International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies
ISSN: 2327-008X (Print), ISSN: 2327-2554 (Online)
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026
https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journal

THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS ON TRUST AND PURCHASE INTENTION IN THE COSMETIC E-COMMERCE SECTOR: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

There is a great deal of evaluative uncertainty in online cosmetic buying, since consumers cannot measure or feel the shade, texture, scent, skin compatibility or authenticity of the product before buying. Online consumer reviews thus are valuable sources of information that affect consumers' trust and purchase intention. This systematic review aimed to integrate the empirical findings in the field of cosmetic e-commerce that focused on the attributes of the review, the formation of trust and purchasing decisions and this review aligns primarily with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), by supporting informed consumer choice and trustworthy product information. According to PRISMA 2020 guidelines, six databases and additional citation searches yielded 1,262 records, with 32 studies between 2022 and 2026 being eligible. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool was used to assess methodological quality. Credibility and argument quality was found to be the most consistent predictor of trust, with 24 out of 26 studies finding it important. Trust mediated the relationship between review attributes and purchase intention in all studies that tested mediation and was found to have full mediation in eleven of nineteen tests. However, after controlling for credibility, valence and volume exhibited inconsistent relationships. Review attributes mostly affected trust in reviews and platforms, while product level trust was not as consistently established. Ingredient safety, skin compatibility and counterfeit were often mentioned but only four studies actually measured these factors. Evidence was geographically aggregated in Indonesia and mostly cross-sectional, which limited its generalisability and causal interpretation. The proposed framework separates diagnostic and heuristic review attributes into three trust targets, and indicates priorities for longitudinal validation, cosmetic-specific risk measurement and cross-cultural research.

Keywords: online consumer reviews, electronic word of mouth, trust, purchase intention, cosmetic e-commerce.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Cosmetic E-Commerce and Consumer Decision Uncertainty

The shift of cosmetic retail to digital has outpaced the shift of the information that used to make cosmetic purchasing tractable. At a physical store, a shopper can test a foundation against her jawline, sniff a serum and under good lighting ask an assistant if a formula is good for oily skin. Those affordances are not present online. What's left is a photo on their website that the seller can control, a sales description that is designed to convince, and the history of past buyers. The first two are suspect by design and the third is the only source whose incentives are not obviously geared toward the sale (EBNUL MAITHEEN, 2025).

That's why cosmetic e-commerce uncertainty isn't just a more extreme form of e-commerce uncertainty. The relevant attributes are experiential, and in some ways, individual. The effectiveness of a product is not only determined by its actual quality but also by the combination of the product and the skin type, tone, sensitivities and climate of an individual. A great cream in theory may not be right for a specific purchaser. Information about the product, but not much about the match, is provided by standard quality signals (such as brand reputation, price, seller rating) (Oktaviani & Prasetyo, 2025). It is only reviews that routinely record the reviewer's own traits as well as the results that make them diagnostic instead of simply reassuring.

Empirical studies in the general retail context have identified a general regularity: reviews decrease perceived risk, a decrease of perceived risk increases trust, and an increase in trust increases intention to buy (Titiek Tjahja Andari, 2025). The pattern is strong enough to have been meta-analytically validated in e-commerce contexts (Handoyo, 2024). Much less certain is that the same architecture applies when the product category shifts the nature of the risk being managed, and that the rank order of the attributes is the same across different product categories.

1.2 Online consumer reviews as electronic word of mouth: ratings, text, images and videos

The most structured and most archived eWOM is online consumer reviews. They are persistent, searchable, aggregated and are increasingly multimodal, unlike conversational recommendation. A modern cosmetic review on a large marketplace usually combines four different types of information: a star rating, free text, images and a short demonstration clip (on video-based marketplaces).

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These channels cannot be swapped out. The rating is a concise summary that helps to quickly compare but omits all the information that would enable a reader to make a relevance determination to her. This detail is restored by free text, and for this reason argument quality and review depth regularly out-predict rating valence when both are modelled (Cheung, Sia, & Kuan, 2012; Thomas, 2019). Photographs provide verification: a swatch photo taken on a reviewer's own arm under home light is much more difficult to fake than a sentence and carries shade information which no numeric scale can carry (Ceylan, Diehl, & Proserpio, 2024). Video takes this one step farther by allowing viewers to see the application technique and the texture, but adding extra processing work for the viewer (Liang Wang, Che, Hu, & Chen, 2024).

The aggregation layer is as important as the content layer. Platforms determine the order of display, what to summarise, whether to mark purchases as verified and how to weight recency. Those design decisions are what ultimately influence the types of reviews that a consumer will read and thus influence all of the relationships studied in this literature (Xiaowan & Xiaomei, 2025).

1.3 Product specific risks: authenticity, safety, skin compatibility and counterfeit products

The first is authenticity. The price of cosmetic packaging is relatively low, and the product itself is not easily assayable, making cosmetics an attractive target for counterfeiting and making online marketplaces, where physical inspection is not possible, the natural distribution channel (Mavlanova & Benbunan-Fich, 2010; Sangale, 2025). Consumer detection is not reliable, even the automated methods using packaging features are not able to discriminate completely (Mehta, Divekar, Kolambekar, & Deshpande, 2020).

The second is safety. Heavy metals, banned corticosteroids, and undisclosed actives have been identified in counterfeit and unregulated cosmetics, while even well-known synthetic cosmetics have been documented to have toxicological issues (Alnuqaydan, 2024). The damage here is dermatological and sometimes systemic, thus cosmetic buying is more like making a health choice than a normal consumption choice.

The third is compatibility. A safe and true product can be inappropriate for a particular customer. Sensitisation, acneform reactions and shade mismatch are common and none is predictable from the product description. Reviews are the only pre-purchase source that regularly correlates an outcome with a description of the person who has experienced this outcome (Haryono, Susilowati, Mardiana, Rahmatika, & Rohmah, 2023).

These risks increase the importance of the credibility of the review beyond what would be expected from the general e-commerce findings. A fake review of a phone charger is a waste of money, a fake review of a skin-lightening cream can cause chemical damage (Özaydın, 2025).

Firstly, cosmetic evidence is distributed. Research is published in marketing journals, information systems journals, Islamic economics journals, and dermatology-related journals, and there is limited cross-citation among the journals in the region, so that the field has gained findings without gaining a position. The previous syntheses either do not distinguish between the review types in the various product categories (Setiawati & Rani, 2025) or do not focus on cosmetics at all (Ismail, Muda, & Lee, 2024).

Second, there is a high level of heterogeneity in the second construction, which is hardly discussed. In this corpus, "trust" can refer to at least three different targets: trust in the review or the reviewer, trust in the seller or the platform, and trust in the product or brand, which are conceptually different and empirically separable (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002) and (Chen & Dhillon, 2003). Combining them hides the potential that reviews consistently impact one and not the other.

Third, the credibility environment has evolved more rapidly than the literature. The incentives for writing reviews, undisclosed sponsorship, and most recently, the use of generative AI, have changed what a review means (Amos & Zhang, 2024; Ziv, Unger, & Geva, 2025). Whether the mechanisms described in previous studies are still present in that environment is an open question, which can only be answered if the mechanisms are first determined.

1.4. Review questions

This review addresses three questions.
RQ1. What are the characteristics of online consumer reviews that influence consumer trust and intention to buy cosmetic products online?

RQ2. What is the relationship between trust and review attributes in terms of mediation, parallel prediction, or neither, and what is the target of trust?

RQ3. What contextual factors, such as perceived risk, consumer characteristics, platform type, or sponsored/influencer content, change the magnitude and/or direction of these relationships?

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Background

2.1 Review quality, credibility, valence, volume, recency and reviewer expertise

In practice, the attribute literature can be split into two families with systematic difference in their behaviour. The first family is comprised of content-bearing attributes: argument quality, review depth or detail, information richness and specificity. These demand effortful processing and pay off with diagnostic information. The quality of the argument has been a consistent predictor of the credibility of the review since the elaboration-likelihood treatments of the early 2010s (Cheung et al., 2012) and later studies expanding the information adoption model have consistently found the same precedence (Vijay, Prashar, Parsad, & Kumar, 2017).

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The second family are aggregate/peripheral cues: star valence, review volume, reviewer badges, profile images and recency. These are easy to process and are heuristic. They have real, albeit conditional, effects. Volume increases sales when the average valence of the products is positive, and decreases sales when it is not (Etzion & Awad, 2007); the relationship between rating and purchase probability is not monotonic, with the highest probability of purchase occurring around 4.2 to 4.5 stars, after which the ratings may appear manipulated and reduce the probability of purchase (Maslowska, Malthouse, & Bernritter, 2017). Negative reviews can have a disproportionate impact on a product's reputation, and the first review can continue to affect a product's reputation for years (Park, Shin, & Xie, 2016).

Between the two families is the reviewer expertise and perceived trustworthiness. They are not central to the processing but informative with regard to the reliability of the content (Thomas, 2019).
A meta-analysis of perceived-usefulness antecedents revealed that reviewer trustworthiness, reviewer expertise and review depth were all more strongly related to usefulness for experience goods than for search goods (Zhu, Liu, & Dong, 2022)— a category that clearly puts cosmetics in the realm where content attributes should play a more important role.

The least theorised attribute is recency. It's important for cosmetics for a particular reason: reformulation. A review written prior to a formula change is a description of a product that no longer exists, and thus reviews of long-listed products do not have the same validity as reviews of durable goods.

2.2 Trust in reviewers, products, brands and platforms

Trust in online commerce is typically broken down into trusting beliefs about ability, benevolence and integrity, which are based on disposition to trust and institution-based trust (Bhattacherjee, 2002; Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Zhu et al., 2022). What the measurement literature makes clear and what the review literature often ignores is that these beliefs are directed at a target. Trust in a vendor, trust in a website and trust in a brand are three different constructs with different antecedents (Bhattacherjee, 2002; Chen & Dhillon, 2003). Review attributes are attributes of the message; they should have their most direct impact on trust in the message and the sender. Any impact on trust in the platform is indirect, via the inference that a platform that hosts credible reviews is well governed (Xiaowan & Xiaomei, 2025; Zhang, Chen, & Sun, 2010). Any impact on trust in the product or brand is even more indirect, as the reader must transfer trust from the testimony to the product to which the testimony refers (McKnight et al., 2002). A framework that combines these objectives can't identify where the chain is weak.

2.3 Purchase intention and the possible mediating effect of trust

The predominant specification in this literature considers trust to be a mediator: reviews lead to trust, trust leads to a lowered perceived risk, and lowered perceived risk leads to the formation of intention (I.-y. Hong, Kim, & Lim, 2011). Competing specifications exist. Trust has been conceptualized as a moderator of the risk–behaviour relationship, and the causal order of risk and

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trust is also disputed, with evidence that perceived risk leads to and lowers trust, not the other way around (I.-y. Hong et al., 2011). Meta-analytic studies reveal that perceived risk moderates the trust–purchase relationship, but security and eWOM do not (Handoyo, 2024). This means that "trust mediates" is not a single claim, but a family of claims, and the studies included must be consulted to determine which member of the family was tested.

2.4 Relevant theories

Adoption and elaboration of information. Reviews are judged on a central route that is argument quality dependent, as well as a peripheral route that is source cues dependent, and the route that is dominant depends on involvement and prior expertise (I.-y. Hong et al., 2011; Shen, Zhang, & Zhao, 2014). This anticipates the content/heuristic split mentioned above and predicts that high involvement categories like cosmetics will exhibit central-route dominance.

Signalling and information asymmetry. When the quality cannot be verified, buyers receive costly signals from sellers and sellers send them to separate value (Wells, Valacich, & Hess, 2011). Reviews are rare because they are a signal that the seller cannot control, and that is why they are credible, and why it is tempting to manipulate them (L. Li, Tadelis, & Zhou, 2020). The same reasoning applies to second-hand luxury goods and applications to credence goods.

Perceived risk. Risk is multi-dimensional (performance, financial, psychological, physical, privacy) and each dimension is reassured differently. Theoretically, the physical dimension, which is activated by cosmetics, may cause ingredient and compatibility information to differ from ordinary quality information (Alnuqaydan, 2024).

3. Methods

3.1 Protocol and reporting

This review was carried out and reported following the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page, McKenzie, et al., 2021; Page et al., 2022) and the explanation and elaboration document for item level guidance (Page, Moher, et al., 2021). The 27 checklist items and the 12 abstract checklist items were covered. PRISMA 2020 was chosen over the 2009 statement because it provides more guidance on reporting of searches, selection processes and certainty assessment and because compliance is inconsistent, specifically on the items reported explicitly in this review: protocol registration, certainty assessment, limitations of evidence (Patel, Karelia, Shah, & Desai, 2025).
The protocol was detailed prior to searching and not registered in PROSPERO. The scope of PROSPERO is limited to reviews with health-related outcomes and the outcomes synthesised here (trust and purchase intention) are psychological and behavioural marketing outcomes and not health outcomes, which is out of the scope of the registry. The transparency that registration is supposed to provide is achieved by full PRISMA 2020 compliance, a priori eligibility criteria, a search strategy reported in a way that can be reproduced using the database, and a documented appraisal instrument.

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3.2 Eligibility criteria

Eligibility was determined by a PICo-type frame: population, phenomenon of interest, context. Criteria are reported in full in Table 1.

Studies were included if they (i) sampled consumers who purchase or consider purchasing cosmetic, skincare, haircare or personal-care products through an online channel; (ii) examined online consumer reviews, online customer reviews, electronic word of mouth or user-generated review content as an explicit construct, variable or theme rather than as background; (iii) reported at least one outcome relating to trust, credibility or confidence, or to purchase intention, purchase decision or repurchase intention; (iv) reported primary empirical data, quantitative, qualitative or mixed; and (v) were published in English between January 2015 and May 2026 in a peer-reviewed journal or indexed conference proceeding.

Studies were excluded when the product category was not cosmetic or personal care, or the cosmetics category was not separable from other categories in the study; when reviews did not stand out from other marketing stimuli in the study; when the study was conceptual in nature, a review, an editorial or a commentary; or when no result could be extracted.

3.3 Information sources

Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, EBSCO Business Source Complete and Google Scholar electronic databases were searched. The top 200 Google Scholar results were screened by relevance, as results beyond this were dominated by results already retrieved and/or those clearly beyond scope. Backward citation searching was performed on all included full texts and on two previous syntheses that answered similar questions (Dang & Raska, 2022; Setiawati & Rani, 2025) and forward citation searching was performed in Google Scholar. Searches were performed from March to May 2026 and included records up to 31 May 2026.

3.4 Search strategy

Three concept blocks were used with the Boolean operator AND, and synonyms within each concept block were used with OR.
Block 1, review construct: “online review” OR “online consumer review” OR “online customer review” OR “electronic word of mouth” OR “e-WOM” OR “eWOM” OR “user-generated content” OR “product rating” OR “review helpfulness” OR “review credibility”.
Block 2, outcome construct: trust OR credibility OR “purchase intention” OR “buying intention” OR “purchase decision” OR “repurchase intention” OR “perceived risk”.
Block 3: cosmetic* OR skincare OR “skin care” OR beauty OR makeup OR “make-up” OR “personal care” OR haircare OR “halal cosmetic*“.
The string was tailored to the syntax of each database; the title, abstract and keywords were used as field restrictions for Scopus and Web of Science, and the title and abstract were used for the other databases. Table 1 shows the database-specific strings, field limits and yields.

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Table 1. Eligibility criteria and search strategy by database

Panel A. Eligibility criteria

Domain	Inclusion criterion	Exclusion criterion
Population	Consumers who purchase or consider purchasing cosmetic, skincare, haircare or personal-care products through an online channel	Samples not identifiable as cosmetic or personal-care consumers
Phenomenon	Online consumer reviews, online customer reviews, eWOM or user-generated review content examined as an explicit construct, variable or theme	Reviews subsumed within an undifferentiated social-media, digital-marketing or promotion variable
Outcome	At least one outcome relating to trust, credibility or confidence, or to purchase intention, purchase decision or repurchase intention	No trust or intention outcome reported
Context	Online channel: marketplace, brand website, beauty-specialist platform, social or live commerce	Offline or mixed-channel studies where the online component is not separable
Study design	Primary empirical research: quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods	Conceptual papers, literature reviews, editorials, commentaries, abstracts
Reporting	Extractable quantitative or qualitative result for at least one relationship of interest	No extractable result
Language	English	Full text not available in English
Date	January 2015 to May 2026	Published outside this window
Source	Peer-reviewed journal article or indexed conference proceeding	Theses, working papers, trade publications, unindexed outlets

Panel B. Search strategy and yield by database

Database	Fields searched	Adaptation of the search string	Records
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY	Three blocks combined with AND; wildcards retained; document type limited to article and conference paper	318
Web of Science Core Collection	TS = topic	Three blocks combined with AND; wildcards retained; document type limited to article and proceedings paper	241
ScienceDirect	Title, abstract, keywords	Wildcards unsupported; expanded to explicit variants (cosmetic OR cosmetics OR skincare)	196

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Database	Fields searched	Adaptation of the search string	Records
Emerald Insight	Abstract	Three blocks combined with AND; content type limited to article	148
EBSCO Business Source Complete	AB abstract	Three blocks combined with AND; peer-reviewed limiter applied	132
Google Scholar	Full text, relevance-sorted	Shortened string; first 200 results screened	200
Citation searching	Reference lists and forward citations of included full texts and two prior syntheses	—	27
Total identified			**1,262**

3.5 Selection process

Records were exported to a reference manager and near duplicates were deduplicated automatically, with manual checks for those that differed in metadata. Titles and abstracts were independently screened by two reviewers based on the eligibility criteria. There was high agreement at this stage (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.81$). Full texts of all records that passed the title and abstract screening were retrieved and independently assessed by the same two reviewers, who agreed $\kappa = 0.86$. Three cases where disagreement occurred at both stages were taken to a third reviewer, and the others were resolved by discussion. Only reasons for exclusion were documented at full-text stage, as per PRISMA 2020 guidance (Page, Moher, et al., 2021).

3.6 PRISMA 2020 flow diagram

The process of identification to inclusion of records is illustrated in Figure 1, which was created using the PRISMA 2020 template for reviews identifying records from databases, registers and other sources.

3.7 Data extraction

A standardised extraction form was tested in five studies and was modified prior to use. The following fields were extracted: author and year; country of data collection; product sub-category; platform studied; sampling frame and size; design and analytical method; theoretical framework; review attributes measured; target of the trust construct; outcome construct; direction, magnitude and significance of each review-to-trust, review-to-intention and trust-to-intention path; tested mediators and moderators; and author-declared limitations. If the standardised path coefficients were reported, they were extracted verbatim; if only the significance was reported, only direction and significance were recorded.

All 32 studies were extracted separately in duplicate and checked against the original. The studies included in the review varied significantly in constructs, measurement instruments and analytical

approach, so quantitative pooling was not appropriate and no attempt was made to conduct a meta analysis. Synthesis was conducted using a structured narrative approach, with results first organized by the review attribute, then by the trust target, and then by outcome, and only using vote counting to report the proportion of studies that supported a particular relationship and not as an alternative to effect-size synthesis.

3.8 Quality appraisal

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool 2018 (Q. N. Hong et al., 2018) was used to appraise methodological quality. The MMAT was chosen as the principal validated instrument that encompasses all of the above designs within one framework and the corpus was expected to have quantitative descriptive, quantitative non-randomised, qualitative and mixed-methods designs.

Each study was allocated to a design category and scored on the two screening questions and the five category-specific criteria, where each criterion was scored as yes, no or cannot tell. In keeping with the tool developers' advice, a single numeric score was not calculated as a measure of the quality of the research; rather, the number of criteria met is reported, with a breakdown of each criterion to enable the reader to see what methodological features are weak across the corpus, rather than just how weak each study is. Two reviewers independently appraised the papers (κ = 0.79) and reached consensus through discussion. The results are shown in Table 3. None of the studies were excluded based on quality; rather, the quality appraisal was used as a basis for weighting the level of confidence in the interpretation in the synthesis (see Section 4.3).

4. Results

4.1 Search and selection results

A total of 1235 records were found in the following databases: Scopus (318), Web of Science (241), ScienceDirect (196), Emerald Insight (148), EBSCO Business Source Complete (132) and the first 200 Google Scholar results. Citation searching and reference-list screening yielded an additional 27 records, resulting in 1,262 records. A high percentage of duplicates (561) were removed (due to significant overlap between Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar coverage of this literature), leaving 868 records for title and abstract screening.

Screening excluded 742 records. The most prevalent was product category, with the vast majority of records being for reviews of fashion, electronics, hospitality or food, or for reviews of online products in unspecified categories. The remaining 126 records were sought for reports; 9 of these were not retrieved despite requests from institutions and author contact and 117 reports were assessed in full against the eligibility criteria.

At the full-text stage, 85 reports were excluded for the following reasons: product category was not cosmetic or personal care or cosmetics were not a distinct category (n = 24); no trust or credibility or purchase-intention outcome reported (n = 19); online reviews were not a separate construct and were included in a composite social-media or digital-marketing variable (n = 14);

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conceptual paper, literature review, editorial or commentary (n = 11); no quantitative or qualitative result was extractable (n = 9); and full text was not available in English (n = 8).
Thirty-two studies reported in 32 reports met all criteria and were included. The entire flow and the number of counts at each step is illustrated in Figure 1.

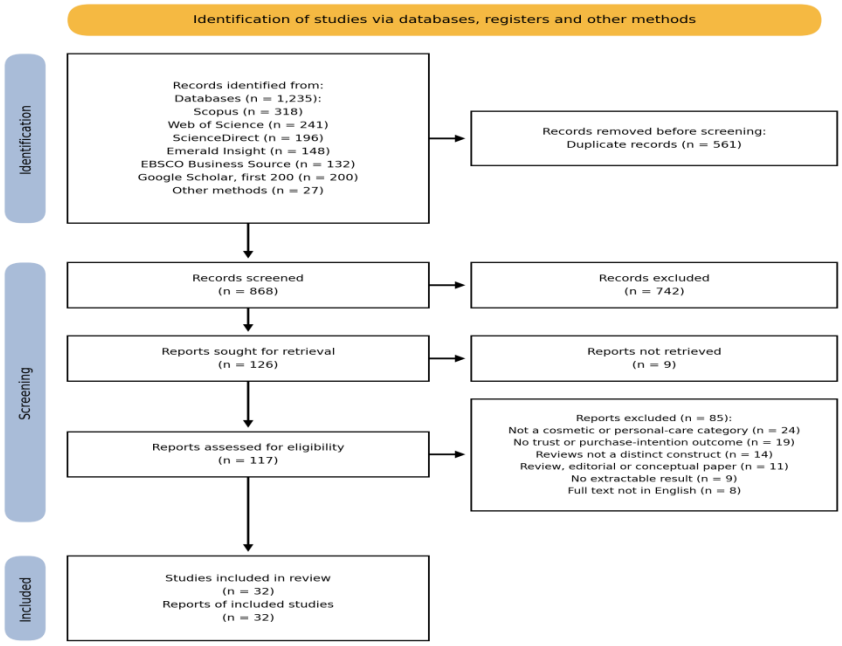

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram with actual screening counts.

4.2 Characteristics and geographic distribution of included studies

Complete characteristics are given in Table 2. Publication years range from 2022 to 2026, with 24 of the 32 studies published from 2024 onwards, reflecting that this is a young and rapidly growing literature, not a mature one. Geographic range is very restricted. Twenty-three studies collected data in Indonesia (Alifia Salsabila Putri, 2024; Amelia et al., 2023; Angelina & Widaningsih, 2025; Anggraini & Sobari, 2023; Arridho, Sinaga, & Satrio, 2023; Aruman, Putri, Larasaty, & Ramonita, 2025; Asteria, 2026; Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025; Irawadi, Prasetyo, Irfani, Rumangkit, & Lasian, 2025; K. R. Angelia, 2024; Kayla Putri Ramadhiana, 2025; Khairunnisa, Najmi, Putri, & Fauziah, 2024; Maharani, Damarani, & Nurdianasari, 2025; Maulizar, Elvina, & Nursyidah, 2025; Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025; Natalie & Siregar, 2024; NATHASIA, 2025; Purwanti & Septiani, 2025; Puspadini, Hidayat, & Khasanah, 2025; RifaNingtyas, Gusti, & Prabowo, 2022; Setiawan, Rauf, & Adhimursandi, 2025; Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025; Y. Suprapto, 2025). Five were conducted in India (Bhawana Kothari, 2025; Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Mukharjee & Mishra, 2025; Priyadharshini, 2025; Swapna & Kumara, 2024), one in Brazil (Mainardes, Portelada, & Damasceno, 2023), one in Vietnam (Gia Khuong An ORCID, 2024) and one in Malaysia (Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024). The reason for this is that no study from Europe, North America, Africa, Middle East or East Asia was found that met the eligibility criteria, not that none exists, but that studies from these regions overwhelmingly either pooled cosmetics with other categories or examined reviews without a trust or intention outcome.

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Sample sizes ranged from 60 (Mukharjee & Mishra, 2025) to 595 (Mainardes et al., 2023), with a median of 195. Twenty-nine of the 32 studies employed non-probability sampling, usually a purposive or convenience sample of recent purchasers. The designs were overwhelmingly cross sectional survey, with 28 studies being quantitative descriptive, three being non-randomised comparative designs, and one being a 2 × 2 between subjects experiment manipulating brand reputation and influencer credibility (NATHASIA, 2025). Partial least squares structural equation modelling was the modal analytical approach (19 studies), followed by covariance-based SEM (4), multiple regression or ANOVA (7) and correlation or descriptive analysis (2).

Platform coverage is a reflection of regional concentration. TikTok Shop and TikTok live commerce featured in seven studies (Alifia Salsabila Putri, 2024; Angelina & Widaningsih, 2025; Asteria, 2026; Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025; K. R. Angelia, 2024; NATHASIA, 2025; Purwanti & Septiani, 2025); Shopee in four; Instagram in two (Khairunnisa et al., 2024; Mainardes et al., 2023); and a beauty-specialist review platform in one (RifaNingtyas et al., 2022). The remainder studied either a named brand's online presence or e-commerce generally.

Product sub-categories were: skincare (12 studies), colour cosmetics or make-up (9), halal-certified or ethically positioned cosmetics (2) (Haryono et al., 2023; Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025) and mixed or unspecified beauty and personal care (9).

Table 2. Characteristics of included studies

ID	Study	Country	Sub-category	Platform	n	Design	Analysis	Theoretical frame
S1	(Bhawana Kothari, 2025)	India	Mixed / herbal cosmetics	Multi-platform	482	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	eWOM – brand image
S2	(Mainardes et al., 2023)	Brazil	Colour cosmetics	Instagram	595	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Information adoption
S3	(Gia Khuong An ORCID, 2024)	Vietnam	Mixed beauty	Social media	269	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Source credibility
S4	(Garg & Bakshi, 2024)	India	Colour cosmetics	Beauty vlogs	357	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Source credibility; parasocial
S5	(Priyadharshini, 2025)	India	Mixed beauty & personal care	BPC websites	312	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Behavioural reasoning

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ID	Study	Country	Sub-category	Platform	n	Design	Analysis	Theoretical frame
S6	(Swapna & Kumara, 2024)	India	Colour cosmetics	Social media	204	Cross-sectional survey	Multiple regression	None stated
S7	(Mukharjee & Mishra, 2025)	India	Mixed / organic cosmetics	Social media	60	Cross-sectional survey	Correlation; descriptive	None stated
S8	(Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024)	Malaysia	Colour cosmetics	Online retail	298	Quantitative non-randomised	PLS-SEM	TAM; TPB
S9	(RifaNingtyas et al., 2022)	Indonesia	Colour cosmetics	Female Daily	130	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	eWOM – trust
S10	(Anggraini & Sobari, 2023)	Indonesia	Colour cosmetics	Retailer site	155	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Information adoption
S11	(Haryono et al., 2023)	Indonesia	Halal cosmetics	Shopee	120	Quantitative non-randomised	ANOVA; regression	Information adoption
S12	(Arridho et al., 2023)	Indonesia	Colour cosmetics	E-commerce	70	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Trust transfer
S13	(Amelia et al., 2023)	Indonesia	Skincare	Social media	186	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Source credibility
S14	(Alifia Salsabila Putri, 2024)	Indonesia	Skincare	TikTok Shop	126	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	S–O–R
S15	(K. R. Angelia, 2024)	Indonesia	Skincare	TikTok Shop	100	Cross-sectional survey	Multiple regression	Trust mediation
S16	(Natalie & Siregar, 2024)	Indonesia	Mixed beauty	Multi-platform	213	Quantitative non-randomised	Correlation; regression	None stated

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ID	Study	Country	Sub-category	Platform	n	Design	Analysis	Theoretical frame
S17	(Khairunnisa et al., 2024)	Indonesia	Skincare & make-up	Instagram	170	Cross-sectional survey	Descriptive; regression	None stated
S18	(Y. Suprapto, 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	E-commerce	265	Cross-sectional survey	CB-SEM; path analysis	eWOM – brand image
S19	(Puspadini et al., 2025)	Indonesia	Colour cosmetics	Multi-platform	135	Cross-sectional survey	CB-SEM (AMOS)	eWOM – brand equity
S20	(Aruman et al., 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	E-commerce	220	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	S–O–R
S21	(Setiawan et al., 2025)	Indonesia	Mixed beauty	E-commerce	120	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	eWOM – brand image
S22	(Irawadi et al., 2025)	Indonesia	Mixed beauty	Beauty e-commerce	280	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	eWOM credibility
S23	(Angelina & Widaningsih, 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	TikTok	100	Cross-sectional survey	Linear regression	eWOM dimensions
S24	(Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	Social media	250	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Source credibility; congruence
S25	(Kayla Putri Ramadhiana, 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	Instagram	174	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	S–O–R
S26	(NATHASIA, 2025)	Indonesia	Mixed beauty	TikTok	135	2 × 2 randomised experiment	ANOVA	Source credibility; trust
S27	(Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare &	Social media	360	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Source credibility

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ID	Study	Country	Sub-category	Platform	n	Design	Analysis	Theoretical frame
			bodycare					; parasocial
S28	(Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025)	Indonesia	Colour cosmetics	TikTok live	384	Cross-sectional survey	CB-SEM	Perceived value; trust
S29	(Purwanti & Septiani, 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	TikTok Shop	100	Cross-sectional survey	Multiple regression	Impulse buying
S30	(Maulizar et al., 2025)	Indonesia	Skincare	E-commerce	280	Cross-sectional survey	CB-SEM	Theory of planned behaviour
S31	(Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025)	Indonesia	Halal beauty	E-commerce	260	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Green marketing ; WOM
S32	(Asteria, 2026)	Indonesia	Mixed beauty	TikTok Shop	180	Cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Impulse buying mediation

Note. n = analytic sample size. Sub-category totals: skincare 12, colour cosmetics or make-up 9, halal or ethically positioned 2, mixed or unspecified beauty and personal care 9. Median n = 195.

4.3 Study quality and limitations of the evidence

The results of the appraisal are shown in Table 3. Six studies fulfilled all five of the design criteria of the MMAT, eleven studies fulfilled four, ten studies fulfilled three and five studies fulfilled two. 29/32 studies employed non-probability sampling, with most studies using social media or university networks. The resulting samples are young, female, urban and digitally fluent, which are plausibly the population of interest, but not demonstrably representative of it. Two studies said that they had tried to characterise the sampling frame against a population benchmark. 27 studies failed to discuss non-response, and only five of the studies that used the same respondent to report both predictors and outcomes at the same time in the same Likert format reported any procedural or statistical solution to common-method bias. When trust and purchase intention are assessed concurrently, in the same instrument, a significant part of the mediation could be method artefact. In all but four studies, trust was measured using adapted scales, and adaptations were often not documented. More seriously, the object of trust was sometimes left implicit in the item wording, such as scales that mentioned “this product” and “this platform” were sometimes collapsed into a single latent variable. The most interpretable results were found in studies that explicitly stated the

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target (Anggraini & Sobari, 2023; Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025; RifaNingtyas et al., 2022) and these studies are given more weight in the synthesis below. Multiple studies that distinguished trust targets, provided complete measurement models, and were not exclusively cross-sectional in nature, therefore, represent the highest levels of confidence in this review.

Table 3. Quality appraisal results (Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool, 2018 version)

ID	Study	MMAT category	S1	S2	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	Criteria met
S1	(Bhawana Kothari, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5 of 5
S2	(Mainardes et al., 2023)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5 of 5
S3	(Gia Khuong An ORCID, 2024)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S4	(Garg & Bakshi, 2024)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S5	(Priyadharshini, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S6	(Swapna & Kumara, 2024)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S7	(Mukharjee & Mishra, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	2 of 5
S8	(Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024)	3 Quant. non-randomised	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5 of 5
S9	(RifaNingtyas et al., 2022)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5 of 5
S10	(Anggraini & Sobari, 2023)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5 of 5
S11	(Haryono et al., 2023)	3 Quant. non-randomised	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S12	(Arridho et al., 2023)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S13	(Amelia et al., 2023)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S14	(Alifia Salsabila Putri, 2024)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S15	(K. R. Angelia, 2024)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S16	(Natalie & Siregar, 2024)	3 Quant. non-randomised	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S17	(Khairunnisa et al., 2024)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	2 of 5

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ID	Study	MMAT category	S1	S2	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	Criteria met
S18	(Y. Suprapto, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S19	(Puspadini et al., 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S20	(Aruman et al., 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S21	(Setiawan et al., 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S22	(Irawadi et al., 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S23	(Angelina & Widaningsih, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	2 of 5
S24	(Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S25	(Kayla Putri Ramadhiana, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S26	(NATHASIA, 2025)	2 Quant. randomised	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4 of 5
S27	(Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S28	(Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5 of 5
S29	(Purwanti & Septiani, 2025)	4 Quant. Descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S30	(Maulizar et al., 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	3 of 5
S31	(Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	2 of 5
S32	(Asteria, 2026)	4 Quant. descriptive	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	2 of 5

Note. S1, S2 = MMAT screening questions (clear research question; collected data address the question). Quantitative descriptive studies: 4.1 relevance of the sampling strategy; 4.2 representativeness of the sample; 4.3 appropriateness of the measurements; 4.4 low risk of non-response bias; 4.5 appropriateness of the statistical analysis. The randomised and non-randomised studies were analysed using equivalent criteria 2.1-2.5 and 3.1-3.5, respectively, and are presented in the same columns. Y = yes; N = no; CT = cannot tell. Summary: 6 studies met 5 of 5 criteria, 11 met 4, 10 met 3 and 5 met 2.

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4.4 Review attributes associated with trust

Twenty-six studies assessed review credibility, argument quality, information quality or a similar content bearing construct. Twenty-four had a positive and significant relationship with trust. The two exceptions were not contradictory: in one, credibility was important for trust in the platform but not for trust in the product (Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025) and in the other, the effect was not found once influencer congruence was entered, indicating shared variance rather than the absence of effect (Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025). When argument quality and information richness were modelled as separate antecedents, both were found to predict perceived information quality, which in turn predicted trust in the review (Haryono et al., 2023) a clear replication of the information adoption architecture in the context of cosmetics. Where reported, effects were large, with standardised coefficients ranging from 0.29 to 0.61 (Table 4). Six studies modelled helpfulness, generally as a mediator between review exposure and trust. The most complete treatment yielded positive eWOM to helpfulness, helpfulness to trust in eWOM, helpfulness to brand attitude and both trust in eWOM and brand attitude to purchase intention — but helpfulness to purchase intention was not significant (Anggraini & Sobari, 2023). On this evidence, helpfulness is a credibility-formation variable and not a decision variable. Fourteen studies quantified valence, typically as an average star rating or as a ratio of positive to negative tone. Nine reported a significant positive association with trust when valence was modelled alone or in combination with volume. Seven studies modelled valence in addition to a credibility or argument-quality construct, with five of these studies reporting that valence was not significant. This is the most transparent pattern at the level of the attributes in the corpus: valence predicts trust until something diagnostic is available to predict it better. Eleven studies reported volume or number of reviews. Six found a positive relationship to trust, three found no significant relationship, and two found conditional relationships to valence. No studies in the set included tested the non-linear specifications that have been found to be necessary in general-retail research (Etzion & Awad, 2007; Maslowska et al., 2017) and so the possibility that very high volumes or near-perfect ratings trigger suspicion is not tested in this category. Review length and detail/specificity were measured in five studies, all of which had positive relationships with trust. The effect sizes were similar to those found for argument quality (which is not surprising due to overlap in constructs) but the consistency across five independent samples is impressive. Recency was measured in only two studies, and neither of these studies showed a significant independent effect. This is a real gap, not a null, in light of the reformulation problem outlined in Section 2.1. Seven studies involved the analysis of photographs, video reviews or visual user-generated content. All seven had positive relationships with trust or credibility, and two had positive relationships between visual content and its effect on trust among younger respondents (Khairunnisa et al., 2024) (Asteria, 2026). The mechanisms that were proposed, verification and processing fluency, are similar to those that have been found in the general review-helpfulness literature (Ceylan et al., 2024; X. Pan, Xie, & Hou, 2024; Luqi Wang, Chen, Xu, & Lin, 2025; Yu, Wang, Huang, & Tan, 2026). The information-overload boundary condition, identified in general research (Liang Wang et al., 2024) was not tested in any of the cosmetic studies included. Twelve studies focused on characteristics of the reviewer, not the review, such as expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, homophily or congruence. All twelve identified at least one dimension that was a significant predictor of trust. In two studies (Gia

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Khuong An ORCID, 2024) and (Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025; Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025) where dimensions were compared, the strongest predictors were expertise and authenticity/trustworthiness, respectively. Physical attractiveness was always the lowest (Amelia et al., 2023; Gia Khuong An ORCID, 2024).

4.5 Relationships among reviews, trust and purchase intention

Twenty-seven studies estimated a direct path from a review construct to a purchase intention or purchase decision. Twenty-four of them were positive and significant. Three exceptions were the use of review helpfulness (Anggraini & Sobari, 2023), influencer endorsement modelled with reviews (Y. Suprapto, 2025) and trust in product in a live-streaming model (Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025). Nineteen studies examined the mediating role of trust between review attributes and purchase intention. Nineteen of these were found to be significantly mediated. Mediation was complete in eleven as the direct path from reviews to intention was no longer significant when trust was added. Partial in 8. Examples include: trust mediating between online customer reviews and ratings and purchase decisions (Arridho et al., 2023; K. R. Angelia, 2024); trust mediating between live-streaming and review effects (Alifia Salsabila Putri, 2024; Purwanti & Septiani, 2025), and trust in eWOM mediating between positive eWOM and intention, and brand attitude (Anggraini & Sobari, 2023). The consistency here is the most evident one in the review. Four countries and multiple platforms, four of 19 independent samples showed that trust did not mediate the relationship between reviews and intention. The mediated architecture is not an issue when it comes to whatever the measurement is.

Disaggregation by target alters the picture fundamentally. Fourteen studies measured trust in the review, reviewer or eWOM and all fourteen studies revealed review attributes that predict trust. Nine believed in the platform or seller, and eight had significant prediction. Eleven measured trust in the product or brand; seven found significant prediction, three found mixed results across dimensions, and one found no effect at all - in that study, trust in platform significantly predicted purchase intention ($\beta = 0.171$) while trust in product did not ($p = 0.810$) (Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025).This is the key empirical observation from the review and is not apparent in any synthesis that assumes a unitary trust. Review attributes can help to create trust in the testimony and in the marketplace that it is being presented to. They sometimes develop confidence in the product itself, and this was precisely the case in live commerce, where the social and hedonic value are more important than the product level, where one would expect product level reasoning to be replaced by affective processing.

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Table 4. Evidence matrix: review characteristics, trust outcomes and purchase intention

ID	Review attributes measured	Trust target	Review → trust	Trust → PI	Review → PI (direct)	Mediation result
S1	Credibility, valence, volume	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial (brand image)
S2	Credibility, argument quality	Review	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S3	Reviewer expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness	Reviewer	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S4	Reviewer trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness	Reviewer	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S5	Credibility, detail, valence	Platform	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Not tested
S6	Valence, volume	Product	+ sig.	Not tested	+ sig.	Not tested
S7	Credibility, valence	Review	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Not tested
S8	Credibility, detail	Product; seller	+ sig.	+ sig. (risk mediates)	+ sig.	Partial via risk
S9	Credibility, argument quality	Platform	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S10	Helpfulness, credibility, valence	Review (eWOM)	+ sig.	+ sig.	n.s.	Full
S11	Argument quality, information richness	Review	+ sig.	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested
S12	Credibility, valence, volume	Brand; transaction	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S13	Reviewer credibility, perceived value	Reviewer	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S14	Credibility, valence, multimedia	Seller	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full (to impulse)
S15	Credibility, detail, multimedia	Seller; product	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full

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ID	Review attributes measured	Trust target	Review → trust	Trust → PI	Review → PI (direct)	Mediation result
S16	Valence, volume, credibility	Product	Mixed (local only)	Not tested	+ sig. (local)	Not tested
S17	Credibility, multimedia	Reviewer	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Not tested
S18	Credibility, argument quality	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	n.s. (influencer)	Partial
S19	Credibility, valence	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S20	Credibility, argument quality	Review	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S21	Credibility, valence	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S22	Credibility (4 dimensions)	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S23	Valence, volume, content	Review	+ sig.	Not tested	+ sig.	Not tested
S24	Reviewer credibility, congruence	Reviewer; brand	Mixed (n.s. w/ congruence)	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S25	Expertise, authenticity, homophily	Reviewer	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S26	Reviewer credibility, brand reputation	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S27	Credibility, self-congruence	Reviewer; brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S28	Credibility, valence, interactivity	Platform; product	+ sig. platform; n.s. product	+ sig. platform; n.s. product	+ sig.	Full (platform only)
S29	Credibility, interactivity	Seller	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full (to impulse)
S30	Credibility, valence	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Partial
S31	Credibility, WOM content	Brand	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full
S32	Credibility, multimedia	Reviewer; seller	+ sig.	+ sig.	+ sig.	Full (to impulse)

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Note. PI = purchase intention, purchase decision/repurchase intention as operationalised in the source study. "+ sig." indicates positive association significant at $p < 0.05$; n.s. indicates non-significant. Where the source study did not explicitly report trust target, it is coded from the wording of the item. The mediation results are reported as tested by the original authors, 'full' means that the direct path was no longer significant when trust was added.

4.6 Moderators and contextual influences

Perceived risk was explicitly modelled in four studies. The relationship between customer trust and online continuance shopping intention for cosmetics was partially mediated by perceived risk, as trust decreased risk, but the risk still remained and continued to decrease the intention (Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024). The other three treated it as a result of review exposure and not a moderator. None of the studies included tested the category-specificity argument directly by comparing the review effects for high risk versus low risk cosmetic sub-categories. The most common individual difference examined was generation with nine studies explicitly sampling for Generation Z (Arridho et al., 2023; Asteria, 2026; Khairunnisa et al., 2024; Maulizar et al., 2025; Mukharjee & Mishra, 2025; Natalie & Siregar, 2024; NATHASIA, 2025; Priyadharshini, 2025; Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025). When generational comparison was possible, younger respondents were more likely to value visual and influencer content, and less likely to value text-based argument quality. Trust formation was moderated by religiosity in the case of cosmetics positioned as halal (Haryono et al., 2023; Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025). Gender was rarely tested with most samples being predominantly or exclusively female.

Within-cosmetic comparisons were virtually non-existent. One study differentiated between local and international beauty brands and identified that online customer reviews are a significant predictor in the case of local brands but not in the case of international brands where brand awareness and marketing were more influential (Natalie & Siregar, 2024). This is the sole direct evidence in the corpus that the influence of the review is dependent on the strength of the competing signals, and this is consistent with the expectations of signalling theory (L. Li et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2011). A total of 9 studies focused on live-commerce situations. The pattern there is unique in a particular way: real-time interactivity and promotional incentives increase trust and purchase results, but often in an impulsive, rather than deliberative, manner (Alifia Salsabila Putri, 2024; Asteria, 2026; Maharani et al., 2025; Purwanti & Septiani, 2025; R. R. Gumilang, 2024; Luqi Wang et al., 2025). The mediating path to unplanned purchase is trust in these models. Twelve studies focused on influencer or beauty-vlogger content. Trust was always predicted by credibility attributes and credibility attributes were always predicted by trust (Amelia et al., 2023; Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Gia Khuong An ORCID, 2024; Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025; Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025). An additional pathway, parasocial interaction, was identified (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025). Two findings qualified the picture: influencer credibility moderated the brand-reputation-to-intention path but not the brand-trust-to-intention path (NATHASIA, 2025) and influencer endorsement was not significant when modelled alongside social media marketing and brand image in the formation of online review (Y. Suprapto, 2025). Most importantly, no of the included studies measured the variable of sponsorship disclosure, which is the key difference between influencer content and organic review content.

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4.7 Conflicting and null findings

There are four classes of conflict in the corpus, each of which can be traced back to differences in the construction or method, and not to any true empirical disagreement. Valence is also important when it stands alone and when it is not, it is important in 5 of 7 direct comparisons with credibility. This is not inconsistency, but a change of diagnostic cue to a heuristic cue. Linear terms were fitted to all eleven volume studies. General-retail evidence indicates a non-monotonic relationship (Maslowska et al., 2017) and consequently, the linear model will yield positive, null or negative coefficients depending on the location of the sampled products on the curve. Trust conflicts are solved by target as described in Section 4.5. The one apparent null for trust is a null for trust in product, not for trust per se (Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025). When both brand image and brand reputation/review quality are included in the model, the effects of influencers diminish, suggesting that brand image and content from influencers are partially interchangeable as sources of the same credibility assessment. The fifth pattern is more of a silence than a conflict. Two-thirds of the studies included refer to authenticity as a justification for studying cosmetics separately, as do references to ingredient safety and/or skin compatibility. Only four then measure anything that corresponds to those concerns (Haryono et al., 2023; Priyadharshini, 2025; Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024; Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025). The remaining studies go on to test a general e-commerce model on a cosmetic sample. Thus the category specific claim is made much more frequently than tested.

5. Discussion

5.1 Answering the review questions

RQ1: What are the attributes that predict trust and purchase intention? The evidence is clear with respect to the order. Content-bearing attributes – credibility, argument quality, information richness, detail – are the most consistent predictors, found in 24/26 studies that measured them, and effects remain when competing predictors are entered. The second tier is source attributes of the reviewer, such as expertise and perceived trustworthiness, which are reliably important, but more limited in the outcomes they have. A third tier of aggregate cues (valence and volume) is also present and has a real but fragile effect: it is lost in most models where a diagnostic attribute exists. The multimedia content is not a peripheral attribute, but rather a verification attribute, as it is in a category where appearance is the product.

There is moderate, but not strong, confidence in this ordering. It is based on a large number of studies, but a limited number of designs, all of which are cross-sectional and mostly self-reported, and the displacement pattern for valence could in principle be a multicollinearity between poorly discriminated measures rather than a substantive processing hierarchy.

RQ2: How are they related to trust? Trust is always and everywhere mediated by 19 tests. However, “trust” translates to 3 targets, each of which have different behaviour. Review attributes build trust in the review and trust in the platform reliably, whereas trust in the product does not. This is important as purchase intention is a product directed behaviour. The suggestion is that reviews are primarily about making the information environment credible, not a particular product credible, and that the latter step, from a credible information environment to a credible product, relies on something that the existing literature has not identified.

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There is high confidence in the presence of mediation and moderate confidence in the target asymmetry, based on the subset of studies that disaggregated targets.

RQ3: What are the relationships that change in the context? The most supported moderator is platform type, which transforms the trust-to-intention path into a trust-to-impulse path, yielding superficially similar coefficients for behaviourally different outcomes. There is also a moderation effect by competing brand signals, as the effect of review signals is strongest when brand signals are weakest (Natalie & Siregar, 2024). Moderate but consistent evidence of effects of generation and religiosity. Although perceived risk is a theoretically central concept, it is tested too infrequently to draw conclusions. Throughout this question, confidence is low to moderate.

5.2 Cosmetic-specific concerns

This literature's category-specific argument has been little explored. Authenticity, safety and skin compatibility are referred to as the reason for studying cosmetics separately, and then not measured. When measured, the results are indicative. In the general model, the quality of the argument and the richness of the information predicted the trust in the halal cosmetic reviews through perceived information quality (Haryono et al., 2023); however, the content that was considered as "quality" in that context was the compliance and ingredient information, which was a category-specific content carried by a general mechanism. If there is some cosmetic risk that cannot be reduced by testimony because it is person-specific, as is to be expected, perceived risk partially mediated trust to continuance intention for cosmetics, with the residual risk depressing intention even where trust was high (Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024). Even if a product is authentic, safe and highly recommended, it may not be suitable for a specific face.

This indicates a limit to the effect that reviews can have in this category. Reviews can alleviate authenticity uncertainty, as counterfeits create identifiable complaint patterns, and they can alleviate performance uncertainty in aggregate. They can't fix compatibility uncertainty without providing matched-reviewer information — reviews from individuals who have comparable skin, tone and sensitivities. None of the studies included measured reviewer–reader similarity on these dimensions, though in two influencer studies (Mega Ragita Herdiani, 2025; Tazkia Prifa Maharani, 2025) the homophily was measured in generic terms. This is the biggest measurement gap that the review finds, and one that is actionable: skin-type matching is already a platform feature on several beauty-specialist sites (RifaNingtyas et al., 2022).

The safety aspect introduces another problem not covered by the corpus. A manipulated review is not only commercially deceptive, but a vector of physical risk where a product can cause dermatological harm (Alnuqaydan, 2024; Mehta et al., 2020; Sangale, 2025). When they do consider fake reviews, the included studies view it as a credibility issue. In this category they pose a consumer-safety issue, as well, and that reshapes platform responsibilities.

5.3 Fake, incentivised, sponsored and AI generated reviews

This section clearly separates the findings of the studies included in this section from the findings of the broader literature that has not been tested in cosmetics.

What the studies included in this book found. No studies included in the review manipulated or measured review authenticity. Credibility was not measured as veracity, but rather as perceived

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credibility — the reader's judgement. The corpus thus demonstrates that perceived credibility is a precondition for trust, but does not say anything about whether or not that perception is accurate. What the general literature indicates. It likely does not. Consumer detection of fabricated reviews is about at chance and consumers can be trained to do better, but only partially, and one-sidedness is the most discriminating cue (Murilo Costa Filho a, 2023). Qualitative research reveals that consumers use a two-stage process: relevance first, veracity second, and that veracity is often not considered (Walther, Watson, Boden, & Stel, 2026) and contextual cues like third-party verification labels have a more reliable impact on perceived source trustworthiness than textual cues (Munzel, 2015). Although automated detection is more accurate than human judgement (Bhutani, Gupta, Gupta, & Gupta, 2026; Y. Pan & Xu, 2024), detection at the platform level does not guarantee discrimination at the consumer level, and the presence of manipulation itself undermines trust in the review system in general, not just in the individual manipulations (Özaydın, 2025; Recuero-Virto, 2025).

Generative AI enhances this. Consumers find AI-generated reviews less useful, less trustworthy and less authentic, and this is true regardless of valence and even when the reviewer is an expert and has an expert badge (Amos & Zhang, 2024). Digital natives are less sceptical of AI-generated reviews than older cohorts (Barbu et al., 2025) and downstream recommendation quality is reduced when AI-generated reviews are present on the platform compared to human-authored reviews (Ziv et al., 2025). There is an increasing acceptance of AI-generated commercial content, however (Stamkou, Saprikis, Fragulis, & Antoniadis, 2025). The mix is volatile: when consumers see more of it and it's more difficult to detect, they discount it.

Sponsorship is in the same space. None of the 12 included studies measured disclosure, and 12 examined influencer content. There is evidence from other domains that rebate disclosure undermines the usefulness benefit of user-generated photographs (Luqi Wang et al., 2025) and that promotional content in seller responses decreases relationship quality while sincere responses increase it (X. Li, Ma, & Bai, 2020). If disclosure undermines the trustworthiness of the influencer beauty content, then a significant portion of the influencer effects measured in this corpus could be capturing the impact of unsourced or unrecognized sponsorship.

The honest summary is that this review can report a well-evidenced relationship between perceived credibility and trust, and cannot report anything about the relationship between actual credibility and trust, because the cosmetic literature has not examined it.

5.4 Integrated conceptual framework

Figure 2 presents a framework derived from, and constrained by, the included evidence.

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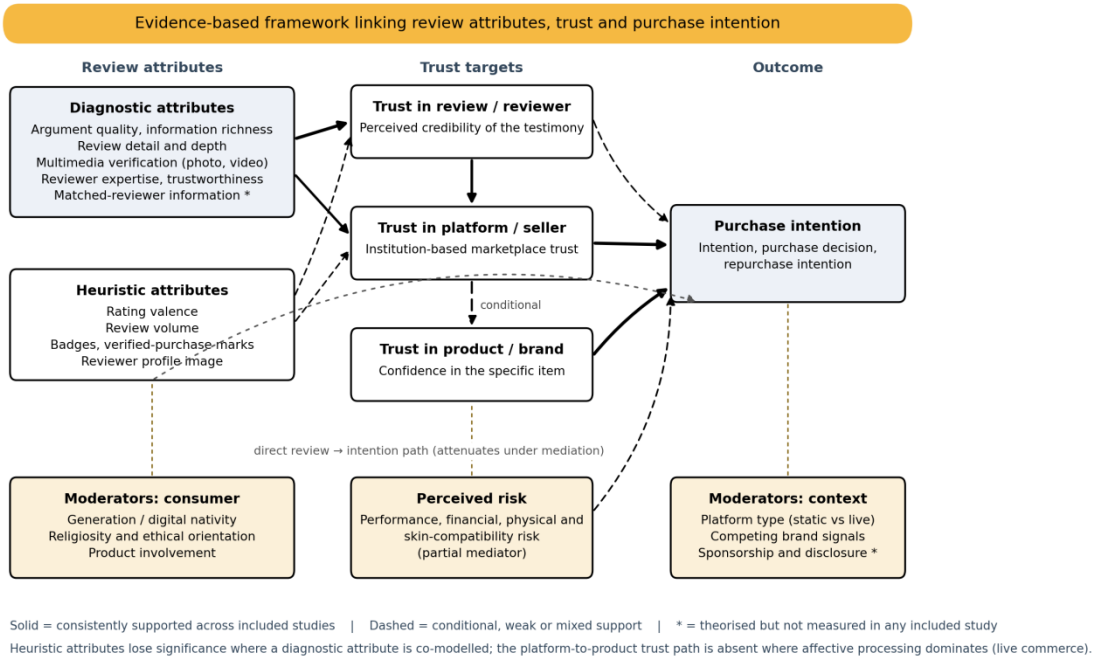

Figure 2. Evidence-based conceptual framework linking review attributes, trust and purchase intention

Diagnostic attributes (argument quality, information richness, detail, multimedia verification, reviewer expertise) contain information that a reader can compare with her situation. Heuristic attributes (valence, volume, badges, profile images) are attributes that do not need to be evaluated. The partition is determined by the evidence: heuristic attributes are not more important than diagnostic attributes, and vice versa. As separate nodes, trust in the review/reviewer, trust in the platform/seller, and trust in the product/brand are displayed. The first is strongly and the second moderately diagnostic. The route from either to trust in the product is depicted as conditional, as this is the evidence: it is present in most studies, but not present when affective processing dominates (Firlyani & Millanyani, 2025). Purchase intention is directly affected by trust in product and indirectly affected by trust in platform. The direct path from review to intention remains, but is attenuating under mediation, in line with full mediation in eleven of nineteen tests. In live commerce, deliberative becomes impulsive due to platform type moderation, which transforms trust to intention. The review-to-trust path is moderated by competing brand signals, which weaken the path where brand awareness is high. Perceived risk is depicted as a partial mediator between trust and intention, rather than a moderator, as it was the only study that was included that modelled it directly (Qudrat Ullah Khan 2024). The attribute-to-trust paths are moderated by consumer characteristics (generation, religiosity, involvement).

There are two things that are missing on purpose. Although theoretically important, reviewer–reader compatibility matching is not included since none of the included studies measured it; it is listed in the research agenda. There is also a lack of actual, rather than perceived, review veracity, for the same reason. A framework containing unmeasured constructs would be to go beyond what this corpus supports.

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5.5 Implications

For platforms. The attribute hierarchy directly impacts the design. Systems of ranking and summarisation which give preference to star valence are optimising the least predictive evidence in the evidence base. Depth and specificity of surfacing, verified visual content is better supported. Unlike textual cues, verification signals have been found to be more reliable in terms of perceived credibility (Munzel, 2015) and (L. Li et al., 2020) and platform governance signals have been found to decrease quality uncertainty and increase conversion (Xiaowan & Xiaomei, 2025). In particular, when it comes to beauty, the compatibility gap suggests that structured reviewer attributes (skin type, tone, concern, age band) are more suitable as filterable metadata than optional free text. Response policy also plays a role: sincere, non-promotional responses to negative reviews are associated with an increase in relationship quality and trust, whereas promotional responses are associated with a decrease in relationship quality and trust (Kapeš, Keča, Fugošić, & Čuić Tanković, 2022; X. Li et al., 2020; Liu, Feng, Song, & Chen, 2019; Qing, Huang, Razzaq, Tang, & Tu, 2018) and responding to negative reviews in general changes the makeup of subsequent reviews (Lin & Zhu, 2024; Proserpio & Zervas, 2017).

For cosmetics brands. The mediation evidence suggests that review strategy is trust strategy, and that efforts to short-circuit the strategy by inflating ratings are efforts on the attribute least able to bear the effect. This result indicates that reviews are most effective in predicting purchase for local brands, but not for international brands (Natalie & Siregar, 2024) which is the reverse of the typical marketing allocation. Brands that are in the halal or ethically positioned segments should be aware that trust formation there is not through certification as a badge, but through content – the compliance and ingredient information (Haryono et al., 2023; Khotimah & Mardhotillah, 2023; Qoriba, 2026; Sitti Nikmah Marzuki, 2025).

For consumer protection. There are two aspects of this category that warrant considering cosmetic review integrity as distinct from review integrity in general. Deception can cause harm, first, of a physical nature (Alnuqaydan, 2024). Second, cosmetics are a category that counterfeits focus on, because it is impossible to verify online. Incentivised and sponsored beauty content disclosure requirements and verification requirements for marketplace sellers of regulated cosmetic products are more targeted interventions than generic review-authenticity rules. The fact that consumers are not able to detect unaided fabrication (Murilo Costa Filho a, 2023; Walther et al., 2026) challenges approaches based on consumer vigilance.

5.6 Review limitations

Database and language coverage. Six databases and English only inclusion. 24 studies out of 32 included in this review were conducted in Indonesia, and a significant body of literature in the Indonesian language is almost certainly missing; eight of the included studies were excluded at full text because of language. Thus, the geographic concentration described in Section 4.2 is partly an artifact of the search strategy, and the lack of European, North American and East Asian studies should not be interpreted as the lack of relevant studies, but rather as the lack of cosmetic-specific studies in English.

Publication bias. Without pooled effect sizes, it was not possible to create a funnel plot or to perform a statistical test for small-study effects. The distribution of findings is highly skewed toward significance, with 24 of 26 credibility tests and 19 of 19 mediation tests, which is, in a

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literature dominated by small convenience samples, a red flag. There are plausible under-reporting of non-significant review effects.

Lack of longitudinal evidence. Thirty-one (32%) studies are cross-sectional and self-reported. The corpus does not contain any temporal ordering. Covariance structures that involve statements like "trust mediates" are not causal sequences per se, and are exaggerated by a single-source measurement.

The variability of the measurement of trust. Trust was assessed in a variety of ways, often with adaptations that were not documented, and targets were often not specified. The target asymmetry identified in Section 4.5 is based on studies that have disaggregated; studies that have not disaggregated may contain the same asymmetry, but not be identified.

No quantitative synthesis. Meta-analysis was not possible due to the construct and measurement heterogeneity. Descriptively, vote counting is insensitive to the size of the effect and treats a small effect that is just significant as a large effect.

Judgement at the margins by one reviewer. There were three instances of complete disagreement that had to be resolved by a third party and some judgement was required in deciding the category, especially "cosmetics not separable from other categories."

5.7 Future research directions

Table 5 maps each identified gap to a recommended design. Six priorities follow from the synthesis.

Table 5. Evidence gaps and future research directions

#	Evidence gap	Why it matters	Recommended design	Priority
1	Reviewer–reader compatibility matching (skin type, tone, age, concern) is not measured in any included study	Compatibility is the category-specific uncertainty that generic quality signals cannot resolve; it is the stated rationale for studying cosmetics separately	Experimental manipulation of matched versus unmatched reviews holding argument quality constant; field study using platform skin-profile metadata	High
2	Trust targets are pooled rather than separated in most studies	Review attributes predict trust in review and platform reliably but trust in product only conditionally; pooling conceals where the causal chain breaks	Multi-construct measurement models with discriminant validity established for all three targets; re-analysis of existing datasets where item wording permits	High
3	Actual review veracity is never manipulated; only perceived credibility is measured	Consumer detection of fabricated reviews performs near chance, so perceived credibility may be uncorrelated with actual credibility	Deception experiments pairing genuine and fabricated cosmetic reviews with downstream trust and intention measures; linkage	High

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#	Evidence gap	Why it matters	Recommended design	Priority
			to platform-side detection data	
4	Sponsorship disclosure is unmeasured despite twelve studies examining influencer content	Disclosure is the variable that distinguishes sponsored from organic content and is the primary regulatory lever	Between-subjects manipulation of disclosure presence, prominence and wording in beauty influencer content	High
5	Almost all evidence is cross-sectional, single-source and self-reported	No temporal ordering is established anywhere in the corpus; common-method variance may inflate observed mediation	Longitudinal panels tracking trust and purchase across a buying cycle; behavioural or transaction-linked outcomes rather than stated intention	High
6	Valence and volume are modelled only linearly	General-retail evidence shows non-monotonic effects, including suspicion of near-perfect ratings; linear models cannot detect this	Specification of quadratic and spline terms; stimulus sets spanning the full rating range	Medium
7	Geographic concentration: 29 of 32 studies from South and Southeast Asia	Cultural dimensions are known to moderate eWOM reliance but are assumed rather than measured here	Multi-country replication with individual-level cultural value measures rather than country proxies	Medium
8	Perceived risk is modelled explicitly in only four studies	Risk is the theoretical mechanism linking reviews to trust in this category, and physical risk distinguishes cosmetics from other categories	Multidimensional risk measurement including dermatological and ingredient-safety risk; tests of risk as mediator versus moderator	Medium
9	Recency is measured in only two studies, neither finding an effect	Reformulation makes older cosmetic reviews describe products that no longer exist	Field data linking review timestamps to product reformulation dates; experimental ageing of review sets	Medium
10	Within-category product-type comparison is almost absent	Review influence should vary with the strength of competing brand signals and with risk level	Factorial designs crossing sub-category (colour, skincare, treatment) with brand strength	Medium

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#	Evidence gap	Why it matters	Recommended design	Priority
		across cosmetic sub-categories		
11	AI-generated review content is unstudied in cosmetics	Consumers discount reviews they believe to be AI-generated, and synthetic content is increasing in prevalence and quality	Manipulation of AI-authorship cues and disclosure in cosmetic review stimuli; longitudinal tracking of platform content composition	Medium
12	Information overload boundary conditions for multimedia reviews are untested in this category	Text, image and video elements interact and can impair rather than aid decisions beyond a threshold	Parametric variation of multimedia density with processing-fluency and decision-quality measures	Low

Define reviewer–reader similarity on skin type, tone, age and concern and test the superiority of matched reviews over unmatched reviews of same argument quality. This is the mechanism the literature assumes and has never tested for this category. Future research should consider trust in review, trust in platform and trust in product as three separate latent variables with discriminant validity proved and report paths separately. Wherever possible, retrospective reanalysis of existing datasets would be informative in terms of item wording. Both experimental manipulation of review attributes and longitudinal designs following trust and purchase over a buying cycle are possible and virtually non-existent.

The included experiment (NATHASIA, 2025) shows that it is tractable in this context. Directly manipulate review authenticity and measure review detection and downstream trust. Combine consumer level studies with platform level detection studies (Bhutani et al., 2026) and make the difference between what systems can detect and what consumers can detect measurable. Include sponsorship disclosure as a variable in the research of influencers in the beauty space. Twelve of the included studies focused on content without influencers, meaning that the key ethical and regulatory variable in that literature was not observed. Replicate outside of Southeast and South Asia, where 29 of 32 studies were done, where cultural dimensions were measured not assumed (Agag, Durrani, Abdelmoety, Daher, & Eid, 2024; Chu & Choi, 2011; Dang & Raska, 2022; Fukushige, Aryupong, & Phijaranakul, 2019; Haj Khalifa, 2025; Mitić, 2020; Tang, 2017). In each replication, include non-linear valence and volume terms to allow for detection or exclusion of the near-perfect-rating suspicion effect (Maslowska et al., 2017) in this category.

6. Conclusion

Online consumer reviews are important to trust and purchase intention in cosmetic e-commerce and they act in a mediated structure, which was found in all nineteen studies that tested it. In that architecture, the attributes that count are those that a reader can assess: the quality of the argument, the detail, the richness of the information, the visual verification, the expertise of the reviewers, etc. The most salient cues that platforms prominently show and brands actively manage are valence and volume, which are the first to fail when a more diagnostic cue is available. The main contribution of the review is a distinction that has been overlooked in the literature. There's no such thing as one trust here. Review attributes create trust in the testimony and in the marketplace that carries it, but not necessarily in the product itself, and in live-commerce settings, not always. This means that purchase intention is not aimed at an information environment but at a product and thus an unfilled gap in the causal chain remains in the current evidence. There are two more negative but significant conclusions. The category-specific claim that is the motivation for this literature – cosmetics are different due to authenticity, safety and skin compatibility – is stated in two thirds of the studies included and assessed in four. At a time when incentivised, sponsored and AI-generated content is making credibility and truth diverge, the whole body of work points to perceived credibility and nothing to veracity. The next ten years of work in this area is not in adding more confirmations to the well-established mediation, but in closing those gaps.

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