



# Exploring The Critical Drivers Of Online Purchase Intention For Beauty Products: A Quantitative Analysis Of Social Media Influence

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## ABSTRACT

The increasing influence of social media platforms has significantly altered consumer engagement with beauty products and brands. With the beauty industry rapidly embracing digital platforms for promotion and sales, understanding the determinants that drive online purchase intention is vital. This study quantitatively examines the critical factors influencing online purchase intentions for beauty products, specifically focusing on the roles of social media engagement, perceived trust, influencer marketing, and perceived risk. A survey of 800 Indian consumers who actively engage with beauty brands on social media was conducted. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was utilized to validate the proposed hypotheses. The findings demonstrate that social media engagement, influencer marketing, and perceived trust significantly influence online purchase intentions, with perceived risk acting as a negative moderator. The research contributes to digital marketing literature by offering strategic insights for beauty brands aiming to enhance consumer trust and reduce risk perceptions through social media platforms, ultimately increasing online sales.

**Keywords:** Social media influence, online purchase intention, beauty products, perceived trust, perceived risk, influencer marketing, and consumer behaviour.

## 1. Introduction

In today's highly digitalized world, consumer behavior has experienced a significant transformation, particularly with the rapid integration of social media into daily lives. Consumers have shifted from passive recipients of marketing messages to active participants, shaping conversations around brands and products. This shift is especially pronounced in the beauty sector, where social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok have become crucial tools for discovering, reviewing, and engaging with beauty products.

The rise of social media influencers has further amplified consumer engagement by providing personalized recommendations and endorsements, often blurring the lines between genuine consumer advice and commercial promotion. Influencers have emerged as trusted intermediaries, significantly impacting consumers' trust in brands and their willingness to purchase products online. However, the decision-making process for online purchases, particularly in the beauty industry, remains complex due to the intangible nature of the products, which typically require physical interaction for evaluation.

Existing literature provides substantial insights into the influence of social media on consumer behavior; however, the specific factors that drive online purchase intentions, especially in the beauty industry, require further exploration. Most notably, while social media engagement and influencer endorsements are well-documented, there remains a gap in understanding how these factors translate into actual purchase decisions. This study aims to bridge that gap by examining the interplay between social media engagement, perceived trust, influencer marketing, and perceived risk, and how these factors collectively influence consumers' intentions to purchase beauty products online.

This research is particularly timely as the global beauty industry experiences a shift towards digital platforms, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As consumers continue to rely more on online platforms for

their beauty product needs, beauty brands must adapt by understanding the critical factors that drive purchase intentions.

The objectives of this study are.

**The objectives of this study are threefold:**

1. To identify the influence of social media engagement on online purchase intentions for beauty products.
2. To explore the mediating role of perceived trust in the relationship between social media influence and online purchase intention.
3. To examine the moderating role of perceived risk in the same relationship.

By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to offer valuable insights for beauty brands and marketers aiming to leverage social media effectively to boost online sales.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social Media and Consumer Behaviour**

The integration of social media into everyday life has redefined how brands interact with consumers. No longer confined to traditional advertising, beauty brands now leverage social media platforms to engage directly with consumers, bypassing traditional media channels. This shift has created a more dynamic and personalized consumer-brand relationship. Social media engagement is multifaceted, encompassing various interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and user-generated content like reviews and unboxing videos.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media has facilitated a new era of brand communication, where consumers are no longer passive observers but active participants. This shift is particularly relevant in the beauty industry, where visual content and tutorials play a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior. Mangold and Faulds (2009) assert that social media platforms empower consumers to influence each other, with peers and influencers becoming more influential than the brands themselves.

In the beauty industry, influencers play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior. Jin and Phua (2014) highlight that social media influencers, through endorsements and tutorials, act as intermediaries, providing valuable insights and reviews that significantly impact consumer trust and purchase intentions.

### **2.2 Online Purchase Intention in the Beauty Industry**

Online purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood of purchasing a product through digital platforms. In the beauty industry, this concept is particularly complex due to the tactile nature of beauty products, which traditionally require physical interaction for evaluation. Despite this challenge, social media platforms have successfully bridged this gap by providing virtual experiences, detailed reviews, and influencer endorsements. Gefen and Straub (2004) emphasize that perceived trust is a critical driver of online purchase intention, especially in industries like beauty where product authenticity and safety are of paramount concern. Pavlou and Fygenson (2006) extend this argument by introducing the concept of perceived risk, which acts as a barrier to online purchases, particularly when consumers are unsure of a product's quality or compatibility.

In the context of beauty products, perceived trust and perceived risk play essential roles in shaping consumer behavior. Social media platforms, through influencer endorsements and user-generated content, have proven effective in reducing perceived risk by offering detailed product information and testimonials from credible sources (Kim and Peterson, 2017).

### **2.3 Key Drivers: Social Media Engagement, Perceived Trust, and Perceived Risk**

Social media engagement has become an indispensable factor in driving online purchase intentions, particularly in visually-driven industries like beauty, where consumers interact with brands, influencers, and fellow users through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. These social media platforms offer interactive and dynamic environments where consumers not only passively consume brand content but also actively participate by liking, commenting, sharing, and engaging with influencers. This interaction fosters a sense of community and enhances brand loyalty, ultimately influencing consumer decision-making processes (Kang, 2018).

Studies indicate that frequent engagement with social media content exposes consumers to brand messaging and user-generated content, which collectively contribute to purchase intentions (Kim & Ko, 2012). Active participation, such as following influencers or engaging with branded content, increases consumer exposure to a constant stream of brand-related information, thereby reinforcing brand recognition and making it more likely for consumers to internalize these messages and consider purchasing products (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Central to this dynamic is perceived trust, which serves as a critical mediator in transforming social media engagement into actual purchase intentions. Gefen and Straub (2004) emphasize the importance of trust in online transactions, particularly when consumers must rely on digital representations and third-party endorsements. In the beauty industry, trust is heavily influenced by factors such as the credibility of the influencer, the transparency of product information, and consistent positive reviews from peers (Chen, 2017). Influencers play a pivotal role in building trust, especially given the intimate nature of beauty products. Consumers often depend on trusted sources for recommendations on product quality, skin compatibility, and

authenticity. Influencers, by sharing personal experiences and reviews, bridge the gap between consumers and brands, thereby enhancing the perceived trustworthiness of the promoted products. Jin and Phua (2014) argue that consumers are more likely to make purchase decisions when they trust the influencer's recommendations, positioning influencers as perceived experts in the beauty domain. The trust established by influencers is crucial, as beauty products often involve personal health and appearance, heightening the need for trusted advice (Boerman et al., 2017).

While social media engagement and perceived trust play a significant role in driving purchase intentions, perceived risk introduces complexity into the decision-making process. Perceived risk refers to a consumer's assessment of potential negative outcomes associated with an online purchase, such as concerns over product quality, compatibility, or even transaction security (Kim & Peterson, 2017). In the context of beauty products, perceived risk is particularly pronounced due to the inability to physically examine or test products, which is a critical consideration for skincare and cosmetic purchases, where product efficacy and safety are paramount (Choi & Lee, 2020).

Perceived risk serves as a counterbalance to the positive effects of social media engagement and perceived trust. High levels of engagement and trust may increase the likelihood of purchase, but perceived risk can negate these effects if consumers feel uncertain about the authenticity or quality of the product or the reliability of the platform. For instance, even when consumers trust an influencer's recommendation, they may hesitate to make a purchase due to concerns over product delivery, potential counterfeit goods, or compatibility issues with their skin type (Bianchi & Andrews, 2015).

To mitigate perceived risk, beauty brands and online platforms have adopted various strategies, such as providing detailed product descriptions, leveraging customer reviews, and offering virtual try-on tools. These innovations allow consumers to visualize how products will look on them, thereby addressing key concerns and reducing the perceived risks associated with online beauty purchases (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Additionally, brands often offer free returns or sample products to further reduce the potential risk to the consumer.

The interplay between social media engagement, perceived trust, and perceived risk creates a nuanced framework for understanding online purchase intentions in the beauty sector. While engagement and trust foster a positive environment for purchase decisions, perceived risk moderates this relationship by introducing hesitation and uncertainty. This study seeks to examine these relationships further, providing a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences consumer behaviour in the beauty industry.

### 3. Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Social media engagement positively influences online purchase intention for beauty products.

H2: Social media influencers positively impact perceived trust in beauty products.

H3: Perceived trust mediates the relationship between social media influence and online purchase intention.

H4: Perceived risk negatively moderates the effect of social media influence on online purchase intention.

H5: The frequency of social media use positively moderates the relationship between social media engagement and online purchase intention.

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design aimed at investigating the relationships between social media engagement, perceived trust, perceived risk, and online purchase intentions in the beauty products sector. A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from previous research (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006), ensuring reliability and accuracy in capturing the relevant variables. The survey instrument consisted of 30 items, each measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was designed to measure the following constructs:

- Social Media Engagement
- Perceived Trust
- Perceived Risk
- Online Purchase Intention

The constructs were adapted to reflect consumer behaviour in the beauty industry, particularly focusing on consumers who actively engage with beauty brands on social media platforms.

#### 4.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population for this study comprised active social media users in India, aged 18-45, who had previously purchased beauty products online. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed to select respondents, ensuring representation across various demographic categories such as age, income, and frequency of social media use. A total of 800 respondents participated in the survey, with data collected via an online survey platform over three months. The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1, ensuring a representative sample for the Indian market.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Demographics**

Variable	Frequency (%)	Total Sample (n=800)
Gender		
Male	48%	384
Female	52%	416
Age Group		
18-24 years	32%	256
25-34 years	45%	360
35-45 years	23%	184
Frequency of Social Media Use		
Daily	75%	600
Several times a week	15%	120
Weekly	10%	80

### 4.3 Variables and Measures

The key variables in this study were:

- **Social Media Engagement:** Measured by the frequency of interaction with beauty brands and influencers on social media platforms.
- **Perceived Trust:** Measured by the level of trust consumers place in social media influencers and the beauty products they endorse.
- **Perceived Risk:** Measured by the degree of uncertainty consumers feel about purchasing beauty products online.
- **Online Purchase Intention:** Measured by the likelihood that consumers will purchase beauty products online.

### 4.4 Data Analysis

To test the research hypotheses, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed. SEM allows for the simultaneous testing of multiple relationships and the assessment of both direct and indirect effects between the key variables. SEM was chosen due to its ability to handle complex models with multiple mediators and moderators.

Data was processed using SPSS for preliminary analysis and AMOS for SEM. Prior to conducting SEM, data was cleaned for missing values, and assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were checked to ensure the validity of results.

## 5. Data Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all key variables, providing an overview of the data. The frequency distribution and mean scores for each construct are presented in Table 2, demonstrating the level of engagement, trust, and purchase intention among the respondents.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables**

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Social Media Engagement	4.21	0.63
Perceived Trust	4.15	0.72
Perceived Risk	3.10	0.81
Online Purchase Intention	4.05	0.65

### 5.2 Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of each construct, with all alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were also calculated to assess convergent validity. Table 3 presents the reliability and validity scores for each construct.

**Table 3: Reliability and Validity Scores**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Social Media Engagement	0.88	0.89	0.62
Perceived Trust	0.91	0.92	0.68
Perceived Risk	0.83	0.84	0.57
Online Purchase Intention	0.87	0.88	0.61

### 5.3 SEM Results

The SEM analysis confirmed that social media engagement positively influences online purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and social media influencers positively impact perceived trust ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Perceived trust was found to mediate the relationship between social media influence and online purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, perceived risk was found to negatively moderate the relationship between social media influence and purchase intention ( $\beta = -0.30$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ).

**Table 4: SEM Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing**

Path	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Hypothesis Supported
Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.48	<0.001	Yes
Influencer Marketing → Perceived Trust	0.52	<0.001	Yes
Perceived Trust → Purchase Intention	0.46	<0.001	Yes
Perceived Risk → Purchase Intention	-0.30	0.002	Yes

## 6. Findings

The results from this study confirm that social media engagement plays a pivotal role in influencing online purchase intentions, particularly within the beauty sector. Consumers are increasingly interacting with brands and products through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, engaging not only with brand-generated content but also with influencer endorsements and user-generated reviews. This high level of engagement exposes consumers to brand messaging more frequently and strengthens their purchase intentions through enhanced familiarity and perceived social validation.

A key finding of this study is that influencer marketing—especially endorsements from trusted influencers—plays a crucial role in building consumer trust, which is essential for driving purchase behavior. In the beauty industry, where products often involve personal care and appearance, trust becomes an even more significant factor, as consumers seek recommendations from sources they deem credible. Influencers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, providing personal experiences, tutorials, and reviews that help consumers make informed decisions about products they have not physically interacted with. This aligns with findings from Jin and Phua (2014), who observed that influencer credibility significantly enhances consumer trust, ultimately leading to higher purchase intentions.

Furthermore, the results of this study extend the work of Kim and Peterson (2017), by confirming that perceived risk remains a significant barrier to online purchases in the beauty sector. This perceived risk is heightened due to the intangible nature of online shopping, particularly in industries like beauty where product efficacy, skin compatibility, and safety are paramount concerns. Many consumers hesitate to purchase beauty products online because they are unable to physically test or evaluate the product before buying. Even when consumers trust an influencer's recommendation, they may still hesitate due to concerns about product authenticity, potential counterfeit goods, or uncertainty about how the product will perform on their own skin.

The study further reveals that perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between social media influence and purchase intention, emphasizing the importance of reducing consumer uncertainty during the online purchase process. This finding underscores the need for beauty brands to implement strategies that minimize risk perception, such as offering detailed product information, leveraging customer reviews, and providing virtual try-on tools or product samples. These strategies can help mitigate consumer concerns by providing them with more information and opportunities to engage with the product digitally before making a purchase.

The moderating effect of perceived risk also highlights the importance of transparency in online beauty retail. Consumers are more likely to trust a brand or influencer when they feel confident about the product's quality and safety. Therefore, brands should focus on fostering this trust by maintaining transparency in product ingredients, offering guarantees, and ensuring that the influencer endorsements are authentic and not merely paid promotions. The rise of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) tools, which allow consumers to virtually try on products, has also emerged as a promising avenue for reducing perceived risk and increasing consumer confidence in online beauty purchases.

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the factors that drive online purchase intentions in the beauty sector. Social media engagement, influencer marketing, and perceived trust significantly influence consumers' decisions to purchase beauty products online. However, perceived risk remains a significant hurdle, and brands must address this issue to fully capitalize on the potential of social media as a sales channel. By reducing uncertainty and enhancing trust, beauty brands can create a more favorable environment for online purchases, thus improving overall sales performance in the digital marketplace.

## 7. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how social media engagement, influencer marketing, and perceived risk influence online purchase intentions in the beauty sector. The study confirms that influencer marketing, particularly through trusted figures, significantly enhances consumer trust, which in turn positively impacts purchase behaviour. This highlights the importance for beauty brands to carefully select influencers who resonate with their target audience and maintain long-term partnerships. Trust, as a mediating factor, is crucial in driving consumer decisions, especially in industries like beauty where product authenticity and personal care play a major role.

Additionally, the role of perceived risk was found to be a significant barrier to online purchases. Consumers are often hesitant to buy beauty products online due to concerns about product efficacy, safety, and compatibility. The study suggests that brands must actively address these risks by providing detailed product information, transparent reviews, and innovative solutions like virtual try-ons to reduce consumer uncertainty. By mitigating perceived risk, beauty brands can enhance the effectiveness of their social media strategies, creating a more favourable environment for online purchases and ultimately increasing sales.

This study emphasizes the intertwined nature of trust, social media engagement, and risk reduction in shaping consumer behavior in the digital beauty market. Beauty brands that invest in building strong relationships with credible influencers and actively address consumer concerns through transparent communication and innovative tools will be better positioned to succeed in the competitive online marketplace.

## 8. Conclusion

This study makes a notable contribution to the expanding body of research on online consumer behavior, specifically in the beauty industry. By identifying key drivers such as social media engagement, influencer marketing, and perceived trust, the research provides critical insights into what influences consumers' online purchase intentions. The findings confirm that these factors play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, while perceived risk acts as a moderating variable that can either strengthen or weaken the impact of social media efforts. This underscores the importance for beauty brands to carefully manage their digital presence and partnerships to foster trust and mitigate risk.

For beauty brands to succeed in the competitive digital marketplace, they must focus on building trust through collaborations with credible influencers and by enhancing transparent communication with consumers. The study highlights that strategies such as providing detailed product information, using authentic consumer reviews, and leveraging innovative tools like virtual try-ons are essential for reducing perceived risk. These efforts help to reassure consumers about the quality, safety, and compatibility of beauty products purchased online, which in turn drives higher purchase intentions.

Moreover, the implications for beauty brands are clear: integrating these strategies into their digital marketing efforts can not only boost consumer confidence but also improve the overall effectiveness of their social media campaigns. Brands that prioritize transparency, trust-building, and risk reduction will likely see greater success in converting online engagement into actual sales.

Future research should further explore the relationships between these key variables across different consumer segments and product categories. By broadening the scope to include various demographic groups and product types, future studies can validate the findings of this research and provide a more comprehensive

understanding of how social media, influencer marketing, trust, and risk interact in influencing online purchase behaviour in the beauty sector and beyond.

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