

The Mediating Influence of Customer Trust on Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Online Cosmetics Market

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Abstract - As visual products such as beauty and cosmetics are being discovered and assessed in a digital-first way, the marketplace has radically changed. Given the increased risks involved in buying cosmetics online before actually seeing them physically, this study focuses on the influence of social media marketing activities (SMMA) that affect the purchase intention (PI), namely entertainment (ET), interaction, trendiness, and customization, with the mediating role of customer trust (CT). A structured questionnaire gathered primary insights from 350 online cosmetic buyers in Kerala's Ernakulam district via snowball sampling. Furthermore, this methodological approach allowed for capturing a diverse demographic spectrum of digital shoppers within the region, providing granular insights into evolving e-commerce adoption patterns. The quantitative evaluation was conducted through the use of multiple linear regression, internal reliability checks, and mediation analysis. The results suggest that all four promotional dimensions are significant factors in CT ($R^2 = 0.618$), with content trendiness being the top predictor ($\beta = 0.488$). In addition, CT has a direct positive relationship with PI ($R^2 = 0.577$) and indirectly affects the PI through marketing activities (Effect = 0.5338). The study proves that, although creative marketing can spark initial consumer interest, brand trust can be built by making it contemporary, relevant to the trend and interactive, while the online sales conversion can be achieved through their strategy.

Keywords: SMMA, CT, PI, Social Commerce, Beauty and Cosmetic Consumer, Consumer Behaviour

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has revolutionised the way businesses communicate with customers. Social commerce is the combination of social media and e-commerce features, allowing users to find, assess and buy products in social media contexts (Aloqool & Alsmairat, 2022; Hajli et al., 2017). Brands are now frequently assessed and transactions made on these platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) that are becoming increasingly dynamic and are more than just entertainment (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This transition to social commerce has been greatly accelerated with the wide-spread adoption of smartphones, low cost of internet connection and the popularity of social networks around the world (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

Social media marketing has seen remarkable growth in recent years, as consumers make more and more use of digital platforms to get product tips, opinions from influencers, peer reviews and enjoy interactive brand experiences (Singh & Agrawal, 2024). Social media is different from traditional marketing in that it provides an interactive, real-time environment with added value features like live-streaming, user-generated content, and personalized ads (Cheung et al., 2020). Hence, companies are spending more resources in SMMA that are related to entertainment and electronic word-of-mouth to influence consumers' perceptions and behavior of purchasing (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

The beauty and cosmetics industry are one of the most dynamic and competitive sectors to benefit from social commerce (Chuah et al., 2023). With their visual and experiential nature, cosmetic products are commonly watched by users on tutorial videos, before-after shows, and influencers' videos before users make purchasing decisions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). But buying cosmetics online comes with its fair share of risks, since they can't be touched in person and can only be judged by the image provided online. Trust is considered a key pillar for digital cosmetics brands as there are concerns about product authenticity, misleading information, quality, data privacy, and transaction security (Hongsuchon et al., 2022).

There is a large body of research on social media marketing, but few studies have explored the processes by which such activities lead to purchase decisions within the mind of the consumer. The majority of the published research focuses on direct impacts of SMMA on other metrics such as customer engagement or brand awareness and neglects the mediation of CT in the cosmetics industry (Alnaser et al., 2024). Visual credibility and consumer trust are significant and key factors in cosmetic purchases, and the mechanisms of these trust building elements in SMMA are crucial to explaining digital consumer behavior (Salhab et al., 2023).

This paper makes significant theoretical and management contributions. In general terms, it further enhances the understanding of consumer decision-making on social commerce by creating CT as a bridge between SMMA and PI. In real world terms, the results inform cosmetics marketers about how to tailor their social media marketing efforts to target the right customers with messages that build trust, making the most of resources and improving competitive advantage.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the impact of SMMA on online beauty and cosmetics consumers' trust?

RQ2: How does CT directly affect the intention to buy cosmetics and beauty products online?

RQ3: Does CT mediate between the SMMA and the PI?

The study is organized as follows: A review of the literature is conducted in Section 2 to form the framework and hypotheses. The research design, sampling and analytical tools are described in Section 3. The empirical findings, regression models and the mediation testing are presented in Section 4. Section 5 concludes the study with practical suggestions and future work.

II. RELATED WORKS

Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)

Previous studies at the foundational level had determined that SMMA are multi-dimensional constructs that consist of interaction, trendiness, ET, customization and electronic word-of-mouth, all of which affect customer equity drivers and behavioral intention that affect downstream outcomes (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Further research finds that these promotional dimensions do not have the same effect in all sectors, but

rather that visual trendiness and real-time interaction are the persistent drivers of interactions between consumers and brands (Cheung et al., 2020; Chuah et al., 2023). In the personal care and cosmetics market, SMMA positively influence the perception of the product quality, environmental attitudes, and consumer satisfaction, which positively impacts both PI and the cognitive evaluation of the product (An & Ngo, 2025; Begum & Kalpana, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Customer Trust

Trust in social commerce is a vital cognitive connection between outside marketing stimuli and consumer behavior (Aloqool & Alsmairat, 2022; Hajli et al., 2017). Consumer trust helps reduce perceived risk and transaction uncertainty in online cosmetic purchases due to sensory risk factors associated with the purchases, including not being able to physically test texture or shades (Hongsuchon et al., 2022; Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Research conducted on online platforms shows that brand credibility and institutional trust are the main drivers for conversion of promotional inputs into PIs (Alrwashdeh, 2025; Salhab et al., 2023).

Purchase Intention

PI is considered the ultimate outcome variable in digital commerce studies, which is largely affected by brand image, platform interactivity and source credibility (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). But synthesized evidence points toward the existence of a long-standing "intention-behavior gap", in which positive brand awareness does not automatically mean that people will actually make the purchase without going through other psychological processes that help justify consumer choices such as trust (Dwivedi et al., 2025). Table I summarizes the empirical studies reviewed across the three main constructs.

TABLE I COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Core Constructs	Context & Sample	Synthesized Key Findings	Ref. No.
SMMA, Equity Drivers	Luxury Fashion	Marketing improves brand value, which leads to higher buying interest.	Kim & Ko, (2012)
SMMA Scale Validation	E-Commerce Retail	Validated scale showing marketing directly boosts purchase decisions.	Yadav & Rahman, (2017)
SMM Elements, Engagement	Social Users (N=214)	Interactive content and trending posts are the strongest drivers of engagement.	Cheung et al., (2020)
SMMA, Quality & Value	Gen Z Organic Cosmetics (N=315)	Product quality matters more than price value in driving buying intent.	An & Ngo, (2025)
SMMA Dimensions	Online Cosmetics (N=260)	Entertaining content is the main driver behind buying cosmetics online.	Chuah et al., (2023)
SMMA, Value & Engagement	Cosmetic Retail (N=338)	Marketing increases purchases by improving product value and engagement.	Alnaser et al., (2024)
SMMA, Trust & Quality	Bio-Cosmetics Retail	Building trust and highlighting quality make customers more ready to buy.	Ngo et al., (2025)
SMM Strategies, Brand Trust	Beauty Centers (N=374)	Brand trust and a good image turn social media efforts into real sales.	Salhab et al., (2023)
SMMA, Trust & Engagement	E-Commerce Retail (N=542)	Brand trust is the main reason social media marketing leads to online sales.	Alrwashdeh, (2025)
Network Trust, Intention	Social Commerce	Trusting a social platform is a key first step before buying on it.	Hajli et al., (2017)

Research Gap

Existing studies have extensively examined the relationship between promotional activities and overall brand equity and engagement, but empirical studies that isolate CT as a multi-dimensional mediator in the online beauty context are still under-researched. The role of perceived value or brand image as mediators has been the main subject of cosmetics studies, with the path of trust under explored. Further, there is limited empirical validation in localized emerging regional markets like Kerala.

Theoretical Inferences and Hypotheses Development

Considering the synthesized literature, the dimension of SMMA offer the informational and interactive cues that build CT. The more trust that customers have in a company, the less uncertainty they perceive, which leads to an increase in PI, and so on. Therefore, CT acts as an explanatory mediator between SMMA and ultimate PIs.

The following hypotheses are created to be tested empirically:

H1: SMMA directly create CT among online cosmetics buyers.

- H1a: Engaging ET content strengthens consumer trust toward beauty brands
- H1b: Interactive communication enhances brand reliability and CT.
- H1c: Perceived trendiness reinforces consumer trust in online cosmetics.
- H1d: Personalized marketing content builds greater buyer trust within digital beauty channels.

H2: Building consumer trust strongly motivates online purchasing decisions

H3: Enhancing CT indirectly connects social media marketing to purchase decisions

The multi-dimensional SMMA are hypothesized to influence the PI (dependent variable) via the CT (mediator) as visual summarized in fig. 1.

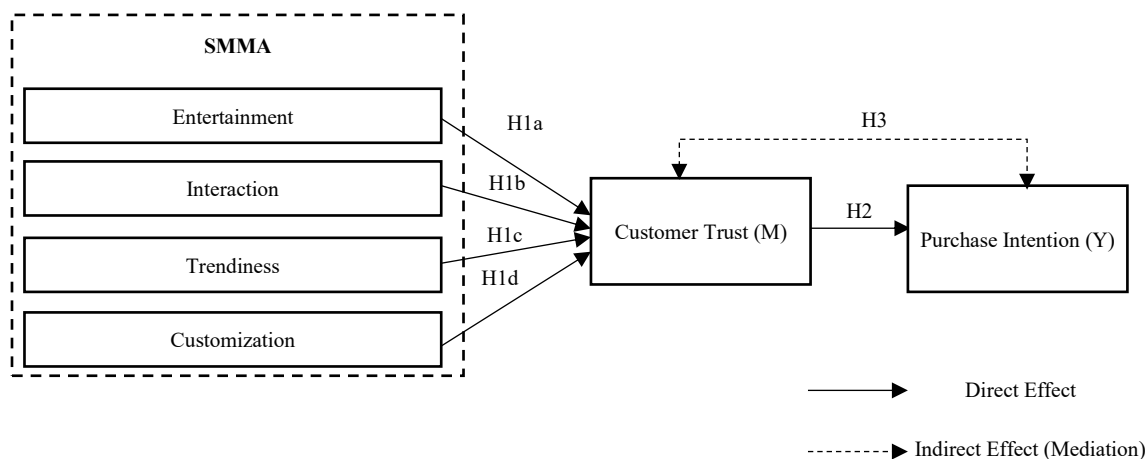


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of SMMA, CT, and PI

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section introduces the systematic methodology adopted to explore the relationship between SMMA and PI while examining the mediation role of CT. It provides details of the research design, the sampling framework, the data collection process, and analytical procedures used to analyse the proposed model.

Research Design

This study is designed as a quantitative and descriptive research. It is a design that can be used to empirically test the statistical relationships among social media marketing independent variable dimensions (ET, interaction, trendiness,

and customization), the mediating variable (CT), and the dependent variable (PI).

Target Population and Sampling Strategy

The audience is online beauty and cosmetics shoppers from Ernakulam district in Kerala, India. A non-probability sampling technique was used because the participants were recruited by social media platforms that they have an experience of buying cosmetics online. The total number of valid respondents (N = 350) was used to collect primary data.

Data Collection Instrument

An online questionnaire consisting of three sections of primary data was used. The first section is on demographic characteristics. The second section assesses the aspects of the

SMMA (ET, interaction, trendiness and customization). The third section measures CT and PI by displaying four

measurement items for each construct. For all construct items, a standard 5 point - Likert scale was used.

TABLE II STRUCTURAL BREAKDOWN OF THE MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

Variable / Construct	Dimension / Factor	Number of Items	Sample Measurement Item
SMMA	ET	3	Content on the brand's social media pages is fun
	Interaction	3	The brand allows real-time communication and feedback on social media.
	Trendiness	3	The brand provides up-to-date and trending cosmetics information.
	Customization	3	The brand offers personalized product recommendations on social media.
CT	Unidimensional	4	I believe the product information provided by the brand is reliable.
PI	Unidimensional	4	I intend to buy cosmetics from this brand online

There are 20 operational items in total across a number of different variable categories as shown in table II. The questionnaire was designed in this way to ensure that items were separated clearly, respondent fatigue was reduced and to give a framework for later statistical reliability and regression testing.

Analytical Framework

IBM SPSS software was utilized for data processing. Descriptive statistics summarized respondent demographics and item scores, while Cronbach's alpha (0.70) confirmed internal reliability. Direct relationships were evaluated using multiple regression analysis, and mediation pathways were evaluated using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section outlines the statistical findings obtained from the primary dataset (N = 350).

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic evaluation of gender and age distribution is summarized in tables III and IV.

TABLE III DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE – GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	179	51.1
Female	171	48.9
Total	350	100.0

TABLE IV DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE – AGE

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 20 Years	26	7.4
21 – 30 Years	153	43.7
31 – 40 Years	94	26.9
41 – 50 Years	51	14.6
Above 50 Years	26	7.4
Total	350	100.0

As shown from table III male (51.1%) respondents and female (48.9%) respondents were balanced. The majority of the respondents are aged from 21-30 (43.7 %) followed by 31-40 (26.9 %) (Table IV). Young and middle-aged consumers are the main population presented in these metrics, which show that they are the main users of social media and digital commerce platforms to buy cosmetics.

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

All study constructs were measured using descriptive metrics such as mean scores and standard deviations that indicate central tendency and dispersion of data.

TABLE V DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR STUDY VARIABLES

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
ET	350	3.42	1.332
Interaction	350	3.15	1.335
Trendiness	350	3.78	1.338
Customization	350	3.28	1.342
CT	350	3.55	1.291
PI	350	3.61	1.307

Table V shows the descriptive analysis where all the constructs were recorded with a mean score ranges from 3.12 – 3.78, which is considered neutral to moderate. The range of standard deviation is between 1.291 and 1.342, showing moderate variability between respondent ratings. Finally, among the SMMA dimensions, customization recorded the highest standard deviation (SD = 1.342), reflecting greater dispersion and polarization in consumer opinions regarding personalized digital features. Conversely, customer trust showed the lowest standard deviation (SD = 1.291), indicating relatively consistent perceptions of brand reliability across the respondent pool.

Reliability Analysis

TABLE VI RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF STUDY CONSTRUCTS

Variables	Items	α
ET	3	0.935
Interaction	3	0.938
Trendiness	3	0.940
Customization	3	0.943
CT	4	0.932
PI	4	0.942

In table VI, the results indicate high internal consistency and the coefficient Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.932 to 0.943 for all measurement scales. Scaling values are all significantly above the criterion for adequate reliability found in parametric statistical testing (0.70), thus indicating good reliability.

Multiple Regression Analysis

TABLE VII MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS: SMMA DIMENSIONS ON CT

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized B	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	0.653	—	5.989	< 0.001
ET	0.154	0.162	2.875	0.004
Interaction	0.172	0.178	2.046	0.042
Trendiness	0.471	0.488	5.335	< 0.001
Customization	0.147	0.151	2.683	0.008

Note: $R = 0.786$, $R^2 = 0.618$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.614$, $F = 139.624$, $p < 0.001$.

The four marketing dimensions shown in table VII collectively explained 61.8% of the variance in CT ($R^2 = 0.618$, $F = 139.624$, $p < 0.001$) and the model is statistically significant. Notably, trendiness is the most influential factor for CT, highlighting the significance of the latest visual contents.

Impact of CT on PI

A simple linear regression was used to test the direct effect of CT on PI. The overall model was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.577$, $F = 475.197$, $p < 0.001$), which means that 57.7% of the total variance of the online purchasing decision can be explained by the customer trust model. The effect of customer trust was positive and significant on the purchase intention ($\beta = 0.760$, $t = 21.799$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis H2 is accepted.

Mediation Analysis

Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) was used to test the hypothesis with 5,000 bootstrap resamples at a 95% confidence interval. Social media marketing activities (SMMA) had a direct effect on purchase intention which was still statistically significant (Effect = 0.1124, $p = 0.0466$). Also, the indirect effect via customer trust was significant (Effect = 0.5338, 95% CI [0.4439, 0.6271]). Customer trust is a partial mediator as the confidence interval does not cross zero and both direct and indirect pathways between the variables are significant. So, hypothesis H3 is accepted.

Hypotheses Summary

Table VIII consolidates the empirical outcomes of all hypothesized paths.

TABLE VIII SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES TESTING RESULTS

Hypothesis	Path Description	Result
H1a	ET $\rightarrow$ CT	Supported
H1b	Interaction $\rightarrow$ CT	Supported
H1c	Trendiness $\rightarrow$ CT.	Supported
H1d	Customization $\rightarrow$ CT.	Supported
H2	CT $\rightarrow$ PI.	Supported
H3	SMMA $\rightarrow$ Customer Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention.	Supported

Discussion

The findings from the research show that social media marketing can influence the purchasing of cosmetics online as it directly builds consumer trust. Trendiness was the most influential dimension in creating customer trust among the four dimensions studied. This is a reflection of the visual and fast-moving nature of the beauty market, where consumers are looking for what is trending, viral and new product formulations. In addition, interactive communication and personalized marketing can reduce the online purchasing barriers, including shade matching concerns and concerns about the authenticity of the product (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Importantly, the partial mediation effect reveals that creative marketing is used to initially create consumer interest, only to be successful in getting consumers to make a purchase when it creates brand trust (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Salhab et al., 2023).

As a digital marketer and cosmetics management, social media campaigns need to focus on establishing trust before making a sales pitch. It is important that brands have a regular posting schedule, where they share trending beauty techniques and new product releases to also stay relevant (An & Ngo, 2025). Moreover, having faster response to customer queries and open communication in public engagement builds trust in the brand. When consumers are hesitant to purchase a product, short-form video tutorials can be very useful, combined with tailored product recommendations, to

turn their passive social media interaction into real online transactions (Ngo et al., 2025; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

V. CONCLUSION

The present study explores the structural relationships of SMMA (comprising of ET, interaction, trendiness and customization) with the outcome variable customer PI with its mediation CT in Ernakulam district. The purpose of this study is to link these constructs under an empirical model, thus enabling a broader understanding of the psychological motivations that underlie consumers' decisions in the digital environment. The empirical results of the study with an online cosmetic consumer's sample of 350 (N = 350) reveals that the marketing activities in SMM are strong predictors of CT with the total variance accounted for by SMM activities being 61.8% ($R^2 = 0.618$). Individual dimensions showed that trendiness is the most important dimension in consumer trust ($\beta = 0.488$), making it very important to ensure that the visuals are fresh and timely, with current and up-to-date information about the products to create a sense of credibility to the brand. A significant direct predictor of PI was CT, explaining 57.7% of the variance in PI ($R^2 = 0.577$). Moreover, mediation analysis showed that the influence of marketing activities on purchase decision was mediated by the customers' trust of the brand (Effect = 0.5338), meaning that the marketing activities have the highest commercial value if they are able to build customers' trust in the brand. Despite its contributions, this study has notable limitations that point to avenues for future research. Specifically, the sampling method was geographically restricted to the Ernakulam district using non-probability techniques, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader regional or international cosmetics markets. Future studies should incorporate multi-regional or cross-national samples and employ probability sampling methods to enhance the empirical robustness and broader applicability of the structural model.

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