

Message Framing in Social Commerce Reviews: The Roles of Emotional Congruence and Perceived Authenticity in Purchase Intention

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor materials which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature: _____

Date: 27/05/2026

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Finally, I declare that this work has not been previously submitted for assessment at this or any other institution, except where otherwise stated.

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Ethical Approval

This research was granted ethical approval by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 15 September 2025 (application number 25/313)

Abstract

Social commerce has reshaped contemporary consumer behaviour by integrating social media interactions with e-commerce functions, creating environments where consumers increasingly rely on peer-generated reviews and testimonials when evaluating products (Hajli, 2015; Liang & Turban, 2011). Such content functions as a form of social proof by helping consumers reduce uncertainty and make purchase-related judgements based on the experiences of others (Cialdini, 1984; Hajli, 2015). Although prior research recognises the persuasive role of social proof in digital commerce, less attention has been given to how the framing of peer-generated reviews, particularly emotional versus rational message framing, shapes consumer responses and purchase intention (Zhang et al., 2018; Fernandes et al., 2022). This thesis addresses this gap by examining how emotional and rational review framing influence purchase intention through the mediating roles of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity.

Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the study explores whether consumers respond to social commerce reviews through affective alignment, evaluative credibility, or both (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). A quantitative, between-subjects experimental design was employed across two studies using simulated Instagram-style cosmetics reviews. Study 1 involved 124 female participants, while Study 2 involved 143 female participants. Participants were exposed to either emotionally framed or rationally framed review content before reporting their emotional congruence, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention.

The findings indicate that emotional message framing significantly increased emotional congruence, suggesting that personal and experiential testimonials created stronger affective alignment with consumers. Emotional congruence also mediated the relationship between emotional framing and purchase intention, demonstrating its role as an affective persuasive mechanism. However, emotional framing produced a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention compared with rational framing. This suggests that although emotional appeals may increase personal resonance, they may be less effective in supporting purchase-oriented judgement than rational reviews that provide clearer and more diagnostic product information. Perceived authenticity was found to be a strong positive predictor of purchase intention, but it was not significantly influenced by whether a review was framed emotionally or rationally.

This thesis challenges the assumption that emotional content is inherently more persuasive in social commerce environments. The findings suggest that effective review-based persuasion depends on a balance between emotional resonance, informational clarity, and perceived credibility. This research contributes to social commerce literature by clarifying the mechanisms through which message framing influences purchase intention and offers practical insight for marketers seeking to design credible and persuasive peer-generated content.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Chapter Introduction

As digital platforms increasingly mediate consumer interactions, peer-generated content such as customer reviews and testimonials has become a central source of persuasion in online purchasing environments (Shirazi et al., 2022; Rahman & Pial, 2019). Recent evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of online consumers consult reviews before making purchase decisions; for instance, a large-scale survey study found that 93% of consumers report that online reviews influence their shopping choices (Chen et al., 2022). Rather than relying solely on firm-generated communication, consumers increasingly evaluate products through the experiences, opinions, and recommendations shared by other users (Chen et al., 2018).

Within this context, social commerce – defined as the integration of e-commerce functions with social media interactions – has transformed how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products (Hajli, 2015; Liang & Turban, 2011). Consumers may now discover products through algorithmically curated feeds, evaluate them through reviews, comments, and peer-generated demonstrations, and complete purchases within or alongside the same digital environment (Zhang et al., 2018). Reviews, testimonials, likes, and other visible social signals serve as forms of social proof that reduce uncertainty and shape consumer judgement (Hajli, 2015; Liang & Turban, 2011). However, while the presence of such content is widely recognised as influential, less attention has been given to how the content of these messages, specifically how they are framed, affects consumer responses (Zhang et al., 2018). This is important because consumers are exposed not merely to the existence of reviews, but to differently worded and differently framed reviews that may shape judgement in distinct ways (Fernandes et al., 2022). Understanding these differences is therefore necessary for explaining when review content supports persuasion and purchase decision-making, given evidence that message framing in product communications can substantially alter both attitudes and purchase intentions (Waqas et al., 2023).

Prior research has demonstrated that social commerce environments are heavily influenced by social proof mechanisms such as user-generated reviews and testimonials (Chung, 2025). These forms of peer-generated content play a central role in shaping consumer evaluations and purchase decisions, particularly in online contexts characterised by uncertainty (Qiu & Zhang, 2024; Sang et al., 2024). As digital platforms continue to evolve, understanding how consumers interpret and respond to such content has become increasingly important within consumer behaviour research (Geng & Chen, 2021). In this respect, the literature provides strong support for the view that review-based persuasion is a fundamental feature of contemporary social commerce.

1.2 Context Background

Social commerce refers to the integration of social media platforms with online shopping, enabling users to discover, engage with, and purchase products directly within the app environment (Mutambik et al., 2023). Unlike traditional e-commerce, which is often driven by search-based browsing, social commerce leverages Web 2.0 technologies—particularly user-generated content, peer reviews, and interactive engagement—to influence consumer behaviour and facilitate transactions (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Yahoo! first defined “social commerce” in 2005, characterizing it as the incorporation of collaborative online shopping features, namely user ratings, reviews, and shared wish lists, to foster greater interactivity within the e-commerce environment (Mutambik et al., 2023). Since this emergence, the concept has evolved significantly with the rise of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, where commerce is embedded directly into users’ social interactions (Swapna & Venu, 2025). These developments reflect the hybrid nature of social commerce, merging community-driven interaction with commercial functionality (Liang & Turban, 2011). At its core, social commerce transforms everyday social experiences such as likes, comments, and shares into meaningful commercial actions, reshaping how consumers discover and evaluate products in a digitally connected world (Hajli, 2015). Rather than functioning as purely social interactions, these visible forms of engagement operate as commercial cues that influence how consumers interpret product popularity, relevance, and desirability (Huang et al., 2025). A high number of likes or positive comments may signal collective approval to the consumer, while shares and ongoing interaction can increase a product’s visibility and perceived legitimacy (Heiens & Narayanaswamy, 2021). In this way, social activity becomes commercially meaningful because consumers use the observable responses of others as part of their product evaluation and purchase judgement (Huang et al., 2025).

In social commerce, social proof, functions as a central mechanism through which consumers interpret and evaluate products (Dinh & Lee, 2022). Social proof refers to the tendency of individuals to look to the experiences, opinions, and behaviours of others when making decisions, particularly under conditions of uncertainty (Cialdini, 1984). In digitally mediated shopping environments, this process is often expressed through user-generated reviews, ratings, testimonials, and other visible signals of peer endorsement, which provide consumers with validation from others and reinforce confidence in purchase decisions (Patwa et al., 2024). This is especially relevant in cosmetics marketing, where consumers must often evaluate products based on highly subjective and appearance-related criteria, such as suitability, finish, and personal fit, making peer-generated reviews particularly influential in the absence of direct trial (Wang et al., 2021; Rahman & Pial, 2020).

1.3 Significance Gap

Emotional framing may strengthen affective connection and relatability, but it does not necessarily translate into stronger purchase intention (Wang et al., 2025). While emotional content can enhance engagement and resonance, it may lack the diagnostic clarity required to support decision-making, particularly in social commerce environments where consumers rely on evaluative cues (Jilv et al., 2025). In contrast, rational framing may provide more concrete and informative content that facilitates product evaluation and action (Wang et al., 2025). The difference in the customer perception of message framing suggests that persuasive effectiveness depends not only on whether a message is emotional or rational, but also on the psychological processes it activates (Al-Aziz & Metawie, 2022).

Despite the extensive literature on emotional appeals and social proof, limited research has simultaneously examined how emotional versus rational message framing influences purchase intention through underlying psychological mechanisms (Chen et al., 2022). In particular, the roles of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as explanatory pathways remain underexplored in social commerce contexts (Harrison-Walker & Jiang, 2023). Examining these two mechanisms together is theoretically justified because social commerce reviews are interpreted through both affective and evaluative judgements. Emotional congruence captures whether review content feels personally relevant and emotionally aligned, whereas perceived authenticity captures whether that content is judged as genuine, sincere, and believable (Lee & Kim, 2022). Taken together, these constructs help explain not only whether consumers feel aligned with a review, but also whether they regard it as credible enough to inform a purchase decision (Guduru et al., 2023).

Two mechanisms are especially relevant in this regard. First, emotional congruence refers to the extent to which the emotions conveyed in a review align with the consumer's own feelings, self-perceptions, or lived concerns (Salimi & Khanlari, 2018). This is important in social commerce because review content often relies on personal narratives and subjective experience, making emotional alignment a likely factor in whether consumers find a message relatable and personally meaningful (Zablocki et al., 2019). Second, perceived authenticity reflects the extent to which a review is seen as genuine, sincere, and believable (Lie et al., 2024). This is equally important because consumers may be influenced not only by whether a review resonates with them, but also by whether it appears trustworthy and suitable for informing a purchase decision (Guduru et al., 2023). Both constructs are theoretically relevant to social commerce, yet their specific role in explaining how message framing shapes purchase intention remains insufficiently understood (Jilv et al., 2025).

1.4 Research Objective and Research Questions

The objective of this study is to examine how emotional versus rational message framing in social commerce reviews influences purchase intention, and whether this relationship operates through emotional congruence and perceived authenticity.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does message framing in social commerce reviews influence purchase intention?
2. To what extent does emotional congruence mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in social commerce reviews?
3. To what extent does perceived authenticity mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in social commerce reviews?

1.5 Contribution

Understanding the mechanisms through which message framing influences purchase intention is important both theoretically and practically. This research contributes to academic literature by deepening the understanding of how message framing influences purchase intention in online review environments. Rather than assuming that emotional content is uniformly more persuasive, the study adopts a more nuanced perspective by comparing emotional and rational review framing and examining the distinct mechanisms through which each may influence consumer responses.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers valuable guidance for marketing professionals in the cosmetics industry and beyond. It highlights how user-generated content may shape consumer responses differently depending on how messages are framed and interpreted. The findings will be particularly useful for social media strategists, influencer marketers, and digital brand managers seeking to design persuasive content that moves beyond assumptions that emotional language alone is more effective. This study challenges the assumption that emotional content is inherently more persuasive in social commerce environments.

Prior research has established that social proof and user-generated reviews play a significant role in shaping consumer evaluations and purchase intentions in online environments (Abdul Talib & Mat Saat, 2017; Patwa et al., 2024; Rahman & Pial, 2020). However, much of this work has focused on the presence and influence of such content, as well as its ability to enhance engagement and trust, with less attention given to how the framing of review content shapes consumer responses (Huang et al., 2025). By directly comparing emotional and rational message framing in a social commerce context, this study extends existing research beyond broad assumptions that emotionally engaging content is uniformly more persuasive across all dimensions of consumer response. Rather, it investigates whether different framing strategies influence different aspects of consumer evaluation, particularly emotional congruence, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention. The study therefore offers a more nuanced understanding of how framed review content may shape consumer response in social commerce environments.

Additionally, while previous studies have shown that emotional appeals can enhance engagement, relatability, and affective response (Rahman & Pial, 2019; Vrtana & Krizanovna, 2023), limited research has examined the psychological mechanisms through which these effects influence purchase intention in social commerce contexts. In particular, emotional

congruence and perceived authenticity have received limited integrated attention as explanatory pathways, despite their relevance to how consumers interpret peer-generated reviews (Wang et al., 2021; Lie et al., 2024). By examining these two constructs together, they capture complementary dimensions of consumer response: Emotional congruence helps explain whether review content feels relatable and relevant to the consumer's own experiences and concerns, whereas perceived authenticity helps explain whether that content appears credible, sincere, and believable enough to inform a purchase decision. Therefore, by examining these two mechanisms together, this study contributes not simply by asking whether one framing style is more persuasive than another, but by explaining through which processes differently framed review content influences consumer response (Lee & Kim, 2020).

The study further contributes to the literature by demonstrating that emotional and rational review messages may activate distinct and, at times, competing evaluative pathways. While emotional framing enhances affective alignment, it may not directly translate into purchase intention, highlighting the importance of evaluative clarity in decision-making (Jilv et al., 2025). This provides a more nuanced understanding of persuasion in social commerce, particularly in cosmetics contexts where consumer decisions are shaped by both affective relevance and evaluative judgement, because it suggests that review content may influence consumers through emotional alignment on the one hand and through judgements of genuineness and decision usefulness on the other.

As such, this research contributes theoretically by clarifying the mechanisms through which message framing influences consumer behaviour, and practically by offering insights for marketers seeking to design more effective review-based communication strategies in social commerce environments.

1.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the study by situating it within the growing context of social commerce, where consumer decision-making is increasingly shaped by peer-generated reviews, testimonials, and other forms of social proof. It has shown that, in digitally mediated purchasing environments, consumers rely not only on the presence of review content, but also on how that content is framed and interpreted when evaluating products.

The chapter has further established that although emotional and rational message framing are both important in social commerce, their persuasive effects may operate through different psychological processes. In particular, it has identified emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as two relevant mechanisms for explaining how framed review content may influence purchase intention. By highlighting the limited research that integrates these mechanisms within a social commerce context, the chapter has clarified the significance of the research gap addressed in this thesis. In addition, the chapter has outlined the research objective, research questions, and expected contribution of the study. This chapter has provided the contextual and conceptual foundation for the thesis. The next chapter builds on this foundation by reviewing the literature relevant to social proof, message framing, emotional congruence, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention in greater depth.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to comprehending how message framing in social commerce influences consumer purchase intention. In contemporary digital environments, consumer decision-making is increasingly shaped by user-generated content, particularly customer reviews and testimonials, which function as key sources of social proof (Kumar, 2023). While such content is widely recognised as persuasive, less attention has been given to how different forms of message framing—specifically emotional versus rational appeals—shape consumer responses and behavioural outcomes. Existing research suggests that emotionally framed content can enhance engagement, relatability, and affective connection, particularly in social commerce contexts where communication is informal and experience-driven (Park & Lee, 2014). At the same time, rationally framed content may provide clearer, more diagnostic information that supports evaluation and decision-making (Rawal et al., 2026).

To address this, the chapter introduces two key constructs: emotional congruence and perceived authenticity, as potential mechanisms through which message framing may influence consumer behaviour and purchase intention. Although both constructs are recognised as important in social commerce, their specific roles in explaining how message framing affects purchase intention remain underexplored.

The chapter begins by outlining the social commerce context and the role of user-generated reviews in shaping consumer decision-making. It then examines social proof as a foundational mechanism in online environments. The discussion subsequently concentrates on message framing, distinguishing between emotional and rational appeals, and explores how these forms of communication may influence consumer perceptions differently. The chapter then reviews emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as key explanatory mechanisms, before linking these constructs to purchase intention. Finally, the chapter integrates these perspectives to develop the conceptual framework and hypotheses guiding this study.

2.2 Social Proof

The concept of social proof, which is a cognitive shortcut employed during uncertain decision-making, was introduced by Cialdini (1984). Rooted in human psychology, social proof functions as a critical social influence strategy—one where individuals are guided by the observed actions of others, especially in moments of uncertainty (Cialdini, 1984). This mechanism is particularly influential in consumer decision-making, as individuals look to peer behaviour, expert opinions, and social endorsements when forming judgements about products and services (Dinh & Lee, 2022). In the digital landscape, social proof manifests through cues such as user ratings and consumer reviews, influencer and celebrity endorsements, user-generated content, and engagement metrics that include likes, shares, and comments, tools widely adopted by e-commerce platforms and marketing campaigns to enhance credibility and influence purchasing behaviour (Huang et al., 2025; Shirazi et al., 2022).

Social proof consistently shapes consumer decision-making across contexts, including guiding choices on interactive platforms such as short-form video (SFV) platforms, where validation and engagement are crucial (Huang et al., 2025). SFV platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts prioritise highly engaging, algorithmically curated content that amplifies visibility and social influence (Yin, 2024). These platforms rely heavily on visual storytelling and social interactions (likes, comments, shares) to drive discovery and influence, making them fertile ground for emotionally charged social proof to take hold (Yin, 2024). Within these environments, users often mimic popular content or influencer choices, a form of social proof that guides behaviour in real time through emotionally resonant cues and peer-endorsed actions (De Araujo et al., 2024).

Research indicates that engagement metrics—such as likes, comments, and shares—serve as important feedback for content creators, shaping the visibility and promotion of their posts (Yin, 2024). However, the overemphasis on these metrics can also create a competitive environment where content is increasingly tailored to garner higher engagement, sometimes at the expense of its inherent value (Yin, 2024). While consumers may not always consciously attend to engagement metrics during shopping, research shows that increased user engagement on social media can significantly raise purchase intention (Rahman et al., 2017). This suggests that even indirect actions, such as likes and shares, subtly influence purchasing behaviour by fostering a sense of social endorsement (Rahman et al., 2017). Research suggests that emotional appeals within these reviews—whether expressed through excitement, trust, or personal relatability—significantly enhance their persuasiveness, making social proof a critical factor in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023).

This section defines social proof and its role in shaping consumer behaviour in digital environments. It then examines how social proof operates within social commerce, with particular emphasis on peer-generated content such as reviews and testimonials as key sources of influence. The discussion further explores how social proof functions within review-based environments, where consumers rely on the experiences of others to evaluate products in the absence of direct interaction. Subsequently, the section considers the importance of social proof in the evaluation of experiential goods, such as cosmetics, where consumer decision-making is heavily influenced by socially embedded cues. Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how review content influences consumer evaluation, which is further examined through message framing and the underlying psychological mechanisms that shape consumer responses in subsequent sections.

2.2.1 Social Proof in a Review-Based Environment

Research suggests that information sharing among consumers on social commerce platforms can enhance perceptions of familiarity, ease of use, and usefulness, thereby influencing purchase intention (Shirazi et al., 2022). Such findings underscore the critical role of peer-driven interactions in facilitating decision-making within social commerce environments. Consumers frequently rely on testimonials and reviews from individuals they perceive as similar to themselves, as this reduces uncertainty and reinforces purchase decisions (Rahman & Pail, 2020). Perceived similarity enhances the relevance of the information presented, making it easier for consumers to relate to the reviewer's experience and apply it to their own context (Wang et al., 2021). Prior research further suggests that emotional interactions, such as familiarity and perceived relatability, influence how consumers evaluate and respond to recommendations (Wang et al., 2021). Consumers are also more likely to accept

recommendations from individuals perceived as relatable or trustworthy, highlighting the role of affective cues in shaping responses to social proof (Park et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and reviews can act as validating signals by serving as visible indicators of collective approval (Dinh & Lee, 2022). High engagement volumes contribute to perceptions of popularity and legitimacy, subtly nudging consumers toward products that appear widely endorsed (De Vries et al., 2012). In contexts where direct product evaluation is not possible, these metrics foster a sense of social validation, helping consumers assess value and decision support based on the behaviour of others (Dinh & Lee, 2022).

2.2.2 Social Proof in Experiential Goods (Cosmetics)

Unlike traditional retail settings, where customers can physically test products before purchasing, online shoppers must increasingly rely on customer testimonials, influencer endorsements, and social media engagement to assess product quality and effectiveness in the absence of physical inspection (Kim & Ko, 2012). The cosmetics industry highlights the role of social proof, as these products are considered experiential goods whose quality is often evaluated through others' reviews and social feedback (Zollo et al., 2021).

This is particularly important in social commerce environments, where subjective evaluation plays a central role in decision-making, especially for experiential goods such as cosmetics (Wang et al., 2021). Because consumers must often assess suitability, appearance-related outcomes, and personal fit without direct product trial, peer-generated reviews become especially influential in shaping purchase judgements (Wang et al., 2021). In this sense, social proof in cosmetics operates not only by signalling popularity or endorsement, but also by helping consumers imagine how a product may perform in relation to their own needs and preferences. As discussed in Section 2.2, engagement metrics can function as social proof and influence consumer purchase intention (Yin, 2024; Rahman et al., 2017). Research also suggests that emotional appeals within these reviews—whether expressed through excitement, trust, or personal relatability—can enhance persuasiveness, making social proof a critical factor in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in cosmetics-related contexts (Vrtana & Krizanovna, 2023).

2.2.3 Message Framing: Emotional vs Rational Appeals

In social commerce environments, message framing does not operate independently of social proof, but rather shapes how peer-generated review content is interpreted by consumers (Gier et al., 2023). Because reviews and testimonials function as forms of social proof, the way their content is presented may influence whether consumers perceive them as relatable, informative, and persuasive (Naeem, 2020). Accordingly, understanding message framing is important not only for explaining how persuasive messages work in general, but also for explaining how socially embedded review content influences consumer evaluation and purchase intention (Grappi et al., 2024).

Message framing refers to the way in which information is presented to consumers, influencing how a message is interpreted and evaluated (Phan et al., 2023). In marketing and advertising contexts, message framing is commonly categorised into emotional and rational appeals, each of which shapes consumer responses through different forms of communication (Gier et al., 2023). Emotional framing emphasises feelings, personal experiences, and subjective evaluations, whereas rational framing focuses on objective information such as

product features, benefits, and usage (Liu et al., 2020). Emotional reviews may generate affective alignment and relatability, while rational reviews may provide clearer product-based information that supports decision-making (Wang et al., 2023). This distinction is particularly relevant in social commerce environments, where consumers rely on user-generated reviews to form product judgements in the absence of direct product interaction (Hu, 2025).

Emotional appeals operate by engaging consumers' affective responses, often through personal narratives, storytelling, and expressions of feelings such as satisfaction, confidence, or excitement (Park & Lee, 2014). In review-based environments, emotionally framed content frequently resembles personal testimony, allowing individuals to relate to the reviewer's experience and imagine similar outcomes for themselves (Modhvadiya et al., 2025). This type of framing can enhance perceived relatability and personal relevance, as consumers are more likely to engage with content that reflects their own concerns or aspirations (Park & Lee, 2014). As a result, emotional framing tends to encourage more intuitive and experience-based evaluations of products (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). This highlights the role of emotional framing in shaping affect-driven responses in social commerce contexts.

In contrast, rational appeals emphasise informational content, presenting product-related details such as functionality, usage instructions, and performance outcomes (Akbari, 2015). Rationally framed messages provide consumers with concrete and structured information, enabling more deliberate evaluation of a product's attributes (Rawal et al., 2026). In social commerce contexts, where uncertainty is often high due to the lack of physical product trial, such information may be particularly valuable in supporting consumer decision-making (Sung et al., 2023). By offering clarity and specificity, rational framing enables consumers to assess whether a product meets their needs, thereby facilitating more informed judgements (Rawal et al., 2026). This suggests that rational framing supports more analytical and decision-oriented evaluation of products.

While emotional and rational appeals represent distinct approaches to message framing, their effectiveness is not uniform across contexts (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). Emotional framing may enhance engagement and relatability, but it does not necessarily translate into stronger purchase intentions when consumers require clear and diagnostic information to support their decisions (Modhvadiya et al., 2025). In other words, content that feels emotionally engaging may still be less effective if it does not provide enough concrete information for consumers to judge whether the product is suitable, useful, or worth purchasing (Modhvadiya et al., 2025). By contrast, rational framing may be more effective in contexts where consumers prioritise product understanding and evaluation (Akbari, 2015). Rather than primarily increasing emotional engagement, rational framing appears to support persuasion by helping consumers assess product attributes, compare options, and reduce uncertainty in a more deliberate way (Akbari, 2015). This suggests that the persuasive impact of message framing depends not only on the content itself, but also on how the information is processed by consumers.

In this regard, the effects of message framing are shaped by the extent to which individuals engage in detailed, message-related processing or rely on simpler evaluative cues, aligning with dual-process perspectives that distinguish between systematic and heuristic routes to persuasion (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). Accordingly, dual-process theories of persuasion provide a useful framework for explaining how emotional and rational framing influence consumer responses. This theoretical perspective provides the foundation for

understanding how different forms of message framing are processed in social commerce environments.

2.2.4 Dual-Process Theory (ELM)

Unlike traditional advertising, which focuses on direct brand messaging, social commerce fosters consumer evaluation through peer-driven content, such as reviews and ratings, and enhances engagement through interactive shopping experiences on e-commerce platforms (Patwa et al., 2024). This shift toward peer validation over brand authority reflects a broader transformation in consumer behaviour, where perceived authenticity is derived from community experiences rather than top-down persuasion (Bruhn et al., 2012). As a result, consumers increasingly rely on socially embedded cues when interpreting and evaluating product-related information.

The effectiveness of social proof can be understood through dual-process theories of decision-making, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Cyr et al., 2018). This framework suggests that consumers process information through either a central or peripheral route, with social proof often serving as a peripheral cue that enables consumers to make quick, emotion-driven decisions (Cyr et al., 2018; Kitchen et al., 2014). The central route, as explained by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), involves careful and thoughtful evaluation of product information, where consumers assess quality based on logical reasoning, whereas the peripheral route relies on mental shortcuts and affective reactions, with decisions shaped by external cues such as reviews or influencer endorsements. In this context, the extent to which consumers respond to such cues may depend on how closely the content aligns with their own feelings, experiences, and personal concerns.

2.3 Mechanisms in Social Proof

To explain how message framing influences purchase intention in social commerce reviews, this study investigates two mechanisms: emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. These constructs were selected because they capture two distinct yet complementary dimensions of consumer response to review content. Emotional congruence reflects the extent to which the emotional tone of a review aligns with the consumer's own feelings, experiences, or self-perceptions, thereby shaping affective alignment and relatability (Danvers et al., 2018). Perceived authenticity, by contrast, reflects whether the review is seen as genuine, sincere, and believable, thereby shaping evaluative judgement and the perceived value of the information (Nunes et al., 2021). Together, these mechanisms provide a more nuanced explanation of how differently framed review content may influence consumer responses in social commerce environments.

2.3.1 Emotional Congruence

Emotional congruence captures the degree to which the emotional tone of a review corresponds with the consumer's own feelings, experiences, or self-perceptions, thereby strengthening relatability and affective engagement (Danvers et al., 2018). This concept can be understood through self-congruity theory, which posits that consumers prefer brands or messages whose images align with their self-concepts, including both their actual and ideal selves (Sirgy et al., 1991). When there is a match between the emotional or symbolic meaning of a message and the consumer's self-perceptions, individuals are more likely to form favourable evaluations and experience a stronger sense of connection with the content (Park & Lee, 2014). In social commerce contexts, where consumers are exposed to user-generated reviews and personal testimonials, such alignment becomes particularly relevant, as evaluations are shaped by both affective and experiential cues (Park & Lee, 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Taken together, these perspectives highlight emotional congruence as a key mechanism through which review content may influence consumer evaluation.

This alignment is especially evident in review-based environments, where consumers encounter narratives that reflect personal experiences and emotional expressions (Hamby et al., 2015). When the emotions conveyed in a review resonate with a consumer's concerns or aspirations, the content tends to be perceived as more relatable and personally relevant (Lee & Kim, 2022). Prior research also suggests that consumers are more likely to be influenced by messages that reflect similar experiences or characteristics, as perceived similarity enhances engagement and message acceptance (Duong et al., 2019). In this regard, emotional congruence can strengthen the connection between the consumer and the message, making it easier for individuals to imagine themselves in the reviewer's situation and evaluate the product through that lens (Green & Brock, 2000). This demonstrates how emotional alignment enhances both relatability and evaluative engagement in social commerce contexts.

As a result, emotional congruence plays an important role in shaping consumer responses to review content. When consumers perceive a strong alignment between the emotional tone of a message and their own experiences, they are more likely to engage with the content and form favourable evaluations (Lee & Kim, 2022). However, the extent to which such alignment translates into behavioural outcomes may depend on additional factors beyond emotional resonance alone (Chen et al., 2022). In particular, while emotional congruence may enhance relatability and engagement, consumers may also consider whether the content appears genuine and believable when forming purchase-related judgements. This suggests

that, alongside emotional alignment, perceptions of authenticity are likely to play a critical role in determining how review content influences consumer responses (Chen et al., 2022).

2.3.2 Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity is the extent to which content is seen as genuine, sincere, and believable by consumers (Nunes et al., 2021). In social commerce environments, where product information is often conveyed through user-generated reviews and testimonials, authenticity plays a critical role in shaping how such content is evaluated (Ranjith et al., 2025). Unlike traditional advertising, which is typically recognised as persuasive and commercially driven, peer-generated content is often evaluated based on its perceived honesty and lack of strategic intent (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2019). Consequently, authenticity becomes an important criterion through which consumers assess the credibility and value of information encountered in review-based contexts (Chen et al., 2022).

In review-based environments, perceptions of authenticity are shaped by specific content characteristics, such as the presence of personal experiences, detailed narratives, and realistic or unpolished expressions (Kori & Sharma, 2025). Reviews that include concrete descriptions, before-and-after outcomes, or candid emotional reactions are more likely to be perceived as genuine, as they resemble real-life experiences rather than constructed promotional messages (Walther et al., 2025). Conversely, content that appears overly polished, vague, or excessively positive may be perceived as less authentic, reducing its persuasive impact (Zhang et al., 2023). In this regard, authenticity is not solely determined by the source of the message, but by how the message is presented and whether it aligns with consumers' expectations of sincerity.

When consumers perceive review content as authentic, they are more likely to engage with the message and form favourable product evaluations (Yum & Yoo, 2024). However, authenticity does not operate in isolation, as consumers simultaneously process both affective alignment and evaluative cues when interpreting review content (Guduru et al., 2023). While emotional congruence may enhance relatability, authenticity influences whether the content is considered believable and suitable for informing decision-making (Yum & Yoo, 2024). While authenticity is often associated with trust, it may function as a distinct evaluative cue in social commerce, reflecting perceived sincerity rather than reliance on the source itself.

2.4 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the likelihood that a consumer will engage in a buying decision based on their evaluation of a product (Zong et al., 2023). It is widely used in consumer behaviour research as an indicator of potential purchasing behaviour, reflecting the extent to which individuals are willing to act on their attitudes and perceptions. In digital environments, purchase intention is often shaped by the information available to consumers, as well as their subjective interpretations of that information (Ho Nguyen et al., 2022).

In social commerce contexts, purchase intention is influenced by both informational cues and affective responses derived from user-generated content such as reviews and testimonials (Van Dat et al., 2025). Consumers rely on these cues to reduce uncertainty and form judgements about product quality, suitability, and desirability (Kwakye et al., 2024). As a result, purchase intention emerges as the outcome of multiple interacting factors, including how information is framed, how it is processed, and how it aligns with consumer perceptions of relevance and authenticity (Zong et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of examining the mechanisms through which review content influences consumer decision-making, particularly in relation to message framing and evaluative responses (Kwakye et al., 2024).

2.5 Comparative Literature Review

To identify the studies included in the comparative literature review, a targeted search was conducted using Google Scholar and Scopus. These databases were selected to ensure broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature relevant to the conceptual focus of this thesis, while also allowing the inclusion of influential and widely cited research across marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital commerce contexts. The search focused on studies related to the key constructs underpinning this thesis, namely, social proof framing, emotional congruence or related constructs, perceived authenticity or related evaluative cues, and purchase intention in online, review-based, or social commerce settings. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as: *social proof*, *social commerce*, *online reviews*, *user-generated content*, *message framing*, *emotional appeal*, *rational appeal*, *emotional congruence*, *self-congruity*, *authenticity*, *credibility*, and *purchase intention*. Following the initial search, studies were screened on the basis of conceptual relevance to the present research model. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and foundational theoretical works that directly informed one or more of the core constructs in the study. Research was retained where it provided clear theoretical, empirical, or contextual relevance to the relationship between framed review content and consumer response in digital environments.

Table 2.5.1 therefore presents a simplified comparative overview of the studies most relevant to this thesis. The table is designed to highlight the dominant patterns in prior research, identify areas of fragmentation, and clarify the specific gap addressed by the present study. It particularly shows the extent to which previous studies have examined social proof framing, emotional congruence or related constructs, authenticity or related evaluative cues, and purchase intention. In doing so, it highlights that while prior research has examined social proof broadly, and in some cases emotional or rational framing separately, few studies have compared emotional and rational framing within the same framework, and fewer still have integrated emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as parallel mechanisms of purchase intention in social commerce reviews.

Table 2.5.1: Overview of Selected Literature on Social Proof

Author(s)	Research Context	Social Proof Framing	Emotional Congruence / Related Construct	Authenticity / (Related Evaluative Cue)	Purchase Intention	Main Finding	Gap Relative to Current Study
Akbari (2015)	Ad appeals (Quantitative)	Rational				Rational framing is more effective for high-involvement products.	Does not examine social commerce reviews or emotional congruence.
Chen et al. (2022)	Online reviews (Quantitative - Eye-tracking)	General social proof only		✓	✓	Authenticity is a key criterion for assessing review credibility and value.	Does not test emotional versus rational framing.
Cialdini (1984)	Social Influence (Theoretical)	Not directly examined				Social proof serves as a cognitive shortcut during uncertainty.	Foundational theory only; does not test specific frames.
Guduru et al. (2023)	Online reviews	General social proof only		✓		Authenticity affects review helpfulness.	Does not test framing or purchase intention.

Hajli (2015)	Social commerce (Quantitative)	General social proof only			✓	Social factors drive intention to buy in social commerce.	Does not differentiate between framing types.
Hamby et al. (2015)	Consumer reviews	Emotional	✓ (Narrative resonance)			Reviews persuade through emotional narratives.	Does not compare rational framing or test authenticity.
Kori & Sharma (2025)	Product reviews	General social proof only		✓		Unpolished expressions build trust through authenticity.	Focuses on trust rather than purchase intention.
Lee & Kim (2022)	Online reviews (Quantitative)	Emotional vs. Rational	✓		✓	Framing influences intention via relevance.	Does not integrate authenticity as a mechanism.
Liu et al. (2020)	Online reviews	Other framing-related cue			✓	Language style and product type interact to affect intention.	Does not test emotional/rational framing or congruence.
Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy (1990)	Marketing (Quantitative)	Emotional vs. Rational				Framing impact depends on processing routes.	General marketing context; lacks authenticity test.
Modhvadiya et al. (2025)	Emotional ads	Emotional	✓		✓	Emotional framing enhances perceived relatability.	Does not compare rational framing or test authenticity.

Park & Lee (2014)	Advertising (Quantitative)	Emotional	✓			Emotional content enhances relatability and connection.	Lacks rational framing comparison or authenticity.
Patwa et al. (2024)	Social validation	General social proof only				Peer validation shifts authority from brands.	Does not test emotional vs. rational framing.
Petty & Cacioppo (1986)	Persuasion (ELM)	Not directly examined				Central vs. peripheral routes to persuasion.	Theoretical foundation; does not test review framing.
Qiu & Zhang (2024)	Online reviews (Meta-analysis)	General social proof only			✓	Reviews central to decisions under uncertainty.	Meta-analysis; lacks integrated framing/mechanism model.
Ranjith et al. (2025)	Skincare (Quantitative)	General social proof only		✓	✓	Credibility on Facebook influences intention.	Focuses on credibility rather than framing/congruence.
Rawal et al. (2026)	Advertising appeals	Emotional vs. Rational				Rational framing supports deliberate evaluation.	Does not test emotional congruence or authenticity.
Sang et al. (2024)	Digital platforms (Quantitative)	Emotional	✓ (User Emotion)		✓	UGC influences PI through the mediator of emotion.	Does not compare rational framing or authenticity.

Shirazi et al. (2022)	Social commerce (Quantitative)	General social proof only			✓	Information sharing enhances platform usefulness and PI.	Does not test framing or mechanisms like authenticity.
Sirgy et al. (1991)	Self-congruity	Not directly examined	✓			Preference for messages aligned with self-concept.	Theoretical framework; does not test review framing.
Sung et al. (2023)	Online reviews	Rational				Rational info supports decision support under uncertainty.	Focuses on trust rather than authenticity.
Van Dat et al. (2025)	Social commerce (Quantitative)	General social proof only			✓	UGC and trust shape purchase intention.	Focuses on trust rather than authenticity.
Vrtana & Krizanova (2023)	Online reviews	Emotional			✓	Emotional appeals in reviews enhance persuasiveness.	Does not compare rational framing or test congruence.
Walther et al. (2025)	Online reviews (Qualitative)	Other framing-related cue		✓ (Veracity)		Unpolished expressions used to determine review veracity.	Qualitative; does not test purchase intention quantitatively.
Zollo et al. (2021)	Organic cosmetics	General social proof only			✓	Quality is evaluated through social feedback in experiential goods.	Does not compare emotional vs. rational framing.

2.5.1 Literature Review Analysis

As presented in Table 2.5.1, prior literature has firmly established that social proof, particularly through user-generated content, reviews, testimonials, and engagement metrics, plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour in digital environments (Patwa et al., 2024; Shirazi et al., 2022). Existing research has also demonstrated that message framing influences how consumers interpret persuasive content, with emotional and rational appeals affecting consumer evaluation in different ways (Akbari, 2015; Lee & Kim, 2022; Rawal et al., 2026)

At the same time, the literature remains fragmented in several important respects. Although many studies identify trust as a central explanatory mechanism in online consumer behaviour, comparatively less attention has been given to distinguishing trust from perceived authenticity, particularly in peer-generated review contexts (Van Dat et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, while emotional congruence and related constructs such as self-congruity, similarity, and emotional alignment are recognised as important for enhancing relatability and engagement, they are rarely examined alongside perceived authenticity within a single explanatory framework (Sirgy et al., 1991; Lee & Kim, 2022). Research on message framing has also largely been developed in broader advertising and communication settings, rather than in the more socially embedded and peer-driven context of social commerce reviews (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Rawal et al., 2026).

Against this background, the present study offers a distinct integration of constructs. Rather than assuming that emotionally engaging content is inherently more persuasive, it brings together social proof, emotional versus rational message framing, emotional congruence, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention within a single social commerce review framework. This integration is important because it recognises that peer-generated review content may influence consumers through both affective and evaluative processes. Emotional framing may enhance resonance through emotional congruence, whereas rational framing may better support product evaluation where diagnostic information is important, particularly in experiential contexts such as cosmetics.

Accordingly, the present study addresses a clear gap in the literature. It advances existing research by moving beyond broad trust-based explanations and by offering a more differentiated account of how framed review content shapes consumer response in social commerce. More specifically, it examines how consumers navigate the dual demands of emotional alignment and evaluative credibility when interpreting peer-generated reviews in contexts characterised by uncertainty and the absence of direct product trial.

2.6 Research Gap

The literature on message framing suggests that the way review content is presented also matters (Gier et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020). Research on emotional and rational appeals indicates that different framing styles can shape how persuasive messages are interpreted, with emotional framing often associated with engagement, personal relevance, and affective response (Park & Lee, 2014; Modhvadiya et al., 2025; Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023), and rational framing associated with clarity, diagnosticity, and more deliberate evaluation (Akbari, 2015; Rawal et al., 2026). However, much of this work has been developed in broader advertising or communication contexts, rather than in the more socially embedded and peer-driven environment of social commerce reviews (Akbari, 2015; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Park & Lee, 2014; Rawal et al., 2026). As a result, although framing is recognised as important, its role in review-based persuasion remains insufficiently specified (Lee & Kim, 2022).

A further limitation is that many studies and practitioner discussions treat emotional or affective appeals as especially powerful in persuading a customer's purchase intention, which reinforces the impression that more emotional content is inherently more persuasive (Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023; Modhvadiya et al., 2025). Research also shows that when people attempt to persuade others, they tend to increase emotionality in their language because they intuitively associate emotion with persuasive effectiveness, even when this can backfire (Rocklage et al., 2018). This assumption is problematic because it overlooks the possibility that emotionally engaging content may not always be the most effective in supporting purchase-related decisions, especially in contexts where consumers also seek concrete and diagnostic information (Modhvadiya et al., 2025; Akbari, 2015; Rawal et al., 2026). Accordingly, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of emotional versus rational framing may depend not only on the message itself, but also on the psychological processes through which consumers interpret and evaluate the content (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Lee & Kim, 2022).

Although prior research has frequently emphasised trust as a key explanatory mechanism, relatively fewer studies have examined alternative processes that may underlie consumer responses to review content (Van Dat et al., 2025; Kwakye et al., 2024). This is an important omission because trust does not fully capture how consumers respond to the emotional tone or perceived sincerity of peer-generated reviews (Chen et al., 2022; Nunes et al., 2021; Guduru et al., 2023). In social commerce environments, consumers are not only asking whether content is trustworthy; they are also likely to assess whether it feels personally relevant and whether it appears genuine and believable (Lee & Kim, 2022; Ranjith et al., 2025). These considerations point to the relevance of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as two distinct but complementary explanatory pathways (Lee & Kim, 2022; Nunes et al., 2021).

The choice of emotional congruence is justified by research suggesting that consumers respond more favourably to messages that resonate with their own experiences, concerns, and self-perceptions (Sirgy et al., 1991; Lee & Kim, 2022). Related work on self-congruity, perceived similarity, and narrative alignment indicates that when review content feels emotionally compatible with the consumer's own perspective, it becomes more relatable, engaging, and evaluatively meaningful (Duong et al., 2019; Green & Brock, 2000; Hamby et al., 2015). Emotional congruence is therefore relevant because it captures the affective pathway through which message framing may shape consumer response (Park & Lee, 2014).

Perceived authenticity is equally important because review-based persuasion in social commerce depends not only on emotional resonance, but also on whether the content is judged as genuine, sincere, and believable (Chen et al., 2022; Ranjith et al., 2025). Prior research on authenticity, sincerity, veracity, and helpfulness suggests that consumers use cues such as personal detail, realism, and unpolished expression to infer whether review content is suitable for decision-making (Kori & Sharma, 2025; Walther et al., 2025; Yum & Yoo, 2024). Perceived authenticity therefore captures the evaluative pathway through which consumers determine whether a review should be taken seriously as a basis for purchase judgement (Guduru et al., 2023). Examining authenticity alongside emotional congruence is especially important because it allows the present study to distinguish between content that feels relatable and content that feels believable, rather than assuming these are the same process (Lee & Kim, 2022). Emotional congruence helps explain whether review content feels relatable and personally relevant to the consumer's own experiences and concerns (Lee & Kim, 2022). Perceived authenticity helps explain whether that same content appears genuine, sincere, and believable enough to inform a purchase decision (Guduru et al., 2023). Considering both within the same framework is therefore theoretically justified because social commerce reviews must do more than generate emotional resonance; they must also appear credible and decision-useful (Zablocki et al., 2019). Examining the two together allows the present study to distinguish between whether review content feels relatable and whether it is accepted as believable, rather than assuming these responses are interchangeable (Lee & Kim, 2022).

While some studies have examined how emotional versus rational appeals in online reviews influence purchase intentions through mechanisms such as perceived information relevance (Lee & Kim, 2022), there remains limited research in social commerce contexts specifically addressing how emotional versus rational message framing affects purchase intention via emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. Existing work has typically examined these constructs separately, or has prioritised trust and credibility over a more differentiated account of consumer interpretation (Van Dat et al., 2025; Kwakye et al., 2024; Ranjith et al., 2025). Consequently, the literature remains fragmented, and very few studies appear to integrate social proof framing, emotional versus rational review framing, emotional congruence, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention within a single explanatory model.

Drawing on this discussion, the present study proposes that message framing will influence purchase intention directly and indirectly through the mechanisms of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. Emotional framing is expected to enhance emotional congruence because it relies on personal expression, affective tone, and experiential language, which may resonate more strongly with consumers' own feelings and concerns (Park & Lee, 2014; Hamby et al., 2015; Lee & Kim, 2022). At the same time, because authenticity reflects whether content is perceived as genuine and believable, it is also reasonable to examine whether perceived authenticity helps explain the relationship between message framing and purchase intention (Guduru et al., 2023; Ranjith et al., 2025). These expectations provide the basis for the hypotheses developed below.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to understanding how message framing influences consumer purchase intention within social commerce environments. It established social proof as a foundational mechanism in digital consumer behaviour, revealing that reviews, testimonials, and other peer-generated cues play a central role in shaping evaluation and decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. This chapter also discusses message framing as an important aspect of review-based persuasion, with emotional and rational appeals influencing how content is interpreted and processed.

The chapter further investigated emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as two key mechanisms through which framed review content may influence consumer responses. While emotional congruence captures the extent to which review content resonates with consumers' own feelings, experiences, and self-perceptions, perceived authenticity reflects whether that content is judged as genuine, sincere, and believable. Together, these mechanisms provide a more differentiated explanation of how review content may shape purchase intention through both affective and evaluative pathways.

The comparative review reveals that the existing literature remains fragmented. Although prior research has separately established the importance of social proof, message framing, congruence-related constructs, authenticity-related cues, and purchase intention, very few studies appear to integrate these elements within a single social commerce review framework. In particular, limited attention has been given to how emotional versus rational message framing influences purchase intention through emotional congruence and perceived authenticity in social commerce contexts.

Consequently, this chapter identifies a clear research gap and established the theoretical foundation for the study. The next chapter builds on this review by developing the hypotheses and conceptual model that guide the empirical investigation.

Chapter 3 – Hypothesis Development

3.1 Introduction

This study addresses the identified gap by adopting a mechanism-based approach that examines how different message frames shape consumer responses and identifies the pathways through which these effects occur in a social commerce context. By focusing on emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as explanatory mechanisms, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how review content influences purchase intention, extending beyond traditional assumptions of emotional persuasion and trust. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by clarifying that the persuasive effects of review content may depend on both affective resonance and evaluative judgement.

Drawing on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, this chapter develops the hypotheses that guide the empirical investigation. The chapter first explains the expected relationship between message framing and purchase intention, before considering the mediating roles of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. It then presents the conceptual model that summarises the proposed relationships among the study variables.

3.1.1 Direct Effect of Message Framing on Purchase Intention

Message framing is expected to influence purchase intention because the way review content is presented shapes how consumers interpret and evaluate product-related information (Rawal et al., 2026). Emotional framing tends to rely on personal expression, subjective experience, and affective tone, whereas rational framing emphasises product-related details, functionality, and usage information (Phan et al., 2023; Akbari, 2015). Prior research suggests that these different styles of communication may influence consumer responses in different ways, particularly in online review environments where consumers rely on peer-generated information to reduce uncertainty (Hu, 2025; Dat et al., 2025). In social commerce contexts, consumers are often exposed to peer-generated reviews that are personal, experiential, and socially embedded (Chen & Shen, 2015). Under these conditions, emotionally framed review content may be especially persuasive because it can enhance relatability, affective engagement, and personal resonance (Zablocki et al., 2019). When consumers perceive that a review reflects feelings, experiences, or concerns that are relevant to their own perspective, they may respond more favourably to the message (Lee & Kim, 2022). Therefore, emotional message framing is expected to produce higher purchase intention than rational message framing.

H1: Emotional message framing (vs. rational message framing) leads to higher purchase intention in social commerce reviews.

3.1.2 Message Framing and Emotional Congruence

Emotional framing is expected to generate higher emotional congruence than rational framing because it relies more heavily on feelings, personal experience, and expressive language. In review-based environments, emotionally framed content may be more likely to resonate with consumers' own concerns, aspirations, or self-perceptions, thereby increasing the sense of emotional alignment between the message and the individual (Modhvadiya et al., 2025; Park & Lee, 2014). By contrast, rational framing focuses more on informational clarity and product features, which may be useful for evaluation but less likely to generate the same degree of affective resonance (Rawal et al., 2026). Therefore, emotional framing is expected to produce higher emotional congruence.

H2: Emotional message framing (vs. rational message framing) leads to higher emotional congruence.

3.1.3 The Mediating Role of Emotional Congruence

Emotional congruence is expected to mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention because emotional and rational review messages differ in the extent to which they invite affective alignment with the consumer. Emotionally framed reviews typically rely on personal expression, lived experience, and affective language, which may make the message feel closer to the consumer's own concerns, aspirations, or self-perceptions (Zablocki et al., 2019). By contrast, rationally framed reviews are more likely to emphasise factual and product-oriented information, which may support evaluation but generate less emotional resonance (Guo et al., 2020). When review content is perceived as emotionally congruent, it becomes more relatable, personally relevant, and experientially meaningful, allowing consumers to connect their own perspective to the reviewer's account (Lee & Kim, 2022). This stronger sense of alignment is expected to increase favourable product evaluation and, in turn, purchase intention (Lee & Kim, 2022). Emotional congruence therefore represents the affective mechanism through which message framing may shape consumer decision-making in social commerce contexts (Sirgy et al., 1991; Park & Lee, 2014).

H3: Emotional congruence mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

3.1.4 The Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity

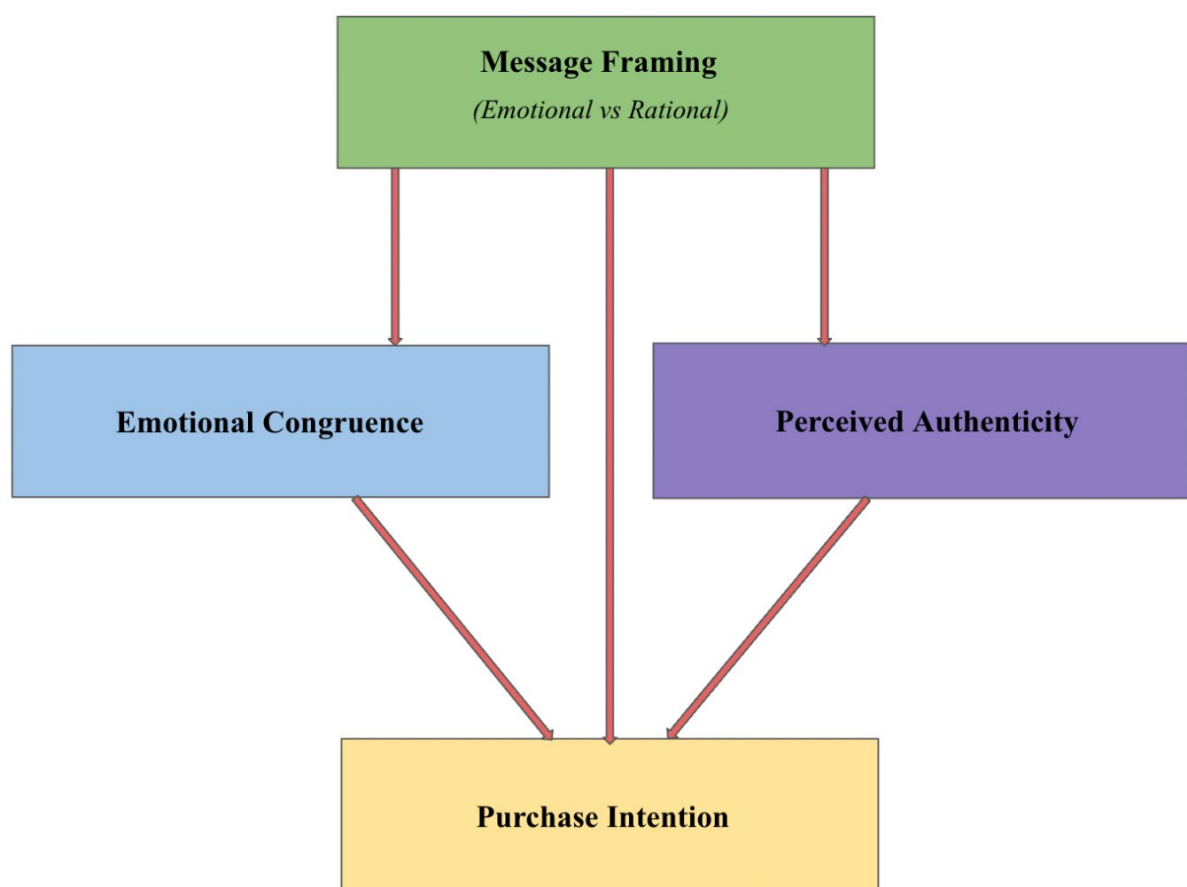
Perceived authenticity is also expected to mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention because consumers may be influenced not only by how relatable a review feels, but also by whether it appears genuine, sincere, and believable. In social commerce settings, peer-generated reviews are often evaluated for their perceived realness and suitability as a basis for decision-making (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2019). If a review is perceived as authentic, consumers may be more willing to rely on it when judging whether a product is worth purchasing (Yum & Yoo, 2024). Accordingly, perceived authenticity represents an evaluative pathway through which message framing may influence purchase intention.

H4: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

3.2 Conceptual Model

Based on the preceding hypotheses, the conceptual model proposes that message framing functions as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable. Emotional congruence and perceived authenticity are positioned as parallel mediating variables that explain how message framing influences purchase intention. More specifically, the model proposes that emotional versus rational framing may affect consumer purchase intention both directly and indirectly through its effects on emotional congruence and perceived authenticity.

Figure 1 - 3.2.1: Conceptual Model



Message framing is operationalised as emotional versus rational review framing. Emotional congruence and perceived authenticity are proposed as parallel mediators of the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

3.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has developed the hypotheses and conceptual model that guide the empirical investigation of the study. Drawing on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, it proposes that message framing influences purchase intention both directly and indirectly through the mechanisms of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. In doing so, the chapter translates the identified research gap into a set of theoretically grounded expectations regarding how consumers respond to emotionally versus rationally framed review content in social commerce environments.

More specifically, the chapter argues that message framing is likely to affect purchase intention because emotional and rational review messages provide different forms of persuasive value. It further proposed that emotional framing is expected to generate higher emotional congruence, and that emotional congruence, in turn, mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention. Perceived authenticity is also proposed as a mediating mechanism, based on the expectation that consumers evaluate peer-generated reviews not only in terms of relatability, but also in terms of whether the content appears genuine, sincere, and believable. The chapter closes by presenting the conceptual model, which positions message framing as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as parallel mediators.

The following chapter outlines the methodology used to empirically test these proposed relationships.

Chapter 4 – Methodology & Research Design

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the present study. It details the research design, sampling strategy, experimental stimuli, measurement instruments, and analytical techniques used to investigate the research objectives. The study employs a quantitative, between-subjects experimental design to examine how emotional versus rational message framing in social commerce reviews influences purchase intention, and whether this relationship is mediated by emotional congruence and perceived authenticity.

The chapter will begin by describing Study 1, followed by Study 2, which replicates the design using a larger sample to assess the robustness of findings. It then presents the measurement of key constructs and concludes with the analytical approach used to test the hypothesised relationships.

4.2 Study 1 Purpose and Overview

Study 1 investigates how emotional versus rational message framing in social commerce reviews influences consumer purchase intention. In addition, it examines whether emotional congruence and perceived authenticity function as mediating mechanisms in this relationship.

An Instagram-style post featuring a hydrating hydrogel moisturiser was used as the experimental stimulus. This product category was selected because skincare hydration is a common and familiar consumer need, allowing participants to engage with the content without requiring specialised knowledge or high product involvement. The use of a cosmetics-related stimulus is also appropriate given the experiential and self-expressive nature of the category, where consumers often rely on reviews to evaluate products in the absence of physical trial.

The stimulus is designed to represent an influencer post rather than displaying several customer reviews. In the emotional framing condition, the post was presented as a personal testimonial based on the influencer's experience with the product, whereas the rational framing condition presented factual product information, including product attributes, and performance-related information.

4.2.1 Research Design

A between-subjects experimental design was employed with two conditions:

- **Condition A (Emotional Framing):** Participants were exposed to a simulated Instagram-style post presented as a personal testimonial, emphasising emotional experiences such as confidence, self-expression, and satisfaction.
- **Condition B (Rational Framing):** Participants viewed a simulated Instagram-style post presenting factual, product-focused information, including ingredients and functional benefits.

Both conditions used the same visual image to control visual influence, while the textual content was manipulated to reflect either emotional or rational framing. The length of the text was kept consistent across conditions to minimise confounding effects. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions using Qualtrics' randomisation function.

Figure 2 - 4.2.1: Study 1 Stimuli Instagram Post





Anna Hipkins




Anna Hipkins I thought this product would be too delicate for my skin. I have combination skin—it's either really dry and flaky, or in summer it's oily and breaks out. The first day I applied this, I felt an all-day refreshing sensation - like that clean, refreshed feeling after washing your face with water and soap. These past two months, the gel has genuinely made a huge difference for my dryness and scarring. I've noticed my skin looking even, especially the dark pigmentation around my jawline (probably the hyaluronic acid helping with that). In my mission to find a long-term fix for my skin, I struggled with quite a few high-end moisturisers that either felt too heavy or caused more issues. This one surprised me - it's light, lasts all day, and balances my skin perfectly. I especially like that it was hydrating without feeling greasy. So I just want to show my appreciation for this product because of the difference it has made to my confidence and daily routine (I keep it right at the front shelf of my bathroom). Truly recommend this if you've got dry skin or scarring, you'll feel it within the first 2-3 days!




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Emotional Framing



Anna Hipkins




Anna Hipkins The Dermaleaf Hydroveil Moisture Gel is a dermatologist-recommended facial moisturizer formulated with purified hyaluronic acid, a naturally occurring ingredient known for its powerful ability to attract and retain water, additionally reducing scars. The gel delivers long-lasting hydration by boosting the skin's moisture barrier, helping maintain smooth, supple skin throughout the day. The lightweight, fast-absorbing texture glides on easily and dries quickly, leaving no greasy or sticky residue, which makes it suitable for layering under makeup or sunscreen. The formula is oil-free, non-comedogenic, dye-free, and fragrance-free, making it a gentle and effective choice for all skin types—including sensitive and acne-prone skin. In a 4-week clinical study with 120 participants experiencing dry or dehydrated skin, 85% reported noticeable improvements in hydration levels, skin smoothness, and overall suppleness. This gel is ideal for people seeking a daily moisturiser that combines comfort with clinical performance. For best results, apply evenly to clean, dry skin every morning and night as part of your skincare routine. Manufactured in accordance with FDA cosmetic safety standards, the Dermaleaf Hydroveil Moisture Gel is cruelty-free and widely available across major pharmacies, supermarkets, and trusted online retailers throughout the United States, both in physical stores and digital platforms.




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Rational Framing

Participants in study 1 were randomly assigned to view one of two Instagram post stimuli featuring the same cream product and fictitious influencer, as shown in figure 4.2.1. The stimuli differed only in message framing: one presented an emotional testimonial-style review, while the other presented a rational product-focused description. Participants were distributed approximately equally across the two conditions.

4.2.2 Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the CloudResearch platform, which served as the recruitment source, while the survey was administered and data were collected using Qualtrics. Data collection for Study 1 took place on 10 February 2026 between 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Eligibility was restricted to female participants. Respondents who selected male or another gender were screened out and automatically directed to the end of the survey, and no additional eligibility criteria were applied. Participants received \$1 USD as compensation for completing the study. Responses from participants who failed the attention check were excluded from the final dataset.

A total of 277 respondent records were collected. Following eligibility screening, respondents who identified as male or another gender were excluded from participation, and responses that failed the attention check were removed. This resulted in a final sample of 124 female participants included in the analysis. Only female participants were included, as the study focuses on cosmetics consumption, a category in which women represent the primary consumer segment across global markets (Šniepienė & Jonuševičienė, 2019). Prior research indicates that women demonstrate significantly higher engagement with cosmetic products, including greater frequency of use, product knowledge, and involvement in purchase decisions (Šniepienė & Jonuševičienė, 2019). Restricting the sample to female participants therefore enhances the relevance of the findings and reduces variability associated with differing consumption patterns across genders.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions, with 62 participants in the emotional condition and 62 in the rational condition. Demographic information, including age, was collected, along with measures of online shopping behaviour, such as frequency of reading reviews and perceived importance of trust when shopping online.

4.2.3 Procedure

Participants accessed the survey via an online link and were first presented with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two message framing conditions.

Participants viewed the assigned Instagram-style post and were then asked to complete a series of Likert-scale measures assessing:

- purchase intention
- emotional congruence
- perceived authenticity

Additional questions captured demographic information and control variables related to online shopping behaviour. An attention-check item was included to ensure data quality. The survey took approximately 5–7 minutes to complete.

4.3 Study 2 Purpose and Overview

Study 2 replicates the design of Study 1 to assess the consistency and robustness of the findings across a larger sample. The same conceptual framework, stimuli structure, and measurement approach were retained to enable direct comparison between the two studies.

4.3.1 Research Design (Study 2)

A between-subjects experimental design was employed with two conditions:

- **Condition A (Emotional Framing):** Participants were exposed to a simulated Instagram-style post presented as a personal testimonial, emphasising emotional experiences such as confidence, self-expression, and satisfaction.
- **Condition B (Rational Framing):** Participants viewed a simulated Instagram-style post presenting factual, product-focused information, including ingredients and functional benefits.

For Study 2, both conditions used the same visual image to control for visual influence within the experiment, while the textual content was manipulated to reflect either emotional or rational framing. Although the visual stimulus differed from that used in Study 1, the wording length was kept consistent across conditions to reduce potential confounding effects. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions using Qualtrics' randomisation function.

Figure 3 - 4.3.1: Study 2 Stimuli Instagram Post

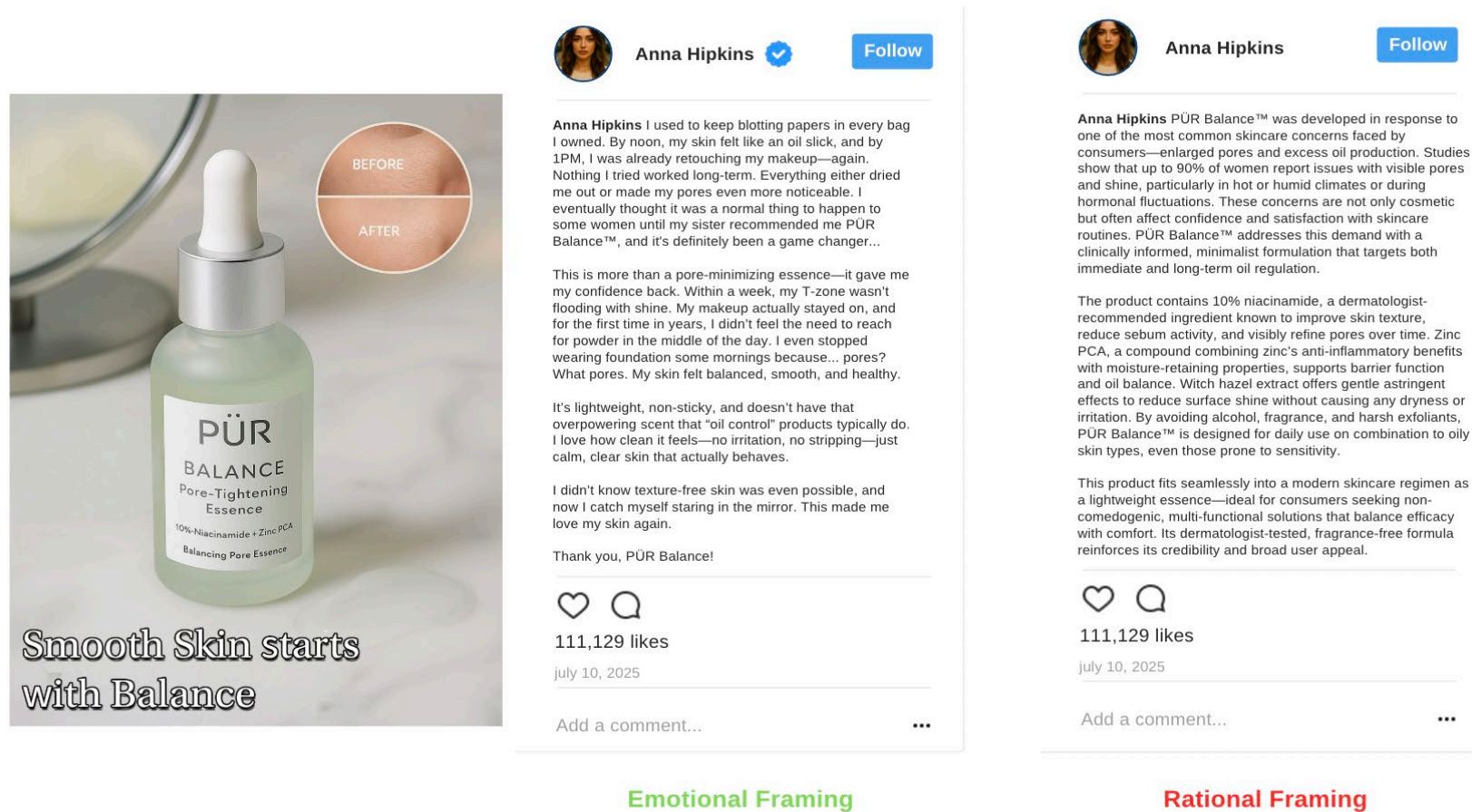


Figure 4.3.1 shows that study 2 differs to study 1 only in product visual and name, consequently changing the context of the messaging.

4.3.2 Participants and Recruitment (Study 2)

Study 2 was conducted on 12 March 2026 between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Participants were recruited through the CloudResearch platform, while the survey was administered and data were collected using Qualtrics, consistent with Study 1. The same eligibility criteria were applied, with participation restricted to female respondents. Respondents who selected male or another gender were screened out and automatically directed to the end of the survey, and no additional eligibility criteria were applied. Responses that failed the attention check were excluded from the final dataset. Participants received \$1 USD as compensation for completing the study.

A total of 143 participants were included in the final analysis. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two message-framing conditions, with 72 participants in the emotional condition and 71 in the rational condition. The procedure, stimuli, and measurement instruments were identical to those used in Study 1, ensuring methodological consistency across both studies.

Studies 1 and 2 were conducted using independent samples, with different participants recruited for each study.

4.4 Questionnaire Scale Measurement

4.4.1 Survey Instrument Overview

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two message conditions (condition A: emotional testimonial or Condition B: rational product description) and then completed a series of Likert-style scales designed to assess their purchase intention and perceived authenticity of the message and emotional congruence. All questions were designed to be completed within 5–7 minutes to maintain engagement and data quality. It is acknowledged that the emotional and rational stimuli differed not only in message framing, but also in testimonial style and in the amount and type of product information presented. The emotional condition adopted a more experiential, testimonial-based style, whereas the rational condition contained more product-focused and descriptive information.

4.4.2 Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was conducted to verify whether participants perceived the emotional and rational message framing conditions as intended. The manipulation check ensures that any observed effects can be attributed to the manipulation of the independent variable rather than unintended variation in stimulus interpretation (Kane & Barabas, 2018).

Participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which the review post reflected emotional versus rational appeal and affective versus analytical tone. These items were measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale (bipolar scale), with opposing descriptors (e.g., emotional vs rational, affective vs analytical) anchored at each end.

This approach allows for a direct assessment of whether the emotional condition was perceived as more affective and the rational condition as more analytical. A successful manipulation check provides evidence of internal validity by confirming that the

experimental conditions were meaningfully differentiated in the way intended (Kane & Barabas, 2018).

4.4.3 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Perdana et al. (2026). The items assess consumers' inclination to purchase and likelihood of trying the product. The original items were reworded where necessary to reflect the product and social commerce context used in the present study, while retaining their original conceptual meaning. The response format was also adapted to a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree").

4.4.4 Emotional Congruence

To assess emotional congruence, this study adapted a four-item scale based on Duong et al. (2019). Duong et al. (2019) investigated the effects of congruent and incongruent online comments on individual responses in a digital health context, focusing on how alignment between message content and audience perceptions shapes risk perception, source credibility, and message evaluation. The original scale was conceptually modified and reworded to capture emotional alignment between the reviewer's experience and the participant's own feelings within a social commerce context. To ensure consistency across all constructs, the original scale was adapted to a 7-point Likert format.

4.4.5 Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Kothari et al. (2025), whose measurement approach was based on the authenticity scale developed by Morhart et al. (2015). The items capture the extent to which the content is perceived as honest, real, and genuine. For the present study, the items were reworded where necessary to refer specifically to the social commerce content presented in the experimental stimuli while retaining the conceptual meaning of the original scale. Responses were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, consistent with the response format used across the study.

4.4.6 The 7-point Likert scale

A 7-point Likert scale was employed across all measurement constructs in this study to ensure consistency and enhance measurement sensitivity. Compared to shorter scales, such as 5-point formats, 7-point scales provide greater granularity, allowing respondents to express more nuanced differences in their perceptions and attitudes (Mohd Rokeman, 2024).

The use of a 7-point scale is widely supported in consumer behaviour and marketing research, as it improves scale reliability and increases variance without significantly increasing respondent burden (Peng & Finn, 2016). This is particularly important in studies examining perceptual and affective constructs, such as emotional congruence and perceived authenticity, where subtle differences in interpretation may be meaningful. Additionally, maintaining a consistent scale format across all constructs helps minimise cognitive processing demands for respondents, as they are not required to adjust to different response

formats throughout the questionnaire. Drawing on cognitive load theory, reducing unnecessary cognitive effort can support more accurate and consistent responses (Krieglstein et al., 2022).

4.4.7 Composite Scores

Composite scores were calculated for each of the multi-item constructs by averaging participants' responses across the items corresponding to each construct. Purchase intention was calculated as the mean of its four items, emotional congruence as the mean of its four items, and perceived authenticity as the mean of its three items. This produced a single composite score for each construct for every participant, with scores ranging from 1 to 7. Higher scores represented higher levels of purchase intention, emotional congruence, and perceived authenticity, respectively. These composite scores were subsequently used in the descriptive, inferential, and mediation analyses.

4.4.8 Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was included to assess whether participants perceived the product post in accordance with the intended emotional or rational message-framing condition. Participants rated the post using two 7-point bipolar items assessing emotional versus rational appeal and affective versus analytical tone. The two item responses were averaged to create a single manipulation-check score for each participant, which was subsequently used to compare perceptions across the emotional and rational conditions.

4.5 Data Analysis

To test the hypothesised relationships, this study employed Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) for SPSS (Hayes, 2022). Model 4 is a parallel mediation model that allows for the examination of both direct and indirect effects of an independent variable on a dependent variable through multiple mediators.

In this study:

- **Independent Variable (X):** Message framing (0 = rational, 1 = emotional)
- **Dependent Variable (Y):** Purchase intention
- **Mediator 1 (M1):** Emotional congruence
- **Mediator 2 (M2):** Perceived authenticity

This model enables the assessment of:

1. The direct effect of message framing on purchase intention
2. The indirect effect through emotional congruence
3. The indirect effect through perceived authenticity

All variables were computed as mean scores from multi-item scales. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects. Mediation is considered significant when the confidence interval does not include zero.

This analytical approach allows for a clear examination of the psychological mechanisms through which message framing influences consumer purchase intention in social commerce.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach adopted to investigate the influence of message framing on purchase intention in social commerce. A two-study experimental design is employed to test the proposed relationships and assess their robustness across samples. The chapter details the research design, participant recruitment, experimental procedure, measurement of constructs, and analytical techniques used.

By employing a controlled experimental approach and mediation analysis, the study provides a structured framework for examining how emotional and rational review framing influence consumer responses through underlying psychological mechanisms. The following chapter presents the results of the analyses conducted across both studies.

Chapter 5 – Study 1 Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical results of the research across two experimental studies. It begins with Study 1, outlining participant demographics, followed by an assessment of data quality through manipulation checks, reliability analysis, and descriptive statistics. The distribution of key variables is then examined to ensure that the assumptions for parametric testing are met. Descriptive comparisons between the emotional and rational message conditions are subsequently provided to offer initial insights into differences across constructs. The chapter then proceeds to the primary inferential analysis, where Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 is employed to examine the direct and indirect effects of message framing on purchase intention through emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. A summary of hypothesis testing and an interpretation of findings conclude in the Study 1 section.

5.2 Study 1 – Sample Demographics

A total of 124 female participants were selected in the final analysis. Participants were randomly assigned to either the emotional review condition ($n = 62$) or the rational review condition ($n = 62$).

Table 5.2.1: Age of respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	9	7.3%
26-32	36	29.0%
33-40	25	20.2%
41-49	27	21.8%
50+	27	21.8%
Total	124	100%

Participant demographics were examined to understand the age distribution of the sample. The largest age group was 26–32 years (29.0%), followed by participants aged 41–49 years (21.8%) and 50 years and above (21.8%). Participants aged 33–40 represented 20.2% of the sample, while 7.3% were aged between 18–25 years.

5.3 Study 1 Descriptive Statistics

5.3.1 Manipulation Check

Table 5.3.1: Manipulation Check

Source	df	F	p	η^2
Condition	1,122	18.23	< .001	.13

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess whether participants perceived the emotional and rational message conditions differently. The results indicated a significant difference between conditions, $F(1,122) = 18.23$, $p < .001$, confirming that participants perceived the emotional and rational message conditions as intended. The effect size was moderate ($\eta^2 = .13$), suggesting that the experimental condition explained a meaningful proportion of variance in manipulation check scores

5.3.2 Reliability Analysis

Table 5.3.2: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Congruence	4	.956
Authenticity	3	.968
Purchase Intention	4	.972

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. As shown in Table 5.3.2, all constructs demonstrated excellent reliability. Emotional congruence showed a Cronbach's alpha of .956 across four items, while authenticity demonstrated an alpha of .968 across three items. Purchase intention also exhibited very high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .972 across four items. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, indicating strong internal consistency among the scale items.

5.3.3 Zero-Order Correlation Matrix

Table 5.3.3: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Purchase Intention (PI_M)	3.93	1.74	—		
2. Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	4.78	1.60	.696***	—	
3. Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	4.04	1.58	.671***	.728***	—

Table 5.3.3 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for the key constructs in Study 1. The results show that all three variables were positively and significantly correlated with one another. Purchase intention was strongly and positively correlated with perceived authenticity ($r = .696, p < .001$) and emotional congruence ($r = .671, p < .001$), indicating that participants who perceived the review as more authentic and more emotionally aligned also reported stronger purchase intention. Perceived authenticity and emotional congruence were also strongly and positively correlated ($r = .728, p < .001$), suggesting that while the two constructs are related, they may still represent distinct aspects of consumer response. These zero-order correlations provide preliminary support for the expected relationships among the study variables and justify further examination through mediation analysis.

5.3.4 Descriptive Statistics of Composite Measures

Table 5.3.4: Descriptive Statistics of Composite Measures

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Purchase Intention (PI_M)	1	7	3.93	1.74
Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	1	7	4.78	1.60
Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	1	7	4.04	1.58

Descriptive statistics for Study 1 are presented in Table 5.3.4. Purchase intention recorded a mean score of 3.93 (SD = 1.74), indicating moderate purchase intention among respondents. Perceived authenticity reported a higher mean of 4.78 (SD = 1.60), indicating that participants generally perceived the reviews as relatively authentic. Emotional congruence shows a mean of 4.04 (SD = 1.58), reflecting moderate emotional alignment between the reviewer's experience and respondents.

5.4 Study 1 - One-Way ANOVA Comparison Between Conditions

Table 5.4.1: One-Way ANOVA Comparison Between Conditions

Construct	Rational (0) Mean (SD)	Emotional (1) Mean (SD)	F	df	p	η^2
Purchase Intention	4.24 (1.51)	3.62 (1.90)	4.06	(1, 122)	.046	.032
Emotional Congruence	3.77 (1.59)	4.32 (1.53)	3.92	(1, 122)	.050	.031
Perceived Authenticity	4.90 (1.44)	4.66 (1.74)	0.74	(1, 122)	.391	.006

To examine whether the emotional and rational framing conditions differed across the key study variables, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted for purchase intention, emotional congruence, and perceived authenticity. As shown in Table 5.4.1, a significant difference was found for purchase intention, $F(1, 122) = 4.06$, $p = .046$, $\eta^2 = .032$, with participants in the rational condition reporting higher purchase intention ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.51$) than those in the emotional condition ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.90$). This result runs counter to Hypothesis 1, which predicted that emotional framing would lead to higher purchase intention than rational framing. A borderline significant difference was also observed for emotional congruence, $F(1, 122) = 3.92$, $p = .050$, $\eta^2 = .031$, with participants in the emotional condition reporting higher emotional congruence ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.53$) than those in the rational condition ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.59$). By contrast, no significant difference was found for perceived authenticity, $F(1, 122) = 0.74$, $p = .391$, $\eta^2 = .006$, although the rational condition showed a slightly higher mean ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.44$) than the emotional condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.74$). These results provide an initial inferential indication that the two framing conditions differed in purchase intention and emotional congruence, but not in perceived authenticity.

To further examine the underlying mechanisms driving these differences, mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4

5.5 Study 1 Hayes PROCESS Model 4 Analysis

A parallel mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) to examine whether perceived authenticity and emotional congruence mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention. In this model, message framing was entered as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and perceived authenticity and emotional congruence as parallel mediators. The model summaries for each regression equation are presented in Table 5.5.1, followed by the regression coefficients in Tables 5.5.2 and 5.5.3. The direct and indirect effects of message framing on purchase intention are reported in Table 5.5.4.

Table 5.5.1: Model Summary for PROCESS Model 4

Outcome Variable	R	R ²	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	.1765	.0312	2.4460	3.9243	1	122	.0498
Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	.0777	.0060	2.5580	0.7412	1	122	.3910
Purchase Intention (PI_M)	.7687	.5908	1.2645	57.7576	3	120	< .001

Table 5.5.1 shows that the regression model predicting emotional congruence was statistically significant, $F(1, 122) = 3.9243$, $p = .0498$, although it explained only a small proportion of the variance ($R^2 = .0312$). By contrast, the model predicting perceived authenticity was not significant, $F(1, 122) = 0.7412$, $p = .3910$, indicating that message framing did not meaningfully explain perceptions of authenticity. The regression model predicting purchase intention was significant, $F(3, 120) = 57.7576$, $p < .001$, explaining 59.08% of the variance in purchase intention.

Table 5.5.2: Regression Coefficients for the Mediator Models

Outcome Variable	Predictor	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	Constant	3.7661	0.1986	18.9612	< .001	3.3729	4.1593
	Condition	0.5565	0.2809	1.9810	.0498	0.0004	1.1125
Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	Constant	4.9032	0.2031	24.1393	< .001	4.5011	5.3053
	Condition	-0.2473	0.2873	-0.8609	.3910	-0.8160	0.3213

As shown in Table 5.5.2, message framing had a significant positive effect on emotional congruence, $b = 0.5565$, $p = .0498$, indicating that the emotional framing condition generated higher emotional congruence than the rational framing condition. However, message framing did not significantly affect perceived authenticity, $b = -0.2473$, $p = .3910$. This suggests that although emotional framing increased consumers' affective alignment with the review, it did not significantly alter whether the review was judged as genuine or believable.

Table 5.5.3: Regression Coefficients Predicting Purchase Intention

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.5069	0.3435	1.4756	.1427	-0.1733	1.1870
Condition	-0.8143	0.2155	-3.7788	.0002	-1.2410	-0.3877
Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	0.5112	0.0994	5.1420	< .001	0.3143	0.7080
Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	0.3683	0.0972	3.7886	.0002	0.1758	0.5608

Table 5.5.3 indicates that both emotional congruence and perceived authenticity were significant positive predictors of purchase intention. Emotional congruence significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = 0.5112$, $p < .001$, while perceived authenticity also significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = 0.3683$, $p = .0002$. At the same time, message framing retained a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention, $b = -0.8143$, $p = .0002$. This indicates that the emotional framing condition was associated with lower purchase intention relative to the rational framing condition, even after accounting for the mediating variables.

Table 5.5.4: Study 1: Direct and Indirect Effects of Message Framing on Purchase Intention

Path	Effect	SE / BootSE	LLCI	ULCI	Result
Direct Effect: Condition → Purchase Intention	-0.8143	0.2155	-1.2410	-0.3877	Significant
Total Indirect Effect	0.1934	0.2468	-0.2971	0.6763	Not significant
Indirect Effect via Emotional Congruence	0.2844	0.1552	0.0037	0.6137	Significant
Indirect Effect via Perceived Authenticity	-0.0911	0.1115	-0.3378	0.1163	Not significant

As shown in Table 5.5.4, the direct effect of message framing on purchase intention was significant, with emotional framing associated with lower purchase intention than rational framing. The total indirect effect was not significant, as the 95% confidence interval included zero. However, the specific indirect effect through emotional congruence was significant, Effect = 0.2844, 95% CI [0.0037, 0.6137], indicating a significant indirect effect through emotional congruence. By contrast, the indirect effect through perceived authenticity was not significant, 95% CI [-0.3378, 0.1163], as the confidence interval included zero. Based on this output, emotional congruence mediated the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in Study 1, whereas perceived authenticity did not. Ultimately, the results indicate a pattern of inconsistent mediation in Study 1, whereby emotional framing increased emotional congruence, which in turn positively influenced purchase intention, while also exerting a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention.

5.6 Study 1 Discussion

The findings from Study 1 reveal a mixed but theoretically meaningful pattern in the relationship between message framing and purchase intention. Emotional message framing significantly increased emotional congruence, indicating that participants exposed to emotionally framed reviews felt more affectively aligned with the reviewer and the review content. At the same time, emotional framing exerted a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention. This suggests that although emotionally framed reviews may enhance perceived relatability and emotional resonance, they do not necessarily increase purchase intention overall. Instead, emotionally framed content appears to strengthen one aspect of consumer response while weakening another.

The positive relationship between emotional congruence and purchase intention indicates that affective alignment remains an important part of how consumers respond to review content. When consumers perceive that the emotional tone of a review reflects their own feelings, concerns, or self-perceptions, the content may become more relatable, personally relevant, and engaging (Park & Lee, 2014). This supports the view that emotionally framed reviews can foster affective engagement by helping consumers imagine themselves in the reviewer's position (Wang et al., 2021). In social commerce contexts, where peer-generated content often relies on personal testimony and experiential language, this form of emotional resonance appears to be meaningful for consumer evaluation (Modhvadiya et al., 2025). In Study 1, the indirect effect of message framing on purchase intention through emotional congruence was significant, indicating that emotional congruence mediated the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

At the same time, this positive indirect effect through emotional congruence was accompanied by a significant negative direct effect of emotional framing on purchase intention. This suggests a pattern of inconsistent mediation, whereby emotional framing strengthens affective alignment while simultaneously reducing purchase intention through another pathway. One possible interpretation is that emotional framing may enhance affective engagement without necessarily providing the level of evaluative clarity consumers require when making a purchase decision. In the cosmetics context, consumers often need to assess product suitability, expected performance, and practical benefits without direct product trial (Kim & Ko, 2012; Rahman & Pial, 2020). Because rational framing served as the comparison condition, the negative direct effect of emotional framing suggests that rationally framed reviews were more effective in directly supporting purchase intention. This can be interpreted in light of the evaluative demands of cosmetics consumption, where consumers often assess product suitability, expected performance, and functional benefits without direct product trial (Kim & Ko, 2012; Rahman & Pial, 2020). In such contexts, review content that offers clearer and more diagnostic information may be better positioned to support purchase-oriented judgement. Emotional framing may therefore strengthen affective connection with the review, while remaining less effective than rational framing in directly facilitating product evaluation. In this sense, emotional framing may succeed in creating affective alignment, but fall short in offering the clarity needed to support behavioural intention.

A different pattern emerged for perceived authenticity. Although authenticity significantly predicted purchase intention, it did not mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention because message framing did not significantly influence perceptions of authenticity. This finding suggests that authenticity is important in shaping consumer responses, but is not determined by whether a review is framed emotionally or rationally.

This distinction is theoretically significant because the two constructs played different empirical roles in the present model. Emotional congruence was more clearly linked to message framing, suggesting that framed review content can influence how relatable and personally relevant a review feels to consumers. Perceived authenticity, by contrast, was not significantly shaped by message framing, but it still predicted purchase intention, suggesting that consumers also make a separate judgement about whether review content is credible enough to inform a decision. In this sense, the findings indicate that consumer responses to social commerce reviews may involve both feelings of alignment with the message and evaluations of whether the message is believable and decision-useful. The fact that authenticity predicted purchase intention but was not shaped by message framing further suggests that consumers do not use emotional tone alone as a sufficient cue for credibility, but may instead rely on other characteristics, such as realism, specificity, balance, or sincerity, when deciding whether review content is believable.

These findings from Study 1 suggest that emotional and rational message framing activate distinct, and at times opposing, evaluative processes. Emotional framing appears to enhance perceived relatability through emotional congruence, while rational framing may be more effective in directly supporting purchase decisions by providing clearer and more decision-relevant information. The results therefore challenge any simple assumption that emotionally engaging content is inherently more persuasive in social commerce. Instead, they point to a more nuanced process in which emotional framing may strengthen affective connection through emotional congruence, while rational framing may better satisfy consumers' need for evaluative clarity.

5.6.1 Study 1 - Summary of Hypothesis Tests

H1 – Emotional message framing (vs. rational message framing) leads to higher purchase intention in social commerce reviews.

Not Supported

H2 – Emotional message framing leads to higher emotional congruence

Supported

H3 – Emotional congruence mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

Supported

H4 – Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

Not Supported

Chapter 6 – Study 2 Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of Study 2, which was conducted as a replication and extension of Study 1 using a larger sample. Following the same overall analytical structure, the chapter examines participant demographics, data quality, descriptive statistics, comparisons between conditions, and mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4. By repeating the procedures applied in Study 1, Study 2 provides an opportunity to assess the consistency and robustness of the proposed relationships in a second empirical setting.

The same analytical structure in chapter 5 – study 1, is applied to this chapter, allowing for comparison and validation of findings across a larger sample. Study 2 replicates the procedures of Study 1, including demographic analysis, data screening, descriptive statistics, and mediation analysis. The results of both studies are presented sequentially to enable a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed relationships and to assess the consistency and robustness of the findings.

6.2 Study 2 – Sample Demographics

Study 2 included a larger sample than Study 1, with 143 participants retained for the final analysis compared to 124 in Study 1. A total of 143 female participants were selected in the final analysis. Participants were randomly assigned to either the emotional review condition ($n = 72$) or the rational review condition ($n = 71$).

Table 6.2.1: Age of respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	11	7.7%
26-32	22	15.4%
33-40	32	22.4%
41-49	33	23.1%
50+	45	31.5%
Total	143	100%

A total of 143 participants completed the survey in the second study. The largest age group was 50 years and above (31.5%), followed by participants aged 41–49 years (23.1%). Participants aged 33–40 accounted for 22.4% of the sample. Participants aged 26-32 represented 15.4% of the sample, while participants aged 18-25 were the lowest demographic participating in this study at 7.7%.

6.3 Study 2 - Descriptive Statistics

6.3.1 Manipulation Check

Table 6.3.1: Manipulation Check

Source	df	F	p	η^2
Condition	1,141	55.75	< .001	.283

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether participants perceived the emotional and rational message conditions differently. The results revealed a significant difference between conditions, $F(1,141) = 55.75$, $p < .001$, indicating that the manipulation was successful. The effect size was large ($\eta^2 = .283$), suggesting that the experimental condition accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in manipulation check scores.

6.3.2 Reliability Analysis

Table 6.3.2: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Congruence	4	.974
Authenticity	3	.968
Purchase Intention	4	.961

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. As shown in Table 6.3.2, all constructs demonstrated excellent reliability. Emotional congruence displayed a Cronbach's alpha of .974 across four items, and authenticity demonstrated an alpha of .968 across three items. Purchase intention also demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .961 across four items. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, indicating strong internal consistency among the scale items.

6.3.3 Zero-Order Correlation Matrix

Table 6.3.3: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Purchase Intention (PI_M)	4.01	1.74	—		
2. Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	5.16	1.36	.636***	—	
3. Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	4.36	1.54	.595***	.634***	—

Table 6.3.3 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for the key constructs in Study 2. The results show that all three variables were positively and significantly correlated with one another. Purchase intention was positively associated with perceived authenticity ($r = .636, p < .001$) and emotional congruence ($r = .595, p < .001$), indicating that participants who perceived the review as more authentic and more emotionally aligned also reported stronger purchase intention. Perceived authenticity and emotional congruence were also positively correlated ($r = .634, p < .001$), suggesting that the two constructs are related but remain conceptually distinct. These zero-order correlations provide preliminary support for the expected relationships among the study variables and justify further examination through mediation analysis.

6.3.4 Descriptive Statistics of Composite Measures

Table 6.3.4: Descriptive Statistics of Composite Measures

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Purchase Intention (PI_M)	1	7	4.01	1.74
Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	1	7	5.16	1.36
Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	1	7	4.36	1.54

Descriptive statistics for Study 2 are presented in Table 6.3.4. Purchase intention recorded a mean score of 4.01 (SD = 1.74), indicating moderate levels of purchase intention among respondents. Perceived authenticity reported a relatively high mean of 5.16 (SD = 1.36), suggesting that participants generally perceived the reviews as authentic. Emotional congruence recorded a mean of 4.36 (SD = 1.54), indicating a moderate degree of emotional alignment between the reviewer's experience and respondents.

6.4 Study 2 - One-Way ANOVA Comparison Between Conditions

Table 6.4.1: One-Way ANOVA Comparison Between Conditions

Construct	Rational (0) Mean (SD)	Emotional (1) Mean (SD)	F	df	p	η^2
Purchase Intention	4.16 (1.77)	3.85 (1.71)	1.09	(1, 141)	.298	.008
Emotional Congruence	3.99 (1.62)	4.73 (1.36)	8.80	(1, 141)	.004	.059
Perceived Authenticity	5.22 (1.25)	5.10 (1.47)	0.27	(1, 141)	.603	.002

To examine whether the emotional and rational framing conditions differed across the key study variables, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted for purchase intention, emotional congruence, and perceived authenticity. As shown in Table 6.4.1, no significant difference was found for purchase intention, $F(1, 141) = 1.09, p = .298, \eta^2 = .008$, although participants in the rational condition reported a slightly higher mean ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.77$) than those in the emotional condition ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.71$). A significant difference was observed for emotional congruence, $F(1, 141) = 8.80, p = .004, \eta^2 = .059$, with participants in the emotional condition reporting higher emotional congruence ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.36$) than those in the rational condition ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.62$). For perceived authenticity, no significant difference was found between conditions, $F(1, 141) = 0.27, p = .603, \eta^2 = .002$, despite the rational condition showing a slightly higher mean ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.25$) than the emotional condition ($M = 5.10, SD = 1.47$). These results indicate that, at the descriptive inferential level, the framing manipulation significantly affected emotional congruence, but not purchase intention or perceived authenticity.

6.5 Study 2 - Hayes PROCESS Model 4 Analysis

A parallel mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) to examine whether emotional congruence and perceived authenticity mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in Study 2. In this model, message framing was entered as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and emotional congruence and perceived authenticity as parallel mediators. The model summaries for each regression equation are presented in Table 6.5.1, followed by the regression coefficients in Tables 6.5.2 and 6.5.3. The direct and indirect effects of message framing on purchase intention are reported in Table 6.5.4.

Table 6.5.1: Model Summary for PROCESS Model 4

Outcome Variable	R	R ²	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
Emotional Congruence (EC_M)	.2424	.0588	2.2436	8.8009	1	141	.0035
Perceived Authenticity (Auth_M)	.0439	.0019	1.8559	0.2719	1	141	.6029
Purchase Intention (PI_M)	.7006	.4909	1.5770	44.6724	3	139	< .001

Table 6.5.1 shows that the regression model predicting emotional congruence was statistically significant, $F(1, 141) = 8.8009, p = .0035$, explaining 5.88% of the variance in emotional congruence. By contrast, the model predicting perceived authenticity was not significant, $F(1, 141) = 0.2719, p = .6029$, indicating that message framing did not significantly explain authenticity perceptions. The regression model predicting purchase intention was significant, $F(3, 139) = 44.6724, p < .001$, explaining 49.09% of the variance in purchase intention.

Table 6.5.2: Regression Coefficients for the Mediator Models

Outcome Variable	Predictor	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Emotional Congruence (EC M)	Constant	3.9894	0.1778	22.4424	< .001	3.6380	4.3409
	Condition	0.7432	0.2505	2.9666	.0035	0.2479	1.2385
Perceived Authenticity (Auth M)	Constant	5.2207	0.1617	32.2905	< .001	4.9010	5.5403
	Condition	-0.1188	0.2279	-0.5214	.6029	-0.5693	0.3316

As shown in Table 6.5.2, message framing had a significant positive effect on emotional congruence, $b = 0.7432$, $p = .0035$, indicating that the emotional framing condition generated higher emotional congruence than the rational framing condition. However, message framing did not significantly affect perceived authenticity, $b = -0.1188$, $p = .6029$. This suggests that while emotional framing increased affective alignment with the review, it did not significantly alter whether the review was perceived as genuine or believable.

Table 6.5.3: Regression Coefficients Predicting Purchase Intention

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-0.1571	0.4321	-0.3636	.7167	-1.0115	0.6973
Condition	-0.5807	0.2244	-2.5876	.0107	-1.0244	-0.1370
Emotional Congruence (EC M)	0.4492	0.0945	4.7519	< .001	0.2623	0.6361
Perceived Authenticity (Auth M)	0.4834	0.1039	4.6514	< .001	0.2779	0.6889

Table 6.5.3 indicates that both emotional congruence and perceived authenticity were significant positive predictors of purchase intention. Emotional congruence significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = 0.4492$, $p < .001$, while perceived authenticity also significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = 0.4834$, $p < .001$. At the same time, message framing retained a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention, $b = -0.5807$, $p = .0107$. This indicates that the emotional framing condition was associated with lower purchase intention relative to the rational framing condition, even after accounting for the mediating variables.

Table 6.5.4: Study 2: Direct and Indirect Effects of Message Framing on Purchase Intention

Path	Effect	SE / BootSE	LLCI	ULCI	Result
Direct Effect: Condition → Purchase Intention	-0.5807	0.2244	-1.0244	-0.1370	Significant
Total Indirect Effect	0.2764	0.2169	-0.1548	0.7019	Not significant
Indirect Effect via Emotional Congruence	0.3338	0.1267	0.1053	0.6021	Significant
Indirect Effect via Perceived Authenticity	-0.0574	0.1130	-0.2973	0.1569	Not significant

As shown in Table 6.5.4, the direct effect of message framing on purchase intention was significant, with emotional framing associated with lower purchase intention than rational framing. However, this significant direct effect should be distinguished from the overall effect of message framing on purchase intention. As reported in Section 6.4 and Table 6.4.1, the overall difference in purchase intention between the emotional and rational framing conditions was not statistically significant, $F(1, 141) = 1.09$, $p = .298$. The significant direct effect reported here emerged after accounting for emotional congruence and perceived authenticity within the mediation model. The total indirect effect was not significant, as the 95% confidence interval included zero. However, the specific indirect effect through emotional congruence was significant, 95% CI [0.1053, 0.6021], indicating that emotional congruence mediated the relationship between message framing and purchase intention. By contrast, the indirect effect through perceived authenticity was not significant, 95% CI [-0.2973, 0.1569], as the confidence interval included zero.

These results indicate that emotional framing increased emotional congruence, and both emotional congruence and perceived authenticity positively predicted purchase intention. At the same time, emotional framing exerted a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention within the mediation model, despite there being no significant overall effect of framing on purchase intention in Section 6.4. These findings suggest a pattern of inconsistent mediation, whereby emotional framing enhanced purchase intention indirectly through emotional congruence, while simultaneously reducing purchase intention through its direct effect. Perceived authenticity, although positively related to purchase intention, did not function as a significant mediator in Study 2.

6.6 Study 2 - Discussion

The findings from Study 2 largely reinforce the pattern observed in Study 1, while providing stronger evidence for the mediating role of emotional congruence. Emotional message framing significantly increased emotional congruence and also exerted a significant negative direct effect on purchase intention. This suggests that emotionally framed reviews may strengthen affective alignment with the reviewer while simultaneously being less effective than rationally framed reviews in directly supporting purchase intention. In this sense, Study 2 replicates the broader tension identified in Study 1 between emotional resonance and evaluative clarity.

Study 2 also found a significant indirect effect through emotional congruence, indicating that emotional congruence functioned as a meaningful mediating mechanism in the second study. More specifically, emotionally framed reviews increased affective alignment, which in turn positively influenced purchase intention. This reinforces the idea that emotionally framed content can foster a sense of connection between the consumer and the message, particularly in review-based settings where peer-generated content often relies on lived experience and subjective expression (Hamby et al., 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Lee & Kim, 2022). At the same time, the continued negative direct effect of emotional framing suggests that although emotional reviews may feel more relatable, they may still provide less of the concrete and diagnostic information consumers require when making a purchase decision.

A similar pattern to Study 1 also emerged for perceived authenticity. Although authenticity was a significant positive predictor of purchase intention, it did not mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention because message framing did not significantly influence authenticity. This replicates the Study 1 finding that authenticity remains important to consumer judgement, but does not appear to be shaped by emotional versus rational framing. Instead, authenticity appears to function as an independent evaluative cue that consumers use when judging whether review content is believable and useful.

Ultimately, the findings from Study 2 strengthen the interpretation advanced in Study 1. Emotional and rational message framing appear to activate distinct, and at times opposing, evaluative processes. Emotional framing enhances perceived relatability through emotional congruence, whereas rational framing appears to be more effective in directly supporting purchase decisions. The replication of this broader pattern in a larger sample adds robustness to the conclusion that emotionally framed review content is not inherently more persuasive in social commerce. Instead, the findings suggest that persuasion in review-based environments depends on a balance between emotional resonance and evaluative clarity.

6.6.1 Study 2 - Summary of Hypothesis Tests

H1 – Emotional message framing (vs. rational message framing) leads to higher purchase intention in social commerce reviews.

Not Supported

H2 – Emotional message framing leads to higher emotional congruence

Supported

H3 – Emotional congruence mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

Supported

H4 – Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between message framing and purchase intention.

Not Supported

Chapter 7 – Discussion

7.1 General Discussion

The primary objective of these studies was to examine how emotional versus rational message framing in social commerce reviews influences purchase intention through the mechanisms of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity. Across both studies, a broadly consistent pattern emerged. Emotional framing generated higher levels of emotional congruence, indicating that consumers felt more affectively aligned with the reviewer and the content of the review. However, this increased emotional resonance did not translate into stronger purchase intention overall. Instead, emotional framing exerted a negative direct effect on purchase intention, suggesting that although emotionally framed reviews may make a product feel more relatable and personally meaningful, they may be less effective in directly supporting purchase decisions.

This pattern suggests that emotionally framed review content may strengthen affective engagement without necessarily providing the evaluative clarity consumers require when deciding whether to buy. In contrast, rationally framed reviews may be better suited to supporting decision-making because they provide more concrete, diagnostic, and product-relevant information (Rawal et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2025). In the cosmetics context, where consumers often need to assess suitability, expected performance, and product benefits without direct trial, such informational value is likely to be especially important (Kim & Ko, 2012; Rahman & Pial, 2020). Consequently, emotional framing appears to enhance affective engagement, while rational framing may be more effective in directly supporting purchase decisions. However, informational clarity and diagnosticity were not directly measured in the present studies and are therefore presented only as possible explanations for the observed findings.

A further important finding was that perceived authenticity consistently emerged as a significant positive predictor of purchase intention across both studies, yet it was not significantly influenced by message framing. This indicates that consumers do not automatically interpret emotional messaging as more genuine or sincere than rational messaging. Instead, authenticity appears to be judged on the basis of other cues, such as the realism of the review, the specificity of the details provided, or whether the content feels believable rather than exaggerated. In this sense, authenticity functions as an independent evaluative cue, although not as a framing-dependent mechanism in the present study.

Taken together, these findings suggest that persuasion in social commerce reviews operates through multiple processes. Emotional framing appears to influence consumers primarily through affective alignment, whereas purchase-oriented judgement also depends on evaluative clarity and the perceived usefulness of the content. The overall pattern therefore challenges any straightforward assumption that emotionally expressive review content is inherently more persuasive. Rather, the findings indicate that effective persuasion in social commerce depends on a balance between emotional resonance and informational clarity, particularly in product categories such as cosmetics where both personal relevance and functional evaluation are central to the purchase decision.

7.1.1 Addressing the Research Questions

RQ 1: How does message framing in social commerce reviews influence purchase intention?

Study 1 found that rational framing produced significantly higher purchase intention than emotional framing, while Study 2 found no significant overall difference between the two framing conditions. Accordingly, H1 was not supported in either study.

RQ 2: To what extent does emotional congruence mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in social commerce reviews?

Emotional framing increased emotional congruence, and emotional congruence significantly mediated the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in both studies. Accordingly, H2 and H3 were supported in both Study 1 and Study 2.

RQ 3: To what extent does perceived authenticity mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in social commerce reviews?

Perceived authenticity did not significantly mediate the relationship between message framing and purchase intention in either study. Accordingly, H4 was not supported in either study.

Taken together, the research questions were answered, with consistent support for emotional congruence as a mediating mechanism, but not for the predicted positive effect of emotional framing on purchase intention or for the mediating role of perceived authenticity.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

7.2.1 Emotional vs. Rational Message Framing

A prominent implication of the study is that it challenges the assumption that emotionally engaging content is inherently more persuasive. Much of the existing literature, along with practitioner intuition, tends to position emotional appeals as especially powerful because they enhance engagement, relatability, and affective connection (Park & Lee, 2014; Rahman & Pail, 2019; Vrtana & Krizanovna, 2023). The results of this thesis complicate that view. Although emotional framing consistently increased emotional congruence across both studies, it also exerted a negative direct effect on purchase intention. This suggests that emotional engagement and persuasive effectiveness should not be treated as equivalent outcomes. A review may feel more resonant and personally meaningful to a consumer without necessarily being more effective in producing behavioural intention.

This finding is theoretically important because it suggests that the persuasive value of message framing depends on the type of consumer response being considered. Emotional framing appears to be more effective in generating affective alignment, whereas rational framing appears more conducive to direct purchase-oriented evaluation. In this way, the study extends framing research by showing that the consequences of emotional versus rational communication are not uniform, but are shaped by the distinct aspects of consumer judgement they activate.

7.2.2 The role of Dual Process Theory (ELM)

The findings also contribute to dual-process explanations of persuasion, particularly in relation to the Elaboration Likelihood Model. As discussed in chapter 2, the Elaboration Likelihood Model proposes that consumers process persuasive information through either a central route or a peripheral route, with the former involving more effortful evaluation of message content and the latter relying more on affective cues, heuristics, and immediate impressions (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Within social commerce, where consumers are frequently exposed to peer-generated reviews, testimonials, and socially embedded cues, these forms of processing may coexist.

The present findings suggest that emotional congruence may be understood as part of a more affective and experiential route to persuasion. When review content feels emotionally aligned with the consumer's own experiences, concerns, or self-perceptions, it becomes more personally relevant and engaging (Lee & Kim, 2022). This helps explain why emotional framing consistently increased emotional congruence across both studies. At the same time, the negative direct effect of emotional framing on purchase intention suggests that affective alignment alone may be insufficient when consumers require clearer evaluative support for decision-making.

In this sense, the study does not directly test central versus peripheral route processing, but it does suggest that socially embedded review persuasion involves a tension between emotional resonance and evaluative judgement. Consumers may not simply be responding to the factual content of the review, but to the extent to which the message feels familiar, emotionally meaningful, and socially believable within their own frame of reference. This helps explain why emotional framing consistently increased emotional congruence across both studies. At the same time, the negative direct effect of emotional framing on purchase intention suggests that persuasion in social commerce cannot be explained by affective engagement alone. Although emotionally framed content may enhance connection, it may not provide the level of concrete and diagnostic information required for purchase decisions. Because rationally framed reviews provide more structured and decision-relevant information, they may be more consistent with the kind of evaluative processing consumers draw on when judging product usefulness and fit (Jilv et al., 2025).

However, the present study did not directly measure central-route processing, and therefore this interpretation should be made cautiously. Rather than demonstrating the operation of the central route itself, the findings suggest that social commerce persuasion may involve a tension between affective resonance and evaluative judgement. Emotional framing appears to strengthen affective engagement by making review content feel more personally resonant, while rational framing appears to be more effective in directly supporting purchase intention. The contribution of the present findings to dual-process explanations therefore lies in showing that emotionally engaging content may enhance affective alignment without necessarily producing stronger behavioural intention. In this sense, persuasion in social commerce review environments may depend less on emotionality alone than on whether review content offers an effective balance between resonance and decision-useful information.

7.2.3 Emotional Congruence and Authenticity

Another important theoretical contribution lies in clarifying the different empirical roles played by emotional congruence and perceived authenticity in the present model. Emotional congruence was consistently influenced by message framing and positively associated with purchase intention across both studies, with Study 2 providing clearer support for its mediating role. This indicates that emotional congruence is the construct most clearly linked to framing in the current research, and suggests that affective alignment is an important pathway through which framed review content can shape consumer response.

Perceived authenticity, by contrast, was a significant predictor of purchase intention but was not significantly affected by message framing in either study. The contribution of this finding is therefore more limited and should be interpreted carefully. Rather than showing that authenticity functioned as a framing-dependent mechanism, the results suggest that authenticity remains important to consumer evaluation, but not in a way that is explained by emotional versus rational framing alone. In other words, while authenticity appears relevant to purchase intention, the present study does not provide evidence that it changes as a result of message framing.

Accordingly, the main theoretical implication is not that the two constructs were directly differentiated by consumers through explicit comparative judgement, but that they played different roles in the model. Emotional congruence emerged as the mechanism most clearly connected to framing, whereas authenticity operated as a broader evaluative predictor of purchase intention that remained relatively independent of framing. This refines the understanding of consumer interpretation in social commerce by suggesting that framed review content may more readily influence affective alignment than authenticity perceptions.

7.2.4 Managerial Implications

A central managerial implication is that marketers should be cautious about assuming that emotionally expressive review content will automatically produce stronger purchase responses. Although emotional framing was effective in increasing emotional congruence, it did not directly increase purchase intention. This suggests that content which feels engaging, warm, or personally resonant may still fall short if it does not provide consumers with enough useful information to support an actual buying decision.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that brands and influencers should pay closer attention to the type of review-based content they choose to highlight, repost, or build into their social commerce communication. In cosmetics, consumers are often making decisions without direct product trial, which means they rely heavily on reviews to assess practical factors such as suitability, finish, texture, ingredients, wear, and expected performance (Chen et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). The implication is not that marketers should dictate how consumers write their own reviews, but that brand- and influencer-led communication should make space for more concrete product information, rather than relying only on emotional tone or broad expressions of satisfaction. Content that combines personal experience with specific product-relevant detail may therefore be more effective in helping consumers move from interest to purchase intention.

At the same time, the findings do not suggest that emotional framing should be disregarded. Emotional content still played an important role by increasing emotional congruence, which indicates that it can strengthen connection, relatability, and personal relevance. The practical implication is therefore one of balance rather than substitution. Brand- or influencer-led content may be more effective when it combines emotional resonance with enough functional detail to support evaluation.

The results also have implications for how brands think about authenticity. Because perceived authenticity predicted purchase intention but was not influenced by emotional versus rational framing, authenticity should not be treated as something that can be created through emotional tone alone. Instead, the results suggest that consumers may judge authenticity through broader cues such as realism, specificity, sincerity, and whether content appears natural rather than overly polished or exaggerated. For practitioners, the implication is that believable communication may depend less on making content more emotional and more on ensuring that it feels concrete, credible, and grounded in plausible product experience.

This is particularly relevant for influencer marketing and branded review strategy. Overly curated or heavily promotional language may weaken the sense of sincerity that consumers look for when using reviews as decision aids. By contrast, content that includes specific product experiences, balanced observations, and natural expression may be more effective in supporting authenticity. In this sense, authenticity should be treated not as a stylistic outcome of emotional framing, but as a broader quality of believable communication.

Chapter 8 – Limitations and Future Research

8.1 Limitations

From the contributions of the findings across two studies, there are still several limitations that should be acknowledged. One limitation concerns the composition of the sample. Both studies relied exclusively on female participants. While this was appropriate given the cosmetics context and the nature of the product stimulus, it limits the generalisability of the findings to broader consumer populations. Male and non-binary consumers may interpret social proof, review content, and persuasive framing differently, particularly in product categories where identity, self-presentation, and product involvement operate in different ways (Dittmar et al., 1995). As such, the findings should be interpreted within the context of a female consumer sample rather than as universally applicable across all audiences.

A second limitation relates to the product category examined in the study. The research focused specifically on cosmetics, which are experiential goods often evaluated through subjective, appearance-related, and self-expressive criteria. This context was appropriate for the study's objectives, but it also means that the findings may not transfer directly to other product categories. The persuasive effects of emotional and rational framing may differ in contexts involving more utilitarian goods, highly functional products, or higher-stakes luxury items, where consumers may rely on different evaluative criteria when making purchase decisions.

A further limitation concerns the use of simulated Instagram-style stimuli presented within a survey environment. Although this approach strengthened experimental control by isolating the framing manipulation, it may not fully capture the complexity of real social commerce environments. In practice, consumers are exposed to dynamic, algorithmically curated content streams that include not only the post itself, but also comments, likes, shares, creator identity, competing content, and repeated platform exposure (Taylor & Choi, 2022). The static nature of the stimulus therefore simplifies the real-world conditions under which social proof and message framing are typically encountered.

Another limitation lies in the cross-sectional nature of the design. Both studies measured purchase intention at a single point in time, immediately following exposure to one framed review stimulus. This does not account for the possibility that consumer responses may shift over time, nor does it capture how repeated exposure to multiple reviews may influence perception and judgement. In actual social commerce settings, purchase decisions are often shaped cumulatively through ongoing encounters with different types of user-generated content rather than a single review in isolation (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

In addition, the study examined purchase intention rather than actual behaviour. Although purchase intention is a widely accepted indicator in consumer research, it does not always translate directly into real purchasing action. Consumers may express favourable intentions in a survey setting without ultimately completing a purchase in real-world circumstances (Morwitz, 2014). This means that the findings provide insight into evaluative and behavioural tendency, but not into verified marketplace behaviour.

Finally, although the study focused on the mediating roles of emotional congruence and perceived authenticity, it did not fully examine potential moderators that may shape the strength or direction of these relationships. Consumer responses to emotional and rational

framing may vary depending on factors such as review-reading habits, product familiarity, involvement level, trust orientation, or prior experience with social commerce (Chen & Chang, 2015). The absence of these boundary conditions limits the extent to which the findings can explain when and for whom the observed effects are strongest.

8.2 Future Research

An important avenue that researchers can investigate is the inclusion of more diverse demographic groups, since this study focused on female participants within a cosmetics context. Future research could examine whether the effects of emotional versus rational framing vary across gender identities, age groups, or other consumer segments. Broader samples would help determine whether the observed relationships are context-specific or more widely generalisable, and may also reveal whether demographic characteristics moderate the persuasive effects of review framing (Dittmar et al., 1995; Shan et al., 2022).

A second direction is the use of longitudinal designs. The present studies captured consumer responses at a single point in time, immediately after exposure to one review stimulus. Future research could investigate whether emotionally framed reviews produce longer-term effects that are not visible in short-term purchase intention measures. For example, emotional framing may contribute to brand affinity, memorability, or delayed persuasion over time, even if it does not immediately increase purchase intention. Examining these possibilities would provide a more nuanced understanding of how framing operates beyond the immediate moment of evaluation.

Future research could also compare different forms of social proof across media formats. Given the growing dominance of short-form video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, it would be valuable to examine whether emotional framing operates differently in video testimonials compared with the textual Instagram-style posts used in this study. Video-based content may amplify emotional expression through tone of voice, facial expression, pacing, and visual demonstration, potentially altering how consumers perceive relatability, authenticity, and persuasive value (Hao et al., 2019).

Another important direction concerns the drivers of authenticity. Since message framing did not significantly influence perceived authenticity in the present study, future research should investigate which cues do shape authenticity perceptions more directly. These may include factors such as unpolished or realistic presentation, reviewer reputation, balanced product evaluations, the inclusion of both positive and negative attributes, or the level of detail and specificity within the review. Exploring these factors would help clarify why some user-generated reviews are perceived as genuine and believable, while others are not. In addition, future studies could examine potential moderators that may influence when emotional or rational framing is more effective. Variables such as consumer involvement, need for cognition, product familiarity, trust orientation, and review-reading frequency may shape how individuals respond to different review styles. Identifying these boundary conditions would strengthen understanding of for whom and under what circumstances each framing strategy is most persuasive.

Overall, future research has considerable scope to extend the present findings by broadening contexts, methods, and explanatory conditions. Such work would deepen understanding of how social commerce reviews influence consumer behaviour and further refine the role of message framing, emotional congruence, and authenticity in digitally mediated purchasing environments.

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APPENDIX 1 – Survey Questions

SCREENING QUESTION

Q1 Please be aware that in this research, we are only interested in the opinion of female participants due to the nature of the surveyed product. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender (3)

MANIPULATION CHECK

Q2 Please indicate the extent to which you think the review post was....

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Emotional appeal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rational appeal
Affective tone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Analytical tone

PURCHASE INTENTION SCALE

Q3 Based on the review you just read, Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I intend to purchase this product (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I intend to purchase this product in the near future (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Given the opportunity, I am very likely to buy this product (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I consider this product a top choice when I need items in it's category (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

AUTHENTICITY SCALE

Q4 Based on the review you just read, Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The message felt genuine (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The message seemed honest (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The way the person conveyed the message felt genuine (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

EMOTIONAL CONGRUENCE SCALE

Q5 Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the product review you just viewed

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The reviewer's experience felt emotionally similar to how I would feel in the same situation (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I could emotionally relate to the reviewer's experience described in the review (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The feelings expressed in the review matched how I would feel about the product (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
felt an emotional connection with the reviewer's experience. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

AGE

Q6 What is your age

18-25 (1)

26-32 (2)

33-40 (3)

41-49 (4)

50+ (5)

Q7 How often do you read customer reviews before making a purchase?

Never (1)

Sometimes (2)

About half the time (3)

Most of the time (4)

Always (5)

Q8 To what extent do you feel the post reflects the personal experience of someone who regularly uses cosmetic products?

Not at all (1)

Slightly (2)

Somewhat (3)

Moderately (4)

Quite a bit (5)

Very much (6)

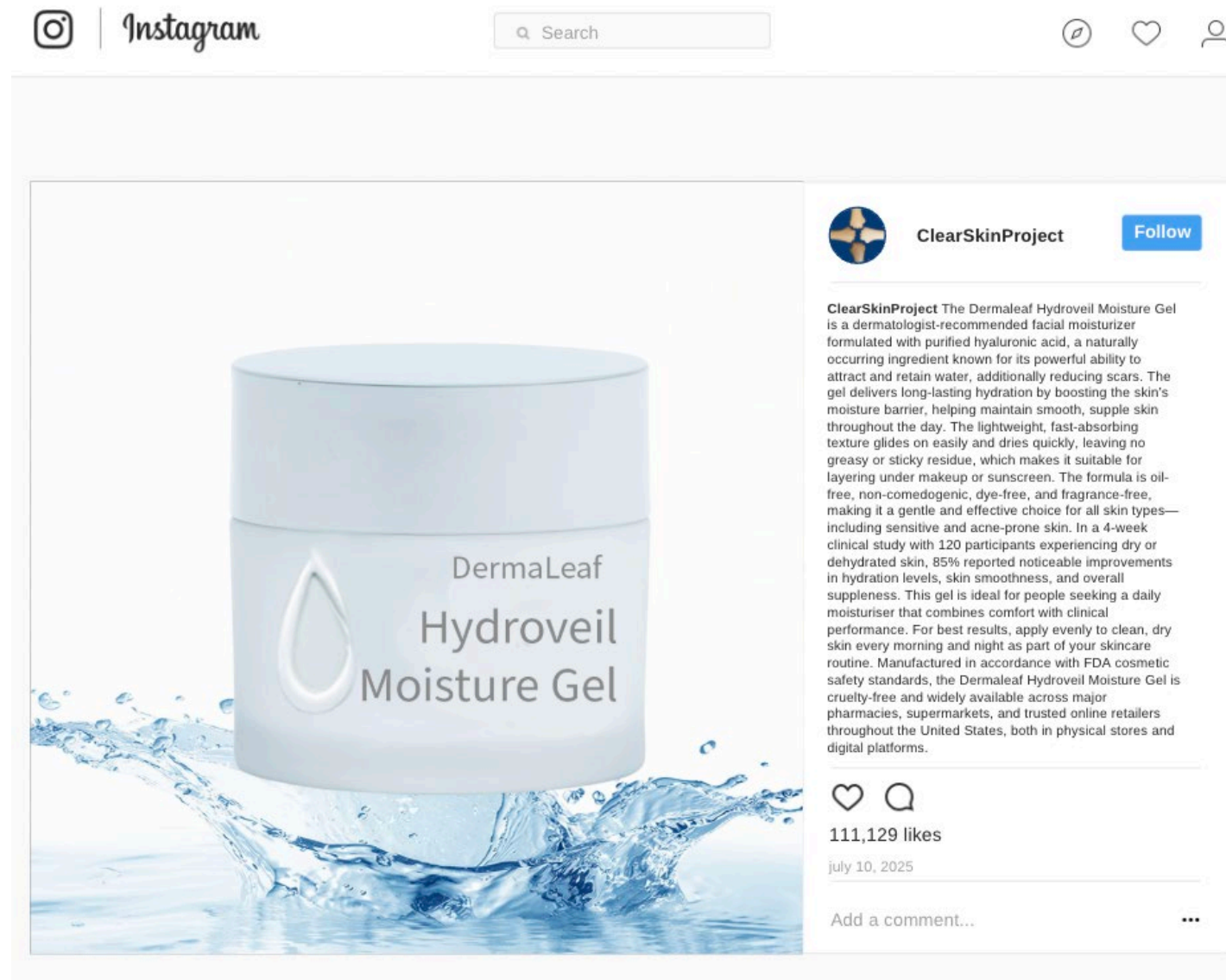
Extremely (7)

APPENDIX 2 – Survey Product Advertisement for Studies 1 and 2

Study 1 Condition A – Emotional Message Framing



Study 1 Condition B – Rational Message Framing



Study 2 Condition A – Emotional Message Framing

 | Instagram

Search





**Anna Hipkins**  [Follow](#)

Anna Hipkins I used to keep blotting papers in every bag I owned. By noon, my skin felt like an oil slick, and by 1PM, I was already retouching my makeup—again. Nothing I tried worked long-term. Everything either dried me out or made my pores even more noticeable. I eventually thought it was a normal thing to happen to some women until my sister recommended me PÜR Balance™, and it's definitely been a game changer...

This is more than a pore-minimizing essence—it gave me my confidence back. Within a week, my T-zone wasn't flooding with shine. My makeup actually stayed on, and for the first time in years, I didn't feel the need to reach for powder in the middle of the day. I even stopped wearing foundation some mornings because... pores? What pores. My skin felt balanced, smooth, and healthy.

It's lightweight, non-sticky, and doesn't have that overpowering scent that "oil control" products typically do. I love how clean it feels—no irritation, no stripping—just calm, clear skin that actually behaves.

I didn't know texture-free skin was even possible, and now I catch myself staring in the mirror. This made me love my skin again.

Thank you, PÜR Balance!



111,129 likes

july 10, 2025

Add a comment... 

Study 2 Condition B – Rational Message Framing

 | Instagram





Smooth Skin starts
with Balance

 ClearSkinProject [Follow](#)

ClearSkinProject PÜR Balance™ was developed in response to one of the most common skincare concerns faced by consumers—enlarged pores and excess oil production. Studies show that up to 90% of women report issues with visible pores and shine, particularly in hot or humid climates or during hormonal fluctuations. These concerns are not only cosmetic but often affect confidence and satisfaction with skincare routines. PÜR Balance™ addresses this demand with a clinically informed, minimalist formulation that targets both immediate and long-term oil regulation.

The product contains 10% niacinamide, a dermatologist-recommended ingredient known to improve skin texture, reduce sebum activity, and visibly refine pores over time. Zinc PCA, a compound combining zinc's anti-inflammatory benefits with moisture-retaining properties, supports barrier function and oil balance. Witch hazel extract offers gentle astringent effects to reduce surface shine without causing any dryness or irritation. By avoiding alcohol, fragrance, and harsh exfoliants, PÜR Balance™ is designed for daily use on combination to oily skin types, even those prone to sensitivity.

This product fits seamlessly into a modern skincare regimen as a lightweight essence—ideal for consumers seeking non-comedogenic, multi-functional solutions that balance efficacy with comfort. Its dermatologist-tested, fragrance-free formula reinforces its credibility and broad user appeal.

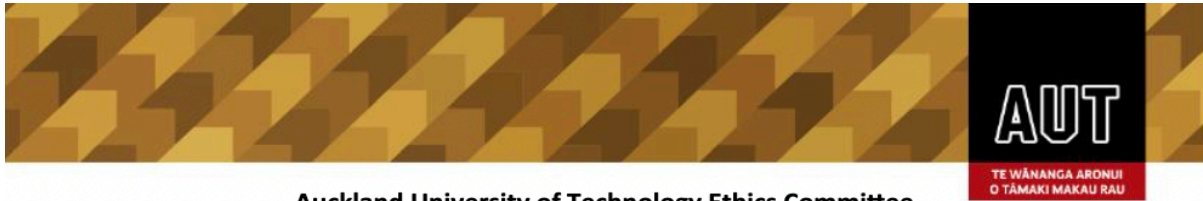


111,129 likes

july 10, 2025



APPENDIX 3 – Ethics Approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

30 September 2025

Ken Hyde
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Ken

Re Ethics Application: **25/313 Building Trust through Social Commerce: The Emotive Power of Social Proof**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 30 September 2028.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please include a mechanism for participants to access a summary of the research finding (D.5.1).

Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC unless requested but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

For any enquiries, please contact the Secretariat at ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: dm.xavier02@yahoo.com;nfr5693@autuni.ac.nz

APPENDIX 4 – Artificial Intelligence Declaration

You may use this free text box to explain the intent for the use of the AI generated content. For example, rather than stating what prompt(s) were used, you may articulate the purpose for which the prompt was used (supported by examples) here:

I acknowledge the utilisation of artificial intelligence, namely ChatGPT, to assist with layout, formatting guidance, proofreading, structural critique, and clarity checks during the preparation of this thesis. These tools were used to support the presentation and refinement of my own work, rather than to generate original research arguments, conduct data analysis, or produce final findings. All AI-generated suggestions were critically reviewed, edited, and selectively incorporated. I take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of this thesis.

STUDENT DECLARATION

By signing you are confirming that the AI use stated in the table(s) above are accurate and follow AUT's recommended guidelines detailed in the AI Hub and Postgraduate Handbook.

Student Name: Darline Xavier

Signature:



Date: 27/05/2026