

Bachelor's Programme in Business

The Digital Transformation of Beauty Marketing

Examining eWOM, consumer perception and purchase intentions in beauty
industry marketing

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**Bachelor's thesis
2025**

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Title of thesis The Digital Transformation of Beauty Marketing

Programme Bachelor's Programme in Business

Major Marketing

Thesis supervisor Nora Bäckman

Date 5.12.2025

Number of pages 42

Language English

Abstract

This thesis explores how digitalisation and social media have transformed marketing in the beauty industry, with a focus on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), consumer trust and purchase intentions. The study was conducted as a bibliometric literature review based on 50 peer-reviewed articles, followed by a qualitative thematic analysis. The results show that social media platforms have become central spaces for beauty product communication, where influencers and user-generated content shape brand perception and decision-making. eWOM is found to strongly influence trust and attitudes, which act as key drivers of purchase intention. Influencer credibility, authenticity and parasocial relationships further enhance consumer engagement and emotional connection. The thesis highlights digital persuasion as an interplay of technology, social influence and psychological processes, and suggests that brands benefit from fostering authentic communication and encouraging consumer participation.

Keywords digitalisation, beauty marketing, eWOM, social media, influencer marketing, consumer trust, purchase intention

Tekijä Aurora Granholm

Työn nimi The Digital Transformation of Beauty Marketing

Koulutusohjelma Kauppatieteiden kandidaatti

Pääaine Markkinointi

Työn ohjaaja Nora Bäckman

Päivämäärä 5.12.2025

Sivumäärä 42

Kieli Englanti

Tiivistelmä

Tämä kandidaatin tutkielma tarkastelee, miten digitalisaatio ja sosiaalinen media ovat muuttaneet kauneusalan markkinointia, keskittyen erityisesti eWOM-ilmiöön, kuluttajien luottamukseen ja ostopäätöksiin. Tutkimus toteutettiin bibliometrisenä kirjallisuuskatsauksena 50 vertaisarvioidun artikkelin pohjalta, jota täydensi kvalitatiivinen teema-analyysi. Tulokset osoittavat, että sosiaalinen media on keskeinen kanava kauneustuotteiden viestinnässä, jossa vaikuttajat ja käyttäjien tuottama sisältö muokkaavat brändimielikuvia ja ostopäätöksiä. eWOM vaikuttaa vahvasti kuluttajien luottamukseen ja asenteisiin, jotka puolestaan ohjaavat ostoaikomuksia. Vaikuttajan uskottavuus, aitous ja parasosiaaliset suhteet syventävät sitoutumista ja tunnesidettä brändeihin. Tutkimus kuvaa digitaalista vaikuttamista teknologian, sosiaalisen vuorovaikutuksen ja psykologisten tekijöiden kokonaisuutena, ja korostaa autenttisen viestinnän merkitystä yrityksille.

Avainsanat digitalisaatio, kauneusmarkkinointi, eWOM, sosiaalinen media, vaikuttajamarkkinointi, kuluttajaluottamus, ostopäätös

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The global beauty and personal care industry is one of the most dynamic, fast evolving and culturally influential consumer markets. As a steadily growing part of the global economy, it stands out by its strong cultural and socio-economic impact. Over the past two decades, digitalisation has transformed how beauty products are marketed, purchased and discussed. The rise of digital technologies and social media has reshaped traditional promotional practises, with the emphasis of firms marketing budgets shifted towards social media marketing. Retail has moved from traditional brick-and-mortar stores to online channels, with e-commerce accounting for approximately 30% of industry revenue. (Statista, 2025a) Digital platforms have also reshaped how consumers discover and evaluate beauty products. Traditional advertising channels, such as TV or magazines, have been widely replaced by interactive online environments that enable direct consumer-brand engagement. Social media has shifted marketing communication from one-way persuasion to two-way dialogue (Shen & Bissell, 2013; Watanabe et al., 2021). Given their experiential and hedonic nature, beauty products are especially suited to digital environments grounded in visual storytelling, community interaction, and user participation. Technological advancements, including AI-based diagnostics, virtual try-on tools and algorithmic recommendations, further support personalized and data-driven beauty routines (Turcu & Brancu, 2024).

Within this environment, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become central arenas for beauty discourse. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) now plays a decisive role in shaping consumer trust, attitudes and purchase intentions, as peer-generated content is often perceived as more credible than traditional advertising (Yu et al., 2023). Both positive and negative eWOM strongly influence brand equity and reputation (Alnaser et al., 2024). Consumers, especially the younger generation, actively rely on reviews, tutorials and influencer content to navigate the beauty market (Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021; Macheke et al., 2023). Influencers function as key intermediaries, as their credibility, authenticity, similarity to followers and parasocial relationships effectively translate engagement into attitudes and purchase behaviour (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

Despite growing research on social media marketing, influencer communication and eWOM, research gaps remain. The existing literature often approaches these elements separately rather than as interconnected drivers of consumer behaviour. Prior studies have focused on more specific sub-areas, such as influencer credibility (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and eWOM effects on brand perception (Alnaser et al., 2024). Fewer studies have

synthesised these perspectives within the beauty market context or considered how brands can strategically utilize them. A gap remains in understanding how digitalisation, eWOM and influencer-driven persuasion shape consumer trust, attitudes and purchase intentions, and how beauty brands may leverage these mechanisms in practice.

This topic is relevant from theoretical, practical and societal perspectives. The beauty industry is an ideal setting for studying digital consumer behaviour because it is growing quickly, adopting new technologies fast and carries strong psychological and cultural meaning. This makes the topic important on several levels. Theoretically, digitalisation challenges traditional marketing by shifting influence from brands to consumers. Practically, understanding eWOM, influencer collaboration and authenticity-focused engagement is essential for firms designing effective and ethical digital marketing strategies. Societally, beauty marketing plays a role in shaping identity, self-esteem and cultural norms, making it important to understand how digital media influences representation, inclusivity and consumer well-being.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how digitalisation and the rise of social media have transformed marketing in the beauty industry, and to identify the mechanisms through which electronic word-of-mouth and consumer engagement influence trust, brand perception and purchasing behaviour. In addition to examining these processes from a consumer perspective, this thesis also considers how beauty brands can strategically leverage digital engagement and eWOM to shape brand perception and drive purchase intentions. While research on social media and influencer marketing already exists, also in the beauty contexts, less attention has been given to understanding these mechanisms as an interconnected whole. Because beauty industry is a dynamic and evolving segment, the research must also evolve and keep understanding the mechanisms through which beauty consumers navigate the digital marketplace.

This study is guided by the following three research questions.

RQ1: *How has marketing in the beauty industry evolved as a result of digitalisation?*

RQ2: *How can beauty companies utilize eWOM to build consumer trust?*

RQ3: *How can beauty companies utilize eWOM to influence purchase intentions?*

1.3 Defining key concepts

To ensure conceptual clarity, the most central concepts used throughout this thesis are defined below.

The Beauty Industry. The beauty industry refers to market for makeup, skincare, fragrance, hair care and personal care segments (Turcu & Brancu, 2024; Statista, 2025a). Industry leader is L’Oreal with annual revenue of more than €43 billion in 2024 (Statista 2025b; L’Oréal, 2024a). The industry, brands and products, can also be divided roughly to luxury and mass-market. Nowadays due to social media, also smaller indie brands or celebrity founded brands are gaining a lot of popularity aside of traditional brands. Beyond its commercial scope, the beauty industry involves the design, production, promotion and consumption of products that enhance appearance and self-care.

Electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM). According to Hung & Li (2007), eWOM refers to consumer-generated communication about products and brands shared online. It includes reviews, tutorials, comments and recommendations exchanged between consumers online. eWOM is perceived as more credible and influential than brand-generated content (Yu et al., 2023), especially in the beauty context.

Social media marketing (SMM). Social media marketing refers to marketing activities that use social media platforms to build brand and product awareness, stimulate emotional and cognitive engagement and influence consumer attitudes and behaviours. (Alnaser et al., 2024)

Influencer marketing. Key part of modern social media marketing, influencers are social media users who create content for large and engaged audiences and possess the perceived expertise, authenticity or lifestyle relevance that enables them to affect followers’ attitudes and behaviours (Scholz, 2021; Sokolova & Kehi, 2020), such as purchase intention.

Purchase intention. Purchase intention refers to consumer’s likelihood or willingness to buy a product in the near future. It is influenced by trust, attitudes, social norms and persuasive communication, such as eWOM and influencer content. (Delbaere et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2024)

1.4 Artificial intelligence statement

In this thesis, artificial intelligence (AI) was utilized during the data sourcing phase and the organizing of the themes. ChatGPT and ChatPDF assisted in retrieving, summarising and organising information from academic articles and abstracts to assess their relevance for inclusion in the study. AI also supported grammatical refinement throughout the work. Beyond this initial screening and structuring support, AI has not been utilised in the process of writing this thesis.

2 Methodology and bibliometric analysis

This chapter explains the methodology and the data collection process utilized in this thesis.

2.1 Research method

This thesis is based on a bibliometric analysis, which is a quantitative mapping method used to structure and synthesise large bodies of academic literature. Bibliometric analysis is particularly valuable in emerging research fields, such as social media marketing, where concepts develop rapidly, as it helps identify dominant themes, publication patterns, theoretical foundations and research gaps (Donthu et al., 2021). In this thesis, bibliometric analysis focuses on literature related to digital marketing in the beauty sector and the consumer behaviour among beauty market. The goal of the review is to provide understanding of existing literature and to establish a foundation for the qualitative thematic analysis in the Chapter 4.

The research consists of three parts:

1. The literature search and filtration process.
2. Quantitative analysis using six metrics.
3. Qualitative thematic analysis.

2.2 Literature search process and filtration

The literature search and filtration process is explained below and visualized step-by-step in Figure 1. The literature search was conducted on two major academic databases, Web of Science and Scopus. These two databases were chosen to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed research in marketing and consumer behaviour, especially in the segment of beauty.

Database search

The first step was to determine suitable keywords for the initial search. Based on web- and database searches, the keywords selected for the research were “beauty/cosmetics”, “social media” and “marketing”. Two searches using these keywords were conducted on both databases. Searches were conducted with two queries:

1. *“beauty AND marketing OR beauty AND marketing AND social media”*

2. *“cosmetics AND marketing OR cosmetics AND social media AND marketing”*

Using the same queries on both platforms ensured a broad yet relevant range of articles. The first run using the query 1 resulted in 1898 articles on Web of Science and 260 articles on Scopus. Query 2 resulted in 4068 articles on Web of Science and 215 articles on Scopus.

Refinements

All of the refinements were used similarly in both databases and in both searches. After the initial searches, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to improve quality and relevance. The first inclusion refinement was to include only peer-reviewed articles from academic journals to ensure the results to be scientific and academic. Also, the search was language was refined to include only English articles. These refinements resulted a scope of 1396 articles (Web of Science) and 166 articles (Scopus) for query 1, and 2614 articles (Web of Science) and 122 articles (Scopus) for query 2.

The second step of the filtration process was to refine the search to include only relevant publications and topics. This was conducted by excluding unrelated or low-quality publications, also excluding irrelevant categories, such as engineering. This filtration resulted a scope of 199 articles (Web of Science) and 137 articles (Scopus) for query 1, and 87 articles (Web of Science) and 80 articles (Scopus) for query 2.

Manual screening

The next step of the search and filtration process was to manually read and review the titles and abstracts of the resulted articles and evaluate the suitability for this research. The articles were included if the title or abstract indicated that the article is relevant to this study. Also, the chosen articles were assessed by their quartile rank on SJR, and it was decided that only articles ranked Q1 (the highest on the level Q1-Q4) and Q2 would be included to ensure the quality of the publications and the study. After the manual screening and the ranking inspection on SJR, the result count was 13 (Web of Science) and 17 (Scopus) articles for query 1, and 11 (Web of Science) and 9 (Scopus) articles for query 2. This resulted in total 50 articles to be used in this thesis based on the conducted research method bibliometric analysis.

During the writing process, additional relevant articles were identified by reviewing the reference lists of the initial publications found in the database

search. As the original articles were of high quality (Q1–Q2), it is reasonable to assume that the referenced studies included in them were also reliable. Supplementary data, statistics and insights were also gathered from reputable web sources such as Forbes, McKinsey & Company and cosmetics company pages.

All sources used in this study, both from the bibliometric analysis and external materials, are fully cited in the reference list.

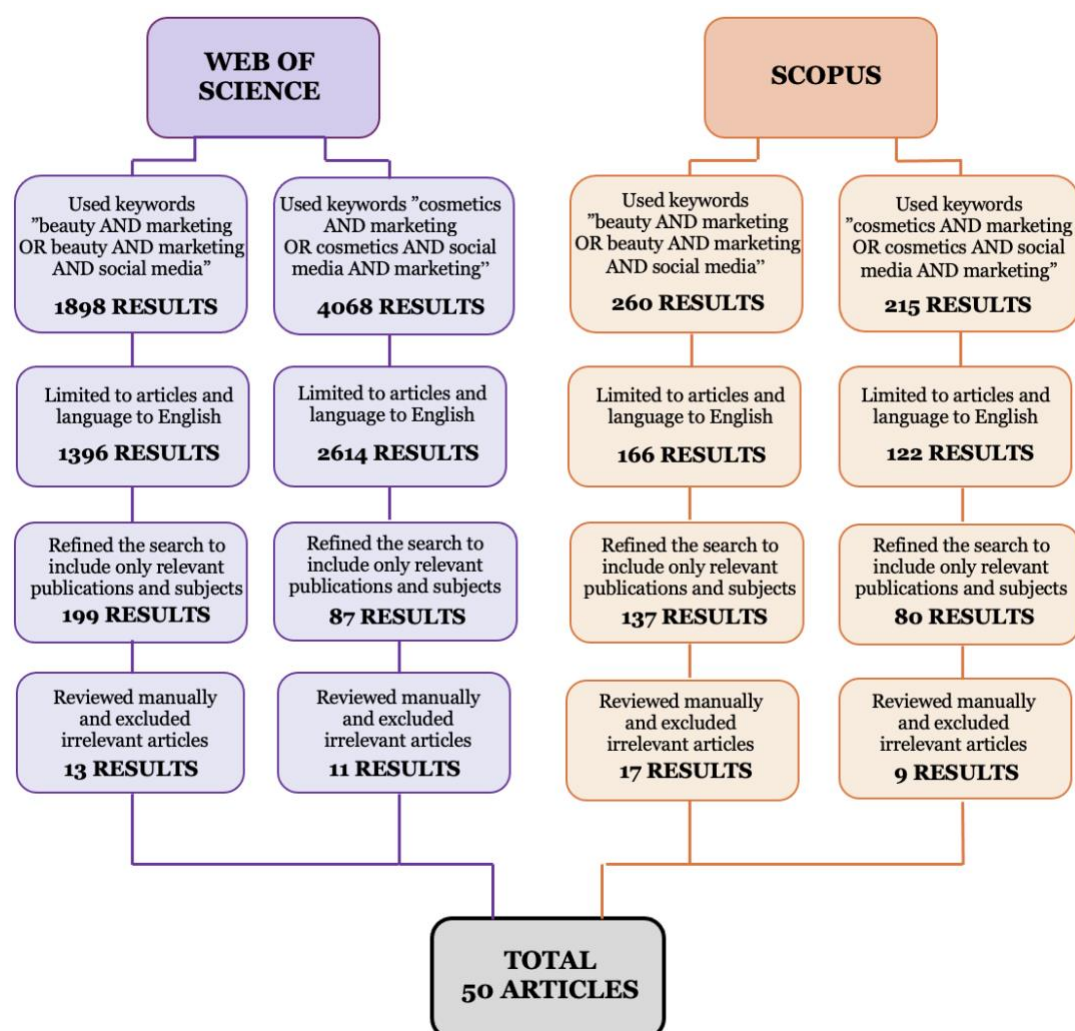


Figure 1: Article search and filtration process.

3 Quantitative analysis

The second phase of this bibliometric study is the quantitative analysis. The selected 50 articles were examined to understand research development within digital beauty marketing and to identify patterns across the publications. Quantitative results provide a structured overview of the field and support the following qualitative synthesis. Six metrics guided the analysis: publication year distribution, journals with most publications, journals ranked by quartile, most cited articles, most occurring key words and main theoretical frameworks.

3.1 Publication time trend

The first metric used in the analysis was publication timeline distribution. This measure illustrates how research on digital beauty industry marketing has developed over time. As shown in Figure 2, the earliest article in the dataset was published in 2003, while the most recent articles are from 2024. Interest in the topic remained low until the mid-2010s, after which a clear upward trend can be observed, especially in 2020s. The increase aligns with the rapid adoption of social media and the following rise of influencer marketing and growing digitalisation in beauty commerce. The sharp growth after 2020 indicates that digital beauty marketing is a contemporary and increasingly relevant research field, with publication numbers expanding annually.

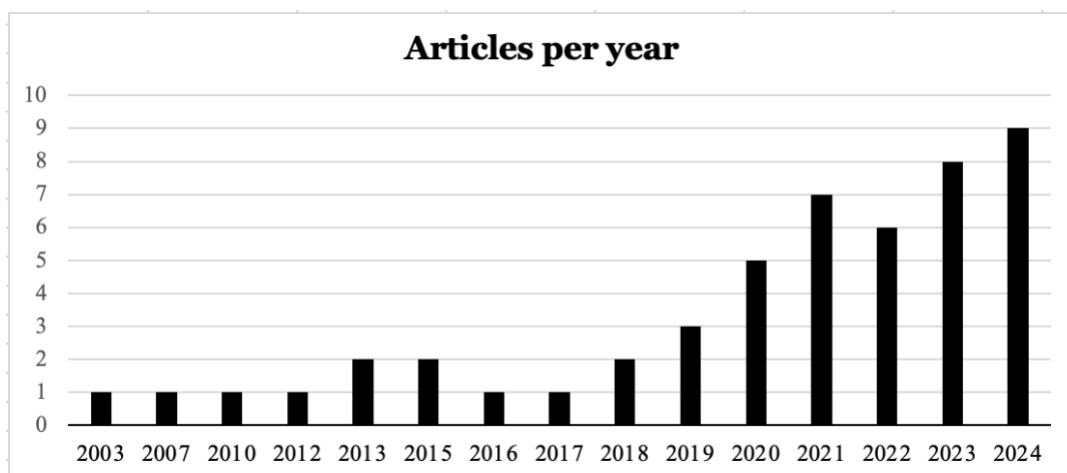


Figure 2: Publication time trend.

3.2 Analysis of the publications

Next, this section examines the publication outlets. Table 1 presents the journals that contributed more than one article in this study. The Journal of Retail and Consumer Services has the highest count of publications with a total of five articles. Following, the second most represented journal is Psychology and Marketing. Several journals contributed two papers each, many of which are well-established in marketing, consumer research and digital business. This distribution supports the assumption that beauty marketing research is rooted in marketing and consumer behaviour segments.

Journal Title	Publications
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	5
Psychology and Marketing	3
International Journal of Advertising	2
International Journal of Consumer Studies	2
Innovative Marketing	2
International Journal of Data and Network Science	2
Journal of Advertising Research	2
Journal of Business Research	2
Journal of Global Fashion Marketing	2
Journal of Promotion Management	2
Sustainability (Switzerland)	2
Young Consumers	2

Table 1: Journals with most publications.

As previously noted, the quality of all journals was verified using the SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJR). Table 2 presents a list of the journals included in the analysis along with their respective rankings. The objective was to utilize sources of the highest possible quality. As the table indicates, the majority of the journals fall within the Q1 category, signifying that they are highly reputable and reliable. It can also be observed that most of the journals are strongly related to marketing, business, sales and consumer behaviour.

Journal Title	Ranking
American Behavioral Scientist	Q1
California Management Review	Q1
Fashion and Textiles	Q1
Harvard Business Review	Q1
Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	Q1
International Journal of Advertising	Q1
International Journal of Consumer Studies	Q1
International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	Q1
International Marketing Review	Q1
Journal of Advertising	Q1
Journal of Advertising Research	Q1
Journal of Business Research	Q1
Journal of Business Strategy	Q1
Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management	Q1
Journal of Global Fashion Marketing	Q1
Journal of Global Marketing	Q1
Journal of Internet Commerce	Q1
Journal of Marketing	Q1
Journal of Marketing Communications	Q1
Journal of Marketing Management	Q1
Journal of Product and Brand Management	Q1
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Q1
PLoS ONE	Q1
Psychology and Marketing	Q1
Social Media and Society	Q1
Sustainability (Switzerland)	Q1
TQM Journal	Q1
Young Consumers	Q1
Cogent Business and Management	Q2
Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication	Q2
Innovative Marketing	Q2
International Journal of Data and Network Science	Q2
Journal of Promotion Management	Q2
Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC	Q2

Table 2: Journals ranked by quartile.

3.3 Analysis of the articles

The third metric focused on the most cited papers, highlighting influential contributions in the field. Table 3 presents the top-cited articles organised by citation counts. The most cited paper is “Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility and Product-Endorser fit” (Schouten et al., 2020) with 1050 citations, published

in 2020. The second most cited was Sokolova and Kefi (2020) with 918 citations, followed by Haenlein et al. (2020) with 362 citations.

Notably, all three leading papers were published in 2020, indicating that recent years have produced work that has quickly become highly influential.

Article	Authors	Year	Journal	Citations
Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit	Schouten, AP; Janssen, L; Verspaget, M	2020	International Journal of Advertising	1050
Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions	Sokolova, K; Kefi, H	2020	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	918
Navigating the New Era of Influencer Marketing: How to be Successful on Instagram, TikTok, & Co.	Haenlein, M; Anadol, E; Farnsworth, T; Hugo, H; Hunichen, J; Welte, D	2020	California Management Review	362
The influence of eWOM on virtual consumer communities: Social capital, consumer learning, and behavioral outcomes	Hung, KH; Li, SY	2007	Journal of Advertising Research	304
Antecedents and outcomes of digital influencer endorsement: An exploratory study	Torres, P; Augusto, M; Matos, M	2019	Psychology & Marketing	273
Strengthening outcomes of retailer-consumer relationships -: The dual impact of relationship marketing tactics and consumer personality	Odekerken-Schröder, G; De Wulf, K; Schumacher, P	2003	Journal of Business Research	240
Augmented Reality in Retail and Its Impact on Sales	Tan, YC; Chandukala, SR; Reddy, SK	2022	Journal of Marketing	196
Social media influencers: A route to brand engagement for their followers	Delbaere, M; Michael, B; Phillips, BJ	2021	Psychology & Marketing	162
Social Media, Social Me: A Content Analysis of Beauty Companies' Use of Facebook in Marketing and Branding	Shen B., Bissell K.	2013	Journal of Promotion Management	158
Social Media Sellout: The Increasing Role of Product Promotion on YouTube	Schwemmer C., Ziewiecki S.	2018	Social Media and Society	147
An expert with whom i can identify: the role of narratives in influencer marketing	Feng, Y; Chen, H; Kong, Q	2021	International Journal of Advertising	146
The Effect of Social Media on Perceived Information Credibility and Decision Making	Cooley D., Parks-Yancy R.	2019	Journal of Internet Commerce	125
Understanding the effect of personal and social value on attitude and usage behavior of luxury cosmetic brands	Ajitha, S; Sivakumar, VJ	2017	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	114
Investigating Female Shoppers' Attitude and Purchase Intention toward Green Cosmetics in South Africa	Shimul, AS; Cheah, I; Khan, BB	2022	Journal of Global Marketing	92
Exploring the role of visual aesthetics and presentation modality in luxury fashion brand communication on Instagram	Kusumasondjaja, S	2020	Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management	79

Table 3: Most cited articles.

3.4 Analysis of the keywords

Keywords were extracted to identify recurring themes within the articles and to reveal dominant viewpoints in the field. In this metric, keywords were manually collected from each article and ranked by how often they appeared. The most occurring keywords are presented in Table 4.

The results suggest that the research on digital beauty marketing is largely centered around digital environment (eWOM, social media influencers, engagement) and consumer behaviour (purchase intention, consumer perception of brand, authenticity, trust). The recurring terms also suggest that previous studies have focused on these areas. These results demonstrate that research attention has concentrated on understanding how consumers evaluate digital messages and how those evaluations shape decisions. This directly supports the importance of Research Questions 2 and 3 by confirming that trust and attitudes are dominant pathways to purchase behaviour.

Keyword	Appearances
Purchase intention	30
Social media influencers	28
Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)	24
Consumer behaviour	23
Authenticity	18
Trust/credibility	18
Engagement	15
Brand perception	12
Beauty/cosmetics industry	12
Influencer attributes	11

Table 4: Most occurring keywords.

3.5 Analysis of the main theoretical frameworks

Finally, the main and most relevant theoretical frameworks were identified from the articles. While not all publications were strongly theory-driven, several relied heavily on established frameworks. The key theories identified and their frequency are shown in Table 5.

The most applied theory is Theory of Planned Behaviour which is fitting in this context as it links behaviour to activation, such as following a brand or making a purchase. The prevalence of TPB and credibility-focused models suggests that behavioural intention and trust formation are central themes in the literature. This theoretical alignment supports the relevance of these frameworks for interpreting the findings and addressing the research questions.

The Source Credibility Model is also widely applied, emphasizing the role of expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill in persuasion in this study. Other theories, including Social Influence Theory and the Stimulus-Organism-

Response (S-O-R) model, show how visuals, social norms and emotional reactions guide consumer decisions. They help explain why attractive content, parasocial relationships and peer reviews are so persuasive in the beauty market. Less commonly applied models like the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Parasocial Interaction Theory also highlight how identity fit and emotional connection build trust and shape buying intentions.

Overall, the strong presence of TPB, credibility-based and social influence frameworks indicates that digital persuasion in beauty relies mainly on trust, social approval and emotional engagement forming a solid theoretical foundation for this thesis.

Theoretical framework	Number of articles
Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)	12
Source Credibility Model (Ohanian)	10
Social Influence Theory	8
Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R)	7
Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	6
Parasocial Interaction Theory	4

Table 5: Main theoretical frameworks.

4 Qualitative

4.1 The main topics and themes

The qualitative phase of this bibliometric study began with identifying the central themes emerging from the literature. Three overarching topics were recognized: the modern beauty industry, social media and digital influence, and influencer marketing, trust and consumer behaviour. The following section examines each of these themes in detail, drawing on insights from the reviewed publications.

4.2 Modern beauty industry

4.2.1 Overview of the industry

The industry's core segments are makeup, skincare, haircare, fragrances, and personal care items, combining both material consumption and symbolic meaning (Turcu & Brancu, 2024). Despite beauty trends shifting quickly nowadays, the overall use and consumption of beauty products remain consistently high. This ongoing demand is also illustrated by the "Lipstick Effect", or Lipstick index, a concept introduced by Estée Lauder's CEO in 2001. The concept describes how women tend to indulge to small, affordable luxuries, such as lipstick, during periods of recession or financial strain, as such items provide emotional uplift and comfort without significant financial burden. This phenomenon explains why the beauty industry remains so resilient and how the sector often recovers more quickly during economic downturns and experiences fewer losses than related industries, such as fashion. (Turcu & Brancu, 2023; Forbes, 2022)

According to McKinsey & Company report, the global beauty market is valued at \$450 billion in 2025 and is expected to reach \$590 by 2030. The expected annual growth rate is estimated to be 5% over the next five years, following a strong 7% growth between years 2022-2024. On European level alone, in 2024 the beauty industry retail sales were valued at €104 billion and the industry employed more than three million people. (Cosmetics Europe, 2025) This makes the sector a significant contributor to both economic performance and innovation across the region. These figures highlight the central role of beauty products in the daily life of consumers. Beyond their aesthetic function, they are essential items integrated into routines of hygiene, skincare, protection, expression and overall well-being, both physiological and social.

The global beauty industry has demonstrated remarkable resilience and sustained average annual growth of approximately 4.5% over the past twenty years (Ünalmiş et al., 2024; Turcu & Brancu, 2023). Although beauty

products have been used throughout the human history, the foundations of the modern beauty industry were established in the early 20th century. The emerge of key firms, such as L'Oréal, founded in 1909 (L'Oréal, 2025) and Estée Lauder, founded in 1946 (The Estée Lauder Companies, 2025) helped professionalise product development and create global distribution models that shaped the industry's modern structure. Today, the potential consumer market of the beauty industry is the size of 4.2 billion people, that is 53% of the world's population. This represents the number of consumers the industry reaches, and the size is projected to reach 60% by 2030. (L'Oréal, 2024b)

Consumption patterns also vary by region and age. According to Turcu & Brancu (2023) European consumers spend an average of €135 annually on beauty and hygiene products, while consumers in high-income countries, such as Switzerland and Norway, spend up to €225 per capita. Older consumers, especially women in the context of beauty industry, significantly spend more than younger demographics.

4.2.2 Psychological significance

Beyond its economic relevance, the beauty industry also carries deep psychological and symbolic meaning. Historically, the use of beauty products has reflected broader societal changes, evolving from symbols of class distinction to tools of self-expression and empowerment. Beauty consumption is also deeply intertwined with development of identity. Engaging in beauty practices is associated with enhanced self-confidence, improved mood, creativity and reduced stress. (Turcu & Brancu, 2024). People use beauty products to express their aesthetic preferences, align themselves with lifestyle groups and communicate personal values. (Hassan et al., 2021) However, the exposure to idealized beauty standards, particularly on social media, can increase social comparison, feelings of inadequacy and thus negatively influence self-esteem (Claeys, Charry & Tessitore, 2024). This contrast highlights the dual role of beauty as both empowering and psychologically challenging.

Another central aspect related to beauty consumption is identity formation. Consumers use beauty products to express their personal style and to signal that they belong to certain aesthetic subcultures or that they want to align themselves with particular identity groups (Hassan et al., 2021). Generation Y, also known as millennials (born 1986–2005) in particular, demonstrate high engagement with beauty content and integrate beauty and cosmetics products deeply into self-presentation and their lifestyle practices (Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021; Macheke et al., 2023). Their ease with digital technology and reliance on online reviews and influencers shows how identity formation is closely linked to digital information-seeking and social influence.

Globalization strengthens these dynamics by spreading standardized beauty ideals across borders through multinational brands and digital influencers. As these standards circulate globally, consumers aesthetic preferences start to become more alike and social media becomes even more primary space where beauty norms are discussed, reinforced and challenging. (Macheka et al., (2023)

4.2.3 Digitalisation

Digitalisation has been a major driver of the change in the industry. Technological innovations and advancements, including AI-enabled skin diagnostics, smart beauty devices, and personalized recommendation engines have transformed product discovery and evaluation (Turcu & Brancu, 2024). The way beauty is marketed has shifted from traditional advertising channels to social media marketing. Retailing has shifted heavily from physical retailing, such as department stores, supermarkets and specialty stores, to online stores. According to Statista, the e-commerce accounts 30% of annual sales. Turcu & Brancu (2024) highlight that consumers find online shopping more convenient and easier. Technology has changed how consumers search products and information. According to a survey, roughly 51% of European consumers find information about beauty products through online platforms. (Hassan et al.,2021).

The online environment, social and retailing, advances this transformation by providing extensive information, peer reviews, and social media integration (Hassan et al., 2021). These developments contribute to an ecosystem in which consumers rely heavily on digital tools, peer-generated content and influencer guidance when navigating beauty product choices. Sustainability trends are also reshaping consumption patterns. Many consumers expect environmentally responsible packaging, transparent supply chains and ethical production methods (Turcu & Brancu, 2024).

4.2.4 Social impact

Beauty consumption increasingly is revolving also around the experiential value. Brands now offer interactive experiences and moments, such as personalized consultations, high-tech in-store tools and special curated events. This seeks to deepen emotional attachment and foster hedonic engagement (Dhillon et al., 2022). These strategies strengthen consumer-brand relationships and enhance the symbolic meaning attached to the products and the brand.

Social norms also play a major role in beauty consumption. Because cosmetics are socially visible products, individuals often seek validation or guidance from peers, influencers and online communities. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) both explain the importance of subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived control in shaping purchase decisions (Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021; Khan et al., 2024). These frameworks help explain why consumers place deep value in online reviews and influencer opinions especially in beauty products, where uncertainty about quality or results is high.

Digitalisation has also given consumers more power. They can now actively shape brand narratives, assess products and claims and share their experiences. Content, such as reviews, unboxings, tutorials and social media discussions provide both useful information and a way to hold brands accountable (Macheka et al. 2023). This consumer influence is the foundation of the co-creation processes that define modern beauty marketing.

As stated by Dalziel & De Klerk (2021), notably millennial women show how strongly beauty consumption is shaped by social influences. Their digital engagement and tendency to rely on online reviews and influencer recommendations demonstrate the importance of peer input. This reliance increases the impact of trust-building mechanisms which plays key role in shaping their purchase intentions.

4.3 Social media and digital influence

4.3.1 eWOM as a source of information and evaluation

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become one of the most influential communication mechanisms in beauty marketing, particularly due to the uncertainty associated with evaluating cosmetic product performance without trying it first. Online reviews, testimonials, user-generated content and consumer discussions all provide vital information that helps consumers evaluate product quality, suitability and overall value. Early research on virtual communities shows that online platforms give individuals a platform where they can exchange experiences, build a sense of belonging and create long-lasting knowledge that influence what products they and their peers choose (Hung & Li, 2007).

eWOM is generally considered more trustworthy than brand-generated messages. (Yu et al. 2023) Consumers trust eWOM more due to its authenticity and the lack of commercial bias. Detailed, informative, and

specific reviews are especially influential. These reviews can significantly enhance brand image and increase purchase intentions. On the other hand, negative eWOM can rapidly damage how brand is perceived and reduce purchase behaviours due to the speed at which negative content spreads online. (Alnaser et al., 2024)

Cultural differences shape how consumers interpret eWOM. For instance, Western consumers tend to trust Instagram-based eWOM more compared to Asian consumers, indicating that perceptions of credibility and the social function of reviews vary across cultures (Kohler et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of contextualizing eWOM strategies to consumer expectations and cultural norms.

4.3.2 Social media marketing and brand engagement

Social media marketing (SMM) facilitates dynamic and interactive communication between beauty brands and consumers. Instead of simply delivering advertisements, brands now build ongoing interactions that encourage consumers to think, feel and take action. These are core aspects in the concept of social brand engagement (SBE) (Alnaser et al., 2024). These interactions strongly influence trust formation and attitude development, especially in high-involvement categories such as beauty.

Beauty products are visual, sensory and experience-driven, which makes them ideal to social media platforms that emphasize visual and emotional content. Instagram, for example, supports the creation of curated, aspirational imagery that appeals to consumers' hedonic motivations. These motivations often matter more than practical factors in beauty purchasing (Alnaser et al., 2024). These hedonic interactions also enhance positive attitudes towards the brands and thus strengthen brand attachment.

Influencers strengthen the effects of SMM's through the stages of the hierarchy of effects model. As Delbaere et al. (2021) explain, influencer content increases cognitive engagement (attention and processing), affective engagement (admiration, emotional resonance) and behavioural engagement (willingness to buy). In the beauty industry context, influencers are especially effective because they can show products in action with tutorials, reviews and routines. This especially makes influencers powerful sources of trust and key shapers of consumer attitudes. TRA and TPB help explain these dynamics in more depth. Both theories highlight how consumers' attitudes, subjective norms and sense of control all shape their intention to buy a product (Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021; Khan et al., 2024).

4.3.3 Omnichannel beauty experiences

Beauty consumption now takes place across multiple different channels, such as physical retail, brand websites, influencer platforms, and social media communities. This creates an omnichannel environment in where consumers stay continuously connected. This interconnected structure shapes every stage of the purchase journey, from the first discovery of a product to final decision-making and purchase decision (Koetz, 2019).

At the center of this environment is co-creation as it is not the influencers who alone shape the discovery and purchase journey. Beauty consumers also actively participate by creating user-generated content, posting reviews and publicly evaluating product claims (Hung & Li, 2007; Yu et al., 2023). These actions not only inform and help others but also hold brands responsible for the quality and truthfulness of their products (Macheka et al., 2023). This transparency significantly influences trust which is an essential factor motivating purchase intention.

Different social media platforms encourage different styles of interaction. Instagram focuses on carefully crafted and visually appealing content. TikTok's short videos prioritize authenticity, humour and fast-moving trends, when alternatively, YouTube offer a platform for longer more educational content (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Zaman et al., 2024). Due to these differences, users develop platform-specific expectations on content quality, trustworthiness, and credibility.

Physical retail and stores still remain influential, particularly when integrated with digital tools such as virtual try-ons, digital skin diagnostics and AI-based product recommendations (Koetz, 2019). These technologies strengthen consumers' confidence in product suitability, further supporting positive attitudes and reducing perceived risk. As the younger generation relies more on online support in decision making, the older demographics still trust more in physical retailing and expert opinions.

4.4 Influencers, trust and consumer behaviour

4.4.1 Influencer credibility and authenticity

Influencers have become a central component of beauty companies' marketing portfolios, acting as trusted intermediaries between brands and consumers. Influencer credibility is one of the most powerful drivers of

persuasion in digital beauty marketing. According to Scholz (2021), unlike traditional celebrities, influencers often build their audiences by sharing everyday routines, personal stories and experiences and practical knowledge. This makes influences appear more authentic and relatable. In beauty consumption context these credibility cues help reduce uncertainty, perceived risk and guide consumer choices.

For beauty companies, credible influencers function as trusted endorsers. Source Credibility Theory helps explain why as the theory highlights three key elements that shape how followers evaluate endorsers: expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill. In beauty markets, influencers who are seen as knowledgeable and honest generate stronger persuasion effects (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Expertise built through hands-on-product testing and demonstration and understanding ingredients enhances trust and strengthens consumers' confidence in product claims (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

Authenticity is a key part of strengthening influencer credibility. When influencers are open about partnerships and communicate in an honest, transparent way, consumers tend to trust them more and form more positive attitudes (Ünalmiş et al., 2024). In contrast, when influencers appear too sales-driven or hide paid partnerships, their credibility drops. Detailed and informative content, such as clear explanations, product comparisons and honest evaluations act as evidence that support the influencer's claims and hence boost consumers belief in the influencer's judgment (Khan et al., 2024). For brands, this highlights the importance of collaboration with influencers whose communication style aligns with transparency and education.

Similarity (homophily) between the influencer and the follower also boosts credibility and strengthens persuasion. Consumers are more likely to trust influencers who seem similar to themselves in lifestyle, values or aesthetic expression (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This connects to Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals look for role models or group representatives who reflect their self-concept or the identities they aspire to. Beauty brands therefore benefit from partnering with influencers who reflect the target segment's identity (Hassan et al., 2021; Pereire et al., 2023).

Demographically different groups respond to credibility cues in different ways. Older consumers usually rely more on rational factors such as expertise and trustworthiness. Younger consumers may be more influenced by relational and emotional cues (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). These differences highlight that credibility is shaped by multiple factors and varies across different consumer groups.

4.4.2 Parasocial bonds and emotional influence

Beyond credibility, social media enables parasocial relationships (PSRs) and parasocial interactions (PSIs) that are also key ways how influencers shape consumer behaviour. PSRs are the long-term emotional connections that followers develop with influencers. PSIs describe the momentary feeling of interaction or intimacy they get while consuming influencers content (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Social media makes both of these processes stronger, as it allows real-time responses, direct messages and personal storytelling (Ashraf et al., 2023).

Influencers build a sense of parasocial closeness by sharing behind-the-scenes footage, daily routines, personal struggles or intimate stories about their life (Pereire et al., 2023). From a marketing perspective, parasocial bonds function as relationship capital. Beauty influencers make these bonds even deeper through ritualistic and repeated content formats, such as “Get Ready With Me” videos or skincare routines. For followers, these formats create familiarity and emotional resonance (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). These parasocial interactions become part of the follower’s day and make them feel included in the influencer’s personal world.

According to Sokolova & Kefi (2020), parasocial bonds strongly influence attitudes toward both influencers and the products that they promote. When followers develop stronger emotional connection with an influencer they trust them more, feel more emotionally engaged and are more easily persuaded by their recommendations. For Generation Z, these PSRs can become habitual or even addictive. This leads to more frequent exposure and a higher chance of acting on what the influencers recommend. (Ashraf et al., 2023). Physically attractive influencers and visually pleasing content further enhances parasocial closeness. Attractive influencers are especially persuasive and effective in beauty-related categories. (Antioco et al., 2012) Polished and aesthetically pleasing visuals trigger positive emotions that make followers evaluate both the influencer and the endorsed products more favourably. (Garg & Bakshi, 2024).

However, parasocial engagement can also have negative psychological outcomes. When influencers post idealized, highly polished content, it can lead followers to compare themselves upward. This often results in feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt (Claeys et al., 2024). Paradoxically, these negative emotions can make followers depend even more on influencers, hoping that the recommended products “fix” the flaws they believe they have. Authenticity reduces these harmful effects. For brands, this suggests that

balanced, realistic content may outperform overly polished campaigns. When influencers share unfiltered, honest or more realistic content, it lowers comparison pressure and provides emotional comfort. This strengthens PSRs, connection and enhances trust (Claeys et al., 2024).

4.4.3 Visual appeal, relatability and identity alignment

Influencer content is primarily visual, and appearances plays a central role in how beauty messages persuade people. Attractive influencers or visually compelling content tend to draw more attention, create positive emotions and make it easier for followers to absorb the message (Antioco et al., 2012). In beauty context, where the product's function is linked to appearance, these visual cues become especially powerful.

As stated by Hassan et al. (2021), relatability enhances the impact of these visuals and emotions. When influencers present themselves as approachable, genuine and imperfect, followers tend to trust them more. This relatability helps counterbalance unrealistic beauty ideals, reduces psychological and social distance between the influencer and the audience, and makes consumers more receptive to their recommendations.

Identity alignment is another important part of how influencers persuade their audiences. According to Social Identity Theory, consumers adopt attitudes and behaviors that match with groups or individuals they identify with. Beauty influencers often act as role models of visuality or lifestyle, giving followers ideas for how they might want to look or express themselves (Hassan et al., 2021; Pereire et al., 2023). When followers feel that an influencer reflects who they are or who they want to become, they are more likely to accept and act on that influencer's recommendations. All of these factors (visual appeal, relatability, and identity alignment) work together to shape attitudes toward influencers and products they promote.

5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to offer understanding on the impact of electronic word-of-mouth and social media marketing activities on consumers attitudes and behaviour in the context of beauty industry. The bibliometric review showed that research in this field has grown rapidly, reflecting how social media and influencer-driven communication have become central to beauty marketing. Here, the findings are discussed in relation to the three research questions, emphasising what they mean for beauty brands and marketing practice. The findings and key insights are summarized in Table 8. Lastly, theoretical, practical and managerial implications are explored.

5.1 Digitalisation and the cosmetics industry

RQ1 focused on how digitalisation and the rise of social media have transformed marketing strategies in the cosmetics industry. The theoretical analysis shows that digitalisation has fundamentally transformed how beauty brands communicate, innovate and position themselves in the market. New technological advancements including AI-driven personalization, virtual try-on features, algorithmic recommendation systems and mobile-based diagnostics have made the consumer journey far more interactive and tailored to the individual (Turcu & Brancu, 2024; Hassan et al., 2021). From a brand perspective, these advances have shifted marketing strategies away from broad segmentation and mass communication that is no longer sufficient. Brands are expected to deliver highly personalized, data-driven approaches that match each consumer's needs, concerns and aesthetic preferences. As a result, marketing has become more responsive, experiential and adaptable to the context.

At the same time, social media has become the main space where people discover, explore and evaluate beauty products. Where traditional advertising relied on one-directional messaging, social media platforms have introduced an environment built on visibility, engagement and co-creation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube enable brands to showcase products in formats that highlight product use and emotional value rather than static product benefits (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Zaman et al., 2024). Beauty content (tutorials, routines, unboxings, before-after demonstrations) spreads through visually driven platforms that reward attractive visuals, authenticity and quick engaging formats. These platforms give consumers more power to access product information but also to co-produce it. User-generated content, peer recommendations and influencer stories have become central parts of the beauty marketing ecosystem. As a

result, brands no longer control the conversation. Persuasion is now shared across consumers, influencers and online communities.

Importantly, digitalisation has redistributed communicative power. Instead of controlling the brand image alone, companies now operate in a network where consumers, influencers and online communities actively shape brand meaning. Reviews, comments and user content contribute to brand equity, and negative buzz spreads just as fast as positive engagement. For firms, this means that marketing portfolios increasingly rely on community management, influencer partnerships and content strategies rather than only paid media. Offline elements, such as stores, print, television, still matter, but their role has shifted toward supporting digital ecosystems rather than leading them.

While digitalisation offers brands new possibilities, it also brings challenges. Fast-moving online trends require a constant flow of content, which can strain resources, particularly for smaller brands. Social media shortens product life cycles and makes long-term brand building harder. Also, heavy reliance on platforms means that algorithm changes can quickly impact visibility. Despite the shift online, physical retail still matters for product testing and sensory experience, because digital channels cannot fully replace the physical evaluation for customers. Brands must therefore innovate online while maintaining long-term strategy.

Overall, the findings for the first research question show that digitalisation has transformed beauty marketing by integrating advanced technological personalization with communication that is driven by consumers and social media. The industry has shifted towards a new marketing approach built on flexible networks. The pace of marketing has accelerated: content circulates faster, trends rise and decline quickly, and brands must respond continuously rather than episodically.

5.2 eWOM, trust and attitudes

RQ2 explored how beauty companies can use electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to build consumer trust and attitudes. The findings clearly indicate that eWOM has become one of the most influential forces in digital beauty markets. Because cosmetics are products hard to evaluate before use, consumers rely heavily on the experiences of others to reduce uncertainty and feel more confident in their choices (Hung & Li, 2007). Peer reviews offer practical insights and real experiences that traditional advertising cannot provide. For firms, this is a strategic opportunity

Credibility is a key reason eWOM is so persuasive. Reviews that are detailed, honest and transparent are seen as more trustworthy (Alnaser et al., 2024). Consumers recognize insincerity or hidden advertising, and overly promotional content tends to reduce trust. In contrast, balanced reviews including mentions of drawbacks, usually increase perceived authenticity (Ünalnıř et al., 2024). Relatability is another strengthening factor for eWOM. When reviewers share similar traits like skin type, concerns or aesthetic preferences, their advice feels more relevant and believable (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Hassan et al., 2021). Because beauty decisions are tied to identity and self-expression, consumers naturally turn to voices that reflect their own experiences.

These dynamics strongly shape consumers' attitudes. Positive eWOM typically leads to more favourable evaluations of products, while negative eWOM spreads quickly and can have an even stronger impact due to the negativity bias (Alnaser et al., 2024). Since beauty choices are socially visible, attitudes are also influenced by what peers appear to approve of (Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021). Therefore, eWOM also involves risks. Because brands cannot fully control peer communication, negative reviews or viral criticism can spread quickly and damage reputation. Negative content often travels faster and sticks longer than positive feedback, increasing vulnerability.

To summarize, eWOM is a strong driver of trust and attitude formation in the beauty market. It reduces uncertainty, increases relevance, fosters authenticity and communicates social cues. All together, these functions make eWOM a central factor shaping how consumers perceive beauty brands and set the stage for the behavioural patterns explored in the third research question.

5.3 eWOM and purchase intentions

RQ3 examined how eWOM beauty brands can use eWOM to influence purchase intentions. The findings show that eWOM influences buying decisions through a chain of effects. It builds trust, shapes attitudes and ultimately increases the likelihood of purchase. The impact is indirect and sequential; eWOM generates trust, trust shapes attitudes and formed attitudes increase likelihood of purchase. This chain of effects is illustrated in

Figure 3.



Figure 3: *The impact of eWOM on buying decisions.*

This process aligns with the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Dalziel & De Klerk, 2021; Khan et al., 2024). When consumers view eWOM as credible, they feel more confident in the product's claims, their sense of risk decreases, and their willingness to buy increases. In this way, trust becomes the key link between peer communication and purchase decisions (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). For companies, this means that eWOM should not be viewed solely as awareness-driving content, but as a mechanism that gradually moves consumers toward conversion. As eWOM shapes what consumers think and how they feel about a product, these favourable evaluations translate directly into stronger purchase intentions. In the beauty sector this is particularly strong, because products carry symbolic meaning and are tied to identity and self-expression.

Influencer-driven eWOM adds another layer by introducing emotional motivations. Parasocial relationships create feelings of closeness and trust that go beyond rational judgment (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Ashraf et al., 2023). When followers feel connected to an influencer, they are more open to their recommendations and more likely to act on them. This emotional attachment strengthens the influence of attitudes on purchase behaviour. From a marketing standpoint, influencers act not only as communicators but as relationship assets that extend the brand's voice into consumers' everyday routines.

A factor also shaping these decisions is aesthetics. Visually appealing influencer content sparks positive emotions, increases product desire, and presents beauty ideals followers may want to replicate (Antioco et al., 2012; Garg & Bakshi, 2024). These visual cues can shape aspirations, influence perceptions of product effectiveness, and motivate purchase. This highlights the importance of brands storytelling, visuals and emotionally engaging formats.

Overall, eWOM affects purchase intentions through a combination of trust, positive attitudes, emotional connection, and visual appeal. Beauty products especially influenced by this blend of informational and emotional factors.

As a result, eWOM shapes not only what consumers think, but also how they feel and how they ultimately act.

Research question	Key findings	Core insights for firms
RQ1: How has marketing evolved as a result of digitalisation?	Marketing has shifted from traditional one-way advertising to interactive, personalised and visually driven social media environments. Consumers now co-create brand meanings through reviews, tutorials and user-generated content.	Firms should adopt multi-platform strategies, prioritise personalised content and engage in dialogue rather than broadcasting. Digital presence and visual storytelling are now essential for competitiveness.
RQ2: How can beauty companies utilise eWOM to build trust?	eWOM builds trust through authenticity, transparency and relatable product experiences. Credibility increases when influencers show real expertise and communicate openly about partnerships.	Brands should encourage authentic reviews, select credible influencers and support community discussion. Transparency strengthens trust and reduces perceived risk.
RQ3: How can beauty companies utilise eWOM to influence purchase intentions?	eWOM influences purchases indirectly: trust → attitudes → purchase intention. Emotional connection and parasocial bonds amplify this effect, but negative eWOM can also spread rapidly and harm brand perception.	Firms should use eWOM strategically to guide consumers through the decision journey. Engaging influencer partnerships and visually appealing content drive conversions, but active monitoring of negative eWOM is crucial.

Table 6: Summary of findings.

5.4 Implications

Theoretical implications

The results of this thesis offer several theoretical implications. First, the findings show how classical persuasion theories like Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Relationship Theory function in today's beauty market landscape. Instead of working separately, these theories overlap and jointly influence how consumers think and feel, providing a more complete picture of digital persuasion. Second, the study adds to TRA and TPB research by illustrating how peer reviews and influencer communication help form subjective norms and attitudes, which then shape purchase intentions in products tied to identity. Third, this thesis brings together broader digitalisation trends, platform-specific dynamics, and individual psychological processes into a single framework. This multi-level perspective is rarely addressed in beauty marketing research and helps explain how digital influence operates across different layers of consumer experience. Finally, the results highlight eWOM as a key connecting mechanism between digitalisation and consumer behaviour. This clarifies how consumer influence is evolving in social media environments and strengthens theoretical discussions about the changing nature of persuasion online.

Practical implications

This thesis also offers practical insights for consumers and society. For consumers, access to high-quality eWOM and influencer content increases transparency and helps them make more informed choices in a category where products can be hard to evaluate beforehand. Understanding how persuasion works can also help individuals think more critically about influencer content and recognize emotional triggers, such as parasocial connections.

For society, the findings underline the importance of authenticity and transparency in digital beauty communication. Because idealized social media imagery can create pressure and emotional strain, more realistic and honest representations can help reduce these negative effects (Claeys et al., 2024). The results may also help policymakers and regulators strengthen guidelines for sponsorship disclosure and influencer accountability.

Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, this study offers several practical insights for beauty brands. First, the research highlights the importance of encouraging eWOM by supporting user-generated content, authentic reviews, and active brand communities. Because trust depends heavily on credibility and authenticity, brands should choose influencers who show real expertise, communicate transparently, and feel relatable to their audiences. Overly commercial partnerships can harm credibility and weaken the pathway from trust to purchase intention.

Additionally, managers should remain aware of the risks connected to eWOM and influencer marketing. Negative reviews, product backlash or influencer scandals can spread quickly and harm brand credibility. Overly commercial partnerships or lack of transparency may also reduce trust. To minimise these risks, brands should monitor online conversations, ensure clear sponsorship disclosure and work with influencers who authentically align with the brand. Diversifying marketing channels rather than relying solely on influencers provides further protection if online sentiment turns negative.

The findings also suggest that brands should make use of digital tools such as virtual try-ons and personalised diagnostics to reduce uncertainty and help consumers feel more confident in their choices. While visually appealing and emotionally engaging content is important, it should be paired with clear, informative messaging, since both emotional and rational factors shape consumer responses. Finally, honest communication and clear disclosure in influencer marketing are essential for maintaining trust in a crowded digital environment.

6 Conclusion

This thesis explores how digitalisation and social media have reshaped marketing in the cosmetics industry, and how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences consumers' trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions. Together, these insights provide a clear picture of how modern beauty consumption develops online.

The findings show that digitalisation has shifted much of the influence from brands to consumers. Beauty marketing is now more personalised, interactive and visually driven. To explain these changes, the analysis draws on several theoretical frameworks including Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Relationship Theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

A central conclusion is that eWOM strongly shapes trust and attitudes in the beauty market. Trust grows when reviews appear credible, authentic, and relatable, and when consumers feel the communicator shares their needs or experiences. Attitudes are also shaped by peer expectations and the dynamics of online communities. These results are consistent with earlier studies showing that people rely heavily on peer information when choosing high-involvement products like cosmetics. The thesis also shows that eWOM influences purchase intentions through a combination of trust, positive attitudes, and emotional connection. Influencer relationships, appealing visuals, and perceived expertise all increase the persuasiveness of online recommendations and support established behavioral theories linking attitudes and social cues to intention formation.

Overall, the study presents digital beauty consumption as a complex interaction of technology, peer communication, and psychological processes. It highlights eWOM as a key element in today's beauty decision-making and emphasizes the importance of understanding digital influence for both researchers and practitioners.

6.1 Limitations and future research

Although this thesis provides a strong theoretical foundation from existing literature, several limitations point to future research opportunities. First, the work is conceptual and relies solely on existing literature. Empirical research is needed to test the proposed relationships between digitalisation, eWOM, trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions.

Second, the review focuses mainly on women and digitally active groups such as Generation Y and Z. While these groups dominate online beauty consumption, future studies should also explore other age groups, genders, and cultural contexts, as reliance on influencer-based eWOM varies across societies and nations. Research could also expand beyond primarily Western or Eastern demographics.

Third, the thesis treats the beauty industry as a single category, despite its many segments. Future research could compare different product types such as skincare versus makeup, to see whether persuasion works differently across categories.

Finally, social media platforms evolve quickly. Platform-specific studies, especially on TikTok and Instagram, could clarify how features impact trust, parasocial interaction, and eWOM credibility. Research should also explore emerging trends, such as AI-generated content and virtual influencers and how they affect authenticity and trust. In addition, this thesis focuses mainly on positive persuasion. Future studies should examine negative eWOM and how distrust spreads online.

Despite these limitations, this thesis offers a strong conceptual base for future empirical and interdisciplinary research by identifying the key psychological and technological drivers of digital persuasion in beauty markets.

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