

## **Investigating the Impact of TikTok Influencers on Purchase Intention of Cosmetic Products among Gen Z in Sri Lanka: Examining the Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust**

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The rapid growth of social media platforms, particularly such as TikTok, significantly impacts influencer marketing in the form of the way the brands connect with consumers. This study addresses the critical role of influencer marketing in an era where trust and authenticity are paramount in driving purchases, especially in industries like cosmetics that rely on customer confidence. The study analyzes the impact of TikTok influencer attributes by five key attributes such as expertise, interactivity, popularity, argument quality, and homophily, on the purchase intention of cosmetic products among Gen Z TikTok users in Sri Lanka, focusing on the mediating role of consumer trust. By examining the impact of influencer attributes, the researcher provides a nuanced understanding of how TikTok's unique engagement can leverage purchase intention among Gen Z consumers, shaping consumer trust and providing useful information for marketers, influencers, customers, brands, and stakeholders by concentrating on specific attributes of the TikTok influencers. Highlighting a recent case in the Sri Lankan cosmetic market, such as the promotion of unauthorized products, the study emphasizes trust and authenticity in the influencer-driven market strategies. In 2024, TikTok reached over 1 billion active users worldwide, resulting in one of fast growing social media platforms, particularly among Gen Z, who form a substantial segment of its user base as platform species for short form video content and algorithm driven personalized feed.

A quantitative research method was used, and the data was collected from the Gen Z TikTok users by using a structured questionnaire from 412 Gen Z TikTok users in Sri Lanka. The data was analyzed by applying correlation, multiple linear regression tests, and other relevant techniques using SPSS to outline influencer attributes, consumer trust, and purchase intention. Mediator analysis was used to assess the role of customer trust. The

framework was developed by integrating insights from the existing literature and expert opinions in the industry. Based on that, four hypotheses were generated for the study. Overall, all four main hypotheses have supported the study, determining that TikTok significantly impacts the purchase intention of cosmetic products among Gen Z in Sri Lanka. The findings suggest that homophily (0.878) and interactivity (0.846) of influencers are the most effective factors for encouraging purchase intention, while popularity (0.784) has minimal significance among others. However, using correlation and regression analysis, the study's results reveal that Expertise does not significantly influence purchase intention. It also shows that consumer trust can mediate the effect of the influencer attributes on purchase intention, which means that influencers need to be genuine. The brands must be aligned with the consumer preferences when selecting the influencers without depending only on the follower base. The study is geographically limited to the Sri Lankan context and focuses exclusively on the TikTok organic engagement of the influencers and consumers, as paid advertising has not yet been introduced in the local landscape. In addition, self-reported survey data may include biases in customer preferences and individual behaviors.

Understanding these managerial implications accurately indicates that brands should aim at engaging influencers with high audience values, improve credibility and drive customer engagement. Brands can build trust and maximize influencer marketing on TikTok, growing its audience's engagement with the content. The findings suggest that influencer marketing significantly impacts the intention to purchase cosmetic products, and the trust of social media influencers strongly mediates the intention to purchase. This research is part of social media marketing discussions to extend the understanding of TikTok influencers' contribution to consumer behaviour based on literature. Future research should examine these types of contexts in diverse regions and industries, especially because paid media will be available for TikTok in the near future, considering the development of social commerce and customer engagement in a dynamic environment.

**Keywords:** *Cosmetics, Customer Trust, Gen Z, Influencers, Influencer Marketing, Purchase Intention, social media, TikTok*