

# Examining Susceptibility to Influence, Social Media Engagement, and Cosmetic Spending Behavior

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## ABSTRACT

Amid rapid technological transformations, understanding how consumers respond in digital marketing environments is increasingly critical for marketing managers. Using Cialdini's principles of influence, this exploratory research examines the intersection of psychological susceptibility to influence tactics, digital engagement in social media, and consumer spending on cosmetic products. Additionally, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms that make certain consumer groups exceptionally responsive to influence tactics. In an online survey of 201 females, two influence tactics were found to significantly predict social media engagement and consumer behavior. Specifically, younger consumers demonstrated a greater susceptibility to social proof, and non-Caucasians were more influenced by authority. This study advances our understanding of susceptibility to persuasion by integrating multiple psychological influence tactics into a single behavioral model and foregrounding the ethical implications of targeting consumers who may be more vulnerable to persuasion.

## KEYWORDS

Authority, Beauty Products, Consumer Spending Behavior, Vulnerability, Cosmetics Industry, Influence Tactics, Reciprocity, Social Media Engagement, Social Influence, Social Media Use, Social Proof

## INTRODUCTION

A recent McKinsey & Company study estimated that the global cosmetics<sup>1</sup> market is valued between \$447 and \$460 billion in 2025 and is expected to grow rapidly, with a 2028 projection of over \$700 billion (Weaver et al., 2025). McKinsey further predicts that one-third of global beauty product sales will be through online channels by 2030. Cosmetics marketing is fueled by pervasive social media marketing activities (An & Ngo, 2025) such as influencer marketing. According to the Digital Marketing Institute's *State of Influencer Marketing Report*, beauty is one of the most

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prominent sectors for influencer marketing activity, with nearly 22% of marketers integrating it into their strategic efforts (20 Surprising Influencer Marketing Statistics, 2025).

Clearly, the cosmetics industry has become one of the most dynamic areas of opportunity for digital persuasion, especially with social media influencers playing a central role in shaping consumer attitudes, preferences, and purchasing behavior. As millions of consumers turn to social media influencers for makeup tutorials, beauty product recommendations, and brand endorsements, the psychological mechanisms underlying these persuasive encounters have become increasingly important. Even though influencer marketing is a dominant force, relatively little is known about which consumers in this market are most responsive to specific persuasive influence tactics and why. Understanding these dynamics is increasingly vital as influencer strategies become more sophisticated.

There is strong interest surrounding this industry, with recent research focusing on the broader cosmetics market (Akram et al., 2023; Sinukaban et al., 2025) and niche sectors such as bio-cosmetics (Ngo et al., 2025), organic/green cosmetics (An & Ngo, 2025), botanic cosmetics (Koay et al., 2022), and halal cosmetics that follow Islamic guidelines (Hasim et al., 2025; Islam et al., 2025). As digital platforms and social media marketing activities continue to evolve, it becomes increasingly important to investigate how consumers respond to these innovations and online marketing strategies. Sinukaban et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study of female college students and found that influencer trust was a primary determinant of their cosmetic purchasing decisions. Bushara et al.'s (2023) study revealed that younger consumers perceive greater value in cosmetics when social media marketing emphasizes social responsibility and product benefits. Ananthasai et al. (2023) demonstrated how social media marketing content increases consumer engagement and brand affinity with skincare products. Choedon and Young-Chan (2020) provided evidence that social media marketing can positively influence brand awareness and purchase intentions for organic cosmetics, with brand engagement and brand equity mediating these relationships. Collectively, these works highlight the importance of social media for communicating persuasive information in the cosmetics industry.

Influencer engagement campaigns often promote unrealistic beauty standards (Danylova, 2020). While cosmetics can boost confidence and self-expression, excessive consumer spending in this product category is often driven by other factors such as social pressures, insecurities, or self-esteem (Chen et al., 2019). Recent research highlights the importance of examining how economic, social, and psychological factors intersect to shape consumption patterns in digital spaces (Escourido-Calvo et al., 2023). Converging forces are particularly relevant when considering the behaviors of younger consumers who tend to be among the heaviest users of social media. These consumers are known to rely on user-generated content and recommendations from social media influencers when making product decisions (Elkatimiş, 2024).

To explain why influencer recommendations carry such weight, researchers often look to Robert Cialdini's foundational work on the psychology of persuasion. Cialdini has authored over 230 professional and scientific publications and is lauded for his original and groundbreaking 1984 book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, which has been cited in over 7,000 manuscripts. His key sources of influence, also known as influence tactics or principles of influence, are authority, liking, social proof, scarcity, reciprocity, and commitment & consistency. Each principle will be defined and expanded upon in the literature review to illustrate how it can manifest in the context of social media marketing influence.

A growing body of peer-reviewed scholarship has applied Cialdini's principles of influence to the study of cosmetics marketing, particularly in relation to social media influencers. This literature demonstrates that principles of influence can shape how consumers evaluate beauty content, form trust judgments, and make purchase decisions. For instance, authors of studies on fashion influencer marketing and social media power (Ioanid et al., 2015; Zietek, 2016) incorporated Cialdini's work to highlight how companies can successfully utilize these principles when collaborating with influencers. Most studies examine individual principles in isolation rather than how multiple principles can operate

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