The Role of Social Media Influencers in Cosmetic Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review

Original Article

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has transformed the beauty and cosmetics industry, positioning social media influencers (SMIs) as critical intermediaries between brands and consumers. This study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 37 empirical articles published between 2015 and 2025 to synthesize how influencer credibility, authenticity, and parasocial relationships affect consumer behavior, brand perception, and purchase intention. The review follows PRISMA 2020 and bibliometric protocols using Publish or Perish, Scopus, CrossRef, and Covidence for systematic screening. The findings indicate four dominant research themes: (1) source credibility and influencer attributes, (2) authenticity and parasocial relationships, (3) consumer behavioral outcomes such as brand trust and loyalty, and (4) strategic influencer marketing practices. The results reveal that trustworthiness and authenticity consistently mediate the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention, while cultural and contextual factors moderate these effects. Moreover, micro- and nano-influencers are increasingly valued for their authenticity and engagement over macro-influencers with larger audiences. The review concludes that influencer marketing in the cosmetics sector has evolved from transactional promotion to relational advocacy, emphasizing ethical transparency, audience alignment, and sustainable consumer loyalty.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Cosmetic Marketing, Purchase Intention, Social Media Influencers, Systematic Literature Review.

1. Introduction

The rise of social media has fundamentally reshaped marketing communication, particularly in the beauty and cosmetics industry. Social media influencers (SMIs), often referred to as beauty gurus, have become pivotal in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. By leveraging their expertise in makeup and skincare, influencers make beauty content more accessible and diverse, thereby enhancing brand awareness and engagement (Hassan et al., 2021) Their influence is particularly prominent among Generation Z and young millennials, who represent the largest proportion of social media users and are highly responsive to digital endorsements. The credibility of influencers anchored in attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness plays a central role in shaping purchase intentions and brand perception (Nugroho et al., 2022; Rizomyliotis et al., 2024). Compared to traditional celebrities, influencers are perceived as more relatable and authentic, allowing them to exert a stronger psychological and behavioral impact on consumers (Chekima et al., 2020).

The persuasive power of cosmetic influencers extends beyond simple endorsements. Social comparison theory and materialism have been used to explain how followers internalize influencer lifestyles and values, driving purchase decisions. Exposure to influencer content

can foster fear of missing out and elevate materialistic aspirations, which collectively amplify consumers' intent to purchase endorsed products (Dinh et al., 2023). Moreover, influencer credibility attributes trust, expertise, and attractiveness directly affect brand consideration and purchasing decisions (Nugroho et al., 2022; Rizomyliotis et al., 2024). These relationships are further moderated by consumer values such as environmental consciousness, which may either reinforce or weaken the impact of influencer marketing.

The intersection of digital culture and influencer marketing highlights the complexity of audience perception. Gender dynamics, cultural identity, and authenticity significantly shape how consumers engage with influencers. Cross-cultural evidence further suggests that these factors are not universal, as perceptions of influencer credibility differ across cultural settings. For example, Balaban & Mustățea (2019) demonstrated variations between Romanian and German audiences, showing that cultural norms influence how credibility cues are evaluated. Likewise, Lokithasan et al. (2024) found that gender-based responses among Southeast Asian emerging adults reflect localized cultural expectations toward influencers, indicating that influencer effectiveness is shaped by cultural resonance rather than standardized marketing messaging. Studies reveal that consumers often prefer influencers whose gender aligns with the product category, with female audiences being more observant of beauty related content (Lokithasan et al., 2024). As both content creators and strategic brand partners, cosmetic influencers embody authenticity and emotional relatability, fostering consumer trust and loyalty (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019). Beyond sales promotion, they also contribute to broader social change, championing diversity, inclusivity, and cultural acceptance within the beauty industry (Hassan et al., 2021). However, these positive influences coexist with challenges, such as the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards and misleading promotional practices, which warrant critical examination (Ekinci et al., 2025).

While influencer marketing offers substantial benefits, the industry faces increasing challenges regarding authenticity, oversaturation, and ethical transparency. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital consumption but also led to consumer fatigue and skepticism toward influencer content (Le & Aydin, 2023). As influencer marketing becomes a mainstream strategy, concerns over paid partnerships, misinformation, and social pressure have intensified. Brands are thus urged to adopt ethical influencer collaborations that emphasize genuine communication, transparency, and value alignment. Addressing these concerns is essential for maintaining consumer trust and sustaining the longterm effectiveness of influencer-driven campaigns.

Although research on social media influencers in the cosmetics and beauty industry has expanded rapidly, the existing literature remains fragmented and lacks a comprehensive synthesis. Most prior studies have focused on isolated topics such as purchase intention, brand engagement, or influencer attributes without mapping how these themes have evolved over time. Furthermore, the diversity of research methods and theoretical frameworks has produced inconsistent findings, making it difficult to establish a unified understanding of influencer effectiveness. While various influencer attributes (e.g., expertise, authenticity, attractiveness) have been identified as significant, their interrelationships and comparative influence on consumer behavior remain underexplored. Additionally, there is a lack of systematic evaluation of the dominant research approaches and theoretical models applied in this field. Consequently, no study to date has comprehensively consolidated prior findings to identify overarching patterns, recurring variables, and future research directions in cosmetic influencer marketing. This study addresses these gaps by conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to integrate, evaluate, and synthesize existing evidence.

Given the multifaceted roles of cosmetic influencers and the evolving dynamics of digital marketing, there is a pressing need for a systematic and integrative assessment of existing research. Prior studies, though extensive, remain fragmented in their approaches and findings, lacking a unified understanding of how influencers shape consumer behavior in the cosmetics domain (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019). A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) can consolidate diverse perspectives, identify research gaps, and map emerging trends that define the current and future trajectory of influencer marketing. Thus, this study aims to synthesize and clarify the various ways in which influencers affect consumer behavior and marketing dynamics, particularly in fast-moving and socially driven industries such as cosmetics. Social media influencers, with their broad reach and high perceived authenticity, play a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes, brand trust, and purchase intentions within this sector.

2. Literature Review

The cosmetics industry has been profoundly transformed by the rise of social media influencers (SMIs), who now serve as intermediaries between brands and consumers. Unlike traditional celebrities, SMIs are valued for their relatability, perceived authenticity, and ability to foster trust through consistent engagement. Based on the 37 articles reviewed, four dominant themes emerged: source credibility, authenticity and parasocial relationships, consumer behavioral outcomes, and strategic influencer marketing practices.

2.1. Source Credibility and Influencer Attributes

The Source Credibility Theory remains the most widely applied conceptual framework in influencer marketing research. It identifies three dimensions of influence trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness that determine message effectiveness. Empirical findings consistently support that trustworthiness is the most critical determinant of persuasion. Casaló et al. (2020) found that influencer credibility and congruence with brand identity significantly enhance purchase intention. Similarly, Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) reported that micro-influencers, who are perceived as authentic and approachable, generate stronger trust and influence purchase decisions compared to macro influencers.

Balaban & Mustățea (2019) examined cross cultural perceptions of influencer credibility and found that expertise was valued more highly by German consumers, while authenticity and empathy were more influential among Romanian audiences. These findings confirm that source credibility functions as a multidimensional construct that adapts to cultural and social contexts within the cosmetics industry.

2.2. Authenticity and Parasocial Relationships

Recent research has shifted focus from surface level attractiveness toward authenticity and parasocial relationships. Authenticity defined as the influencer's sincerity, transparency, and self-consistency plays a vital role in building emotional attachment (Lou & Yuan, 2019). When followers perceive influencer content as genuine, they develop parasocial relationships, or one-sided social bonds, which foster higher trust and engagement.

Jin & Muqaddam (2019) demonstrated that these parasocial bonds mediate the link between influencer credibility and purchase intention, transforming commercial persuasion into relational trust. Audrezet et al. (2020) expanded this view by proposing the concept of authenticity management, where influencers balance personal integrity with brand sponsorships. In beauty and skincare contexts, authenticity strengthens perceptions of honesty regarding product performance and ingredient quality, a key factor in consumer decision-making.

2.3. Consumer Behavioral Outcomes

Across the literature, the most common dependent variables are purchase intention, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Lim et al. (2017) confirmed that influencer credibility positively affects purchase intention through the mediation of consumer attitudes. Sokolova & Kefi (2020) found that congruence between influencer and brand image enhances purchase likelihood, while Naderer et al. (2021) highlighted the moderating role of similarity and disclosure in shaping engagement.

In emerging markets, particularly Southeast Asia revealed that attractiveness and social similarity exert stronger effects on purchase intention than expertise alone. Ki & Kim (2019) further emphasized that influencer credibility fosters brand trust, which subsequently builds brand loyalty, suggesting a long-term relationship-building mechanism between influencers and consumers.

2.4. Strategic Approaches in Influencer Marketing

The reviewed studies also reflect a strategic shift toward data-driven influencer partnerships and long-term collaborations. Lou & Yuan (2019) noted that influencers now act as co-creators of brand narratives rather than simple endorsers, shaping brand meaning through participatory communication. Ki & Kim (2019) argued that micro and nano influencers provide greater engagement and authenticity, making them increasingly preferred by cosmetic brands seeking niche audiences. Lim et al. (2017) suggested that integrating influencer marketing analytics such as engagement rate and sentiment analysis improves the precision of digital campaign measurement. Meanwhile, Audrezet et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of maintaining ethical and authentic practices amidst commercialization. Transparency in sponsorships and consistent messaging are identified as key drivers of consumer trust and brand credibility.

3. Methods

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to collect, evaluate, and synthesize academic research related to the role of social media influencers in cosmetic marketing. The SLR method provides a structured, transparent, and replicable process that minimizes bias and ensures comprehensive coverage of relevant studies. Through this systematic procedure, the review offers a robust summary of existing evidence and highlights conceptual and methodological gaps in the literature. The method was selected because research on influencer marketing particularly in the cosmetics industry has grown rapidly and is often dispersed across multiple disciplines such as marketing, psychology, and communication. Applying the SLR framework allows fragmented findings to be integrated into a coherent understanding of how social media influencers shape consumer behavior, brand perception, and marketing effectiveness.

This review followed methodological guidelines proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003). The process began with the formulation of clear research questions designed to define the scope and objectives of the study. The research questions guiding this review are as follows: RQ1: What are the main research trends and thematic focuses of studies on social media influencers in the cosmetics and beauty industry? RQ2: What consumer behavioral outcomes (such as attitudes, purchase intention, and brand engagement) are most frequently examined in relation to influencer marketing? RQ3: What key factors or influencer attributes have been identified as influencing consumer behavior in cosmetic marketing contexts? RQ4: What theories and research methods have been predominantly used in prior studies? RQ5: What

research gaps and future directions can be identified from the existing literature on influencer marketing in the cosmetics industry?

Following the formulation of the research questions, a structured search was conducted using Publish or Perish (PoP) (version 8) from two major databases, namely Scopus and CrossRef, which were selected due to their broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals. These databases were selected because they contain peer-reviewed and high-quality academic publications, ensuring the inclusion of reliable and validated sources. Scopus offers extensive journal coverage across marketing, psychology, and social sciences, while CrossRef provides complementary citation metadata. The search string applied in this study was: ("social media influencer" OR "digital influencer" OR "beauty influencer") AND (cosmetic OR beauty OR skincare) AND ("marketing" OR "brand" OR "consumer behavior").

The combination of these keywords was intended to capture a broad range of studies focusing on social media influencers in the cosmetics and beauty industry, particularly those exploring marketing and consumer-related outcomes. Specific constructs such as credibility or authenticity were not included as primary keywords to maintain inclusivity and avoid over-restricting search results. However, studies addressing these constructs were included during the screening phase when found conceptually relevant to the topic. To ensure that the review reflected the most current developments, the search was limited to journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, yielding an initial total of 496 records. This timeframe was selected to represent the modern evolution of influencer marketing, which began gaining prominence following the widespread adoption of visually driven social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, enabling influencers to emerge as a dominant marketing strategy.

All retrieved articles were exported in CSV format and imported into Covidence for systematic screening to ensure relevance and credibility. The process included identifying duplicate records, reviewing titles and abstracts, and assessing full-text eligibility based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. During the identification phase, 51 duplicates were removed automatically and manually. A total of 445 studies were screened based on their titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review of 75 potentially relevant articles. After careful evaluation, 38 studies were excluded due to reasons such as lack of cosmetic or beauty context, conceptual focus without empirical data, or methodological ambiguity. The final synthesis included 37 empirical studies. Articles were included if they focused on social media influencers in the cosmetics context and examined marketing or consumer behavior outcomes. The final set of studies was selected after careful evaluation of relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to the research objectives.

Data from each article were then extracted and analyzed both descriptively and thematically. Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify publication patterns, research trends, and the evolution of topics over time. Thematic analysis was used to synthesize conceptual relationships among influencer attributes, consumer behavioral outcomes, and theoretical approaches. Bibliometric indicators such as citation counts and h-index values obtained through PoP were used to assess the academic impact and influence of each study.

To ensure methodological rigor and transparency, all stages of the review process were conducted systematically and documented in detail. The use of Scopus and CrossRef guaranteed peer-reviewed validity, reducing potential bias from non-academic or duplicated sources. Meanwhile, the integration of bibliometric analysis through Publish or Perish provided objective and replicable validation of the selected literature. Combining quantitative bibliometric evidence with qualitative thematic synthesis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how social media influencers affect consumer behavior within the cosmetics industry. Overall, this methodological design ensures that the review is transparent,

replicable, and aligned with the recognized standards of evidence-based research synthesis (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The full workflow of the systematic selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 structure, encompassing four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram summarizing the inclusion and exclusion process from database search to final selection, ensuring methodological transparency and traceability.
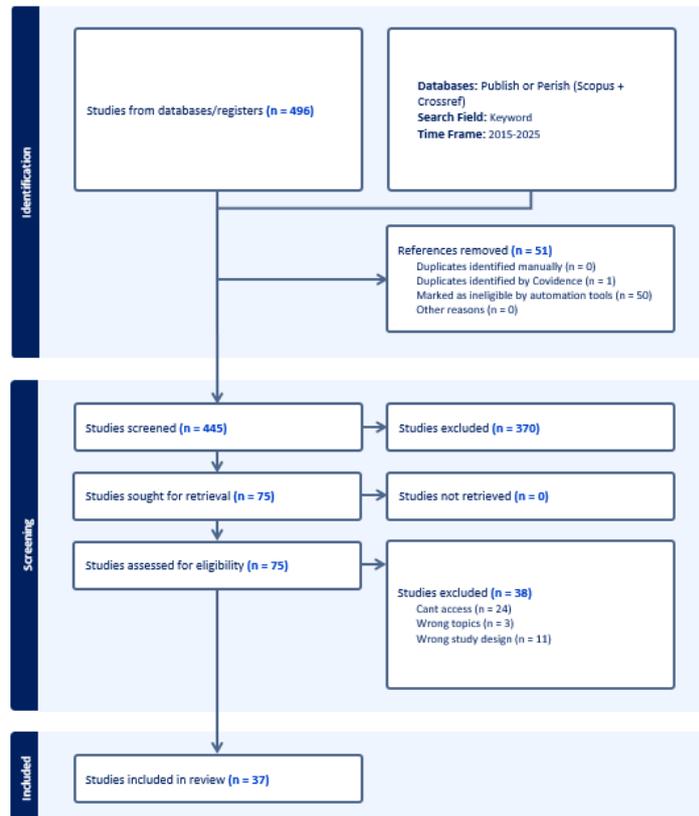

Figure 1. Prisma Diagram

After the selection process, data extraction was conducted systematically in Covidence. Each study was reviewed for key bibliographic and analytical variables, including author(s), year, journal, country, research design, theoretical framework, influencer attributes, and consumer outcomes such as purchase intention, brand trust, and loyalty. The extracted data were organized into an Excel-based coding matrix for thematic and descriptive analysis.

To provide an overview of the research evolution within this domain, the publication trend of the included studies was analyzed based on year of publication. As illustrated in Figure 2, the number of publications related to social media influencers in the cosmetics and beauty industry increased significantly after 2019, reaching its peak in 2020 and 2022. This upward trend indicates growing academic attention toward influencer marketing in beauty-related contexts during the post-pandemic digital transformation era.
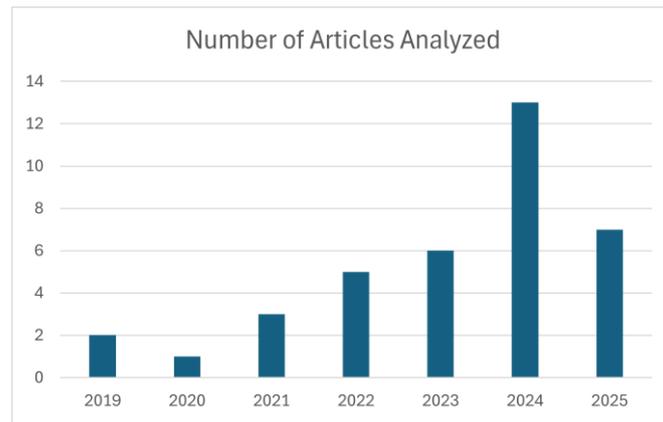
Figure 2. Number of included articles year-wise

Following this descriptive trend analysis, a bibliometric co-occurrence mapping was performed using VOSviewer (version 1.6.20). This analysis aimed to visualize keyword relationships, research clusters, and thematic concentrations within the field of influencer marketing in the cosmetics sector. The VOSviewer network visualization helped identify dominant research streams such as influencer credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and brand engagement. Figure 3 illustrates the keyword co-occurrence map generated from the 37 selected studies, providing a bibliometric overview of the field.
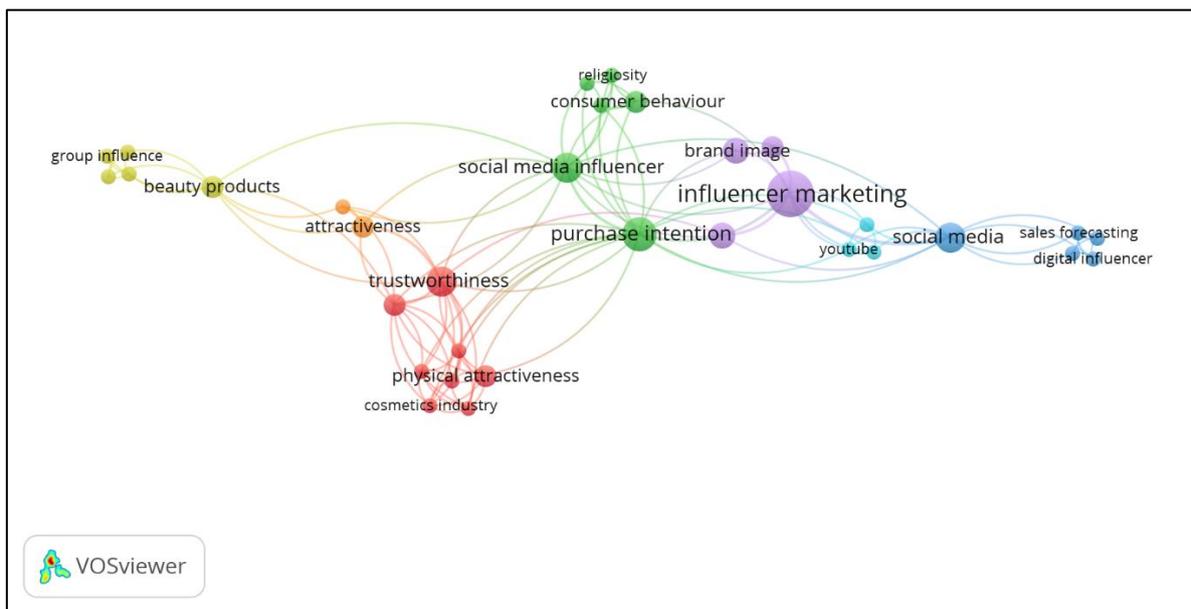

Figure 3. Keyword network visualization of included studies

To maintain research quality and minimize bias, all selected studies underwent a methodological appraisal covering research clarity, data validity, theoretical contribution, and robustness of analysis. This quality assessment ensured that only empirically grounded and methodologically sound studies were included in the synthesis. The integration of PRISMA-based systematic review and bibliometric visualization enhanced the reliability of findings, providing both quantitative mapping and qualitative interpretation of influencer marketing research within the cosmetics industry.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

This section synthesises empirical patterns, thematic developments, and methodological tendencies across the 37 included studies on influencer marketing in the cosmetics industry. The analysis integrates bibliometric outputs (year-wise publication trends and keyword co-occurrence networks) with qualitative interpretation of theoretical and behavioural findings.

To provide a clear and concise overview of the dominant insights across research traditions, Table 1 presents a thematic summary of findings from qualitative, quantitative, experimental, and conceptual studies. This format responds to the reviewer's request for a structured summary of the analysed all 37 literatures. It also clarifies how existing research converges around recurring behavioral constructs such as credibility, authenticity, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention, while still revealing methodological variations across studies.

Table 1. Key Findings

No	Authors (Year)	Method	Key Findings
1	Lakmal et al. (2019)	Qualitative	Studies emphasise authenticity, relatability, and emotional closeness as core drivers of trust formation. Oversaturation leads to decreased engagement, and gender differences show that women respond more strongly to beauty influencers.
2	(Adireja et al., 2024; An et al., 2024; Ani & Huda, 2025; Chan et al., 2024; Comicho et al., 2025; Cresentia & Nainggolan, 2022; Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021; Garg & Bakshi, 2024a, 2024b; Gökerik, 2024; Hung et al., 2025; Huong et al., 2025; Ismail & Mohamed, 2024; Kaur & Chandra, 2025; Khwela et al., 2024; Macheka et al., 2024; Markiones et al., 2023; Masuda et al., 2022; Musa et al., 2024; Nafees et al., 2021; Nagvanshi & Popli, 2023; Palupi et al., 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2023; Pessanha & Soares, 2021; Rachmawati, 2024; Rahman, 2023; Ramela et al., 2022; Rimadias et al., 2022; Supriani et al., 2025; Taher et al., 2022; Trisnawati et al., 2025; Ünalmış et al., 2024; Widyadhana, 2023; Yusiana et al., 2023; Zukhrufani & Zakiy, 2019)	Quantitative	Trustworthiness is the most consistent predictor of purchase intention. Parasocial interaction frequently mediates credibility to Purchase Intention. Brand image often serves as a mediator. Attractiveness plays a role in some contexts (e.g., Vietnam) but is weaker in others.
3	Wang & Lee (2021)	Experimental	Excessively high follower counts lower perceived authenticity. Similarity significantly boosts engagement. Disclosure strengthens persuasion knowledge but its effect on PI varies by context.

4.2. Discussion

The findings indicate that influencer marketing literature in cosmetics has matured into a strategic communication framework emphasizing trust, authenticity, and emotional resonance. Across the 37 included studies, these attributes consistently emerge as the

strongest predictors of key behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention, brand trust, parasocial interaction, and brand loyalty (Balaban & Mustăţea, 2019; Casaló et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The PRISMA synthesis confirms a sharp rise in scholarly output after 2019, coinciding with the global expansion of digital platforms and the increasing reliance on influencer-based strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Indonesian market, the findings of this review are closely reflected in the way consumers rely on relational cues, social similarity, and authenticity when evaluating beauty influencers. Studies in Asia demonstrate that audiences respond more positively to influencers who present themselves as relatable and socially aligned with their followers, rather than distant aspirational figures (Hassan et al., 2021; Nugroho et al., 2022).

This pattern aligns with broader cross-cultural evidence showing that perceptions of credibility and emotional resonance vary depending on local social norms and identity expectations (Balaban & Mustăţea, 2019; Lokithasan et al., 2024). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which dominate Indonesia's beauty and skincare segments, amplify these dynamics by rewarding conversational content, informal interactions, and influencer-follower closeness elements that strengthen perceived authenticity and encourage purchase decisions (Casaló et al., 2020). As a result, influencer effectiveness in Indonesia is shaped less by celebrity status and more by cultural congruence and everyday relatability, reinforcing that social similarity is a core determinant of cosmetic purchase intention.

The year-wise publication trend (Fig. 2) demonstrates that academic attention peaked between 2020-2024, reflecting growing interest in how influencers shape brand identity and consumer trust in digital spaces. This aligns with the paradigm shift from traditional advertising to social media driven advocacy (Lim et al., 2017).

The co-occurrence visualization (Fig. 3) further reinforces that the nexus of trustworthiness and purchase intention remains at the center of research attention. Across studies, trust consistently emerges as the mediating construct linking influencer credibility to consumer response (Balaban & Mustăţea, 2019; Casaló et al., 2020) Additionally, authenticity conceptualized as perceived sincerity and self-congruence has been found to strengthen parasocial relationships and brand engagement (Audrezet et al., 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019).

Cross-cultural comparisons further suggest that contextual factors moderate these effects: Western studies emphasise disclosure (Boerman et al., 2017), whereas Asian studies highlight the influence of relatability, personal warmth, and social similarity (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). These distinctions underscore the culturally contingent nature of influencer effectiveness and highlight the importance of aligning influencer attributes with local social expectations.

In line with the reviewer's recommendation to position this SLR within the broader body of existing reviews, Table 2 presents a concise comparison of this study against previous SLRs in the domain. This comparison highlights the unique contribution of this review its exclusive focus on cosmetic influencers, its integration of credibility-authenticity-parasocial dynamics, and its cross-cultural synthesis drawn from 37 empirical studies.

Table 2. Comparison with Previous Systematic Reviews

No	SLR	Scope	Limitations	Contribution of This SLR
1	Enke & Borchers (2019)	Strategic communication & influencer roles	Does not focus on cosmetics; broad constructs; limited cultural segmentation	Provides cosmetics specific synthesis with empirical studies and integrates credibility authenticity parasocial dynamics.
2	Ki et al. (2020)	Influencers as human brands	Limited focus on influencer effectiveness outcomes	Adds cross cultural evidence and beauty specific behavioural outcomes.
3	Divyashree & Subin (2025)	Intellectual knowledge-base of influencer marketing	Broad topic; little industry segmentation; limited analysis of cultural differences	Adds sector-specific insights (beauty/cosmetics) and provides cross-cultural comparisons (Asia vs Western).
4	Zhang et al. (2025)	Live-stream influencer marketing	Focus only on live-stream contexts; does not cover Instagram/TikTok cosmetics content	Expands review beyond live-streaming to multi-platform cosmetics influencers with thematic synthesis.
5	This SLR (2025)	Cosmetics influencer marketing	Focused only on the cosmetics industry, limiting generalizability.	Offers the most comprehensive cosmetics-focused influencer SLR, integrating 37 studies with thematic and cross-cultural insights.

Managerially, these findings recommend that cosmetic brands prioritize long-term partnerships with influencers who exhibit consistent authenticity and audience alignment. Instead of relying solely on macro-influencers, engaging micro and nano influencers can yield higher audience trust and organic reach. The integration of influencer marketing with data driven personalization further enhances consumer loyalty and engagement.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesized 37 studies spanning 2019-2025 to identify dominant themes, theoretical frameworks, and behavioral outcomes associated with influencer marketing in the cosmetics industry. Results highlight that influencer attributes, particularly trustworthiness, authenticity, and expertise, serve as key drivers of purchase intention, brand trust, and loyalty. The study contributes by bridging credibility-based and relational authenticity frameworks, illustrating that influencer effectiveness depends not only on persuasive cues but also on emotional and social resonance. Practically, cosmetic brands should cultivate influencer partnerships that align with brand ethos and audience expectations, emphasizing ethical transparency and value congruence. Ultimately, the review concludes that influencer marketing has evolved from transactional endorsement toward relational advocacy, where authentic communication and audience alignment drive sustainable consumer loyalty.

Although this review provides valuable synthesized evidence, several limitations should be acknowledged. The dataset relied solely on Scopus and CrossRef, potentially omitting relevant studies indexed in other major scientific databases. The review also focused on publications from 2019-2025, a period marked by rapid digital transformation, suggesting the need to explore emerging short-form video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts. In addition, most included studies used cross-sectional quantitative methods, indicating opportunities for longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method research. Lastly, as the current evidence base is dominated by studies from Asia and Europe, future research should broaden geographical and cultural contexts, including Africa and Latin America, and explore new phenomena such as AI-generated influencers, virtual avatars, and ethical transparency.

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