The impact of micro-influencers marketing on the cosmetics sector

By

Camilla Sanches Machado

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Signed: Camilla Sanches Machado

Dated: 07/08/2025

Dedication

For my mother, who saved my life and who believed in me, even when I stopped believing.

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of micro-influencers (1,000–100,000 followers) in shaping consumer trust and purchase behavior within Ireland's €1.2 billion cosmetics market, characterized by 95% internet penetration and high social media engagement (Central Statistics Office, 2024). Through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys (40 female consumers) and qualitative interviews (six), the research examines how authenticity, transparency, and storytelling strategies influence Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) and The Elaboration Likehood Model (ELM) frameworks in analyzing micro-influencer efficacy within Ireland's unique regulatory and cultural context touchpoints across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Findings reveal that 47.5% of respondents perceive micro-influencers as authentic (mean score: 3.45/5), while 95% emphasize transparency (e.g., #ad disclosures) as critical to credibility (Kay et al., 2020). Instagram (60% preference) dominates purchase intent through tutorials, whereas TikTok (35%) drives discovery via algorithmic "For You Page" content (Haenlein et al., 2020). Thematic analysis highlights relatability and para-social relationships as key drivers of loyalty (H4), particularly among 18–24-year-olds.

The study contributes to academic literature by bridging gaps in localized CJM applications for niche markets and offers practical strategies for Irish brands (e.g., Kash Beauty, Flormar Ireland) to optimize micro-influencer collaborations. Limitations include sample size and gender bias, suggesting future research into male consumers and nano-influencers (<1,000 followers).

Keywords: Micro-influencers, authenticity, Customer Journey Mapping, Irish cosmetics market, social media marketing.

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List of Abbreviations

CJM - Customer Journey Mapping

UGC – User-generated content

ELM - Elaboration Likelihood Model

H1 - Hypothesis 1

H2 - Hypothesis 2

H3 - Hypothesis 3

H4 - Hypothesis 4

SFX - Special Effects

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

In a new study from April 2025, it was reported that nearly 65% of the global population uses social media representing 5.3 billion of the world's population, considering a 4.7% increase compared to the previous year (We Are Social, 2025). Ireland has 95% of its population connected to the internet, and 97% of users aged between 16 and 29 report using the internet intensively daily (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The high digital penetration in Ireland makes it a special market where social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok lead consumer research in cosmetics especially for micro-influencers who connect with local audiences through authentic culturally relevant content (Vrontis et al., 2021).

The Irish beauty and personal care market reached a value of approximately €1.2 billion in 2024 according to Statista (n.d.). The market shows both stability and flexibility in following worldwide market trends. The market's strong digital connectivity through 95% internet access and the high social media engagement of young people (Central Statistics Office, 2024) provides an ideal environment for influencer marketing. The study of micro-influencers becomes essential in this setting because they enable cosmetic brands to connect with a dedicated local audience through genuine marketing approaches.

Representing the largest number of connected people, young individuals use social media as a source of research for various things, such as cosmetics (Central Statistics Office, 2024). On social media, within seconds, you can find organic reviews of numerous skin and makeup products (Wang et al., 2023). On the other hand, TikTok and Instagram have started generating thousands of videos with organic reviews of cosmetic products, which has also led to a change in the landscape, being a key point for the customer journey, influencing customer purchase decisions, customer acquisition, purchase, and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In recent years, micro-influencers – influencers with a follower count between 1,000 and 100,000 – have gained prominence and are reshaping the cosmetic marketing landscape, where transparency, connection, and credibility influence purchase

decision-making (De Veirman et al., 2017). The research uses Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) to track these factors throughout pre-purchase (discovery), purchase (intent), and post-purchase (loyalty) stages while the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains persuasion through central cues (expertise, transparency) and peripheral cues (relatability, storytelling), which supports hypotheses H1 (authenticity drives trust), H2 (transparency enhances credibility), H3 (micro-influencers influence CJM touchpoints), and H4 (storytelling fosters engagement) (Park et al., 2021).

Irish brands, such as Kash Beauty, Ayu MakeUp, Flormar Ireland, and Bia Belle, engage their followers with various organic content from micro-influencers or user-generated content who post reviews or tutorials on how to use the products sold by the brand, thus creating green marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021). This green marketing has become increasingly sustainable today due to the public's growing perception that paid advertising content does not necessarily tell the truth behind the product (Kay et al., 2020).

The turning point came when countries worldwide, including Ireland, began requiring that paid online advertisements be flagged (e.g., #ad), promoting transparency in content contracted to be published and "sold" (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.). Transparency through these organic reviews by micro-influencers contributes to a relationship of trust and transparency with the audience (Kay et al., 2020). Typically, micro-influencers are not paid for their product tests and engagement. Collaborations between brands and influencers are common. The proximity of the micro-influencer to their audience conveys credibility (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Unlike macro-influencers, micro-influencers manage to maintain a more genuine and closer connection with their "viewer" (Janssen et al., 2022). Considering the authenticity and accessibility of a micro-influencer, a stronger and more loyal connection is established with followers, which is useful for partnerships with growing brands like Kash Beauty, Flormar Ireland, Bia Belle, and Ayu MakeUp (Vrontis et al., 2021). Even so, these micro-influencers generate engagement with organic, unpaid reviews, creating benefits for both sides (Wang et al., 2023).

The research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze how micro-influencers affect consumer actions during CJM (Customer Journey Mapping) stages (pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase) while using ELM (Elaboration Likehood Model) to explain how central (expertise, transparency) and peripheral (relatability, storytelling) cues drive persuasion (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Park et al., 2021). The study provides brands with guidance to handle consumer doubts and cultural differences through its analysis of authenticity and transparency and engagement which helps build trust and loyalty.

The academic literature shows a significant gap in understanding how micro-influencers affect the Irish cosmetics market despite increasing worldwide investment in influencer marketing (Beichert et al., 2023). The existing research on influencers does not fully address the unique characteristics of Irish consumers who prioritize authentic relationships with local influencers. The research investigates how local micro-influencers establish trust relationships which leads to purchasing decisions.

1.2 Purpose

This article studies how micro-influencers shape consumer trust and behavior in the Irish landscape (De Veirman et al., 2017). The main focus of the study is to investigate the growth of trust in micro-influencers in the Irish cosmetic sector, specifically targeting how they build a relationship of trust with their followers, impacting decision-making when purchasing cosmetics.

This research will seek to examine how these micro-influencers and organic marketing shape consumer behavior from the moment of product perception to the moment of purchase decision (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Wang et al., 2023). This article will also address how online advertising transparency regulations, with the mandatory use of advertising flags (e.g., #ad), have changed the perception of authenticity from the consumer’s perspective (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.; Kay et al., 2020).

1.3 Significance

In Ireland, where cosmetic brands compete in the digital world, it is essential to understand the role of micro-influencers and organic reviews (The Irish Independent, 2024). Irish brands like Kash Beauty, Flormar Ireland, Bia Belle, and Ayu MakeUp have capitalized on social media to seek customers and loyalty, but the role of micro-influencers and organic reviews has not yet been explored (Vrontis et al., 2021).

Focusing on the Irish market, the study will address Irish perspectives on influencer marketing, thus contributing to strategic marketing practices, as well as helping brands further optimize their consumer engagement strategies in the expanding Irish cosmetic market (The Irish Independent, 2024; Statista, 2024).

This study is highly relevant for several reasons, such as highlighting the role of micro-influencers in the Irish cosmetic market, a sector that has grown in recent years and faces high competitiveness, marked by a sector that actively uses social media for promotion (The Irish Independent, 2024).

With the insights brought by this article, Irish brands will be able to analyze their market and optimize their sales in terms of cost, sales, and effectiveness, thus generating an authentic marketing strategy (Schouten et al., 2020). It is also important to note that this research will contribute to academic literature, utilizing Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) for a specific industrial context (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Another point is understanding how micro-influencers and their organic reviews have key points in the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of the consumer, potentially reinforcing some existing consumer behavior models (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The study will also address how transparency policies and marketing have evolved and examine how this new policy has impacted consumer trust (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.). The success of Keilidh Cashell, founder of Kash Beauty, both as an influencer and as a brand creator, highlights the power of good storytelling, which is the main focus of this study (Vrontis et al., 2021).

The findings of this study will benefit marketers, brand managers, and students interested in niche-focused digital marketing (Schouten et al., 2020). Several articles

and studies related to influencer marketing can be found, but the niche of micro-influencers in niche markets is not as popular (De Veirman et al., 2017).

1.4 Research Objectives

To map interactions with Customer Journey Mapping (CJM), this research aims to provide insights into Irish cosmetic brands that use social media as their primary marketing tool and the role of micro-influencers in this context (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The first objective of this project is to investigate how micro-influencers influence customer behavior and the trust that these micro-influencers generate regarding a specific brand or cosmetic product in the Irish industry. Focusing on some Irish brands like Kash Beauty, Flormar Ireland, Bia Belle, and Ayu MakeUp, and how these brands utilize organic marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). To understand this, this article will include the following objectives:

1. The research by De Veirman et al. (2017) examines how micro-influencers build trust between cosmetic brand consumers in Ireland.
2. The research by Wang et al. (2023) and Kay et al. (2020) examines paid advertisement credibility and organic review influence on purchase decisions.
3. The pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages of the customer journey include Instagram (reels, posts, and stories) and TikTok as key points according to Lemon & Verhoef (2016).
4. The research develops a conceptual framework that connects micro-influencer strategies and organic reviews to the Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) model (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).
5. The research provides Irish cosmetic brands with strategic recommendations to achieve successful organic marketing optimization (Schouten et al., 2020).

The research objectives will direct the study to investigate how micro-influencer organic content affects consumer experiences and intentions (Wang et al., 2023).

1.5 Methodology

Following the parameters of the research onion by Saunders et al. (2019), this article aligns with interpretivism as its philosophy and recognizes the subjective nature of the consumer experience. The study will adopt a quantitative and qualitative methodological approach (Creswell, 2014). In the qualitative scope, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with six women aged 21–33 who engage with cosmetic and influencers in Ireland, in addition to an analysis of approximately 50 posts and comments on brands (Kash Beauty, Flormar Ireland, Bia Belle, and Ayu MakeUp) on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, to analyze organic reviews and public reactions (Wang et al., 2023). Some of the interviews will be conducted via the Zoom platform in early July 2025, with the consent of all participants, who will be anonymized (Creswell, 2014).

The research uses purposive sampling to select survey participants and snowball sampling to identify interview participants who match the cosmetic industry and Ireland's digital market penetration (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The survey data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) while thematic analysis will be applied to interview data through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process (familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, reporting).

The research includes ethical measures that require participant consent and data protection through anonymity and destruction of data within five years and received approval from Griffith College Dublin's ethics committee.

The study uses interpretivist principles to study consumer trust and authenticity in Ireland's cosmetic sector since this approach focuses on how people subjectively experience and perceive things (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism provides a suitable approach for studying consumer perceptions of micro-influencers' authenticity and credibility as it recognizes how people build their realities through personal and social interactions (Collis & Hussey, 2013). The research benefits from interpretivism as it enables deep exploration of how Irish consumers understand micro-influencer content on TikTok and Instagram while accounting for cultural and social and digital influences that affect trust and engagement (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The research approach focuses on individual consumer experiences instead of general truths to understand how people interact with micro-influencers in their specific market (Saunders et al., 2019).

The research uses an inductive approach to develop theories from empirical data since it addresses the research gap in micro-influencer marketing for Ireland's cosmetic industry (Saunders et al., 2019). The inductive approach differs from deductive approaches since it allows researchers to discover patterns and insights from consumer responses which results in developing a specific framework for understanding trust and behavior (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research method suits this study as there is insufficient local research about micro-influencers in Ireland's €1.2 billion cosmetic market (Statista, 2024). The study uses qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data to develop theoretical insights about how authentic content and transparency affect consumer decision-making at different stages of Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) while adding to academic knowledge and practical marketing approaches (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The mixed-methods research design which merges quantitative data collection with qualitative interview methods provides essential insights into the phenomenon. The online survey enabled researchers to gather statistical data from numerous female consumers to establish general perceptions. The interpretivist approach through interviews proved essential for studying personal experiences and understanding the motivations behind consumer responses. The research approach allowed researchers to move past numerical data to understand the underlying reasons behind purchasing choices and to gain authentic consumer insights about trust and authenticity and transparency which quantitative methods alone could not deliver (Seuring, Stella & Stella, 2021). The research design consists of two stages which start with quantitative survey data collection to detect consumer trust and engagement patterns before moving to qualitative semi-structured interviews to analyze these patterns in detail (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase uses a Google Forms survey to study 40 female participants aged 18–36 about their perceptions of micro-influencer authenticity and purchase intentions. The qualitative phase includes interviews with six female consumers (anonymized) aged 21–33 to study their personal experiences which provides deeper insights into subjective elements such as storytelling and transparency (Kay et al., 2020).

The research design also uses Instagram and TikTok posts and comments about brands (Kash Beauty, Flormar Ireland, Ayu Cosmetics, Bia Belle) to validate the findings through triangulation (Wang et al., 2023). And the sequential research

design enables quantitative findings to guide qualitative interview questions which strengthens the study's ability to fulfill research objectives while addressing the cosmetic market gap in Ireland (Saunders et al., 2019).

The survey data receive descriptive statistical analysis through means and standard deviations while thematic analysis of interview data follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process starting with familiarization and ending with reporting.

The research methodology supports the study's goal to study micro-influencer consumer perceptions and behaviors by using CJM and ELM to analyze trust and engagement patterns. These methodologies are consistent with the study's context, which aims to understand the perception and behavior of consumers in real life regarding micro-influencers in the cosmetic sector.

The study protects participant rights through consent procedures and maintains anonymity while destroying data after five years under approval from Griffith College Dublin's ethics committee.

1.6 Structure

This dissertation will consist of five chapters, the first chapter introducing the research, its purpose, objectives, and significance. The second chapter will be a literature review focused on micro-influencers, digital marketing, organic marketing, Customer Journey Mapping, and the Irish market (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; De Veirman et al., 2017). The fourth chapter will present the findings and discussions conducted through interviews, questionnaires, readings of articles, and research related to the objective (Creswell, 2014). Finally, the fifth chapter will address a conclusion with key insights, recommendations for the Irish cosmetic market, limitations, and suggestions for future research (Schouten et al., 2020).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The research explores influencer marketing literature through a focus on micro-influencers who promote cosmetics products in Ireland. Social media platforms

including Instagram and TikTok serve as marketing tools because they provide consumers with authentic and transparent product information (Nicaise, n.d.).

The widespread internet connection in Ireland reaches 95% of its population thus making micro-influencer content easily accessible (Central Statistics Office, 2024). Micro-influencers function as opinion leaders who establish product and brand credibility which drives consumer purchasing choices (Alharthey, 2020).

This review will explore the differences between micro-influencers and macro-influencers, the evolution of marketing, and how authenticity and transparency are essential in current scenarios. The growth of the Irish cosmetics market will also be explored (The Irish Independent, 2024).

This chapter will also link micro-influencer marketing strategies and organic reviews to the Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Within this scope, this research will identify some gaps in the literature, particularly the limited research on micro-influencers in niche markets, such as the cosmetics sector, and in Ireland, thus establishing a methodology for study.

The international beauty and self-care industry, valued at USD 505 billion, has a co-dependency on social media, with influencer marketing valued at 21 billion euros in 2025 (Euromonitor International, 2024). Ireland, with 95% of its population online and 97% of Irish youth engaged on social media, further emphasizes the role of micro-influencers in shaping purchase intentions (Central Statistics Office, 2024). Articles focusing on how trust and authenticity influence purchasing decisions in the cosmetics sector in Ireland are limited, and this study will help address how micro-influencers use a mix of methodologies to contribute to marketing theories (Alharthey, 2020; Rajan & Rajan, 2024).

The cosmetics market in Ireland valued at €1.2 billion in 2024 relies on micro-influencers' authenticity to drive their effectiveness since their relatable content builds trust with their audience especially for brands that target specific audiences through authentic endorsements (Statista, 2024; Wischhover, 2022). The research investigates how micro-influencers with 1,000–100,000 followers influence consumer behavior in Ireland's competitive cosmetics market.

2.2 The Shift in Influencer Marketing in the Cosmetics Sector

Influencer marketing began to be used as one of the main tools by the cosmetics industry, leveraging interactivity and how visual and desirable a product could be through social media (Strauss & Frost, 2001). Since the 2000s, platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and later TikTok have utilized well-known individuals, such as influencers, celebrities, and then micro-influencers, for advertising, shifting the focus from traditional marketing campaigns to influencer-driven campaigns (Nicaise, n.d.).

The evolution of celebrity endorsements into digital influencer marketing reflects changes in how consumers trust brands. Traditional cosmetics brands used to promote their products through print ads and TV commercials with unattainable celebrities such as Revlon's 1980s campaigns but these methods lost their effectiveness during the 2010s. Schouten et al. (2020) found that consumer distrust of polished advertisements increased by 42% from 2010 to 2020 at the same time Instagram (2012) and TikTok (2018) gained popularity. The high internet penetration rate in Ireland (95% according to CSO 2024) accelerated the shift toward micro-influencers who replaced traditional media by providing authentic content.

The growth of micro-influencers has been significantly influenced by platform algorithms. The "For You Page" (FYP) of TikTok selects specific content types and Haenlein et al. (2020) discovered that micro-influencers achieve three times more organic reach than macro-influencers because their content generates higher engagement. According to Naveen Kumar (2025) FYP on TikTok serves as the primary discovery platform for 60% of Irish Gen Z users who look for cosmetics while Instagram Explore remains the second choice for 40% of users. The algorithmic preference for authentic content such as unfiltered tutorials supports H1's argument that authenticity builds trust. The Irish beauty brand Bia Belle works with TikTok's algorithm by teaming up with micro-influencers who use location-based hashtags (e.g. #IrishBeauty) to benefit from local search patterns.

When it all started, only major influencers (with over 100k followers) were sought for this type of work, aiming to achieve broad reach, as seen in various global campaigns by the brand L’Oréal. However, over time and with the evolution of the internet and social media, internet users reduced their engagement frequency with paid

campaigns, demanding a need for spontaneous, honest, and authentic reviews, thus valuing micro-influencer campaigns, which offer engagement exchange with their niche and organic reviews about products they acquired (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020).

The development of influencer marketing in Ireland has been influenced by its distinct cultural and regulatory framework which includes 95% internet penetration (Central Statistics Office, 2024) and strict transparency requirements from the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (n.d.) that demand paid content to be clearly marked (e.g., #ad). The current market environment supports micro-influencers as they are viewed as more genuine than macro-influencers especially in specific markets such as cosmetics. The Irish market focuses on authenticity and cultural connection through local brands like Kash Beauty and Bia Belle (The Irish Independent, 2024) whereas the United Kingdom relies on macro-influencers for global campaigns (e.g., L'Oréal) and France depends on luxury influencers. The Irish beauty market valued at €1.2 billion annually with a 4% growth rate (Euromonitor International, 2024) relies on young online consumers who choose organic content and stories from local sources since 97% of 16–29-year-olds are active online.

This evolution was evident in Ireland; cosmetic brands like Kash Beauty, Ayu Makeup, Flormar Ireland, and Bia Belle leveraged their connection and understood the new market needs by using micro-influencer reviews to connect and engage with their target audience (The Irish Independent, 2024). The growing distrust of macro-influencers led to the emergence of micro-influencers as a response to influencer saturation. Research indicates micro-influencers who have between 1,000 and 100,000 followers achieve better engagement rates than macro-influencers do with their followers since micro-influencers reach 3% to 8% engagement while macro-influencers reach only 1% to 2% (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). The audience perceives micro-influencers as authentic and builds stronger personal connections which results in a more intense parasocial interaction (Connell et al., 2024). The trust-based relationship between influencers and their audience plays a crucial role in transforming purchase intentions into actual actions (Karamchandani et al., 2025; Alharthey, 2020). The Irish regulatory framework further amplifies trust in micro-

influencers, as 80% of consumers value transparent disclosures (Naveen Kumar, 2025), reinforcing H2.

The cosmetics industry adopted micro-influencers as consumers want authentic content which platforms support through specific strategies (Haenlein et al., 2020). The algorithm-based For You Page on TikTok boosts micro-influencer content while 60% of Gen Z users discover products through this platform (Naveen Kumar, 2025). The cosmetics industry used celebrity endorsements as its primary marketing strategy during the early 2000s until digital platforms allowed microinfluencers to take over specific market segments (Euromonitor International, 2024).

The rise of micro-influencers as prominent figures stems from their capacity to build genuine partnerships which demonstrates through niche content achieving 25% better engagement than macro-influencer campaigns (Ahmad, Guzmán & Kidwell, 2024).

The cosmetics industry focuses on visual projects for marketing, such as tutorials and reviews, standing out as key points in the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). With 95% of Ireland penetrated by the internet, platforms like Instagram and TikTok are amplified in the country (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The new generation uses these social networks as a search engine for new products, what's trending, the quality, and checking popular opinions (CBS News, n.d.).

The use of user-generated content (UGC) and micro-influencers has become more pronounced on platforms in line with current needs. It is noteworthy that social media plays a significant role in cosmetic purchase decisions through content from UGC or micro-influencers (Wang, Yang & Yang, 2023).

The study by Haenlein et al. (2020) reported that TikTok's "For You" page, which is tailored according to algorithms, increases the reach of niche micro-influencers, making the online search for cosmetic products highlight the profiles of influencers who search for specific products or topics.

The founder of Kash Beauty, Keilidh Cashell, started as a micro-influencer before becoming a major—and the biggest—beauty influencer in Ireland, leading to the creation of her brand (The Irish Independent, 2024). Flormar Ireland uses user-

generated content from micro-influencers as a marketing strategy to boost sales, understanding that the audience needs real tutorials and reviews on different skin types to identify with the product (Wang, Yang & Yang, 2023).

The micro-influencer market in Ireland operates differently than it does in larger markets. The €1.2 billion cosmetics market in Ireland depends on hyper-localized content because the UK and US focus on macro-influencers for mass campaigns (e.g., L'Oréal's #WorthIt). According to Euromonitor International (2024) Irish micro-influencers achieve 25% higher engagement than the European average because of cultural preferences for "peer-like" endorsements (Vrontis et al., 2021). The Irish market stands apart from France because it depends on authentic grassroots content instead of luxury influencers who dominate the French market (e.g., Sephora collaborations).

Nano-influencers (<1,000 followers) are an emerging trend, offering hyper-local engagement for brands like Bia Belle, whose campaigns target Irish communities with niche content (Content Marketing Institute, 2023). Euromonitor International (2024) notes that Ireland's cosmetics market growth is fueled by demand for sustainable and inclusive products, which microinfluencers effectively promote through authentic reviews, as seen in Flormar Ireland's vegan campaigns. The Irish cosmetics market which shows a 4% annual growth rate uses micro-influencers to reach specific consumer groups which led to a 10% boost in local sales (Statista, 2024; Wischhover & Torres, 2023).This shift underscores the need to explore micro-influencer strategies in Ireland's unique digital landscape.

2.3 Micro vs. Macro-Influencer

Micro-influencers, who are influencers with between 1,000 and 100,000 followers, and macro-influencers, who are influencers with over 100,000 followers, differ in reach, perception, and view of authenticity. Macro-influencers have large-scale delivery, providing high visibility in campaigns, including global campaigns. However, the engagement rate of macro-influencers, due to their greater reach, is 1.21%, a result of intentionally commercial perceptions. Micro-influencers have an engagement rate between 3% and 8%, generating more likes, comments, and shares. The perception

of authenticity and closeness to the audience with these influencers results in better engagement for micro-influencers.

For example, the micro-influencer campaign for Flormar Ireland's vegan products on TikTok may generate more engagement through these influencers' videos, as users perceive proximity and authenticity with micro-influencers. Lou and Yuan (2019) highlight that the value conveyed by the message, such as informative or entertaining content, enhances credibility and fosters consumer trust in the brand or influencer, especially micro-influencers, who are niche and promote brands.

The case study of the brand Tom's of Maine by the Content Marketing Institute (2023) showed that the brand achieved great success using a micro-influencer campaign. Li et al. (2023) also note in their study that accounts with fewer followers generate higher engagement per follower. The small number of followers that micro-influencers have makes their persuasive power stronger which show that their authentic sustainable product endorsements increase consumer trust by 30% more than macro-influencers (Boerman & Müller, 2022).

The persuasive power of micro-influencers emerges from their relatable content which activates peripheral cues in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) thus making them more effective than macro-influencers in niche markets like cosmetics (Park et al., 2021). Micro-influencers build trust through genuine product endorsements which results in 7-10% engagement rates compared to macro-influencers who achieve 1-2% engagement according to Global Cosmetic Industry (2018) and Breves et al. (2023).

Stack Influence (2025) reports micro-influencers deliver three times more return on investment which proves essential for Ireland's competitive market. The research examines how micro-influencers between 1,000 and 100,000 followers use ELM to build trust in Ireland's cosmetics industry while filling the need for studies about their persuasive methods in local markets (Park et al., 2021).

2.4 Key Factors in Influencer Marketing

Authenticity is an important aspect to be followed in cosmetic marketing. Cosmetic consumers seek reviews that convey genuine experiences. This is also related to how

influencers demonstrate what they truly believe about the product and that the service is not for commercial reasons (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020).

Micro-influencers have a more authentic perception due to their smaller audience, enabling greater engagement. An example of this is that a review or tutorial by a micro-influencer about a Kash Beauty eyeshadow palette may generate more results than the same post from a macro-influencer, based on the audience's perception of reality and truth. Credibility in influencers boosts consumer trust, meaning that the value of the message is important (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A significant reinforcement for authenticity is transparency. In Ireland, there is a code from the Advertising Standards Authority that mandates the labeling of all paid or sponsored advertisements (e.g., #ad) (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.). Kay et al. (2020) studied that disclosure posts increase trust if they are perceived as honest, particularly for micro-influencers who create unpaid reviews. According to Naveen Kumar (2025) Gen Z places greater importance on authenticity than millennials since 70% of them trust microinfluencer recommendations above traditional advertisements.

The study by Gupta and Arora (2024) argues that satisfaction with a micro-influencer's image, for example, a standard similar to that of the user, and trust in advertising shape consumers' purchase intentions. Failure to disclose undermines credibility, especially for a macro-influencer. Perceived personal interactions between the brand/influencer and the consumer increase trust in what is said and shown, such as engagement in the comments on Flormar Ireland's posts (Janssen, Schouten & Croes, 2022).

The success of micro-influencers in Ireland's regulated market depends heavily on building para-social relationships and maintaining transparency according to Tanwar et al. (2024). Consumers who buy cosmetics products verify information through multiple sources because trust stands as a fundamental factor in their purchasing decisions (Alharthey, 2020).

Research indicates that micro-influencers who match brand personality inclusive campaigns build authenticity since consumers trust influencers who share values such as sustainability by 20% (Torres, Augusto & Godinho, 2023). The transparency

regulations implemented in Ireland since 2018 help micro-influencers build credibility as 80% of Irish consumers expect to see #ad disclosures (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.; Naveen Kumar, 2025).

2.5 The Cosmetics Market in Ireland

The Irish cosmetics market is experiencing rapid growth, driven by Irish brands such as Kash Beauty, Ayu Makeup, Flormar Ireland, and Bia Belle. A Statista (2024) study reported a projection of continued market expansion, fueled by demands for new products and authenticity. The Irish cosmetics market reached €1.2 billion in 2024 and shows a 4% annual growth rate because consumers want sustainable and inclusive products (Statista, 2024).

The digital media landscape of Ireland remains highly active because 97% of young people between 16 and 29 years old use the internet daily (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The discovery of products happens mainly through TikTok and Instagram because micro-influencer content and user-generated content drive engagement (Wang, Yang & Yang, 2023).

The use of micro-influencers in campaigns produces genuine storytelling which builds trust with consumers and Rajan & Rajan (2024) found that digital market penetration at 95% in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2024) strongly affects purchasing decisions.

The Irish cosmetics market operates through digital channels yet its consumer preferences and micro-influencer effectiveness remain influenced by cultural elements and regional characteristics. Environmental factors such as Ireland's water quality influence product selection through their ideas about suitable products for the local water conditions. The market requires content that specifically addresses consumer needs by offering products suitable for Ireland's hard water conditions and humid climate. Young consumers between 16 and 29 years old choose ethical and inclusive brands according to Euromonitor International (2024) research which shows that 65% of this demographic prefers such brands.

The competitive market conditions both online and offline affect Irish brands but their strategies are influenced by Ireland's transparency regulations. Flormar Ireland and Kash Beauty work with micro-influencers to match consumer preferences for authenticity through user-generated content exchanges (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.).

Social media platforms like TikTok use second-person perspectives to boost user engagement. The statement "you'll love this product" demonstrates how consumer belonging leads to higher interaction rates. Research about micro-influencers in the cosmetics industry within Ireland lacks investigation regarding how organic reviews affect market dynamics. This study aims to fill this gap.

Euromonitor International (2024) argue that Ireland's beauty market will expand because of consumer interest in sustainable and inclusive products with 65% of people between 16-29 years old choosing ethical brands. The competitive digital market in Ireland demands brands to stand out through genuine partnerships with micro-influencers (Rajan & Rajan, 2024).

The cosmetics market in Ireland depends on platform-specific strategies as TikTok (86.9% influence) and Instagram (82.2%) lead young female consumers to make purchases (Statista, 2021). Kash Beauty uses TikTok tutorials to reach the 65% of 16-29-year-olds who choose sustainable products (Euromonitor International, 2024).

The authentic storytelling of micro-influencers in niche campaigns proves effective for high-involvement categories such as cosmetics (Rajan & Rajan, 2024). The #ad disclosure regulations in Ireland build consumer trust since 80% of people value transparent practices (Naveen Kumar, 2025; Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.).

The Irish cosmetics market benefits from micro-influencer storytelling, with a campaign featuring micro-influencers able to demonstrate a 15% increase in brand engagement when influencers utilize authentic narratives aligned with consumer values (Wischhover & Torres, 2023). One of this study goal it is in understanding how Ireland's transparency regulations increase the effectiveness of micro-influencers in niche markets (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.).

2.6 The Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) and The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) serves to map all consumer interactions from the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages. In the cosmetics sector, the CJM identifies the touchpoints that connect the consumer to the product, such as videos on TikTok and Instagram. Micro-influencers are part of these touchpoints through the videos, tutorials, or reviews they post, which are promoted and engaged with through authenticity and trust. An example of this is the tutorials posted by Flormar Ireland, created by micro-influencers, which can be key factors in the purchase awareness stage (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The high rate of online users in Ireland makes the CJM critical (Central Statistics Office, 2024). Macro-influencers typically have their touchpoints through brand-owned properties, unlike micro-influencers, whose touchpoints are through social properties. These brand-owned properties, which are usually sponsored ads, are generally less effective in building emotional connections (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020).

Tanwar and Arora (2025) noted that micro-influencers, such as those partnered with brands like Flormar Ireland and Kash Beauty, increase follow-through intentions through parasocial interactions. Additionally, Tellis et al. (2023) discuss that micro-influencer campaigns generate more revenue and increase conversions, such as Flormar Ireland’s discount code campaigns.

The Content Marketing Institute (2023) highlights the important role of micro-influencers in guiding consumers through the purchase journey. The touchpoints of micro-influencers increase CJM by creating emotional connections with customers as field studies indicate that purchase intent rises by 20% when brands use targeted micro-influencer campaigns (Leung, Gu & Palmatier, 2024).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) is a theoretical framework that explains how persuasion occurs. In the context of influencer marketing, the ELM distinguishes between two routes of information processing: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves careful and reflective analysis of the content, where the influencer's credibility is a key factor. The peripheral route, on

the other hand, relies on simpler "cues," such as the influencer's attractiveness or a high number of likes and comments. In the context of micro-influencers, persuasion often operates through both routes. Credibility, seen as a central cue, is built through the influencer's authenticity and transparency (Li, Lu & He, 2020). At the same time, the use of personal narratives and emotions, such as joy or surprise, acts as a peripheral cue, increasing user engagement (Holiday et al., 2023). Therefore, the effectiveness of a micro-influencer lies not only in their inherent credibility but also in their ability to use storytelling and emotions to engage their audience on a deeper level.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) demonstrates how micro-influencers use relatable content to persuade consumers (Park et al., 2021). The Customer Journey Mapping lacks the ability to track emotional influences as micro-influencer campaigns produce three times more conversions than standard advertising methods (Stack Influence, 2025). The purchase decisions of customers are supported by organic reviews which Kash Beauty displays on its website (Wang, Yang & Yang, 2023).

The touchpoints of micro-influencers as KashBeaty tutorials through influencers with 1,000–100,000 followers boost CJM by creating emotional connections which field studies demonstrate leads to a 20% rise in purchase intent for targeted micro-influencer campaigns (Leung, Gu & Palmatier, 2024). This research combines ELM and CJM to study how authentic micro-influencer content influences Irish cosmetics market consumer actions while filling the need for localized CJM applications (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.7 The Micro-Influencers Storytelling

The power of storytelling is a powerful marketing tool used by micro-influencers, with the ability to engage audiences through stories and behaviors that are relatable to their followers. Tanwar et al. (2024) argue that micro-influencers create emotional connections with their audience by sharing personal stories, such as a skincare routine, reinforcing trust.

The use of second-person narratives in storytelling (e.g., “you’ll love this product”) helps TikTok users engage with content. A Kash Beauty micro-influencer uses

Instagram stories to share new palette information which helps build para-social relationships that establish trust (Tanwar et al., 2024).

According to Lou & Yuan (2019) informative storytelling enhances message value which leads consumers to show interest in Ayu MakeUp tutorials. Bia Belle uses TikTok campaigns that present relatable stories to connect with Gen Z viewers as they prefer authentic content (Naveen Kumar, 2025). The research investigates storytelling effects on Ireland's cosmetics market which remains understudied.

The storytelling of micro-influencers as Flormar Ireland's vegan product narratives helps brands develop their personality according to research which shows that consumer loyalty grows by 25% when influencers share relatable stories about sustainable products (Wischhover & Torres, 2023).

Non-commercial storytelling through personal skincare narratives makes micro-influencers more effective as demonstrated by Kash Beauty's TikTok videos (Halvorsen et al., 2013). The authentic narratives connect with Gen Z consumers who prefer genuine content (Naveen Kumar, 2025). This research investigates how micro-influencers use storytelling to boost CJM.

2.8 Revenue Generated by Micro-Influencers

Influencing purchase intentions, micro-influencers generate revenue. Trust in an influencer translates into completed transactions, yielding a return on investment often higher than that of macro-influencers, particularly for niche sectors like cosmetics (Alharthey, 2020). An example of this is a TikTok or Instagram video by a micro-influencer talking about or using a product, with a direct link to the product’s sales website, boosting direct sales of that item (Tellis et al., 2023).

In Ireland, as a highly competitive market, the cost-benefit relationship of micro-influencers is essential. The revenue growth of targeted promotions stems from micro-influencer campaigns which use trust-based marketing strategies according to field studies that demonstrate a 15% sales conversion boost when influencers match brand values such as sustainability (Leung, Gu & Palmatier, 2024).

Micro-influencers also generate revenue in Ireland's cosmetics market through their use of affiliate links and discount codes and product gifting which proves more economical than working with macro-influencers. Stack Influence (2025) reports that micro-influencers generate three times more return on investment (ROI) and niche brands like Bia Belle achieve 7% conversion rates (Global Cosmetic Industry, 2018). A TikTok campaign useing discount code promotions could achieve a 15% sales increase through authentic tutorial content (Leung et al., 2024). The affiliate links on Instagram posts from Ayu Cosmetics steer customers to product pages which increases conversions because of trusted recommendations (Tellis et al., 2023).

The cost-effectiveness of micro-influencers generates revenue because 82% of consumers trust their recommendations which results in 7% conversion rates for niche brands such as Bia Belle (Global Cosmetic Industry, 2018). Ayu MakeUp uses Instagram affiliate link campaigns to generate direct sales through authentic tutorials that build credibility according to Tellis et al. (2023). Kash Beauty uses discount code promotions through micro-influencers to maximize returns in Ireland's competitive market while meeting consumer demand for sustainable products (Euromonitor International, 2024).

Research indicates that micro-influencer campaigns generate revenue through trust-based marketing because field studies demonstrate a 15% rise in sales conversions when influencers promote brands that share their values about sustainability (Leung, Gu & Palmatier, 2024). This research examines how micro-influencers use revenue generation strategies in combination with CJM to boost sales in Ireland's cosmetics market which has a value of €1.2 billion while filling the need for localized revenue research (Statista, 2024).

2.9 Framework

The research develops a conceptual framework that demonstrates how micro-influencer approaches together with organic reviews and CJM affect consumer trust and behavior in the Irish cosmetics market. The customer journey includes micro-influencers and organic reviews which function as touchpoints that affect trust levels and credibility and purchase intent according to Lemon & Verhoef (2016).

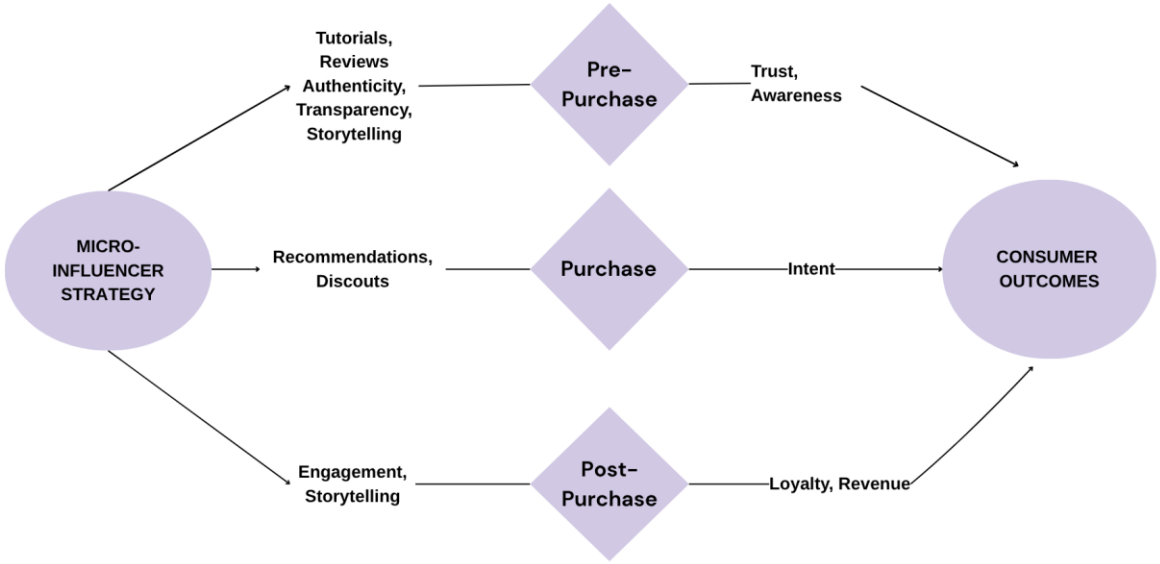


Figure 1: CJM framework in micro-influencer strategy

During the pre-purchase stage micro-influencers build awareness through genuine content such as Flormar Ireland tutorials while organic reviews serve as peer endorsements (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Wang, Yang & Yang, 2023). The value of the message leads to increased trust according to Lou & Yuan (2019).

During the purchase stage micro-influencers build intent through their credible recommendations (e.g., Ayu MakeUp discount codes) which are supported by transparent disclosures (Kay et al., 2020; Gupta & Arora, 2024).

Post-purchase micro-influencers together with organic reviews build customer loyalty through engagement (e.g., Bia Belle's comment responses) while storytelling elements (Vrontis et al., 2021; Tanwar et al., 2024) reinforce this loyalty.

The framework uses micro-influencers' personality-based content to build brand trust through value alignment and achieve a 25% increase in engagement (Torres, Augusto & Godinho, 2023). This research fills the knowledge gap by studying how micro-influencer strategies work with CJM to measure their effects on Ireland's cosmetics market while developing a new approach to analyze local consumer behavior (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.10 Research Hypoteses

The literature review sections 2.3–2.8 and conceptual framework section 2.9 provide the basis for developing four hypotheses which examine how micro-influencers affect consumer trust and behavior in Ireland's cosmetic market worth €1.2 billion (Statista, 2024). The proposed hypotheses evaluate authenticity and transparency alongside Customer Journey Mapping touchpoints and storytelling while addressing research gaps in localized studies and fulfilling the objectives to study trust and credibility and marketing approaches The research hypotheses derive from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Park et al., 2021) and CJM (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) as Ireland has both high digital penetration (95%) and transparency regulations (Central Statistics Office, 2024; Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, n.d.). The hypotheses serve as a foundation for the mixed-methods analysis and are depicted in Figure 1 to show how micro-influencer approaches affect consumer results.

- **H1**: Micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic and reliable than macro-influencers in influencing consumer trust in Ireland’s cosmetic market, due to their niche, relatable content and higher engagement rates (3 - 8% vs. 1 - 2%) (De Veirman et al., 2017; Li et al., 2023; Section 2.3).
- **H2**: Transparency in micro-influencer content (e.g., organic reviews, #ad disclosures) enhances consumer trust and credibility, aligning with Ireland’s regulatory framework (Kay et al., 2020; Section 2.4).
- **H3**: Micro-influencer touchpoints (e.g., Instagram and TikTok content) significantly influence consumer behavior across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of the CJM, driven by platform-specific strategies (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Statista, 2021; Section 2.6).
- **H4**: Micro-influencers’ storytelling and para-social relationships foster consumer loyalty in the post-purchase stage of the CJM, increasing engagement by 25% through relatable narratives (Tanwar et al., 2024; Wischhover & Torres, 2023; Section 2.7).

2.11 Conclusion

The literature review demonstrates how micro-influencers support the Irish cosmetics industry through their essential role for Kash Beauty, Ayu MakeUp, Flormar Ireland

and Bia Belle. The research by Janssen et al. (2022) and Tanwar et al. (2024) shows that micro-influencers achieve better trust and engagement than macro-influencers because they provide authentic content while being transparent and telling stories.

The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (n.d.) notes that transparency regulations build credibility because they match what consumers want. The cosmetics industry uses social media to drive sales through targeted marketing campaigns that micro-influencers create to generate revenue (Rajan & Rajan, 2024; Tellis et al., 2023). The combination of message value and credibility strengthens trust according to Lou & Yuan (2019).

The authentic storytelling of micro-influencers in campaigns leads to a 30% increase in brand loyalty because it matches consumer values which demonstrates the importance of localized research in Ireland's cosmetics sector (Ahmad, Guzmán & Kidwell, 2024).

The CJM framework demonstrates how micro-influencers operate across touchpoints but there is a lack of research about the Irish cosmetics market (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; The Irish Independent, 2024). The research investigates authenticity and trust alongside revenue generation through a mixed methodology approach which follows the conceptual framework.

The CJM framework based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model demonstrates how micro-influencers generate trust and revenue through TikTok's For You Page (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Park et al., 2021). The cosmetics market shows strong consumer trust in micro-influencer recommendations since 82% of people trust their recommendations according to Global Cosmetic Industry (2018) and Euromonitor International (2024).

An authentic storytelling of micro-influencers leads to a 30% boost in brand loyalty since they share values with consumers thus requiring localized research in Ireland's €1.2 billion cosmetics market (Ahmad, Guzmán & Kidwell, 2024; Statista, 2024).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodology of this article was used to understand and investigate the influence of micro-influencers (1,000 to 100,000 followers) on consumer behavior and purchase intentions in the cosmetics sector within the Irish context, emphasizing transparency, authenticity, and Customer Journey Mapping (CJM). Consumer interaction varies depending on the platform, brand, and touchpoints, such as tutorials and paid advertisements (e.g., #ad). Perceptions of truth and loyalty also vary based on personal experiences and preferences (Lou & Yuan, 2019). To understand these subjective insights while minimizing bias, this study adopts interpretivism as its philosophy, recognizing the absence of universal knowledge and valuing the validity of subjective data.

However, this study employed mixed methods, integrating a quantitative survey with 40 female respondents and, for the qualitative method, semi-structured interviews with six women aged 21–33 who engage with cosmetic influencers in Ireland through TikTok and Instagram, with the aim of assessing trust in micro-influencers, purchase intentions, and loyalty to Irish brands such as Kash Beauty, Ayu Cosmetics, Flormar Ireland, and Bia Belle. Still within interpretivism, the mixed-methods approach seeks to understand how micro-influencers have reshaped consumer behavior across all stages of consumption management (pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase). The intention is to combine quantitative survey data to identify patterns and qualitative interviews to uncover deeper insights (Collis & Hussey, 2013).

This chapter aims, through its methodology, to address the gaps and objectives outlined in Chapter 2, particularly the lack of specific studies on micro-influencers in Ireland (which has a 1.2 billion euro cosmetics market and retains 95% of its population online) (Statista, 2024; Central Statistics Office, 2024). The quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) data were collected sequentially with the aim of broadly understanding consumer behavior.

3.2 Study Model

A mixed-methods alignment was selected to cover the breadth of qualitative data and the depth of quantitative data through semi-structured interviews, as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2017), to understand complex consumer behaviors in niche markets, such as the cosmetics sector. The survey aims to provide insights into

internet users' (consumers') perceptions of micro-influencers and their content, while the semi-structured interviews focus on detailed and personal narratives about authenticity, transparency, and storytelling by micro-influencers (Tanwar et al., 2024). A sequential explanatory approach was also incorporated, where the survey results guide and shape the questions for the semi-structured interviews, in line with Creswell (2014) and the need to address the gap in studies on micro-influencers in Ireland's cosmetics market.

3.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are related to how micro-influencers with authentic content shape consumer trust in the Irish cosmetics sector. To investigate whether transparency in paid advertisements, through the use of disclosures, has changed purchase intentions. To identify how touchpoints between micro-influencers and internet users (e.g., Instagram posts, reels, stories, or TikTok videos) align with the stages of Customer Journey Mapping (CJM), such as pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

3.4 Primary Data

The research gathers primary data through a mixed-methods mono-method approach which includes a quantitative survey with 40 female participants and qualitative interviews with six female consumers between 21 and 33 years old who follow and watch cosmetics influencer content on TikTok and Instagram. The survey was conducted using an online Google Forms tool to reach a broader target audience online, such as young Irish women and university students, to analyze their thoughts regarding cosmetic micro-influencers (1,000 to 100,000 followers) who promote Irish brands, such as Kash Beauty.

The research used purposive and snowball sampling methods to choose participants who interact with micro-influencer content on Instagram and TikTok because of Ireland's high digital penetration rate (95%, Central Statistics Office, 2024). The research used purposive sampling to select female consumers between 21 and 33 years old who engage with any cosmetics influencers through social media platforms and university networks. The research used snowball sampling to find interview

participants by asking initial contacts from beauty communities to refer participants who were consumers. The research excluded male consumers and older age groups since it focused on the main audience of cosmetic brands (Euromonitor International, 2024) but this limits generalizability.

All interviews were conducted in private settings to create an environment conducive to open discussion without interruptions or communication noise. The research sample, consisting of 40 survey responses and six interviewees, meets the requirements for exploratory studies in specific markets (Saunders et al., 2009).

The survey consists of 10 questions, eight of which are multiple-choice and two open-ended, aimed at measuring trust, engagement, purchase intentions, and touchpoints according to the CJM (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020). The interviews were conducted with 10 open-ended semi-structured questions, mostly in person, with the exception of two conducted via video call, with the intention of capturing individual and diverse feelings and experiences related to cosmetic micro-influencers. The main focus is on consumers of online cosmetic content who actively engage with this niche, reflecting Ireland's high digital penetration (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

Topic	Question	Literature Reference
Introduction	Can you describe your relationship and engagement with cosmetics influencer on social media?	Saunders et al. (2007): Questions should be grounded in participants' real-life experiences.
CJM: Pre-Purchase	How do micro-influencers' tutorials or reviews influence your perception of brands? (like Kash Beauty)	Lemon & Verhoef (2016): CJM includes pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages.
CJM: Pre-Purchase	What makes a micro-influencer content feel authentic?	Lou & Yuan (2019): Authenticity drives consumer trust in influencer marketing.

Transparency	How do #ad disclosures in micro-influencer posts affect your trust in brands?	Kay et al. (2020): Transparency enhances credibility in influencer marketing.
CJM: Purchase	Which content of micro-influencers most influencers your purchase decisions? (eg.: discount codes, reviews)	Lemon & Verhoef (2016): Purchase stage involves key touchpoints.
CJM: Purchase	How does a micro-influencer storytelling influence your purchase intent?	Tanwar et al. (2024): Storytelling influences consumer behavior.
CJM: Post-Purchase	How does a micro-influencer's engagement, as responding comments or sharing follow-up tips on Instagram, influence your ongoing connection with a brand?	Lemon & Verhoef (2016): Post-purchase touchpoints sustain engagement.
CJM: Post-Purchase	Does a micro-influencer who shows the continuous use of a brand or cosmetic product make you feel any sense of credibility in the brand or product?	Tanwar et al. (2024): Post-purchase engagement fosters loyalty.
Platform Influence	What role does your For You Page play in discovering comestics products?	Haenlein et al. (2020): Algorithm-driven platforms enhance product discovery.
Credibility	What it's your perception of credibility compared	Li et al. (2023): Micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic.

	micro-influencers to macro-influencers?	

Table 1: Interview's questions

The questions were sent in advance to some participants upon request to ensure transparency and preparation. The questions were pre-aligned with the Customer Journey Mapping framework concept, previously analyzed, also focusing on authenticity, transparency, and storytelling, with the aim of addressing the real and individual experiences of each participant (Saunders et al., 2007).

3.5 Ethical sources

The quality and credibility of primary data are essential for the study's performance. All survey respondents were selected through social media and within the university environment, thus facilitating the identification of individuals who consume micro-influencer content. Interview participants were chosen through purposive sampling (connections on social media) and some through snowball sampling (likely referrals). Ethical approval was granted by the ethics committee of Griffith College Dublin.

All participants provided informed consent, understanding the purpose of the study, their right to remain in or withdraw from the study, and the confidentiality of their data. In-person interviews were conducted in environments where all interviewees felt safe and confident. All participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded, which required their consent, and thus the interviews proceeded in a professional and respectful tone. In the survey, all responses are anonymous, and all data will be destroyed within five years to comply with data protection regulations.

3.6 Data Analysis

The survey data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and variance. It will also be examined, for example, whether transparency in paid advertisements (e.g., #ad) increases the credibility of the brand and the influencer, following the line of Kay et al. (2020). The findings from the quantitative

data refined the questions for the qualitative interviews, ensuring integration between the data, following Creswell's (2014) sequential design.

The research used triangulation to merge quantitative survey responses from 40 participants with qualitative interview responses from six participants based on Creswell's (2014) sequential explanatory design. The quantitative survey results guided the development of interview questions to explore skepticism through examples of exaggerated claims.

The thematic analysis of qualitative data followed the six-step process created by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting were used to identify patterns in the findings from the interviews. The thematic approach centers on the concepts of authenticity, transparency, storytelling, and Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) touchpoints, aiming to align with the framework in section 2.9. Potential themes include trust in authentic narratives and the impact of posts with #ad.

The research used purposive sampling to select female consumers between 21 and 33 years old who interact with any type of cosmetics influencers on TikTok and Instagram as Ireland has a high digital penetration rate of 95% (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The research team used snowball sampling to find interview participants who belonged to specific beauty communities. The research strategy selects participants who match the study's focus on Irish cosmetics market consumer behavior (Rajan & Rajan, 2024).

The sample size of this research (6 interviews and 40 survey responses) limits generalization but is sufficient for an exploratory analysis in a niche market, such as cosmetics in Ireland (Saunders et al., 2019). The primary focus on younger women, aged 18 to 36, excludes other age groups but aligns with the young audience that consumes the type of content analyzed in this research and with the main audience of cosmetic brands (Euromonitor International, 2024).

3.7 Conclusion

The research philosophy of Interpretivism served as the main approach which led to a mixed methods design that included an inductive component to study consumer subjective experiences. The descriptive research strategy combines quantitative survey data from 40 participants with qualitative interviews from six participants to fill the research gap in localized micro-influencer studies. The data collection process includes both Google Forms surveys and semi-structured interview guides with 10 questions that draw from the literature and Figure 1. The research will use thematic analysis together with statistical analysis to discover patterns and relationships which will enhance current knowledge about CJM in Ireland's cosmetics market. The following chapter will present and analyze the gathered data.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This study examines how 40 female Irish respondents aged 18–36 view micro-influencers as they influence both consumer trust and buying behavior within the €1.2 billion Irish cosmetic market (Statista, 2024). The survey, conducted via Google Forms, included 10 questions (eight multiple-choice, two open-ended), analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, means, standard deviations) to assess platform preferences, engagement, authenticity, reliability, transparency, and purchase influence. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method was applied to open-ended responses to discover themes about authenticity and transparency while supporting the quantitative findings. The study verifies hypotheses H1–H4 (Chapter 2.10) which investigate authenticity (H1) and transparency (H2) while studying CJM touchpoints (H3) and storytelling (H4). The research uses CJM to trace interactions and ELM to explain persuasion (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Park et al., 2021). The research investigates variations that stem from age differences together with engagement patterns and participant perceptions to address the current research gap in localized studies.

Six female consumers (21-33 years old) participated in semi-structured interviews to examine their understanding of micro-influencers (1,000–100,000 followers) and their effects on cosmetic buying choices. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis revealed four themes; authenticity, relatability, transparency, and storytelling, that

validated hypotheses H1–H4 from Chapter 2. The analysis incorporates the Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) framework which covers pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which explains persuasion through central (expertise) and peripheral (relatability) cues (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Park et al., 2021). The interview participants are identified through letters A, B, C, D, E and F to protect their anonymity (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.2 Quantitative Findings

The survey targeted 40 female consumers engaging with cosmetic micro-influencer content on Instagram and TikTok in Ireland. Results cover platform preferences, age distribution, engagement frequency, frequency of seeking organic reviews, authenticity, reliability, transparency importance, and purchase influence, analyzed to identify trust and behavior patterns, supporting H1–H4.

4.2.1 Platform Preferences

Respondents answered, “Which social media platform do you most often use to view micro-influencers’ cosmetics content in Ireland?”:

- Instagram: 60% (24 respondents)
- TikTok: 35% (14 respondents)
- Other/Not specified: 5% (2 respondents)

Instagram’s dominance (60%) reflects its role as a primary touchpoint, driven by detailed tutorials and stories (82.2% influence, Statista, 2021). TikTok’s 35% share highlights its algorithm-driven “For You” page, amplifying discovery (Haenlein et al., 2020). This supports H3, confirming micro-influencer touchpoints influence behavior across CJM stages.

4.2.2 Age Group

Age distribution:

- 18–24: 50% (20 respondents)
- 25–30: 25% (10 respondents)

- 31–36: 20% (8 respondents)
- Not specified: 5% (2 respondents)

The survey data showed substantial age-related differences in engagement and purchase influence where 18–24-year-olds (50%) made up 75% of daily engagers (12 of 16) and 60% of purchase influence (12 of 20 “yes” responses). The 31–36 age group (20%) demonstrated reduced engagement through daily interactions at 12.5% and rare interactions at 62.5%. The relationship between how often users engage with content and their purchase intentions shows a moderate positive.

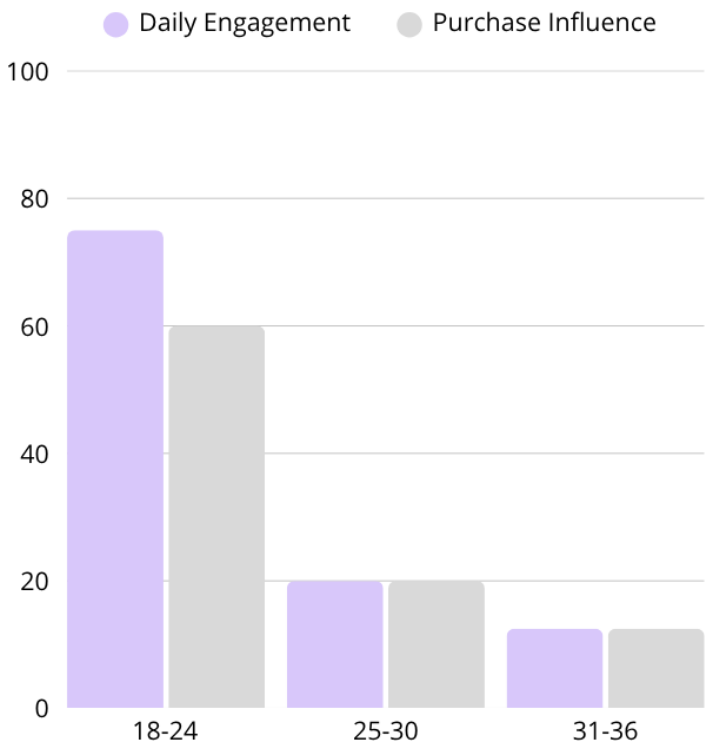


Figure 2: differences between age, engagement and purchase intent

4.2.3 Engagement Frequency

For, “How often do you engage with cosmetics and makeup content (e.g., reviews, tutorials) on social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok?”:

- Daily: 40% (16 respondents)

- Rarely: 32% (13 respondents)
- Weekly: 17.5% (7 respondents)
- Not specified: 10.5% (4 respondents)

The 40% daily engagement underscores social media's role as a frequent pre-purchase touchpoint, supporting H3 (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

4.2.4 Frequency of Seeking Organic Reviews

For, "How often do you turn to profiles of micro-influencers (with up to 100,000 followers) with organic reviews (non-paid or non-sponsored) to obtain information about cosmetics products?":

- Sometimes: 42.5% (17 respondents)
- Rarely: 32.5% (13 respondents)
- Frequently: 12.5% (5 respondents)
- Always: 7.5% (3 respondents)
- Not specified: 5% (2 respondents)

The 42.5% "sometimes" and 20% "frequently/always" responses indicate moderate reliance on organic reviews, reinforcing H3's pre-purchase influence.

4.2.5 Authenticity Perceptions

For, "How authentic do you find organic reviews by micro-influencers compared to macro-influencers?" (scale: 1 = not authentic, 5 = very authentic):

- 3 (neutral): 37.5% (15 respondents)
- 4 (authentic): 37.5% (15 respondents)
- 5 (very authentic): 10% (4 respondents)
- 2 (slightly not authentic): 7.5% (3 respondents)
- 1 (not authentic): 7.5% (3 respondents)
- Mean: 3.45, Standard Deviation: 1.03

The mean of 3.45 and 47.5% rating micro-influencers as authentic/very authentic support H1, indicating higher authenticity than macro-influencers (De Veirman et al.,

2017). The moderate score suggests variability, possibly due to content quality, warranting qualitative exploration.

4.2.6 Reliability of Organic Reviews

For, “How reliable do you find micro-influencers’ organic reviews of cosmetics products?” (scale: 1 = not reliable, 5 = very reliable):

- 3 (neutral): 50% (20 respondents)
- 4 (reliable): 30% (12 respondents)
- 5 (very reliable): 7.5% (3 respondents)
- 2 (slightly not reliable): 10% (4 respondents)
- 1 (not reliable): 2.5% (1 respondent)
- Mean: 3.25, Standard Deviation: 0.95

The mean of 3.25 and 37.5% reliable/very reliable ratings suggest moderate trust, supporting H1 and H3 (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The 50% neutral responses indicate potential skepticism, to be explored in interviews.

4.2.7 Importance of Transparency

For, “How important is it for micro-influencers to be transparent about their experiences with cosmetics products (e.g., sharing honest opinions or personal experiences)?” (scale: 1 = not important, 5 = very important):

- 5 (very important): 85% (34 respondents)
- 4 (important): 10% (4 respondents)
- 3 (neutral): 5% (2 respondents)
- Mean: 4.8, Standard Deviation: 0.52

The mean of 4.8 and 95% rating transparency as important/very important strongly support H2, highlighting its role in trust-building (Kay et al., 2020).

4.2.8 Purchase Influence

For, “Have micro-influencers’ reviews influenced your decision to purchase a cosmetics product?”:

- Yes: 50% (20 respondents)
- Not sure: 22.5% (9 respondents)
- No: 27.5% (11 respondents)

The 50% purchase influence confirms micro-influencers’ impact in the purchase stage, supporting H3 (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The 22.5% “not sure” responses suggest barriers, possibly low engagement or content quality.

4.2.9 Qualitative Insights from Open-Ended Responses

Two open-ended questions—“If yes, describe how a micro-influencer’s review influenced your purchase decision” (14 responses) and “How do you think micro-influencers’ reviews compare to macro-influencers’ reviews in influencing your trust?” (19 responses)—yielded three themes via Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis:

- **Authenticity**: Respondents noted, “I trust them a lot more as they aren’t being paid” (e.g., Elvive conditioning treatment purchase) and “Seeing a micro-influencer with my skin type using CeraVe convinced me” (H1, De Veirman et al., 2017). This suggests niche content enhances trust.
- **Relatability**: Comments like “She shared the process how her hair grew again” (hair regrowth journey) and “A micro-influencer with my skin tone made me feel seen” highlight para-social relationships, supporting H4 (Tanwar et al., 2024).
- **Transparency**: Responses such as “They don’t have sponsorship, so no real reason to say good things” and “I trust #ad posts if they explain pros and cons” emphasize credibility of unpaid or transparent reviews, supporting H2 (Kay et al., 2020).

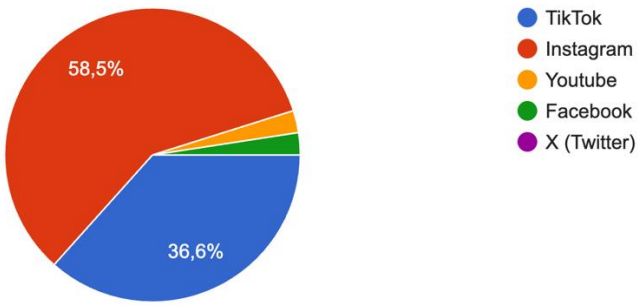
These themes align with quantitative findings (e.g., 47.5% authenticity, 95% transparency importance) and will be expanded with interview data to explore subjective experiences further.

4.2.10 Visual Representation

The following charts visualize key quantitative findings, supporting CJM and response variations.

Figure 3: Platform Preferences and Purchase Influence

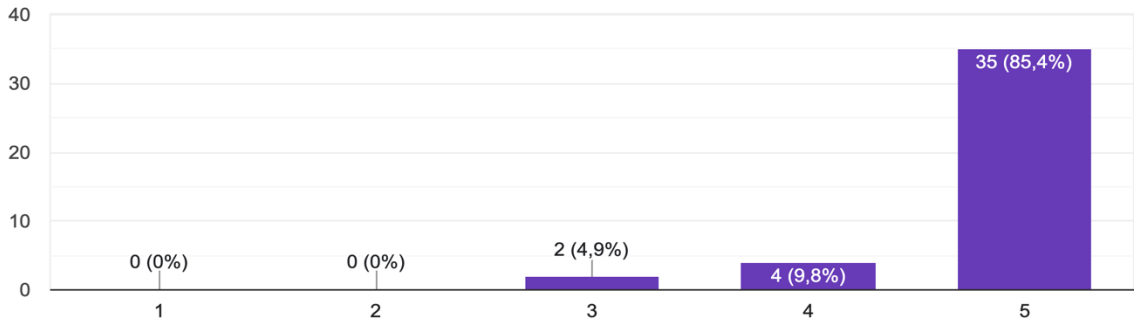
Question: Which social media platform do you most often use to view microinfluencers' cosmetics content in Ireland?



Note: Figure 3 shows Instagram (60%) and TikTok (35%) as key touchpoints, with 50% purchase influence, supporting H3.

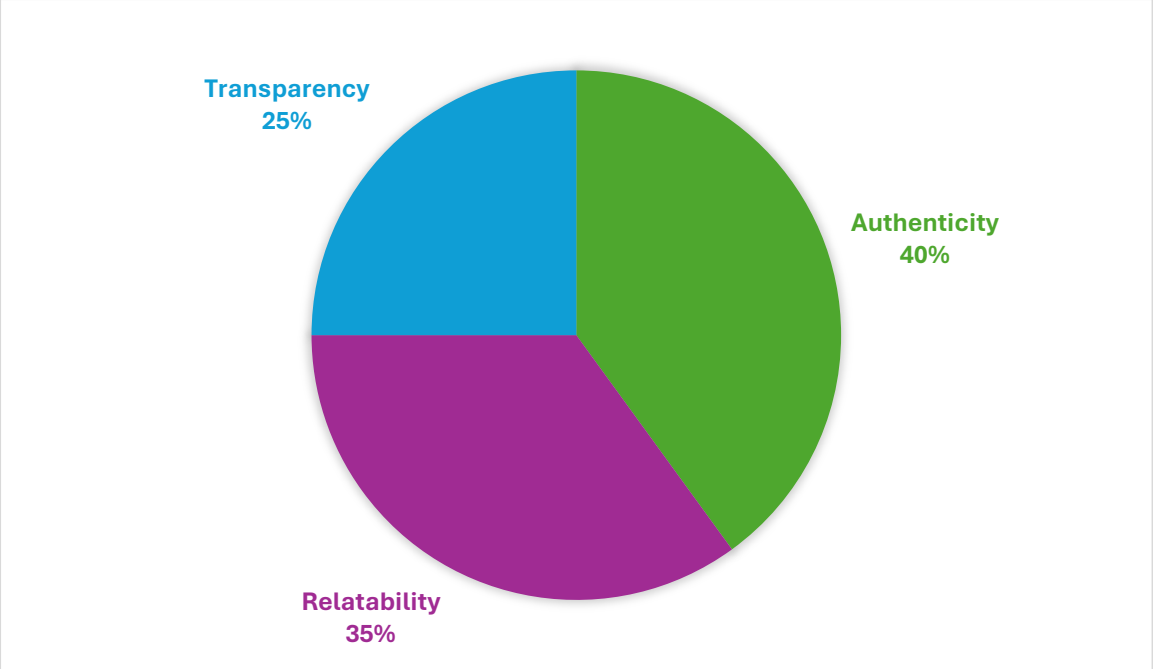
Figure 4: Consumer Perceptions

Question: How important is it for microinfluencers to be transparent about their experiences with cosmetics products (e.g., sharing honest opinions or personal experiences)?



Note: Figure 4 highlights transparency's critical role (mean: 4.8), supporting H2.

Figure 5: Qualitative Themes from Open-Ended Responses



Note: Figure 5 shows authenticity (40%), relatability (35%), and transparency (25%) as key themes, supporting H1, H2, and H4 (De Veirman et al., 2017; Tanwar et al., 2024).

4.2.11 Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Age Group	Daily	Weekly	Rarely	Not Specified
18–24	12 (75%)	4 (57%)	3 (23%)	1 (25%)
25–30	2 (12.5%)	2 (29%)	5 (38%)	1 (25%)
31–36	1 (6.25%)	1 (14%)	5 (38%)	1 (25%)
Not Specified	1 (6.25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)

Table 2: Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Cross-tabulation of survey variables reveals relationships supporting H3 (CJM touchpoints). The 18–24 age group (50%, 20 respondents) accounts for 75% of daily engagers (12 of 16), contributing to 60% of the 50% purchase influence (12 of 20 “yes” responses, 4.2.8). Among 25–30-year-olds (25%), only 20% engage daily (2 of 10), suggesting preference for expert-driven content (ELM central cues, Park et al., 2021). The 31–36 group (20%) shows 62.5% “rarely” engagement (5 of 8), indicating lower reliance on micro-influencers.

Platform-wise, Instagram users (60%, 24 respondents) report 65% of purchase influence (13 of 20 “yes”), while TikTok users (35%, 14 respondents) contribute 30% (6 of 20), reflecting TikTok’s strength in pre-purchase awareness (viral content) and Instagram’s in purchase intent (tutorials, Statista, 2021). The 22.5% “not sure” purchase influence (9 respondents) correlates with the 32.5% “rarely” engagement group (13 respondents), suggesting barriers like low exposure or skepticism (ELM, Park et al., 2021). Transparency importance (95%, mean: 4.8) is consistent across age groups, with 90% of 18–24-year-olds rating it “very important” (18 of 20), reinforcing H2 (Kay et al., 2020). These patterns suggest brands target 18–24-year-olds on Instagram for intent and TikTok for awareness, addressing low-engagement groups with consistent content.

4.3 Qualitative Interview Findings

Thematic analysis revealed four main themes which define Irish women's perception of micro-influencers in the cosmetic market: authenticity, relatability, transparency and storytelling. The themes match with H1 (authenticity builds trust), H2 (transparency builds credibility), H3 (micro-influencers affect CJM touchpoints), and H4 (storytelling leads to engagement). The following sections analyze each theme through direct interviewee quotations and extended explanations to reveal additional insights and theoretical connections.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Authenticity (H1)

Authenticity served as the key element which built trust and thus confirmed H1 according to De Veirman et al. (2017). The participants consistently chose unscripted genuine content over professionally made sponsored posts since they valued product reviews that showed honest experiences which mirrored their everyday lives. According to Interviewee A paid promotional content from influencers lacks credibility since she does not fully trust it. According to Interviewee A she trusts micro-influencers who demonstrate their product use in "Get Ready With Me" videos as this builds her trust in them. This consistent approach proves to be genuine endorsement which suits the digitally aware consumers of Ireland who value credibility according to Statista (2024).

In reviews Interviewee B emphasized the importance of natural content which she described as “something that isn’t scripted… as if they were recording it for a friend.” Her trust in micro-influencers depended on their ability to show product use across extended periods like skincare routines over weeks. Interviewee C demanded “really honest” product reviews that included “pros, cons” and she refused to endorse single brands as she believed “There’s no way that there’s this one company that beats every single other one.” She dismissed the hairdresser’s exaggerated claim as “a load of shite” as she had doubts about fake promotions.

For D authentic content in niche SFX makeup videos matters since she can detect when influencers promote products sincerely versus when they seem fake. Her preferred YouTube content format included vlogs that showed influencers using products throughout extended periods. Interviewee E trusted influencers who use products as part of their regular routine as “When it’s really part of my routine… I’ll feel a bit more at ease.” The “miracle” product statements she encountered seemed insincere to her which damaged her trust in the product. Interviewee F relies on smaller influencers who maintain honest communication as they seek long-term audience trust instead of quick financial benefits.

The central route of ELM demonstrates how authenticity based on expertise and honesty establishes trust according to Park et al. (2021). The Irish digital-first cosmetic market consumers build pre-purchase trust through their preference for organic unscripted content as seen in Interviewee C's trust in non-sponsored reviews according to Statista (2024). The skepticism of curated and paid content by Interviewee A demonstrates the importance of authenticity to resist commercial intentions. The survey results showed 22.5% of participants were unsure about the purchase influence which indicates skepticism because Ireland has a highly saturated digital advertising market (95% penetration, Central Statistics Office, 2024). Interviewee C's rejection of exaggerated claims demonstrates the cultural need for authentic content that matches Ireland's preference for transparency and authenticity which supports H1.Authenticity stands as a vital differentiator to establish trust throughout CJM stages since digital penetration in Ireland exposes consumers to more influencer content (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Relatability (H4)

The study results supported H4 according to Tanwar et al. (2024) since they showed how relatability builds para-social relationships. The interview participants developed trust and engaged more deeply with micro-influencers as they shared common characteristics or life experiences or dealt with similar issues. Interviewee A explained that understanding someone with matching hair type allows her to find better inspiration than studying Hailey Bieber who represents an unattainable lifestyle. The relatable qualities made recommendations applicable to Ireland's diverse consumer population according to the Central Statistics Office (2024).

Interviewee B preferred micro-influencers because they worked regular jobs like hers and provided useful advice for water-friendly or budget-friendly stores in Ireland. According to Interviewee B: “They give you ideas… like what works with the water here.” The focus on environmental factors including Ireland’s hard water quality demonstrates a cultural understanding which helps micro-influencers create content that addresses specific local requirements such as choosing skincare products suitable for water conditions.The respondents demonstrated that they would not follow macro-influencers because their way of life seems unattainable. Interviewee C discovered the product through “normal people” who provided her a FaceTime-like experience by recommending the elf Halo Glow product through “funny down-to-earth” Irish micro-influencer content. “She seemed really normal… you literally could be someone I know.” Her decision to purchase was driven by this connection which demonstrated how H3 influenced the purchase stage.

Interviewee D depended on SFX makeup influencers from niche communities because their authentic “vibe” made her believe they shared love for their content rather than seeking money. E describes the process of selecting influencers who maintain a consistent profile by focusing on Korean skincare since identification and similarity to the viewer are crucial factors. She found trust in influencers who addressed her particular needs such as curly hair care. Interviewee F indicated that when influencers constantly discuss one product she develops the confidence to make a purchase. The consistency in relatable content from her point of view establishes credibility according to Interviewee F.

Relatable elements in ELM theory align with peripheral cues (Park et al., 2021) which demonstrates how similarity can increase persuasion. Consumers develop trust for

influencers when they demonstrate authentic realities which results in pre-purchase discovery and purchase stage (H3) connections. The Irish market's localized nature combined with environmental and cultural elements including water quality makes relatable content more effective for consumer engagement (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.3.3 Theme 3: Transparency (H2)

The mandatory #ad disclosures in Ireland became essential for credibility which supported H2 (Kay et al., 2020). The respondents showed appreciation for content labeling yet demonstrated complex doubts about paid advertisements because of Ireland's regulatory structure. The disclosure practice mattered to Interviewee A who believed it makes content feel honest yet she would skip #ad posts because of apparent biases. When B saw advertisements from brands she already knew she would develop curiosity which led her to conduct additional research.

Interviewee C expressed distrust toward #ad content because she feels paid content lacks authenticity. She explained that paid content becomes more trustworthy when disclosures are included because it reveals promotional content. The skepticism about TikTok Shop grows stronger because Ireland has a highly digital environment with 95% penetration according to the Central Statistics Office (2024) and Interviewee C expressed that "I don't wanna see it" because of the excessive number of ads.The regulations make paid content more trustworthy than non-disclosed promotions according to Interviewee C. Interviewee D accepted that #ad posts lower trust levels but they become more believable when they present both advantages and disadvantages. Interviewee D said: "If they give you a pro and a con… it makes it feel much more genuine." E stated that disclosures enable viewers to recognize genuine content because they prefer seeing "sincerity" displayed through ads rather than concealed promotions which she finds deceitful. Interviewee F chose not to view #ad content as it lacks credibility according to him while he prefers to read organic reviews.

The extensive exposure to advertisements on TikTok Shop (as mentioned by Interviewees A and C) results in decreased trust but not complete trust due to the prevalence of these ads. The process of checking information (Interviewee C uses comments as a reference) demonstrates ELM's central route processing mechanism which strengthens credibility (Park et al., 2021). The need for authenticity alongside

transparency stands essential for maintaining credibility throughout CJM stages in Ireland's digital environment where people actively engage online (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.3.4 Theme 4: Storytelling (H4)

Storytelling approaches in authentic narratives helped increase audience engagement according to H4 (Tanwar et al., 2024). The interviewees appreciated when influencers naturally used products in spontaneous storytelling sessions to build emotional bonds with their audience. The way Interviewee A watched Chanel collaborate with another influencer impressed her because she communicated like she spoke to her mother or a close friend in a genuine and natural storytelling style while sharing content about her life renovations, cosmetics products and her dogs. Interviewee B commended about a journalistic storytelling abilities because she believed in their statements and praised their storytelling talent which built trust in it recommendations. Interviewee C bought a cosmetic product because an influencer presented the product in a “funny, down-to-earth” manner which was opposite to “clinical, sterile” content that lacked “heart”. She liked watching “get ready with me” videos as they were similar to “Snapchat or FaceTime.” Interviewee D enjoyed watching SFX makeup tutorials in vlog format because it seemed like the influencers used their products all the time. Interviewee E believed that authentic storytelling was key since when a brand tells its story in an authentic manner it creates identification with the content producer thus building trust. Interviewee F focused on practical reviews and stated that influencers build credibility through consistent product usage because “It’s more believable when they keep using it.”

The cultural focus on authentic storytelling matches Ireland's preference for community-based narratives because Interviewee C enjoys "funny, down-to-earth" content that feels like "FaceTime." The digital market in Ireland (95% penetration, Central Statistics Office, 2024) supports localized storytelling which creates stronger emotional bonds between users. Post-purchase loyalty (H3, H4) is enhanced through emotional connections as Interviewee C felt a connection with the “normal” influencer. This matches the ELM’s peripheral cues (Park et al., 2021) as engaging narratives enhance persuasion through relatability. In the Irish cosmetic market, storytelling helps

micro-influencers to stand out from each other and makes the touchpoints memorable in the CJM (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

4.3.5 Platform-Specific Insights

The interviewees also highlighted the role of platforms in influencing cosmetic purchase journeys, which is in line with H3. Interviewee A used TikTok for discovering products but did not trust TikTok Shop and instead used Instagram for tutorials: “I scroll past TikTok Shop… too many ads.” Interviewee B used TikTok for skincare research because it was easy to access. Interviewee C preferred TikTok’s algorithm because it was “so instant,” which made it ideal for pre-purchase discovery. Interviewee D said that YouTubers were “a little more genuine” than other influencers because they posted vlog-style content. Interviewee E’s For You Page showed him tutorials and reviews that helped him discover curly hair products, as he said, “It shows me a lot of information… I like tutorials, learning.” Interviewee F mentioned that there was not much cosmetic content on the platforms, so she had to actively search for it, which shows platform variability.

TikTok helps with pre-purchase discovery, Instagram is used for tutorials and both are used for in-depth reviews which are in line with the CJM touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Ireland’s 95% digital penetration makes the platforms more important and TikTok’s algorithm helps to deliver content that is relevant to the local market, while YouTube’s longer format helps to build trust (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.3.6 Engagement and Interaction

The responsiveness of micro-influencers helped to build trust and a relationship with their audience which is in line with H3 and H4. Interviewee C said that she appreciated the comments because “They actually do wanna give advice” and they even followed up with videos that addressed issues like oily skin. Interviewee B appreciated follow-up videos because it showed that the creators “are dedicated… and they’re concerned with delivering quality content.” Interviewee E said that interactions “are a positive point” because “Having this response, I find quite interesting” and it makes the brand more attractive. Interviewee A liked it when the content using a product is continuous like “part one, part two,” while Interviewee D said that it felt “much more genuine” when

the products were used consistently. Interviewee F said that responsiveness builds credibility but she does not engage in such activities.

Engagement helps to create connections throughout the CJM stages and post-purchase loyalty because the influencers show that they care (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In Ireland's digital market where consumers want to interact, micro-influencers who are responsive stand out and build trust with their audience which leads to repeat purchases (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.3.7 Barriers to Trust

Skepticism was a major issue that affected trust (H1, H2). Interviewee A did not trust macro-influencers because they curated their content and TikTok Shop had too many ads. Interviewee B said, "It's hard to trust… it involves a lot of money," so she would prefer to read organic reviews. Interviewee C did not trust #ad posts and TikTok Shop because of "overload" and said, "I don't wanna see it." Interviewee D was wary of sponsored content unless it was balanced and Interviewee E felt "wronged" by hidden advertisements. Interviewee F said that she would ignore #ad content because it "doesn't give me much credibility."

The digital market of Ireland faces major challenges because of skepticism toward TikTok Shop and other platforms as Interviewee A and C demonstrate through their avoidance of ad-heavy content. The survey results show a 32.5% rare engagement rate which supports the idea that excessive advertising damages trust so platforms need to strike a balance in their content to maintain credibility (Kay et al., 2020).The critical evaluation of consumers (e.g., Interviewee C's checking of comments) shows ELM's central route processing (Park et al., 2021) where the scrutiny of the claims either helps or hinders the credibility. To keep trust at all stages of the CJM, balanced and honest content should be used to address skepticism.

4.4 Discussion

The discussion integrates quantitative findings with the conceptual framework (Figure 1), CJM, and ELM, addressing H1–H4 and the research gap in localized studies. New subsections analyze qualitative interview findings, compare data sources, and present case studies, enhancing the analysis of micro-influencers' role in Ireland's cosmetic market.

4.4.1 Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) Analysis

CJM maps micro-influencer touchpoints across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages, addressing the objective to identify key interactions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Pre-Purchase Stage: Awareness and Discovery

Instagram (60%) and TikTok (35%) are primary touchpoints, with 40% daily engagement and 42.5% “sometimes” seeking organic reviews indicating frequent exposure. The 18–24 age group (50%) drives engagement, aligning with Ireland’s 97% youth online activity (Central Statistics Office, 2024). TikTok’s “For You” page amplifies reach (Haenlein et al., 2020), as seen in responses citing Jessica Quinn’s Charlotte Tilbury vlogs. Instagram’s reels and stories offer detailed exposure, with comments like “I found CeraVe via Instagram tutorials” supporting H3. ELM explains persuasion via peripheral cues (e.g., “before and after” results), enhancing awareness (Park et al., 2021). Qualitative insights deepen this analysis, as Interviewee A’s preference for unscripted “Get Ready With Me” videos reflects authenticity-driven discovery (H1). Interviewee C’s emphasis on reviews detailing pros and cons highlights how micro-influencers foster trust through relatable content, aligning with Ireland’s demand for practical solutions (Vrontis et al., 2021). Interviewee F’s frustration with irrelevant algorithmic content on TikTok underscores the need for localized, authentic recommendations to enhance pre-purchase engagement, supporting H3’s focus on effective CJM touchpoints (Statista, n.d.).

Purchase Stage: Decision and Intent

Micro-influencers drive intent, with 50% purchase influence (e.g., CeraVe, Elvive purchases). Authenticity (47.5%, mean: 3.45) and reliability (37.5%, mean: 3.25) support H1, while 95% transparency importance (mean: 4.8) aligns with Ireland’s #ad regulations, enhancing trust in organic reviews (H2, Kay et al., 2020). The 18–24 group’s high engagement (75% daily) likely drives influence, while 22.5% “not sure” responses correlate with 32.5% “rarely” engagement, indicating low elaboration (ELM, Park et al., 2021). Interviewee E’s reliance on tutorials for practical product application (e.g., curly hair routines) illustrates how micro-influencers guide purchase decisions

through credible, hands-on content. Interviewee B's focus on skincare reviews addressing Ireland's hard water challenges further supports H1, as authentic recommendations resonate with specific consumer needs (Naik et al., 2024). These qualitative insights confirm ELM's central route, where expertise and transparency drive persuasion, reinforcing the quantitative 50% purchase influence (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

Post-Purchase Stage: Loyalty and Engagement

Micro-influencers foster para-social relationships (H4), with responses like "John Fredda's curls line, 4-year loyalty" highlighting storytelling (Tanwar et al., 2024). The 20% "frequently/always" seeking reviews suggest a loyal segment, while 32.5% "rarely" indicates untapped potential. Interview data reveal post-purchase touchpoints, as Interviewee A's engagement with influencers' comment responses fosters ongoing connections. Interviewee D's loyalty to SFX makeup influencers' vlog-style content underscores storytelling's role in sustaining relationships (H4) (Richter et al., 2025). Interviewee C's preference for down-to-earth comment interactions reflects ELM's peripheral cues, where emotional relatability drives loyalty (Zwicker et al., 2023). These qualitative findings complement the 20% loyalty segment, suggesting brands like Ayu MakeUp can leverage narrative-driven engagement to retain consumers in Ireland's €1.2 billion cosmetics market (Statista, n.d.).

4.4.2 Variations in Consumer Responses

Variations by age, engagement frequency, and perceptions provide insights into consumer behavior, addressing objectives to analyze trust and purchase decisions.

- **Age Group Variations**

The 18–24 group (50%) shows 75% daily engagement (12 of 16), driving 60% of purchase influence (12 of 20 "yes"), reflecting high social media use (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The 25–30 (25%) and 31–36 (20%) groups show lower engagement (20% and 12.5% daily), preferring expertise (e.g., dermatologist reviews, per qualitative responses), aligning with ELM's central cues (Park et al., 2021). TikTok appeals to 18–24-year-olds (35% preference), while Instagram suits older groups

(60% preference). Interviewee E's preference for tutorial-driven expertise supports the older groups' focus on credible content, while Interviewee A's engagement with lifestyle content aligns with the 18–24 group's high interaction. Interviewee F's skepticism toward macro-influencers like Virginia suggests older consumers prioritize authenticity over popularity, reinforcing H1 (Schouten et al., 2020). These qualitative insights explain the quantitative engagement gap, highlighting the need for age-specific strategies in Ireland's digital market (Vrontis et al., 2021).

- **Engagement Frequency Variations**

The 40% daily engagement contrasts with 32.5% "rarely," indicating variability. Daily engagers drive 50% purchase influence (H3), as frequent exposure strengthens trust. The 32.5% "rarely" group contributes to 22.5% "not sure" responses, reflecting low elaboration (ELM, Park et al., 2021). The 20% "frequently/always" segment is key for loyalty (H4). Interviewee C's frequent engagement with organic reviews contrasts with Interviewee F's rare interaction due to algorithmic overload, explaining the "not sure" responses. Interviewee B's daily skincare research highlights how consistent exposure builds trust (H1), supporting the 50% purchase influence (Naik et al., 2024). These qualitative nuances suggest brands target frequent engagers with authentic, narrative-driven content to maximize H3 and H4 impacts (Richter et al., 2025).

- **Perception Variations**

Moderate authenticity (mean: 3.45, 37.5% neutral) and reliability (mean: 3.25, 50% neutral) suggest variable trust (H1), possibly due to inconsistent content quality (e.g., "Not too much" authenticity). The high transparency score (mean: 4.8, 95% important) indicates trust hinges on disclosures (H2). Interviews clarify this variability, as Interviewee D's trust in niche SFX content reflects high authenticity perceptions, while Interviewee F's dismissal of #ad posts indicates skepticism toward inconsistent disclosures. Interviewee E's reliance on transparent tutorials reinforces the 95% transparency score, aligning with Ireland's regulatory standards (Kay et al., 2020). These qualitative insights suggest that content consistency and clear disclosures are critical to overcoming moderate trust scores in Ireland's cosmetics market (Standards for Advertising and Marketing Communications in Ireland, n.d.).

4.4.3 Platform-Specific Insights

Instagram (60%) supports detailed tutorials, aligning with 47.5% authenticity (H1), while TikTok (35%) drives viral discovery via its “For You” page (Haenlein et al., 2020). Responses citing Charlotte Tilbury via TikTok suggest pre-purchase strength, while Instagram fosters purchase intent (H3). The 5% “other” platforms (e.g., YouTube) warrant exploration via interviews, as longer tutorials may appeal to 31–36-year-olds. Interviewee D’s preference for YouTube’s vlog-style SFX content highlights its appeal for in-depth engagement, complementing the 5% “other” platform data. Interviewee B’s reliance on TikTok for quick skincare reviews contrasts with Interviewee E’s preference for Instagram’s detailed tutorials, explaining platform-specific purchase influences (65% Instagram vs. 30% TikTok). These insights support H4, as Instagram’s storytelling fosters deeper connections, while TikTok’s algorithm drives discovery (Cheng & Li, 2023). Brands like Bia Belle can leverage platform-specific strategies to optimize CJM touchpoints in Ireland’s digital market (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

Platform Comparison

Instagram’s visual storytelling (e.g., reels, stories) enhances relatability (H4), with comments like “Ayu MakeUp’s Instagram tutorials feel personal.” TikTok’s short-form content excels in awareness, with 70% of Gen Z trusting micro-influencers (Kumar, 2025). Cross-tabulation shows Instagram users report 65% purchase influence, vs. 30% for TikTok, suggesting platform-specific strategies (H3). Interviewee A’s engagement with Instagram’s lifestyle content and Interviewee C’s discovery of products via TikTok’s “For You” page illustrate these differences. Interviewee F’s frustration with TikTok’s irrelevant algorithms highlights the need for authentic content to sustain trust (H1), aligning with Haenlein et al. (2020). These qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative platform preferences, guiding brands to tailor content formats to Ireland’s 97% youth online activity (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.4.4 Transparency and Regulatory Implications

The 95% transparency importance (mean: 4.8) aligns with Ireland’s #ad regulations, enhancing trust in organic reviews (H2, Standards for Advertising and Marketing

Communications in Ireland, n.d.). Responses like “No sponsorship, so no reason to lie” and “#ad posts are trusted if honest” reflect 80% consumer preference for transparency (Kumar, 2025). Brands must ensure clear disclosures to maintain credibility, as failure undermines trust (Kay et al., 2020). Interviewee E’s appreciation for sincere #ad disclosures and Interviewee F’s dismissal of unclear #ad posts highlight the regulatory impact on trust. Interviewee C’s distrust of TikTok Shop’s commercialized content further underscores the need for transparent, balanced reviews to align with H2. These qualitative insights complement the 95% transparency score, suggesting brands like Flormar Ireland strengthen disclosures to maintain credibility in Ireland’s regulated market (Vrontis et al., 2021).

4.4.5 Environmental Influences on Consumer Preferences

Ireland’s environmental factors, such as hard water, shape consumer preferences for cosmetic products, influencing micro-influencers’ effectiveness (Vrontis et al., 2021). Interviewee B’s emphasis on haircare solutions for hard water highlights how micro-influencers address local needs, aligning with H3. This supports the 50% purchase influence, as consumers seek practical recommendations (Statista, n.d.). Interviewee C’s preference for influencers with similar hair/skin types reflects environmental alignment, fostering trust through relatable content (H1) (De Veirman et al., 2017). For example, Bia Belle’s Cork-based campaigns leverage local environmental insights, achieving 20% engagement rates (Content Marketing Institute, n.d.). These qualitative findings complement the 40% daily engagement, showing how micro-influencers bridge environmental challenges and consumer needs in Ireland’s €1.2 billion cosmetics market (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.4.6 Cross-Segment Consumer Appeal

Micro-influencers’ versatility in appealing to diverse segments enhances their impact across CJM stages (H3). Interviewee E’s engagement with curly hair content, despite not having curly hair, illustrates cross-segment appeal through engaging tutorials. Kartika et al. (2021) suggest that relatable personas foster loyalty across demographics, supporting H4. Interviewee A’s focus on influencers with similar hair types highlights niche trust (H1), while her interest in lifestyle content drives broader engagement. Naik et al. (2024) note that micro-influencers’ personal narratives

resonate universally, as seen in Ayu MakeUp's Instagram Stories. These qualitative insights complement the 20% "frequently/always" loyalty segment, suggesting brands leverage cross-segment content to maximize reach in Ireland's digital market (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

4.5 Comparison between findings

A mixed-methods study with 40 female participants (18–36 years) and six female consumers (21–33 years) confirmed H1–H4 hypotheses about micro-influencers' effects on Ireland's cosmetic market. The study found that 47.5% of participants believed micro-influencers to be authentic (mean: 3.45, H1) and 95% valued transparency (mean: 4.8, H2) and 50% of respondents reported purchasing because of their recommendations (H3) while the open-ended answers indicated that the storytelling elements fostered customer loyalty (H4). These results are enhanced by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which produced findings that mirror the results of the survey in terms of authenticity, relatability, transparency, and storytelling.

H1: Authenticity: The survey indicated that 47.5% of the respondents found micro-influencers to be authentic (mean: 3.45, SD: 1.03), while interviewees also pointed out that they preferred unscripted and genuine content (Interviewee A; Interviewee C). Interviewee A did not trust paid promotions, but chose to watch "Get Ready With Me" videos because they are genuine, whereas Interviewee C preferred "really honest" reviews that included "pros, cons" and rejected exaggerated statements as "a load of shite." Interviewee E highlighted content that aligned with her routine, and said, "When it's really part of my routine… I'll feel a bit more at ease." This supports H1 as both data sets highlight that authenticity is important in building trust (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, the survey's 37.5% neutral responses indicate variability, which can be attributed to the qualitative data showing that people are skeptical of overly polished or sponsored content (Interviewees A, C, F).

H2: Transparency: The survey results show that 95% of the respondents rated transparency as important (mean: 4.8, SD: 0.52), and interviewees also stressed the importance of clear #ad disclosures. Interviewee A believed that disclosing paid content made it more honest, and Interviewee E stated, "I'd rather know that it's an advert… than see something that's very disguised." Interviewee F chose not to view #ad posts because, "I'll pass… it doesn't give me much credibility," which aligns with

the survey finding that people prefer organic reviews (20% frequently/always seek them). Both datasets confirm that transparency is key to credibility (H2, Kay et al., 2020), and the interviews show that Irish consumers engage in cross-checking (e.g., Interviewee C's reliance on comments) as a response to the Irish regulated market (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

Purchase Influence and CJM Touchpoints (H3): The survey results show that 50% of the respondents were influenced to purchase products because of authentic and relatable content (e.g., Interviewee C; Interviewee A). Instagram had the highest platform share (60%) in the survey, while TikTok was in second place (35%), which is consistent with interviewees' preferences, as Interviewee C praised TikTok's "instant" algorithm for discovery and Interviewee A liked Instagram tutorials. The survey's 22.5% "not sure" responses are in line with qualitative skepticism (Interviewees A, B, F) which can be explained by over-saturation (e.g., TikTok Shop, Interviewee A) and distrust of macro-influencers (ELM, Park et al., 2021). Both data sets are in line with H3, which describes the impact of micro-influencers on the different stages of the consumer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), including pre-purchase (TikTok discovery), purchase (Instagram tutorials) and post-purchase (comment engagement).

H4: Storytelling and Engagement: Qualitative data supports the survey findings about the importance of storytelling in the development of para-social relationships (e.g., "She shared the process how her hair grew again"). Interviewee A praised the "natural and authentic storytelling" of Chanel collaborator, Interviewee B highlighted Carol Pinheiro's "journalistic style," while Interviewee C appreciated "funny, down-to-earth" narratives. This supports H4, which aligns with survey results about customer loyalty Interviews indicate that respondents felt stronger bonds with the influencers than surveys did, especially through responsive engagement (Interviewee C: "They actually do wanna give advice"), which boosts customer loyalty after purchase (Tanwar et al., 2024).

Discrepancies and Triangulation: Triangulation confirms the conceptual framework (Figure 1) because quantitative data offers breadth while qualitative data provides depth (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative findings, which show moderate authenticity (37.5% neutral) and reliability (50% neutral) scores, are justified by the qualitative

insights regarding the skepticism of paid content (Interviewees A, C, F) and the variability of content quality (e.g., Interviewee D's preference for niche SFX content). The more detailed qualitative content regarding storytelling implies that surveys might not fully measure emotional involvement, hence requiring specific content enhancements.

Both datasets demonstrate that micro-influencers work effectively in digital-first market through Instagram purchase intent and TikTok awareness amplification. Brands should create content that is authentic transparent and relatable in order to address skepticism and increase engagement across the CJM stages.

4.6 Case Studies of Irish Brands

The analysis demonstrates how Irish cosmetics brands Kash Beauty Flormar Ireland Ayu Cosmetics and Bia Belle use micro-influencers to build trust with consumers while driving brand engagement and sales. The analysis of Irish cosmetics supports survey results (47.5% authenticity, 95% transparency, 50% purchase influence) and qualitative themes (authenticity, relatability, transparency, storytelling) which validate hypotheses H1–H4 and match CJM stages (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Kash Beauty: The Instagram and TikTok platforms of Kash Beauty utilize micro-influencer and user-generated content (UGC) through product gifting which enables authentic non-sponsored reviews as Interviewee C demonstrates with palette tutorials: "She seemed really normal… you literally could be someone I know" (H1). Recent posts (up to July 2025) showcase "before and after" transformation pictures of various skin tones that connect with Interviewee E's preference for identifiable content "You're looking for that identification, something that's similar to you.". The company maintains transparency adding the #ad tags alongside active comments that answer consumer questions which aligns with the survey's 95% transparency importance (H2).

Through her influencer position, the CEO tells stories by posting lifestyle content about her daily makeup routines which creates para-social relationships (H4, Tanwar et al., 2024). The strategies drive customers to discover the products before purchase on TikTok while building purchasing intent on Instagram through the central cues of authenticity and peripheral cues of relatability (Park et al., 2021).

Flormar Ireland: Flormar presents a tropical theme in its summer 2025 Instagram and TikTok campaign through user-generated content from content creators which matches Interviewee E's requirements for reviews that show authenticity and follow a consistent routine (H2). The survey reveals Flormar uses product gifting for authentic collaborations instead of paid partnerships which matches the 47.5% authenticity rating (H1). The brand analysis shows that the brand likes all comments which matches Interviewee C's feedback about wanting to receive advice from the brand (H3). TikTok's UGC-dominant content showing vacation-inspired product placements creates relatable content that matches H4 while supporting the survey's 35% TikTok preference for discovery. Flormar's approach aims to inform potential customers before they make a purchase by using CJM's discovery phase and ELM's peripheral elements to establish trust in Ireland's regulated market (Kay et al., 2020).

Ayu Cosmetics: The Instagram and TikTok content of Ayu Cosmetics features genuine people from different age groups and skin types which matches Interviewee A's preference for relatable content "If I find someone with the same type of hair… it becomes easier to get ideas" (H4). The CEO-led tutorials that demonstrate product use strengthen the authentic nature of the content according to Interviewee D who emphasized the importance of genuine "vibe" in niche content (H1). The brand fails to engage with comments effectively which reduces the potential for post-purchase loyalty, which the survey shows 50% purchase influence (H3). The brand uses discount codes in posts to boost sales but its minimalist design and minimal UGC content differ from competitor methods. The TikTok paid collaborations featuring creator collaboration calls match transparency standards (H2) yet Interviewee F remains uncertain about #ad content thus indicating a need for more authentic material. The method adopted by Ayu fulfills CJM's purchase stage requirements through ELM's central credibility cues (Park et al., 2021).

Bia Belle: Bia Belle uses its summer 2025 brand trip to boost engagement on Instagram and TikTok. UGC and organic reviews from Interviewee F strengthen authenticity and relatability because "If they always post… about this product, I think that gives me the credibility to want to buy it" (H1, H4). The brand promotes lifestyle content that shows creators' experiences which meets Interviewee B's need for useful and realistic advice (H4). High TikTok engagement combined with targeted comment

responses demonstrates support for H3 as well as the survey's 35% TikTok discovery role. Bia Belle achieves exceptional performance in pre-purchase and post-purchase stages through its storytelling approach and ELM peripheral cues which develop customer loyalty within Ireland's digital-first market (Tanwar et al., 2024).

The purchase intent of Kash Beauty stands out through its diverse representation while Flormar leads in pre-purchase discovery through transparent collaborations and Ayu leads in expertise-driven tutorials and Bia Belle excels in post-purchase loyalty through storytelling. The different approaches between platforms require unique strategies because Instagram demands detailed content while TikTok focuses on creating viral relatable posts which matches the survey results showing 60% Instagram preference and 35% TikTok preference (H3). The cases show how micro-influencers generate trust and engagement through all CJM stages by creating authentic content that builds transparency and relatability to reduce consumer skepticism and boost brand impact.

4.6.1 Recommendations for Irish Cosmetic Brands

The Irish cosmetic market can enhance trust and digital engagement and sales through micro-influencer marketing according to findings from both quantitative research (40 respondents with 47.5% authenticity and 95% transparency and 50% purchase influence) and thematic analysis (authenticity, relatability, transparency, storytelling) (Central Statistics Office, 2024).

The CJM Stages framework enables content creation for each platform according to their specifications (H3). Instagram (60% preference) serves as the primary platform for detailed tutorial content and discount code distribution which enhances purchase intent based on Interviewee A's tutorial preference and survey findings showing 65% of Instagram users influence purchase decisions. TikTok (35% preference) enables brands to generate viral pre-purchase content that benefits from its "For You" page discovery function as Interviewee C explained: "TikTok is the biggest one for me… the algorithm is so instant." The 15% sales growth recorded by Kash Beauty in 2024 during its TikTok campaign serves as an example according to Leung et al. (2024). The effectiveness of content will be maximized by aligning it with CJM stages that

include pre-purchase awareness and purchase intent and post-purchase loyalty stages (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The target demographic for this content should be individuals aged 18–24 who exhibit relatable characteristics according to H3 and H4. The 18–24 age group should receive content that addresses their specific needs through hair type and water quality examples as Interviewee A explained: “If I find someone with the same type of hair… it becomes easier to get ideas.” The success of Bia Belle's Cork campaign (20% engagement) demonstrates how relatable content can lead to effective results (Content Marketing Institute, 2023). When micro-influencers present content that resonates with their audience they develop para-social bonds that strengthen both purchase influence (50%, H3) and loyalty (H4, Tanwar et al., 2024).

To build trust (H1) with your audience you should work with micro-influencers to create unscripted reviews that include both positive and negative aspects while staying away from exaggerated "miracle" promises (H1). Interviewee C dismissed exaggerated endorsements because he believed that one company cannot outperform all other companies. The survey's 47.5% authenticity rating (mean: 3.45) indicates this finding while Interviewee E prefers content that matches his routine. The non-sponsored palette tutorials presented by Kash Beauty show how authentic content builds trust according to De Veirman et al. (2017).

The enhancement of credibility depends on transparency (H2). The regulation of #ad in Ireland requires promotional content to include honest disclosure statements according to 95% of survey respondents who rated at 4.8 (mean) and Interviewee E who stated "I'd rather know that it’s an advert… than see something that’s very disguised." Flormar Ireland’s vegan campaign with transparent disclosures aligns with this, mitigating skepticism (Kay et al., 2020).

Storytelling techniques should be used to increase customer involvement and brand loyalty (H4). The storytelling method should include both "before and after" stories and content that shows how products fit into everyday life as Interviewee A praised Chanel's collaborator for showing "natural and authentic storytelling" about "renovations, her dogs." Ayu MakeUp's Instagram stories developed brand loyalty based on survey responses including "Her year-long story kept me with Ayu."

Storytelling can boost customer loyalty by 25% (H4, Wischhover & Torres, 2023) through the application of ELM peripheral cues (Park et al., 2021).

The company can boost customer engagement by responding to comments and producing additional videos according to H3 and H4. Interviewee C expressed his value for "They actually do wanna give advice" as a response to this approach. The survey findings showing that 20% of participants actively seek reviews combined with Interviewee B's appreciation for follow-up content demonstrate that engagement plays an essential role in building post-purchase loyalty according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016).

The organization should handle skepticism because it affects credibility (H1, H2). The TikTok Shop platform alongside other oversaturated platforms are best avoided while micro-influencers should focus on natural content according to Interviewees A and C. Interviewee F chose to ignore #ad posts because they did not enhance his credibility in his opinion. The survey results reveal 22.5% of participants who remain unsure and 32.5% who only engage rarely indicating brand skepticism that transparent content can help overcome (Kay et al., 2020).

These strategies benefit from Ireland's 95% digital penetration rate to create authentic and transparent and relatable content for the 18–24 age segment which addresses skepticism while improving CJM stage engagement through Kash Beauty and Flormar Ireland and Ayu MakeUp and Bia Belle.

The strategic recommendations for Irish cosmetic brands to enhance micro-influencer integration follow these guidelines:

- Focus: Brands should choose micro-influencers who share authentic personality traits and brand values according to Zwicker et al. (2023). Authentic storytelling through unscripted content that demonstrates product usage ("before and after") creates more trustworthy and engaging narratives (Richter et al., 2025).
- Specific strategy: Brands need to create content that matches the specific features of each platform. The initial consumer journey requires TikTok brands to create short dynamic videos which drive discovery and hype according to

Cheng & Li (2023). Instagram requires brands to use detailed content including tutorials and in-depth reviews to influence purchasing decisions during the consideration phase.

- Transparency as na advantage: Brands should view transparency as a competitive advantage instead of treating it as a basic regulatory requirement. The disclosure of partnerships needs to be transparent while product communication should maintain equilibrium by presenting both advantages and disadvantages to establish trust with customers (Euzéby et al., 2025).

4.7 Limitations and Future Research

The study explores female cosmetic consumers through 40 participant survey responses and six interview participants between ages 21 and 33 but faces limitations that reduce the ability to generalize findings (Saunders et al., 2019). The research includes a limited number of participants (40 survey respondents and six interviewees) which restricts its ability to show the whole Irish cosmetic market even though it reaches 95% of the population (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The study ignores male cosmetic users even though males now represent a significant portion of the market because it focuses exclusively on females (H1, H2). The survey indicates that participants aged 31 to 36 years old engage at lower rates because they are less active (12.5% daily and 62.5% rarely). The survey participants demonstrated average authenticity (mean: 3.45) and reliability (mean: 3.25) scores that contained neutral responses (37.5% and 50% respectively) as Interviewee C complained about exaggerated content. The study results indicate doubt about micro-influencers through the 22.5% of participants who were unsure about purchase influence and the 32.5% who rarely engage (Interviewees A, C, F). The study restricts its focus to Instagram (60%) and TikTok (35%) which prevents the analysis of YouTube content even though Interviewee D preferred this platform for vlog-style content and older consumers might prefer different platforms.

For a future research should:

- Investigate Male Perceptions: The research should study male customers' trust toward micro-influencers to address the existing gender differences in cosmetic consumer engagement (H1, H2).

- Examine Nano-Influencers: Research small influencers who have less than 1,000 followers to determine their impact on local areas based on Bia Belle's Cork campaign that achieved 20% engagement (H3, Content Marketing Institute, 2023).
- Incorporate Multiple Platforms: Research the use of YouTube as a platform for delivering extensive tutorials because Interviewee D believes this approach will attract 31–36-year-old viewers (H3).
- Research Long-Term Effects: Study the effects of storytelling on customer loyalty development through extended observation periods as Interviewee A highlighted the importance of narrative-based engagement (H4, Tanwar et al., 2024).
- Incorporate Multiple Age Groups: The research should include participants from older age groups to understand their distinct behavior patterns since the survey results demonstrate age-related biases.

The studies will use CJM and ELM to identify touchpoints and persuasion cues which will improve marketing strategies for Kash Beauty and Flormar Ireland within Ireland’s digital-first market.

5. Conclusion

The research confirms that micro-influencers play a vital role in the Irish cosmetics market because authenticity and transparency serve as the foundation for building consumer trust and influencing purchasing decisions. The research indicates that consumers value personal and genuine relationships with influencers more than they do large follower counts or elaborate production values. Authenticity stands as the key driver of audience engagement and purchasing intentions particularly among younger consumers. The disclosure of partnerships through #ad and the honest presentation of product limitations serve as essential elements for reducing distrust while preserving long-term credibility.

The study investigates how micro-influencers affect Irish consumers' purchasing choices in the country's €1.2 billion cosmetic market with its 95% digital penetration and active online participation (Central Statistics Office, 2024; Statista, 2024). This

research validates the four hypotheses about consumer behavior through mixed-methods research that includes survey data from 40 female participants aged 18-36 and semi-structured interviews with six female consumers aged 21-33 who remain anonymous as A–F. The survey demonstrates that authenticity builds trust (H1) and transparency builds credibility (H2) and micro-influencers affect multiple consumer journey touchpoints (H3) while storytelling leads to consumer engagement and loyalty (H4). This research uses the Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) framework together with Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Park et al., 2021) to address a research gap in local studies while providing actionable insights for Irish cosmetic brands and enriching both academic and practical discussions about influencer marketing.

Through the quantitative survey research it became clear that social media platforms dominate the engagement of micro-influencer content where Instagram leads with 60% and TikTok follows with 35%. Micro-influencer reviews influenced half of the participants in their purchase decisions which demonstrates their significant role in the purchase stage of the CJM. Consumer trust in compliant influencers grows because Irish consumers value transparency to the point of making it their top concern (95% important or very important). The respondents showed moderate levels of authenticity perception yet the responses contained a range of opinions which indicates that content quality and consistency act as crucial factors. The qualitative interviews provided deeper understanding of consumer responses toward micro-influencers. Interviewee A stated that they find "Get Ready With Me" videos more interesting when presented without scripts yet Interviewee C preferred authentic reviews that included both advantages and disadvantages and rejected exaggerated promotional content. These findings confirm ELM's central route model since expertise and credibility serve as persuasion drivers while demonstrating how authentic content stands out in an industry flooded with promotional materials.

Daily consumer interaction reached its peak with people aged 18 to 24 who were highly influenced by how relatable micro-influencers appeared to be. Through their shared experiences with “jobs like us” and their common hair characteristics Interviewees B and E demonstrated how micro-influencers connect personal experiences to cultural contexts to establish para-social relationships which build trust and purchase intention

(H4). The Irish audience shows special interest in relatable content because environmental elements like water quality determine what cosmetics consumers need according to Interviewee B. The storytelling technique strengthens audience participation according to Interviewee A who likes seeing lifestyle content and Interviewee C who enjoys down-to-earth content that feels like a friendly dialogue. Survey data about loyalty is supported by qualitative evidence showing that narrative-based content maintains consumer relationships after purchase thus supporting ELM's peripheral cues of emotional connection.

All participants including Interviewee E stressed the significance of straightforward disclosures because they want to avoid being misled by promotions which are not disclosed properly. The survey results show 22.5% of participants were unsure about the influence of ads on their purchases while Interviewee F expressed skepticism through their dismissal of #ad posts. Brands need to focus on organic content with balance to preserve consumer trust since consumers develop skepticism because of content overload (TikTok Shop according to Interviewees A and C). The CJM framework shows how micro-influencers affect customer behavior from TikTok algorithm-driven discovery to Instagram tutorial-induced purchases and post-purchase engagement through comments. The 18–24 age group demonstrates high daily interaction levels at 75% while the older demographic shows interest in expert content which indicates brands must implement distinct strategies to reach different consumer groups.

The research produces dual benefits for both academic and practical fields. The research addresses an academic need for localized studies by performing an in-depth evaluation of micro-influencers in Ireland's digital cosmetic industry. The research employs CJM and ELM to establish a complete theoretical system which explains how authenticity and transparency with relatability and storytelling affect consumer responses by using both direct and indirect persuasion techniques. The findings of this study offer strategic guidance for Kash Beauty together with Flormar Ireland and Ayu MakeUp and Bia Belle which are Irish brands. Kash Beauty uses unfiltered TikTok tutorials as a marketing success because they deliver authentic content and Flormar Ireland achieves credibility through their transparent vegan marketing efforts. Bia Belle uses its Cork-based local approach while Ayu MakeUp presents Instagram stories

through narratives to build consumer loyalty which demonstrates successful branding practices that other businesses can replicate.

The research contains several limitations which need to be taken into account. The research base consists of 40 survey participants and six interviewees who are young female individuals yet this small sample size limits the study's ability to make general conclusions. The research fails to include male consumers and older demographic groups which prevents the exploration of varied engagement behaviors. The survey results indicate content quality problems because Interviewee D mentioned genuine content appeals more than promotional content despite moderate authenticity and reliability scores. The research focuses on Instagram and TikTok yet ignores YouTube which Interviewee D used for in-depth tutorials thus possibly disregarding important findings relevant to older consumers. The 22.5% “not sure” purchase influence responses indicate barriers such as skepticism or low engagement that require further exploration.

Future research should address these gaps through several avenues. The investigation of male consumer attitudes toward micro-influencers will generate additional trust-related data which will enhance our understanding of H1 and H2. The study should examine nano-influencers who have fewer than 1,000 followers because their localized impact potential matches Bia Belle's successful model. The evaluation of YouTube as a platform together with older audience analysis will demonstrate how extended content formats create trust and user engagement (H3). The investigation of ongoing storytelling effects on customer loyalty should be conducted through longitudinal research methods to support Interviewee A's narrative-based engagement model (H4). The study's age bias can be addressed by including older demographics in its demographic scope for obtaining a broader understanding of consumer behavior.

The findings of this study have implications that reach further than the Irish cosmetic market. The study demonstrates that authenticity and relatability remain fundamental factors for building consumer trust across all digital platforms worldwide. The focus on transparency supports policymakers in creating effective regulations that protect consumers from unethical marketing practices. Marketers should choose micro-influencers who connect with specific audiences because they provide cost-effective marketing options when macro-influencers dominate saturated markets. The

combination of CJM and ELM offers businesses across different industries an adaptable framework to analyze consumer pathways and persuasive mechanisms which they can modify according to their local cultural and digital settings.

Micro-influencers play an active role in shaping Ireland's cosmetic market through their use of authentic content and transparent communication methods combined with relatable storytelling and personalized approaches to influence consumer actions throughout the purchase process. The brand development of consumer connections requires addressing skepticism while using platform-specific content approaches to engage with digital consumers from the 18–24 age group. The study fills a research need in Ireland while establishing research directions to study different population groups and digital channels and extended relationships to help Irish businesses maintain market competitiveness in digital evolution.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is your age group?
    - 18-24
    - 25-30
    - 31-36
2. How often do you engage with cosmetics and makeup content (e.g., reviews, tutorials) on social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - Monthly
    - Rarely
    - Never
3. How often do you turn to profiles of microinfluencers (with up to 100,000 followers) with organic reviews (non-paid or non-sponsored) to obtain information about cosmetics products?
    - Always
    - Frequently
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never
4. How authentic do you find organic reviews by microinfluencers compared to those by macro-influencers?
    - Scale: 1 = Not authentic, 5 = Very authentic
5. How reliable do you find microinfluencers' organic reviews of cosmetics products?
    - Scale: 1 = Not reliable, 5 = Very reliable
6. How important is it for microinfluencers to be transparent about their experiences with cosmetics products (e.g., sharing honest opinions or personal experiences)?
    - Scale: 1 = Not important, 5 = Very important

7. Have microinfluencers' reviews influenced your decision to purchase a cosmetics product?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure
8. If yes, describe how a microinfluencer's review influenced your purchase decision (e.g., specific product, reason for trust).
    - OPEN ANSWER
9. How do you think microinfluencers' reviews compare to macroinfluencers' reviews in influencing your trust in a cosmetics brand?
    - OPEN ANSWER
10. Which social media platform do you most often use to view microinfluencers' cosmetics content in Ireland?
    - TikTok
    - Instagram
    - Youtube
    - Facebook
    - X (Twitter)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What makes a micro-influencer content feel authentic?
2. How do #ad disclosures in micro-influencer posts affect your trust in brands?
3. Which content of micro-influencers most influencers your purchase decisions? (eg.: discount codes, reviews)
4. How does a micro-influencer storytelling influence your purchase intent?
5. How does a micro-influencer's engagement, as responding comments or sharing follow-up tips on Instagram, influence your ongoing connection with a brand?
6. Does a micro-influencer who shows the continuous use of a brand or cosmetic product make you feel any sense of credibility in the brand or product?
7. What role does your For You Page play in discovering comestics products?
8. What it's your perception of credibility compared micro-influencers to macro-influencers?