

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF DERMATOLOGIST-RECOMMENDED VS. INFLUENCER-PROMOTED SKINCARE PRODUCTS: A STUDY OF TRUST, CREDIBILITY, AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUNG ADULT

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Abstract

This research analyzes the differences between the effects of dermatologist recommendations and social media influencer endorsements on consumers' behavior in the skincare industry. The research examines how two groups absorbed trust issues, with the younger demographic being the focus of the research due to the rapid growth of digital marketing and the usage of social media by youth. A total of 192 respondents, mostly female within the age bracket of 18–24 years, were administered an online questionnaire to measure the level of awareness, credibility, and spending behavior with the use of social media and influencer marketing. Research results indicate that while influencers are important for product awareness, dermatologists are believed to provide skin care advice with a much higher level of trust and preference due to their clinical background. They expressed greater skepticism toward products advertised by influencers

due to concerns about authenticity and commercial bias. The study illustrates a marked preference from consumers for medically endorsed skincare products, with the purchasing decision being affected more so by outcome efficacy and professional endorsement rather than product popularity. The findings created brand restructuring options that allow using the authority of dermatologists and the popularity of social media influencers to increase consumer confidence and sales.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Over recent years, the skincare industry has expanded massively, and this can be attributed to the increased usage of digital marketing and social media. Alamer et al. (2023) state that 'the way the customer interacts with skincare brands has changed' since it is easier than ever to obtain product information and read reviews. Social media influencers have now taken over advertising skincare products to the younger generation, particularly those active on Post, Tik Tok and Youtube (Chan et al, 2024). Such influencers talk about their skincare regimes and recommend products that many people tend to purchase. Despite the power of social media, there has always been a reliance on dermatologist referrals which are based on clinically proven medicine. Skincare specialists recommend products that wet the skin and are safe and effective for the skin. These specialists recommend most of the pharmaceutical grade skin care products (Lee et al, 2020). Their followers, contestants, and dermatologists' fads create a market of skincare that does not skimp on the effects on consumers who trust social media.

Research Problem

At the moment, there is a lack of clarity on how aligned or misaligned dermatologist guidance is in comparison to what influencers promote and sell skincare products. With influencers sometimes focusing on advertisement contracts rather than the product's usefulness while dermatologists focus on clinical proof, consumers are left with misleading information that could alter their trust and

purchasing decisions. This disparity between recommendations based on empirical data and influencer marketing driven by popularity needs further exploration of how such gaps are viewed by consumers regarding trust, perceived impact, and real buying actions.

Research Objectives

This study aims to first measure the gained knowledge, trust, and public preferences associated with skincare products prescribed by dermatologists and those that are suggested by social media influencers. Second, this research seeks to assess the effect that endorsements from professional dermatologists and influencers make, delving into the dynamics of actual consumer purchasing behavior, and seeing which endorsement bears more attention over the consumers' decisions.

Research Questions

The analysis seeks to answer the following questions: What is the level of awareness regarding skincare products endorsed by dermatologists vis-a-vis skincare cosmetics recommended by an influencer? What is the relative credibility and effectiveness of recommendations made by a dermatologist as opposed to an influencer? What are the key determinants of trust, decision-making, and purchasing behavior of consumers within the skincare industry?

Significance of the Study

The study aims to answer the following questions: How informed are patients about skincare products recommended by a dermatologist versus cosmetics proposed by an influencer? In terms of credibility and effectiveness, how does the recommendation by a dermatologist compare with that of an influencer? What are the primary trust, decision-making, and purchasing behavior factors of consumers in the skincare market?

Literature Review

Overview of Dermatologist Involvement in Skincare

Previously, dermatologists managed skincare selections based on scientific guidelines and provided them with medically tested ingredients, which included retinoids, ceramides, and antioxidants (Crudele et al., 2019). Due to the clinical and scientific proof results gathered, dermatology endorsements have undoubted credibility (Lee et al., 2020). This showed how consumers view the suggestions given by a dermatologist to be helpful, safe, and highly reliable. For example, broad-spectrum sunscreen usage is often recommended by dermatologists to protect against skin damage which shows the faith offered by scientific evidence and clinical results (Farberg et al., 2016). Such trust related to dermatology endorsements persuasion has a major impact on the consumer resulting in a change in their purchasing behavior and loyalty towards medical-grade skincare products.

Role of Influencers in the Skincare Market

Different categories of influencers exist due to their follower counts, which also define the nature and type of products they promote. Macro-influencers have large followings while micro-influencers have moderate followings; on the other end are nano-influencers who have smaller niche communities. These influencers promote their brands using visual storytelling on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube through relatable content, how-to guides, and product reviews (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). Their status as relatable peers greatly influences brand and product impact, particularly among younger consumers. While influencer marketing is built on the reliability of personal testimony, this reliability comes into question due to monetary motivations, causing some level of skepticism toward influencer-endorsed skincare products (Ünalmiş et al., 2024).

Consumer Behavior in Skincare Purchases

Hassan et al. (2021) state that trust in the recommender's credibility, social proof, and paid endorsements greatly influence the purchasing decisions of skincare consumers. Research shows that

the goodwill given to dermatologist-endorsed products is much higher than non-endorsed products which decrease with increased consumer indecisiveness and increases consumer loyalty (Lee et al, 2020). On the other hand, products promoted by influencers face doubt especially about authenticity due to funding influence (Chan et al, 2024). Trusting endorsements, people base their decisions on scientifically proven studies rather than biased opinions from experts.

Gaps in Current Research

A gap remains in the comparison between dermatologists' recommendations and influencers' endorsements. While earlier studies reviewed them separately, little is known about the relative analysis and consumer perception studies that are influenced by these two types of endorsements in the context of contemporary marketing.

Methodology

A. Research Design

The blend of emphasis in quantitative methods made it effective for this study, which sought to measure the public awareness, perceptions, and purchasing **رفتار** towards products that are recommended by dermatologists and promoted by social media influencers. A precise measurement of a set of variables and an analysis of the trend within a population can be accomplished through the use of quantitative methods as they provide numerical and description verification. The collected data enabled the opening of multiple angles for further analysis including but not limited to demographics, consumer concerns, expenditures, and levels of trust in endorsements. The questionnaire enabled 'behind the doors' reality tests for standardized base data to ensure the clinicians were equally skilled in capturing vertical and horizontal directions and angles. Another quantitative methodology feature enabled capturing the correlation between demographic traits and social media interactions that provided needed logical substance to assumptions within the limited

scope of the blended methods. The explicit claims through hypotheses increased reliability and provided representativeness in the claims made about the study population.

B. Data Collection

An online questionnaire was sent out to 192 people to elicit their responses. The survey consisted of demographic questions such as age, gender, education, and occupation alongside skincare issues, money spent per month, preferred recommendations (dermatologist or influencer), and trust/purchasing decision factors. Primary skincare issue of the respondents such as acne, aging, dryness, or pigmentation, and typical monthly skincare payments was recorded. Also, questions intended to gauge trust/skepticism were included, as well as marketing by an influencer, incidence of side effects from using the suggested products, and how people mark the effectiveness of a product (usually by studying its constituents). Clarity and ease of response were the most important while developing the questionnaire to ensure the respondents engaged fully and provided accurate responses. All data regarding the demographics and their responses from the survey were transformed into pie charts and bar graphs, to demonstrate the consumer attitudes and behaviors effectively.

C. Sampling

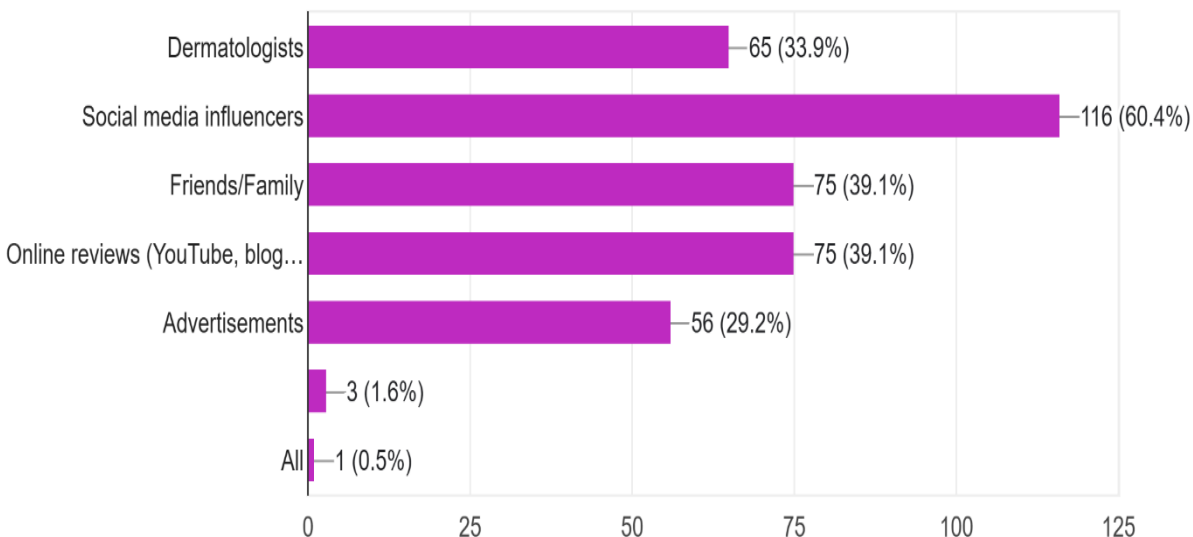
This survey used convenience sampling of young adults within a broad age range of 18 to 24 years; this age group made up 92.2% of the respondents. The sample also comprised mostly females (69.8%), which is representative of this population's higher usage of skincare products and social media. Undergraduates made up most of the respondents (79.2%), with full-time students accounting for about 89.6%. This sampling method was specifically selected because of the population's high exposure to and interaction with digital media and influencer content, as well as their likelihood to participate in skincare activities and procedures as well as product use. They are very active users of social media, which makes this population very important when studying the

impact of digital marketing as opposed to expert physician marketing. Furthermore, concentrating on this younger, digitally active population enables the study to capture the current attitudes, patterns of trust, and spending behaviors that the skincare market is using, which helps in predicting future market trends.

Findings and Discussion

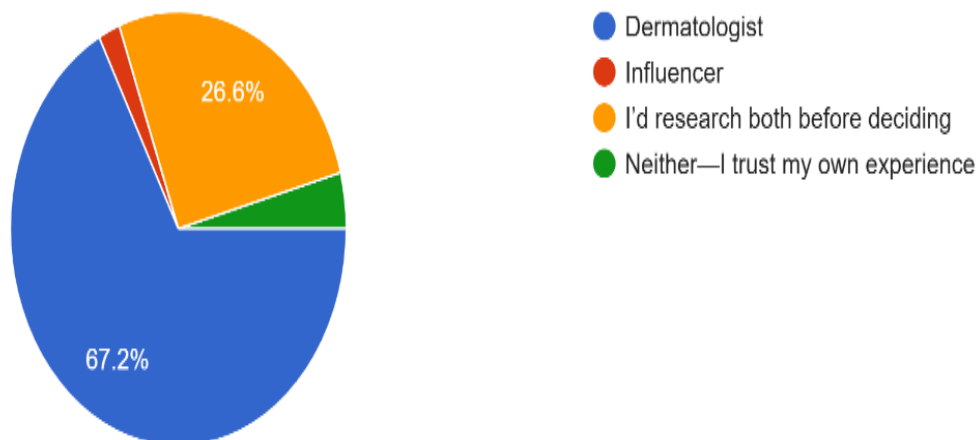
Awareness Levels of Dermatologist vs. Influencer-Endorsed Products

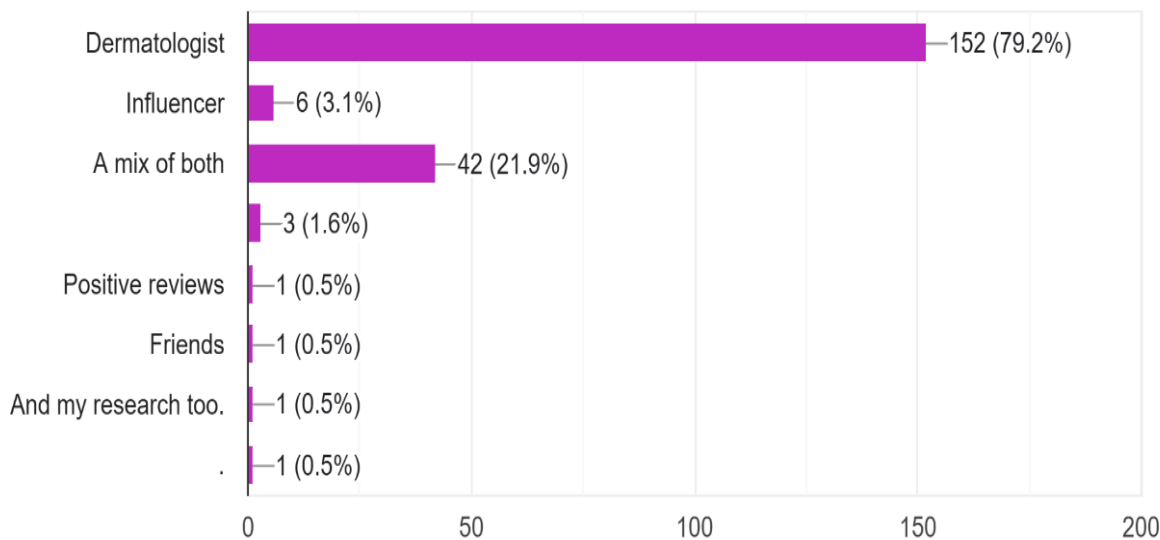
The results indicated that there were gaps in public knowledge about skincare products suggested by dermatologists and those recommended by influencers. Respondents reported that they get most of their information about skincare products from social media influencers (60.4%), friends and family (39.1%), reviews (39.1%), advertisements (29.2%), and dermatologists (33.9%). While social media influencers created the most initial product awareness, the respondents showed greater trust and clearer product differentiation between those recommended by dermatologists and those endorsed by social media influencers. Such differences illustrate the worrying degree of awareness that consumers have about the sources of information about skincare, which display a negative attitude towards influencer marketing, despite its prevalence.



Perceived Trustworthiness and Effectiveness

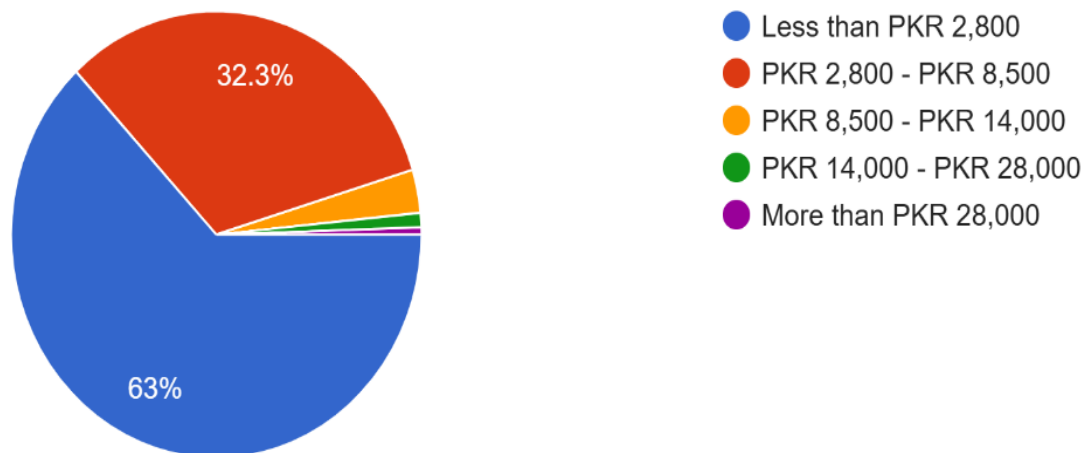
A large majority of respondents (79.2%) stated they trust dermatologist recommendations more than influencer promotions (3.1%). Another proportion (21.9%) trusted both dermatologists and influencers which suggests some willingness towards influencer promotion insofar as it is endorsed or corroborated by expert opinion. Moreover, while choosing between an influencer and a dermatologist for skincare advice, the respondents had a clear preference in favor of dermatologists (67.2%) which indicates their trust in the knowledge and skill of dermatologists. This overwhelming trust in dermatologists indicates the respondents' appreciation of scientific and clinical medicine and much less value was placed on influencer promotion which respondents were more critical of because of perceived marketing motives.





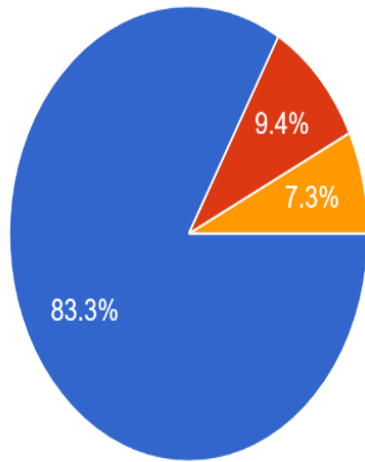
Influence on Purchasing Decisions

When it comes to consumer expenditure, the data illustrates that most of the participants, 63% of them, allocated below PKR 2,800 a month towards skincare, showing comparatively low expenditure within this population sample. This spending behavior illustrates that while consumers seem to care about skincare routines, their economic reality greatly affects the products they select. There seems to be a strong correlation between trust and purchasing behavior where it seems economically wise to consider dermatologist endorsements due to probable effectiveness and minimal chances of negative consequences. Consequently, participants appeared to be skeptical about investing large amounts of money in products endorsed by influencers without the approval of a dermatologist.

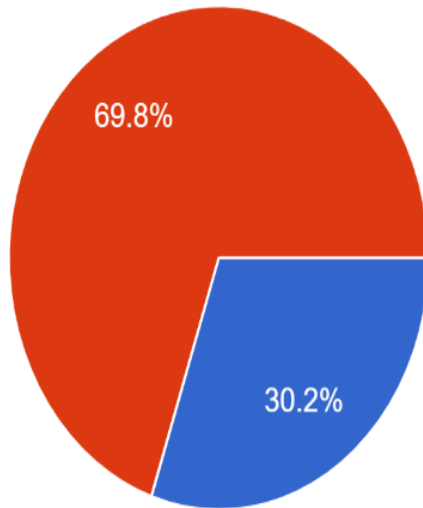


Demographic Trends and Media Consumption Habits

The demographic profile mostly consisted of young adults 18 to 24 years old (92.2%), and female participants (69.8%). This relatively younger and female-constrained demographic is noticed to participate in skincare trends on social media, significantly influencing their consumption behaviors. Respondents displayed a strong preference towards experimental or pharma products for skincare therapy (83.3%), indicating greater vigilance for the safety of products owing to educational qualifications and wide digital information exposure. The increasing preference for scientifically verified products among the younger population confirms that such consumers are well-informed and rational, depend on digital media a great deal but appreciate medical authority more than social fads.



- Medically tested / pharmaceutical brands
- General skincare / cosmetic brands
- I don't know the difference

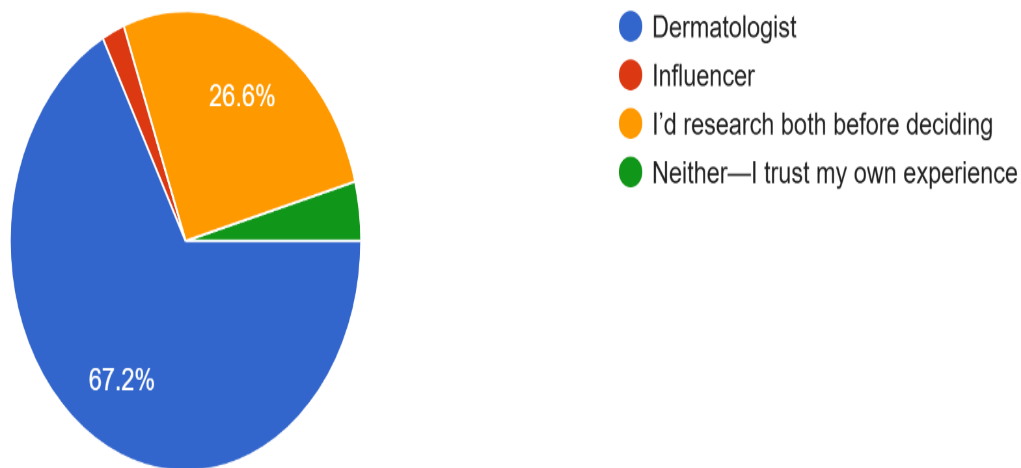


- Male
- Female

Comparative Analysis Between Groups

Comparative investigation between the trust level and impact of dermatologists and influencers indicate that dermatologists are by far the most preferred source of information for skin care advice, with a strikingly high score of almost 80 percent. Promotions by influencers received far lower trust

ratings, below ten percent. Nevertheless, a notable portion indicated willingness to adopt a blended, or hybrid approach, suggesting collaborative possibilities. The analysis further revealed cynicism among the consumers around the influencer endorsement due to how commercialized it appears to be. Therefore, there is an evident discrepancy regarding trust by consumers toward the promotions made by dermatological specialists versus those made by influencers, which presents a strategic gap for marketing by skincare companies, who could endorse the products through a dermatologist and subsequently use an influencer to market the brand, thus employing maximum credibility and digital influence simultaneously.



Conclusion

This research assessed how aware customers are of certain skincare products, their perceptions of the products as well as their trust in the products, specifically regarding a dermatologist's recommendation, as compared to an influencer's marketing. The results illustrate that trust and preference towards skincare products are significantly high if it is recommended by a dermatologist

due to their credibility, expertise, and reliability. While social media influencers do have a considerable impact in creating initial awareness of a product, there is still skepticism due to commercial bias and authenticity being of major concern. Medically validated skincare products are preferred, and purchasing behavior is highly cautious and influenced by expert recommendations. Such information has some crucial implications for marketing skincare brands such as collaborating with dermatologists and engaging influencers in a transparent manner which would utilize medical credibility and social media attention seamlessly. Homogeneity of sample demographics, primarily amongst young females, was identified as a limitation in the study which affects the generalizability of the results.

A more complete understanding of the consumer's behavior can be achieved by extending the scope of these studies to include different demographic attributes and using qualitative approaches. Further understanding the impact of a dermatologist as compared to an influencer when marketing skin care products can help understand their place in consumer decision-making in the dynamic skincare market.

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