

TAJMMR: Trans Asian Journal of Marketing Management Research

ISSN: 2279-0667

Vol. 15, Issue 6-7, June-July 2026

SJIF 2021 = 7.263

A peer reviewed journal

ISSN (Online) : 2279-0667



TRANS Asian Journal of Marketing & Management Research (TAJMMR)
<https://tarj.in>

TAJMMR

ISSN (online) : 2279-0667

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Karun Kant Uppal

Impact Factor : SJIF 2021 = 7.263

Frequency : Monthly

Country : India

Language : English

Start Year : 2012

Published by : www.tarj.in

**Indexed/ Listed at : Ulrich's Periodicals
Directory, ProQuest, U.S.A.**

E-mail ID: tarjjournals@gmail.com

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ROLE OF MICRO-INFLUENCER ENDORSEMENTS IN STRENGTHENING BRAND IMAGE OF COSMETIC BRANDS

Fiona Marissa Fernandes*; Dr. Pragya Singh**

*Research Scholar,
Department of Commerce,
Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Govt Degree College,
University of Allahabad, UP, INDIA

**Assistant Professor,
Department of Commerce,
Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Govt. Degree College,
University of Allahabad, UP, India
Email Id: ffiona1112@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5958/2279-0667.2026.00003.3

ABSTRACT

With the arrival of digital times, micro-influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most powerful instruments of branding, particularly in the cosmetics sector where consumer perceptions regarding products are always based on peer evaluation, authenticity, and aesthetics. In this theoretical paper, the impact of micro-influencer campaigns on brand image creation and reinforcement is discussed. On the basis of social influence, source credibility, and social proof theories, the study predicts that micro-influencers will substantially contribute to brand image through perceived authenticity, trustworthiness, and aesthetic quality, thereby influencing brand engagement among consumers.

KEYWORDS: *Influencer Marketing, Brand Image, Perceived Authenticity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As Instagram and YouTube have drastically altered the way cosmetics brands distribute product information, these social media platforms stand as excellent microcosms for this research. With traditional advertising continuing to decline in performance, influencer marketing is an avenue that many have opened up to Micro-influencers — usually defined as those in the range of 10,000 to 100,000 followers — have received particular attention from this group for their niche communities and ideally perceived authenticity and engagement.

In the recent few years, several cosmetic companies collaborated with micro-influencers for activism purpose focused on new arrivals and brand perception showcasing usage of products.

Actually, micro-influencer campaigns are not just used for promoting a product but also serve to create the symbolic meaning, character and overall screening of the brand. This paper introduces some of the conceptual mechanisms by which in particular micro-influencers can promote brand image in the cosmetic-vendor space (Hitiyatul Julia, 2025).

Influencers create vibrant, entertaining content which directly influences the image of a brand — especially in fashion and cosmetics. Research shows that micro-influencers can influence the purchase intention of more consumers to a greater extent because they become acquainted with the audience through authentic and supportive communications. Brands leverage these digital engagement indicators (likes, comments, shares etc.) so as to be noticed and have credibility to create their own brand image and increase visibility (Srinivas, 2025).

The success of an influencer campaign is not just about the creativity of the content, but how far the message is delivered via that content speaks with your target audience. We must also understand that trends/innovations in influencer marketing are related to on whether its adapting with changes in the consumer behaviour or not. Consumer Interaction with growing digitalization & fast- paced environment, which is crucial in the design, structure and success of campaigns (Mita Fransiska, 2024).

Combining efficiency, attractiveness and trustworthiness of influencers create a positive attitude towards the brand thus being an intermediary factor who translates the potential credibility of influencer into consumer behaviour according to studies (Adi, 2024).

Influencers have the potential to influence consumer opinion through promoting products, creating content that resonates and much more. Influencers today used their clout and large network for the betterment of brand image. More investments in Influencer marketing circuits that can increase the positive image of beauty and personal care products, as well as increasing its image or attractiveness (Rachmawati, August 2024,).

2. Objectives

- 1) Understanding the role of micro-influencers in strengthening the brand image in cosmetic sector.
- 2) To provide India-specific evidence linking micro-influencer campaigns to brand performance indicators such as engagement and sales.
- 3) To know the micro-influencer credibility on consumer trust and brand perception.

3. Research Methodology

The current research design is conceptual and theoretical that investigates the role of micro-influencer marketing in influencing the brand image and improving the brand performance from beauty and personal care sector in India. Instead of eliciting primary data, the review synthesizes

extant theoretical and empirical literature to derive a holistic understanding of the nexus between micro-influencer behaviours and brand-related outcomes.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Micro-Influencers: Definition and Characteristics

They are familiar faces with a more limited, but devoted following. They look more realistic, relatable and natural than the macro-influencers or stars. Research (Hansen, 2020) shows micro influencers to be more;

- Curate niche communities (beauty, skin care, and wellness)
- Have higher engagement rates.
- Assets to borrow more on brand voice and authority

These influencers are called in the cosmetic industry as beauty guru who use their makeup to make sure that they get paid much more while letting social media customers know about the enterprises of cosmetics (Siti Hasnah Hassan S. Z.-K., 2021).

4.2 Brand image in Cosmetics Industry

Brand image is what consumers think about your brand, and a set of associations that they produce when thinking about the brand. Brand image in cosmetics sector is formed by:

- Product quality perceptions.
- Brand personality (Premium, Natural or Youthful).
- Social visibility and aspirational value.
- Endorsements and user-generated content.

Cosmetic products function based on experience and are not generally obscured, which makes brand image a robust factor influencing perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty. Partnership with influencers who already enjoy big name and trust contribute largely to the growth of the cosmetics brands. Active and loyal followers of influencers trust their endorsements, both because they are trusted voices of authority that lend credibility to the products, but also because it brings new customers in or allows an existing customer to associate a product with positive sentiment or perceived high quality. (Christine J. Concepcion, 2025).

The brand image is a major factor influencing the purchase decisions for cosmetics. The consumer of makeup products is also impacted massively by the message provided in different starters lessons under makeup lesson video on YouTube (Johassan, 2025).

5. Mechanisms of Impact

Micro-influencers have a number of interconnected mechanisms that shape positive brand image:

Authenticity & Affinity: They present themselves as more candid and personable, they open up firm ground that amounts to "performable authenticity," Blur the lines of personal advocacy and commercial endorsement. It promotes intimacy and bonding, as we discussed in self-expressive/identity building FMCG categories like beauty and food.

Engagement and Parasocial Relationships: The more a follower interacts with an influencer (as between 3–8% on Instagram engagement), the greater the parasocial relationships that develop, leading followers to view influencers which in turn drives brand awareness and affinity.

Self-branding and targeting niche: The followers make an exercise of self-branding on the part of the influencer content upon which one intends his/her personal identity will find himself as a brand. This speeds up the reach of consumers in niches such as sustainable beverages for FMCG.

Deep cultural and linguistic resonance: For regions with diverse culture, influencers who create content in local languages or dialects (with some cultural allusions) work massively better than other creators. For instance, vernacular content generates six times higher engagement than English or Hindi national language content in India.

Increased trust and authenticity Local influencers tend to share more similar daily lifestyles, values and cultural backgrounds with their audiences. This makes them seem like a friend suggesting which products to buy and removing the purchasing doubt of the consumers.

Better engagement and conversion rates: Regional influencers usually have a much more engaged audience compared to macro-influencers because of this small community element. Such loyalty can help deliver higher conversion rates, particularly those associated with celebratory campaigns or local events.

Deeper access to local markets: Regional influencers can help brands being the bridge to their destination in untouched territories or extending already existing footprints specially at Tier 2 & 3 cities. Over the years, these influencers have been critical in accessing a wider array of digitally-inclined customers as internet penetration increasingly burrows into rural areas. (Atika Hermanda, 2019).

Affordable promotion: Marketers also see greater economic value in local micro-influencers than national celebrities for many brands (including larger companies targeting specific geographic regions). Because they are a closely related audience, very interested, the ROI is much better.

6. India-Specific Case Evidence

Nykaa – Nykaa runs these themed campaigns like #Nyka GlamFam where micro influencers post their beauty routine and favourite Nykaa product. Not only does it increase the reach of the product but also creates a community around beauty lovers.

Mama Earth - #Touch Of Goodness campaign by Mamaearth featured micro-influencers who shared stories based on experiences of the chosen range. In fact, all the numerous influencers on you tube post their experiences of the use of the product. Real mothers reviewed toxin-free formulations in campaigns that received huge comment-to-like ratios and pointed users toward direct-to-consumer conversion through affiliate links. This strategy helped Mamaearth become one of the first 'Instagram-born' unicorns in India.

My Glamm- The leading Indian makeup brand that has smartly adopted a lot of different types of influencers (especially micro-influencers) as an integral part of their marketing strategy. The brand includes micro-influencers, which helps in authenticity building, creating trust and reaching to niche communities.

Sugar Cosmetics- It has a strong emphasis on User Generated Content where customers are encouraged to post their makeup looks and reviews creating an authentic sense of community. They work in an organised way with Indian micro-influencers who do swatches on different regional skin tones. The brand partook in a #Bold And Free reels challenge, led by creators from tier-2 cities, garnering millions of impressions plus quantifiable spikes in Amazon and Nykaa search ranks on sale days.

Plum Goodness

Wellness and clean-beauty micro-influencers echo Plum's "100 per cent vegan" positioning. The videos submitted by users with side-by-side before-and-after results on Indian skin have directly correlated with conversion-rate uplifts on the brand's D2C site—29% higher web conversions for brands using User Generated Content versus traditional ads.

Table: Influencer Marketing Outcomes in Indian Beauty Brands

Brand	Year	Influencer Marketing Activity	Reported Outcome	Reference
Mamaearth	2026	As a part of its growth strategy, it collaborated with mom bloggers, beauty creators and micro-influencers very closely	Aimed at building a beauty business valued in 1000+ crores & cutting out large scale digital growth, influencer marketing recognized as one of the key drivers.	(IndianDigitalAds, 2026)
SUGAR Cosmetics	2025–2026	Brand collaborations with relatable influencers instead of celebrities	FY2025 annual revenue of around ₹412 crore; Influencer partnerships among top growth channels	(Cognitute., 2026);
Plum Goodness	2026	Healthy creator & influencer ecosystem on Instagram	Fosters a social media community of more than 810,000 followers to support brand engagement and awareness	(Socialveins., 2026)
Tira Beauty	2025–2026	Beauty categories from large+ creator and influencer campaigns	This beauty brand has Partnered with 5,000+ creators, runs 50+ campaigns & achieves 100M+ total views through its online appearance.	(Krazyfox., 2026)

7. Theoretical Foundations

7.1 Source Credibility Theory

This theory states that message acceptance depends on the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the source (Amos, 2008). These results validate the source credibility from the perspective of the social media influencer and its ability to exert a favourable outcome of consumers toward the ad. A research showed that the respondents were more likely to trust the social media influencer and feel delighted with their product-fit and attractiveness with whom they perceived as a resemblance to themselves. (Brahim Chekima, 2020).

Micro-influencers often score high in:

Expertise: This usually refers to the skills, qualification, specialisation, and competence in a particular area. Knowledge of cosmetic products through reviews/tutorials.

Trustworthiness: The customer bases the purchase decision on transparency and authenticity of the influencer. Perceived impartiality and honesty.

Attractiveness: This measures the likability and familiarity with influencer. Visual and lifestyle aesthetics that correspond with the standards of beauty.

These variables increase the persuasive effectiveness of messages, which allows to produce a greater effect on brand image positively

7.2 Social Proof Theory

If consumers are uncertain, they look at the behaviour of others and will likely follow that example. Micro-influencers offer:

- Real-time product usage.
- 'Peer-like recommendations.
- User-generated content that reduces product uncertainty.

This creates a perception that the endorsed cosmetic brand is popular, credible, and desirable.

7.3 Social Influence Theory

According to Kelman (1958), influence occurs via:

- **Compliance**-It refers to the change in individuals' behaviour because of the power of persuasion of the influencer.
- **Identification**- It refers to the desire to emulate influencers lifestyle.
- **Internalization** – It refers to the genuine acceptance of the message based on influencers trustworthiness and knowledge.

Micro-influencers play a strong role in identification and internalization, reinforcing positive brand associations (Kelman, 1961).

7.4 Parasocial Interaction Theory

Followers experience a one-sided connection to influencers such relationships can bring emotional closeness and increase trust, which gives micro-influencer an effective role as brand ambassadors, capable to influence the affirmation of a brand identity (Horton, 1956).

8. Conceptual Understanding of Micro-Influencer Campaigns leading to enhancement of Brand Image: Discussion

8.1 Enhancing Perceived Authenticity

Micro-Influencers share content in an authentic, personal and relatable way. The way they naturally communicate adds authenticity to brand messaging. Benefits of collaborating with the micro-influencers for the Brands are:

- Less scripted endorsements.
- Real product usage demonstrations.
- Honest product pros and cons.
- Authenticity support observed sincerity, transparency of brand.

Marketing has turned into one of those ways to reach consumers to purchase. Credibility influencers are also determined to determine whether or not this will have an effect on respondents' interest to purchase the brand's makeup products through an honest review that is no figment of the imagination and claims. (Puji Isyanto, 2020).

Certainly, the credibility and trust of an influencer are the most important components needed to form good relationships with their audiences. High degrees of engagement can be obtained with authentic and engaging content such as tutorials and product reviews. In addition, choosing the right influencers can contribute to improving your target audience's marketing plan (Febriana Astita, 2025).

8.2 Establishing Trust and Brand Credibility

Micro-influencers usually sometimes even inspire commentary/engagement in the comments and Q&As. That reputation does not happen overnight and immediately lends itself to the brand.

Trust-based elements include:

- Disclosure of review content
- Utilizing a product on a daily basis as part of their routines
- Open faced comparisons with competitor products

Having this establishes a more trustworthy brand Image.

Influencers have a direct and significant effect on the credibility of the endorsed product brand image. Trusted influencer has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention through brand image (Santi Duwi Putri Nugroho, 2022).

8.3 Adding Allure and Aspirational Cachet to a Brand

Cosmetic brands are highly dependent on aesthetics. Micro-influencers offering aspirational product imagery (without that celebrity-endorsement bias) through makeup tutorials and

before/after transformations; through lifestyle imagery. It makes the beauty standards that go along with the brand more attainable.

Attractiveness has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention mediated by brand image. Most of Gen Z respondents also agree — if the goal is getting attention in a campaign, using social media influencers to sell cosmetics can get you there. More than half of the respondents agreed that the strategy to use an influencer on social media to advertise cosmetic products had worked in arousing consumers' curiosity (Santi Duwi Putri Nugroho, 2022).

8.4 Enhancing the Emotional Bond with Consumers

Micro-influencers and micro-communities form based on personal routines, issues with skin types and beauty journeys. The emotional connects thereby established not only deeper association of consumers with the endorsed brand but also act as indirect enhancers of brand relationship. Micro-influencers were seen as more authentic than celebrities in the marketing of their products. The reason for such large percentage is because micro influencers are way ahead when it comes to establishing authenticity and credibility among their audiences, an important detail that ties into influencer marketing campaigns.

It also revealed that exposure to influencer posts led to a change in brand perception the same irrespective of whether it was a micro-influencer or celebrity. This probably indicates that the image consumers have of the brands is affected in a comparable manner by both types of influencers. Although micro influencers will always be known to have lesser reaches than celebrities, a majority of them do tend to create genuine connections with their audiences' improvements when it comes to brand trust and consumer loyalty (Rishikaysh Kaakandikar, 2024).

8.5 Driving Engagement and Co-Creation

Micro-influencer campaigns encourage:

- Feedback: Comments, likes, and shares.
- User-generated content (UGC).
- Trends that are participatory (e.g. GRWM, get ready with me)

This kind of engagement builds a higher and livelier brand picture.

9. Managerial Implications

Cosmetic brands should:

- Get engaged with niche micro influencers that match the brand character.
- Zero in on real stories instead of scripted promotions
- Use UGC and interactive formats, including tutorials and beauty challenges.

- Use engagement metrics — to track consumer behaviour
- Incorporating collaborations for long-term increase in trust transfer.

10. CONCLUSION

Theoretically, micro-influencer campaigns build a significant role in improving the brand image of cosmetic products. They are highly relatable, have deeper expertise in their niche, and have stronger bonds with the followers – all that make them more authentic communicators of Brand Value. There is a highest engagement from followers to social media influencers endorsing cosmetic brands based on these behaviours which are knowledgeable, relatable, assertive and articulate—characteristics that are very helpful in building the trust (Siti Hasnah Hassan S. Z.-K., 2021).

Influencer marketing is grounded in credibility and parasocial interaction theories, with social proof playing a supplementary role as micro-influencers impact consumer perception by adding human value to the brand to increase emotional connection and enhance symbolic consumption. This is a theoretical paper which highlights the importance of micro-influencers in modern branding practice and serves as a conceptual framework that can be used as basis for empirical studies.

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