Original Article :

The influence of social media on skin care and cosmetic choice among females in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

Background & Aims:
Social media platforms have a great role as a source of information that affect different individuals considering their skincare and cosmetic choices. The aim of this study was to determine the level of impact of using of social media on the decisions of females on their choices considering skincare and cosmetic products.

Methods:
This study was depending on a cross-sectional design that used a self-reported questionnaire which was distributed among 407 Saudi females in the period between July and September 2023. The questionnaire used aimed to assess the sociodemographic factors of the participants as well as their social media usage, and its impact on their skincare and cosmetic choices.

Results:
The study included 407 female participants with most of them aged 19-24 years (40%), residents of western region (45.5%), and single (60.4%). Moreover, 42.5 % of the participants reported that they depended on social media as their primary source of skincare and cosmetic recommendations where TikTok was the most used one. Among the participants, most of them reported minimal improvement (61.7%) and 33.2 % reported having adverse reactions upon using social media-recommended products.

Conclusion:
The current study showed that social media has a significant role in determining the decisions of Saudi females considering their choices of skincare and cosmetic products. Although the high incidence of adverse reactions of social media- recommended products, there is a moderate to high level of trust among them.

Keywords:
social media, skin care, cosmetic choice, females in Saudi Arabia

Introduction:

Dermatology, also known as "skin care," has become a prominent topic on social networking platforms [1]. In which agencies now have a diverse range of promotional outlets for their products. Influencer marketing may be a less expensive advertising approach because it allows you to directly reach your target audience[2]. A study of social media's impact on purchasing decisions is crucial to advancing best practices in marketing and consumer-brand interaction strategies [3].

Social media has become one of the most popular marketing tactics due to its low cost, large social networking, and ease of client communication [4]. The majority of users on the most popular social media platforms in Saudi Arabia are between the ages of 25 and 34. These sites include YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (X), which are also significantly more popular than TikTok and Snapchat [5].

According to current findings, there is a positive relationship between the tolerance and desire for cosmetic treatments and the use of appearance-focused social media sites like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, whether active or passive [5]. The skincare market is growing faster than the rest of the beauty sector. The market for cosmetic skin care products is expected to increase by $45 billion between 2018 and 2023, with an annual growth rate of approximately 6% [6].

A cross-sectional study was undertaken in Indonesia to investigate the relationship between user-generated content and purchase intention for cosmetic items. The findings revealed that the majority of those influenced were females aged 18 to 30 who were undergraduates [7]. In 2021, a cross-sectional study was conducted in India to determine the impact of marketing on skincare products. In an online poll of 200 Indian participants, the results showed that 145 (72.5%) of those aged 21 to 40 were influenced by advertisements for cosmetic products [8].

A study has been published in Georgia on the influence of social platforms on skin care in 2022, and the end result showed that dermatologists are no longer the only patients' guides, and that this position has been gradually replaced by social platforms and social media influencers, resulting in a wide range of people being encouraged to use other skin care alternatives [9]. A study of clients' inclinations to purchase cosmetics items impacted by both attractiveness and trustworthiness found that there is no significant difference in the attractiveness and believability of social media influencers between men and women [10].

Various cosmetic and beauty goods can be

sold after being advertised on social media platforms. Although social media has grown in popularity and has an impact on our lives, there has been little research on its impact on cosmetic and dermatological product purchasing decisions. A small number of studies have been conducted on a sample of Saudi adult females.

This study aimed to assess the effect of social media on the choice of skincare and cosmetics among females in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Subjects and methods:

From July to September 2023, a cross-sectional survey took place in Saudi Arabia. Excluded from the research were non-Saudi females, men, and those not participating; the study included Saudi national women who accepted to take part. Applying a formula with a 95 percent confidence interval, a standard deviation of 1.96, and a maximum acceptable marginal error of 0.05, the sample size was ascertained from the Raosoft website. Using these criteria, the smallest needed sample size came up to 384 people.

An online survey gathered the data. After two expert dermatologists reviewed the survey, it was validated in pilot research involving 20 people for reliability assessment. Via the WhatsApp platform, the survey was sent out as a Google Form. Two parts made up the survey: the first part comprised seven questions on sociodemographic attributes including nationality, gender, city of residence, age, marital status, educational level, and occupation. There were 18 inquiries in the second part meant to evaluate how much social media affects women's cosmetic choices from Saudi Arabia.

The study was ethically approved by the Saudi Arabia research ethics committee of New Najran General Hospital – Najran Health Cluster. The approval was granted under IRB Log Number: 2025-28E on May 19, 2025, in accordance with International Council for Harmonisation - Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP) guidelines. The analysis of the data was carried out with SPSS version 26 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.). Chi-squared test ($\chi 2$) was used to investigate the links between variables in quantitative data expressed in numbers and percentages. A p-value below 0. 05 was seen to be statistically significant.

Results:

(Table 1) Of the studied 407 participants, 40% had an age ranging from 19-24 years, 45.5% were residents from the western region of Saudi Arabia, and 60.4% were single. The majority (64.9%) had a bachelor degree of education and 48.6% were students.

Table 1: Distribution of the participants according to their socio-demographic characteristics (No.: 407).

Variable	No. (%)
Age (years)	
≤18	**48 (11.8)**
19-24	**163 (40)**
25-29	**53 (13)**
30-34	**40 (9.8)**
35-39	**20 (4.9)**
≥40	**83 (20.4)**
Region of residence	
Southern Region	**71 (17.4)**
Eastern Region	**127 (31.2)**
Northern Region	**8 (2)**
Western Region	**185 (45.5)**
Central Region	**16 (3.9)**
Marital status	
Widow	**8 (2)**
Single	**246 (60.4)**
Married	**143 (35.1)**
Divorced	**10 (2.5)**
Educational level	
Middle school or less	**8 (2)**
Secondary school	**112 (27.5)**
Bachelor degree	**264 (64.9)**
Master/doctoral degrees	**23 (5.7)**
Occupational status	
Free businesses	**13 (3.2)**
Student	**198 (48.6)**
Unemployed	**92 (22.6)**
Retired	**20 (4.9)**
Employed	**84 (20.6)**

(Table 2) Of the participants, 22.1% were suffering from dermatological diseases, 44% had a combination skin type, and 56.8% visited a dermatologist for cosmetic dermatology care. The majority (91.6%) would seek dermatologists in future if needed, and 69.3% spent ≤500 SR on cosmetic products every month. For most of the participants (79.1%) the price of cosmetic or beauty products affect their decision to buy it. Almost one quarter of the participants (25.6%) believe that social media is an enough source for information and the majority (83%) thought that social

media have both good and bad impact on society. About 76.9% thought that cosmetic specialized accounts on social media are helpful (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of participants according to dermatological diseases, skin type, monthly money spent on cosmetic products, effect of price on buying decision, if social media is an enough source for information and its impact on society (No.: 407).

Variable	No. (%)
Do you suffer from dermatological disease?	
No	**317 (77.9)**
Yes	**90 (22.1)**
What is your skin type?	
Oily	**99 (24.3)**
Normal	**94 (23.1)**
Combination	**179 (44)**
I do not know	**35 (8.6)**
Do you ever visit a dermatologist for cosmetic dermatology care?	
No	**176 (43.2)**
Yes	**231 (56.8)**
Would you seek dermatologist in future if needed?	
No	**34 (8.4)**
Yes	**373 (91.6)**
How much will you spend on cosmetic products every month? (SR)	
≤500	**282 (69.3)**
501-1000	**70 (17.2)**
1001-1500	**21 (5.2)**
1501-2000	**12 (2.9)**
2001-2500	**8 (2)**
2501-3000	**6 (1.5)**
>3000	**8 (2)**
If you are about to buy any cosmetics or beauty products, does the price affect your decision?	
No	**85 (20.9)**
Yes	**322 (79.1)**
Do you believe that social media is an enough source for information?	
No	**303 (74.4)**
Yes	**104 (25.6)**
In your opinion, does social media have a good or bad impact on the society?	
Good impact	**42 (10.3)**
Bad impact	**27 (6.6)**
Good and bad impact	**338 (83)**
Do you think cosmetic specialized accounts on social media are helpful?	
No	**94 (23.1)**
Yes	**313 (76.9)**

(Table 3) demonstrates that 173 (42.5%) of the participants reported that their usual first skincare and cosmetics treatment approach sources is the social media recommendations. Of them (No.: 173), 62.4% reported that TikTok was the platform preferred to be used for skincare and cosmetics treatment and recommendations. The majority (68.1%) usually use the over-the-counter products as social media skincare and cosmetics treatment recommendation and 61.7% found minimal improvement in their skin. Almost one third of the particpants (No 407) (33.2%) experienced adverse reactions based on the social media recommendations for skincare and cosmetics treatment. Of them, 16.7% and 34.4% reported that visual presentation affects their confidence in information related to skincare and cosmetics products in moderate and high extent, respectively. The majority (75.9%) saw the last advertisement for skincare products on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Twitter (X)), of them (29.1%) were very convince by the content.

Table 3: Influence of social media on skin care and cosmetic choices (No.: 407).

Variable	No. (%)
What are your first skincare and cosmetics treatment approach sources, usually?	
Family/friend	119 (29.2)
Social media recommendation	173 (42.5)
Medical professional	105 (25.8)
Doctor	10 (2.5)
Other	
If your answer was social media, what platform do you prefer to use for skincare and cosmetics treatment? recommendations? (No.: 173)	
TikTok	108 (62.4)
Snapchat	65 (37.5)
Instagram	64 (36.9)
YouTube	38 (21.9)
Facebook	16 (9.2)
Twitter (X)	53 (30.6)
WhatsApp	10 (5.7)

What is the social media skincare and cosmetics treatment recommendation you use usually?	
Self-made recipe	119 (29.2)
Drink a lot of water	218 (53.6)
Diet modification	147 (36.1)
Supplement use	109 (26.8)
Over-the-counter product	277 (68.1)
Exercise modification	115 (28.3)
Did you find any changes in your skin?	
Minimal improvement	251 (61.7)
Significant improvement	103 (25.3)
No, I did not find any change	53 (13)
Have you experienced any adverse reactions based on the social media recommendations for skincare and cosmetics treatment?	
No	272 (66.8)
Yes	135 (33.2)
To what extent does visual presentation (photos and videos) affect your confidence in information related to skincare and cosmetics products?	
Nothing	55 (13.5)
A little	144 (35.4)
Moderate	140 (34.4)
Highly	68 (16.7)
Where did you see the last advertisement for skincare products?	
Online (banner, advertisement)	44 (10.8)
TV/radio	11 (2.7)
Newspaper/magazine	14 (3.4)
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Twitter (X)).	309 (75.9)
I did not see any new ads	29 (7.1)
Did this ad convince you? (No.: 378)	
Very convinced	110 (29.1)
Not convinced	130 (34.3)
I do not know	138 (36.5)

(Figure 1 and 2) illustrate that 40.8% of the participants had a moderate / high trust in information received from social media. While 51.1% reported that visual presentation (photos and videos) affects their confidence in information related to skincare and cosmetics products in a moderate or high extent, respectively.

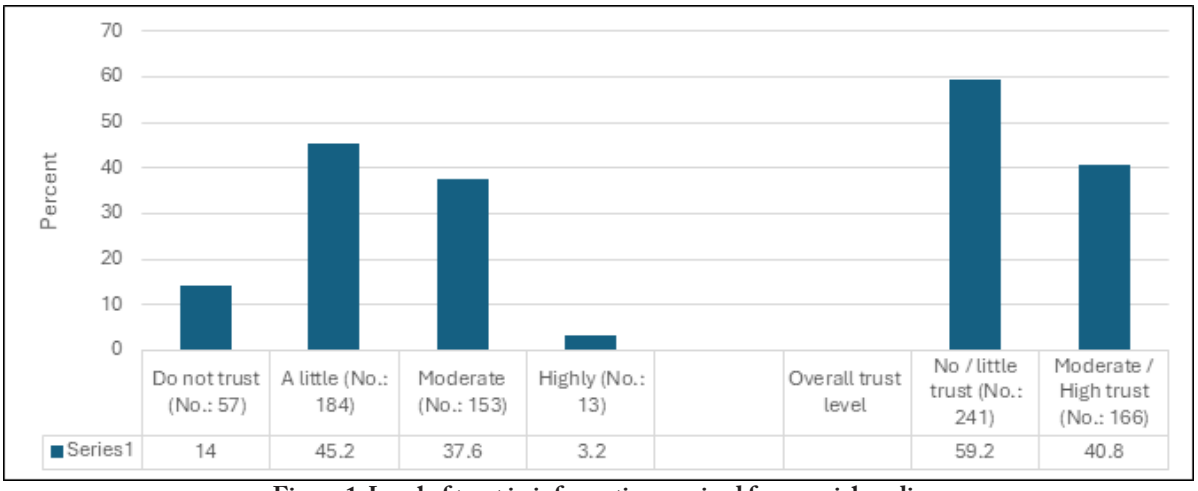


Figure 1: Level of trust in information received from social media.

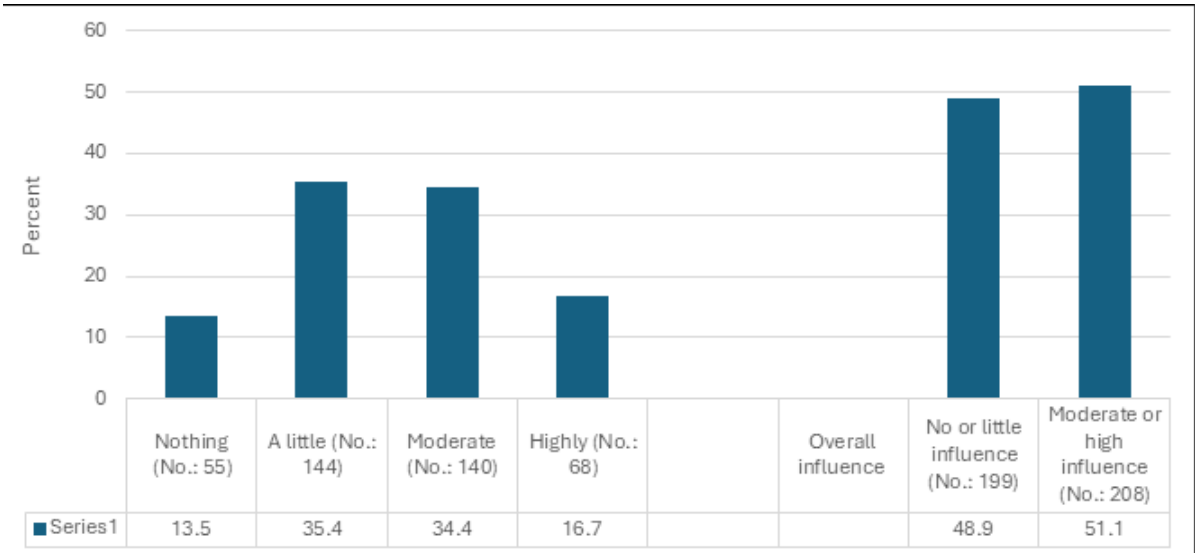


Figure 2: Effect of visual presentation (photos and videos) on participants' confidence in information related to skincare and cosmetics products.

(Table 4) shows that despite the prevalence of moderate / high social media information trust level was higher among participants aged 19-24 years (44.6%), Western Region residents (47.6%), single (60.8%), those having a bachelor degree of education (65.1%) and students (52.4%), all these associations were not significant (p=>0.05). At the same time the moderate / high social media information trust level in using skincare and cosmetics treatment and recommendations was higher among participants using TikTok (61.9%), Snapchat (40%), YouTube (22.9%), Facebook (10.5%), however, these associations were non-significant (p=>0.05).

(Table 4) also demonstrates similar results, where a non-significant relationship was found between social media information influence and their sociodemographic characters, and social media platforms preferred to use for skincare and cosmetics treatment and recommendations (p=>0.05).

Table 4: Relationship between social media information trust level and influence on the participants and patients' sociodemographic characters and social media platforms preferred to use for skincare and cosmetics treatment and recommendations (No.: 407).

Variable	Social media information trust level		χ2	p-value	Influenced by social media		χ2	p-value
	No / little trust (No.: 166) No. (%)	Moderate / High trust No. (%)			No or little influence No. (%)	Moderate or high influence No. (%)		
Age (years)			3.62	0.604			7.91	0.161
≤18	29 (12)	19 (11.4)	Reference		24 (12.1)	24 (11.5)	Reference	
19-24	89 (36.9)	74 (44.6)	1.3 (0.65-2.44)	0.476	73 (36.7)	90 (43.3)	1.23 (0.65-2.35)	0.524
25-29	36 (14.9)	17 (10.2)	0.72 (0.31-1.6)	0.432	23 (11.6)	30 (14.4)	1.30 (0.59-2.86)	0.506
30-34	23 (9.5)	17 (10.2)	1.1 (0.48-2.64)	0.782	23 (11.6)	17 (8.2)	0.74 (0.32-1.72)	0.483
35-39	13 (5.4)	7 (4.2)	0.82 (0.27-2.43)	0.723	7 (3.5)	13 (6.3)	1.86 (0.63-5.5)	0.261
≥40	51 (21.2)	32 (19.3)	0.96 (0.46-1.93)	0.907	49 (24.6)	34 (16.3)	0.69 (0.33-1.41)	0.317
Region of residence			4.9	0.297			1.58	0.811
Southern Region	50 (20.7)	21 (12.7)	Reference		38 (19.1)	33 (15.9)	Reference	
Eastern Region	71 (29.5)	56 (33.7)	1.8 (1.0-3.5)	0.045*	60 (30.2)	67 (32.2)	1.3 (0.72-2.30)	0.397
Northern Region	4 (1.7)	4 (2.4)	2.4 (0.54-10.4)	0.249	4 (2)	4 (1.9)	1.15 (0.26-4.96)	0.850
Western Region	106 (44)	79 (47.6)	1.77 (0.98-3.2)	0.055*	91 (45.7)	94 (45.2)	1.2 (0.68-2.05)	0.535
Central Region	10 (4.1)	6 (3.6)	1.4 (0.46-4.4)	0.537	6 (3)	10 (4.8)	1.91 (0.63-5.85)	0.252
Marital status			3.89	0.273			2.39	0.495
Widow	5 (2.1)	3 (1.8)	0.86 (0.20-3.68)	0.841	6 (3)	2 (1)	0.30 (0.06-1.5)	0.148
Single	145 (60.2)	101 (60.8)	Reference		117 (58.8)	129 (62)	Reference	
Married	88 (36.5)	55 (33.1)	0.89 (0.59-1.36)	0.615	71 (35.7)	72 (34.6)	0.92 (0.61-1.38)	0.691
Divorced	3 (1.2)	7 (4.2)	3.3 (0.84-13.3)	0.085	5 (2.5)	5 (2.4)	0.91 (0.25-3.2)	0.879
Educational level			2.5	0.475			1.27	0.735
Middle school or less	5 (2.1)	3 (1.8)	Reference		5 (2.5)	3 (1.4)	Reference	
Secondary school	63 (26.1)	49 (29.5)	1.3 (0.29-5.7)	0.731	55 (27.6)	57 (27.4)	1.73 (0.39-7.57)	0.469
Bachelor degree	156 (64.7)	108 (65.1)	1.15 (0.27-4.9)	0.847	126 (63.3)	138 (66.3)	1.83 (0.43-7.8)	0.416
Master/doctoral degrees	17 (7.1)	6 (3.6)	0.58 (0.12-3.24)	0.542	13 (6.5)	10 (4.8)	1.3 (0.24-6.7)	0.768
Occupational status			2.85	0.583			3.83	0.429

Free businesses	9 (3.7)	4 (2.4)	Reference		7(3.5)	6 (2.9)	Reference	
Student	111 (46.1)	87 (52.4)	1.76 (0.53-5.9)	0.358	90 (45.2)	108 (51.9)	1.4 (0.45-4.3)	0.558
Unemployed	54 (22.4)	38 (22.9)	1.6 (0.45-5.5)	0.471	51 (25.6)	41 (19.7)	0.94 (0.29-3.0)	0.914
Retired	14 (5.8)	6 (3.6)	0.96 (0.21-4.39)	0.963	12 (6)	8 (3.8)	0.77 (0.18-3.2)	0.727
Employed	53 (22)	31 (18.7)	1.3 (0.37-4.6)	0.669	39 (19.6)	45 (21.6)	1.34 (0.42-4.3)	0.619
If your first skincare and cosmetics treatment approach source is social media, what is the platform you prefer to use for skincare and cosmetics treatment? recommendations? (No.: 173)								
TikTok	43 (59.7)	65 (61.9)	0.08	0.77	31 (52.5)	77 (65.3)	2.67	0.102
Snapchat	23 (33.8)	42 (40)	1.48	0.477	26 (45.6)	39 (33.6)	2.37	0.305
Instagram	26 (38.2)	38 (36.2)	0.07	0.786	17 (19.8)	47 (40.5)	1.87	0.171
YouTube	14 (20.6)	24 (22.9)	0.12	0.725	12 (21.1)	26 (22.4)	0.04	0.839
Facebook	5 (7.4)	11 (10.5)	0.48	0.489	4 (7)	12 (10.3)	0.5	0.478
Twitter (X)	22 (32.4)	31 (29.2)	0.18	0.664	16 (27.6)	37 (31.9)	0.33	0.56
WhatsApp	5 (7.4)	5 (4.8)	0.5	0.476	4 (6)	6 (5.2)	0.23	0.625

Discussion:

With almost half of the participants using social media sites for their first approach to skin care and cosmetic treatments, the results of this research emphasize the significant impact of social media on female Saudi Arabians. This is in line with worldwide patterns in which social media is now a primary source of health and beauty knowledge [9,11,12]. The dependence of the participants on social media platforms especially TikTok and snapchat in having information on cosmetic products indicates the importance of visual content in determining the perceptions and decisions of the female individuals considering cosmetics and skincare usage[13,14]. In addition, 51.1 % of the participants showed that visual presentations of the products had moderate to high impact on their confidence considering information related to the products which is also reported in previous studies which indicated that visual presentation as photos and videos have a significant impact on enhancement of the perceived credibility of social media content[15,16].

Particularly among younger people aged 19–24 years, residents of the Western region, and students, the strong confidence in social media recommendations suggests the growing importance of digital platforms as a main information sources. Studies on

the behavior of digital natives find that this group shows more social media activity[17,18]. Notwithstanding this confidence, the research showed worries about the efficacy and safety of these suggestions; 61.7% noticed little improvement in their skin quality and 33.2% reported side effects. These results are in line with Bressler M. 's observations which showed the potential risks of information provided at social media particularly considering specialized knowledge as dermatology and cosmetics[19].

Although most of the respondents showed medium or high confidence in social media information, there was no statistically relevant link between this trust level and sociodemographic features or favored platforms. Earlier research supporting this view contradicts this result that age, education, and profession might vary the level of faith put in social media posts[13,20]. One possible reason for the lack of strong correlations in this analysis could be the uniformity of the sample, particularly given the high number of people with a bachelor's degree and the focus of participants in one age group.

Furthermore, the study found that price was a major determinant in purchasing decisions for 79.1% of participants. This finding aligns with research conducted by Tajeddini K et al. (2014), which highlighted the role of cost considerations in consumer behavior, particularly in the beauty and cosmetics sector [21]. Despite the financial considerations, a significant majority of participants (91.6%) expressed willingness to consult a dermatologist in the future, indicating a preference for professional guidance alongside social media recommendations. This finding reflects a growing awareness of the limitations of non-expert advice and the importance of evidence-based care in dermatology [22].

Social media platforms like TikTok and Snapchat were the most popular sources for skincare and cosmetic advice, with TikTok being the primary platform for 62.4% of participants. This finding corroborates recent studies that identify TikTok as a leading platform for health-related content dissemination due to its visual appeal and widespread user base[12,23,24]. However, the prevalence of adverse reactions and minimal effectiveness of recommendations calls for increased regulation and quality control of content shared on these platforms [25,26]. The findings also emphasize the need for healthcare professionals to leverage social media platforms to provide accurate and reliable information, as recommended by literature review[27–29].

A variety of psychological and behavioral factors explain why participants place trust in social media for skin care information. One significant driver is

the "halo effect," a cognitive bias where individuals assume that influencers or celebrities who excel in one area—such as appearance or social status—are also credible authorities on skin care, leading users to trust their recommendations without critical evaluation[10]. Additionally, social media's highly visual and interactive nature—particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram—enhances the perceived authenticity and relatability of content, making it feel more trustworthy than traditional advertisements[29]. Social proof also plays a critical role: when users see products endorsed by people they admire or by large communities, they experience a sense of validation and are more likely to believe in the efficacy of those products. For many, social media fosters a sense of community and shared experience, which lowers skepticism and increases openness to peer and influencer advice[6]. The pursuit of aspirational beauty ideals, combined with the FOMO (fear of missing out) effect and immediate access to before-and-after visuals, further motivates trust and drives behavior, often at the expense of verifying credentials or underlying evidence. Lastly, younger users, in particular, may conflate popularity and engagement (likes, comments, shares) with accuracy, blurring the line between credible information and persuasive marketing. These intertwined social and psychological processes help account for the elevated trust users place in social media for skin care decision-making[7,9].

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of an online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, may have introduced selection bias, as it primarily reached participants who are active on these platforms and may not represent the general female population in Saudi Arabia. Second, the reliance on self-reported data could have introduced response bias, as participants may have over- or under-reported their behaviors, trust levels, or experiences with skincare and cosmetic products. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between social media influence and participants' skincare and cosmetic decisions. Lastly, the study's findings may not be generalizable beyond the Saudi Arabian context, as cultural and regional factors likely influence social media usage and consumer behavior. Future research should aim to address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and mixed-method approaches to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

A key recommendation for health professionals and policymakers is to actively engage with social media platforms to improve the quality of skin care information available. Dermatologists and public health authorities should leverage popular channels like TikTok and Snapchat to deliver accurate, evidence-based content through visually appealing formats tailored to digital natives. Collaborations with credible influencers could enhance reach and trustworthiness. Policymakers should implement stricter regulations to monitor and control misleading or harmful advertisements, including the use of AI-generated deceptive content. Social media companies can introduce stronger content verification protocols and user education tools to help differentiate expert advice from unverified recommendations. Additionally, professional bodies should promote public awareness campaigns emphasizing the importance of consulting qualified dermatologists over solely relying on social media, reinforcing the limitations and risks of self-diagnosis and unverified online treatments. This integrated approach can help mitigate the risks of misinformation, adverse effects, and consumer dissatisfaction in skincare decisions informed by social media.

In conclusion, while social media serves as a significant source of skincare and cosmetic information for females in Saudi Arabia, the findings underscore the need for caution when relying on these platforms for health-related decisions. The reported adverse effects and limited improvements in skin conditions highlight the importance of professional consultation and evidence-based practices in dermatology. A key factor contributing to dissatisfaction among users is the reliance on unverified sources, often promoted by influencers and individuals without medical qualifications. Many of these endorsements come from social media personalities rather than certified dermatologists, leading to misinformation and ineffective treatments. Additionally, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in deceptive advertising—such as generating videos of consultants seemingly endorsing products—further complicates the issue by misleading consumers. This highlights the necessity for individuals to seek skincare advice from credible, qualified professionals rather than AI-generated or manipulated content. Future research could focus on developing strategies to enhance the accuracy of social media content and improve public awareness about the risks of self-diagnosis and treatment based on online recommendations.

Post conclusion Information:

Acknowledgement : Non

Consent of Patient:

Written informed consent has been obtained from all participants involved in this study.

Ethical Approval:

The ethical approval for the study titled "The influence of social media on skin care and cosmetic choice among females in Saudi Arabia" was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at New Najran General Hospital – Najran Health Cluster. The approval was granted under IRB Log Number: 2025-28E on May 19, 2025, in accordance with ICH-GCP guidelines.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this manuscript.

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