

User-Generated Content, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Consumer Trust in Social Media Beauty Communities: A Netnographic Study

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ABSTRACT

Instagram has become a critical digital space for local skincare businesses to promote products, interact with consumers, and build trust through visible online communication. This study aims to explore Instagram-based beauty communities involving two selected local skincare stores in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative design with a pure netnographic approach. Data were collected from publicly available Instagram content from January to June 2026, including feed posts, reels, captions, consumer comments, admin responses, testimonials, reposted customer stories, and highlight content. The findings show that consumer trust is constructed through two complementary patterns. ALVE tends to build informational trust through product clarity, price confirmation, promotional consistency, stock information, and admin responsiveness. Meanwhile, MIYUKI tends to build relational trust through storytelling, humor, friendly communication, Reels-based content, consumer enthusiasm, and community-oriented engagement. This study implies that local skincare stores should manage Instagram as a trust-building platform by combining accurate product information, authentic consumer participation, positive e-WOM, and emotionally engaging content.

Keywords: consumer trust; digital marketing; electronic word of mouth; netnography; user-generated conte

INTRODUCTION

The growth of social media usage has made beauty businesses increasingly dependent on digital spaces to convey product information, attract consumer attention, and maintain customer engagement. In the skincare sector, social media is no longer just a promotional channel, but also a social space where consumers evaluate products, share personal experiences, ask for recommendations, compare stores, and build trust through visible interactions (Mainardes et al., 2023; Septyarini et al., 2022). This transformation is crucial for skincare businesses because purchasing decisions are closely linked to perceptions of product safety, authenticity, service credibility, and the risk of product incompatibility with individual skin conditions. Instagram has become a relevant digital environment for observing how beauty-related interactions occur through visual content, captions, comments, testimonials, reposts, and conversations between business accounts and consumers (Luthfiyah & Sari, 2025). Therefore, studying skincare marketing on Instagram requires an approach that captures not only the promotional messages generated by businesses, but also the meanings, experiences, and trust-building processes generated by consumers within the digital community.

User-Generated Content (UGC) has become a crucial element in contemporary digital marketing as consumers increasingly rely on content created by others when evaluating brands, products, and sellers. UGC can appear in the form of comments, testimonials, reviews, tagged posts, product usage experiences, before-and-after narratives, and informal recommendations shared through social media. In the context of beauty and skincare, UGC is particularly influential because consumers often seek peer-to-peer information before making decisions about products that affect their body, appearance, and self-confidence. Consumers use UGC to support purchasing decisions because content created by other consumers is often perceived as more trustworthy than company-generated marketing communications (Hochstein et al., 2025). Similarly, UGC plays a significant role in shaping online trust and purchase intentions on social commerce platforms (Van Dat et al., 2025). These studies demonstrate that consumer-generated content is not simply supplementary information, but a meaningful social signal that can strengthen or weaken trust in digital transactions.

Closely related to UGC, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is also central to understanding consumer behavior in beauty communities on social media. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to consumer opinions, recommendations, complaints, experiences, and evaluations shared through digital platforms. In Instagram-based skincare marketing, e-WOM can appear in comments, direct product inquiries, user recommendations, expressions of satisfaction, complaints about product suitability, and discussions about product authenticity or seller responsiveness. Recent studies have shown that e-WOM is related to consumer trust, perceived product quality, purchase intention, and repurchase intention. Brand trust influences consumers' propensity to provide e-WOM, and e-WOM intention is related to repurchase intention (Anastasiei et al., 2026). In the context of skincare in Indonesia, e-WOM and brand trust were found to be relevant in explaining skincare product purchase intentions (Tanjung & Keni, 2023). These findings suggest that e-WOM is a strategic mechanism through which consumer voice influences the reputation and credibility of skincare businesses.

Consumer trust is a crucial construct in digital skincare marketing because consumers evaluate not only price and product variety but also seller credibility, product authenticity, service quality, admin responsiveness, and the reliability of peer testimonials. Trust in online communities mediates the relationship between information credibility and purchase intention in the context of social commerce skincare (Ranjith et al., 2025). This means that credible information, reliable interactions, and trustworthy social

communication are crucial in reducing consumer uncertainty. In the case of a local skincare store, trust can arise from repeated positive comments, visible customer testimonials, transparent product information, prompt responses to inquiries, and consumer narratives confirming the store's reliability. Therefore, consumer trust should be examined not only as an individual psychological response but also as a social construct formed through interactions between consumers, business accounts, and digital beauty communities.

Recent studies on digital beauty and skincare marketing have shown that social media has been extensively researched through customer experience, word-of-mouth, information credibility, online trust, and consumer purchase intention. Social media interactions in beauty product consumption have been shown to involve testimonials, customer touchpoints, and consumer engagement in shaping digital beauty experiences (Septyarini et al., 2022). Electronic word-of-mouth on Instagram has also been studied in the cosmetics context, specifically related to e-WOM credibility, e-WOM quality, consumer attitudes, and purchase intention (Mainardes et al., 2023). In social commerce of skincare, source credibility, e-WOM credibility, trust in online communities, and risk perception have been shown to play a significant role in explaining skincare purchase intention (Ranjith et al., 2025). In Indonesia, netnography has been applied to understand public responses to skincare product advertisements, particularly in the case of Ms Glow product advertisements (Sembiring & Afriya, 2022).

While these studies have advanced the understanding of digital beauty marketing, most previous research has focused on skincare brands, advertisements, influencers, cosmetic products, social commerce platforms, or purchase intent models. Limited attention has been paid to how User-Generated Content (UGC), Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and consumer trust are built through naturally occurring Instagram interactions involving local skincare stores in regional markets. This gap is significant because local skincare retailers are increasingly relying on Instagram to build visibility, credibility, and customer relationships, yet their trust-building practices remain underexplored. Therefore, this study offers a netnographic contribution by examining two local skincare stores in Merauke as digital retail actors and by interpreting how consumer narratives, peer recommendations, and observed interaction patterns shape consumer trust within Instagram-based beauty communities.

Netnography is used in this study to interpret consumer interactions that occur naturally within digital communities, particularly regarding meanings, experiences, opinions, and online consumption patterns (Bansal et al., 2024; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets, 2002). Based on this approach, Instagram is positioned as a digital field site to observe trust signals, social recommendations, and consumer narratives. This study focuses on two Instagram accounts of local skincare stores in Merauke, South Papua, which were purposively selected based on account activity, availability of public content, consumer interaction, the presence of testimonials, and their relevance to User-Generated Content (UGC), e-WOM, and consumer trust.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how UGC, e-WOM, and consumer trust are constructed within an Instagram-based beauty community involving two local skincare stores in Merauke. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on local skincare stores as the primary unit of analysis, rather than national skincare brands, beauty influencers, or marketplace platforms. This study contributes theoretically by extending the netnographic study on the relationship between UGC, e-WOM, and consumer trust in Instagram-based beauty communities, and contributes practically by providing insights for local skincare businesses to strengthen digital marketing strategies through credible content, responsive interactions, and trust-focused community engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Culture and Digital Beauty Consumption

In the beauty market, consumers perceive skincare products through personal experiences, peer validation, visual representations, perceived risk, and trust in the seller (Anastasya, 2025). This perspective is consistent with Consumer Culture Theory, which views consumption as a sociocultural process shaped by identity, meaning, market practices, and social interactions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In beauty social media communities, consumers not only respond to promotional content but also participate in constructing words about beauty, product safety, authenticity, and store credibility (Larasati & Handayani, 2025). Instagram provides a relevant space to observe these meanings of consumption because consumers can express their experiences through comments, testimonials, tagged content, reposts, and product-related discussions. Consumer interactions on Instagram can reflect how consumers assess product suitability, seller satisfaction, service responsiveness, and the authenticity of the product offered. These interactions demonstrate that beauty consumption in the digital environment is shaped not only by business-generated content but also by peer-based narratives and community validation.

Digital Marketing and Instagram-Based Engagement

In the skincare retail sector, Instagram serves as a visual and interactive platform that allows stores to showcase products, publish promotional content, share testimonials, respond to consumer inquiries, and strengthen engagement with potential buyers. Digital marketing capabilities are increasingly important as digital transformation changes the way companies create value and interact with customers (Homburg & Wielgos, 2022). Social media marketing is closely linked to consumer engagement because social media enables two-way interactions between businesses and consumers. Social media marketing activities can influence consumer experiences and brand responses (Koay et al., 2021). In Instagram-based skincare marketing, consumer engagement can occur through likes, comments, questions, recommendations, testimonials, and responses to promotional content. These forms of engagement are important because they demonstrate how consumers participate in a store's digital presence.

User-Generated Content in Beauty Communities

User-Generated Content (UGC) and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) are important forms of consumer participation in Instagram-based skincare marketing. UGC refers to consumer-created content such as comments, testimonials, tagged posts, reposted customer stories, product-use experiences, and informal recommendations, while e-WOM refers to consumer opinions, evaluations, complaints, recommendations, and product-related discussions distributed through digital platforms. In skincare marketing, both concepts are important because consumers often face uncertainty regarding product suitability, authenticity, safety, price, and seller credibility. Previous studies show that UGC can strengthen online trust and purchase intention through credibility and trust in information, while e-WOM can influence consumer responses through product evaluations, information credibility, and brand trust (Bashir et al., 2025a; Hidayah et al., 2024; Tanjung & Keni, 2023; Van Dat et al., 2025). In this study, UGC and e-WOM are understood as naturally occurring Instagram interactions that reflect how consumers express satisfaction, ask for advice, confirm product information, recommend stores, and contribute to the construction of consumer trust in local skincare beauty communities.

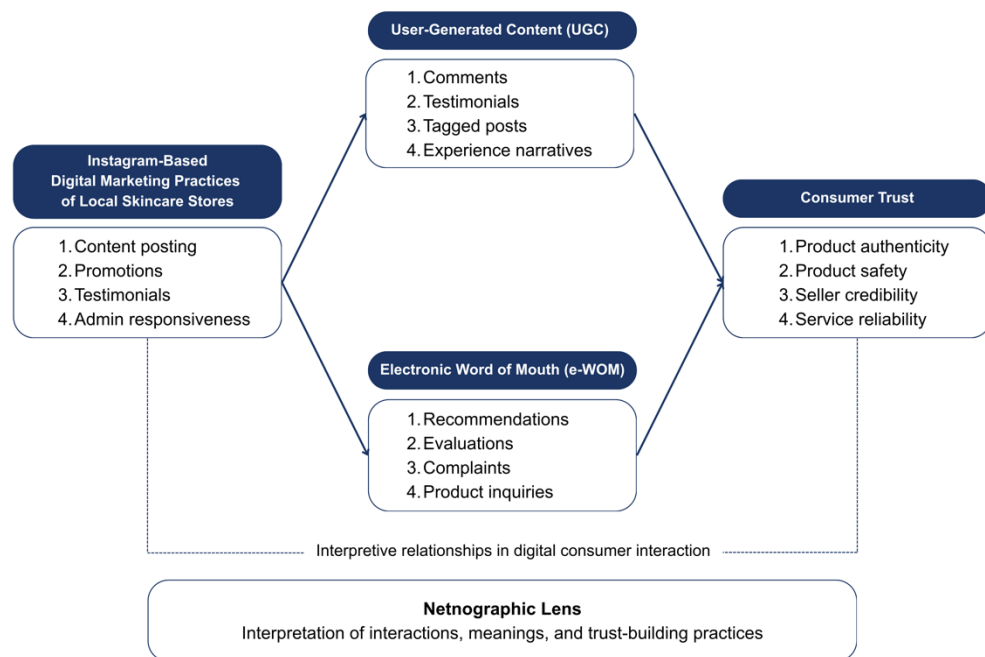
Consumer Trust in Instagram-Based Skincare Marketing

Consumer trust is a critical aspect of Instagram-based skincare marketing because consumers often face uncertainty regarding product authenticity, product safety, seller credibility, and service reliability. In online skincare transactions, trust can be formed

through credible information, consistent testimonials, transparent communication, visible customer satisfaction, responsive store interaction, and peer-based validation. Previous studies show that trust plays an important role in social commerce purchase intention and that source credibility, e-WOM credibility, and trust in online communities influence skincare purchase intention (Ranjith et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022). In this study, consumer trust is understood as a meaning constructed through digital interaction, which may appear explicitly through satisfaction, recommendations, and positive evaluations, or implicitly through repeated inquiries, consumer engagement, admin responsiveness, and visible confidence in local skincare stores on Instagram.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a pure netnographic approach. Netnography was selected because the study aimed to interpret naturally occurring consumer interactions in Instagram-based beauty communities rather than to test statistical relationships among variables. The research context was Instagram-based skincare marketing among two selected local skincare stores in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. Instagram was treated as a digital field site where consumers expressed experiences, recommendations, questions, evaluations, and trust-related responses toward local skincare stores. The unit of analysis consisted of digital interactions related to User-Generated Content (UGC), Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and consumer trust, including feed posts, reels, captions, consumer comments, admin responses, testimonials, reposted customer stories, tagged posts, and highlight content. The data were collected from January to June 2026. The two skincare store accounts were selected using purposive sampling based on active Instagram use, availability of public content, visible consumer interaction, presence of customer testimonials or consumer-generated responses, and relevance to the study's focus on UGC, e-WOM, and consumer trust.

Data were collected through non-participant digital observation and documentation of publicly available Instagram content. The researcher systematically observed selected posts, reels, captions, comments, admin replies, testimonials, tagged content, and highlight stories when accessible. Each data item was documented in a research data sheet containing the store account, date of content, content type, caption summary, visible engagement, consumer comments, admin responses, and preliminary analytical category. The data were analyzed using thematic coding and interpretive netnographic analysis. Deductive coding was guided by the three main analytical categories, namely UGC, e-WOM, and consumer trust, while inductive coding was used to identify emerging themes such as product authenticity, product suitability, admin responsiveness, testimonial credibility, peer recommendation, and service reliability. Trustworthiness was strengthened through systematic documentation, transparent coding procedures, data triangulation across captions, comments, testimonials, reposts, and admin responses, as well as an audit trail of observation notes and coding decisions. Ethical considerations were maintained by using only publicly accessible Instagram data, excluding private messages or restricted content, anonymizing usernames and personal identifiers, and reporting consumer expressions in a way that protects the privacy and dignity of social media users.

RESULTS

The observed data consists of Instagram activity from two selected local skincare stores in Merauke, namely ALVE and MIYUKI. The data includes Instagram posts, content types, captions, number of visible likes, visible comments, consumer comments, and admin responses. The findings are presented based on the observed digital footprint and are organized based on Instagram-based digital marketing practices, User-Generated Content (UGC), Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and consumer trust.

Table 1. Profile of Observed Instagram Data

Store Account	Observation Period	Observed Content	Total Likes	Average Likes per Post	Total Comments	Average Comments per Post	Posts with Comments	Posts with Visible Admin Responses
ALVE @alve.k	2 January - 16 May 2026	34 Feed posts	3,517	106.58	24	0.71	11 of 34 posts	9 posts
MIYUKI @miyuki beautystore	12 February - 1 June 2026	25 posts: 19 Reels & 6 Feed	6,033	251.38	336	13.44	25 of 25 posts	6 posts

Source: Processed Instagram observation data.

Table 1 shows that the two stores have different Instagram engagement patterns. ALVE relied entirely on feed-based content during the observation period, while MIYUKI used a more dynamic content structure dominated by Reels. MIYUKI generated higher visible engagement, with 6,033 likes and 336 comments from 25 observed posts. In contrast, ALVE generated 3,517 likes and 24 comments from 34 observed feed posts. This indicates that MIYUKI's Instagram activity produced stronger interactive responses, while ALVE's content generated more limited but still identifiable consumer interactions. The difference is particularly visible in the comment data, where all MIYUKI posts received comments, whereas only 11 of 34 ALVE posts received visible consumer comments.

Instagram-Based Digital Marketing Practices of Local Skincare Stores

The observed Instagram content shows that both stores use Instagram as a marketing channel, but they emphasize different communication styles. ALVE's content was dominated by promotional messages, discount announcements, product availability

information, membership benefits, and seasonal sales. The captions frequently used urgency-oriented promotional language such as limited discounts, payday sales, anniversary promotions, Valentine promotions, and product restock information. This pattern indicates that ALVE positions Instagram as a direct promotional channel intended to stimulate immediate consumer response.

MIYUKI, on the other hand, used Instagram not only for promotion but also for storytelling, entertainment, community interaction, and store personality building. The dominant use of Reels enabled MIYUKI to present humorous, emotional, and relational content. The store repeatedly addressed consumers as “Bestie,” introduced mascots and staff-related narratives, shared store development updates, and used giveaway-based content to invite participation. This pattern indicates that MIYUKI’s Instagram marketing is more community-oriented and relational, whereas ALVE’s Instagram marketing is more promotion-oriented and transactional.

Table 2. Dominant Digital Marketing Patterns

Store Account	Dominant Content Pattern	Main Consumer Response Pattern	Trust-Related Signal
ALVE @alve.k	Discount promotion, product availability, membership offers, restock information, and seasonal sales	Product inquiries, price confirmation, restock requests, delivery questions, and short emotional reactions	Trust is built through price clarity, product availability, admin confirmation, and promotional consistency
MIYUKI @miyuki beautystore	Reels, storytelling, giveaway, delivery service, staff/persona-based content, store development updates, and community narratives	Emotional support, humor, praise, participation in giveaway, product interest, and community-based responses	Trust is built through relational closeness, peer enthusiasm, service visibility, and consistent community engagement

Source: Processed Instagram observation data.

The comparison in Table 2 indicates that the two stores construct digital marketing practices through different forms of consumer engagement. ALVE’s Instagram activity encourages consumers to ask practical questions related to products, prices, sizes, promo periods, delivery possibilities, and product restocks. MIYUKI’s Instagram activity encourages broader social participation through humor, affective comments, encouragement, support, and responses to store narratives. These patterns show that Instagram-based skincare marketing in local retail settings is not uniform; each store develops a distinct digital identity through its content style and interaction pattern.

User-Generated Content in Instagram Beauty Communities

The observed UGC appeared mainly in the form of consumer comments, emotional reactions, product inquiries, testimonials, purchase intentions, and responses to store-generated content. In ALVE’s case, UGC was mostly transactional and inquiry-based. Consumers used the comment section to ask about promotions, product availability, product sizes, prices, delivery possibilities, and restock schedules. Examples include comments such as “Masih promo kak?”, “Brp sis,” “yang jauh bisa ga ya,” “Min restock Mykonos,” and “95 ini betul kh.” These comments indicate that consumers used Instagram as an information-seeking space before making purchase decisions.

In MIYUKI's case, UGC was more expressive, emotional, and community-oriented. Consumers did not only ask questions, but also responded to the store's storytelling, humorous Reels, giveaway content, and service narratives. Comments such as "kurirnya pinky gemoy," "Parfumnya wangi banget," "ikut an ahh, siapa tau nanti rezekinya," "otww besok," "sukses selalu," and "kerenn cee sukses selalu" show that consumers participated in building the store's online atmosphere. These comments functioned not only as responses to content, but also as public expressions of affection, approval, and social support.

Table 3. Patterns of User-Generated Content

UGC Pattern	ALVE	MIYUKI
Product inquiry	Consumers asked about prices, sizes, promo availability, stock, and restock schedules	Consumers asked about services, product recommendations, delivery, and store updates
Emotional reaction	Mostly short reactions using emojis or brief enthusiasm toward promotions	Stronger emotional expressions through humor, praise, encouragement, and affective comments
Testimonial-like expression	Limited visible experience-based comments in the observed data	More visible expressions of satisfaction, product liking, and positive evaluation
Participation signal	Consumers showed interest in discounts and membership offers	Consumers participated in voting, giveaway, story-based content, and store development narratives

Source: Processed Instagram observation data.

The UGC pattern shows that consumers in both accounts contributed to the stores' digital presence, but with different depths of participation. ALVE's UGC reflected consumers' need for functional and practical information, while MIYUKI's UGC reflected stronger emotional and relational participation. This finding indicates that UGC in local skincare marketing can emerge in at least two forms: inquiry-based UGC and community-based UGC. Inquiry-based UGC supports consumer decision-making through practical questions, while community-based UGC strengthens the affective and social atmosphere around the store account.

Electronic Word of Mouth and Consumer Interaction

The e-WOM observed in this study appeared through recommendations, product evaluations, product inquiries, expressions of purchase intention, complaints or doubts, and consumer-to-store interaction. In ALVE's account, e-WOM was mostly related to promotional interest and product availability. Consumers asked whether promotions were still valid, whether certain products were available, whether delivery was possible for distant customers, and whether specific items would be restocked. These interactions indicate that ALVE's e-WOM was shaped by consumer interest in price, promo value, stock certainty, and buying feasibility.

In MIYUKI's account, e-WOM was more affective and socially expressive. Consumers commented on the attractiveness of delivery service, supported the store's development, responded to giveaway opportunities, and expressed interest in visiting or buying. The post about the opportunity to win a motorcycle generated the highest number of comments, with 179 visible comments. This indicates that giveaway-based content can stimulate high e-WOM activity because consumers are encouraged to express participation and purchase intention publicly. Other high-engagement content included

story-based Reels, delivery service content, and store development updates, which generated comments related to admiration, humor, support, and emotional closeness.

Table 4. Dominant e-WOM Expressions

e-WOM Expression	Example of Consumer Meaning	Observed Pattern
Product inquiry	Consumers seek information before purchasing	Strong in ALVE and present in MIYUKI
Recommendation and purchase intention	Consumers express willingness to buy, visit, or participate	Present in both accounts, stronger in MIYUKI
Positive evaluation	Consumers praise products, services, store atmosphere, or content	Stronger in MIYUKI
Complaint or doubt	Consumers question prices, availability, delivery, or product details	More visible in ALVE as practical clarification
Community support	Consumers express encouragement, humor, and emotional support	Stronger in MIYUKI

Source: Processed Instagram observation data.

The e-WOM pattern indicates that Instagram comments are not merely reactions to content, but also digital signals that shape store reputation. In ALVE, e-WOM helped clarify practical information and reduced uncertainty related to purchase decisions. In MIYUKI, e-WOM functioned as social proof and community validation. The presence of enthusiastic comments, supportive responses, and repeated emotional expressions created a visible impression that consumers were familiar with and positively oriented toward the store. This demonstrates that e-WOM in local skincare marketing may operate through both informational and emotional pathways.

Consumer Trust in Local Skincare Instagram Marketing

Consumer trust appeared through several trust-related signals, including questions about product availability, requests for restock, confirmation of price and promo details, confidence in delivery service, positive responses to store content, and willingness to participate in store activities. In ALVE's account, trust was constructed mainly through practical confirmation. Consumers asked questions such as whether a promo was still available, whether a product was in stock, whether a customer outside the area could still buy, and whether a stated price was correct. These questions suggest that trust formation in ALVE's account was closely related to clarity, accuracy, and responsiveness.

ALVE's visible admin responses also played a role in trust construction. For example, admin responses clarified that product prices were listed in the image, confirmed that distant customers could still purchase, explained that certain promotions applied to specific product variants, and provided estimated restock information. Although not all comments received visible replies, the replies that were present helped reduce consumer uncertainty. In this case, admin responsiveness functioned as a direct trust-building mechanism.

In MIYUKI's account, consumer trust was formed more through relational closeness and community validation. The frequent use of friendly language such as "Bestie," humorous Reels, delivery service narratives, giveaway announcements, and store development updates created a sense of familiarity between the store and its audience. Consumers responded with expressions of support, admiration, and affection. Although visible admin replies were fewer than ALVE's, MIYUKI's high level of consumer engagement suggests that trust was not constructed only through direct admin responses, but also through consistent relational content and peer enthusiasm.

Table 5. Consumer Trust Signals in the Observed Data

Trust Signal	ALVE	MIYUKI
Product authenticity and availability	Reflected through product inquiries, stock questions, and restock requests	Reflected through product interest, skincare routine content, and product recommendation responses
Price and promotion clarity	Strongly reflected through questions about promo periods, prices, and discount conditions	Reflected through responses to discount, giveaway, and shopping event content
Seller credibility	Built through admin clarification and product information	Built through store personality, community narratives, and visible consumer enthusiasm
Service reliability	Reflected through delivery feasibility and membership-related questions	Reflected through delivery service content, treatment information, and consumer responses to service narratives
Relational trust	Present but less dominant	Strongly visible through "Bestie" communication, humor, support, and repeated affective engagement

Source: Processed Instagram observation data.

The findings indicate that consumer trust in Instagram-based skincare marketing is constructed through both informational and relational mechanisms. Informational trust is formed when consumers receive clarity about products, prices, promotions, stock, and delivery. Relational trust is formed when consumers feel socially connected to the store through friendly language, humor, storytelling, and visible peer participation. ALVE demonstrates a stronger pattern of informational trust, while MIYUKI demonstrates a stronger pattern of relational trust.

Cross-Case Netnographic Interpretation

The cross-case analysis shows that ALVE and MIYUKI represent two different models of Instagram-based beauty retail interaction. ALVE's model is promotion-driven, where Instagram functions mainly as a channel to distribute sales information and trigger purchase-related inquiries. The strength of this model lies in its clarity of promotional offers, product visibility, and direct admin clarification. However, the observed interaction remains relatively limited because many posts received no visible comments, and consumer participation was mostly short and transactional.

MIYUKI's model is community-driven, where Instagram functions as a space for storytelling, humor, emotional connection, and social participation. The strength of this model lies in its ability to generate higher engagement, more expressive UGC, and

stronger affective e-WOM. Consumer comments were not limited to product questions, but also included praise, encouragement, jokes, and support for store activities. This indicates that MIYUKI's Instagram presence functions not only as a marketing channel, but also as a digital beauty community where consumers participate in shaping the store's social image.

Table 6. Cross-Case Summary of Findings

Analytical Focus	ALVE	MIYUKI	Main Interpretation
Digital marketing orientation	Promotion-oriented and sales-driven	Community-oriented and story-driven	Local skincare stores may construct different digital identities through Instagram
Dominant content format	Feed posts	Reels and feed posts	Reels-based content appears to stimulate stronger visible interaction in the observed data
UGC pattern	Transactional and inquiry-based	Expressive, emotional, and participatory	UGC can function as practical inquiry or community participation
e-WOM pattern	Informational, promo-related, and product-related	Affective, supportive, and socially expressive	e-WOM operates through both informational and emotional pathways
Consumer trust pattern	Built through price clarity, stock information, admin confirmation, and promo reliability	Built through relational closeness, peer enthusiasm, service narratives, and community validation	Trust is constructed through both informational and relational mechanisms
Admin response pattern	More visible responses to consumer questions	Fewer visible responses, but stronger overall engagement	Consumer trust is not only shaped by admin replies, but also by content style and peer interaction

Source: Processed Instagram observation data.

The findings show that Instagram-based beauty communities contribute to consumer trust through visible consumer participation and interaction. UGC provides evidence of consumer involvement, while e-WOM creates public signals of interest, evaluation, and social validation. In ALVE's case, these processes are more closely related to promotional clarity and purchase feasibility. In MIYUKI's case, these processes are more closely related to emotional engagement and community belonging. These results indicate that local skincare stores can build trust on Instagram not only by offering products and promotions, but also by creating interactive, credible, and socially engaging digital spaces.

DISCUSSION

User-Generated Content and the Construction of Consumer Participation

This study aims to explore how User-Generated Content (UGC), Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and consumer trust are constructed within Instagram-based beauty communities involving two selected local skincare stores in Merauke. The findings confirm that Instagram functions not only as a digital promotional channel, but also as a participatory space where consumers ask questions, express product interest, share emotional responses, validate store credibility, and contribute to the public visibility of local skincare businesses. This study is important because it extends digital marketing research from national skincare brands and influencer-centered studies to local beauty retail actors operating in a regional market. Its main contribution lies in showing that consumer trust in local skincare Instagram accounts is not produced solely by store-generated content, but also through the visible participation of consumers in comments, testimonials, product inquiries, and affective responses.

The findings show that UGC emerged differently across the two accounts. In ALVE, UGC was mainly inquiry-based, appearing through consumer questions about product prices, promotions, stock availability, restock schedules, and delivery possibilities. In MIYUKI, UGC was more expressive and relational, appearing through praise, humor, encouragement, giveaway participation, and emotional support for store narratives. This indicates that UGC in local skincare marketing should not be interpreted only as formal customer reviews or structured testimonials. Short comments, product questions, emojis, and affective responses also function as consumer-generated traces that reflect participation and shape the social meaning of a store account.

This finding is consistent with the view that User-Generated Content (UGC) influences consumers because it provides peer-generated information and social validation in digital commerce. UGC can influence purchase intention through trust and credibility because consumers often rely on other users' experiences to evaluate products and sellers (Bashir et al., 2025). UGC also affects online trust and purchase intention in social commerce platforms, indicating that consumer-generated information can reduce uncertainty in digital transactions (Van Dat et al., 2025). The present study supports these empirical findings, but adds a qualitative explanation by showing how UGC appears in naturally occurring Instagram interactions. In the case of ALVE, UGC helps reduce practical uncertainty through product inquiries and clarification needs, while in the case of MIYUKI, UGC strengthens emotional closeness and community atmosphere through praise, humor, and supportive comments. Therefore, UGC in local skincare retailing works through both informational and relational mechanisms.

Electronic Word of Mouth as Informational and Affective Consumer Voice

The findings also show that e-WOM operates through informational and affective pathways. Informational e-WOM is visible in ALVE's Instagram account, where consumers ask about price accuracy, product availability, promotional conditions, and delivery feasibility. These interactions show that consumers use the comment section to clarify information before making purchase decisions. Affective e-WOM is more visible in MIYUKI's account, where consumers express admiration, humor, enthusiasm, support, and willingness to participate in store activities. This suggests that e-WOM in Instagram-based skincare marketing does not only consist of explicit recommendations, but also includes public expressions of interest, doubt, enthusiasm, and social approval.

Theoretically, this finding supports the idea that consumer information adoption in digital platforms depends not only on the availability of information, but also on perceived credibility, review quality, and social relevance. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on Instagram can influence purchase intention through trust and comprehensive reviews, especially when consumers seek detailed information and personal experience before purchasing (Lenggu & Ariadi, 2023). e-WOM credibility and quality on Instagram have also been shown to influence cosmetics purchase intention, indicating that consumer responses become persuasive when they are perceived as credible and useful (Mainardes et al., 2023). The present study strengthens these empirical findings by showing that e-WOM credibility in local skincare stores is constructed through visible interaction. When consumers ask questions and the store provides clarification, informational trust is strengthened. When consumers express positive emotions, support, and enthusiasm, social confidence around the store is reinforced.

However, the findings also suggest that e-WOM should not automatically be assumed to generate trust or purchase intention. Some skincare studies show that e-WOM does not always have a direct positive effect on brand trust or purchase intention, although brand trust remains important in explaining purchase intention (Tanjung & Keni, 2023). This helps explain why the presence of comments alone is insufficient. In the present study, the meaning of e-WOM depends on the content of the comment, the context of the post, the credibility of consumer expression, and the way the store responds or creates a supportive digital atmosphere. Therefore, e-WOM becomes more meaningful when it is connected to trust cues, product clarity, peer validation, and consumer confidence.

Consumer Trust in Local Skincare Instagram Marketing

The findings indicate that consumer trust in local skincare Instagram marketing is constructed through informational trust and relational trust. Informational trust is more visible in ALVE, where consumers rely on price clarity, product availability, promotional consistency, restock information, and admin confirmation. Relational trust is more visible in MIYUKI, where consumers respond to storytelling, humor, friendly language, giveaway content, and community-oriented communication. This distinction shows that trust in local skincare marketing is not uniform because it may emerge from practical certainty as well as from emotional closeness, familiarity, and repeated positive interaction. Trust is central in skincare-related purchase behavior because consumers require credibility and reassurance when evaluating products related to appearance, personal care, and perceived risk (Tjipto & Keni, 2025; Wijaya & Keni, 2022).

This study adds a netnographic contribution by showing how trust is expressed through observable digital traces in Instagram interactions. In ALVE, trust appears through consumer efforts to verify product, price, stock, and promotional details before purchasing. In MIYUKI, trust appears through social warmth, affective engagement, supportive comments, and positive consumer participation. These findings indicate that trust is not only an internal psychological state, but also a socially visible process reflected in questions, repeated interest, recommendations, emotional responses, and willingness to participate in store activities. Therefore, local skincare stores can build consumer trust by combining accurate product information with relational communication that makes consumers feel recognized, reassured, and involved.

Instagram Engagement and Local Beauty Community Formation

The comparison between ALVE and MIYUKI shows that Instagram engagement is shaped by content format, communication tone, and the type of relationship built with consumers. ALVE's feed-based and promotion-oriented content generated practical consumer responses, but the overall interaction was more limited. In contrast, MIYUKI's Reels-based and community-oriented content generated stronger visible engagement

through humor, storytelling, giveaways, and friendly address terms such as “Bestie.” This indicates that engagement in local beauty communities is not only driven by product promotion, but also by entertainment, emotional proximity, social connection, enjoyment, and consumer value in brand-related social media content (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). User-generated responses on Instagram can also influence brand trust and sharing intention through emotional mechanisms, which helps explain why MIYUKI’s content generated stronger affective participation (Bigné et al., 2023).

At the same time, engagement volume should be interpreted carefully because high engagement does not automatically mean deeper trust, and low engagement does not necessarily indicate weak credibility. MIYUKI’s high number of comments reflects stronger public participation, while ALVE’s lower number of comments reflects a more transactional communication pattern. However, ALVE’s visible admin responses still provide important trust cues by clarifying consumer questions. This means that engagement should be understood qualitatively by examining what consumers say, how they respond, what type of uncertainty they express, and how the store’s content or response shapes interpretation.

Explaining the Uneven Role of Admin Responsiveness

One important finding that requires further explanation is the uneven role of admin responsiveness. ALVE showed more visible admin replies to practical consumer questions, yet its overall comment engagement was lower. MIYUKI showed fewer visible admin replies, yet generated stronger consumer participation and emotional engagement. This indicates that admin responsiveness is important, but it is not the only factor that shapes digital trust and engagement. Admin replies help reduce uncertainty, especially when consumers ask about price, stock, restock, product variants, or delivery. However, relational content, entertaining formats, peer enthusiasm, and community tone may also generate trust even when admin replies are not dominant.

This finding is consistent with previous research showing that social media marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) do not always directly affect purchase intention, but can influence purchase intention through brand trust and consumer engagement (Praatmana, 2024). In the present study, this means that the effect of Instagram activity should not be seen as direct or mechanical. Consumer trust is shaped by a combination of store communication, consumer participation, and the perceived social atmosphere of the account. A store with many admin replies may build informational credibility, while a store with strong affective engagement may build relational credibility. Therefore, local skincare stores need both informational and relational credibility to strengthen consumer confidence.

The finding also explains why some blank admin response fields should not be interpreted as data weakness. In netnographic interpretation, the absence of visible replies is meaningful because it shows how interaction is publicly managed. Unanswered comments may reduce opportunities for public clarification, especially for questions related to price, availability, or product suitability. However, if the account has strong relational content and positive consumer responses, trust may still be supported by peer validation and repeated affective interaction. Therefore, admin responsiveness should be understood as one trust-building mechanism among several digital mechanisms operating in Instagram-based beauty communities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Instagram-based consumer trust in local skincare stores is constructed through the interaction between User-Generated Content (UGC), Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and store-consumer communication. The netnographic

findings show that the two selected skincare stores in Merauke build trust through different but complementary patterns. ALVE tends to construct informational trust through product clarity, promotional consistency, stock information, price confirmation, and visible admin responses. Meanwhile, MIYUKI tends to construct relational trust through storytelling, humor, friendly communication, Reels-based content, consumer enthusiasm, and community-oriented engagement. These findings indicate that Instagram functions not only as a promotional medium, but also as a social space where consumer participation, peer validation, and public interaction contribute to the credibility of local skincare businesses.

The study implies that local skincare stores need to manage Instagram as a trust-building platform by combining accurate product information, responsive communication, authentic customer testimonials, and emotionally engaging content. For practitioners, the findings suggest the importance of responding to consumer questions, encouraging organic testimonials, and designing content that invites meaningful interaction rather than merely displaying products. For future researchers, this study can be extended by involving more local skincare stores, comparing different social media platforms such as TikTok or marketplace reviews, or combining netnographic observation with interviews to gain deeper insight into consumer motivation, trust formation, and purchase behavior in regional beauty markets.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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