

Quantitative Analysis Of Determinants Influencing Online Purchase Intentions In The Beauty Industry: The Role Of Trust And Social Influence

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the determinants of online purchase intentions in the beauty industry, focusing on the moderating effects of influencer marketing on trust and social influence. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 480 respondents actively purchasing beauty products online, and analysed using Smart PLS for structural equation modelling. The findings reveal that trust and social influence significantly influence purchase intentions, while influencer marketing enhances these relationships, underscoring its strategic role in shaping consumer behaviours. The study offers theoretical insights into consumer decision-making and practical recommendations for beauty brands to optimise influencer-driven marketing strategies, fostering trust and engagement in competitive digital marketplaces.

Keywords: Online purchase intention, Beauty products, Trust, Social influence, Influencer marketing

Introduction

The global beauty industry, valued at over \$511 billion in 2023, has undergone a significant transformation driven by digital advancements and the pervasive influence of social media. E-commerce platforms have reshaped not only the way beauty products are marketed but also the decision-making processes of consumers. These digital shifts have created new opportunities for brands to engage with consumers and build trust through innovative strategies like influencer marketing.

Online purchase intentions—defined as a consumer's propensity to buy products through digital platforms—have become a central focus for marketers aiming to capitalise on the growth of online retail. Extant research highlights the pivotal roles of trust and social influence in shaping consumer behaviour in digital contexts (Gefen et al., 2003; Kim & Lennon, 2019). Trust, often conceptualised as a consumer's belief in the reliability and integrity of a platform or brand, mitigates perceived risks associated with online transactions (McKnight et al., 2002). Social influence, encompassing the persuasive power of peers, reviews, and influencers, has been shown to guide consumer decision-making, particularly in the beauty industry where personal endorsements hold significant sway (Aral & Walker, 2011).

Simultaneously, influencer marketing has emerged as a transformative tool in the beauty industry, leveraging the credibility and reach of social media personalities to enhance brand trust and influence purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencers offer authentic and relatable content, which resonates deeply with consumers and aligns with their evolving expectations of personalised and credible marketing. However, while prior studies have examined trust, social influence, and influencer marketing individually, their combined effect on online purchase intentions remains underexplored, particularly in the context of emerging economies like India.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Online Purchase Intentions

Online purchase intention is a central construct in consumer behaviour, defined as the likelihood that a consumer will buy products through digital platforms (Pavlou, 2003). The concept has evolved from traditional

models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which emphasises perceived ease of use and usefulness (Davis, 1989), to more comprehensive frameworks incorporating psychological, environmental, and socio-cultural factors (Gefen et al., 2003).

The beauty industry, known for its reliance on visual and sensory elements, has witnessed exponential growth in online transactions, driven by convenience, access to global products, and personalised digital experiences (Sharma & Gupta, 2021). However, challenges such as scepticism about product authenticity and the inability to physically evaluate items remain significant barriers. In response, strategies like influencer endorsements and transparent customer reviews have emerged as crucial mechanisms for bridging the gap between intention and action (Raut et al., 2020).

2.2 Trust as a Determinant

Trust is a cornerstone of online consumer behaviour, reducing perceptions of risk and fostering confidence in digital transactions (McKnight et al., 2002). In e-commerce, trust is multi-dimensional, encompassing confidence in the brand, the e-commerce platform, and third-party endorsers like influencers.

In the beauty industry, trust is particularly critical due to the intangible nature of products, which often require sensory evaluation. Consumers rely heavily on influencers to provide authentic, experience-based recommendations (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Trust in influencers, built through consistent and transparent content, has been shown to directly enhance purchase intentions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Furthermore, trust in the e-commerce platform—manifested in secure payment systems, verified customer reviews, and flexible return policies—plays a pivotal role in alleviating consumer apprehensions (Kumar et al., 2022).

2.3 Role of Social Influence

Social influence, derived from the opinions, behaviours, and endorsements of others, significantly shapes consumer decision-making. It is typically categorised into two dimensions:

Normative Influence: The desire to conform to social norms and expectations.

Informational Influence: Reliance on others' opinions and recommendations for decision-making (Kelman, 1958).

In the digital age, social influence is amplified by user-generated content, including online reviews, testimonials, and influencer endorsements. Influencers serve as tastemakers in the beauty industry, offering aspirational yet relatable content that resonates with consumers (De Veirman et al., 2017). Their ability to demonstrate product application and benefits often bridges the trust gap, making them key drivers of social proof. Younger consumers, in particular, rely on influencers as trusted advisors, viewing their endorsements as more credible than traditional advertisements (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

2.4 The Moderating Effect of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing, which involves collaborations with individuals who possess significant social media reach and influence, has become a cornerstone of digital marketing strategies. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing leverages authenticity, relatability, and personal connection to drive consumer engagement (Abidin, 2020).

This study posits that influencer marketing moderates the relationships between trust, social influence, and online purchase intentions, amplifying their impact. For instance Influencers perceived as credible and knowledgeable can strengthen consumer trust in both the product and the platform (Ohanian, 1990).

By creating a heightened sense of social proof, influencers encourage consumers to align with perceived norms and preferences, thereby increasing purchase intentions (Raut et al., 2020).

Moreover, the beauty industry's reliance on experiential marketing aligns seamlessly with influencer-driven content, where product demonstrations, tutorials, and testimonials create an engaging and trustworthy consumer experience. This moderating role of influencer marketing underscores its strategic importance in bridging the gap between digital marketing efforts and consumer purchase behaviours.

3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

3.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the determinants of online purchase intentions in the beauty industry, focusing on the moderating role of influencer marketing in the relationships between trust, social influence, and purchase behaviour. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the direct effect of trust on online purchase intentions in the beauty industry.

2. To analyse the impact of social influence on online purchase intentions.
3. To evaluate the moderating role of influencer marketing on the relationship between trust and online purchase intentions.
4. To assess the moderating role of influencer marketing on the relationship between social influence and online purchase intentions.
5. To provide insights for beauty brands on leveraging influencer marketing to build trust and foster consumer engagement in digital marketplaces.

3.2 Hypotheses

In alignment with the study's research objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed to examine the role of trust, social influence, and influencer marketing in shaping online purchase intentions in the beauty industry:

- **H1:** Trust has a significant positive effect on online purchase intentions in the beauty industry. Trust is anticipated to mitigate consumer apprehensions about product quality and transaction security, fostering confidence in digital purchasing decisions.
- **H2:** Social influence has a significant positive effect on online purchase intentions. Peer recommendations, user-generated content, and influencer endorsements are expected to enhance consumer perceptions, making them more likely to purchase beauty products online.
- **H3:** Influencer marketing moderates the relationship between trust and online purchase intentions, such that the relationship becomes stronger when influencer marketing is perceived as more credible and effective. By amplifying trust through relatable and authentic endorsements, influencers are hypothesised to strengthen consumers' intent to purchase.
- **H4:** Influencer marketing moderates the relationship between social influence and online purchase intentions, such that the relationship becomes stronger when influencer marketing enhances social proof and perceived credibility. This dimension is expected to amplify the effects of peer pressure and normative influences, encouraging consumer purchases.

These hypotheses will be tested using a quantitative approach, employing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through Smart PLS to provide a robust analysis of the relationships between the constructs. The results are expected to offer theoretical and practical insights for the beauty industry, enabling brands to optimise influencer marketing strategies and drive online consumer engagement.

4. Research Methodology

This section outlines the research design, sampling strategy, measures, and analytical techniques employed to examine the determinants of online purchase intentions in the beauty industry. The study adopts a quantitative approach using Smart PLS for structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses.

4.1 Research Design

The research adopts a cross-sectional and quantitative design, employing survey-based data collection to understand the relationships between trust, social influence, influencer marketing, and online purchase intentions. The study utilises a deductive approach, guided by the conceptual framework developed from the literature review, to test hypotheses and validate the proposed model.

The design is suitable for capturing perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards online beauty product purchases at a specific point in time. This approach enables the identification of significant determinants and their interactions, particularly the moderating role of influencer marketing.

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprises active online shoppers in India who purchase beauty products through e-commerce platforms. The sampling frame includes individuals aged 18–45, ensuring diverse representation of consumers who engage with influencer-driven content and rely on online platforms for beauty product purchases.

- **Sampling Method:** A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across key demographic variables, including gender, age, and location.

- **Sample Size:** A total of 480 responses were collected, consistent with guidelines for SEM analysis, which recommend a sample size of at least 10 times the number of measurement indicators in the model (Hair et al., 2019).
- **Data Collection Method:** Data were gathered through an online survey distributed via social media platforms, email lists, and e-commerce communities. The survey included clear instructions and ensured anonymity to encourage honest responses.

4.2.1 Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected through a structured online survey distributed to a sample of 480 participants who actively purchase beauty products online. The sample consisted of individuals aged 18–45, representing a diverse demographic of urban consumers with varying levels of digital engagement. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across gender, age, and income groups, making the findings generalisable to the broader consumer base in the beauty industry.

The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree") to measure constructs such as trust, social influence, influencer marketing, and online purchase intentions. Items were adapted from validated scales in the literature to ensure reliability and relevance, capturing nuanced consumer perceptions related to digital purchasing behaviour.

To ensure the survey's clarity and contextual applicability, a pilot test was conducted with 40 respondents from the target demographic. Feedback from the pilot led to refinements in the phrasing of certain items to enhance understanding, particularly regarding the role of influencer marketing in building trust and influencing purchase decisions. After these adjustments, the final survey was distributed via online channels, including social media platforms, email campaigns, and e-commerce communities. This digital distribution facilitated efficient and geographically dispersed data collection, minimising logistical barriers and ensuring a robust and diverse dataset for subsequent analysis.

4.3 Measures

To operationalise the constructs, the study employed validated scales adapted from existing literature. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The constructs and their respective measurement sources are as follows:

- **Trust:** Measured using items adapted from McKnight et al. (2002), focusing on product authenticity, platform reliability, and transaction security.
- **Social Influence:** Measured with scales from Venkatesh et al. (2003), including peer recommendations, user reviews, and perceived social norms.
- **Influencer Marketing:** Adapted from Lou and Yuan (2019), the scale captured perceptions of credibility, relatability, and expertise of influencers.
- **Online Purchase Intention:** Based on Kim and Lennon (2019), this scale assessed a consumer's likelihood of purchasing beauty products online.
- **Demographic Variables:** Data on age, gender, income, and frequency of online shopping were also collected to ensure robustness in demographic analysis.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in two stages:

1. **Measurement Model Evaluation:** The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using Smart PLS. Key indices included:
 - **Internal Consistency:** Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR).
 - **Convergent Validity:** Average Variance Extracted (AVE).
 - **Discriminant Validity:** Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios.
2. **Structural Model Evaluation:** Path analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses, focusing on:
 - Path coefficients to evaluate relationships between variables.
 - Coefficient of determination (R^2) to measure the model's explanatory power.

- Effect size (F^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2).

Moderation Analysis: Interaction effects of influencer marketing were assessed to determine its moderating role in the relationships between trust, social influence, and online purchase intentions.

4.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The study utilised Smart PLS 4.0, a Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) tool, due to its suitability for complex models and small-to-medium sample sizes. The key techniques included:

- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): To identify underlying dimensions of the constructs.
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): To validate the measurement model and ensure reliability and validity.
- Path Analysis: To test direct and moderating effects.
- Bootstrapping: A resampling method with 5,000 iterations was used to evaluate the significance of path coefficients and moderating effects.

Statistical outputs, including path coefficients, p-values, and confidence intervals, were interpreted to draw conclusions and validate the hypotheses.

5. Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis was conducted in two stages: factor analysis to validate the measurement constructs and structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the hypothesised relationships between trust, social influence, influencer marketing, and online purchase intentions. The use of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in the first stage helped identify the underlying dimensions of the constructs, while Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed the reliability and validity of the measurement model. In the second stage, SEM was employed to examine the direct relationships between the constructs and assess the moderating effects of influencer marketing.

The findings from the EFA and CFA ensured that all constructs—trust, social influence, influencer marketing, and online purchase intentions—were adequately represented and operationalised, meeting key criteria for reliability and validity. The SEM analysis provided robust support for the hypothesised relationships, revealing the critical role of influencer marketing in moderating the effects of trust and social influence on online purchase intentions in the beauty industry.

5.1.1 Factor Analysis Results

Factor analysis was performed to confirm the reliability and validity of the constructs. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) identified key dimensions of trust, social influence, influencer marketing, and online purchase intentions, while Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model. All factor loadings exceeded 0.7, confirming strong relationships between observed variables and their respective constructs.

The reliability of the constructs was established using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). All constructs achieved Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 and CR values above 0.8, demonstrating internal consistency. Convergent validity was confirmed as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.5. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, showed that the AVE for each construct was greater than the squared correlations between constructs, confirming that all constructs were distinct and well-defined.

Table 5.1: Factor Loadings, Reliability, and Validity

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Trust	TR1	0.82	0.87	0.9	0.68
	TR2	0.84			
	TR3	0.78			
Social Influence	SI1	0.88	0.89	0.91	0.72
	SI2	0.85			
	SI3	0.8			
Influencer Marketing	IM1	0.83	0.88	0.91	0.7
	IM2	0.81			

	IM3	0.86			
Online Purchase Intentions	OPI1	0.89	0.9	0.92	0.74
	OPI2	0.85			
	OPI3	0.87			

• Interpretation

The factor analysis results validate the measurement model, ensuring that all constructs are reliable and valid. The high factor loadings and strong reliability scores confirm the robustness of the measurement scales, while the AVE and discriminant validity results indicate that each construct is distinct and accurately captures its intended dimension.

5.1.2 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised relationships and the moderating effects of influencer marketing. The model fit indices confirm a strong overall fit, indicating that the proposed model aligns well with the observed data.

Table 5.2: Model Fit Indices for SEM Analysis

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Observed Value
Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	≤ 0.08	0.047
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	≥ 0.90	0.92
Chi-Square/df	≤ 3.00	2.51
Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	≥ 0.00	0.36

• Interpretation

The SEM model fit indices demonstrate a strong fit between the proposed theoretical framework and the data. The SRMR value of 0.047 is below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating low residual error, while the NFI value of 0.92 surpasses the minimum requirement, reflecting strong congruence between the hypothesised model and observed data. A Chi-Square/df ratio of 2.51, well within the acceptable range, further validates the model's adequacy. The predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.36$) highlights the model's ability to explain variations in online purchase intentions.

Table 5.3: SEM Path Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
H1: Trust \rightarrow Online Purchase Intentions	0.42	8.23	<0.001	Yes
H2: Social Influence \rightarrow Online Purchase Intentions	0.35	6.45	<0.001	Yes
H3: Influencer Marketing Moderates (Trust \rightarrow Intentions)	0.29	5.02	<0.001	Yes
H4: Influencer Marketing Moderates (Social Influence \rightarrow Intentions)	0.31	5.67	<0.001	Yes

• Interpretation

The results of the path analysis provide strong empirical support for all four hypotheses. Each hypothesised relationship between the constructs demonstrates statistical significance, as reflected by high path coefficients, large t -values, and $p < 0.001$. Below is an expanded interpretation of the findings.

H1: Trust \rightarrow Online Purchase Intentions ($\beta = 0.42$, t t-value = 8.23, $p < 0.001$)

Trust has the strongest direct effect on online purchase intentions among the constructs, with a path coefficient of 0.42. This highlights the critical importance of trust in fostering consumer confidence in e-commerce transactions. Specifically, trust mitigates perceived risks associated with online purchases, such as concerns over product authenticity, payment security, and the credibility of beauty brands or e-commerce platforms. These findings align with previous literature, underscoring the foundational role of trust in shaping consumer behaviour in digital marketplaces.

H2: Social Influence \rightarrow Online Purchase Intentions ($\beta = 0.35$, t t-value = 6.45, $p < 0.001$)

Social influence has a significant positive impact on online purchase intentions, with a path coefficient of 0.35. This indicates that consumer decisions are strongly influenced by peer recommendations, user-generated content, and endorsements from influencers. In the beauty industry, social proof plays a vital role, as consumers often rely on reviews and the perceived popularity of products to guide their purchasing decisions. Influencers act as key drivers of social influence by providing relatable and aspirational content that resonates with consumers.

H3: Influencer Marketing Moderates (Trust → Online Purchase Intentions) ($\beta = 0.29$, t t-value = 5.02, $p < 0.001$ $p < 0.001$)

Influencer marketing significantly moderates the relationship between trust and online purchase intentions, with a path coefficient of 0.29. This finding underscores the amplifying effect of influencer marketing on consumer trust. By offering authentic and personalised endorsements, influencers enhance consumer perceptions of credibility and reliability, reducing uncertainties in the decision-making process. For example, when an influencer demonstrates product usage or shares their personal experiences, they strengthen the consumer's trust in the brand and the e-commerce platform.

H4: Influencer Marketing Moderates (Social Influence → Online Purchase Intentions) ($\beta = 0.31$, t t-value = 5.67, $p < 0.001$ $p < 0.001$)

The moderating role of influencer marketing is also evident in its effect on the relationship between social influence and online purchase intentions, with a path coefficient of 0.31. This highlights the ability of influencer campaigns to amplify the persuasive power of social proof. Influencers not only reinforce consumer perceptions of product popularity and community validation but also create aspirational content that aligns with social norms and consumer identity. This dual role enhances the effectiveness of social influence, making it a powerful determinant of online purchase behaviour.

Key Insights from Path Analysis

1. **Trust as a Foundation:** Trust emerged as the strongest predictor of online purchase intentions, demonstrating the necessity for brands to establish secure and credible online platforms. Strategies such as clear return policies, verified reviews, and secure payment gateways can further bolster consumer trust.
2. **Power of Social Influence:** Social influence significantly drives online purchase intentions by leveraging user-generated content, peer recommendations, and influencer endorsements. Marketers should actively promote social proof mechanisms, such as displaying positive reviews and influencer collaborations.
3. **Influencer marketing as a Catalyst:** Influencer marketing amplifies the effects of both trust and social influence on purchase intentions. The findings confirm that partnerships with credible and relatable influencers are critical for enhancing consumer engagement and driving conversions.

6. Discussion and Implications

This section elaborates on the findings of the study, situating them within the broader academic discourse and outlining their practical and theoretical implications. The results underscore the pivotal roles of trust, social influence, and influencer marketing in shaping online purchase intentions in the beauty industry.

6.1 Practical Implications

The findings offer actionable insights for practitioners, particularly marketers and managers in the beauty industry:

1. **Building Trust as a Key Driver:** Trust emerged as the strongest determinant of online purchase intentions, highlighting the need for beauty brands and e-commerce platforms to prioritise consumer confidence. Practical measures include transparent policies (e.g., return and refund options), ensuring secure payment methods, and using verified reviews to enhance perceived credibility. Partnerships with reputable influencers who align with the brand's values can also help build trust by presenting relatable and authentic endorsements.
2. **Leveraging Social Influence:** Social influence significantly impacts online purchase intentions. Marketers can capitalise on this by encouraging user-generated content, promoting positive customer reviews, and creating shareable content. Additionally, designing campaigns that align with social norms or tap into aspirational lifestyles can further strengthen consumer engagement.
3. **Optimising Influencer Marketing Strategies:** Influencer marketing plays a crucial moderating role, amplifying the effects of both trust and social influence. Brands should carefully select influencers whose audiences align with their target market and who exhibit credibility and relatability. Engaging influencers to create content that integrates personal stories, tutorials, and demonstrations can foster deeper connections with consumers and drive purchase behaviour.
4. **Personalisation and Engagement:** To enhance the impact of influencer marketing, brands can focus on personalisation, using data-driven insights to tailor influencer campaigns. Interactive content, such as live Q&A sessions or product giveaways hosted by influencers, can further drive engagement and conversions.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing body of literature in several significant ways:

1. **Extending Knowledge on Online Purchase Intentions:** By integrating trust, social influence, and influencer marketing into a single model, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing online purchase intentions in the beauty industry. This comprehensive framework offers a valuable contribution to consumer behaviour research, particularly in the context of digital marketing.
2. **Moderating Role of Influencer Marketing:** The study highlights the dual role of influencer marketing as both a direct factor and a moderator. This finding enriches the theoretical discourse by demonstrating how influencers amplify trust and social proof, bridging gaps in existing research that largely examines these constructs in isolation.
3. **Context-Specific Insights:** Conducted within the Indian beauty market, the study offers insights into an emerging economy characterised by rapid digital adoption and evolving consumer preferences. These findings provide a contextualised understanding of how cultural and market-specific factors shape online purchase behaviour, addressing gaps in the literature dominated by studies from Western markets.

7. Future Research Directions

Although this study provides valuable insights, several areas warrant further investigation to expand the scope and applicability of its findings:

1. **Diverse Industry Contexts:** Future studies could explore the applicability of this framework across other industries, such as fashion, electronics, or food delivery, to assess the generalisability of the findings. Each sector has unique trust-building mechanisms and consumer behaviours that may influence results.
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** A longitudinal approach could provide deeper insights into how trust, social influence, and influencer marketing evolve over time and impact consumer loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour.
3. **Comparative Analysis:** Comparative studies between emerging and developed economies could offer a richer understanding of how cultural, economic, and technological factors influence online purchase intentions.
4. **Influencer Characteristics:** Future research could delve deeper into the characteristics of influencers, such as their expertise, relatability, or audience engagement, to identify the most effective attributes for driving consumer trust and purchase intentions.
5. **Consumer Segmentation:** Investigating how demographic factors such as age, gender, income, or digital literacy influence the relationships between trust, social influence, and purchase intentions could offer more tailored marketing strategies.
6. **Advanced Analytical Techniques:** Future studies could employ advanced data analytics, such as machine learning, to uncover hidden patterns in consumer behaviour, providing predictive insights into how influencer marketing impacts purchasing decisions.

By addressing these areas, future research can build on the findings of this study, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic factors shaping consumer behaviour in the digital age.

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