

CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS SELECTED COSMETIC BRANDS: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN BHOPAL CITY

¹ Ms. Sakshi Singh

Research Scholar,

Email: sakshisingh04101992@gmail.com

² Dr. N. K. Shrivastava

Professor,

Email: drshrivastava.nk@gmail.com

¹² Faculty of Commerce

¹²Ram Krishna Dharmarth Foundation University Bhopal (M.P.)

ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as one of the most influential channels shaping consumer decision-making in the cosmetics industry, particularly among urban youth and working professionals. This study examines consumer buying behaviour towards selected cosmetic brands with specific reference to the role played by social media marketing in Bhopal city. The research adopts a descriptive research design and draws on primary data collected from 200 respondents through a structured questionnaire administered using a convenience sampling technique. The study investigates the platforms consumers rely upon for cosmetic-related information, the frequency with which purchase decisions are influenced by social media content, brand preference patterns, and the underlying factors—such as influencer endorsement, product reviews, visual appeal, and promotional offers—that drive purchase intention. Findings indicate that Instagram and YouTube dominate as sources of cosmetic information, that product reviews and discount promotions exert the strongest influence on buying decisions, and that a significant majority of respondents report their brand choices are at least partially shaped by social media exposure. The study concludes with managerial implications for cosmetic brands seeking to strengthen digital engagement strategies in tier-2 Indian cities such as Bhopal.

KEYWORDS

Consumer Buying Behaviour; Social Media Marketing; Cosmetic Brands; Brand Preference; Digital Marketing; Bhopal City

1. INTRODUCTION

The cosmetics and personal care industry has witnessed remarkable transformation over the past decade, driven largely by the proliferation of digital and social media platforms. Consumers today no longer rely solely on traditional advertising, word-of-mouth, or in-store experience to form opinions about beauty and personal care products; instead, they increasingly turn to Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and other platforms to discover new brands, watch product reviews, and follow beauty influencers whose recommendations often carry as much weight as those of close friends or family. This shift has fundamentally altered the traditional consumer decision-making journey, compressing the distance between awareness, consideration, and purchase.

India's cosmetics market has grown rapidly, fuelled by rising disposable incomes, growing beauty consciousness, and increased smartphone and internet penetration even in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Bhopal, as the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, represents an interesting case of a rapidly digitalising urban centre where young consumers are increasingly active on social media while simultaneously navigating a market

flooded with both established multinational cosmetic brands and homegrown Indian players such as Lakme and Nykaa. Understanding how social media marketing shapes buying behaviour in such a city offers valuable insight into consumption patterns that may not mirror those of metropolitan cities like Mumbai or Delhi.

Social media marketing encompasses a wide array of promotional activities, including sponsored posts, influencer collaborations, user-generated content, live-streamed tutorials, targeted advertisements, and interactive engagement through comments and direct messaging. Each of these tools can influence different stages of the consumer decision-making process, from generating initial awareness to reinforcing post-purchase satisfaction through reviews and testimonials. For cosmetic brands in particular, where product efficacy and visual appeal are central to the buying decision, social media offers a uniquely persuasive medium since it allows potential buyers to see real-time application, texture, and results before committing to a purchase.

Despite the growing body of literature on social media marketing and consumer behaviour, relatively few studies have focused specifically on cosmetic consumption patterns in smaller Indian cities. Much of the existing research concentrates on metropolitan consumers or takes a broad, cross-category approach to e-commerce and digital marketing rather than isolating the cosmetics sector. This creates a gap in understanding how consumers in cities like Bhopal—with their distinct socio-economic profile, media consumption habits, and brand accessibility—respond to social media marketing efforts by cosmetic companies.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining consumer buying behaviour towards selected cosmetic brands in Bhopal city, with particular emphasis on the role of social media marketing. Specifically, the research aims to identify the social media platforms most frequently used by consumers for cosmetic-related information, assess the extent to which social media content influences purchase frequency, determine brand preference patterns among local consumers, and evaluate the relative importance of various social-media-driven factors—such as influencer endorsement, product reviews, visual content, and promotional discounts—in shaping purchase decisions.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews existing literature on consumer behaviour and social media marketing in the cosmetics and broader retail context. Section 3 outlines the research methodology adopted for the study. Section 4 presents the data analysis and interpretation, supported by tables and charts. Section 5 concludes the paper with a summary of key findings, managerial implications, and directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Kotler and Keller [1] laid the theoretical foundation for understanding consumer buying behaviour by describing it as a complex process influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors, and argued that marketers must understand each stage of the buyer's decision journey to design effective interventions. Building on this foundation, subsequent researchers have increasingly examined how digital and social media channels have reshaped each of these stages, particularly for visually driven product categories such as cosmetics and fashion.

Mangold and Faulds [2] were among the earliest to argue that social media functions as a hybrid element of the promotion mix, combining characteristics of traditional integrated marketing communication with a much higher degree of consumer-to-consumer influence, since peer recommendations shared on social platforms tend to be trusted more than brand-generated content. Their work is frequently cited as the theoretical basis for studies examining influencer marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in categories like cosmetics, where perceived authenticity strongly affects purchase intention.

Studies focused specifically on beauty and cosmetics have found consistent evidence of strong social media influence. Naz and Iqbal [3] studied Pakistani consumers and reported that Instagram-based beauty content, particularly makeup tutorials and influencer reviews, significantly increased purchase intention among young female consumers, with visual demonstration cited as more persuasive than textual advertising. Similarly, Sharma and Verma [4] examined Indian millennial consumers and found that YouTube beauty vloggers played a substantial role in shaping brand awareness and trust, with viewers reporting higher purchase confidence after watching detailed product reviews compared to relying on in-store advice alone.

Research on influencer marketing has further refined understanding of what drives persuasion. Lou and Yuan [5] proposed that informativeness and trustworthiness of influencer-generated content are stronger predictors of purchase intention than the entertainment value of the content itself, a finding echoed by Djafarova and Rushworth [6], who observed that everyday consumers found micro-influencers more relatable and credible than celebrity endorsers, particularly within the beauty and cosmetics niche. These findings suggest that authenticity, rather than follower count alone, is central to influencer effectiveness in this product category.

In the Indian context, several studies have examined social media's role across broader FMCG and personal care categories. Bansal and Kumar [7] surveyed urban Indian consumers and found that Facebook and Instagram advertisements significantly affected brand recall and purchase consideration for personal care products, while price-sensitivity moderated the strength of this relationship. Agarwal and Mishra [8] focused on tier-2 city consumers in India and found that while social media exposure was high, actual conversion to purchase was more strongly linked to promotional offers and discounts communicated through these platforms than to brand storytelling content, suggesting that price-related triggers remain powerful even in digitally engaged, smaller-city markets.

A number of researchers have also highlighted gender and demographic variations in social-media-driven cosmetic buying behaviour. Chatterjee [9] found that younger female consumers between 18 and 30 years were substantially more likely to make unplanned cosmetic purchases after exposure to social media advertisements compared to older consumers, who tended to conduct additional independent research before purchasing. Complementing this, Duffett [10] examined the impact of social media marketing communications across a broader youth demographic and found that attitude towards a brand's social media presence positively influenced both purchase intention and brand loyalty, reinforcing the idea that consistent, engaging digital presence yields long-term consumer relationships rather than only one-off transactions.

Taken together, the reviewed literature establishes that social media marketing exerts a measurable influence on cosmetics-related consumer behaviour through mechanisms such as influencer credibility, visual product demonstration, eWOM, and promotional messaging. However, most of these studies are either global in scope, focused on major metropolitan Indian cities, or examine personal care products broadly rather than cosmetics specifically within a tier-2 city context. This study builds on the existing literature by narrowing the focus to selected cosmetic brands and consumers in Bhopal city, thereby contributing city-specific empirical evidence to a research area that remains dominated by metropolitan and cross-national studies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design, as the primary objective is to describe existing patterns of consumer buying behaviour and the extent to which social media marketing influences purchase decisions

for cosmetic brands, rather than to establish causal relationships. A quantitative approach was used, relying on a structured, close-ended questionnaire to enable statistical analysis and comparison across respondent groups.

3.2 Data Collection

Primary data was collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire distributed both online (via Google Forms shared through social media and email) and offline (in person at shopping malls, cosmetic retail outlets, and college campuses within Bhopal city) between the months of the survey period. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering respondent demographics, social media usage patterns, brand preferences, purchase frequency, and factors influencing purchase decisions, primarily using multiple-choice and five-point Likert-scale items. Secondary data was drawn from published journal articles, industry reports, and reputable online sources to support the literature review and contextual background.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed to select respondents, given the practical constraints of time and accessibility. This approach targeted cosmetic consumers residing in Bhopal city who actively use at least one social media platform. A total of 200 valid and complete responses were collected and used for final analysis after screening out incomplete or invalid entries.

3.4 Statistical Tools

Collected data was coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and mean scores, were used to summarise respondent demographics and response patterns. Percentage analysis was applied to categorical data such as platform usage and brand preference, while mean scores on a five-point Likert scale were computed to rank the relative importance of factors influencing purchase decisions. Bar charts and pie charts were used to visually represent the findings for ease of interpretation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the findings of the survey conducted among 200 respondents in Bhopal city, organised around five key areas: demographic profile, social media platform usage for cosmetic information, frequency of purchase influenced by social media, brand preference, and the relative importance of factors driving purchase decisions. Each table is accompanied by a corresponding chart and a brief interpretation of the results.

4.1 Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18–24 years	68	34.0
25–34 years	74	37.0
35–44 years	38	19.0
45 years & above	20	10.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 1: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents fall within the 25–34 years age group (37.0%), closely followed by the 18–24 years group (34.0%). Together, these two age brackets account for 71.0% of the sample, indicating that the survey predominantly captured younger, digitally active consumers who are more likely to engage with social media platforms as part of their daily routine. Respondents aged 45 and

above formed the smallest segment (10.0%), consistent with generally lower social media adoption among older age groups.

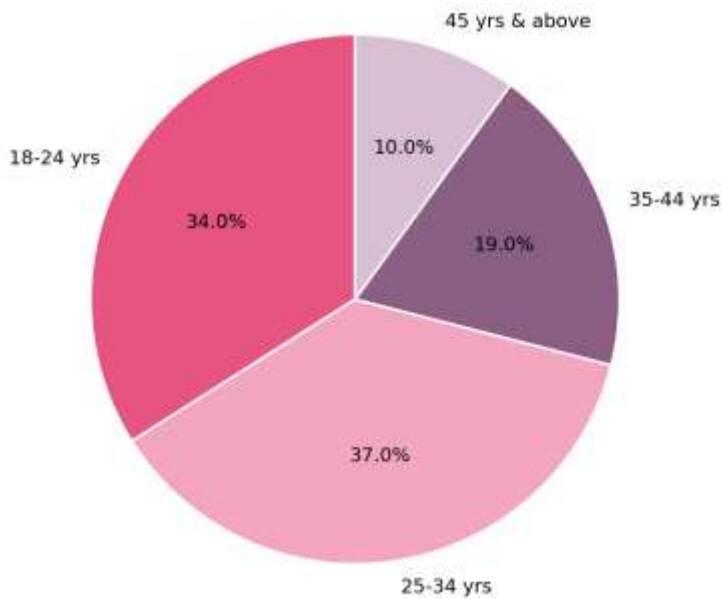


Chart 1: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

4.2 Social Media Platforms Used for Cosmetic-Related Information

Platform	Respondents Using Platform (%)
Instagram	78
YouTube	65
Facebook	42
Snapchat	21
Pinterest	18

Table 2: Social Media Platforms Used for Cosmetic-Related Information (Multiple Response)

Since respondents could select more than one platform, percentages do not sum to 100%. Instagram emerged as the most widely used platform for cosmetic-related information (78%), followed by YouTube (65%), reflecting the strong preference among consumers for visually rich, short-form content such as reels and tutorials as well as long-form review videos. Facebook (42%) retained moderate relevance, while Snapchat (21%) and Pinterest (18%) were comparatively less used, suggesting that these platforms play a supplementary rather than primary role in cosmetic information-seeking behaviour in Bhopal.

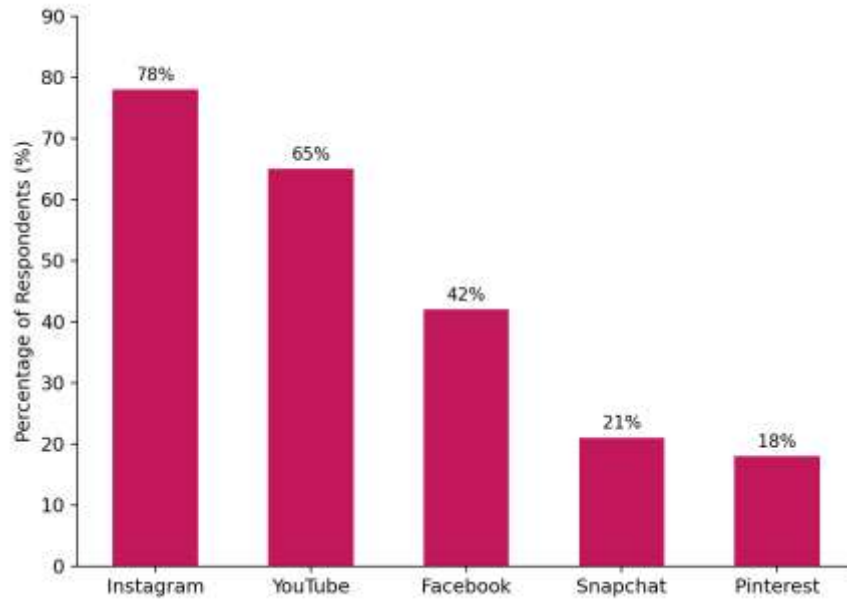


Chart 2: Social Media Platforms Used for Cosmetic-Related Information

4.3 Frequency of Purchase Influenced by Social Media Marketing

Frequency	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Always	24	12.0
Often	62	31.0
Sometimes	71	35.5
Rarely	31	15.5
Never	12	6.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 3: Frequency of Purchase Influenced by Social Media Marketing

A combined 78.5% of respondents reported that their cosmetic purchases are influenced by social media marketing either 'always', 'often', or 'sometimes', underscoring the substantial role digital platforms play in shaping buying decisions. Only 6.0% of respondents stated that social media never influences their purchases, indicating that traditional, offline decision-making now represents a minority pattern among the surveyed consumers in Bhopal.

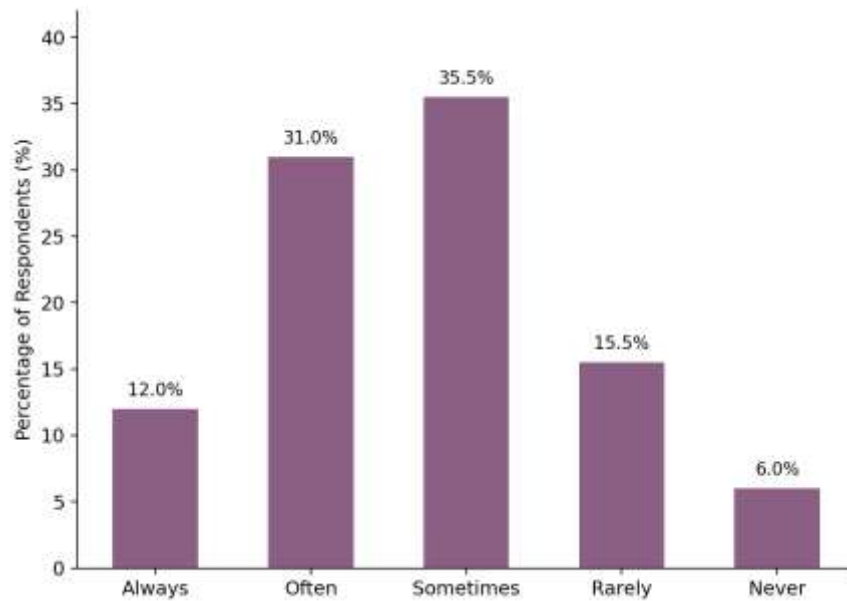


Chart 3: Frequency of Purchase Influenced by Social Media Marketing

4.4 Preferred Cosmetic Brands Among Respondents

Brand	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lakme	52	26.0
Maybelline	38	19.0
Nykaa	46	23.0
L'Oreal	34	17.0
Others (MAC, Sugar, etc.)	30	15.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 4: Preferred Cosmetic Brands Among Respondents

Lakme emerged as the most preferred cosmetic brand among respondents (26.0%), reflecting strong brand equity and long-standing market presence in India, followed closely by Nykaa (23.0%), which has built its reputation substantially through digital-first and influencer-driven marketing. Maybelline (19.0%) and L'Oreal (17.0%) followed, while 15.0% of respondents preferred other brands such as MAC and Sugar Cosmetics, indicating a fairly fragmented but competitive brand landscape in the local market.

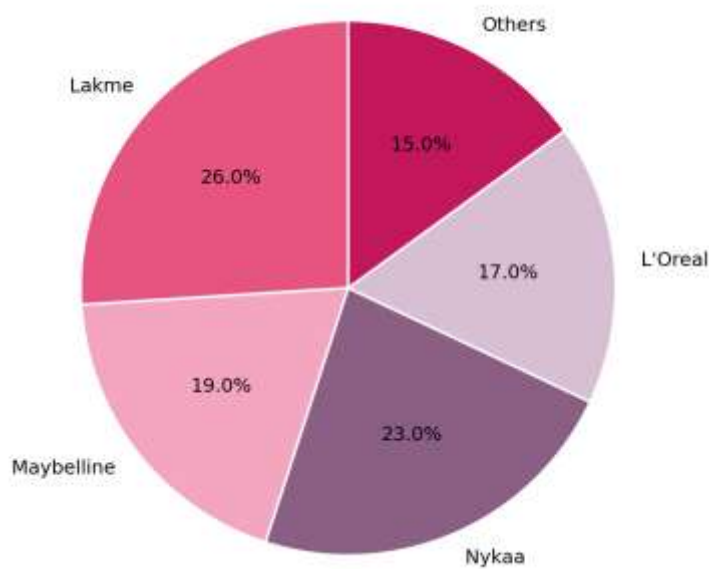


Chart 4: Preferred Cosmetic Brands Among Respondents

4.5 Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions via Social Media Marketing

Factor	Mean Score (5-Point Likert Scale)
Product reviews and ratings	4.2
Discounts/offers promoted online	4.1
Attractive visuals/content	3.9
Influencer/celebrity endorsement	3.8
Brand reputation on social media	3.7

Table 5: Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions via Social Media Marketing

Among the factors evaluated, product reviews and ratings received the highest mean score (4.2), followed closely by discounts and offers promoted online (4.1), suggesting that consumers place greater trust in evidence-based, peer-validated information and tangible monetary benefits than in purely promotional or aspirational content. Attractive visuals (3.9) and influencer endorsement (3.8) also scored favourably, while brand reputation on social media recorded the lowest, though still moderately high, mean score (3.7), indicating that while brand image matters, it is secondary to more direct and actionable forms of social proof.

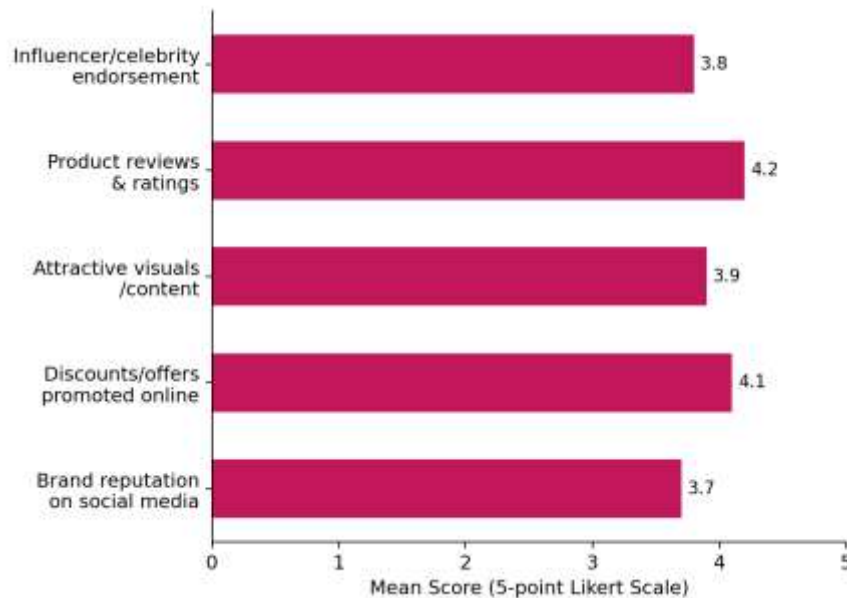


Chart 5: Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions via Social Media Marketing

4.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings collectively demonstrate that social media marketing plays a substantial and multifaceted role in shaping cosmetic buying behaviour among consumers in Bhopal city. The dominance of Instagram and YouTube as primary information sources aligns with earlier findings by Naz and Iqbal [3] and Sharma and Verma [4], confirming that visually rich, tutorial-style content remains highly persuasive in the cosmetics category regardless of city tier. The high proportion of respondents whose purchases are influenced by social media 'often' or 'sometimes' supports Bansal and Kumar's [7] observation that digital advertising meaningfully affects brand recall and purchase consideration among urban Indian consumers. Notably, the strong influence of product reviews and discount-based promotions over influencer endorsement and brand reputation echoes Agarwal and Mishra's [8] finding that tier-2 city consumers respond more strongly to price-related and evidence-based triggers than to brand storytelling. This suggests that while influencer marketing generates awareness and engagement, conversion to actual purchase in a city like Bhopal may depend more heavily on credible reviews and tangible discounts—an important distinction for brands allocating digital marketing budgets in non-metro markets. The brand preference data further indicates that both legacy brands (Lakme) and digitally native brands (Nykaa) can achieve strong market position, provided they maintain an active and trustworthy social media presence.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine consumer buying behaviour towards selected cosmetic brands in Bhopal city with a specific focus on the role of social media marketing. The findings confirm that social media has become an integral part of the cosmetic purchase journey for a majority of consumers in the city, with Instagram and YouTube serving as the dominant platforms for product discovery and information-seeking. A substantial proportion of respondents reported that their purchase decisions are directly influenced by content encountered on these platforms, reflecting a broader shift away from traditional, purely in-store decision-making toward a digitally mediated buying process.

The study further reveals that among the various social-media-driven factors, product reviews and ratings, along with promotional discounts, exert the strongest influence on purchase decisions, outweighing influencer endorsement and general brand reputation. This has important implications for cosmetic brands

operating in tier-2 cities such as Bhopal: marketing strategies that combine authentic, review-driven content with clear promotional value are likely to be more effective at converting engagement into actual sales than strategies relying primarily on celebrity or influencer glamour. Brand preference findings also suggest that both established brands and digitally native entrants can succeed, provided they sustain visible and credible engagement on social platforms.

While this study offers meaningful city-specific insights, it is not without limitations. The use of convenience sampling limits the generalisability of findings to the broader population of Bhopal, and the cross-sectional nature of the data does not capture how social media influence may evolve over time or across changing platform trends. Future research could adopt probability sampling methods, expand the sample to include a wider demographic range, and explore additional variables such as consumer trust, perceived authenticity of influencer content, and post-purchase social media engagement to build a more comprehensive understanding of digitally driven cosmetic consumption in tier-2 Indian cities.

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