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Original Research Article

Influence of Social Media on Skincare Knowledge, Routines, Purchasing Behaviour, and Healthcare-Seeking Practices: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: Social media has emerged as a major source of skincare information, influencing public knowledge, consumer behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices. While it facilitates access to health information, concerns remain regarding the dissemination of misinformation and promotion of unverified skincare practices. This pilot study evaluated the influence of social media on skincare knowledge, routines, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices among adults.

Methods: A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based online survey was conducted among adults aged ≥18 years who actively used at least one social media platform. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling through Google Forms. The questionnaire assessed demographic characteristics, social media use, skincare knowledge, purchasing behaviour, DIY skincare practices, healthcare-seeking behaviour, and attitudes towards social media-based skincare information. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and associations between categorical variables were evaluated using Chi-square or Fisher's exact tests.

Results: Sixty participants completed the survey. Most participants demonstrated moderate (51.7%) or good (28.3%) skincare knowledge, with high awareness regarding sunscreen use (88.3%) and the risks of unsupervised topical steroid use (86.7%). Social media influenced skincare purchasing decisions in 65.0% of participants, while 68.3% reported attempting DIY skincare remedies. Adverse skin effects following social media-based advice were reported by 20.0%, and 30.0% delayed consulting a dermatologist because of information obtained online. Despite the widespread influence of social media, dermatologists remained the most trusted source of skincare information for 73.3% of participants. No statistically significant associations were observed between knowledge scores and participant characteristics or behavioural outcomes ($p>0.05$).

Conclusions: Social media substantially influences skincare-related behaviour, particularly product purchasing and DIY practices, while dermatologists continue to be the most trusted source of skincare information. Strengthening the digital presence of dermatologists and promoting evidence-based educational content may help counter misinformation and encourage informed skincare practices.

Keywords: Social Media; Skincare; Dermatology; Health Literacy; Consumer Behaviour; Healthcare-Seeking Behaviour; Purchasing Behaviour; DIY Skincare; India.

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Introduction

Social media has transformed the way individuals access, interpret, and apply health-related information. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok have emerged as popular sources of skincare knowledge, product recommendations, and beauty advice, providing users with access to a vast range of content generated by dermatologists, influencers, celebrities, and commercial brands. While this increased accessibility has enhanced public awareness of skin health, it has also facilitated the widespread dissemination of misinformation, unverified treatment recommendations, and commercially driven content [9].

The influence of social media on the beauty and skincare industry has grown substantially, shaping consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour. Recommendations from influencers, user-generated reviews, before-and-after transformations, and sponsored advertisements have been shown to significantly affect consumers' purchasing decisions and perceptions of product efficacy and safety [7,8]. In a recent study from Saudi Arabia, Alamer et al. (2023) reported that social media significantly influenced the selection of skincare and cosmetic products among women, while Almudimeegh et al. (2024) demonstrated that exposure to social media positively influenced public attitudes towards skincare practices and cosmetic dermatological procedures. Unlike conventional health communication, skincare information on social media is often presented in an engaging and relatable format, making it particularly persuasive among frequent users. However, the scientific accuracy and reliability of such content remain highly variable, with commercial interests often taking precedence over evidence-based information[9].

Growing awareness of skincare trends propagated through social media has raised concerns among dermatologists. Viral skincare routines, unnecessary layering of active ingredients, DIY skincare remedies, and the indiscriminate use of cosmetic products have been widely adopted despite limited scientific evidence supporting many of these practices.

Yousaf et al. (2020) reported that patients with acne frequently relied on social media when making treatment decisions, often resulting in the adoption of therapies lacking adequate medical evidence. Furthermore, the variable quality of dermatology-related content on social media has raised concerns regarding misinformation and inappropriate self-management of skin conditions [9].

Conversely, social media also represents a valuable opportunity for public health communication. Board-certified dermatologists and professional organizations increasingly use digital platforms to educate the public regarding common skin diseases, photoprotection, and evidence-based skincare practices. Shen and Zhao (2025) demonstrated how popular media can substantially increase public interest in dermatological treatments, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges associated with rapidly disseminated health information. When scientifically accurate content reaches large audiences, social media has the potential to improve health literacy and promote informed healthcare decisions.

Healthcare-seeking behaviour is another important aspect influenced by digital media. Individuals increasingly seek online advice before consulting healthcare professionals, compare treatment experiences shared by other users, and may postpone or avoid medical consultation based on information obtained from social media [7,11]. Alsatti et al. (2023) demonstrated that social media influences decisions regarding when and where patients seek dermatological care, while Albeshri et al. (2020) reported that although patients frequently use social media during their search for dermatologists, professional qualifications and physician reputation remain the primary determinants of dermatologist selection. More recently, Bal et al. (2025) similarly observed that patients with acne continued to place greater trust in dermatologists than social media influencers when making treatment decisions.

India represents one of the world's largest social media markets, with rapidly expanding internet penetration and smartphone accessibility across diverse demographic groups. Concurrently, the Indian skincare market has experienced substantial growth, accompanied by increasing consumer interest in cosmetic products, dermatological treatments, and aesthetic procedures. Despite this digital transformation, there remains limited evidence evaluating how social media influences skincare knowledge, daily skincare routines, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices among the Indian population. Existing studies have largely focused on acne management, cosmetic dermatology, or social media marketing, with relatively few comprehensively evaluating knowledge, attitudes, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices related to skincare in the Indian setting.

Understanding these behavioural patterns is particularly relevant for dermatologists and public health professionals. Identifying the sources of skincare information individuals trust, the extent to which social media influences purchasing decisions and treatment choices, and the prevalence of misinformation-driven practices can guide the development of targeted educational interventions and evidence-based digital health strategies. Such information may also assist healthcare professionals in addressing misconceptions during patient consultations and improving public engagement through responsible use of social media platforms. Therefore, the present pilot study was undertaken to evaluate the influence of social media on skincare knowledge, skincare routines, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices through a cross-sectional survey. Additionally, the study aimed to explore participants' reliance on social media for skincare information, assess their trust in various information sources, and identify behavioural patterns associated with digital skincare content.

Study Design: A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based observational study was conducted to assess the influence of social media on skincare knowledge, skincare routines, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices among social media users. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered online questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The survey was distributed electronically through Google Forms and remained open during the study period. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants before commencement of the survey.

Study Population: The study population comprised individuals aged 18 years and above who were active users of at least one social media platform. Participants from diverse demographic backgrounds were invited to participate in the survey irrespective of their gender, educational status, occupation, or place of residence. Individuals who provided informed consent and completed the questionnaire were included in the final analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Individuals aged 18 years and above who were active users of at least one social media platform and provided informed consent were eligible to participate in the study. Participants who were unable to understand the questionnaire, declined to provide consent, or submitted incomplete responses were excluded from the final analysis.

Sampling Technique: A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed for participant recruitment. The survey questionnaire was administered electronically using Google Forms and disseminated through various social media platforms and messaging applications. Participation was voluntary, and no monetary or other incentives were offered for completing the survey. Eligible individuals who accessed the survey link and provided informed consent were invited to complete the questionnaire.

Study Instrument (Questionnaire Development): Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed specifically for this study following a review of the relevant literature on social media use, skincare practices, consumer behaviour, and healthcare-seeking behaviour. The questionnaire was designed to comprehensively assess the influence of social media on participants' skincare knowledge, skincare routines, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices.

The final questionnaire comprised sections on participant demographics, social media usage patterns, sources of skincare information, skincare routines, influence of social media on product purchasing decisions, trust in various sources of skincare information, healthcare-seeking behaviour, and attitudes towards social media–based skincare content. The questionnaire included a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert scale items, checkbox questions, and close-ended response options to facilitate comprehensive data collection while maintaining ease of completion.

The questionnaire was administered in English using the Google Forms platform and was designed to require approximately 3–5 minutes to complete.

Data Collection Procedure: Data were collected through an anonymous online survey administered using Google Forms during the study period. The survey link was disseminated electronically through various social media platforms and messaging applications. Before accessing the questionnaire, participants were presented with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, and electronic informed consent was obtained. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents could choose to discontinue the survey at any stage before submission. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Responses submitted through Google Forms were securely stored and subsequently exported for statistical analysis.

Statistical Analysis: Data collected through Google Forms were exported to Microsoft Excel for cleaning and coding before being analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 26; IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

Categorical variables were summarized as frequencies and percentages, while continuous variables were expressed as mean ± standard deviation or median with interquartile range, depending on the distribution of the data. Associations between categorical variables were assessed using the Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate. A two-tailed p value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

A total of 60 participants completed the online questionnaire and were included in the final analysis.

Sociodemographic characteristics: The study population predominantly comprised young adults aged 18–24 years (48.3%), followed by participants aged 25–34 years (23.3%). Females constituted 73.3% of the study population, while males accounted for 25.0%. Most participants were undergraduates (61.7%), and nearly half were students (48.3%), followed by professionals (33.3%).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the study participants (N = 60)

Characteristic	N	%
18–24 years	29	48.3
25–34 years	14	23.3
35–44 years	7	11.7
≥45 years	10	16.7
Female	44	73.3
Male	15	25.0
Prefer not to say	1	1.7
Undergraduate	37	61.7
Postgraduate	23	38.3
Student	29	48.3
Professional	20	33.3
Homemaker	8	13.3
Business	2	3.3
Doctor	1	1.7

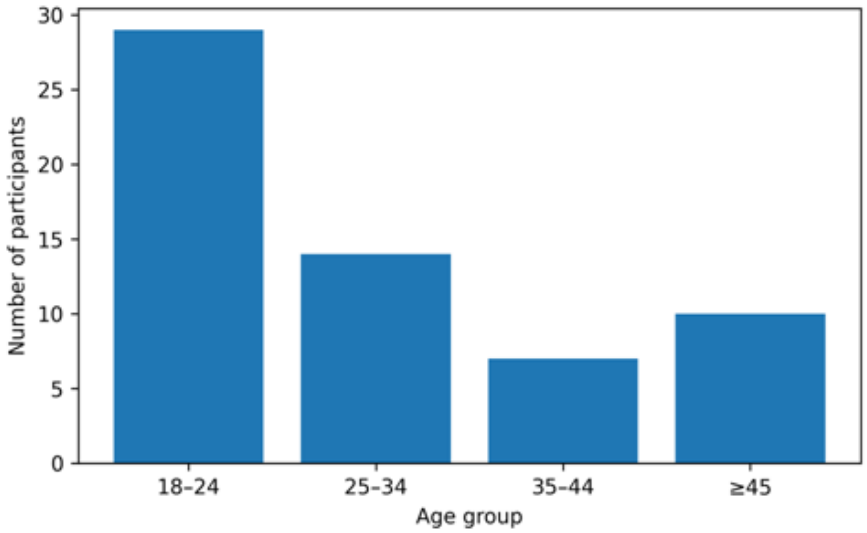

Figure 1: Age distribution of study participants

Knowledge regarding skincare: Overall, participants demonstrated good awareness regarding sunscreen use and topical steroid misuse. A majority correctly identified that sunscreen should be used even on cloudy days (88.3%) and that topical steroid creams should not be used without medical advice (86.7%). However, only 30.0% correctly recognized that natural skincare products are not necessarily safer than chemical products.

Based on the composite knowledge score, 51.7% of participants demonstrated moderate knowledge, 28.3% had good knowledge, and 20.0% had poor knowledge.

Table 2: Knowledge regarding skincare among participants

Variable	Result
Sunscreen should be used even on cloudy days	53 (88.3)
Natural products are not always safer than chemical products	18 (30.0)
Topical steroid creams should not be used without medical advice	52 (86.7)
Poor knowledge (0–1)	12 (20.0)
Moderate knowledge (2)	31 (51.7)
Good knowledge (3)	17 (28.3)

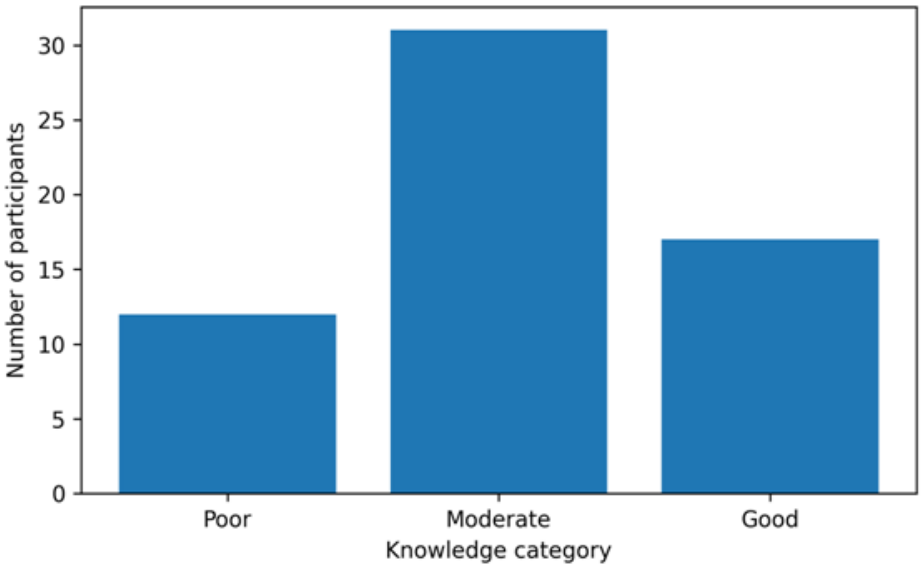

Figure 2: Composite knowledge categories

Skincare practices and healthcare-seeking behaviour: Social media influenced skincare-related behaviour among many participants. Nearly two-thirds (65.0%) reported purchasing skincare products because of information encountered on social media. DIY skincare remedies had been attempted by 68.3% of participants, with most reporting occasional use. Although one-fifth (20.0%) experienced adverse skin effects after following social media-based skincare advice, only 30.0% reported delaying consultation with a dermatologist because of information obtained through social media. Notably, 73.3% identified dermatologists as their most trusted source of skincare information.

Table 3: Skincare practices and healthcare-seeking behaviour

Variable	N	%
Purchased skincare products due to social media	39	65.0
Did not purchase due to social media	21	35.0
Never tried DIY remedies	19	31.7
Occasionally tried DIY remedies	38	63.3
Frequently tried DIY remedies	3	5.0
Experienced adverse effects	12	20.0
No adverse effects	48	80.0
Delayed dermatologist consultation	18	30.0
Did not delay dermatologist consultation	42	70.0
Trusted dermatologists the most	44	73.3

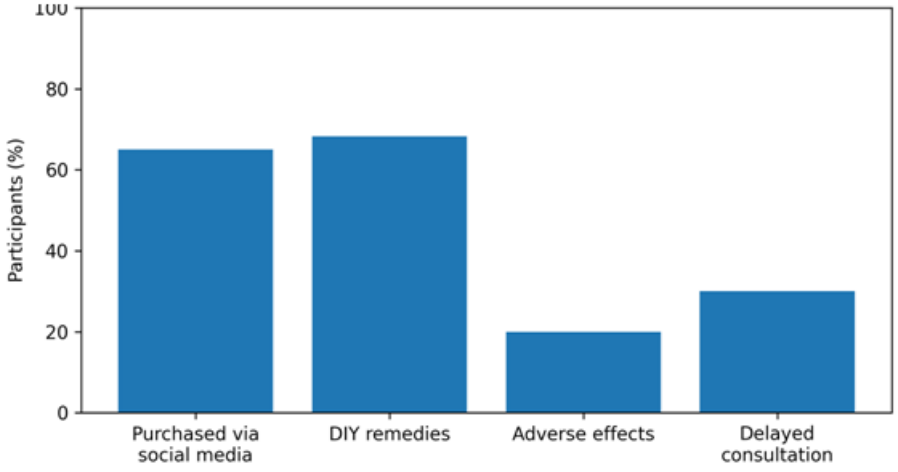

Figure 3: Social media influence on skincare practices

Attitudes towards social media-based skincare information: Participants generally demonstrated a cautious attitude towards skincare information available on social media. More than four-fifths agreed that content created by dermatologists was more trustworthy than influencer-generated content, and three-quarters reported verifying skincare information before following it.

Conversely, only a small proportion agreed that most skincare advice available on social media was reliable. Despite this skepticism, a considerable proportion acknowledged that social media influenced their skincare purchasing decisions.

Table 4: Attitudes towards social media-based skincare information

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Social media has improved my skincare knowledge	16 (26.7)	10 (16.7)	17 (28.3)	12 (20.0)	5 (8.3)
Most skincare advice on social media is reliable	14 (23.3)	20 (33.3)	24 (40.0)	2 (3.3)	0 (0.0)
Dermatologist-created content is more trustworthy	3 (5.0)	2 (3.3)	6 (10.0)	19 (31.7)	30 (50.0)
Social media influences my skincare purchasing decisions	17 (28.3)	12 (20.0)	15 (25.0)	12 (20.0)	4 (6.7)
I verify skincare information before following it	2 (3.3)	7 (11.7)	6 (10.0)	15 (25.0)	30 (50.0)

The mean composite attitude score was 17.25 ± 2.59, indicating an overall positive attitude towards evidence-based skincare practices and critical evaluation of online skincare information.

Table 5: Composite attitude score

Variable	Mean ± SD	Minimum	Maximum
Composite attitude score	17.25 ± 2.59	10	24

Association between participant characteristics and knowledge: No statistically significant associations were observed between composite knowledge scores and participants' gender, educational status, purchasing behaviour, or use of DIY skincare remedies (all $p > 0.05$).

Similarly, no significant association was observed between the use of DIY skincare remedies and the occurrence of adverse effects.

Table 6: Inferential analysis

Comparison	Statistical test	p-value
Education vs Knowledge	Chi-square	>0.05
Gender vs Knowledge	Chi-square	>0.05
Knowledge vs Purchase behaviour	Chi-square	>0.05
Knowledge vs DIY remedies	Chi-square	>0.05
DIY remedies vs Adverse effects	Fisher's exact	>0.05
Trust in dermatologists vs Purchase behavior	Chi-square	>0.05

Discussion

This pilot cross-sectional study evaluated the influence of social media on skincare knowledge, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices among adults. While social media substantially influenced participants' skincare-related decisions, particularly product purchasing and the use of DIY remedies, participants generally demonstrated good awareness regarding evidence-based skincare practices.

Most respondents correctly recognized the importance of sunscreen use and the risks associated with unsupervised topical steroid use. Notably, dermatologists were identified as the most trusted source of skincare information despite the widespread use of social media for skincare-related decisions. These findings suggest that although social media serves as an important source of skincare information, participants continue to value professional medical guidance when making healthcare decisions. As a pilot study, our findings provide preliminary evidence of the growing influence of social media on skincare-related decision-making. Nearly two-thirds of participants reported purchasing skincare products based on social media recommendations, highlighting the increasingly important role of digital platforms in shaping consumer behaviour. This observation is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that social media has become a major determinant of skincare product selection and cosmetic decision-making. Alamer et al. (2023) reported that social media significantly influenced females when

choosing skincare and cosmetic products, while Almudimeegh et al. (2024) observed that exposure to social media was associated with increased interest in skincare routines and cosmetic dermatologic procedures. These findings collectively suggest that social media has evolved beyond an educational platform to become a powerful marketing tool capable of influencing purchasing behaviour.

The increasing popularity of skincare influencers, targeted advertisements, short-form educational videos, and product reviews has transformed the way consumers obtain dermatological information. While these platforms improve access to skincare knowledge, they also facilitate the rapid dissemination of promotional content and misinformation. Nigro et al. (2025) demonstrated that highly viewed dermatology-related content on social media frequently varies in scientific quality, emphasizing the need for greater involvement of board-certified dermatologists in digital health communication. Similarly, Shen and Zhao (2025) illustrated how popular media can rapidly increase public interest in dermatological treatments such as red-light therapy, often independent of the available scientific evidence. These observations reinforce the importance of ensuring that evidence-based dermatological information remains visible and accessible on digital platforms.

An encouraging finding of the present pilot study was the generally satisfactory level of skincare knowledge among participants. Most respondents correctly recognized the importance of regular sunscreen use, including on cloudy days, and understood that topical corticosteroids should not be used without medical supervision. These findings may reflect increasing public awareness regarding common dermatological practices through health campaigns, improved patient education, and greater online access to reliable educational resources. Nevertheless, an important misconception persisted regarding the perceived safety of natural skincare products, with only a minority correctly recognizing that natural products are not inherently safer than synthetic formulations. This misconception has been widely propagated through social media, where terms such as "natural," "organic," and "chemical-free" are frequently used as marketing strategies despite limited scientific evidence supporting superior safety or efficacy [9,10]. Addressing these misconceptions should remain a priority for dermatologists and public health educators.

The present study also explored healthcare-seeking behaviour in the context of social media exposure. Although social media strongly influenced skincare purchases, most participants continued to trust dermatologists over influencers, and dermatologists were identified as the most reliable source of skincare information by nearly three-quarters of respondents. These findings are reassuring and mirror those reported by Albeshri et al. (2020), who found that physician credentials, reputation, and professional expertise remain the most important factors influencing dermatologist selection despite the widespread use of social media. Likewise, Bal et al. (2025) demonstrated that patients with acne consistently reported greater trust in dermatologists than in social media influencers when making treatment decisions. Together, these findings suggest that although social media increasingly shapes consumer behaviour, professional medical expertise continues to be regarded as the most credible source of dermatological advice.

However, approximately one-third of participants in our study reported delaying consultation with a dermatologist because of information obtained through social media. Although this proportion was lower than anticipated, it remains clinically important because delays in seeking professional care may contribute to disease progression, inappropriate self-medication, prolonged symptoms, and unnecessary expenditure on ineffective products. Alsatti et al. (2023) similarly demonstrated that social media influences patients' decisions regarding when and where to seek dermatological care, with many individuals attempting self-management before consulting a dermatologist. These findings emphasize the importance of improving digital health literacy and encouraging early professional consultation for persistent or worsening dermatological conditions.

DIY skincare practices were also highly prevalent, with more than two-thirds of participants reporting that they had tried home remedies recommended through social media. While most participants reported only occasional use, approximately one-fifth experienced adverse skin effects. This observation is clinically relevant because many DIY skincare practices promoted online lack scientific validation and may lead to irritant dermatitis, allergic contact dermatitis, acne exacerbation, or pigmentary disorders. Similar concerns regarding unverified online skincare advice have been highlighted by Yousaf et al. (2020), who found that social media significantly influenced treatment decisions among patients with acne and frequently promoted therapies lacking adequate medical evidence. These findings highlight the importance of educating the public regarding the potential risks associated with self-directed treatments promoted through social media.

Participants in the present study also demonstrated a relatively balanced attitude towards skincare information obtained online. Most respondents preferred content created by dermatologists, reported verifying information before following recommendations, and expressed skepticism

regarding the reliability of all skincare advice available on social media. Nevertheless, social media continued to exert a substantial influence on purchasing behaviour, suggesting that awareness of misinformation alone may not prevent behavioural influence. This apparent contradiction likely reflects the persuasive effects of visual marketing, influencer credibility, repeated exposure to promotional content, and social proof, all of which are recognized determinants of consumer behaviour in digital environments [2,3].

Inferential analyses did not reveal statistically significant associations between participant characteristics and knowledge scores or between knowledge and selected behavioural outcomes. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study was designed as a pilot investigation with a relatively small sample size. The absence of statistically significant associations may therefore reflect limited statistical power rather than the absence of true relationships. The primary objective of this pilot study was to explore trends, assess the feasibility of the questionnaire, and generate preliminary evidence that can inform future hypothesis-driven research involving larger and more representative populations.

The present study has several strengths. To our knowledge, it is among the few pilot studies from India evaluating multiple dimensions of social media influence on skincare, including knowledge, attitudes, purchasing behaviour, DIY practices, and healthcare-seeking behaviour within a single structured questionnaire. The use of a composite knowledge score provided an objective assessment of participant knowledge rather than relying solely on perceptions. Furthermore, the inclusion of behavioural outcomes enables a more comprehensive understanding of the practical implications of social media use in dermatology.

Nevertheless, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the pilot nature of the study and relatively small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, convenience sampling and online recruitment may have introduced selection bias by preferentially including participants who actively use digital platforms. Third, the cross-sectional study design precludes establishing causal relationships between social media exposure and observed behaviours. Finally, all responses were self-reported and may therefore be affected by recall bias and social desirability bias. Future multicentric studies involving larger, more diverse populations are needed to validate these preliminary findings, explore temporal relationships, and identify factors associated with appropriate and inappropriate use of social media for skincare information.

In conclusion, this pilot study demonstrates that social media has become an influential component of contemporary skincare education and consumer behaviour. While participants generally possessed satisfactory knowledge regarding evidence-based skincare practices and continued to place greater trust in dermatologists than social media influencers, online platforms substantially influenced product purchasing decisions and encouraged the use of DIY skincare practices. These findings highlight the need for dermatologists, professional societies, and public health organizations to strengthen their digital presence by providing accurate, engaging, and evidence-based educational content capable of countering misinformation and promoting informed skincare practices.

Conclusion

This pilot study demonstrates that social media plays a significant role in influencing skincare knowledge, purchasing behaviour, and healthcare-seeking practices among adults. While participants generally exhibited satisfactory awareness of evidence-based skincare practices and continued to regard dermatologists as the most trusted source of skincare information, social media substantially influenced product purchasing decisions and encouraged the use of DIY skincare remedies. Although the prevalence of adverse effects and delayed consultation was relatively low, these findings underscore the potential impact of online misinformation on skincare practices.

The findings of this pilot study highlight the need for dermatologists and professional organizations to actively engage on social media platforms by disseminating accurate, evidence-based, and accessible skincare information. Such efforts may help counter misinformation, promote informed decision-making, and encourage timely healthcare-seeking behaviour.

Future multicentric studies with larger and more diverse populations are warranted to validate these findings and further explore the evolving role of social media in dermatological health education and consumer behaviour.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Informed Consent: Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation in the study.

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