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The Impact of Social Media Influencers upon Small and Medium Enterprises within the Cosmetic Industry (Qualitative Approach)

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Abstract

This study examines how social media influencers shape consumers purchase decision in the cosmetic industry with specific attention to generational cohorts; Generation Z and Millennials versus gender; male and female consumers. The main research question asks; “How do consumers perceive and respond to influencers authenticity, credibility and promotional strategies when making purchase decisions?”. This research is important given the growing reliance from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) towards influencer marketing as drivers to gain consumer trust and initiate digital engagement. A qualitative approach was adopted shaped by semi structured interviews with a diverse set of participants within the East Asia region. The data gathered were thematically analysed using the Framework Analysis Method which enabled systematic coding and comparison of data aligned with the study’s predefined research questions. The analysis was guided by several theories which are the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by (Ajzen, 1991), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by (Davis, 1989), Chaffey’s Digital Marketing Model by (Chaffey, 2012), and the Social Influence Theory (SIT) by (Kelman, 1958). The findings revealed four overarching themes which are, authenticity and trust is central in consumers credibility perception, the role of digital demonstration and reviews shapes purchase confidence, generational and gender indicates differences with paid promotions acceptance and the influence of social media platform characteristics asserts consumer expectations on influencer credibility. The overall results revealed that Generation Z consumers value transparency and relatability while the Millennial consumers place a stronger emphasis on credibility and professionalism. The significance of this study underscores the importance of authenticity and platform trust in digital

marketing while providing actionable insights for brands and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to tailor influencer strategies to different demographic groups. Future research will build on these findings by integrating the qualitative insights with quantitative data to deepen the understanding of influencer impact.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour; Digital Marketing