THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON COSMETICS BRAND SWITCHING

An exploratory study on young Vietnamese consumers

Master’s Thesis
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Abstract

In recent years, influencer marketing has become an essential marketing tactic for many businesses, especially for cosmetics brands, leading to numerous research on its impact on brand characteristics such as brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust. However, there is still a distinct lack of studies examining the effects of influencer marketing on brand switching. With a focus on the cosmetics industry in Vietnam as well as young local consumers, this thesis aims to explore attributes of influencers that can affect consumers’ cosmetics brand switching and how influencers leverage such attributes to make consumers change beauty labels.

To this end, this thesis employs qualitative methodologies to collect and examine data. In particular, the empirical data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and then analyzed using the Grounded Theory techniques. As a result, this study finds that several attributes of influencers, namely appearance, content delivery, credibility, expertise, content, interactivity, honesty, blogging motive, blogging frequency, reputation, and understanding of consumers’ needs have impacts on young Vietnamese consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands. Furthermore, this study discovers that influencers cleverly leverage their influential qualities to make consumers fall into the authority and availability biases, which were also demonstrated to be able to affect consumers’ cosmetics brand choices. Apart from influencers’ attributes, other factors, namely product availability, personal experience, personal knowledge, consumer reviews, product price, brand reputation, and personal skin condition are also found to have an influence on consumers’ cosmetics purchases.

Based on the findings, several valid implications for businesses are also put forward. For example, beauty brands should forge partnerships with personalities who have considerable expertise in cosmetics since such figures are perceived to have high credibility. Cosmetics brands are also recommended to collaborate with influencers who have attractive appearances to demonstrate the effectiveness of the promoted products. Those brands should also encourage influencers to truthfully present the pros and cons of the promoted products, show viewers how to best use them, give detailed explanations of chemical ingredients as well as providing before-after images to prove that the products actually work to improve appearances. Additionally, beauty brands should ask influencers to post contents about the promoted products frequently as well as mentioning them regularly while interacting with audiences to enhance consumers’ purchase intention.

Keywords  influencer marketing, brand switching, young consumers, influencers, Vietnamese, purchase intention, consumer behavior, cosmetics
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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Normally, consumers use many different products and services during their whole lives. Among the providers of such products and services, there are brands giving customers absolute satisfaction, making these customers hardly think of switching to a new brand. However, it is noteworthy that there are almost no customers loyal to a product or service forever after only using such an offering. Instead, customers usually use various brands offering a similar product or service and might choose to be loyal to the brand that has the best performance. On the other hand, there are labels providing poor products and services to customers, urging them to use substitutes offered by such labels’ competitors. Even though customers are content with their currently used product or service provided by a brand, they might switch to an offering of a new brand since they seek a new experience of consumption. Thus, it is noticeable that customers’ practice of switching brands is very normal and inevitable, implying that the customer base of a brand is mostly wrested from that of its competitors rather than gained through approaching consumers who are completely new to the offering of such a brand.

One of the most popular marketing tactics used by brands, especially cosmetics labels, is influencer marketing. This marketing approach not only helps brands target desirable audiences but also costs less as well as generates faster and more tangible outcomes for brands than marketing via mass media. With a focus on beauty brands, this study will assist businesses to find out whether they can leverage influencer marketing to increase their customer base by encouraging consumers to switch brands. If influencer marketing is found to have an impact on making consumers switch brands, this study will further examine how influencers could change consumers’ behaviors from the angle of consumers.

1.2. Research problem

Recent studies seem to have focused on examining local markets rather than the global economy. Indeed, consumers living in different geographic areas experience different cultures, which might result in different motives, requirements, and preferences for products (Mueller, 1991; Harris, 1994; Crane, 2002; Steenkamp &
De Jong, 2010). Thus, if companies tailor their products or services to cater to the distinctive needs or tastes of consumers in local markets, they could enhance consumer satisfaction as well as achieving competitive advantage over their competitors (Ghemawat, 2007; Steenkamp & De Jong, 2010). Otherwise, the lack of consideration of regional factors might undermine the performance of businesses and hinder their efforts to expand their markets overseas (Bhattacharya & Michael, 2008). Due to these points, this thesis will concentrate exclusively on a national market rather than an international one.

It is also worth noting that since influencer marketing has become a phenomenon in recent years, plenty of prior papers have studied the impacts of influencers on several aspects of a brand such as brand awareness, brand image, brand engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty. However, there is still a lack of academic research examining the effects of influencers on brand switching, especially in the Vietnamese cosmetics industry – a promising beauty market for investors. Indeed, Vietnam has witnessed a perpetual increase in revenues from the cosmetics segment from 2012 to 2020 (Statista, 2021). In 2020, the revenues from the cosmetics market in Vietnam were roughly 477 million U.S. dollars and they are expected to continuously increase in the following years (ibid). Therefore, it is worth examining the factors impacting this dynamic market. For the intended purpose and thorough academic outcome of this study, it will only focus on investigating whether influencers have an impact on cosmetics brand switching among Vietnamese consumers and further explaining how they encourage their audiences to stop using a beauty product in favor of a new one.

1.3. Research questions

To address the aforementioned problem, this thesis proposes a research question:

How do influencers affect cosmetics brand switching among Vietnamese consumers?

With the aim of finding comprehensive answers, this thesis further suggests the following sub-questions:

a) Which attributes of influencers can affect consumers' consideration of switching cosmetics brands?
b) How do influencers leverage such attributes to make consumers change cosmetics brands?

1.4. Research objectives

Concerning the aforementioned research questions, the objectives of this study are presented as follows:

a) To identify the most influential elements of influencer marketing that pose an impact on consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands

b) To discover how influencers leverage such attributes to cause consumers to change beauty labels

1.5. Thesis structure

This thesis consists of six sections. It starts with background knowledge of influencer marketing, branding, and Vietnamese consumer culture, then continues with the research problem and objective establishment. A comprehensive literature review is then followed with the purpose of presenting previous academic findings on the topic of interest. Next, a conceptual framework linking relevant concepts addressed in the literature review is provided, followed by the methodology section which reports the process of conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting data. Then, the findings and discussion sections are given to identify answers to the research problem. Finally, the conclusion will feature important findings, point out the limitations of this study, and propose recommendations for future research that examines the same issues.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of cosmetics and the market for cosmetics brands

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), cosmetics are defined as items applied to the human body for the purpose of cleansing parts of the body or making improvements or changes to appearance (FDA, 2021). Some examples of cosmetics are fragrances, lipsticks, cleansing shampoos, shower gels, nail gels, and skin moisturizers. The FDA further emphasizes that it does not acknowledge any product as cosmeceuticals, which are widely known as cosmetics possessing therapeutic properties (Brandt et al., 2011). Instead, it solely recognizes a product as a cosmetic, a drug, which is defined as a product used for detecting, alleviating, curing, or preventing diseases, or a combination of both categories (FDA, 2021). Several examples of cosmeceuticals, which are also known as a fusion of cosmetics and drugs, are anti-aging creams, acne treatments, sunscreens, anti-dandruff shampoos, toothpaste, and antiperspirants (Liebenberg et al., 2020; FDA, 2021). Overall, this thesis follows the broadest definition of cosmetics by the FDA rather than treating cosmeceuticals as a distinctive category.

The cosmetics industry has proved itself to be a thriving market for years. Indeed, the global beauty industry was valued at 511 billion U.S. dollars in 2021 and expected to reach over 784.6 billion U.S. dollars in 2025 (Roberts, 2022). The revenue of this market has also experienced continuous growth since 2015, except for a slight decline in 2020, which was due to the impacts of the contemporary pandemic. However, the market quickly bounced back from approximately 72 billion U.S. dollars in 2020 to over 80 billion U.S. dollars in 2021 and was even predicted to surpass 131 billion U.S. dollars by 2026 (Statista, 2022). The beauty industry is also projected to grow remarkably in the next few years due to a rise in customers’ need for appearance and hygiene enhancement (Bloomberg, 2021). Consumers’ preferences are gradually shifting towards vegan and organic products to support environmental sustainability (ibid). From this discussion, it is evident that the beauty industry is important in improving consumers’ health as well as boosting their confidence by enhancing their physical attractiveness. The continuous growth of the cosmetics market also generates numerous job opportunities for employees in addition to massive profits for investors and businesses.
2.2. Influencer marketing

2.2.1. Definition

Influencer marketing is defined as a marketing tactic characterized by having personalities who are active on social media platforms promote products or services to their audiences (Singh & Diamond, 2012). By writing blog posts, producing videos, or taking photos, such individuals, known as “influencers”, try to make their audiences trust the products or services as well as encouraging them to make purchases (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Woods, 2016). Thus, it is important that brands collaborate with figures whose online personas align with the products or services to enhance the credibility of the brands’ offerings. For example, food brands should partner with food bloggers while cosmetics brands should collaborate with beauty gurus. Since such individuals have extensive knowledge of the fields in question, the audiences tend to trust their opinions about the offerings.

On a different note, there are product and service categories that do not require the personalities’ expertise to gain the audiences’ trust. Instead, the influencers just need to recount their experience with the products or services to the audiences. For instance, bloggers do not have to have knowledge of hospitality or transportation when advertising a hotel or car booking application. However, they can still create suitable and interesting contents about the products or services and interact with their audiences to encourage them toward conversion.

Influencer marketing is also perceived as a cyber format of word-of-mouth marketing, with a focus on smaller groups of potential customers rather than the entire market (Woods, 2016; Bakker, 2018). According to Anderson (1998), word-of-mouth marketing involves casual discussions about specific goods or services among personal individuals. With a reference to influencer marketing, well-known figures are the ones who initiate discussions about products or services by sharing their knowledge, opinions, and experience relating to the offerings; they then often give their audiences discount codes to encourage purchases. Under the influencers’ videos, posts, or photos with the products or services, the audiences continue the discussions by sharing their own viewpoints or asking questions about the offerings, which might be answered by the figures or other participants later. Not only do the discussions about the products or services remain in the immediate communities,
but such discourses could also spread to other communities if the audiences share those videos, blogs, or pictures with other people. Thus, influencer marketing is a powerful form of word-of-mouth marketing since it helps increase awareness of a product or service with dispatch.

It is also worth noting that influencer marketing could be categorized as being either earned or paid (Zhou et al., 2021). Regarding paid influencer marketing, famous personalities who lead strong communities are usually paid by brands to advertise their offerings. On the other hand, less popular figures who are building their own communities tend to promote products or services without any sponsorship, which is regarded as earned influencer marketing. If their content attracts plenty of audiences, they might get noticed by brands and get paid for their next promotions of products or services. From the perspective of brands, earned influencer marketing is the optimal goal since it helps them save a significant budget for advertising their offerings. To this end, brands should try to provide products and services with the best quality so that influencers might voluntarily recommend such offerings to their audiences.

2.2.2. Types and merits of influencers

According to a study by Campbell and Farrell (2020), influencers are classified into five categories which are celebrity influencers, mega influencers, macro influencers, micro influencers, and nano influencers based on the number of followers on their social media channels. In respect of the first type, celebrity influencers are those whose well-established reputation is gained from their main career domains, which are normally fields of entertainment, rather than their activities on their social platforms (ibid). These figures often have higher numbers of followers than the other types of influencers. In fact, celebrities often have more than one million followers as well as high social status. Therefore, many famous brands forge a partnership with them for the purpose of enhancing brand images and approaching their fan base (ibid). An example of celebrity influencer is Roger Federer – a well-known tennis player and long-term partner with Rolex. Since Federer has millions of fans around the world as well as a successfully built image of a sophisticated gentleman, Rolex finds him the best personality to represent its luxury timepiece. However, celebrity influencers like Federer do not engage with their followers regularly (ibid)
since they might be too busy working in their primary field or cannot handle a huge number of comments on each post on their social media channel.

Compared to celebrity influencers, mega influencers share the similar number of followers and low engagement with audiences (ibid). Yet, influencers in this category are well-known for their published content on online channels rather than via mass media such as television or newspaper. Chloe Ting is an illustration of a mega influencer with over 22 million subscribers to her fitness YouTube channel. Since she is a fitness personality, she is an ideal partner for brands that specialize in healthy foods or sports apparel and want to reach out to massive groups of potential customers.

For brands who want a balance between audience outreach and audience engagement, macro influencers are a great choice for their promotion of goods or services. Having from 100,000 to one million followers, macro influencers can promote offerings to a sufficiently good number of people and interact with them better than the two aforementioned personalities (ibid). The majority of macro influencers are food bloggers, travel personalities, and music influencers (ibid). An example of a macro influencer is Frank – the owner of a YouTube channel named “Culinary Frank”. He has almost 400,000 subscribers to his channel, which focuses on instructing viewers to make delicious dishes. He usually tries to answer all of the questions under each video as well as reacting to his viewers’ comments. Therefore, he might be a great influencer for promoting food, seasonings, or cookware.

Another type of influencers that has good engagement with audiences is micro influencer, since individuals in this category only have from 10,000 to 100,000 followers on their own social media channels (ibid). Apart from great interactions with micro influencers, the audiences also find these personalities more reliable than the three aforementioned types (ibid). Indeed, many brands notice a remarkable increase in their sales from affiliate purchase links from partnered micro influencers (ibid), indicating the audiences’ immense trust in them. One reason could be that the audiences think that micro influencers kindly want to share good products and services with other people rather than make contents about those offerings for profits. Thus, brands should consider collaborating with such influencers if they want to improve their credibility.
Nano influencers are also an option for brands who desire to emphasize authenticity and engagement with audiences. Since the communities of such influencers are rather small, they can easily interact with each of their followers, helping develop a close relationship between the influencers and their fans. Therefore, their fans also find their recommendations about goods or services more reliable than those of the other types of influencers (ibid). However, nano influencers are rarely approached by brands for advertisement as their reach is quite limited with no more than 10,000 followers (ibid). Instead, such individuals often reach out to brands themselves and ask for partnerships, even unpaid ones (ibid), which is beneficial to both parties. Indeed, on the one hand, brands can save a considerable expenditure on advertising, while on the other hand, influencers can enhance their popularity on social media platforms. Due to this, it is suggested that small brands should consider proactively approaching nano influencers to request their help to promote their offerings, since such influencers have the best interaction with audiences as well as asking for low or no remuneration. Overall, influencers through their activities, contents, and engagement with customers can have profound effects on how consumers relate and interact with brands, positively affecting brand equity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012).

2.3. Branding knowledge

2.3.1. Brand awareness

Definition
Brand awareness refers to the capability of consumers to recollect, realize, and distinguish a brand from others within a product class (Aaker, 1991). This capability is divided into four tiers, namely brand unawareness, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind respectively (ibid). At the first tier, consumers are unaware of the presence of a brand in the market because they never heard of the brand before or have completely forgotten all information about the brand. At the second tier, customers can point out the brands that they at least recognize the names of previously from a certain list of brand names (ibid). If the brands further appear in the response of customers when asked to give a list of brands of a product category, those brands are considered to have reached the third level of brand awareness.
(ibid). It is also worth noting that only the brand which is mentioned first in the list is perceived as attaining the “top-of-mind” level, the highest tier of brand awareness (ibid).

**Brand awareness and influencers**

In a study by Lou and Yuan (2019), influencers’ charisma and know-how are demonstrated to have positive impacts on brand awareness while their credibility is shown to have a negative impact on brand awareness. Regarding influencers’ charisma, it is understandable that physical appearance is the first impression the audiences have on the influencers, which significantly affects the audiences’ decision whether to view the influencers’ content or not. If the influencers are attractive, audiences tend to watch the influencers’ videos or read their blogs about promotional products or services, improving the brand awareness of the offerings. Apart from physical appearance, influencers can attract audiences with their communication styles, which are also demonstrated to have a positive impact on brand awareness in a study by Es-Safi and Sağlam (2021). On a similar note, audiences tend to trust influencers who have expertise in the field of promotional offerings. Therefore, they not only view the content of the influencers themselves but also might share that useful knowledge with others, further boosting brand awareness.

Concerning credibility of influencers, it is interesting that this factor is found to negatively affect brand awareness (Lou & Yuan, 2019). A reason given by the authors for this discovery is that, although the audiences find influencers reliable based on their background, they might still be doubtful whether the influencers give authentic recommendations based on their knowledge and experience or whether they convey misleading information about the products and services for their own gains (ibid). However, in other studies, Jeremy and Antonio (2021) find that influencers’ trustworthiness has a positive impact on brand awareness while Ristevska-Jovanovska and Bogoevska-Gavrilova (2021) demonstrate that influencers’ reliability does not have any significant impact on brand awareness. These inconsistent findings might result from different samplings and studied influencers, which require further research to reach more meaningful conclusions.
2.3.2. Brand image

**Definition**
Brand image is defined as consumers’ conception of a brand through its associations and three attributes, which are functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits (Park et al., 1986; Keller, 1993). Regarding the first type, functional attributes refer to the performance of products or services which assists consumers in dealing with their problems and even preventing possible unfavorable incidents (Wu & Wang, 2014). Meanwhile, symbolic attributes are values which help consumers reflect their self-identity, social class, or association with an exclusive community (Salciuviene et al., 2009; Wu & Wang, 2014). On a different note, experiential attributes are perceived as the ability of a brand to meet customers’ expectation of enjoyment when using its products or services (Keller, 1993).

It is noteworthy that a perfect brand image requires a substantial amount of effort and resources, which not all brands can afford. Therefore, many brands choose to focus on one or two most influential attributes among the three to build their brand image. For example, bottled water brands mainly emphasize the functional and experiential attributes of their products, which are thirst-quenching and ease of consumption, since consumers normally do not buy drinking water to manifest their social status. However, in the case of fashionistas, many of them buy luxury bags which, despite their prohibitive price, cannot hold a small item such as a phone. Rather than using those bags to assist them in carrying things, which is the normal functional feature of bags, these individuals purchase expensive tiny bags because they love the shopping experience and customer service at high-end stores as well as wanting to look wealthy and fashionable, which is considered the experiential and symbolic attributes of the bags.

In addition to the attributes, many customers are also concerned about the brands’ associations, which are perceived as descriptions of the brands (Hartnett et al., 2016). Hence, brands always aim to associate their offerings with positive keywords such as sustainable or user-friendly to make a good impression on customers (Gil et al., 2007). Similarly, brands try to generate unique associations to make their brands distinctive from others (ibid) in the hope of increasing the probability that customers will recall their brands prior to those of competitors. From this discussion,
it is suggested that brands should identify and concentrate on the most essential attributes of their brand image to save resources and try to create special associations to improve their competitiveness in the market.

**Brand image and influencers**

In previous studies, influencers are proved to have favorable impacts on brand images (Hermanda, 2019; Jaya et al., 2020). Specifically, influencers’ attractiveness is found to enhance brand images significantly (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). It is worth noting that influencers’ attractiveness is not only manifested through their appearance but also via their ways of conveying brands’ messages to audiences (ibid). This point is also consistent with the findings in a study by Khodabandeh & Lindh (2021), which reveal that content produced by influencers also enhances brand images remarkably, which further encourages the purchase intentions of customers. Therefore, brands should collaborate with influencers who are both good-looking and adept at making interesting content as well as communicating with audiences in order to best improve brand images.

Apart from attractiveness, the credibility of influencers is also demonstrated to have a considerable impact on brand images (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). However, in the same research, influencers’ expertise is found not to have a significant influence on brand images. Conversely, in a study particularly examining celebrity influencers by Lomboan (2013), the attractiveness, credibility, and expertise of celebrities are all demonstrated to have an impact on brand images. In fact, celebrities are usually invited to be primary representatives for brands, so their expertise directly reflects the brands’ images. On the other hand, other influencers are often secondary partners of brands or even voluntary promoters of offerings for brands; therefore, audiences do not normally correlate the brands’ image with these individuals’ property, since there might be no partnership between the brands and influencers. It is also worth noting that although findings from prior research reveal that the expertise of influencers does not have a significant impact on brand image, brands would be better collaborating with prominent individuals who have expertise in the brands’ offerings, since such individuals might create more relevant promotional contents as well as help the brands answer to audiences’ inquiries about the offerings.
2.3.3. Brand engagement

**Definition**

Brand engagement refers to the degree of a person’s time, financial resources, efforts, and enthusiasm put into a brand outside the experiences of buying and using its products or services (Keller, 2013). Brand engagement consists of three dimensions, which are cognitive processing, affection, and activation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). In particular, cognitive processing is defined as the extent to which an individual thinks about a brand, while affection is described as the level of a person’s positive feeling about it (ibid). On the other hand, activation refers to the degree of physical and mental energy a consumer devotes to a brand (ibid). An example illustrating the three dimensions of brand engagement could be an individual especially loving a fashion brand because of its futuristic designs (affection), spending half an hour watching a fashion show of a brand (activation), and considering whether it is worth buying an item from the collection for a week (cognitive processing).

**Brand engagement and influencers**

In a study by Rios Marques et al. (2020), celebrity and micro influencers are found to be able to improve brand engagement. In particular, the majority of an increase in the number of followers as well as that in the number of views, reactions, and comments on the brand’s Instagram account resulted from content produced by celebrities and micro influencers respectively (ibid). This discovery also supports the aforementioned findings by Campbell and Farrell (2020) that brands usually partner with celebrities to reach out to huge numbers of potential customers while collaborating with micro influencers for great interaction with audiences.

On the other hand, several articles reveal that the presence of influencers in a social media post significantly enhances brand engagement (Bakhshi et al., 2014; Valentini et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2020). Specifically, brand engagement in advertising posts containing images of both influencers and products is reportedly greater than that including photos of offerings only (Silva et al., 2020). This implies that the majority of audiences follow influencers because their physical attractiveness or charisma is manifested through the way they present their content.
On a similar note, the level of brand engagement in informal promotional pictures taken by celebrities themselves is further found to be higher than that in professional advertising photos shot by a photographer (Colliander & Marder, 2018). This is understandable because casual pictures generate the feeling that such figures are recommending good products or services which they themselves have been using, while professional photos often lead to the idea that the personalities just create promotional contents for financial benefits. In addition to taking pictures and narrating their experience with promotional products or services, influencers also ask their audiences some questions, respond to the audiences’ comments, organize prize draws, or even offer discount codes to improve brand engagement (Silva et al., 2020). Especially, influencers often require participants to share promotional posts on their social media channels to be valid for prize draws, which further enhances brand awareness.

2.3.4. Brand attitude

Definition
Brand attitude is interpreted as an individual’s general judgement about a brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981). According to a study by Breckler (1984), brand attitude is made up of cognitive, affective, and conative components. Specifically, cognitive attitude describes what a person knows and thinks about a brand; affective attitude is how an individual feels about a brand; finally, conative attitude is perceived as a personal inclination towards a brand (Rosenberg & Hanland, 1960; MacKenzie et al., 1986; Guiltinan et al., 1997; Assael, 2005). An illustration of the three components of brand attitude is that an individual likes the automobile brand Toyota (affective) and intends to buy a car from the brand (conative) because they know that Toyota manufactures durable and energy-saving vehicles (cognitive).

Brand attitude and influencers
In several papers, audiences’ attitude towards influencers is demonstrated to have a positive relationship with brand attitude (Silvera & Austad, 2004; Amos et al., 2008; Chetioui et al., 2020). Thus, brands often forge a partnership with personalities towards whom audiences are displaying a favorable attitude to improve brand attitude while terminating a partnership with those undergoing scandals to prevent
bad brand attitude, especially since influencers’ misconduct usually leads to further damage to the brand’s part. Similarly, the attractiveness of influencers is found to affect brand attitude (Torres et al., 2019; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). For example, concerning the physical appearance, it is understandable since audiences might regard influencers’ physical looks as a result of using the brand’s products or services. If influencers are good-looking, audiences tend to buy the brand’s offering in the hope of replicating the benefit.

On the same note, influencers’ credibility also proves to have an impact on brand attitude (Schouten et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021). Since audiences usually trust reviews of products or services by influencers who have great credibility, their opinions about a brand tend to be affected by influencers. For example, if a perceived trustworthy influencer shares a good experience with a product by a brand, audiences are inclined to generate a positive attitude towards a brand while a negative experience shared by a reliable influencer might hamper audiences’ attitudes towards a brand. It is also worth noting that influencers’ trustworthiness is found to decline when their contents about products or services are revealed to be sponsored by brands, which subsequently diminishes brand attitude (De Veirman and Hudders, 2020). This discovery makes sense since audiences tend to think that such influencers might exaggerate the benefits of the advertised products or services because they receive financial remuneration from brands.

2.3.5. Brand trust

Definition
Brand trust is described as customers’ reliance on the performance of products or services promised by a brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It could be further interpreted as consumers’ given security when interacting with a brand since they believe that it is dependable and willing to take responsibility for their concerns and well-being (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). These definitions of brand trust are also compatible with the perception of what constitutes brand trust in a study by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003). Indeed, the authors claim that brand trust is made up of two dimensions, which are fiability and intentionality (ibid). Particularly, fiability refers to the consumers’ belief that offerings by a brand will perform in accordance with its commitments or solve their problems, while intentionality involves another belief that
a brand will take responsibility for unfavorable incidents related to the consumption of its offering (ibid). Thus, it is evident that brands must not only provide goods or services with quality as they promise but also be well-prepared to deal with unfortunate consumption issues that may arise.

**Brand trust and influencers**

In several studies, influencers’ trustworthiness is demonstrated to have a positive relationship with brand trust (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020; Leite & Baptista, 2021; Nosi et al., 2021). Indeed, influencers usually develop their credibility by creating content on their daily activities, experiences, and viewpoints on certain issues (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Additionally, influencers can increase their trustworthiness by replying to audiences’ comments (interactivity) and asserting that their sharing of knowledge is mainly for the sake of their audiences rather than their own benefits (authenticity) (Jun & Ji, 2020). In the same research, influencers’ interactivity and authenticity are also found to have an impact on brand trust (ibid), implying that smaller influencers improve brand trust better than celebrities. This implication is rational since these influencers engage with followers more dynamically than celebrities as well as creating a feeling of closeness while celebrities often come across as unapproachable. Moreover, this inference is supported by an article by Schouten et al. (2019), which discovers that endorsements by celebrities are considered less credible than those by other influencers. From this point, it is suggested that brands should partner with influencers rather than celebrities if they aim to enhance their brand trust.

It is interesting that influencers’ physical appearance is also found to have an impact on brand trust (Eru et al., 2018; Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). Particularly, it is inferred that influencers who possess trustworthy facial features or gestures tend to gain more trust from the audience. By utilizing physical characteristics and body language, influencers could further enhance their authenticity, which is already demonstrated to potentially affect brand trust. On a different note, Eru et al. (2018) as well as Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020) also examine whether influencers’ expertise has an impact on brand trust. Interestingly, the former group of authors proves that expertise significantly affects brand trust, while the latter one does not find any relationship between the two observations. It is also worth noting that Eru
et al. (2018) studied young consumers whereas Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020) examined consumers across all ages, which suggests further research on the impact of influencers’ expertise on brand trust across different demographic groups of customers could obtain more meaningful scientific results.

2.3.6. Brand loyalty

Definition
Brand loyalty refers to consumers’ constant support for a brand despite potential adjustments in prices and attributes of its products or marketing tactics of other brands that aim to change consumers’ consumption habits (Oliver, 1997; Shohri et al., 2012). Brand loyalty consists of two components, namely behavioral brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Lin, 2010; Kuikka & Laukanen, 2012). Particularly, behavioral brand loyalty signifies consumers’ decision to repurchase a brand’s products or services while attitudinal brand loyalty denotes consumers’ positive words about a brand, pleasure in consumption of the brand’s offerings, and even inclination to recommend its offerings to other people (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Cengiz & Akdemir-Cengiz, 2016; Ellynia & Widjaja, 2020).

It is worth noting that the relationship between behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalty is not necessarily positive, as Rundle-Thiele and Mackay (2001) suggest. For instance, consumers might buy a product again because it is cheap and has acceptable quality, not because they particularly enjoy the consumption of that product. Likewise, consumers could recommend a service to their friends because of prior experience with it; however, they have since switched to another one as they cannot afford it anymore. In these cases, it is evident that behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalty have a negative relationship, which is opposed to the aforementioned suggestion.

Brand loyalty and influencers
In several articles, brand loyalty is revealed to be impacted by the attractiveness of influencers (Audi et al., 2015; Anjum & Yasmeen, 2021). In fact, many influencers receive adoration from audiences because of their physical appearance and appealing narration, thus, fans often support their favorite personalities by
consistently purchasing offerings from brands partnering with them. However, there are consumers who only value past experiences with products or services regardless of the attractiveness of influencers. This statement is further supported by the research of Udovita and Hilal (2018) as well as Mittal (2021), which reveals that the attractiveness of influencers does not have any significant impact on brand loyalty.

Influencers’ interactions with their followers are also shown to be able to affect brand loyalty (Jun & Yi, 2020; Anjum & Yasmeen, 2021). Indeed, when influencers mention a brand while interacting with their audience, they make an impression of that brand on their audience, which could nudge them into making a purchase of products or services of the brand. Another attribute of influencers found to have an impact on brand loyalty is expertise (Fadeyi, 2020; Anjum & Yasmeen, 2021; Mittal, 2021). Since audiences tend to trust opinions about a brand by personalities who have great knowledge about the brand’s offerings or the field of the brand’s business, reliable or knowledgeable influencers could improve brand loyalty if they make favorable content on a brand. On the other hand, such personalities could threaten brand loyalty if they share unfavorable information or experience about the brand’s offerings.

It is noteworthy that multiple studies discover that the trustworthiness of influencers does not affect brand loyalty (Spry et al., 2011; Anjum & Yasmeen, 2021; Mittal, 2021), as they find the honesty of influencers does not always help improve consumers’ experience with a product or service. Indeed, the effectiveness of products or services might be different due to immutable distinctions between the influencers and consumers. Hence, these consumers often consider their previous consumption of products or services rather than the trustworthiness of influencers when deciding to make a repurchase.

2.3.7. Brand switching

Definition

Brand switching refers to a person’s decision to stop using a product or service provided by a brand and start consuming another offering provided by another brand with similar functionalities to the disused one (Keller, 2008; Rajkumar & Chaarlas,
2012). In other words, brand switching signifies, from the perspective of brands, a loss of customers to its rivals (Garga et al., 2019). However, it is not necessarily perceived as customers shifting their loyalty from a brand to another one, as several authors propose in their articles (Kahlon & Vaidya, 2018; Hanifawati et al., 2019; Astuti & Santoso, 2020). Indeed, when a consumer starts using an offering by a brand, nothing guarantees that they will be content with that product during consumption enough to make a repurchase (behavioral loyalty) or recommendations to other people (attitudinal loyalty). Thus, it could be concluded that brand switching describes a change in customers’ buying habits rather than a shift in brand loyalty.

**Reasons for brand switching**

The relationship between price and quality of products or services is found to be one of the reasons for brand switching (Keaveney, 1995; Kotler & Amstrong, 2010; Mullick & Abdin, 2016). Indeed, if a brand increases the price of its offering given that the quality of the offering remains the same or even diminishes, consumers tend to look for another brand providing a similar product or service, which has better quality and costs less than or at least equal to the previous product or service. Regardless of whether the brand changes its offering’s price or quality, consumers might also want to look for another brand with a better offer in terms of value for money. Alternatively, they may simply desire to switch to another brand because they lose interest in the current one and want to refresh their consumption routines by using something new, which is regarded as variety seeking in several studies (Faison, 1977; Hoyer & Ridgway, 1984; Assael, 2004). Variety seeking even occurs when consumers are completely satisfied with the current product, but still curious about novel options (Faison, 1977). Thus, many brands always try to improve the variety of their offerings in the hope that customers will switch between versions of their offerings rather than to competitor brands.

In addition to price, sales promotions from rival brands can also lead to brand switching (Keaveney, 1995). Promotional campaigns often have a strong influence on customers who are variety seekers, have low or average incomes, or are shopping for generic products such as food or small household items. For these types of customers, discount programs are often great incentives to change brands.
Likewise, customers can also change their purchase behaviors when the offerings of the brand they are currently using are unavailable (ibid). In this case, customers have no choice but to consider offerings of another brand to fulfill their needs. On a different note, changes to overall availability, such as working hours or locations, are found to be able to make customers switch to another brand (Keaveney, 1995). Indeed, if a brand with which customers are currently in a relationship changes its opening hours or moves its physical store to another place, causing access difficulties, customers might look for a new brand that is easier to visit. On a similar note, customers might also temporarily switch to another brand if they are in a hurry and the working hours or physical stores of the new brand are more convenient for them.

On the other hand, the malfunction in the main product or service or the failure in provision of customer service can cause further brand switching (Keaveney, 1995; Saeed et al., 2013; Mullick & Adbin, 2016). Some examples of customer service failures could be neglectful staff members, customers being kept waiting for a long time, wrong orders delivered, or late arrival of orders. It is worth noting that ethical practices of a brand can also make customers consider whether they should continue supporting the brand (Keaveney, 1995). Indeed, if customers notice that a brand runs deceptive advertisements, conceals information about its offerings, or badly treats its employees, they tend to switch to another brand which has perceived better business practices. From this discussion, it is evident that customers have different reasons for brand switching, be they due to their individual desire, unexpected events, or brands and their competitors’ actions.

**Brand switching in previous research**

There have been several studies examining factors that could have impacts on brand switching across different types of products. Regarding the technology industry, brand personality and perceived product quality are found to be able to affect Indonesians’ consideration of switching laptop brands (Hanifati & Salehudin, 2021). On the other hand, brand image and product features are demonstrated to have significant impacts on Malaysians’ intention to change smartphone brands while product price and sales promotion yield the opposite result (Ling et al., 2018). On a different note, rival brand attractiveness as well as consumers’ discontent and
desire for variety seeking are discovered to be able to influence Vietnamese consumers’ consideration of switching cellular service providers (Le Tan & Trang, 2021). In respect of the apparel industry, Korean consumers are found to be susceptible to discount programs when considering switching jacket and footwear labels (Lim & Hwang, 2009). However, promotional programs are revealed to not have an influence on their intention of changing jeans brands (ibid). From these findings, it is evident that factors affecting consumers’ consideration of switching brands vary across different kinds of products. Additionally, distinct consumer cultures might also have an impact on customers’ decision-making.

To validate the aforementioned inference, the following discussion will quickly give an overview of the current literature on factors influencing consumers’ intention to switch brands across different cultures with a focus on the cosmetics industry. Regarding Indonesian consumers, brand image and attitude as well as product feature and quality are revealed to have a significant impact on their consideration of changing cosmetics brands (Ajiwinanto et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Pakistanis are found to be susceptible to advertising and brand endorsements when contemplating converting to another beauty brand (Bagh et al., 2021). On a different note, alternative attraction is discovered to be an essential part of Vietnamese consumers’ consideration of switching between cosmetics brands, while satisfaction is found to not have a significant impact (Cuc et al., 2016). From this discussion, it is rational to infer that consumers from different cultures might be susceptible to different factors when considering cosmetics brand switching. Therefore, this study will solely focus on one consumer culture, namely Vietnamese, to reach meaningful conclusions, which might be helpful for niche market investigations.

2.4. Branding knowledge in the cosmetics industry

In previous studies, several factors are examined for their influences on the aforementioned aspects of branding knowledge in the cosmetics industry. Regarding word-of-mouth (WOM), it is found to have a significant impact on the brand image while not affecting the brand attitude of beauty brands (Ajiwinanto et al., 2021). This discovery implies that WOM might change consumers’ perception of a cosmetics brand in terms of its functional, symbolic, and experiential attributes, but not necessarily their affective and conative attitudes towards the brand. For
example, although an individual might have a new expectation of enjoyment when using the product (experiential attribute of brand image) after learning that a beauty brand will replace its rose-scented moisturizer with a jasmine one, they are still willing to buy the novel product (conative attitude) because they love the brand for its moisturizing technology (affective attitude).

On the other hand, celebrity endorsement is demonstrated to affect brand awareness and brand image of cosmetics labels (Sivesan, 2013; Waqas, 2020). In terms of brand awareness, if the celebrities have plenty of followers on their social media channels, brand awareness of a partner cosmetics brand will be boosted by their brand-related posts. With respect to brand image, the reputation of the celebrities could make consumers form their own self-identification or association with an exclusive group, whereas the physical appearance of the well-known personalities could allow them to infer the effectiveness of the product or service (functional attribute of brand image) or imagine the enjoyment of consuming such an offering (experiential attribute of brand image).

On a different note, content marketing and crowdsourcing are proved to have influences on the brand engagement of beauty labels (Weerasinghe, 2019; Szalaty & Derda, 2020). While content marketing allows brands to convey messages to their target audiences, crowdsourcing enables the audience to share opinions with the brands to improve their performance (Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, 2012; Weerasinghe, 2019). In other words, content marketing allows cosmetics brands to interact with their audience mainly by asking them questions about the brands’ offerings, whereas crowdsourcing enables brands to engage with their audience by encouraging them to contribute to the development of the offerings, which further enhances their experience with the products or services.

Concerning product quality and satisfaction, these factors are discovered to have a significant impact on the brand loyalty of cosmetics brands (Hanzae & Andervaz, 2012; Parmar, 2014; Chan & Mansori, 2016). Indeed, customers tend to repurchase a product (behavioral loyalty) and recommend it to others (attitudinal loyalty) if it has great quality. In case the product does not have high quality, customers might still rebuy that product if they are satisfied with what they pay for. Another factor found to have an influence on the brand loyalty of cosmetics brands is price (Khraim, 2011;
Mwai et al., 2015; Kassim et al., 2021). Interestingly, price is demonstrated to have a positive relationship with brand loyalty of cosmetics brands (ibid), which could be inferred that customers’ price sensitivity for beauty products is low. In other words, customers might not hesitate to repurchase or spread good words about the offerings of a brand to other people even if that brand raises its prices.

2.5. Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework is given to identify a proper direction for this academic research. Indeed, in plenty of studies, influencers are found to affect several aspects of a brand, namely brand awareness, brand image, brand engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Thus, influencers are preliminarily presumed to have an impact on cosmetics brand switching.

![Conceptual framework diagram]

The conceptual framework exhibits the causal relationships between attributes of influencers and consumers’ intention of changing beauty brands. Specifically, these attributes are attractiveness, credibility, expertise, content, and interactivity, which are randomly arranged in the conceptual framework and presumed to have an impact on consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands. In addition to the aforementioned attributes, this study further expects to discover other qualities of influencers that can also affect consumers’ purchase decisions. In summary, following this conceptual framework will facilitate the research progress, especially in the finding of direct answers to the research questions.
III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research method and design

Rather than testing whether causal relationships exist between observed variables, this thesis mainly aims to explore attributes of influencers that impact consumers' considerations of switching brands and investigate consumers' perception of such attributes, which are difficult to be measured and quantified. Therefore, the employment of a qualitative research method is more appropriate than a quantitative one since qualitative approaches allow researchers to gather comprehensive ideas from research participants, which further facilitates the investigation of participants' rationales behind their courses of actions and perceptions. Of qualitative methodologies, the semi-structured interview will be applied in this study due to several reasons. This approach gives researchers great flexibility in designing sets of interview questions and adjusting them to the behaviors of interviewees during actual interviews, with the aim to elicit comprehensive responses from them (Horton et al., 2004). Additionally, this qualitative methodology also enables interviewees to comfortably express and share their opinions as well as emphasizing certain points of interest (ibid). As a result, researchers are not only able to obtain in-depth answers from participants but also discover new interesting insights during the interviews (ibid). From these points, it is evident that the semi-structured interview is the appropriate method for this thesis since it could help to both identify attributes of influencers that can affect Vietnamese consumers’ intention of switching cosmetics brands and understand these consumers’ perception of such attributes.

For this study, 13 online semi-structured interviews were conducted via Messenger – a prominent and credible communication application – due to geographic restrictions between the researcher and the participants. Particularly, the researcher and five interviewees are in Finland, while one interviewee lives in the U.S., another one in Sweden, and the rest in Vietnam. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the first language of both the researcher and the participants, to enhance the mutual understanding between the researcher and the participants and avoid potential difficulties such as misunderstandings or the inability to fully express opinions in a foreign language, which might significantly reduce the quality of the research. All the interviews were also audio-recorded and lasted between 23 March...
2022 and 27 March 2022. Recordings were then transcribed and translated from Vietnamese to English by the researcher, who has had five-year experience in this line of work.

Each interview started with the researcher’s declaration of the purpose of study as well as guarantee of confidentiality of interviewees’ responses, followed by a set of demographic questions regarding their name, age, gender, education, and occupation. Then, the interview proceeded with questions about the interviewee’s preference for cosmetics brands and habit of using beauty products. Finally, the interviewee was asked to share their brand switching experiences as impacted by influencers and explain attributes of influencers that had made or could make them switch cosmetics brands.

3.2. Sample selection

Since this study aims to explore how the qualities of influencers impact young Vietnamese’s consideration of switching cosmetics brands, the ideal interviewees are of Vietnamese nationality, have lived at least 18 years in Vietnam, and are between 18 and 31 years old. Thus, 13 people who satisfy the aforementioned criteria were selected and invited for interviews. Of the thirteen informants, there are three males (23%) and ten females (77%). It is worth noting that this proportion of male to female respondents is rather normal for cosmetics-related research since most men do not follow beauty influencers or content creators. The age of the respondents varies from 24 to 31, with an average of 26.4. 12 out of 13 informants have completed a bachelor’s degree. Out of these, one is a full-time master’s student and the other 11 are full-time workers. Of the 11 full-time employees, four are also pursuing a master’s degree alongside their work (R1, R5, R9, and R12). The last informant is a last-year bachelor’s student (R11).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent (R)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Current country of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Master's degree (studying)</td>
<td>Digital marketing specialist</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Cosmetics R&amp;D executive</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Master's degree (studying)</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Marketing communications specialist</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Master's degree (studying)</td>
<td>Web analyst</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Content creator</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Administrative officer</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Graphic designer</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Master's degree (studying)</td>
<td>Investment associate</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (studying)</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Master's degree (studying)</td>
<td>Software engineer</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (graduated)</td>
<td>Accounts payable clerk</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3. Content analysis

This thesis employs the Grounded Theory techniques, which utilize coding to analyze data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Firstly, different concepts were recognized from the translated interviews, which are named open codes. Then, the relationships among such open codes were identified and classified into relevant categories, which are called axial codes. Finally, these axial codes were associated with pertinent themes, which are known as selective codes.

![Diagram showing the relationship between open codes and axial codes]

*Figure 2: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Appearance"*
Figure 3: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Content delivery"

Figure 4: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Interactivity"
Figure 5: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Content"
Figure 6: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Credibility"
Figure 7: From open codes to the development of the axial code “Expertise”

Figure 8: From open codes to the development of the axial code “Honesty”
Figure 9: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Blogging motive"

Figure 10: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Blogging frequency"
Figure 11: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Reputation"

- Work experience
- Background
- Popularity
- Fame
- Number of views
- Personal life
- No scandal

Figure 12: From open codes to the development of the axial code "Understanding of consumers' needs"

- Personal advice
- Q&A sections
- Relevant content
- Provision of alternatives
- Content suggested by audiences

Understanding of consumers’ needs
Figure 13: From axial codes to the development of the selective code "Authority bias"

Figure 14: From axial codes to the development of the selective code "Availability bias"
In summary of the coding process, all descriptions of influencers were first identified from the interviews and then grouped into categories of open codes based on their relevance of themes. Next, such categories were named after attributes of influencers, which were also known as axial codes. Then, groups of influencers’ attributes were thoroughly examined to determine whether they all had a similar influence or a synergy to impact consumers’ decision-making. Finally, names were given to groups of influencers’ qualities that generate a specific impact on consumers' purchase decisions, also known as selective codes.
IV. FINDINGS

4.1. Consumers’ perception of cosmetics

Although the FDA provides a broad definition of cosmetics that comprises shower gels, shampoos, nail gels, and deodorants, the empirical data shows that all interviewees considered cosmetics to solely be makeup products. After being given the FDA-regulated definition of cosmetics, the respondents then perceived cosmetics as makeup, skincare, and cosmeceutical products rather than body care items such as deodorants, toothpaste, shampoos, or shower gels. Thus, it is evident that consumers often regard cosmetics as advanced beautifying products used for enhancing their physical looks (makeup products) or for improving their skin condition (skincare and treatment products), rather than fundamental products used for maintaining daily natural appearance (body care products). Due to this, the empirical data of this study focuses on the segments of skincare, makeup, and treatment products rather than other categories of cosmetics.

4.2. Informants’ experience with cosmetics

On average, the interviewees began using beauty products around the age of 20. The informants’ experience with cosmetic products also varies from 9 months to 14 years. Of the 13 informants, ten have been using beauty products for over 5 years, two for roughly 2 years (R9 and R12), and one has just started using cosmetics for 9 months (R2). Almost all the interviewees use face cleansers, toners, moisturizers, sunscreens, and serums. In addition to skincare products, female informants also use make-up products while males only use products for cleansing, moisturizing, and protecting their skin. It is also worth noting that all the beauty products that the interviewees have used are low or mid-end items. Some popular brands among them are Bioderma, Cerave, Clinique, La Roche Posay, Maybelline, and The Ordinary.

Each respondent has their own preferred cosmetics brands except for two respondents, who have not found their favorite yet (R2 and R11). Most of the respondents prefer certain brands to others because their preferred products have good qualities which manifest through the improvement of physical appearance (R3, R5, R7, R9, R10, R12, and R13). They also find the products mild (R1, R4, and R6)
and suitable for their skin (R1, R8, and R11), as well as worth the money spent (R5 and R9).

Regarding the interviewees’ routine of using cosmetics, most of them do a skincare routine twice a day, focusing on cleansing and sun-blocking in the morning and moisturizing and special treatment in the evening. Only one interviewee says that they do not use cosmetics daily but only when they have skin problems such as dry skin, dark skin, or acne breakouts (R6). Most of the female respondents also put on make-up when going out to work, hanging out with friends, or participating in social events (R3, R5, R7, R8, R9, R11, and R13) while their male counterparts do not use make-up products at all. Based on the overall routine of respondents, it is evident that they not only want to have attractive physical appearances but also truly healthy skin.

**Table 2: Respondents’ favorite cosmetics brands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Duration of using cosmetics</th>
<th>Favorite cosmetics brands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>The Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>Not found yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Huda Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>SVR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Cerave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Cerave, Sukin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>La Roche Posay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Skin1004, Dior, 3CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Olay, Zakka, Dermarium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Nivea, Lumene, The Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Not found yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Clinique, Vichy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Maybelline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To increase their knowledge of cosmetics, the informants follow influencers that frequently share their opinions on cosmetic products. Out of these figures, Cong Chua Dong is the only micro influencer and is followed by R9. The other personalities that the interviewees have been following are celebrity, mega, or
macro influencers, and are either Vietnamese, American, or Korean. They are also either certified dermatologists, make-up artists, skincare experts, or simply individuals having much experience with cosmetics. In fact, most of the participants follow the two latter types (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, and R12) while only R2 and R13 follow the two former ones.

It is worth mentioning that YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are the main platforms where the respondents connect with their favourite influencers. The duration for which they have followed the influencers is also directly proportional to how long they have been using cosmetics. For example, R1 has been using cosmetics for ten years and started following beauty influencers since high school. Meanwhile, R2 has just begun their cosmetics journey for 9 months and followed beauty gurus for 6 months. However, R10 is an exception; although they have been using cosmetics for over 13 years, they have only followed beauty influencers for less than two years.

Regarding the frequency of viewing beauty influencers’ contents, four informants read posts or watch videos 1-4 times per month (R3, R5, R10, and R11), while two view these contents approximately 10 times per month (R2 and R9). Conversely, R8 and R13 reported viewing beauty influencers’ contents almost every day. Some interviewees only view contents when they need to find solutions to their problems or update their cosmetics knowledge (R1, R6, R9, and R12). Several others reported usually viewing the contents when they pop up on their social media accounts’ newsfeed (R1, R5, R7, R9, and R13) or when the influencers release new contents (R4). R2 and R6 informants further state that they do not watch any beauty influencers’ other contents that are not related to cosmetics whereas R8 says that they view their favourite influencers’ life stories every day.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>Following influencers</th>
<th>Influencer type</th>
<th>Influencers’ background</th>
<th>Longest duration of following</th>
<th>Following platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Changmakeup, Ha Linh</td>
<td>Mega, Macro</td>
<td>Beauty influencers</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>YouTube, Tiktok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Mega, Macro</td>
<td>Dermatologists</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>YouTube, Instagram</td>
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<td>Macro</td>
<td>Beauty influencers</td>
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<td>Macro, Mega</td>
<td>Former brand manager, Medical aesthetician</td>
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<td>An Phuong, Call me Duy</td>
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<td>Macro, Micro</td>
<td>Beauty influencer, Founder of a cosmetics brand</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
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<td>Macro, Mega</td>
<td>Dermatologist, Makeup artist</td>
<td>4 years</td>
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4.3. Attributes of influencers that make audiences follow them

There are several attributes of beauty influencers that attract the informants to them and keep them engaged. Out of these qualities, content delivery is the most commonly appreciated. In particular, R1, R4, and R12 reported being captivated by the influencers’ charismatic voices while R6, R8, and R10 like those with a good sense of humor. On a different note, R9 and R11 say that they prefer influencers to get straight to the point while R7 wants the personalities to give evidence of experiencing the promoted products as well. R11 further states that they are too lazy to do extensive research on cosmetics, so they watch the influencers to follow their advice, thereby saving them a lot of time.

In addition to delivery, the content itself is another attribute that significantly matters to the respondents. R12 and R13 reported preferring influencers who give detailed reviews of their used products, present their pros and cons, compare them with those of other brands as well as giving specific recommendations for each specific circumstance. Meanwhile, R4 and R8 like influencers who create diverse contents; in other words, they like personalities who not only talk about cosmetics but also share opinions on other topics. On the other hand, R6, R7, and R8 follow certain beauty influencers because they find the influencers’ contents relatable to them. For example, R6 finds Lindsie Pham’s content relatable because Lindsie’s skin type is similar to theirs. Likewise, R7 and R8 find the contents of their favorite influencers (HannahOlala and Dao Ba Loc respectively) relatable because the topics discussed usually coincide with the two respondents’ contemporary concerns such as famous cosmetics brands (R7) or high-end and budget beauty products (R8).

Expertise in cosmetics, professional background, and work experience in the relevant domain are considered other three important attributes of beauty influencers. Specifically, R2, R5, R7, R9, and R13 state that they trust and keep following certain influencers because of their background as dermatologists and many years of working for big cosmetics companies or famous celebrities. Along with these respondents, R1, R6, and R12 also choose beauty influencers to follow based on how knowledgeable they are about ingredients constituting beauty products, such as what the ingredients are and how they work on different types of skin.
“All of the influencers I follow are dermatologists.” – R2

“HannahOlala used to work as a brand manager for many high-end cosmetics brands in the US for many years. Then, she moved back to Vietnam and established a company specializing in distributing cosmetics. In addition to her work experience, she also studied dermatology, making her shared information credible.” – R5

It is also noteworthy that appearance is one of the deciding attributes for the informants to consider whether to follow a beauty personality or not. In fact, R1 and R12 said that they are attracted to their favorite influencers’ beautiful faces and flawless skin while R9 and R13 stated that they like their favorite figures’ make-up looks. Influencers’ motive for making contents is also another point of concern for some informants. R1, R7, R12, and R13 favor influencers who give honest reviews of products they have used and create contents for the sake of their viewers rather than for their own financial gains from advertising.

“If there is a product specifically for a certain type of skin but HannahOlala’s skin is not for that, she will ask her assistants or relatives to use the product and then give honest reviews of it.” – R7

“I feel like Mai Van Trang makes contents for helping others to improve their appearance rather than for profits from advertisements.” – R12

From this discussion, it is evident that audiences follow beauty influencers for various reasons. They could start following influencers for their physical attractiveness, charisma in delivering contents, or expertise in cosmetics. Then, they keep supporting the influencers because such personalities produce useful contents for them and give honest reviews of products.

4.4. The impact of influencers on audiences’ cosmetics brand choices

Influencers have several impacts on the informants’ cosmetics brand choices. For instance, R11 and R12 say that influencers’ contents are significantly helpful sources of information for them when they start their journey of improving their appearance. Particularly, influencers help them in choosing suitable and affordable cosmetics for their personal conditions as well as instructing them on how to use
beauty products step by step. On a similar note, R1, R4, R5, and R9 learn how to best use beauty products from influencers. Specifically, R1 stated that they learned how to choose proper lipstick colors for each skin tone from Changmakeup while R4 learned how to mix and match eyeshadow colors and choose suitable make-up styles for events from Soming. Likewise, R9 received many tips for selecting appropriate cosmetics for each skin type from Cong Chua Dong whereas R5 learned how to use acids safely to enhance their skin condition.

“When started using cosmetics, I did not have any knowledge about cosmetics or products which I should buy either. Thus, I looked for contents about recommended cosmetics items for beginners and then followed the influencers’ advice.” – R12

“Back then, I was afraid of using acids for beauty purposes. When I viewed contents by Cassandra Bankson and HannahOlala, I became knowledgeable about how to use acids to enhance skin conditions. They presented scientific evidence to prove that using acids is good for skin, which convinced me to try acid products.” – R5

In addition to being able to choose the right beauty products for themselves, the interviewees also deepen their knowledge of cosmetics thanks to influencers. Indeed, the influencers not only talk about the utility of the promoted products but also give information about the origins and the ingredients’ uses (R1, R5, R7, R9, R10, and R13). Regarding R2, they say that influencers made them aware that except for sunscreens, cosmeceuticals do not have any outstanding benefits compared to normal cosmetics; therefore, they are not enticed by products which are advertised as cosmeceuticals or being dermatologically tested. Similarly, R9 stated that since following Cong Chua Dong, they have chosen products by reading their lists of ingredients rather than by the popularity of brands. On a different note, other interviewees stated that they get to know newly released beauty items in the market (R11) or even affordable but effective products thanks to influencers (R1, R6, and R12).

“Back then, I did not do any research into active elements, so I often used popular Korean cosmetics brands like Innisfree or The Body Shop. When I started to view contents by Cong Chua Dong, whose
approach to choosing cosmetics is by focusing on active elements, I began considering the ingredients of products instead of their brand names when shopping for cosmetics.” – R9

“Back then, Changmakeup often uploaded videos about affordable lipsticks for students, which was very useful for me.” – R1

In fact, some informants reported considering switching to a new cosmetics brand because of an influencer. For instance, R3 intended to buy MAC and Marc Jacobs’ lipsticks because of Changmakeup. R3 explained that in the video promoting these brands, Changmakeup utilizes good lighting to feature the products, tests the products on her full lips as well as providing details about their colors and textures. Likewise, R5 wanted to try new make-up products promoted by Michelle Phan and Ho Ngoc Ha because such products have attractive packaging and look great on the influencers’ faces. R5 further stated that such figures’ credibility and reputation from many years of working in the beauty industry also motivated them to try the products. However, R5 could not buy the items since they were not available for sale in the respondent’s area.

On a similar note, R4, R8, and R9 sought to try new cosmetics after seeing many posts about the products by their favorite influencers. R4 and R9 further explained that their favorite beauty bloggers not only look good with the products but also instruct their audiences on how to do different make-up looks with those items. However, R9 has not bought them yet because such products are quite expensive while R4 had to wait until an abroad trip since the promoted product was not available in their country. From this discussion, it is evident that influencers’ credibility, reputation, content, appearance, expertise in cosmetics, quality of images, and posting frequency could all have an impact on audiences’ cosmetics purchase intentions.

“The way the influencer applied eyeshadow and presented the palette made me want to buy it. She uploads many posts to show how to create different eyeshadow looks, mix and match colors, and choose proper eyeshadow shades for specific events. I liked all of her make-up looks in those posts, so I bought the eyeshadow palette on a later trip to Korea.” – R4
From this section, it is obvious that influencers have various impacts on their audiences. Indeed, they not only show viewers how to choose the right beauty items and how to use them effectively, but they also provide detailed explanations of ingredients, helping broaden viewers’ knowledge of cosmetics. Online personalities could further increase consumers’ purchase intention through their appearance, credibility, or blogging frequency. In fact, consumers’ desire to buy beauty items could be heightened by their trust in the influencers’ reviews of the products and their effectiveness through posts on social media channels.

4.5. Attributes of influencers successfully making audiences switch cosmetics brands

Expertise in cosmetics is one of the most influential attributes of influencers that make audiences switch cosmetics brands (R1, R2, R5, R6, R7, R9, R10, R12, and R13). This attribute could be manifested through the thorough explanation of ingredients (R6, R9, and R12), comparison of the promoted products with others (R9), or presentation of the pros and cons of the products (R2, R4, R10, and R12) as well as scientific evidence for any statements (R5). Credibility is another important quality of influencers that causes their viewers to change cosmetics brands (R6, R9, R11, and R12). For R9, influencers’ credibility is expressed through their background in cosmetics and understanding of the components of beauty products. On the other hand, R8 and R11 assess influencers’ credibility by their reputation while R12 bases it on their own experience of the products recommended by the influencers. In other words, if the promoted products do not meet their expectations, they will not trust the influencers that recommend such products anymore.

“Since the contents might affect their reputation, influencers tend to make detailed and accurate contents to avoid any damage to their reputation.” – R11

“Since I used and was then content with the products introduced by those influencers, they are credible to me, making me willing to try other products recommended by them.” – R12
The ability to produce quality contents is also essential in making consumers switch beauty brands. Apart from crucial sections such as the pros and cons of the products and explanations of components, several informants also follow cosmetics brand recommendations by beauty gurus who illustrate how to best use the products (R1, R4, R5, R9, and R13), provide proof of using the promoted products (R10, R11, and R12) as well as demonstrating their effectiveness (R7, R11, and R13). In the case of R7, they further prefer influencers’ contents which feature expert guests who give the audiences more valuable information about the promoted products. In fact, they reported trying Bobbi Brown’s cushion after watching HannahOlala’s livestream with Bobbi Brown’s brand manager. On the other hand, some informants like contents containing little to no advertisement (R1, R8, and R11) and introducing affordable products to them (R2, R6, R10, R11, and R12).

Apart from contents, the interviewees further take notice of influencers’ content delivery. While R8 and R10 like beauty figures who have appealing and convincing manners of speech, R3 and R7 favor those who are adept at using lighting to present the products truthfully. Especially for lipstick products, some informants pay attention to the way that influencers demonstrate the colors and textures on their skin (R1, R3, and R8). On the other hand, several other interviewees like influencers who are honest in their reviews of promoted products (R1, R3, and R13) as well as understanding consumers’ needs (R1, R8, and R13). Regarding physical appearance, both R2 and R3 reported trying new products after noticing their favorite influencers’ appearance improvement upon using them. The frequency of content posting is also considered an attribute that might cause consumers to change cosmetics brands. R2 and R11 said that they decided to try the new product because they saw the influencers use the products regularly as well as their improved appearance through many posts.

“I see the influencers usually use Vaseline and their skin is really beautiful. In addition, the product is cheap, so why not give it a try?” – R2

“When influencers repurchase a product and use it for a long time, I usually tend to try it.” – R11
From these points, it is noticeable that influencers can cause consumers to switch cosmetics brands in various ways. The most popular approach employed by influencers is maintaining attractive appearances to prove the effectiveness of promoted products. Through their contents, influencers should provide evidence of experiencing the promoted products as well as giving thorough explanations of ingredients to show their expertise in cosmetics. This will lead to an increase in influencers' credibility, encouraging consumers to change beauty brands.

4.6. Audiences' perception of the impact of several influencers’ attributes on their cosmetics brand choices

4.6.1. Appearance

Most of the respondents consider physical looks an important attribute of influencers in shaping their cosmetics brand choices. While R4, R8, R9, R10, and R13 stated that influencers should have attractive facial appearances in general, R2, R5, R6, R7, R11, and R12 clearly specified that influencers just need to have beautiful skin to prove the effectiveness of the promoted products since these informants use and care about skincare products more than make-up. Specifically, influencers should have great skin when promoting skincare products (R9), whereas those who advertise make-up items should have nice make-up looks (R2, R3, and R9).

“We all like influencers with beautiful appearances, don’t we? Appearance also affects our buying decisions since we usually have this illusion that we will become beautiful like the influencers when we use the product.” – R4

Skincare influencers must have beautiful skin because they have to succeed in taking care of their skin to make the audiences believe them. When it comes to make-up influencers, I view Haley Kim’s contents because I desire to have that stunning appearance just like how she looks in her video thumbnails.” – R9

On the other hand, R12 stated that if influencers have some skin issues and can give understandable excuses for such problems, then they will not mind their appearance; however, the credibility of such influencers to them will decrease if they
promote skincare products. It is noteworthy that R13 follows Hung Van Ngo (HVN), a make-up artist who usually does make-up for others rather than on himself; thus, they often pay attention to the appearance of those HVN does make-up for instead of his own. Only R1 reported not considering appearance an important attribute of influencers. For them, influencers just need to show their appearance before and after using the promoted products to demonstrate the effectiveness of the products.

“Actually, I do not pay much attention to appearance. If it is a make-up tutorial, then I really want to see the difference between the influencers’ natural face before make-up and their face afterwards, so I can see how it actually works” — R1

In general, influencers’ appearances could affect consumers’ cosmetics brand choices. Particularly, consumers tend to trust cosmetics suggestions by those who possess great physical appeal since they usually regard influencers’ appearance as the outcome of using the recommended products. In other words, having good physical appearances allows influencers to increase their credibility as they can prove the effectiveness of the promoted products.

4.6.2. Content delivery

Content delivery is also an influential attribute of influencers in forming audiences’ cosmetics brand choices. Indeed, several informants reported usually paying attention to influencers’ manner of speech. Particularly, R1 likes influencers with mellifluous voices, which their claims sound more credible to them, while R13 prefers those communicating messages to audiences like a friend, making them feel like having a close connection with the influencers. Similarly, R8 favors personalities who have a nice communication style; they are also against those who speak in an affected or exaggerated voice. On a different note, R2, R10, and R12 like influencers who are articulate with their messages. R7, R10, and R12 prefer those who present information in a clear and easy-to-understand way. Likewise, R5, R9, and R12 favor figures who are straight to the point. R9 stated that influencers talking too much will generate a feeling that they are advertising products rather than providing objective reviews. Similarly, lengthy talks will also distract them from the main topic of cosmetics, which is the only knowledge that they want to gain from the influencers.
“Back then, I followed Chau Bui, who usually made me feel that she and I had many things in common as we were friends. Thus, I was appealed to her videos which also introduced new products.” – R13

“Concerning make-up influencers, they only need to do make-up rather than chatting too much.” – R9

On the other hand, R10 likes influencers who have a good sense of humor and create fun contents. Meanwhile, R11 has a preference for personalities who show their enthusiasm for cosmetics and support for their communities while R6 has a fondness for those who are transparent about their partnerships with brands when their contents are sponsored by businesses. For R3 and R4, rather than focusing on influencers’ ways of speech, they pay attention to their ways of displaying the products. For example, R3 even reported buying a beauty product because of its attractive packaging in the influencer’s video. Along with R7 and R12, R3 also likes influencers who are proficient at using lighting to show the actual effectiveness of the promoted products on their skin.

“I like influencers who speak clearly, fluently, gracefully, and humorously. But if influencers are only humorous, they will fail to show earnestness in conveying messages about the products. Instead, they should combine humor, informativity, and knowledgeability about the products.” – R10

“I think influencers’ attitude towards the products is also expressed through their content delivery. They should show their satisfaction and love towards the products rather than giving generic or perfunctory compliments for them.” – R11

From this section, it is rational to conclude that influencers’ content delivery could have an impact on consumers’ selection of cosmetics brands. In particular, audiences tend to trust cosmetics advice from personalities who have a captivating, intimate, or straightforward manner of speech since their opinions on beauty items seem more convincing. Apart from the way of speaking, influencers’ passion for cosmetics and honesty about sponsored contents also help enhance the credibility of influencers, reinforcing audiences’ trust in their cosmetics brand choices and suggestions. On a different note, good lighting and product display could also
encourage consumers to buy the promoted products since this technique could highlight the appealing packaging as well as accentuating the improvement in influencers’ appearance after using the products.

4.6.3. Credibility

Credibility is another powerful attribute of influencers on consumers’ cosmetics brand choices. Indeed, R2, R8, and R12 usually use beauty products introduced by personalities who have knowledge of cosmetics, especially the chemical ingredients of beauty products. Particularly for R8, influencers appear more credible to them if they have faced similar skin problems. Otherwise, influencers should give a disclosure in advance indicating that the audiences might have different skin types from them, which may cause the effectiveness of the product to vary. On the other hand, R2, R5, and R9 put more trust in those who have acquired their cosmetics expertise through their academic background and own prestigious certifications such as board-certified dermatologists than in those who are simply famous in the industry. Conversely, rather than taking notice of influencers’ academic background, R11 assesses influencers’ credibility through their years of experience using cosmetics and frequency of attending industry events. Meanwhile, R4 and R8 are more concerned about the influencers’ overall reputation. Specifically, they prefer those who have no scandal and unproblematic personal life.

For R3 and R12, credible influencers are those showing the pros and cons of the promoted products rather than just praising such items. Especially for R12, they find influencers more trustworthy if they convey messages directly and articulately. Like R9, this informant also considers the number of followers to assess credibility; particularly, those who have at least 100 000 followers (celebrity, macro, and mega influencers) appear more credible to them. Conversely, rather than focusing on the number of followers of influencers, R9 evaluates their credibility through their audiences’ experience of the promoted products in the comment sections. Beauty influencers are even more credible to R9 if they are referred by those who have knowledge of cosmetics and great appearance after using products recommended by those influencers. On a different note, R13 assesses influencers’ credibility through the quality of their contents. They tend to trust influencers who produce professional and quality contents, which should be well-structured as well as
providing sufficient essential information to the audiences. R13 also evaluates influencers’ credibility via the advertised products. If an influencer promotes products that do not support beautification, they will lose trust in them and might not watch their content anymore.

“If an influencer is followed by many people or if many people say that the product is effective for them in the comment section, then I tend to trust the influencer’s review of the product more.” — R9

Other informants, namely R7, R8, and R12, reported being convinced by influencers who are honest about their experiences with the promoted products. Specifically, such informants prefer influencers who give evidence for their experiences such as by live-streaming (R7) or showing before-and-after photos of them using the products (R12). R8 and R12 have more trust in those who use the promoted products for a long period of time rather than just testing them on their skin for one-off contents. Similarly, R3, R6, and R10 tend to trust influencers who produce informative contents for viewers over those that create contents mainly for advertisement purposes. It is worth noting that contents containing many advertisements gradually cause some audiences to lose trust in personalities. In fact, R1 and R10 stated that influencers’ credibility has almost no impact on their cosmetics brand choice since they think that influencers create contents only for advertisement purposes and therefore will only compliment the advertised products. Regarding skincare influencers, some individuals release many skincare contents within a short period of time, making it difficult for R1 to trust their reviews since they believe that it should take quite a long time to see the effectiveness of skincare products.

“Sometimes, I doubt whether influencers actually give honest reviews of products when they are financially sponsored by brands. To convince me, influencers have to show that the products they recommend are for the best interest of the audiences in addition to their own financial gains. Only when I can feel that through their videos do I consider buying or trying those products.” — R10

From this discussion, it is noticeable that consumers’ cosmetics brand choices could be influenced by online personalities’ credibility. Consumers are likely to follow
cosmetics suggestions by figures who provide honest reviews of beauty products or have profound knowledge of cosmetics, credible background in cosmetics, high numbers of followers, or years of experience with beauty products since consumers often regard such influencers as trustworthy sources of information about cosmetics. It is also worth mentioning that influencers’ credibility is rather susceptible to sponsored contents. Indeed, if influencers place many advertisements in their content or only praise the advertised products rather than impartially provide their pros and cons, they might lose trust from their audiences as well as discouraging the audiences’ intentions of buying such products.

4.6.4. Expertise

Consumers’ cosmetics brand choices can also be shaped by influencers’ expertise, as they tend to use products promoted by personalities who claim to be knowledgeable about the ingredients of beauty products (R1, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, and R12), explain how the products work on different skin types clearly (R12), state the side effects of the products honestly (R7), as well as warning them about harmful product combinations (R1). Influencers who have expertise in cosmetics and dermatology further help viewers verify information provided by brands (R7) and might sound more convincing to certain audiences (R10). Therefore, some informants also check influencers’ expertise in cosmetics or dermatology through their academic background (R5 and R9), work experience (R10), or even scientific evidence in their contents (R2 and R9).

“Mai Van Trang is very knowledgeable about chemical ingredients, how such components work on skin, and which products should not be used simultaneously in order to avoid acne breakouts.” – R1

Influencers do not have to be dermatologists but at least they need to understand basic knowledge about chemical ingredients as well as the essential parts of a certain product. For example, they need to know which chemical ingredients are needed in sunscreen. Influencers have to thoroughly understand such information and break it down in an easy-to-understand way for the audience.” – R12
For some other respondents, influencers’ expertise matters to them only in certain cases. For instance, when F8 faces serious issues such as acne breakouts, they will watch contents by personalities who are knowledgeable about the chemical ingredients of cosmetics. Conversely, when they have small skin problems or just want to maintain their skin conditions, they will view contents by those who do not necessarily explain components of the promoted products to audiences. Similarly, influencers’ expertise is only important to R3 when they are watching contents about high-end products, as they are not so concerned about it when viewing contents about budget cosmetics. However, they say that they still prefer personalities who have great knowledge of cosmetics since they find such figures more credible than those who do not.

“I do not have sufficient expertise to find out whether the influencers are telling the truth or not. However, if the influencers can demonstrate the relevant knowledge in their reviews, I will feel more confident in choosing that item, especially when it is an expensive one.”—R3

On the other hand, some informants do not care about influencers’ expertise at all (R4 and R11). Particularly, R4 stated that they believe the information that influencers convey to audiences in their contents is mostly provided by brands rather than from their own gained knowledge; therefore, they pay more attention to their content delivery rather than their expertise in cosmetics. On a different note, R11 said that they just watch these contents to see whether the products are effective on the influencers. They also think that consumers should do research on the products themselves since no one has the exact same health conditions.

“In my opinion, expertise in choosing a product depends on our own research rather than the influencers. Influencers are just the ones to show how effective the product is. Thus, I watch their contents just for their reviews of products. In terms of expertise, I would trust other individuals over influencers.”—R11

Overall, although influencers’ expertise does not have any impact on the cosmetics brand choices of a few customers, it still plays an important role in the consideration of beauty brand switching by most consumers. Rather than personalities who simply know which beauty products are good through experience, those who have
expertise in cosmetics know how chemical ingredients actually work to help improve skin conditions, boosting their audiences’ confidence in their recommendations. Likewise, when encountering severe skin problems, consumers also prefer to listen to cosmetics suggestions from personalities who are experts in the field since such influencers usually present reasons and scientific evidence as the basis for their advice.

4.6.5. Content

Content is also an attribute of influencers that play a crucial role in forming consumers’ cosmetics brand choices. Indeed, some respondents say that influencers should have a clear content structure that contains an introduction of brands, a presentation of features of products, and application of the products on the skin so that they can easily follow the messages about brands and products that the influencers want to convey (R3 and R12). On the other hand, some other respondents prefer compelling and fun contents (R4, R7, and R10). R10 further stated that influencers’ contents have to not only be interesting to engage them but also need to be informative enough to persuade them to buy products from brands. Conversely, some informants do not like contents with entertaining elements (R2, R5, and R6). Instead, they prefer influencers to focus on sharing valuable information about beautification with their viewers rather than trying to sell the promoted products (R2, R5, R6, R9, and R12).

*The contents which rigidly follow the scientific style make me lose my interest in reading. If the contents are conveyed wittily or pragmatically, then I am more likely to be influenced.*” – R4

“I prefer contents that are straightforward and focused. The contents do not need to contain humorous or amusing elements to keep me engaged.” – R5

On the other hand, R7 stated that they usually follow cosmetics brands endorsed by influencers who often talk about ingredients and utility of products as well as presenting links and images to illustrate their points. In a slightly different way, R3 and R12 regularly trust cosmetics brand suggestions by influencers who compare and contrast different products in the same category while R9 trusts those who do
not overstate the promoted products. In this way, influencers appear more objective and convincing to audiences. It is also worth mentioning that before-after images are one of the most effective forms of contents that make influencers’ claims more credible. Indeed, almost half of the respondents enjoy viewing before-after contents to see the actual effectiveness of the promoted products (R1, R5, R6, R7, R11, and R12). Other respondents, namely R6, R7, R9, and R12 find influencers’ contents credible if they contain little to no advertising since they believe that advertising might diminish the objectivity in the influencers’ opinions on the promoted products.

Apart from the core messages, respondents also pay attention to how influencers title their contents. In fact, 5 out of 13 interviewees prefer contents with straightforward titles (R2, R5, R7, R8, R9, and R11). Only one respondent, namely R1, reported usually being drawn to sensationalist titles such as “Top 10 budget makeup brands that actually work” although they already know that the underlying motive is to increase traffic to the influencers’ platforms. In addition to titles, R11 also takes heed of the formats of influencers’ contents. They prefer videos to other types of formats such as texts or images since they find that videos convey more information and show the influencers’ experience more vividly than other formats.

To recapitulate briefly, audiences are inclined to follow cosmetics brand choices of influencers whose contents are informative in terms of explanations of chemical components of beauty products, comparisons between similar products, and provision of evidence for the effectiveness of the promoted products. Audiences also trust cosmetics brand choices of influencers whose contents contain little to no advertising to guarantee a high level of impartiality in their judgements of beauty products. Most viewers further prefer contents with straightforward titles and clear structures so they could easily get the gist of messages that the influencers want to convey.

4.6.6. Interactivity

Influencers’ interactivity affects the cosmetics brand choices of most of the interviewees. Indeed, R4 and R13 stated that if influencers keep mentioning a product while interacting with the audience, they tend to remember the name of the product and might purchase it in the future. On the other hand, R7, R8, R9, and R10 reported finding influencers with high interaction rates more credible; thus, these
respondents usually follow such influencers’ cosmetics brand choices. Concerning the assessment of influencers’ credibility through interaction with viewers, R7 regularly views the comment sections to see if the influencers are honest in their reviews or give accurate information on the promoted products while R9 often notices whether the influencers give personal advice to their followers. If R9 observes that the influencers are supportive to their audiences, they will feel more motivated to buy products promoted by them.

Similarly, influencers who are more interactive with their viewers make R10 feel closer to them. In other words, they regard such influencers as friends who are recommending a product to them, which makes these influencers more trustworthy, and their brand suggestions as well by extension. For R9 and R10, if influencers are not interactive with their audiences, they feel like such influencers are just selling the product rather than recommending it to audiences for their best interest. In the case of R8, it is rational to infer that they tend to trust cosmetics brand suggestions by personalities who have high engagement rates, since they said that influencers’ interactivity is closely connected with their reputation.

“Compared to influencers who maintain a distance between themselves and their audiences, when introducing products, influencers who have good interactions with their audiences feel closer and more reliable to me.” – R10

On the other hand, influencers’ interactivity does not affect the cosmetics brand choices of some informants (R1, R2, R3, R5, and R11). R1 stated that they understand that influencers are busy so they might not have time to respond to all questions from audiences. Conversely, R2 said that they almost never view interactions between influencers and their fans, as they believe that each person has their own different experience with a product and thus, it is unnecessary for them to view others’ opinions on the product. On a different note, although R3, R5, and R11 stated that influencers’ interactivity does not have any impact on their cosmetics brand choices, they still prefer to see good interactions between influencers and their fans to know that the influencers are friendly and supportive. Like these three respondents, R6 and R12 also prefer personalities with great interactions with their followers. However, influencers’ interactivity only affects R6’s
cosmetics brand choices when they themselves interact with the influencers. Likewise, beauty gurus’ interactivity only influences R12’s brand choices when the public figures receive strong negative reception from the audiences. Otherwise, it does not impact their purchase decisions.

“If there are more good interactions between influencers and audiences, these interactions will not significantly impact my cosmetics brand choices. However, if the contents get a lot of bad reactions from audiences, such as dislikes, then such reactions will definitely affect my purchase decision.” – R12

To sum up, consumers’ beauty brand choices could be impacted by influencers’ interactivity in several ways. Indeed, most consumers tend to follow cosmetics suggestions by personalities who are highly communicative and supportive to their audiences since such influencers are often perceived as more trustworthy than those who are not. Influencers also can encourage audiences to buy the advertised products by repeatedly mentioning such items when interacting with audiences since this practice increases the probability that consumers will recall the products on their next shopping occasion.

4.7. The extent of the impact of influencers on consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands

6 out of 13 informants stated that influencers make up 70-80% of their consideration of changing cosmetics brands (R7, R8, R9, R11, R12, and R13), while 3 informants said that influencers impact 50-60% of their brand switching decision (R2, R3, and R4). On a similar note, R10 stated that well-known figures affect 30-40% of their intention of changing brands whereas R1 asserted that online personalities currently do not affect their brand switching decision at all. In the case of R5, they reported that influencers impact 70-80% of their consideration of changing skincare brands while such figures only affect 30-40% of their decision to switch makeup brands. Likewise, R6 stated that they completely trust and follow influencers’ cosmetics brand suggestions (100%) if they are beauty experts; otherwise, personalities only account for 50% of their decision.
Apart from influencers, there are other factors that have an impact on consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands. Several respondents reported viewing other consumers’ opinions about the products in addition to influencers’ contents. Such opinions could be from friends (R9 and R12) or other users on online platforms (R6, R10, and R11). Some informants also do their own research and verify the information in the influencers' contents (R6, R10, and R13). The availability and price of products are two other factors affecting consumers’ brand switching decisions. In fact, the products introduced by influencers are not always available in the living areas of consumers; therefore, they often choose alternatives that have similar ingredients and effects to the ones the influencers recommend (R2 and R5). Likewise, if the recommended products are expensive, consumers cannot afford to switch brands (R4, R7, R8, and R10).

Personal experience with products is also a factor influencing consumers’ intention of changing beauty labels (R3, R10, R12, and R13). If consumers have good experiences of using other products by the promoted brands, they might try new products of the same brands. Personal skin condition is also an influential factor in consumers’ purchase decisions (R3, R8, and R12), in that if the promoted products are not suitable for consumers’ skin, there is no reason for consumers to change their current products. Regarding R7 in particular, they also consider the reputation of beauty brands before making brand switching decisions. The more popular the new brands are, the more willing they are to switch brands.

4.8. Foremost attributes of influencers making consumers switch cosmetic brands

The majority of the informants consider honesty and credibility the most influential attributes of influencers on their cosmetics brand switching decisions. Particularly, R1, R3, R8, R9, and R12 tend to follow cosmetics brand suggestions by personalities who invest time in experiencing the promoted products and then give honest opinions on their experience, while cosmetics brand switching decisions of R5, R6, R7, R8, and R13 are likely to be affected by figures who have great credibility. Following the two aforementioned attributes, content is also regarded as a powerful quality of influencers that could make consumers change beauty brands. In fact, R3, R4, R11, and R12 usually trust cosmetics brand choices by figures who
instruct viewers how to best use products, present their pros and cons, as well as demonstrating the effectiveness of the products. R12 further emphasizes that they prefer video-formatted contents to those containing only images.

Expertise and content delivery are other influential attributes of influencers that could make audiences consume a new cosmetics brand. Indeed, while R2, R5, and R7 usually follow advice from personalities who are experts in dermatology or cosmetics, R4, R11, and R13 often buy beauty products suggested by figures who have great communication skills. On a different note, R1 and R9 pay attention to influencers’ motives in making contents. They often trust cosmetics brand choices by those who express enthusiasm for sharing information about cosmetics and helping others improve their appearance rather than for personal financial gains. On the other hand, R10 perceives interactivity as the most influential attribute of influencers that might cause them to consume a new cosmetics brand whereas R8 examines influencers’ reputation when considering switching to a different brand.
V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Main findings

Overall, the empirical data provide rather comprehensive answers to the two sub-questions of this thesis. The answers to each sub-question are concisely given as follows.

a) Which attributes of influencers can affect consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands?

Honesty, credibility, expertise, content, content delivery, interactivity, reputation, blogging motive, understanding of consumers’ needs, appearance, and blogging frequency are attributes of influencers which are found to be able to impact consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands. Of them, honesty, credibility, and content are the most three influential ones.

b) How do influencers leverage such attributes to make consumers change cosmetics brands?

Audiences tend to trust cosmetics brand choices by influencers who demonstrate honesty in their reviews of products as well as having great credibility over those who do not. They are also inclined to follow cosmetics brand suggestions by personalities who have expertise in cosmetics or create informative contents since such figures help them learn how to best use beauty products as well as gaining a thorough understanding of chemical ingredients. Likewise, influencers who have good content delivery can make their claims more convincing while those with good reputations and interactivity can boost their overall credibility.

In addition to such influencers, viewers also follow cosmetics advice from those who have beautiful appearances or want to help others improve their appearance. If influencers frequently post contents about a product, the audiences are likely to remember the product as well as believing that influencers use it regularly to enhance their look, which could motivate them to buy the product in their next shopping experience. While great appearances can show the effectiveness of the promoted products, selfless motives in making contents can make influencers’ statements about cosmetics more persuasive.
Thus, it is evident that influencers leverage plenty of attributes to enhance their credibility with audiences, which makes them trust influencers’ cosmetics brand choices and then switch to a new brand as a result.

5.2. Discussion of findings

5.2.1. The impact of influencers’ appearance and blogging frequency on consumers’ cosmetics purchase intention

Although appearance is one of the important attributes of influencers that shape audiences’ cosmetics brand choices, it is not a decisive factor in making audiences switch beauty brands. This finding parallels that of a study by AlFarraj et al. (2021), which finds that influencers’ physical attractiveness does not have any significant impact on cosmetics buying intention. Indeed, in this study, only 3 out of 13 respondents (R4, R8, and R9) reported considering trying new products while another 3 (R2, R3, and R11) actually switched to new cosmetics brands because of influencers' appearance. It is also worth noting that 4 out of the aforementioned 6 respondents (R2, R4, R9, and R11) reported wanting to change cosmetics brands after viewing many posts by influencers, implying that blogging frequency is a stimulus that makes customers switch brands.

In fact, R4 and R9 stated that influencers' frequent repost of a product makes them remember the product for a long time and tend to purchase it when the product is available for sale in their living area or when the need arises. Thus, it is evident that influencers are trying to make audiences fall into the availability bias, which refers to the inclination to use the information that is the easiest to retrieve to make decisions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). In this case, instead of making a long video or writing a long post about a product, influencers often create short contents about it, usually about different ways to use the product. This practice not only makes the influencers’ contents refreshing to their audiences but also helps viewers remember the product, increasing their purchase intention.
5.2.2. The impact of influencers’ honesty, credibility, and expertise on consumers’ cosmetic purchase intention

In this research, honesty is found to be the most influential attribute of influencers that could make consumers switch cosmetics brands. Consumers usually follow cosmetics brand suggestions by influencers who invest much time in experiencing the promoted products (R1, R3, R7, R8, R9, and R12), appear sincere in their opinions on such items (R1, R3, R7, R12, and R13), give accurate information about brands (R7), as well as being transparent about their brand sponsorship (R6). This discovery further supports that in a paper by Lee et al. (2021), which shows that both a sponsorship disclosure and honest reviews of the promoted products have favorable impacts on buying intention. The paper also finds that when influencers use either a non-sponsorship statement or an honesty claim, the former has a more powerful impact on purchase intention than the latter. Particularly, when influencers use both types of statements in their contents, they significantly improve their credibility (ibid). However, non-sponsorship statements are revealed not to surpass having no statement about sponsorship at all in motivating consumers to buy the promoted products (ibid).

Along with honesty, credibility is also the most influential attribute of personalities that might cause consumers to change beauty brands. This finding further fortifies prior studies proving that figures’ credibility has a favorable influence on consumers’ buying intention (Saima & Khan, 2020; Khan et al., 2022). On a different note, when asked about criteria to assess influencers’ credibility, the informants reported considering academic background or work experience in cosmetics or dermatology (R2, R5, and R9), knowledge of ingredients of beauty products (R2, R8, and R12), similarity in skin condition (R8), relevant brand partnership (R13), evidence for using the promoted products (R7, R8, and R12), audiences’ feedback (R12), motives for making contents (R3, R6, and R10), as well as reputation from personal life (R4 and R8) and the number of followers (R12).

It is surprising that no one regards appearance as an aspect of influencers’ credibility, especially in the context of the beauty industry. However, when being asked about the importance of personalities’ appearance to their cosmetics brand choices, 11 out of 13 respondents state that influencers should have great appearances to prove the effectiveness of the promoted products, implying that
audiences also consider appearance an essential facet of credibility. Therefore, this study’s findings of elements constituting credibility are similar to those by Ohanian (1990) and AlFarraj et al. (2021), as those studies ascribe influencers’ credibility to the three principal elements, namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. While attractiveness is analogous to appearance, expertise can parallel the inclusion of academic background, work experience, and knowledge. On the other hand, trustworthiness can correspond to similarity, usage evidence, followers’ feedback, and motives.

It is also worth noting that the tactic of using prestigious titles such as dermatologist, skincare specialist, or medical aesthetician is also perceived as the employment of authority bias to increase influencers’ credibility and impact consumers’ purchase decisions. Introduced by Milgram in 1961, authority bias has been known as an inclination to be impacted by the opinions of individuals who are authority figures (Milgram & Gudehus, 1978). In this case, it is evident that many influencers use authoritative titles to emphasize their expertise in cosmetics with the aim of convincing audiences of all their claims as well as motivating them to switch cosmetics brands. Although there still exists prudent viewers who verify statements by influencers, it is undeniable that authority bias is a popular and effective technique that many personalities use to boost their credibility and persuade audiences to buy the promoted products.

Expertise is found to be the third most important quality of influencers among the respondents; however, it is the most popular attribute impacting their consideration of switching cosmetic brands. In this study, 9 out of 13 respondents reported changing beauty brands because of influencers’ expertise. This finding also reinforces a study by Botelho (2019), which demonstrates that personalities’ expertise has a strong positive impact on consumers’ buying intention while challenging a study by AlFarraj et al. (2021), which reveals that expertise does not significantly affect consumers’ purchase decision. The difference between the findings might be due to demographic distinctions between the studies. In fact, while 85.7% of the sample in the latter research consists of people over 24, this group only accounts for 45.2% in the former study. Thus, it could be implied that most of the consumers in the latter study have more years of using cosmetics, so their purchase decisions are mainly affected by their own experience and knowledge.
rather than those of influencers. Conversely, the majority of the consumers in the former research as well as in this study have less experience in cosmetics, so they tend to rely on influencers' expertise to choose appropriate beauty items.

5.2.3. The impact of influencers’ content, content delivery, and interactivity on consumers’ cosmetics purchase intention

Following honesty and credibility, content is the next most influential attribute of influencers in making consumers switch beauty brands. This finding supports a similar one in an article by Aggd and Ahmad (2021), which reveals that these online figures’ content has significant impacts on consumers’ buying intention, either directly or indirectly. In the direct way, beauty gurus give audiences information about brands and features of their products (R3 and R12) as well as offering them a pool of alternatives across different price ranges (R7 and R12), helping them reduce time spent in researching products and simplify the selection process. In the indirect way, these personalities enhance their credibility and present their honesty in reviewing beauty products by inviting expert guests to collaborate in their contents (R7) or through before-after images, demonstrating the effectiveness of the promoted products (R1, R5, R6, R7, R11, and R12). It is worth mentioning that the practice of featuring expert guests in contents is also considered the employment of authority bias, which is already mentioned in the previous section.

Content delivery is also an important attribute of influencers that could increase audiences’ intention of switching cosmetics brands. Claims by influencers who possess an attractive voice, a compelling manner of speech, or fluency in conveying messages sound more convincing than those by influencers who do not. In other words, content delivery helps increase influencers’ credibility, which could in turn increase consumers’ purchase intention. Likewise, influencers who present information in a concise and easy-to-understand way could help audiences reduce time spent in researching products and expedite the buying process, while figures who showcase the products attractively could motivate impulsive purchases. Thus, it is rational to conclude that influencers’ content delivery has an impact on consumers' purchase intention. This conclusion also reinforces a finding in the research by Es-Safi and Sağlam (2021), which argues that the communication skills of influencers favorably affect consumers’ buying decisions.
Communication skills are not only helpful in making contents but also for interacting with audiences. Good interaction with followers can improve credibility (R7, R8, R9, and R10) and likability (R3, R5, R10, and R11), prove their good motives for making contents (R9 and R10), as well as increasing purchase intention. If influencers keep mentioning a product while interacting with audiences, that product is likely to appear at their top of mind on their next shopping occasion (R4 and R13). This marketing tactic can also be perceived as an example of availability bias, which has been discussed in the previous section. Although this study discovers that influencers’ interactivity could affect the cosmetics brand choices of 6 out of 13 respondents, only one out of them reported considering interactivity the most influential attribute of influencers that makes them switch cosmetics brands. Since the impact of influencers’ interactivity is not well manifested in this study, this study only partially agrees with the findings in papers by Purnamaningsih and Rizkalla (2020) and Li and Peng (2021), which reveal that a high level of interactivity can lead to an increase in purchase intention.

5.2.4. The impact of other factors on consumers’ cosmetics purchase intention

Apart from influencers, consumers’ cosmetics purchase intention is also affected by other factors. As previously mentioned, if the advertised product is not available for sale in the audiences’ living areas, they could not buy it (R2, R4, R5, and R9) and tend to keep consuming the currently used product or look for an alternative. This finding parallels that of an aforementioned study by Keaveney (1995) which discovers that consumers can switch brands because of the unavailability of wanted brands. On the other hand, consumers also consider the price of products (R4, R7, R8, and R10) as well as the reputation of brands (R7) when making cosmetics purchase decisions. These findings further corroborate that of a study by Alhedhaif et al. (2016), which demonstrates that the two aforementioned factors have favorable impacts on consumers’ purchase of beauty items. On a different note, consumers also rely on their own research or knowledge of the promoted products (R2, R3, R6, R10, R12, and R13), read reviews of other users on online platforms (R6, R9, R10, R11, and R12), or ask their friends who have used the products before (R9 and R12). These discoveries support those in papers by Younus et al. (2015),
Ganisasmara and Mani (2020), and Khalid et al. (2021), which find that consumers’ knowledge, online reviews as well as social factors such as friends or family members have a positive influence on consumers’ buying decision.

In case consumers have used other products by the promoted brand, they also consider their past experience with those products when deciding to buy a new product of that brand (R3, R10, R12, and R13). This finding corroborates that of a study by Weisberg et al. (2011) but contradicts another study by Abd Aziz and Abd Wahid (2018). The difference in findings between the two studies might be due to the dissimilar samplings and independent variables. While the former research selected highly skilled employees working at technology firms for the sampling and previous experience, social presence of brand, and brand trust as independent variables, the latter one chose undergraduate students for the sampling and previous experience, perceived ease of consumption, and perceived benefits as independent variables. Thus, it is evident that past experience and brand factors affect workers’ purchase intentions whereas past experience and product attributes do not have significant impacts on students’ buying decisions.

5.3. Revised conceptual framework

The empirical data helps this thesis confirm that attractiveness, credibility, expertise, content, and interactivity of influencers all have an impact on consumers’ consideration of switching cosmetics brands. However, instead of using “attractiveness” to denote both physical look and message conveyance, this study suggests that attractiveness should be separated into appearance and content delivery for greater transparency. In addition to the aforementioned attributes, this study also found other qualities that affect consumers’ intention of changing beauty brands, namely honesty, reputation, blogging motive, and understanding of consumers’ needs. Likewise, factors other than influencers’ attributes were also discovered to have an impact on consumers’ cosmetics purchases. Therefore, a few adjustments to the conceptual framework are suggested as follows.
The adjusted conceptual framework depicts the causal relationship among brand switching, attributes of influencers, namely appearance, content delivery, credibility, expertise, content, interactivity, honesty, blogging motive, blogging frequency, reputation as well as understanding of consumers’ needs, and other factors including social influences (consumer reviews), marketing influences (product availability, product price, and brand reputation), psychological influences (personal experience, personal knowledge), and personal influences (personal skin condition). All of these factors were found to have an impact on consumers’ intention of switching cosmetics brands. It is also worth noting that such factors are also randomly arranged in the conceptual framework regardless of the extent of their impact on brand switching.
5.4. Implications for international business

Although the limited scope of the study, limited resources, and modest experience of the researcher prevent this thesis from reaching significantly well-grounded conclusions, this thesis still proposes several rational implications for businesses targeting young Vietnamese cosmetics consumers to improve their influencer marketing strategies.

One of the most evident recommendations reached by this study is the collaboration with influencers who have great knowledge of cosmetics, as such personalities are considered to have high credibility. The best option is to form partnerships with those who have academic backgrounds or work experience in cosmetics or dermatology. If those individuals are unavailable, brands could collaborate with those who have a good understanding of the chemical ingredients of beauty products. In addition to unproblematic personal lives, the partnered influencers should also have attractive physical looks or at least beautiful skin to demonstrate the effectiveness of the promoted products. As a result, influencers’ credibility is enhanced, which could lead to improvement in customers’ purchase intention.

Regarding influencers’ contents, influencers could consider starting their posts with honesty claims and non-sponsorship claims (if applicable) to increase their credibility. In addition, their contents should contain the following main sections: introduction of brands, features of products, explanation of chemical ingredients of the promoted products, pros and cons of the products, comparison of alternatives, instructions on how to best use the products, and before-after images to provide evidence of actual experience and prove the effectiveness of the products. It is also recommended to take casual photos with products rather than professional ones since the former create a belief that they are truly recommending great products for the sake of the audiences.

In the light of different types of influencers, the safest choice is to collaborate with macro influencers since these individuals have considerable numbers of followers and good interactions with their fans. However, if brands want their products to get noticed by a larger audience, they should partner with celebrity or mega influencers as these figures have greater fanbases than other influencers. To maximize exposure to audiences, brands are further recommended to collaborate with
influencers who release regular contents on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, which are the most popular social media platforms worldwide. On the other hand, if brands want to guarantee the greatest audience engagement or do not have a large budget for influencer marketing, micro or nano influencers are the most reasonable options.

Concerning the employment of availability bias, brands should ask influencers to upload diverse contents about the promoted products frequently, improve interaction with audiences, and increase mentions of the promoted products to enhance their likability as well as consumers' purchase intention. Influencers should also regularly create polls to ask about cosmetics topics their followers are interested in to not only better understand their needs but also to make more relevant contents. Finally, it is suggested that influencers should practice their delivery to have a more compelling voice, fluency in conveying messages, as well as better clarification of chemical ingredients constituting beauty products.

5.5. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this thesis presents several meaningful implications for businesses, there are still some constraints that need to be specified for the purpose of enhancing the quality of future research studying the same issue.

First, although this thesis employed convenience sampling, the aim was to achieve the greatest degree of trust between the researcher and participants as the two parties have known each other for at least three months, allowing the researcher to obtain rich data from the participants. However, it is acknowledged that this sampling approach might cause an underrepresentation of the group of young Vietnamese consumers. Indeed, this study only covers the demographic group from 24 to 31 years old and lacks representation of the 18 to 23 age group. This early-age segment might provide different viewpoints on the impact of influencers on audiences since individuals in this group might have less experience and knowledge of cosmetics compared to those in the later-age groups. Thus, it is suggested that future research should diversify as well as extending the samplings to reach a more reliable generalization for a certain studied segment.
Secondly, while conducting the interviews in the first language of both the interviewees and interviewer guarantees the freedom of expression of ideas as well as understanding between the two parties, this practice caused some difficulties in translating empirical data from Vietnamese to English for scientific purposes. Consequently, the interviewer might have failed to completely capture some expressive nuances in Vietnamese that have no practical equivalent in English. Apart from the researcher’s limited experience in translation between the two languages, there might also be difficulties due to the differences between the two cultures. Hence, to generate more meaningful outcomes, future researchers should pay great attention to the investigation of relationships between cultures and languages if the language used for methodology implementation is different from that used for research reports.

Thirdly, due to the severe impact of the current pandemic, the interviews were not able to be conducted in person but instead virtually, saving time and other resources for both the interviewees and the researcher. However, there were some minor interruptions during the interviews because of internet instability, which might hinder the good flow of information exchanged between the two parties as well as compromising the professionalism of the research. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should conduct in-person interviews to avoid unfavourable connection issues and gather more data from the body language of interviewees. In case researchers face difficulties in carrying out face-to-face interviews, they should be well-versed in internet connection troubleshooting when doing online interviews.

Fourthly, because the informants were asked additional questions to clarify their statements whenever they provided ambiguous or confusing responses during the interviews, this study found it acceptable not to send transcripts of the interviews to the informants for feedback to avoid fatigue for them since they were all busy during the time of this thesis’ completion. However, to enhance the research credibility, future studies should consider recontacting the interviewees to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts. Furthermore, future studies are encouraged to send their interpretations of the transcripts to the participants to reach a higher degree of precision.
In addition to suggestions for improving the research quality, this thesis also calls for further research on several issues. Though influential patterns of influencers’ reputation, blogging motive, and understanding of consumers’ needs on consumers’ purchase intention are found in this study, the contemporary literature still lacks discussion about the topic, which calls for further research on the impact of the three aforementioned factors on consumers’ buying decisions. On the other hand, future research could also consider studying the impact of personal skin condition on consumers’ purchase intention, a phenomenon that has appeared in this study but into which there is an absence of investigations in the contemporary literature.
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APPENDICES

Interview recordings

Interview questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. BACKGROUND QUESTIONS:
   1. Name
   2. Gender
   3. Age
   4. Education
   5. Profession

B. SUBJECT MATTER QUESTIONS:
   i. Brands:
      1. How long have you been using cosmetics?
      2. What kinds of cosmetics do you use? What are the brand names of such products?
      3. Which cosmetic brands do you like? Why do you like them?
      4. When and how do you use cosmetic products? Could you give me some examples?
   ii. Brands and influencers:
      1. Do you follow any influencers that frequently share their opinions about cosmetic products?
      2. Who are they?
      3. Which platforms?
      4. What made you follow them?
      5. How long have you followed them?
      6. How often do you view their contents?
      7. Can you give examples of when and how influencers helped you with cosmetic brand choices?
      8. Have you ever considered switching to a new cosmetic brand because of an influencer?
a. If yes, could you tell me about such an experience? (which brand, which influencer, which product, how)

9. Have any influencer ever successfully made you switch cosmetic brands.
   a. If yes, could you tell me about such an experience? (which brand, which influencer, which product, how)

10. What was about the influencer that made you switch cosmetic brands?
11. How did such attributes (the things about influencers that you mentioned) make you switch cosmetic brands?
12. Is there something else about influencers that made you switch cosmetic brands or can make you switch cosmetic brands in the future?
13. How can such attributes (the things about influencers that you mentioned) make you switch cosmetic brands?
14. How do you define each attribute that you mentioned previously?
15. Ask interviewees attributes that they have not mentioned yet:
   a. How do you see influencers’ attractiveness in shaping or forming your cosmetic brand choices?
   
   Can you give an example when you thought or considered influencers’ attractiveness in shaping or informing your cosmetic brand choices?

   b. How do you see influencers’ credibility in shaping or forming your cosmetic brand choices?
   
   Can you give an example when you thought or considered influencers’ credibility in shaping or informing your cosmetic brand choices?

   c. How do you see influencers’ expertise in shaping or forming your cosmetic brand choices?
   
   Can you give an example when you thought or considered influencers’ expertise in shaping or informing your cosmetic brand choices?

   d. How do you see influencers’ content in shaping or forming your cosmetic brand choices?
   
   Can you give an example when you thought or considered influencers’ content in shaping or informing your cosmetic brand choices?
e. How do you see influencers’ interactivity in shaping or forming your cosmetic brand choices?
Can you give an example when you thought or considered influencers’ interactivity in shaping or informing your cosmetic brand choices?

16. How much do you think influencers could affect your consideration of switching cosmetic brand?
17. Which one do you consider is the most influential attribute of influencers that makes you switch brand?