

Shades of Success: The Impact of Marketing Strategies on Brand Perception for Minority-Owned Cosmetics Startups in the U.S.

Ajoooni Kaur

1 River Hill High School, 12101 Clarksville Pike, Clarksville, MD 2109, United States

ABSTRACT

Marketing plays a massive role in shaping consumer behavior and brand loyalty, especially in image-driven industries like cosmetics. However, the unique marketing challenges faced by minority-owned cosmetics startups are still largely understudied. Regardless of a growing public interest in diversity and inclusion, many businesses struggle to translate social support into consumer engagement. This paper addresses the underexplored relationship between marketing strategy and brand perception as it applies to minority-owned beauty brands in the United States. It helps to understand how marketing choices such as influencer collaborations, platform selection, visual messaging, and brand storytelling influence the way consumers perceive, trust, and support these brands. It argues that thoughtful marketing strategies can bridge the gap between consumer values and actual purchasing behavior, especially when authenticity is communicated. This study used a mixed-methods approach including a literature review, qualitative interviews with beauty consumers, and a survey of 97 respondents. Interviews captured in-depth opinions on branding and trust, while the survey measured how demographic variables like race, age, and gender relate to perceptions of minority-owned brands. The findings showed that while consumers support diversity, purchasing decisions were still heavily influenced by familiarity, presentation, and marketing reach. The study offers practical implications for minority-owned startups and marketing professionals seeking to build stronger, values-based connections with their audiences in an increasingly competitive industry.

Keywords: Inclusive Marketing; Brand Perception; Consumer loyalty; Marketing Strategies; and Consumer Values

INTRODUCTION

The beauty and cosmetics industry has changed in the past decade. Consumers are no longer focused only on product performance. Many also want brands that share their values, especially when it comes to inclusivity, representation, and authenticity (1, 2). Social

media movements such as #BlackOwnedBusiness and #BuyPOC have increased awareness of minority owned companies and created a stronger demand for diversity in the market (3). Even with this interest, many minority owned cosmetic startups still struggle to gain recognition and compete with larger brands (4, 5).

A major challenge is that large companies often use diverse images in their marketing without being minority led. This gives them the appearance of being inclusive while minority owned brands remain overlooked (1, 2). This creates a tension between consumer beliefs and actual consumer behavior. Many people say they value diversity, yet they continue to buy exclusively from

Corresponding author: Ajoooni Kaur, E-mail: kaurajoooni20@gmail.com.

Copyright: © 2026 Ajoooni Kaur. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Accepted January 2, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.70251/HYJR2348.41184198>

mainstream brands. This raises an important question about how much marketing shapes these choices.

The cosmetics industry feels this tension more than other fields because it is closely tied to identity and beauty standards (5, 6). For minority owned startups, marketing is especially important. It helps them build trust, create visibility, and connect with communities that are often underrepresented (7). At the same time, these smaller brands usually do not have the same resources or reach as major corporations, which makes it harder for them to communicate their message and stand out in a crowded market (4, 8). This study focuses on how consumers interpret and respond to the marketing used by minority owned cosmetic brands.

The purpose of this research is to understand how marketing strategies influence brand perception for minority owned cosmetics startups in the United States. The study looks at strategies such as influencer partnerships, inclusive campaigns, storytelling, and community-based branding. It also explores how identity factors like race, age, gender, and personal values shape consumer reactions. The study asks three main questions. How do consumers interpret marketing from minority owned brands? Are certain platforms or strategies more effective at building trust? How do identity factors influence perception and loyalty?

This research uses three methods. Semi structured interviews capture personal reactions and opinions about minority owned beauty brands. A survey provides a wider view of how people of different ages, genders, and backgrounds respond to marketing. A literature review provides context by summarizing previous work on marketing, consumer psychology, entrepreneurship, and inclusive branding (4, 7, 8).

This study fills a gap in past research. Most previous studies focus on how large companies use diversity in their advertising. Very few focus on how marketing affects the perception and success of brands that are actually minority owned (1, 4). Many studies treat diversity as a trend instead of looking at how authenticity, ownership, and cultural storytelling influence trust and consumer behavior (2, 3). This study shifts the discussion to the experiences of minority founders and how their marketing choices shape public perception.

Another goal of this research is to understand how different consumer groups, especially Gen Z and millennials, respond to marketing on platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, and You Tube (1, 7). These groups say they value social causes, yet their actual buying choices do not always match these beliefs. Some

respondents, for example, support minority owned brands in theory but continue buying from larger companies (3, 6). Learning why this gap exists can help minority owned brands build stronger marketing strategies. The target population for this study includes two groups. The first is cosmetic consumers in the United States who are aware of or have purchased from minority owned brands. The second is founders or marketing leads of minority owned cosmetic startups who design and guide their branding strategies. Together, these perspectives help show how marketing shapes trust, visibility, and connection within the beauty industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review looks at what previous research provides on how marketing affects the way people view minority-owned beauty brands in the United States. The goal is to understand better how things like ads, product design, and messaging can shape how these brands are viewed by consumers (1, 2). It also helps show how past beauty standards and social movements have influenced how minority-owned brands grow and connect with their customers (5, 6) This background is essential for understanding why some brands succeed quicker and easier while others struggle to get noticed or taken seriously in the beauty industry (4, 8).

This literature review covers studies that explore how beauty brands used to advertise, what kinds of products were promoted, and how Black-owned companies worked to overcome challenges in the industry (4, 6). It also looks at how beauty standards have changed and how those changes affected the products made and sold (3, 5). The topics include advertising images, store access, and how race and gender have shaped the industry (1, 6). By comparing the different studies, this review highlights where more research is needed, especially regarding how newer brands use social media and online marketing to build trust and grow their audience today (2, 7) (Table 1).

Research indicates that following the Civil Rights era, beauty standards broadened to include Black women of various skin tones and natural hairstyles like the afro (5, 6). However, white normativity continues to dominate the industry, limiting genuine diversity and representation (2). Colorism remains a significant issue, as many cosmetic brands favor lighter skin tones even within product lines targeting minority consumers like in (1).

Studies by Smith et al. and Johnson focus on historical shifts driven by social movements (5, 6), whereas Lee highlights ongoing issues of colorism in marketing and

Table 1. Overview of Literature: key studies on marketing and consumer perceptions in the cosmetics and beauty industry.

Study Reference	Methods	Setting	Factors	Findings
Baird (5)	Historical analysis using archived texts and marketing imagery to examine beauty standards after the Civil Rights era.	United States (Post Civil Rights Era)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitudes toward beauty standards - Beauty Standards Generated - Marketing Strategies - Language and Imagery - Gendered Expectations - Heightening Tensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The complicated relationship symbolized equality and increased representation - Caused a redefinition of beauty ideals, which included black women of all skin tones - The changes in the relationship between black women and the cosmetics industry in the post-Civil Rights era reflected the success of movements in the 1960s to expose and eradicate inequality
Ramli (8)	Qualitative case study comparing the development of diaspora and non-diaspora cosmetic brands using historical and industry sources.	United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History and Marketing Perspective - Diaspora Entrepreneurship - Unique Historical Context - Brand Creation - Periods of Interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demand for some products like skincare, powder, lipstick and perfumes were created - During World War II, the US cosmetic industry had a lot more growth, and it gained a competitive advantage over what it did during the Great Depression - The reasons for diversity are due to mass migration between 1880 and 1920
Collins (6)	Content analysis of cosmetic advertisements and Black-owned publications focusing on race and gender and beauty messaging.	United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Straightening and Bleaching Advertisements - Black Owned Periodicals - Messages Maintained and Destabilized - Racial and Social Hierarchies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s changed the beauty standards and opened the range of acceptable hairstyles for black women - After 1960, there was a big shift as natural and afro hairstyles were promoted as the ideal over straight hair - Before 1960, the afro hairstyle did not have the same political meaning - There is an unwillingness from a lot of the white-owned cosmetic companies to include black women. Instead of popular companies exploring the shade range of cosmetic lines to serve a broader customer base.
Silverman (4)	Historical case study using archival business records to examine the experiences of Black cosmetic manufacturers in Chicago.	United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perspective of black manufacturers - Experiences of black manufacturers - Historical Development - Overcoming racial barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black manufacturers found it challenging to gain access to white owned stores - In the 1990's that was a period when the competition had increased and expanded - In 1990, black manufacturers started losing ground in corporate America - Chicago's beauty industries have been shaped by discrimination

Continued Table 1. Overview of Literature: key studies on marketing and consumer perceptions in the cosmetics and beauty industry.

Study Reference	Methods	Setting	Factors	Findings
Alli (2)	Thematic review of existing literature on diversity and representation and reputation in global beauty advertising.	World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges involving diversity and representation - Attention to brand reputation - Rise of digital advertising - Beauty industry continues to face challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cosmetics industry faces the challenges of diversity and representation - Despite all of the efforts to diversify beauty standards, white normativity continues to be the biggest issue - Large corporations should be using their platforms to promote healthy standards of beauty - Representation in the beauty industry plays a significant role in how people perceive beauty
Zajek (7)	Quantitative study using survey data and market analysis to examine marketing strategies and international market entry.	United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internationalization of small companies - Most appropriate market entry mode - Theoretical and practical aspects of the internationalization - Communication activities that accompany the entry mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The most appropriate market entry mode would be direct export through distributors. - Marketing can look very different in different areas depending on the consumer behavior - Many companies use an integrated marketing approach, which helps them have a cost advantage - Marketing control is defined by “measuring and evaluating the results of marketing strategies and plans, and taking corrective action to ensure that objectives are achieved”
Nalini (3)	Qualitative analysis of media and industry standards addressing racism and beauty norms in Europe.	Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyze the constant racism present in the cosmetics industry - Standard of what makeup brands should follow - Current flaws in the beauty Industry - Still lacking in diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cosmetics industry is influenced and affected by racism in many ways. - The European beauty ideals were so racially biased that if you did not hold yourself to these standards, you were considered an outcast - A good part about the black beauty industry being left is that it gives a chance for black entrepreneurs to run it, and they can understand what their consumers need - People believe everything they see, so a lack of diversity within a popular brand like Vogue can put potential racial strain on people.

Continued Table 1. Overview of Literature: key studies on marketing and consumer perceptions in the cosmetics and beauty industry.

Study Reference	Methods	Setting	Factors	Findings
Frisby (1)	Content analysis of cosmetic advertising examining colorism and shade ranges and representation.	World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore colorism in the cosmetic industry - Provide an overview of the improvement - The need for darker shades - Suggestions for future research on colorism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in the consistency of depictions of models and women with darker complexions might motivate the idea and change the portrayal of what is beautiful - Tests conducted show that the variety of foundation is not equally distributed, which suggests that significant differences still exist between foundation shades - Colorism is and continues to be a stumbling block for blacks living in America. - Although makeup lines for black women were prevalent, companies focused their advertising on appealing to black women by using skin-lightening products. - Products and merchandise aimed at African-Americans also perpetuated skin color biases by frequently utilizing actors and models with light skin tones

product design (1). This work broadens the perspective to the global beauty industry, underscoring persistent diversity challenges despite increased efforts (2). Studies reveal that minority manufacturers faced challenges accessing mainstream retail channels and encountered competition by the 1990s (4). The cosmetics industry experienced significant growth during World War II, influenced by increased demand and migration patterns (8). Moreover, marketing strategies vary by region, with integrated marketing approaches offering cost benefits and strategic advantages in market entry (7). Structural and historical barriers characterize industry, while international business strategy emphasizes the international level and presents a broader perspective (4, 7, 8).

This study builds upon prior research by focusing on the crossover of representation and market challenges in the cosmetics industry. It provides updated insights relevant to academic scholarships and industry practices aimed at fostering diversity and supporting minority-owned businesses. Although existing literature covers historical changes and structural challenges, limited

research exists on the impact of digital marketing, the long-term effects of colorism on consumer loyalty, and the global expansion of minority-owned brands. Future research should address these gaps to understand how evolving beauty standards and marketing strategies affect diverse consumer groups.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Interviews

A total of seven participants were interviewed for this study. All participants were beauty consumers. These individuals were selected because they directly engage with cosmetic brands and are likely to be influenced by marketing strategies, making their insights relevant to understanding brand perception. The stakeholders interviewed were everyday cosmetics consumers with formal ties to the beauty industry. While they are not business owners or marketers, they are essential stakeholders because their preferences, trust, and purchasing behavior directly impact the success or failure of minority-owned cosmetic startups. Their feedback

reflects how marketing is received and interpreted by the target audience.

The primary focus was to explore consumer perceptions of minority-owned beauty brands and how marketing strategies can shape those perceptions. The goal was to understand how marketing either builds or breaks consumer trust, especially from brands led by underrepresented communities (Table 2).

The interview questions were semi-structured and primarily open-ended. They invited participants to share personal thoughts, reactions, and interpretations. The questions focused on associations with minority-owned beauty brands, the perceived challenges for such brands, responses to advertising and promotions, influences on product discovery and decision-making, the role of digital platforms and influencer marketing, and suggestions for

how minority-owned brands could stand out more. These questions allowed for in-depth, qualitative responses that revealed attitudes, biases, and insights not easily captured in a survey.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations taken into account were informed consent, each participant was informed about the purpose of the interview, how their responses would be used, and that participation was voluntary. Confidentiality: No identifying information was recorded or reported. Responses were anonymized to protect privacy and ensure participants could speak freely. In voluntary involvement and withdrawal, participants were reminded to skip any question they did not feel comfortable answering or to stop the interview at any time, meaning each participant answered these questions willingly. These steps ensured the interview process was ethical, respectful, and conducive to honest, open feedback (Table 3).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of interview participants (n = 7).

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
P1	34	Female	Asian
P2	45	Female	Asian
P3	48	Female	Asian
P4	49	Female	Asian
P5	30	Female	Black or African American
P6	41	Female	Asian
P7	43	Female	Asian

Survey Questionnaire

This survey was conducted through a Google form, asking about different cosmetics industry factors. It was sent out in July 2025, and 97 people of all types were able to respond to the form. These responses included consumers, business owners, and people who have previously worked with cosmetics. The types of questions being asked target a particular topic, being factors that influence customers’ buying decisions in the market, either currently or in the past. These

Table 3. Summary of major themes identified from semi-structured interviews with beauty consumers.

Theme	Emerging Participant Themes	Interview Insights
Trust & Authenticity	Consumers expressed hesitation to trust minority-owned brands compared to established companies, but valued honesty and relatable marketing.	Trust is a recurring barrier and authenticity in messaging can change customer reviews and increase credibility.
Representation & Inclusivity	Participants appreciated seeing people who look like them in ads and valued inclusive shade ranges.	Representation fosters connection and reinforces belonging.
Marketing & Visibility	Respondents noted limited visibility and smaller marketing budgets for minority-owned brands.	Visibility is crucial, smaller brands rely on creativity and social media to stand out.
Influencer Effectiveness	Participants were skeptical of paid influencers but trusted genuine customer reviews.	Peer and micro-influencers can build stronger credibility than celebrity endorsements.
Packaging & Presentation	Eye-catching, creative packaging was repeatedly cited as a reason to try new products.	Visual presentation directly affects consumer perception and brand appeal.
Cultural Messaging	Some participants cautioned against overly narrow cultural focus that might limit wider appeal.	Successful branding balances authenticity with broad inclusivity.

questions aim to uncover the thoughts and perceptions that configure their decision-making. When creating the survey questionnaire, ethical concerns were taken into account. The questions were designed to be respectful and unbiased. Participants' privacy was safeguarded by ensuring all participants were anonymous, and participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary. The primary purpose of the questions was to explore how certain factors, specifically marketing, influence customers' purchase decisions. It was ensured that the questions were clear, specific, and aligned with the study's objectives (Table 4).

The survey conducted as part of this research aims to help understand how marketing strategies can influence consumer perceptions of minority-owned cosmetic startups in the United States. The collected data helps evaluate the gap between consumer values and behaviors and explores how visibility, ownership, and identity factors into a brand's public image. A total of 97 individuals participated in this survey. Most respondents were female and identified as Asian or Asian American. Most respondents were also between the ages of 25 to 44, which reflects a digitally engaged and consumer-savvy demographic.

Table 4. Survey questions and response distribution (percent of respondents) from a cross-sectional online survey conducted in July 2025 (N=97), covering awareness of minority-owned cosmetics brands, discovery channels, attitudes to marketing and diversity, and demographic characteristics.

Hi, my name is Ajooni Kaur, an 11th-grade student researching the impact of marketing strategies in the cosmetics industry on brand perception for minority owned startups in the United States. Through this research, I want to determine the impact and effectiveness of marketing strategies of the cosmetics industry to understand the consumer perception towards marketing strategies concerning the cosmetics industry, along with their effectiveness. I intend to explore the challenges faced and the factors that impact the success of minority owned businesses.
Please complete the survey form for academic purposes. Your data will be kept confidential and secure. Thank you!

Survey Questions	Options	Frequency (in %) N = 97
<p>“Minority” in this research refers to individuals or groups from underrepresented racial or ethnic backgrounds, including but not limited to Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous, Mixed-race, Latinx, and other People of Colour. In this study, “minority-owned brands” are those owned or led by individuals from these racial or ethnic groups.</p>		
1. Have you heard of any minority-owned cosmetics brands before?	1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree	1. 5.2% 2. 8.2% 3. 14.4% 4. 43.3% 5. 28.9%
2. Where do you usually learn about new or small cosmetics brands?	1. Instagram 2. Tik Tok 3. You Tube 4. Ads 5. Influencers 6. Other	1. 46.9% 2. 14.6% 3. 2% 4. 12.5% 5. 12.5% 6. 11.5%
3. Minority-owned brands have to market themselves differently from larger brands (Differentiated Marketing)	1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree	1. 3.1% 2. 7.2% 3. 14.4% 4. 47.4% 5. 27.8%
4. If a brand mentions it is minority owned does it change your perception of it? (Transparency of Minority Ownership)	1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree	1. 5.2% 2. 20.6% 3. 28.9% 4. 32% 5. 13.4%

Continued Table 4. Survey questions and response distribution (percent of respondents) from a cross-sectional online survey conducted in July 2025 (N=97), covering awareness of minority-owned cosmetics brands, discovery channels, attitudes to marketing and diversity, and demographic characteristics.

Survey Questions	Options	Frequency (in %) N = 97
5. Marketing influences whether or not you try a new cosmetics brand.	1. Strongly Disagree	1. 2.1%
	2. Disagree	2. 2.1%
	3. Neutral	3. 17.7
	4. Agree	4. 56.3
	5. Strongly Agree	5. 21.9
6. Does marketing affect how you see minority-owned cosmetics brands?	1. Strongly Disagree	1. 1%
	2. Disagree	2. 8.3%
	3. Neutral	3. 19.8%
	4. Agree	4. 52.2%
	5. Strongly Agree	5. 15.6%
7. Is it essential for you that brands show diversity in their advertising?	1. Strongly Disagree	1. 2.1%
	2. Disagree	2. 4.2%
	3. Neutral	3. 10.4%
	4. Agree	4. 37.5%
	5. Strongly Agree	5. 45.8%
8. Has marketing influenced whether or not you have bought something from a minority-owned brand?	1. Strongly Disagree	1. 3.1%
	2. Disagree	2. 13.4%
	3. Neutral	3. 17.5%
	4. Agree	4. 49.5%
	5. Strongly Agree	5. 16.5%
9. If a mainstream brand and a minority-owned brand both sell similar products, how likely are you to buy from the minority-owned brand?	1. Not at all	1. 1%
	2. Not Likely	2. 7.3 %
	3. Neutral	3. 36.5%
	4. Likely	4. 39.6%
	5. Very Likely	5. 15.6%
10. How often do you consider who owns a brand before buying from it?	1. Always	1. 5.2%
	2. Often	2. 24%
	3. Sometimes	3. 32.3%
	4. Rarely	4. 29.2%
	5. Never	5. 9.4%
Age (Choose One)	1. Under 18	1. 10.3%
	2. 18–24	2. 3.1%
	3. 25–34	3. 19.6%
	4. 35–44	4. 36.1%
	5. 45–54	5. 22.7%
	6. 55–64	6. 7.2%
	7. 65 and above	7. 1%
	8. Prefer not to say	8. 0%
Gender	1. Female	1. 94.8%
	2. Male	2. 5.2%
	3. Prefer not to say	3. 0.0%

Continued Table 4. Survey questions and response distribution (percent of respondents) from a cross-sectional online survey conducted in July 2025 (N=97), covering awareness of minority-owned cosmetics brands, discovery channels, attitudes to marketing and diversity, and demographic characteristics.

Survey Questions	Options	Frequency (in %) N = 97
Ethnicity	1. Black or African American	1. 1%
	2. Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x	2. 3.1%
	3. Asian or Asian American	3. 82.5%
	4. Native American or Alaska Native	4. 0%
	5. Middle Eastern or North African	5. 0%
	6. Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	6. 0%
	7. White	7. 11.3%
	8. Multiracial	8. 0%
	9. Prefer not to say	9. 1%
	10. Other	10. 1%
To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging or shared identity with the ‘People of Colour’ community?	1. Not at all	1. 7.2%
	2. Slightly	2. 14.4%
	3. Moderately	3. 32%
	4. Very	4. 28.9%
	5. Extremely	5. 17.5%

The questionnaire used multiple-choice and Likert scale questions to measure awareness, attitudes, and behaviors regarding minority-owned cosmetic brands. It also asked about marketing exposure, preferred platforms, and the importance of diversity in advertising. Below are the key findings that are organized by core themes and charts that visually represent the most significant insights.

Figure 1 shows how familiar participants are with cosmetic brands owned by minorities. The largest group of respondents, 43.3%, selected “Agree,” followed by 28.9% who chose “Strongly Agree.” This indicates that a substantial majority of participants have heard of such brands. Smaller percentages of participants expressed disagreement or neutrality, suggesting that a lack of awareness is less common.

This chart plays a vital role in the research by establishing a baseline of awareness. Understanding how familiar consumers are with these brands helps frame the broader study on representation and inclusivity in the cosmetics industry. High levels of awareness open the door to more profound questions about consumer behavior, marketing impact, and brand loyalty within underrepresented business segments.

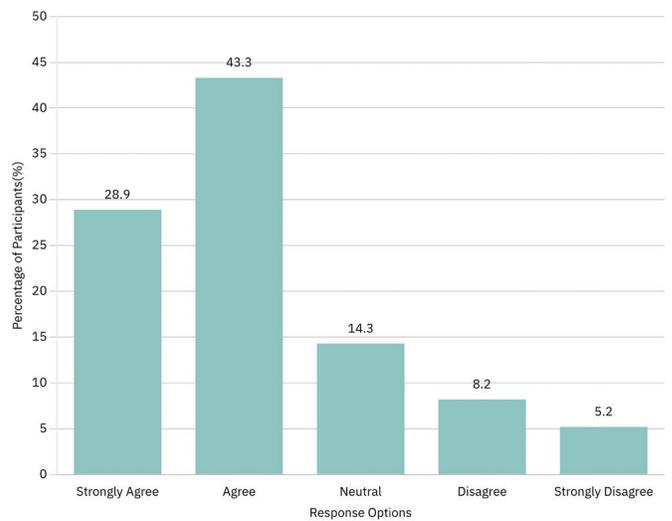


Figure 1. Percentage of participants who have heard of minority owned cosmetic brands.

Figure 2 explores how marketing affects consumer behavior. Nearly half of the participants, 49.5%, selected “Agree,” while 16.5% chose “Strongly Agree,” indicating that marketing plays a key role in shaping purchase decisions. Fewer respondents disagreed or remained neutral, suggesting that while some individuals are unaffected, the majority are influenced by how these brands are promoted.

This finding is central to the research, highlighting the power of visibility and messaging in consumer choices. Effective marketing raises awareness and can actively provide support for minority-owned businesses. This insight helps build the case for equitable representation in media and branding strategies, especially in industries where identity and visibility matter.

Figure 3 illustrates how much participants value the representation of diversity in marketing. A combined 83.3% of respondents selected either “Strongly Agree” (45.8%) or “Agree” (37.5%), showing overwhelming support for inclusive advertising. Only a small fraction expressed disagreement, and just over 10% remained neutral.

This finding is vital to the research, as it underscores the expectation that brands reflect the diverse world consumers live in. The data suggests that representation is not just appreciated; it is a priority. For businesses, this reinforces the need to thoughtfully include diverse identities in their advertising, not as a trend but as a standard that aligns with consumer values and builds

lasting trust.

Figure 4 shows whether marketing alone can shift someone’s perception of a brand. Nearly half of the participants (49.5%) agreed that marketing does influence how they perceive a brand, while 16.5% strongly agreed. A smaller segment disagreed or remained neutral, suggesting most participants acknowledge marketing’s power to shape brand image.

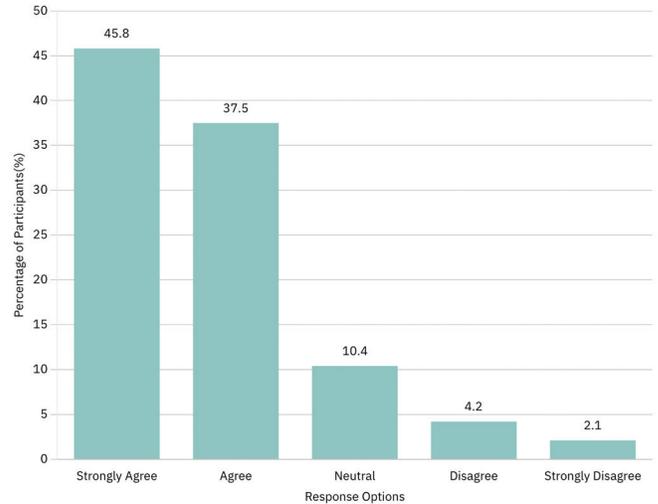


Figure 3. Perceived importance of diversity representation in cosmetic brand advertising.

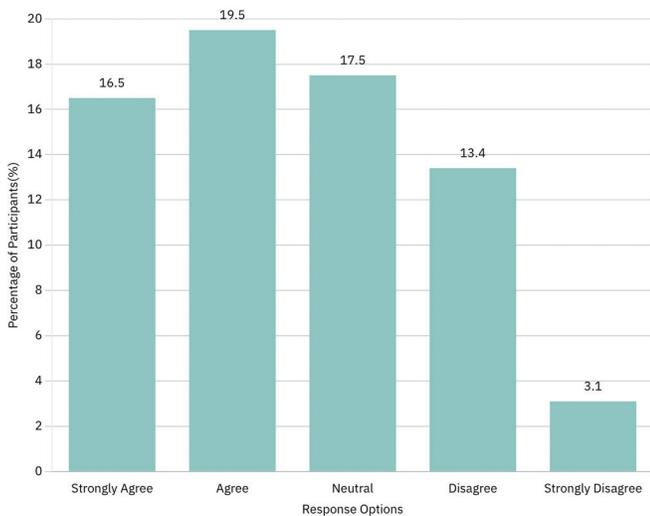


Figure 2. Influence of marketing on consumer purchasing decisions.

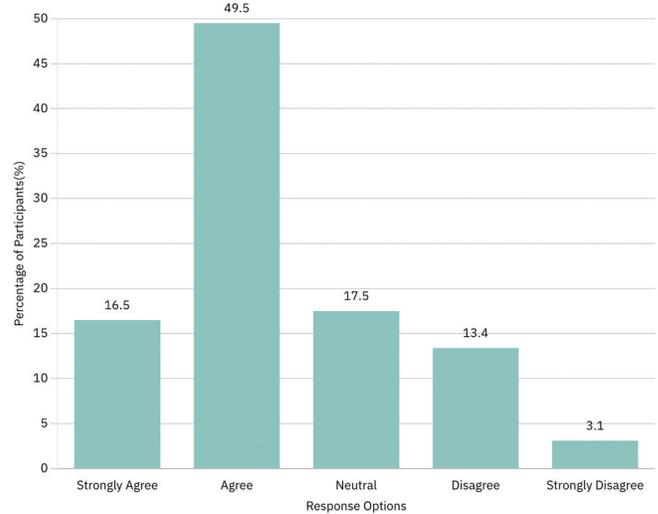


Figure 4. Percentage of people who change their perception of a brand simply because of marketing.

This data reinforces the research’s key point that perception is not static. It can be guided or altered based on messaging, visuals, and representation. When a brand invests in marketing that highlights values such as inclusivity, authenticity, or cultural relevance, it can meaningfully impact how it is viewed, especially in competitive markets.

Figure 5 shows how consumers respond when given the option between similar products from different brands. 55.2% of participants said they are either “Likely” or “Very Likely” to choose the minority-owned brand, while only 8.3% leaned against doing so. A sizable 36.5% remained neutral.

This chart strongly indicates consumer openness to supporting minority-owned businesses when product quality or price is constant. It supports the idea that brand identity and values can meaningfully influence purchasing behavior, particularly when buyers know ownership and feel it aligns with their principles. These insights are key to understanding how social values and representation intersect with market choices.

Figure 6 presents insight into the frequency consumers consider brand ownership during their purchasing decisions. The largest group, 32.3%, said they “Sometimes” think about it, while 24% answered “Often.” A smaller portion, 5.2%, indicated they “Always” do, and about 38.6% said “Rarely” or “Never.”

This distribution reveals a thoughtful shift in consumer awareness. This adds important nuance to the

research, showing that while not everyone prioritizes ownership, it remains a relevant factor that brands can strategically highlight to align with the values of a growing group of socially conscious consumers.

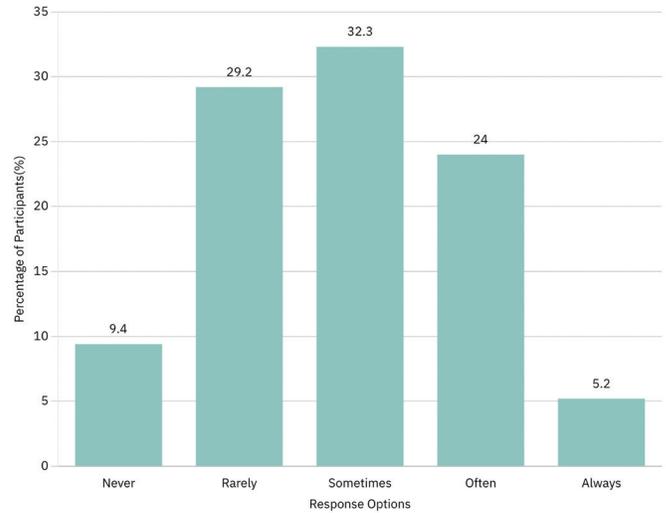


Figure 6. Likelihood of choosing a minority-owned brand when equivalent products are available.

RESULTS

Overall, the interviews and survey showed that people say they care about diversity and inclusivity, but they still often buy what feels familiar. Minority-owned brands stood out for better shade ranges and more real, relatable messaging, but they struggled with trust and visibility. Instagram and Tik Tok helped people discover brands, yet what actually pushed someone to buy was authentic reviews, strong packaging/presentation, and marketing that felt genuine, not forced.

Interview Findings

The interviews revealed several recurring themes about how consumers perceive minority-owned cosmetic startups and their marketing strategies. One of the most consistent takeaways was the importance of inclusive shade ranges, which participants viewed as a key strength of minority-owned brands. For example, one participant shared, “When I think of minority-owned brands, I think of a more inclusive shade range” (P3). Others mentioned positive product experiences, such as, *There is no strange overcast and does not make me look gray when I put*

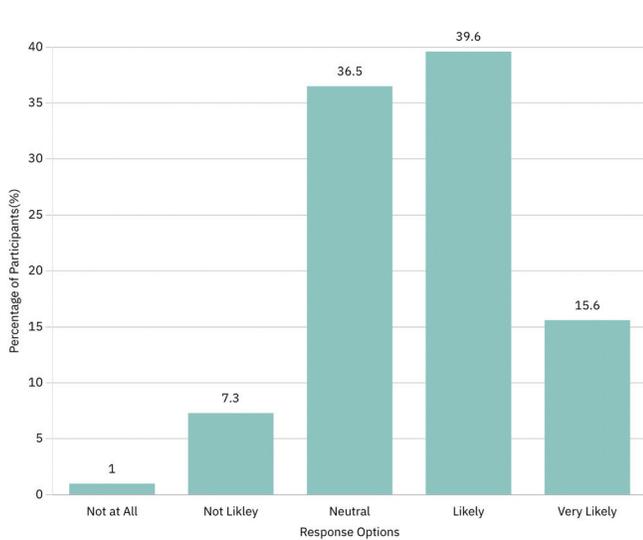


Figure 5. Likelihood of choosing a minority-owned brand when equivalent products are available.

it on” (P5), highlighting how these brands often better serve diverse skin tones.

Despite this strength, brand awareness and trust emerged as significant challenges. Participants noted that these startups often lack national visibility, making it harder for consumers to trust them than more established mainstream brands. One participant said, *“Their biggest challenge is marketing... being able to be well known and nationally recognized”* (P5), while another added, *“Can I trust them? Are the products going to be good?”* (P4).

Influencer marketing received mixed feedback. While some respondents acknowledged the creativity of small-brand campaigns, *“I always think the ads are so creative and unique compared to other ones I have seen”* (P3), others were skeptical. *“It feels less effective because I know they do not use the product... when I see a customer review the product, it is much more effective”* (P2). This skepticism reflects a desire for more authentic and relatable content.

Packaging and visual presentation were also seen as necessary. Several participants mentioned that packaging was a deciding factor in purchasing. *“The packaging always matters... the catchy packaging is what gets me to buy it”* (P6), said one respondent, and another noted, *“I do not like when the packaging is boring”* (P3). Price was also a factor, but visual appeal was a key driver of attention.

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and Tik Tok, were identified as the most common ways people discover new beauty brands. *“Definitely through Instagram or Tik Tok”* (P1), one respondent stated, while another added, *“My daughter... she is always on Instagram and Tik Tok and she sends me stuff and that is how I find out about new brands”* (P2). Word of mouth, especially among younger generations, also played a role.

Lastly, representation and relatability in advertising were noted as essential. Participants expressed appreciation when they saw models who looked like them. *“If I see a person who looks like me using the product... I can see how it looks on someone like me”* (P5). However, some cautioned that focusing too narrowly on cultural identity might limit reach. *“Some of them go too far in on the cultural aspect... they forget they have to attract a larger audience”* (P1).

While minority-owned cosmetic brands are recognized for inclusivity and innovation, they face notable challenges in visibility, trust-building, and striking the right balance between cultural authenticity and a broader appeal.

Survey Findings

The survey results reveal a complex relationship between consumer values, awareness, and action. While there is a strong overall support for inclusive branding and high recognition of the importance of diversity in advertising, these ideals do not always translate to support for minority-owned brands. Marketing plays a significant role in influencing perception, but it must be paired with authenticity, familiarity, and consistent visibility to turn consumer interest into loyalty.

Platforms like Instagram and influencer-driven content influence brand discovery. However, consumers still prioritize factors like packaging, pricing, and brand trust, which often disadvantage minority-owned startups compared to larger, more established companies.

The charts demonstrate that consumers are open to supporting minority-owned brands, but the decision often hinges on how effectively these brands present themselves to consumers. Strong marketing alone is insufficient; the brand must communicate trust, quality, and identity. These insights emphasize the importance of targeted, values-driven strategies highlighting authenticity, not just diversity as a visual checkbox.

Ultimately, this analysis reinforces the need for deeper education and more awareness campaigns to ensure that consumer support aligns more consistently with the values people claim to hold. Minority-owned cosmetic startups can benefit from this information by prioritizing marketing strategies that resonate with identity-conscious buyers while appearing more appealing to mainstream expectations of professionalism and product performance.

DISCUSSION

This study identifies four main themes that shape how marketing strategies affect the perception of minority owned cosmetics startups in the United States. These themes are consumer perception, accessibility and visibility, cultural and economic barriers, and outcomes. Consumer perception is influenced by authenticity, relatability, inclusive messaging, representation, and perceived quality. Accessibility and visibility focus on how easily a brand can be discovered, including factors like store placement, influencer exposure, and online presence. Cultural and economic barriers include product stigmatization, social attitudes, regulations, and affordability. In response, brands rely on inclusive shade ranges, creative packaging, customer reviews, and balanced cultural messaging to build connection

and trust. When these strategies succeed, they lead to stronger outcomes, including consumer trust, loyalty, engagement, community support, and brand recognition.

Figure 7 illustrates how marketing strategies are the central mechanism through which consumer perception, accessibility, visibility, and cultural/economic barriers shape brand outcomes. At the core, marketing practices such as inclusive shade ranges, eye-catching packaging, honest customer reviews, and balanced cultural messaging influence both upstream perceptions and downstream behaviours.

On the consumer perception side, strategies that emphasize authenticity, inclusivity, representation, and quality foster positive associations and relatability. This enhances perceived brand credibility and positions the firm as socially aware, particularly when diversity and cultural celebration are foregrounded.

Similarly, effective strategies improve accessibility and visibility by increasing discoverability through store placement, digital presence, influencer visibility, and efficient ad targeting. These factors ensure that marketing messages reach intended audiences and that products remain salient in highly competitive environments.

At the same time, strategies must account for cultural and economic barriers, such as affordability, stigma, and regulatory constraints. Addressing these barriers through thoughtful design and messaging helps reduce resistance and promotes broader product acceptance.

Ultimately, the combined effect of these three domains flows into outcomes: trust in the brand, loyalty, consumer engagement, community support, and representation. These outcomes represent transactional benefits and long-term relational and symbolic value that strengthen a brand’s market position.

The diagram underscores that outcomes like loyalty and trust are not direct products of strategy alone but are mediated by consumer perceptions, moderated by cultural and economic realities, and amplified through accessibility and visibility. This holistic view highlights the need for marketers to design interventions that simultaneously address structural barriers, cultural narratives, and communication channels to sustain brand equity and foster enduring consumer relationships.

Implications

This study adds new insight to current knowledge about marketing and brand perception in the beauty industry. It focuses on how marketing impacts how consumers view minority-owned cosmetic startups in the United States. The findings show that strong, clear marketing strategies help build trust and support for these brands. The study offers an empirical contribution by using honest feedback from interviews and surveys to show how marketing decisions affect brand image and consumer connection. It also adds to existing knowledge by showing how marketing can be a visibility and brand

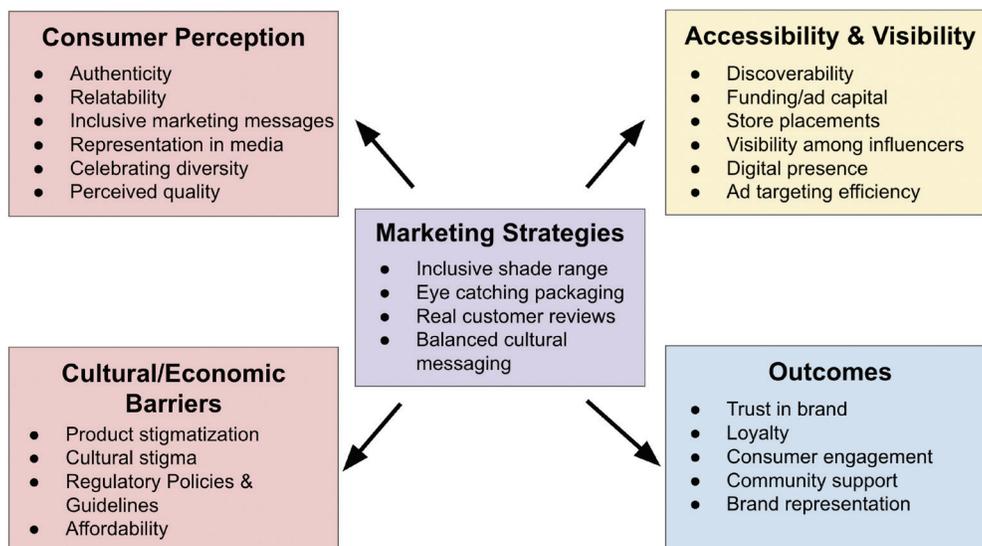


Figure 7. Key factors shaping marketing strategies and their impact on consumer perception and outcomes.

expansion tool.

This research fills a gap in earlier studies that primarily focused on how large beauty companies use diversity to attract customers. Past research has ignored the experiences and strategies of smaller, minority-owned brands. There has been little focus on how ownership, cultural background, and storytelling shape how consumers perceive a brand. This study provides new evidence by focusing directly on these underrepresented businesses and showing how marketing affects their success in the beauty market.

The results hold value for brand owners, marketing teams, and business advisors. The findings highlight how choices in packaging, influencer partnerships, and advertising platforms shape how trustworthy and relatable a brand appears. Companies supporting minority-owned businesses can use these insights to improve their marketing plans. This information may also help design more effective training or resources for startup founders in cosmetics.

Beyond business, this research connects to equality, cultural inclusion, and equal representation in the beauty industry. It shows how meaningful marketing can highlight voices and communities that bigger companies often ignore. The study supports efforts to shift beauty standards and encourage more diversity in what is valued in advertising and brand messaging.

Limitations and Future Directions

Acknowledging this study's limitations helps us better understand the results and explain why some things turned out the way they did. It also helps guide future research by showing what could be improved or explored in more detail.

One major limitation of this study is the sample size and makeup. The interviews included only seven participants, and while the survey had more responses, the majority of people were Asian women between the ages of 25 and 44. This means that shared views and experiences may not represent a broader or more diverse group of beauty consumers. People from different backgrounds or age groups may respond differently to marketing strategies or have various levels of awareness and trust toward minority-owned brands.

Future research could include a larger and more balanced group of participants, with more variation in race, gender, age, and region. This would help provide a fuller picture of how different types of consumers view and respond to minority-owned cosmetic brands.

Another limitation is the scope of the study. The

research looked only at cosmetics startups in the United States. While this helped focus the research, the findings may not apply to other parts of the beauty industry, like skincare, haircare, or markets outside the U.S. In other regions, cultural expectations and consumer habits may be very different.

Future studies could expand the scope to include other beauty sectors or explore how these marketing strategies work in other countries. This would allow for comparison across cultures and industries and help researchers see if the same trends apply in different places. There are also some data limitations. The study used self-reported answers from surveys and interviews. While this type of data helps capture opinions and feelings, it can also be affected by social pressure or forgetfulness. For example, someone might say they care about supporting minority-owned brands but still choose a mainstream brand out of habit or convenience.

Future research could use additional methods, such as tracking purchases, analyzing social media trends, or conducting long-term studies to see how opinions and behavior change over time. These data types could give a more accurate and complete understanding of how marketing affects consumer choices.

While this study provides valuable insights into how marketing shapes the perception of minority-owned cosmetic startups, many areas remain left to explore. By building on this work with larger samples, broader scopes, and new data sources, future researchers can continue to uncover what helps these brands succeed and how consumers connect with their stories.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this research was to explore how marketing strategies influence consumer perception of minority-owned cosmetics startups in the United States. At a time when diversity and inclusion have become popular talking points in advertising, this study aimed to go deeper and investigate how authenticity, visibility, and representation shape trust and purchasing behavior, particularly in the cosmetics industry.

The study's findings point to a clear but complex picture. Consumers overwhelmingly say they support diversity in branding, but that support does not always translate into action. Survey responses showed that while marketing strongly influences whether a consumer tries a minority-owned brand, factors like packaging, brand familiarity, and visibility play a significant role in shaping the final decision. Interviews echoed this, highlighting a

desire for authentic messaging, representation, and value-driven storytelling, especially when shared through platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok. Nonetheless, minority-owned startups face challenges in breaking through due to limited access to resources, a lack of national visibility, and biases within the market.

These findings have important implications. They suggest marketing is more than just a promotional tool; it bridges consumer values and brand identity. When done well, marketing can help minority-owned brands overcome structural barriers, create trust, and build loyalty. However, strategies that appear forced, overly narrow, or inauthentic may do the opposite. The role of storytelling, particularly around culture, community, and lived experience, was found to be powerful in shaping consumer attitudes.

Future research could expand the demographic scope and explore how different groups respond to marketing from minority-owned brands. It would also be valuable to examine how long-term brand loyalty develops over time, and what specific strategies lead to repeated engagement. Further studies also explore cross-cultural comparisons, examining how minority-owned brands are perceived in global markets.

The findings from this research can help startup founders, marketers, and consultants working in the beauty industry. Focusing on authentic storytelling, better representation, and genuine messaging can lead to stronger connections with customers and not just more sales. This study also shows that inclusivity should not be used just to check a box but as a real strength when part of a clear, thoughtful marketing plan.

In closing, this study states that when marketing is thoughtful and sincere, it can drive more than awareness. It can change perception, build trust, and empower minority entrepreneurs to thrive in a highly competitive environment.

REFERENCES

1. Frisby CM. Black and beautiful: A content analysis and study of colorism and strides toward inclusivity in the cosmetic industry. *Adv Journal Commun.* 2019; 7 (2): 35–54. doi:10.4236/ajc.2019.72003.
2. Alli LN. Diversity and inclusion in the beauty and cosmetic advertising and its impact on corporate reputation [Master's thesis]. New York (NY): City University of New York, Baruch College; 2022.
3. Rampersaud N. How is the beauty industry affected by racism? [Capstone paper]. New Paltz (NY): State University of New York at New Paltz; 2020.
4. Silverman RM. The effects of racism and racial discrimination on minority business development: The case of Black manufacturers in Chicago's ethnic beauty aids industry. *J Soc Hist.* 1998; 31 (3): 571–597. doi:10.1353/jsh/31.3.571.
5. Baird ML. 'Making Black More Beautiful': Black women and the cosmetics industry in the post-Civil Rights era. *Gender Hist.* 2021; 33 (2): 557–574. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12522>
6. Collins S. "Dark shades don't sell": Race, gender, and cosmetic advertisements in the mid-twentieth century United States [Master's thesis]. Hamilton (ON): McMaster University; 2018. Available from: <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/22870> (accessed on 2025-12-08).
7. Zajec V. Market entry concept for the US beauty & personal care market on the example of Luxury Cosmetics Ltd [Master's thesis]. Graz (Austria): FH CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences; 2022. Available from: <https://opus.campus02.at/frontdoor/index/index/docId/135> (accessed on 2025-12-08).
8. Ramli NS. A comparative study of marketing strategies: The development of cosmetic brands created by diaspora and non-diaspora entrepreneurs in the US cosmetic industry [dissertation]. York (UK): University of York; 2016.