ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The influence of social media on skincare among university students in Al-Madina region: cross-sectional questionnaire study

Mosab T. Mohanna[1], Kholod Hamdan Aljohani[2], Razan Abdullah Alharbi[2], Nada Saad Aljohani[2], Majd Nasser Saeed Bin Jaber[2], Arwa Mohammed Maihoub[2], Najla Ibrahim Hajea Alenezi[2], Wejdan Ghuthayman Aljohani[2], Rabab Tawfiq Albeladi[2], Rana Muteb Almohammdi[2]

ABSTRACT

Background: Social media has emerged as a significant source of health and beauty information. Users' knowledge, opinions, and purchasing habits are influenced by platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. While social media makes information more accessible, it may also spread misinformation and unrealistic beauty standards.

Methods: A cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey was conducted among university students aged ≥18 years in the Al-Madina region. An online survey collected data on demographics, social media use, skincare information sources, trust in online content, purchasing habits, and attitudes toward cosmetic treatments. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used for analysis.

Results: A total of 511 students participated. Overall, 87.1% used social media for more than one hour daily, and 99.2% were active users. TikTok (37.4%) and Instagram (22.1%) were the most popular platforms. Dermatologists (68.9%) and influencers (59.9%) were the primary skincare information sources. Over half (51.9%) purchased products recommended by influencers. Female students were more likely than males to purchase skincare products (90.7% *vs.* 63.2%, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.322). Additionally, 28.2% reported that social media influenced their decision to visit a dermatologist or cosmetic clinic.

Conclusions: Social media significantly influences university students' skincare knowledge, attitudes, and purchasing behaviors in the Al-Madina region. Increasing the presence of healthcare professionals on social media may promote informed decisions and improve access to reliable, evidence-based skincare information.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, social media, skincare routines, college students, cosmetics, purchasing habits.

Background

Social media platforms enable the global sharing of information among millions of users. It has become evident that social media plays a prominent role in skincare. Over the past few years, its influence has grown rapidly and affected various aspects of people's lifestyles. While social media benefits millions of users worldwide, it also has drawbacks, as individuals may endanger themselves by following trends. It is not advisable to follow skincare trends without understanding their effects, as people have different skin types and levels of tolerance [1].

Correspondence to: Razan Abdullah Alharbi
*Faculty of Medicine, Taibah University (TU), Medina, Saudi Arabia.
Email: Razann987@outlook.com
Full list of author information is available at the end of the article.
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Previous studies [2–4] have shown that 43% of consumers reported that a provider's social media presence influenced their decision to schedule an appointment. Social media is also considered one of the top three factors when purchasing skincare products and ranks sixth when deciding whether to undergo a cosmetic procedure. Additionally, approximately 74% of college students use the Internet to search for healthcare-related information [2].

It has been found that social media platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram have a significant impact on skincare routines and cosmetic choices. A survey conducted in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia [3] showed that Snapchat was the most popular platform. Participants frequently relied on social media for information, with influencers significantly affecting their choice of skincare products. Posts containing reliable information from dermatologists, pharmacologists, and other specialists were more likely to influence purchasing decisions. About 33% of participants reported that Snapchat motivated them to consider aesthetic procedures. Additionally, 94.5% of participants used face filters or editing tools to hide skin issues such as acne due to insecurity. These findings demonstrate the impact of social media on skincare decisions while focusing on the importance of professional and personalized choices [1,3].

Previous research on the effect of social media on skincare has various drawbacks. The generalizability of the results is limited because many researchers focus on certain populations, such as young individuals or those who live in Western nations. Furthermore, self-reported data are used in the majority of studies, which might not always be reliable. Additionally, many people mimic influencers, which might make them feel more self-conscious about their appearance [5,6].

One of the main reasons for conducting this study is the growing influence of social media on consumer behavior. Another reason is to address the knowledge gap regarding the influence of social media on skincare and cosmetic product choices among university students in the Al-Madina region.

The study seeks to answer several key questions: How does social media shape students' decisions when choosing skincare products? Which platforms are most frequently used for skincare-related information? What factors, such as source credibility, professional endorsements, and visual appeal, influence their trust and purchasing decisions. Additionally, the study examines how demographic characteristics, including age, gender, and field of study, affect social media use and purchasing behavior.

This study aims to evaluate how social media affects skincare knowledge and practices among university students and to determine the proportion of students whose choices are influenced by these platforms. The findings may contribute to the development of effective awareness programs that promote safe and informed skincare practices and reduce the risks associated with misinformation.

Methods

Study design and sample size

This cross-sectional analytic study was conducted from June 13, 2025, to September 10, 2025, using an online questionnaire distributed on social media. It was administered in the Arabic language. The questionnaire was distributed by members of the research team through social media platforms to obtain the required number of responses, primarily WhatsApp and Telegram. The target population included university students residing in the Al-Madina region of Saudi Arabia. The study used a convenience non-probability sampling method. Eligible individuals were university and college students aged 18 years and older, living in Al-Madina. A target sample size of 500 participants was established to obtain an adequate number of responses for statistical analysis. A total of 511 participants were ultimately included in the final analysis.

Questionnaire and data collection

A self-administered questionnaire adapted from a previously published peer-reviewed study [1] was used to assess the effect of social media on skincare habits. Minor modifications were made to ensure that the questionnaire aligned with the objectives of the present study and was appropriate for the target population. In the original study, the questionnaire's validity was evaluated and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70 across all sections. Before distribution, the adapted questionnaire was reviewed by the research team to assess face validity, logical flow, clarity, and cultural relevance. Formal psychometric validation of the adapted questionnaire, including content validity assessment by independent experts, construct validity assessment (*e.g.*, factor analysis), reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, and formal pilot testing, was not repeated in the present study.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions; it was organized into three sections. The first section collected participants' sociodemographic characteristics. The second section assessed social media use related to skincare, including the frequency and purpose of use. The third section evaluated participants' skincare practices, perceptions, beliefs, purchasing behaviors, and preferred sources of information regarding skincare products and cosmetic procedures. Regarding the item assessing sources of information related to skincare and cosmetic products, participants could choose more than one answer.

Ethical considerations

The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Medicine at Taibah University (CM-REC), with approval number STU-25-012, dated March 5, 2025. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the start of the survey questionnaire. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the collected data and restricting data access to the research team.

Statistical analysis

Data were cleaned and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Although no technical restriction (*e.g.*, one response per account) was applied, the dataset was manually screened, checked, and cleaned to remove potential duplicates before analysis.

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (version 26.0; IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics were presented. Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and valid percentages. Associations between categorical variables were analyzed using the Chi-square test of association. To assess the strength of significant associations, Cramer›s V effect size was calculated and interpreted as follows: 0.06–0.10 (weak), 0.11–0.20 (moderate), and >0.20 (strong). A P-value <0.05 was considered significant.

Results

The study included 511 university students from the Al-Madina Region. Most of the participants were female, at 75.5% (n = 386), while males accounted for 24.5%. Most students were between 20 and 25 years old (72.2%, n = 369), followed by those <20 years (19.2%), and a smaller proportion >25 years (8.6%) (Table 1). Eighty-nine-point four percent (n = 457) of respondents were unmarried, and 10.6% were married. The highest number of respondents was from Taibah University (91.6%; n = 468), followed by Alrayan Colleges (5.1%), Al-Ghad International Health Sciences Colleges (1.2%) and other institutions (2.4%). As for academic specialties, over half of the students (51.3%) were studying medicine, while other fields accounted for 25.3%. Others were enrolled in nursing (8.6%), computer science (6.1%), business administration (3.1%), and engineering (2.5%), as presented in Table 1.

Figure 1 shows that more than 50% of university students in Al-Madina were pursuing degrees in Medicine (51.3%). Then, other fields accounted for 25.3% of participants. Nursing, Computer Science, Business Administration, and Engineering formed a smaller segment, indicating a high concentration of students in medical disciplines.

Figure 2 shows that most participants were aged between 20 and 25 years (72.2%), while 19.2% were aged less than 20 years and 8.6% were aged more than 25 years. This shows that the group under survey is mainly made up of young people in their main academic years.

Table 2 shows that of the 511 university students in Al-Madina, 99.2% (n = 507) are active social media users. TikTok was the most popular platform for students, with 191 students (37.4%), followed by Instagram with 113 students (22.1%). However, 87.1% of students (n = 445) reported spending over 1 hour/day on these sites. Regarding the multiple-response question, the most frequently reported sources of skincare information were dermatologists (68.9%, n = 352) and social media influencers (59.9%, n = 306), followed by friends and family (49.7%, n = 254) and cosmetologists (31.5%, n = 161). Overall, participants reported moderate levels of trust in these sources, with 38.7% (n = 198) reporting as such. Moreover, 82.0% (n = 419) saw skincare advertisement on social media. 35.4% (n = 181) reported that visual content influenced trust and 21.3% (n = 109) reported that they purchased products after viewing these advertisements. 265 students (51.9%) purchased products recommended by social media influencers, and 30.3% (n = 155) used filters. Additionally, 28.2% (n = 144) reported feeling motivated to visit cosmetic clinics, although only 4.9% (n = 25) underwent procedures such as Botox. (Full response data for all questionnaire items are shown in Supplementary Table S1.)

The relationship between sociodemographic factors and the level of trust in social media among university students in the Al-Madina region is presented in Table 3. Significant differences were also found between age groups, with the highest level of trust being found in the 20–25-year-old group (70.5%) and the lowest in the under-20 group (66.3%) (p = 0.046, Cramer's V = 0.110). Married students were more likely to report no/little trust (48.1%) than unmarried students (30.0%), a statistically significant difference (p = 0.007, Cramer's V = 0.120). Trust levels were significantly associated with the amount of information obtained from social media sources (p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.366). Students reporting "much" (84.7%) or "too much" (83.7%) reported significantly higher trust levels, while those reporting "none" or "little" reported mostly low trust. In addition, the source of information was found to be a significant factor (p = 0.013, Cramer's V = 0.421), with students who received information from dermatologists (75.3%) and family physicians (76.0%) showing greater trust than students who relied on social media bloggers (65.0%). These results point to significant demographic and informational predictors that affect students' trust in cosmetic and skincare information on social media sites.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic characteristics of university students in the Al-Madina region (N = 511).*

Factors	Category	Number	Frequency
Gender	Female	386	75.5
	Male	125	24.5
Marital Status	Married	54	10.6
	Not Married	457	89.4
University Name	Taibah University	468	91.6
	Alrayan Colleges	26	5.1
	Al-Ghad International Health Sciences Colleges	6	1.2
	Other	12	2.4

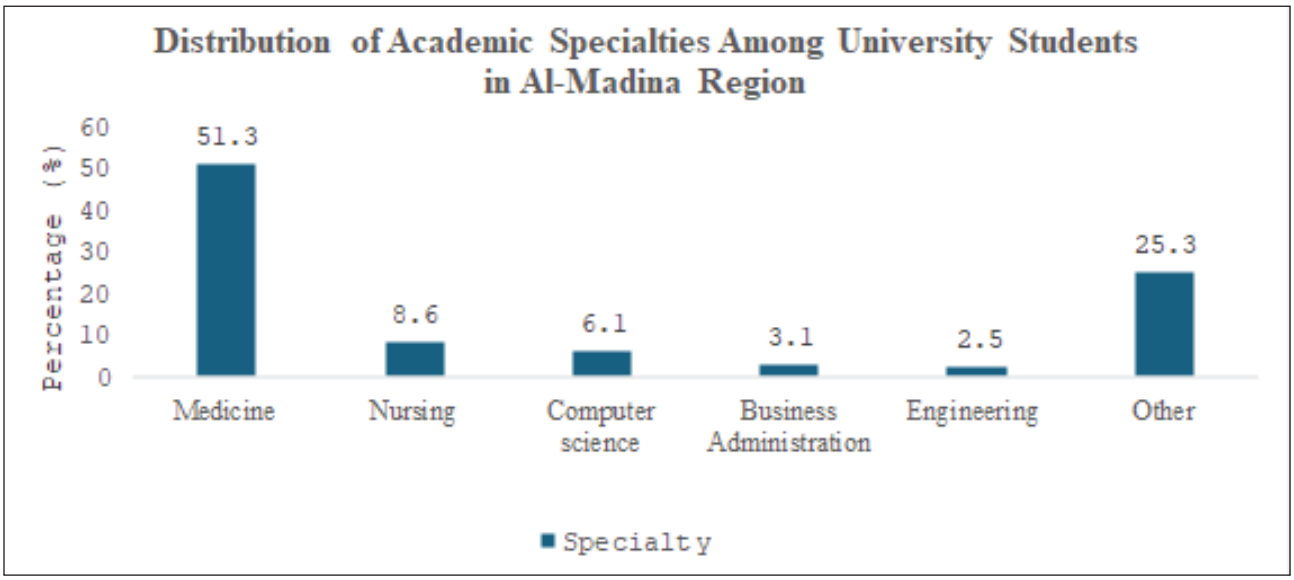


Figure 1. *Distribution of Academic Specialties Among University Students in the Al-Madina Region.*

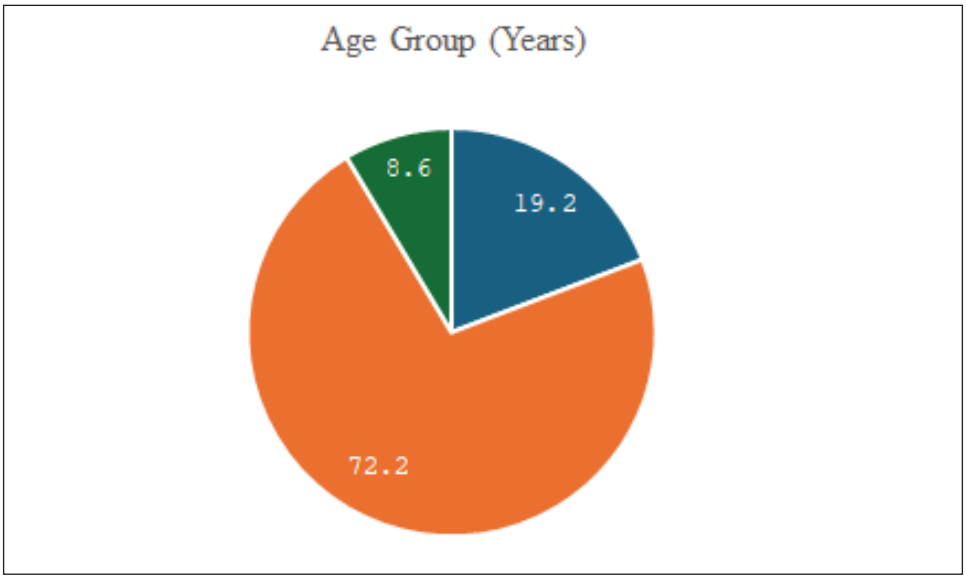


Figure 2. *Age Distribution of University Students in the Al-Madina Region.*

Table 4 investigates the association between social media use, demographic factors, and the purchase of skincare products by university students in the Al-Madina region. Influence was significantly related to gender and social media influence. Women students reported being influenced more often than men students (90.7% vs. 63.2%, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.322). In addition, the degree of influence was highly correlated with the top social media sites ($p = 0.020$, Cramer's V = 0.196). More students who used Instagram (87.6%) and TikTok (87.4%) reported being influenced by these platforms than those who used YouTube (66.7%) and Twitter (75.9%). Also, there was a significant association ($p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.254) between buying behavior and the amount of information acquired from social media. Students who collected "much" information were most likely to be influenced (95.6%), while students who reported collecting "none" (52.9%) or "little" (74.2%) information were less likely to be influenced. The findings show that gender, platform preference, and the amount of information accessed are important factors influencing students' decisions to buy skincare products.

Figure 3 shows the proportion of students influenced by each social media platform, with TikTok (87.4%) and Instagram (87.6%) showing the highest influence rates.

Female students were significantly more likely to report being influenced by social media (90.7%) compared to male students (63.2%, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.322) as presented in Figure 4.

Discussion

Most participants (99.2%) reported actively using social media, highlighting its importance in college students' daily lives. This finding is consistent with previous

Table 2. *Key patterns of social media use and influence on skincare behaviors (N = 511).*

Factors	Category	Number (N)	Frequency (%)
Active Social Media User	Yes	507	99.2
Most Used Platform	TikTok	191	37.4
	Instagram	113	22.1
	Snapchat	91	17.8
	Other	116	22.7
Daily Usage (More than 1 hour)	Yes	445	87.1
Purchased Product Recommended by Influencer	Yes	265	51.9
Use Filters to Conceal Imperfections	Sometimes/Frequently	219	42.8
Social Media Influenced Decision to Visit a Clinic	Yes	144	28.2

Table 3. *Association between sociodemographic factors and trust in social media information among students in the Al-Madina region.*

Factors	Category	Social media information trust level N (%)		P-value	Cramer's V
		No / little trust	Higher trust		
Gender	Female	119 (30.8)	267 (69.2)	0.362	0.040
	Male	44 (35.2)	81 (64.8)		
Age Group (Years)	Less than 20 years	33 (33.7)	65 (66.3)	0.046	0.110
	20–25 years	109 (29.5)	260 (70.5)		
	More than 25	21 (47.7)	23 (52.3)		
Marital Status	Married	26 (48.1)	28 (51.9)	0.007	0.120
	Not Married	137 (30.0)	320 (70.0)		
University Name	Taibah University	146 (31.2)	322 (68.8)	0.180	0.172
	Alrayan Colleges	7 (26.9)	19 (73.1)		
	Al-Ghad International Health Sciences Colleges	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)		
	Other	7 (58.3)	5 (41.7)		
Specialty	Medicine	73 (27.9)	189 (72.1)	0.133	0.576
	Nursing	17 (38.6)	27 (61.4)		
	Computer science	13 (41.9)	18 (58.1)		
	Business administration	1 (6.3)	15 (93.8)		
	Engineering	6 (46.2)	7 (53.8)		
	Other	45 (34.9)	84 (65.1)		
The most used social media platform	TikTok	64 (33.5)	127 (66.5)	0.639	0.117
	Instagram	31 (27.4)	82 (72.6)		
	Snapchat	31 (34.1)	60 (65.9)		
	Twitter	19 (35.2)	35 (64.8)		
	YouTube	14 (31.1)	31 (68.9)		
	Other	7 (36.8)	12 (63.2)		
The amount of information related to cosmetic and skincare products that you have collected from this source	None	10 (58.8)	7 (41.2)	>0.001	0.366
	Little	60 (61.9)	37 (38.1)		
	Intermediate	65 (30.0)	152 (70.0)		
	Much	21 (15.3)	116 (84.7)		
	Too much	7 (16.3)	36 (83.7)		
Where is the source of information related to cosmetic and skincare products on social media?	Dermatologist	87 (24.7)	265 (75.3)	0.013	0.421
	Social media influencer/blogger	107 (35.0)	199 (65.0)		
	Friends and family	76 (29.9)	178 (70.1)		
	Cosmetologist	48 (29.8)	113 (70.2)		
	Family physicians	12 (24.0)	38 (76.0)		
	Other	25 (33.3)	50 (66.7)		

N, number; %, percentage. Chi-square test; **Cramer's V** was calculated to assess effect size for significant associations.

research, which has shown that young people, particularly those in college, largely obtain information about beauty and health from social media [1,2,7]. The popularity of TikTok and Instagram corroborates evidence that visually oriented platforms have a greater influence on skincare behaviors than text-based platforms due to their appealing visual and influencer-driven content [2,6,8]. Additionally, the large proportion of students (87.1%)

Table 4. *Association between sociodemographic factors and influence of social media on purchasing skincare products among students in the Al-Madina region.*

Factors	Category	Influenced by social media N (%)		P-value	Cramer's V
		No	Yes		
Gender	Female	36 (9.3)	350 (90.7)		0.322
	Male	46 (36.8)	79 (63.2)		
Age Group (Years)	Less than 20 years	22 (22.4)	76 (77.6)	0.053	0.107
	20–25 years	57 (15.4)	312 (84.6)		
	More than 25	3 (6.8)	41 (93.2)		
Marital Status	Married	4 (7.4)	50 (92.6)	0.067	0.081
	Not married	78 (17.1)	379 (82.9)		
University Name	Taibah University	76 (16.2)	392 (83.8)	0.254	0.163
	Alrayan Colleges	2 (7.7)	24 (92.3)		
	Al-Ghad International Health Sciences Colleges	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)		
	Other	1 (8.3)	11 (91.7)		
Specialty	Medicine	44 (16.8)	218 (83.2)	0.615	0.532
	Nursing	8 (18.2)	36 (81.8)		
	Computer science	6 (19.4)	25 (80.6)		
	Business administration	0 (0.0)	16 (100)		
	Engineering	1 (7.7)	12 (92.3)		
	Other	18 (14.0)	111 (86.0)		
The most used social media platform	TikTok	24 (12.6)	167 (87.4)	0.020	0.196
	Instagram	14 (12.4)	99 (87.6)		
	Snapchat	16 (17.6)	75 (82.4)		
	Twitter	13 (24.1)	41 (75.9)		
	YouTube	15 (33.3)	30 (66.7)		
	Other	0 (0.0)	19 (100)		
The amount of information related to cosmetic and skincare products that you have collected from this source	None	8 (47.1)	9 (52.9)	>0.001	0.254
	Little	25 (25.8)	72 (74.2)		
	Intermediate	37 (17.1)	180 (82.9)		
	Much	6 (4.4)	131 (95.6)		
	Too much	6 (14.0)	37 (86.0)		
Where is the source of information related to cosmetic and skincare products on social media?	Dermatologist	50 (14.2)	302 (85.8)	0.059	0.399
	Social media influencer/blogger	36 (11.8)	270 (88.2)		
	Friends and family	38 (15.0)	216 (85.0)		
	Cosmetologist	17 (10.6)	144 (89.4)		
	Family physicians	9 (18.0)	41 (82.0)		
	Other	12 (16.0)	63 (84.0)		

N, number; **%**, percentage. Chi-square test; Cramer's V was calculated to assess effect size for significant associations.

who spend more than an hour each day on social media suggests they have had long-term exposure to skincare content. Repeated exposure may increase familiarity, perceived trustworthiness, and normalization of trends, influence attitudes, and purchasing decisions [1,6,9].

Dermatologists were the most frequently cited source of skincare information, followed by social media influencers. This result is consistent with previous studies showing that professional medical sources are still highly trusted despite the widespread use of influencer content [3,6]. However, this study's significant reliance on influencers raises questions about the dissemination of unsupported recommendations, a problem previously highlighted in narrative and observational studies on social media and skincare [5,10,11].

Higher levels of trust were significantly associated with the amount and source of information consumed, and most participants indicated a moderate level of trust in information from social media. Almudimeegh et al. also reported that frequent exposure to skincare-related content increases perceived reliability, regardless of content accuracy [6]. Participants who reported receiving "much" or "too much" information showed significantly higher levels of trust. Feedback from dermatologists and family physicians was strongly associated with higher levels of trust. This outcome confirms previous Saudi Arabian research highlighting the impact of expert approval on customer confidence [1,3].

The results of this study suggest that social media is associated with consumers' purchasing behavior for

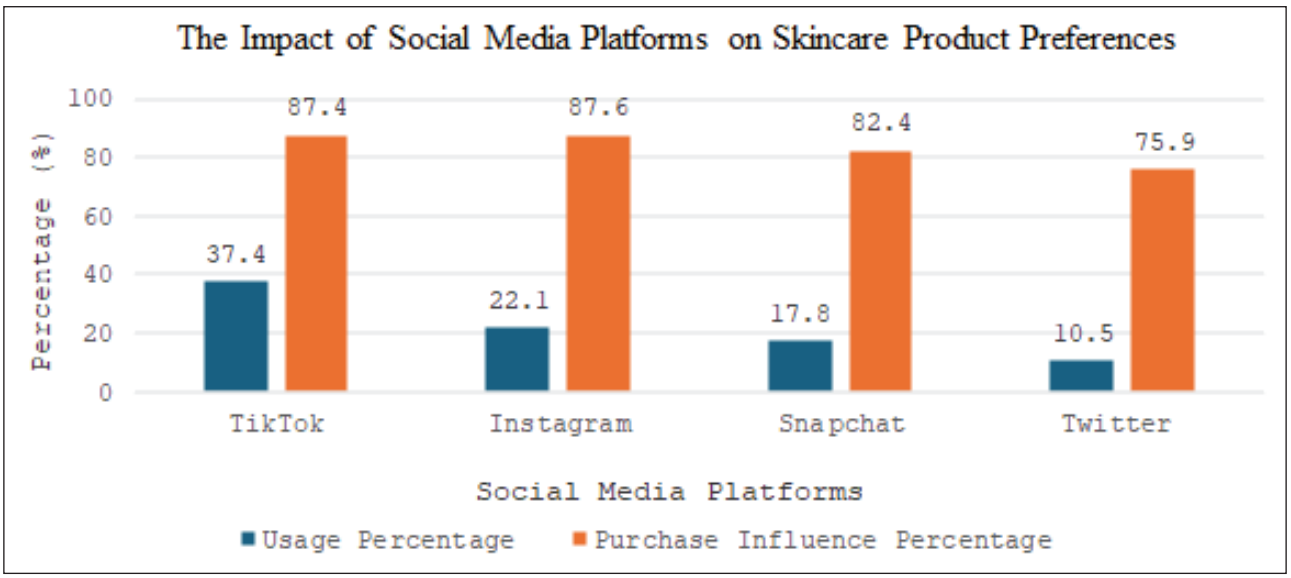


Figure 3. *Association Between Social Media Platforms and Skincare Purchasing Decisions.*

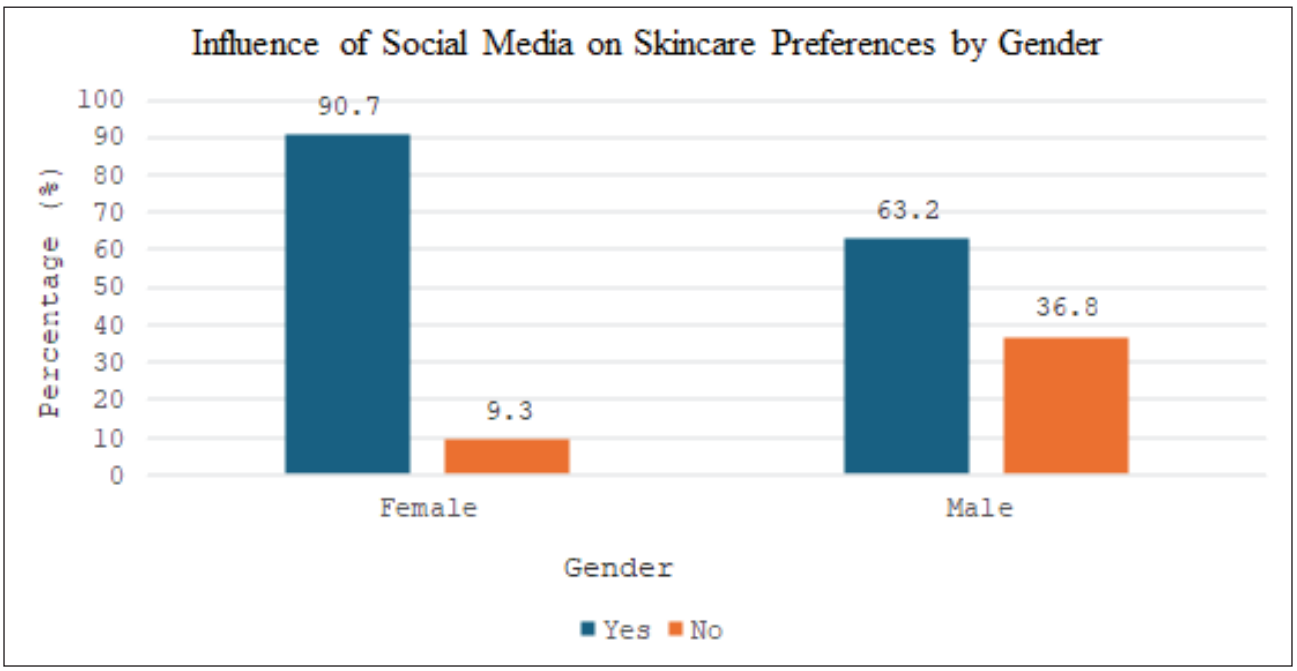


Figure 4. *Gender Differences in Social Media Influence on Skincare Purchases.*

skincare products. A considerable number of respondents stated that recommendations from social media influencers affected their purchases. This finding suggests how consumers are becoming increasingly reliant on social media when making purchasing decisions. This is supported by prior literature identifying social media as one of many factors influencing consumers' shopping behavior in the cosmetics industry [2,5].

Previous research in Saudi Arabia has shown a significant association between social media exposure and cosmetic purchasing choices, particularly among female consumers [1]. The current study builds on that knowledge by including participants of both genders across various academic fields, thereby offering a more detailed perspective on the impact of social media. Notable differences between genders were identified, with female students showing greater sensitivity to social media influence than their male counterparts. This observation is consistent with earlier studies indicating that women engage more deeply with appearance-related digital content and are more frequently the focus of marketing strategies for skincare and cosmetics [12,13,14]. The influence of social media on skincare purchasing decisions varied by platform.

Additionally, short-form video content combined with influencer presence appears to strengthen consumer trust and engagement, thereby enhancing the persuasive power of marketing strategies. This observation is consistent

with earlier studies that emphasized the impact of visual appeal and influencer credibility on consumer decision-making processes [2,15,16].

Trust in social media content was significantly associated with age and marital status, with higher trust levels observed among younger and unmarried participants. Similar patterns have been documented in earlier studies and may be related to greater online activity and prolonged exposure to digital platforms among younger age groups [2,6].

In contrast, academic specialization did not show a significant association with trust in social media or vulnerability to its influence. This finding implies that social media content affects students across fields of study, including those enrolled in medical and health-related programs. These findings are consistent with previous evidence indicating that educational background alone does not necessarily protect individuals from misinformation circulating online [5,17].

In conclusion, our study's results are consistent with regional and global publications that support the association between social media and both skincare routines and cosmetic purchasing behaviors [1–3,18,19]. Nonetheless, this study fills a gap in literature by adding data from the Al-Madina region and offering insights unique to the area that could guide focused educational efforts.

Limitations

As with previous cross-sectional studies in this field, causal relationships cannot be established. Self-reported data may introduce recall and social desirability bias, a limitation commonly reported in similar studies [1,6]. Furthermore, generalizability may be limited using convenience sampling and the predominance of participants from a single university.

Moreover, the study may have been affected by non-response bias due to differences between participants and non-participants. There is selection bias as the study used a convenience sampling technique. The majority of the respondents were female and were mostly medical students from Taibah University, thereby limiting the generalizability of the study.

Additionally, formal psychometric validation, including reliability and construct validity assessment, was not repeated for the adapted questionnaire used in the present study.

Conclusion

Overall, the study findings highlight the need for greater involvement of dermatologists and healthcare professionals on social media platforms to counter misinformation from non-medical sources and promote evidence-based skincare practices, as recommended by previous authors [2,5,20]. Further longitudinal and interventional studies are needed to evaluate long-term behavioral outcomes and the efficacy of educational programs.

Declarations

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all participants who volunteered for this study.

List of Abbreviations

CM-REC	College of Medicine Research Ethics Committee
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
n	Subsample size
N	Total sample size
p	Probability value
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Full questionnaire response data is available in Supplementary Table S1.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, College of Medicine, Taibah University (CM-REC), approval number STU-25-012, dated March 5, 2025. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants prior to completing the survey questionnaire.

Author Contributions

Mosab T. Mohanna conceptualized and supervised the study and critically revised the manuscript. Razan Abdullah Alharbi, Kholod Hamdan Aljohani, Nada Saad Aljohani, Majd Nasser Saeed Bin Jaber, Arwa Mohammed Maihoub, Najla Ibrahim Hajea Alenezi, Wejdan Ghuthayman Aljohani, Rabab Tawfiq Albeladi, and Rana Muteb Almohammdi contributed to the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, manuscript preparation, and critical revision. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Author details

Mosab T. Mohanna[1], Kholod Hamdan Aljohani[2], Razan Abdullah Alharbi[2], Nada Saad Aljohani[2], Majd Nasser Saeed Bin Jaber[2], Arwa Mohammed Maihoub[2], Najla Ibrahim Hajea Alenezi[2], Wejdan Ghuthayman Aljohani[2], Rabab Tawfiq Albeladi[2], Rana Muteb Almohammdi[2]

1. Department of Internal Medicine, College of Medicine, Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia.
2. College of Medicine, Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia.

Supplementary content (if any) is available online.

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