

## SOCIAL MEDIA–BASED CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN THE COSMETICS INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CONSUMERS

Wiwin Riski Windarsari<sup>1\*</sup>

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar

E-mail: [wiwin.riski.windarsari@unm.ac.id](mailto:wiwin.riski.windarsari@unm.ac.id)<sup>1\*</sup>

Received : 12 November 2025

Revised : 15 November 2025

Accepted : 16 November 2025

Published : 19 November 2025

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.59971/jumawa.v3i1.386>

Link Publish : <https://abadiinstitute.org/index.php/JUMAWA/issue/view/56>

### Abstract

This study examines how social media–based Customer Relationship Management (Social CRM) shapes consumer experiences, trust, and loyalty within the cosmetics industry. The research addresses a key issue faced by online cosmetic consumers, which is the difficulty of selecting accurate product shades due to limited visual and sensory information. Using a qualitative descriptive design, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten female consumers aged 18–35 who actively interact with cosmetic brands on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Thematic analysis identified three core dimensions of Social CRM: interactive consultation, educational and visual content, and digital empathy and responsiveness. The findings reveal that real-time consultations via direct messages reduce uncertainty in shade selection, while authentic educational content fosters cognitive trust by improving informational clarity. Additionally, empathetic and timely responses strengthen affective trust and emotional connection, contributing to long-term loyalty. The integrative discussion highlights that effective Social CRM functions as a hybrid mechanism combining service, education, and emotional engagement. This study expands existing CRM literature by demonstrating that social media serves not only as a promotional channel but also as a digital service environment where trust and satisfaction are co-created. Practical implications emphasize the need for empathetic communication, visually inclusive content, and responsive engagement systems to enhance consumer confidence and loyalty.

**Keywords:** Customer engagement; Customer trust; Cosmetics industry; Digital empathy; Social CRM; Social media marketing

### INTRODUCTION

The cosmetics industry has undergone a profound transformation with the rise of digital platforms and the increasing reliance of consumers on social media for product discovery and purchase decisions. In an era where personalization and engagement are central to consumer satisfaction, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has evolved from a transactional system into a dynamic, interactive process known as Social CRM (Trainor et al., 2014). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become essential tools for beauty brands to communicate, educate, and build trust with their audiences. Unlike traditional CRM, which focuses on data management and after-sales service, Social CRM emphasizes ongoing two-way communication, community building, and emotional connection between the brand and its consumers (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014).

A critical issue faced by cosmetic consumers is the difficulty in selecting the correct product shade due to variations in skin tone, lighting conditions, and product presentation online. This mismatch often leads to dissatisfaction, return requests, and decreased trust in the brand. The problem becomes more pronounced in digital spaces, where sensory experiences such as touch and physical testing are absent. Therefore, brands should leverage social media CRM tools to deliver tailored recommendations, respond to individual queries, and foster two-way communication. Personalization, such as product suggestions based on user preferences, would strengthen consumer-brand relationships and increase satisfaction (Wang &

Kim, 2022; Lim et al., 2024). Social CRM not only serves as a marketing channel but also as a virtual consultation space where consumers can interact with brand representatives, seek advice, and validate their product choices. Social CRM analytic framework effectively improves customer retention, acquisition, and conversion by extracting relevant information and supporting decision-making processes (Lamrhari et al., 2022).

The urgency of this study lies in understanding how social media–based CRM contributes to solving consumer information gaps and enhancing customer satisfaction in the cosmetics industry. Many brands use social media primarily for promotional content, yet few fully utilize its potential for relationship management and information personalization. By integrating interactive communication, user-generated content, and responsive engagement, brands can strengthen consumer trust and loyalty. This study explores these dynamics through a qualitative lens to reveal how consumers perceive and experience Social CRM practices in their interactions with cosmetic brands.

The objective of this research is to examine how cosmetic brands utilize social media as part of their CRM strategies to address consumer challenges in product selection, especially shade accuracy. This study also aims to identify best practices in managing consumer relationships through social media platforms to enhance satisfaction and long-term loyalty. The problem-solving approach adopted in this study involves qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews with consumers who actively engage with cosmetic brands on social media. The analysis focuses on identifying themes related to information needs, emotional engagement, and brand responsiveness.

Previous studies have highlighted the role of social media in shaping consumer trust and engagement. Trainor et al. (2014) emphasized that social technologies enhance customer relationship performance by facilitating bidirectional communication and social learning. Similarly, Harrigan and Miles (2014) noted that integrating social media into CRM enables brands to personalize experiences and co-create value with customers. However, few studies have focused specifically on the cosmetics sector, where visual accuracy and personal relevance are crucial to purchase decisions. By addressing this gap, the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of Social CRM practices in industries where aesthetics, personal identity, and digital interaction converge.

In summary, this study investigates the implementation of social media–based CRM in the cosmetics industry to uncover how brands can effectively manage consumer relationships in digital environments. The research provides insights into how social engagement, personalized content, and digital empathy can reduce consumer uncertainty, enhance satisfaction, and build enduring brand relationships.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Customer Relationship Management (CRM): Concepts and Evolution**

CRM is a structured approach for managing customer interactions to strengthen loyalty and profitability (Payne & Frow, 2005). As digital marketing evolved, CRM shifted from a transactional, data-driven model to a more personalized and emotionally responsive system (Nguyen & Mutum, 2012).

In the cosmetics sector, CRM is crucial for sustaining repeat purchases, enabling brands to use preference and purchase data to tailor offerings (Bhat & Darzi, 2016). However, traditional CRM remains limited by one-way communication and slow responsiveness, making it less effective in fast-moving digital environments.

### **Emergence of Social CRM**

Social CRM (s-CRM) emerged to address the limitations of traditional CRM by integrating social media technologies with CRM principles, enabling two-way communication between brands and customers (Trainor et al., 2014). This approach fosters conversational interaction, user-generated content, and community feedback, strengthening trust and co-created value (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014).

Empirical studies show that Social CRM enhances engagement and satisfaction. Firms using it can monitor real-time sentiment and build stronger loyalty (Harrigan & Miles, 2014), while social media analytics improve responsiveness and personalization (Wang & Kim, 2017). Still, effective implementation requires alignment between technology, human interaction, and brand authenticity (Lehmkuhl & Reinhard, 2013).

Although widely applied in sectors like banking and hospitality, Social CRM remains underexplored in the cosmetics industry, where visual aesthetics and subjective product experiences make social interaction especially critical.

### **Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Social CRM**

Social CRM is supported by several theoretical perspectives that explain customer engagement and relationship building in digital environments. The Relationship Marketing Theory posits that long-term business success depends on the establishment and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships between firms and customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This theory emphasizes trust, commitment, and communication factors that are enhanced through social media engagement.

Another relevant framework is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explains how customers adopt digital interaction channels based on perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1989). In Social CRM, the TAM helps explain why customers engage with brands via social platforms when the interaction feels intuitive and beneficial. Additionally, Social Exchange Theory suggests that customers evaluate brand interactions based on reciprocal benefits when brands provide valuable information, customers respond with loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Blau, 1964). These frameworks collectively highlight the importance of perceived value, responsiveness, and emotional connection in sustaining customer relationships online.

### **CRM and Customer Engagement in the Cosmetics Industry**

The cosmetics sector offers a distinctive context for Social CRM because consumers seek personalized guidance and trust-based interactions before buying. Research shows that beauty buyers rely more on social proof and peer input than in other product categories (Rapp et al., 2013), while brands increasingly use influencers, tutorials, and virtual shade-matching to reduce uncertainty (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). However, many cosmetic brands still prioritize visibility over meaningful two-way engagement, creating interactions that feel promotional rather than relational (Olearova et al., 2025).

Key gaps remain: most studies use quantitative designs, the cosmetics industry is underrepresented in Social CRM research, and little is known about how social media addresses informational challenges such as shade or formula selection. This study responds by using a qualitative approach to examine how consumers experience Social CRM, focusing on how interactive communication, digital empathy, and personalized information build trust and strengthen purchase confidence.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative descriptive design to examine how consumers experience Social CRM in the cosmetics sector. This approach captured participants' interpretations and emotional reactions to brand communication on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, focusing on how interactive and

personalized information shapes trust, satisfaction, and purchase confidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling recruited 10 women aged 18–35 who actively engaged with cosmetic brands and had prior challenges such as shade matching. Participation was voluntary, conducted online, and the sample reached data saturation (Guest et al., 2020).

Data were gathered through 30–45-minute semi-structured interviews via Zoom or Google Meet, supported by field notes and screenshots for contextual depth. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic framework. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, triangulation, and secure anonymized data management. This approach provided robust insight into how Social CRM practices influence consumer trust, engagement, and satisfaction in the cosmetics industry.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Overview of Findings**

The analysis of interview data with ten participants revealed three major themes related to consumers’ experiences with social media–based Customer Relationship Management (Social CRM) in the cosmetics industry:

1. Interactive Consultation through Social Media
2. Educational Content and Visual Information as Trust Builders
3. Digital Empathy and Responsiveness as Drivers of Brand Loyalty

These themes reflect how social media has become not only a promotional tool but also a relational space where consumers seek personalized guidance and reassurance before purchasing cosmetic products. A summary of key findings is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Themes and Illustrative Participant Statements

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Description</b>	<b>Illustrative Quote</b>
Interactive Consultation	Social media serves as a channel for two-way communication and personalized product advice.	“I usually DM the brand’s Instagram to ask which shade fits my skin tone. Their admin replies quickly and even sends product swatches.” (P4)
Educational and Visual Content	Informative posts, tutorials, and reviews help consumers make confident purchase decisions.	“I trust the brand that shows real videos comparing shades on different skin tones; it feels honest.” (P7)
Digital Empathy and Responsiveness	Fast, empathetic responses and genuine concern enhance emotional connection and trust.	“When the admin apologized for a delayed reply and explained kindly, it made me feel valued as a customer.” (P2)

**Theme 1: Interactive Consultation through Social Media**

Participants consistently emphasized that social media provides a space for personalized, interactive consultation that substitutes for in-store experiences. Unlike static e-commerce websites, social platforms enable immediate dialogue between consumers and brand representatives. Participants reported that direct messages (DMs) and comment sections act as virtual consultation channels for shade selection, skincare compatibility, and product recommendations.

This finding aligns with Trainor et al. (2014), who argued that Social CRM transforms customer-brand interaction from a one-way broadcast to a two-way relationship, where communication is conversational and context-driven. The interactive consultation process helps reduce uncertainty and reinforces perceived product value. Moreover, it builds consumer confidence in online purchasing, especially for cosmetics, where visual and sensory cues are limited.

However, participants also noted variability in response quality among brands. Some reported highly informative and polite responses, while others encountered slow or automated replies that reduced trust. This indicates that the effectiveness of Social CRM depends not only on platform presence but also on humanized interaction, an aspect often overlooked in digital marketing strategies.

### **Theme 2: Educational and Visual Content as Trust Builders**

The second theme highlights the importance of educational and visual content, including tutorials, user-generated reviews, and before–and–after videos in guiding purchasing decisions. Participants appreciated brands that offered transparent and diverse content, showing how shades appear across different skin tones. Such visual representations were perceived as more authentic than edited advertisements.

As one respondent stated, “I prefer when a brand uses real customers instead of models in their shade guide videos. It helps me imagine how the color looks on me.” (P6)

This result supports findings by Kapitan and Silvera (2016), who suggested that authentic digital content strengthens credibility and emotional attachment to the brand. Similarly, Rapp et al. (2013) emphasized that social media enables consumers to learn and make informed choices through community-driven interactions. In this study, participants identified educational content, especially “shade matching” posts, as a crucial part of CRM because it serves both informational and emotional functions. It helps consumers feel understood and supported, reducing post-purchase regret and increasing satisfaction.

### **Theme 3: Digital Empathy and Responsiveness as Drivers of Brand Loyalty**

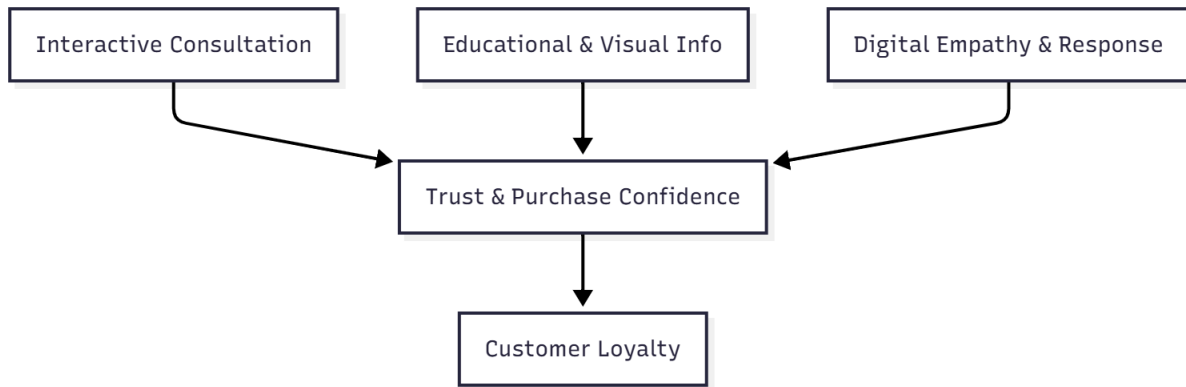
The third theme focuses on digital empathy, defined as the ability of brand representatives to respond promptly and with understanding to consumer concerns. Participants frequently mentioned that emotionally intelligent responses such as acknowledging frustration, apologizing for errors, and showing genuine care led to stronger emotional bonds with the brand.

For example, one participant shared, “I complained about a delayed package, and the admin apologized and offered a small gift. That small gesture made me loyal to the brand.” (P1)

This theme resonates with the Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which posits that trust and commitment are essential for sustaining customer relationships. It also aligns with Wang and Kim (2017), who found that brand responsiveness through digital channels enhances perceived reliability and long-term engagement. The participants’ experiences demonstrate that Social CRM is not only about technology and data but also about empathy and human connection, key elements that foster brand intimacy in competitive cosmetic markets.

Furthermore, the study reveals that responsiveness timing is a critical factor in CRM success. Participants viewed delayed or robotic replies as signs of neglect, leading to decreased engagement. Hence, prompt, empathetic communication becomes a differentiating element of Social CRM performance.

Figure 1 below presents a visual model summarizing the relationship between key themes and consumer outcomes. This conceptual model demonstrates that consumer trust and loyalty in digital cosmetic brands emerge from the integration of responsive communication, educational engagement, and emotional empathy within Social CRM practices.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Social CRM in the Cosmetics Industry

Collectively, the three themes revealed are Interactive Consultation, Educational and Visual Content, and Digital Empathy and Responsiveness, suggesting that Social CRM in the cosmetics industry operates as a hybrid mechanism of service and engagement. This mechanism combines customer service responsiveness, educational marketing, and emotional relationship management within a single digital space. The findings extend prior literature by showing that cosmetic consumers perceive value in both informational accuracy (cognitive trust) and emotional authenticity (affective trust) when interacting with brands online. Compared with traditional CRM, Social CRM provides richer opportunities for personalization and feedback but significantly increases consumer expectations for real-time empathy. A careful balance between technological capability and human interaction is critical, given the highly personal and aesthetic nature of cosmetic purchasing decisions.

These three pillars of Social CRM function as an integrated solution to address the central problem identified in the Introduction: the difficulty consumers face in selecting the correct product shade due to the absence of sensory experience online. Interactive Consultation (Theme 1) allows for immediate dialogue, serving as a virtual consultation substitute for shade selection and product compatibility, directly reducing consumer information uncertainty. Educational and Visual Content (Theme 2), which includes tutorials and shade comparisons across diverse skin tones, is perceived as more authentic than overly edited advertisements, bolstering credibility and helping consumers feel understood and supported. Meanwhile, Digital Empathy and Responsiveness (Theme 3) underpins the relationship; prompt, empathetic responses create strong emotional bonds, aligning with the Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which posits that trust and commitment are essential for long-term relationships. This also supports the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), where the provision of valuable, personal service by the brand is reciprocated by the consumer with loyalty.

Theoretically, successful Social CRM implementation requires satisfying the Perceived Usefulness criterion of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), where visual and educational content make the digital channel feel beneficial and effective in solving complex product selection problems. By integrating responsive communication, educational engagement, and emotional relationship management, brands can effectively nurture Trust & Purchase Confidence both cognitively and affectively, which are key drivers toward Customer Loyalty and advocacy. Ultimately, this study provides evidence that Social CRM serves not only as a marketing mechanism but also as an instrument of digital service and emotional co-creation.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study contributes to expanding the understanding of Social CRM as not only a marketing tool but also an

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instrument of digital service and emotional co-creation. Practically, the results suggest that cosmetic brands should:

1. Train social media administrators in empathetic communication and product knowledge.
2. Develop visually inclusive and educational content to reduce informational asymmetry.
3. Implement real-time engagement systems to improve responsiveness and trust.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined how Social CRM shapes consumer experiences and relationships in the cosmetics industry, where social media now functions as a key relational—not just promotional—channel. The focus was on how consumers interpret Social CRM interactions and how these shape trust, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Findings point to three connected pillars of effective Social CRM: interactive consultation, educational visual content, and digital empathy. Personalized consultations replicate in-store guidance, informative visuals reduce uncertainty, and empathetic responses build emotional security—together reinforcing long-term loyalty.

Theoretically, the study shows that Social CRM effectiveness relies not only on technology but on emotional intelligence and transparency. It extends traditional CRM thinking by highlighting that loyalty emerges from meaningful engagement rather than automation alone.

Managerially, cosmetic brands can strengthen Social CRM by training teams to respond empathetically, producing inclusive and informative content, and adopting data-driven systems that balance automation with human presence.

Going forward, Social CRM should move toward predictive, sentiment-aware systems supported by empathetic AI tools and authentic community partnerships. Ultimately, Social CRM in cosmetics thrives at the intersection of technology, empathy, and education—an approach that deepens trust and fuels lasting advocacy.

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