasing, they are evidentially significant to consumers evaluating whether a product will work for them. That said, the modest magnitude of the correlation ($r = 0.203$) indicates that physical appearance is not sufficient on its own to drive purchase intent, and should be understood as a supporting rather than a primary driver.

4.5.4 Domain Expertise and Purchase Intention

The expertise analysis examined two conceptually related but empirically distinct items. The perception that an influencer is a genuine domain expert whose recommendations meaningfully inform purchase decisions showed a

strongly significant positive correlation with purchase intention ($r = 0.275$, $p = 0.006$, significant at the 0.01 level), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis.

The item measuring years of experience as a credibility credential did not reach significance ($r = 0.106$, $p = 0.297$). This distinction is theoretically important and practically valuable. It suggests that consumers in this product category actively differentiate between substantive expertise — demonstrated through content quality, ingredient knowledge, comparative product assessments, and genuine category engagement over time — and the mere biographical fact of experience, such as the number of years an influencer has been posting. An influencer who has been creating content for five years but demonstrates only superficial understanding of product science may be less persuasive than a newer creator who clearly knows their subject matter deeply and communicates that knowledge with confidence and specificity.

Item	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Decision
Experience as Credibility Indicator	.106	.297	99	H ₀ Retained
Domain Expert Recommendation	.275**	.006	99	H ₀ Rejected

Table 4.13: Correlation – Expertise and Purchase Intention

Source: SPSS Output (Primary Data) | ** Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.6 Summary of Findings and Strategic Recommendations

Key Findings

- Gender did not significantly moderate any of the three behavioural outcomes tested — trend discovery, product satisfaction, and purchase

behaviour — across all three chi-square tests. Brands in the health and beauty sector can, on the basis of these findings, employ consistent influencer marketing strategies across male and female demographic segments without significant loss of effectiveness.

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Influencer credibility — specifically the perception that an influencer is a reliable and trustworthy source of information and acts genuinely in the best interests of their followers — was among **the strongest and most consistent** predictors **of purchase intention in** the correlation analysis.
- 17

Domain expertise **emerged as the single most significant predictor purchase intention.** Critically, demonstrated subject knowledge proved far more persuasive than biographical experience or tenure in the field — a distinction with important implications for influencer selection criteria.
- Physical appearance showed a modest but statistically significant positive association with purchase intention, consistent with the 'halo effect' literature and particularly relevant in a sector where the influencer's body functions as product evidence.
- Follower count showed no significant relationship with purchase intention, directly challenging its widespread use as a primary criterion in influencer selection and campaign planning.
- Sponsored content was associated with lower trust levels among respondents, consistent with the broader academic literature on consumer resistance to perceived financial motives in influencer endorsements.
- 2

Influencer marketing was found to be most **effective in the need recognition and information search stages of the** consumer decision-

making process, and considerably less effective as a direct purchase conversion mechanism.

Strategic Recommendations for Brands in the Health and Beauty Sector

- Prioritise credibility and demonstrated expertise over follower count when selecting influencer partners. A micro-influencer with deep skincare or cosmetic science knowledge, an engaged niche community, and a track record of honest, unsponsored product reviews is likely to generate stronger and more durable purchase intent than a macro-influencer selected primarily on the basis of audience size.
- Invest in long-term influencer partnerships and ambassador relationships rather than isolated one-off sponsored posts. Extended relationships allow influencers to develop and demonstrate genuine familiarity with a product line, generating content that reads as authentically motivated rather than commercially transactional.
- Limit the visible proportion of sponsored content in any influencer's feed. Consumer resistance to paid endorsements is real, measurable, and consequential. Brands that encourage organic integration — allowing influencers to weave product references naturally into their regular content — will benefit from higher perceived authenticity and stronger downstream purchase intent.
- Develop campaigns that explicitly recognise the stage-specificity of influencer marketing's impact. For brand launch, category education, and awareness objectives, broad-reach macro-influencer partnerships may be appropriate. For purchase conversion, targeted collaborations with niche micro-influencers who have demonstrated genuine

community trust and specific category knowledge will deliver stronger results.

- Do not rely on physical attractiveness as a primary selection criterion, despite its statistical significance. While appearance is positively correlated with purchase intent in this sector, it is the weakest of the three significant predictors and is unlikely to compensate for deficiencies in credibility or domain expertise.
- Consider generational and age-based differentiation in content strategy. Campaigns targeting Generation Z consumers should prioritise Instagram and short-form video formats, with conversational and unscripted content styles. Generation Y audiences may respond more positively to longer-form, more structured content formats on YouTube.
- Develop post-purchase engagement strategies that extend the customer relationship beyond the initial influencer-driven purchase. Given that fewer than half of respondents reported high satisfaction with influencer-recommended products, there is a significant opportunity to improve the conversion of first-time purchasers into loyal brand advocates.

4.7 Limitations of the Study

Every piece of empirical research operates within boundaries, and an honest acknowledgement of this study's limitations is essential to interpreting its findings accurately and positioning future research appropriately.

- Sample Size and Demographic Composition: The [redacted] was based on a sample of 99 respondents collected through convenience sampling. While this is adequate for the statistical techniques employed, the

sample is insufficient to support confident generalisation to the broader Indian urban consumer population, let alone to rural or semi-urban consumers, who are under-represented.

- **Geographic and Socioeconomic Concentration:** The online distribution methodology likely resulted in a sample skewed toward urban, educated, English-proficient, and digitally active consumers. The experiences and influencer-marketing responsiveness of rural consumers and those with limited formal education were not captured.
- **Cross-Sectional Research Design:** Data were collected at a single point in time. Consumer attitudes toward influencers, trust levels, and purchasing behaviours evolve continuously as the influencer marketing landscape itself changes. A longitudinal study tracking the same respondents over time would provide richer and more reliable insights into the direction of causal influence.
- **Self-Report and Social Desirability Bias:** Purchase intention and past purchasing behaviour were both measured through self-report questionnaire items. Respondents may have over- or under-stated their actual behaviours due to social desirability effects or imperfect retrospective recall of purchases made over the preceding twelve months.
- **Restricted Independent Variable Set:** The study examined four specific influencer characteristics. Other potentially influential variables — including the influencer's cultural identity, communication style, platform-specific behaviour, perceived political or social values, and the frequency and regularity of content posting — were not incorporated into the model.
- **Platform Aggregation:** The study did not separate or compare the effects of different social media platforms. Given that content formats,

algorithmic behaviour, and audience expectations differ substantially across Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and emerging platforms, platform-specific analyses would yield more granular and actionable insights.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The landscape of marketing communication has been irrevocably and permanently altered by the rise of social media and the ecosystem of content creators — influencers — who populate it. What began as an informal, organic phenomenon — individuals sharing genuine product enthusiasms with communities of similarly interested followers — has matured into a multi-billion-dollar global industry, complete with specialist talent agencies, sophisticated analytics platforms, standardised measurement frameworks, and increasingly detailed regulatory guidelines around commercial disclosure. This evolution has been particularly pronounced in the health and beauty sector, which has both pioneered many of the industry's best practices and illustrated some of its most significant commercial risks.

For brands operating in health and beauty, the evolution of influencer marketing presents both extraordinary opportunity and considerable strategic complexity. The opportunity lies in the intimacy and authenticity that influencer-mediated communication can achieve when done well: a skincare creator demonstrating a product's effect on their own face, in their own words, in the unfiltered context of their regular content, reaches consumers in a psychologically proximate and relationally grounded way that a traditional television advertisement or display ad fundamentally cannot replicate. The complexity lies in the noise — the sheer and still-growing volume of sponsored content, the proliferation of inauthentic accounts and manufactured engagement metrics, and the accelerating sophistication of consumers who have learned, through sustained exposure, to approach influencer endorsements with a well-developed critical scepticism.

16 This dissertation has sought to cut through that complexity by identifying, through rigorous primary empirical research, the specific characteristics of influencers that actually drive purchase intention among consumers of health and beauty products in India. The study employed a structured questionnaire administered to 99 active social media users, analysed using a battery of statistical techniques including chi-square tests, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression, all grounded in the theoretical framework provided by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley's source credibility model.

14 The findings offer a clear, coherent, and practically useful message: credibility and domain expertise matter most, followed by physical appearance; follower count, years of experience, and sponsored content disclosure do not predict purchase behaviour in any statistically meaningful way. This is a finding that should prompt serious reflection among brand managers, talent agencies, and marketing analytics providers who continue to treat audience size as the primary currency of influencer evaluation.

2 The three research objectives have each been addressed. With respect to the impact of product endorsements on buying decisions, the study confirmed that influencer marketing operates most powerfully in the awareness and information search stages of the consumer decision journey. Less than half of respondents reported making purchases directly on the basis of influencer recommendations — a figure that places influencer marketing in its appropriate strategic context: it is an extraordinarily effective tool for brand building and consumer consideration, but it is not a reliable standalone purchase conversion mechanism. Brands that evaluate their influencer marketing investments exclusively on direct sales attribution are likely to significantly underestimate the strategy's actual commercial value.

With respect to brand awareness and brand recall, the study findings are consistent with the broader academic literature. Influencer marketing is highly effective at introducing consumers to new brands and previously unconsidered product categories — particularly for novel, unfamiliar, or emerging products that benefit from social proof and peer-validated information. For established brands seeking to maintain salience and deepen consumer engagement over time, influencer marketing can be deployed effectively through community-building activities including product co-creation, participatory content formats, and genuine long-term ambassador relationships.

With respect to the role of specific influencer attributes, the study produces a nuanced and commercially significant picture. The finding that follower count fails to predict purchase intention is perhaps the most immediately actionable result for marketing practitioners: it suggests that the substantial investment many brands make in securing high-reach macro-influencer partnerships may not be delivering the purchase-intention outcomes they expect or require. Redirecting a portion of these budgets toward carefully selected, domain-credible micro-influencers with genuinely engaged niche communities is likely to deliver stronger results, at lower cost, in the categories that matter most for driving actual purchasing.

The distinction between domain expertise and years of experience — with the former predicting purchase intent significantly and the latter not at all — offers a similarly actionable refinement of conventional influencer assessment practices. It suggests that brands should evaluate the substantive quality of an influencer's content — the depth and accuracy of their product knowledge, the rigour of their comparative assessments, the honesty of their product critiques

— rather than relying on the blunt and often misleading proxy of biographical tenure or posting frequency.

The gender-neutrality finding deserves particular mention in the concluding discussion. In a product sector historically defined by, and predominantly marketed to, female consumers, the consistent absence of significant gender differences across all three chi-square tests is a noteworthy and practically important result. It suggests that brands that have historically concentrated their influencer marketing budgets and content strategies almost entirely on female-oriented creators and female-skewing audiences may be missing a meaningful and growing portion of the male grooming, skincare, and wellness market — a market segment that appears, on the basis of this study's data, to respond to influencer content in broadly similar ways to its female counterpart.

Looking forward, the influencer marketing landscape is likely to continue evolving at pace. The emergence of AI-generated virtual influencers, the intensifying regulatory attention to disclosure standards across multiple jurisdictions, the rapid ascendance of short-form video as the dominant consumer content format, and the growing consumer demand for authenticity and transparency in commercial communication will each, individually and collectively, reshape the dynamics examined in this study. Future research should examine how these structural developments affect the credibility-purchase intention relationship, whether the specific findings of this study hold across different platform environments and content formats, and how the interplay between organic and paid content can be optimised to preserve trust while meeting commercial objectives.

The study also has implications for the theoretical development of source credibility models in digital communication contexts. The empirical distinction between expertise and experience identified in the correlation analysis — demonstrating that perceived knowledge quality matters more than credentialed background or posting tenure — suggests that Hovland et al.'s original formulation of expertise as a credibility dimension may benefit from disaggregation when applied to social media influencer contexts. Perceived knowledge quality, demonstrated content depth, and willingness to engage critically and honestly with products in a category may each function as distinct sub-dimensions of expertise, with different and potentially asymmetric effects on audience persuasion.

In conclusion, influencer marketing is not a passing commercial trend. It is a structural and increasingly permanent feature of the communications landscape that will only grow in strategic importance as social media platforms deepen their integration into the daily lives and purchasing habits of consumers across demographics and geographies. For health and beauty brands in India and beyond, the imperative that emerges from this research is clear and consistent: invest not in the biggest audiences, but in the most credible, knowledgeable, and authentically engaged voices. The returns — measured not merely in immediate sales attribution but in brand equity built over time, in consumer trust earned through genuine value creation, and in long-term loyalty from customers who feel genuinely guided rather than commercially manipulated — will be far greater, and far more durable, than any single viral campaign or sponsored post can deliver.