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Exploring the Impact of Cultural Factors and Consumer Preferences on Market Entry Strategies for the Cosmetics Industry in the Arabian Gulf

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Abstract

English:

This study explores the impact of cultural factors, such as beauty standards and societal norms, on consumer preferences and the potential success of market entry strategies for cosmetics brands in the Arabian Gulf. Utilizing a cross-sectional mixed-methods approach, the research gathered data through a structured questionnaire (300 respondents) and in-depth interviews (10 respondents). The quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics, frequency tables, graphs, and inferential tests (one-sample t-tests), while the qualitative analysis involved thematic analysis of interview responses. The findings revealed that local beauty standards, societal expectations, and the desire for luxury significantly influence purchasing decisions. Market entry strategies, such as joint ventures, local franchising, and direct export, show varying degrees of potential success depending on their alignment with consumer preferences shaped by cultural values. The study's limitations include a relatively small interview sample and reliance on self-reported data. The results provide valuable insights for cosmetics brands aiming to enter or expand in the Arabian Gulf, emphasizing the importance of cultural adaptation, luxury positioning, and social influence.

Italian:

Questo studio esplora l'impatto di fattori culturali, come standard di bellezza e norme sociali, sulle preferenze dei consumatori e sul potenziale successo delle strategie di ingresso nel mercato per i marchi di cosmetici nel Golfo Persico. Utilizzando un sistema trasversale a metodi misti, la ricerca ha raccolto dati tramite un questionario strutturato (300 intervistati) e interviste approfondite (10 intervistati). L'analisi quantitativa ha incluso statistiche descrittive, tabelle di frequenza, grafici e test inferenziali (test t a campione singolo), mentre l'analisi qualitativa ha incluso l'analisi tematica delle riposte alle interviste. I risultati evidenziano che gli standard di bellezza locali, le aspettative sociali e il desiderio di lusso influenzano significativamente le decisioni di acquisto. Le strategie di ingresso nel mercato, come joint venture, franchising locale ed esportazione diretta, mostrano differenti gradi di potenziale successo a seconda del loro allineamento con le preferenze dei consumatori determinate dai valori culturali. I limiti dello studio dipendono da un campione di interviste relativamente piccolo ed il ricorso a dati autodichiarati. I risultati forniscono spunti preziosi per i marchi di cosmetici che intendono entrare o espandersi nel Golfo Persico, sottolineando l'importanza dell'adeguamento culturale, del posizionamento nel segmento luxury e dell'influenza sociale.

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Introduction

Cultural factors such as beauty standards, religious practices, and societal norms play a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences in the cosmetics industry. In Europe, beauty standards vary widely, influenced by a long history of cultural diversity and evolution. European consumers tend to value individual expression, leading to a preference for a wide range of cosmetic products catering to different styles and needs (Jin & Cedrola, 2019). In contrast, in the Arabian Gulf, particularly in countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, beauty standards are often influenced by religious and societal norms, with a significant emphasis on high-quality products that align with these values (Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019).

For SMEs looking to enter these markets, understanding the cultural context is crucial for selecting an appropriate market entry strategy. Strategies such as direct export, franchising, joint ventures, and online sales platforms need to be evaluated not just on logistical and financial grounds but also on how well they align with consumer expectations shaped by cultural factors.

1. **Direct Export**: This strategy can be particularly effective in European markets where there is a high demand for diverse cosmetic products. However, in the Arabian Gulf, success might depend on the ability to meet stringent quality standards and preferences for luxury and halal-certified products.

2. **Franchising**: Offers the advantage of leveraging local knowledge, which can be crucial for navigating the cultural and regulatory landscape, especially in the Arabian Gulf where societal norms significantly influence consumer behavior.

3. **Joint Ventures**: By partnering with local firms, SMEs can gain insights into consumer preferences and establish a stronger presence. This strategy might be more applicable in the Arabian Gulf due to the importance of local business networks.

4. **Online Sales Platforms**: E-commerce is growing in both regions, but its success as a market entry mode will depend on how well SMEs can adapt their online presence to match local consumer behavior and preferences, including the use of social media and influencers (Mukherjee & Shivani, 2020).

Implications for SMEs

For SMEs in the cosmetics industry, understanding the interplay between cultural influences on consumer preferences and strategic market entry modes is key to achieving success. In Europe, where consumer preferences are diverse, SMEs must focus on differentiation and aligning their product offerings with the broad spectrum of consumer needs. In the Arabian Gulf, emphasizing product quality, luxury, and compliance with religious norms can facilitate market entry and expansion. Additionally, choosing a market entry strategy that leverages local partnerships and knowledge can provide SMEs with a competitive advantage in both markets.

Problem Statement

Despite the lucrative opportunities present within the cosmetics industry, SMEs face numerous challenges when attempting to enter or expand into new markets, particularly in diverse regions such as Europe and the Arabian Gulf. These challenges stem from various factors, including but not limited to, regulatory hurdles, intense competition, and cultural differences affecting consumer behavior and preferences (Brown, 2018; Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019). Understanding and navigating these challenges is crucial for SMEs aiming for successful market entry and sustainable growth in these geographically and culturally distinct markets.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this research is twofold: first, to examine how cultural factors—such as beauty standards, religious practices, and societal norms—affect consumer preferences in the cosmetics industry across European countries and the Arabian Gulf/UAE area. Second, the study seeks to analyze the impact of these cultural-influenced consumer preferences on SMEs' market entry strategies. By identifying and understanding these cultural factors, SMEs can tailor their product offerings and marketing strategies to better meet the needs of their target markets, thereby enhancing their prospects for success (Jin & Cedrola, 2019).

Significance of the Study

This research holds significant implications for SMEs within the cosmetics industry that are planning to enter or expand their operations into the European and Arabian Gulf markets. By providing insights into how cultural differences shape consumer preferences and influence market entry strategies, the findings of this study can help SMEs make informed decisions about product adaptation, marketing, and strategic partnerships. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader academic discourse on international business, offering a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between culture and consumer behavior in the context of the global cosmetics industry (Mukherjee & Shivani, 2020).

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on the cosmetics industry, cultural influences on consumer behavior, and market entry strategies for SMEs. Chapter

3 outlines the conceptual framework and hypotheses development. Chapter 4 describes the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 presents the research findings, followed by a discussion in Chapter 6 that interprets the results in the context of existing literature. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of key findings, implications for SMEs, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The cosmetics industry is a highly lucrative sector with significant growth potential. However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often face substantial challenges when attempting to enter or expand into new markets, particularly in diverse regions such as Europe and the Arabian Gulf. These challenges are multifaceted, stemming from regulatory barriers, intense competition, and cultural differences that significantly influence consumer behavior and preferences (Brown, 2018; Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019). Understanding these challenges is crucial for SMEs aiming for successful market entry and sustainable growth.

The theoretical framework for this study is built upon key theories and models from the fields of consumer behavior, cultural dimensions, and market entry strategies. This framework aims to provide a structured approach to understanding the challenges faced by SMEs in the cosmetics industry when entering or expanding into new markets, particularly in Europe and the Arabian Gulf. The framework integrates theories on consumer behavior, cultural influences, and strategic market entry to analyze how these factors affect SMEs' success in diverse markets.

Theoretical Framework

Consumer Behavior Theories

1. **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**: The TPB posits that an individual's behavior is determined by their intention to perform the behavior, which in turn is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of the cosmetics industry, consumer attitudes towards cosmetics, societal norms about beauty, and perceived control over purchasing decisions can significantly influence buying behavior. This theory helps explain how cultural and social factors shape consumer preferences in different markets.

2. **Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory**: This theory suggests that consumers prefer products from their own country over foreign products due to nationalistic feelings and perceptions of domestic product superiority (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Understanding consumer ethnocentrism is crucial for SMEs attempting to enter new markets, as it affects how local consumers perceive and accept foreign cosmetic products.

3. **Cultural Dimensions Theory**: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory provides a framework for understanding cultural differences across countries. The dimensions include power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede, 1980). These dimensions help explain variations in consumer behavior and preferences in the cosmetics industry, guiding SMEs in tailoring their marketing strategies to align with local cultural norms.

Market Entry Strategies

1. **Resource-Based View (RBV)**: The RBV theory suggests that a firm's competitive advantage is derived from its unique resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). For SMEs

in the cosmetics industry, this includes proprietary formulations, branding, and marketing expertise. Understanding the unique resources that SMEs possess can help them develop effective strategies for entering and competing in new markets.

2. **Institutional Theory**: This theory emphasizes the influence of institutional environments, including regulatory frameworks, industry standards, and cultural norms, on organizational behavior (Scott, 1995). SMEs must navigate different institutional environments when entering new markets, adapting their products and practices to comply with local regulations and meet consumer expectations.

3. **Internationalization Process Model**: Also known as the Uppsala Model, this theory describes how firms gradually increase their international involvement through a series of incremental steps (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). This model is relevant for SMEs in the cosmetics industry, as it highlights the importance of building market knowledge and establishing networks to reduce risks associated with entering new markets.

Integrative Framework

The integrative framework for this study combines the above theories to analyze the challenges and strategies for SMEs in the cosmetics industry:

1. **Consumer Behavior Analysis**: Using the TPB and Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, the study will examine how attitudes, societal norms, and nationalistic feelings influence consumer preferences for cosmetic products in Europe and the Arabian Gulf. Cultural Dimensions Theory will further elucidate how cultural differences impact these preferences.

2. **Regulatory and Institutional Environment**: Institutional Theory will guide the analysis of regulatory hurdles and institutional barriers that SMEs face in different markets. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing compliance strategies and ensuring successful market entry.

3. **Strategic Market Entry**: The RBV and Internationalization Process Model will inform the development of market entry strategies for SMEs. By leveraging unique resources and capabilities, and following a step-by-step approach to internationalization, SMEs can mitigate risks and enhance their chances of success in new markets.

The theoretical framework for this study provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the challenges and opportunities for SMEs in the cosmetics industry. By integrating theories of consumer behavior, cultural dimensions, and market entry strategies, the framework offers valuable insights into how SMEs can navigate diverse markets and achieve sustainable growth. This framework will guide the research in examining cultural factors affecting consumer preferences and analyzing their impact on SMEs' market entry strategies in Europe and the Arabian Gulf.

Regulatory Hurdles

One of the primary challenges for SMEs in the cosmetics industry is navigating the complex regulatory landscapes of different regions. In Europe, the Cosmetics Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 provides a comprehensive framework for the safety and labeling of cosmetic products. Compliance with these regulations requires significant investment in testing and documentation, which can be particularly burdensome for SMEs with limited resources (Gautam et al., 2022). .Similarly, in the Arabian Gulf, each country has its own set of regulations and standards for cosmetic products. These regulations often include stringent requirements for product registration, halal certification, and adherence to local safety standards (Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019). Compliance with diverse and stringent regulations across different regions can be costly and time-consuming. In the context of the Arabian Gulf, obtaining Halal certification is a significant requirement due to religious and cultural practices. Ali et al. (2019) highlight that the financial cost and social influence significantly impact the adoption of Halal cosmetics in Malaysia, a finding that is relevant to other regions with similar cultural contexts. This underscores the importance for SMEs to invest in certification processes and align their products with local regulatory standards to ensure market entry and acceptance.

Intense Competition

The cosmetics industry is characterized by high competition, with numerous established brands and new entrants constantly vying for market share. For SMEs, this competitive landscape can be daunting. Established brands often have the advantage of significant marketing budgets, established distribution networks, and strong brand recognition (Jin & Cedrola, 2019). SMEs, on the other hand, must find ways to differentiate their products and carve out a niche in the market. This often requires innovative marketing strategies, unique product offerings, and a deep understanding of consumer preferences. Weber and De Villebonne (2002) compared purchase behavior between France and the USA, revealing that cultural differences significantly impact consumer preferences and buying behavior. SMEs must therefore adopt tailored marketing strategies that resonate with local consumers. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), ALsahli and Ahmed (2021) found that impulse buying in the cosmetics sector is influenced by various factors, suggesting that targeted marketing campaigns could effectively attract consumers. Similarly, the study by Kim et al. (2013) comparing Indonesia and Korea emphasizes the role of gender and cultural perceptions of beauty in shaping consumer behavior, further illustrating the need for market-specific strategies.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences in the cosmetics industry. Beauty standards, religious practices, and societal norms vary widely between regions and can significantly influence purchasing behavior. In Europe, for example, there is a growing trend towards natural and organic products, driven by increasing consumer awareness of health and environmental issues (Jin & Cedrola, 2019). In contrast, consumers in the Arabian Gulf place a high value on luxury and premium brands, often associating them with social status and prestige (Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019). Additionally, religious practices such as the need for halal-certified products are critical in the Arabian Gulf, influencing both product formulation and marketing strategies. Ramadania et al. (2023) discuss how consumer ethnocentrism and cultural sensitivity affect purchase intentions, indicating that SMEs must understand and respect local cultures to successfully market their products. In Bahrain, Al-Hashimi and AlDhari (2019) found that consumer behavior within the SPA and beauty sector is influenced by cultural and social factors, highlighting the importance of culturally tailored marketing strategies. Sun (2021) also points out that factors affecting the purchase of imported cosmetics by Chinese consumers include brand credibility and cultural preferences, suggesting that SMEs must build trust and adapt their products to meet local tastes.

Market Entry Strategies

For SMEs to succeed in entering and expanding into new markets, it is essential to tailor their market entry strategies to the specific cultural and regulatory contexts of their target regions. This involves not only compliance with local regulations but also a deep understanding of local consumer preferences and behaviors. For instance, SMEs aiming to enter the European market may benefit from emphasizing the natural and organic qualities of their products, leveraging the growing trend towards sustainability (Jin & Cedrola, 2019). In the Arabian Gulf, highlighting luxury and exclusivity, as well as ensuring halal certification, can be crucial for attracting consumers (Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019). Kim et al. (2013) and Weber and De Villebonne (2002) provide insights into how gender, cultural perceptions, and national differences impact consumer behavior, emphasizing the need for localized marketing approaches. Additionally, Ali et al. (2019) and Al-Hashimi and AlDhari (2019) highlight the importance of aligning products with cultural and social norms to enhance acceptance and market penetration. SMEs must invest in understanding local markets, obtaining necessary certifications, and developing culturally sensitive marketing strategies to succeed in diverse regions such as Europe and the Arabian Gulf.

Previous Studies on Market Entry Success

The success of market entry strategies is crucial for the growth and sustainability of firms, especially in the highly competitive cosmetics industry. Previous studies have explored various drivers, competencies, and strategies that contribute to successful market entry. This literature review synthesizes findings from these studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing market entry success in different contexts.

Johnson and Tellis (2008) identify key drivers of market entry success into emerging markets such as China and India, highlighting market potential, competitive intensity, and regulatory environment as critical factors. Their study emphasizes the importance of understanding local market dynamics and tailoring entry strategies accordingly. Similarly, Ferdinand and Ciptono

(2022) analyze the attractiveness and competitiveness of Indonesia's cosmetics industry, identifying critical success factors such as market demand, innovation, and regulatory compliance.

Wang and Lestari (2013) examine firm competencies that contribute to market entry success in a high-tech industry within an emerging market. They identify technological capabilities, management expertise, and strategic alliances as essential competencies. These findings are applicable to the cosmetics industry, where innovation and strategic partnerships can significantly enhance market entry success.

Jin et al. (2018) explore the entry market choices and post-entry growth patterns among born globals in the consumer goods sector. Their study highlights the importance of selecting the right entry mode and market, as well as the need for continuous adaptation and growth strategies post-entry. Oh and Rugman (2007) discuss the role of regional multinationals in the Korean cosmetics industry, emphasizing the importance of regional strategies and local adaptation for market entry success.

Kumar et al. (2006) compare innovative business strategies of major players in the cosmetics industry, highlighting how differentiation, branding, and R&D investment contribute to market entry success. Their study provides valuable insights into the competitive strategies that can be employed by SMEs to gain a foothold in new markets.

Ismail (2018) investigates international marketing strategies in the celebrity cosmetics industry through a dual case study of Huda Beauty and Fenty Beauty. The study demonstrates how leveraging celebrity influence, social media marketing, and brand authenticity can drive successful market entry and expansion in the cosmetics industry.

Zajec (2022) presents a market entry concept for the US beauty and personal care market, focusing on Luxury Cosmetics Ltd. The dissertation outlines critical success factors such as brand positioning, market research, and tailored marketing strategies that luxury brands can use to enter and thrive in competitive markets.

Oh and Rugman (2007) highlight the importance of regional adaptation for market entry success, particularly for multinationals in the Korean cosmetics industry. Their study underscores the need for firms to understand and align with regional preferences and regulatory requirements.

Studies such as those by Ferdinand and Ciptono (2022) and Ismail (2018) emphasize the role of cultural sensitivity in market entry strategies. Understanding local beauty standards, consumer behavior, and cultural nuances can significantly enhance the acceptance and success of cosmetic products in new markets.

The literature on market entry success in the cosmetics industry highlights the importance of market attractiveness, firm competencies, strategic approaches, and cultural sensitivity. By leveraging these insights, SMEs can develop effective market entry strategies that address the unique challenges and opportunities in different regions. Understanding local market dynamics, investing in innovation, and adapting to regional preferences are critical for achieving sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the global cosmetics industry.

SMEs in the cosmetics industry face numerous challenges when entering or expanding into new markets, including regulatory hurdles, intense competition, and cultural differences. By understanding and navigating these challenges, SMEs can develop effective market entry strategies tailored to the specific needs and preferences of their target markets. This involves not only compliance with local regulations but also a deep understanding of local consumer behavior and cultural contexts. Through targeted marketing, product adaptation, and cultural sensitivity, SMEs can enhance their prospects for success in the highly competitive and diverse cosmetics industry.

Chapter 3: Conceptual model

Presentation of the Relationship Between Cultural Factors, Consumer Preferences, and Market Entry Strategies

The conceptual model (Figure 1) for this study presents the dynamic interplay between cultural factors, consumer preferences, and the market entry strategies of SMEs in the cosmetics industry. It posits that cultural factors such as beauty standards and societal norms directly influence consumer preferences, which in turn affect the selection of appropriate market entry strategies by SMEs.

1. **Cultural Factors**

    - **Beauty Standards**: In Europe, beauty standards are diverse, evolving with the region's long cultural history and preference for individual expression. In contrast, the Arabian Gulf's beauty standards are shaped by religious norms and societal values, placing emphasis on high-quality and halal-certified products.

    - **Societal Norms**: Societal expectations in both regions shape consumer behavior, from preferences for luxury products in the Arabian Gulf to the wide-ranging needs for individualism in European markets. These norms guide how SMEs adapt their product offerings and engage with customers.

2. **Consumer Preferences**

- **In Europe**: A wide range of preferences for cosmetics products catering to different styles, age groups, and cultural backgrounds. European consumers prioritize diversity in product offerings, individuality, and value for money.
- **In the Arabian Gulf**: A strong focus on luxury, quality, and religious compliance, with consumers often favoring international brands known for prestige and adherence to local cultural values.

3. **Market Entry Strategies**

   - **Direct Export**: Effective in Europe, where diverse preferences exist. This strategy allows SMEs to cater to various market segments. However, in the Arabian Gulf, strict adherence to quality and religious standards may be necessary for success.
   - **Franchising**: Enables SMEs to leverage local knowledge, crucial for navigating the cultural and regulatory landscape in the Arabian Gulf, where consumer behavior is heavily influenced by societal and religious norms.
   - **Joint Ventures**: Partnering with local firms can provide SMEs with deep insights into consumer preferences, particularly in the Arabian Gulf, where local business networks play a critical role in market penetration.
   - **Online Sales Platforms**: With e-commerce expanding in both regions, SMEs must ensure their digital presence is culturally aligned. Success in these platforms hinges on understanding local social media trends, consumer engagement through influencers, and adherence to local norms.

4. **Interrelationship of Factors**: The model proposes that **cultural factors** not only shape **consumer preferences** but also guide the strategic decisions of SMEs regarding **market entry**. In Europe, a broader acceptance of diversity in consumer preferences may allow for a wider range of entry modes. However, in the Arabian Gulf, stricter cultural guidelines necessitate strategies that prioritize compliance with societal and religious norms, such as joint ventures or local partnerships.

Conceptual Model

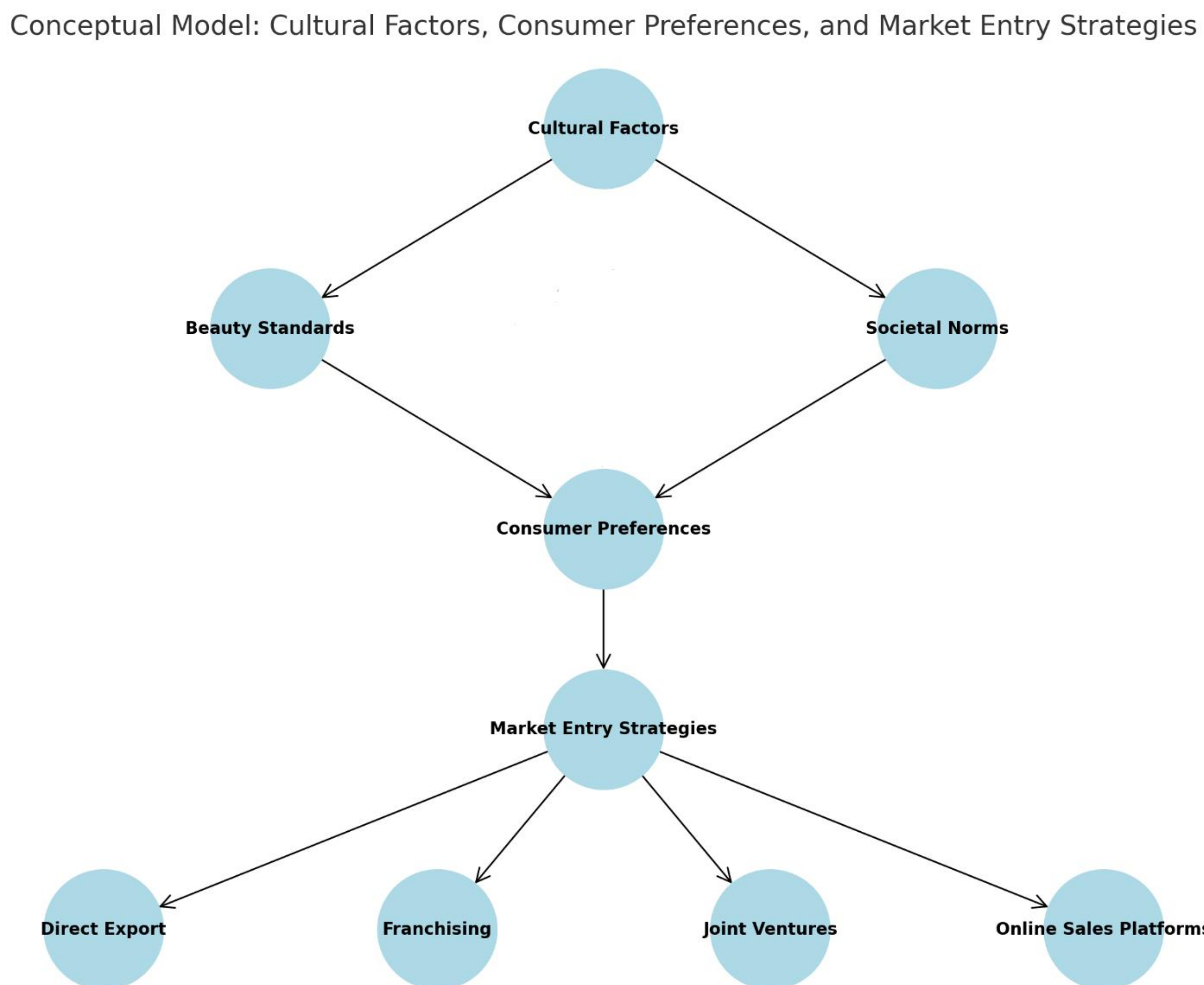

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Hypotheses formulation

The hypotheses of this study are grounded in several key consumer behavior and market entry theories as outlined in the literature review. These theories provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies interact in the cosmetics industry, particularly in the Arabian Gulf market.

1. **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that consumer behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This is reflected in **H1**, where the study posits that cultural factors (such as beauty standards and societal norms) significantly influence consumer preferences. In the Arabian Gulf, subjective norms about luxury and societal expectations around cosmetics influence purchasing behavior.

2. **Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory** (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) explains how nationalistic feelings affect consumer preferences, especially when foreign products are introduced. This theory supports **H2**, where consumer preferences mediate the relationship between cultural factors and the success of market entry strategies, particularly when local consumers are influenced by societal and cultural norms in the Arabian Gulf.

3. **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory** (Hofstede, 1980) provides a lens to understand cultural differences, such as high levels of power distance and collectivism in the Arabian Gulf, which shape societal norms and consumer preferences. **H2** is rooted in this theory, suggesting that market entry strategies adapted to local cultural preferences (such as joint ventures and franchising) will be more successful.

4. **Institutional Theory** (Scott, 1995) underlines the importance of navigating institutional environments, including regulatory and cultural norms. This theory reinforces **H2**, where specific market entry strategies (e.g., joint ventures and franchising) are proposed as more effective in the Arabian Gulf due to the need for compliance with local norms and the importance of local partnerships.

These hypotheses are designed to test how well SMEs can align their strategies with cultural and consumer behavior insights derived from the literature. By integrating the theories mentioned, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for SMEs in the Arabian Gulf cosmetics market.

H1: Cultural factors (beauty standards and societal norms) significantly influence consumer preferences in the cosmetics industry in the Arabian Gulf.

- **H1a**: Beauty standards significantly impact consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf market.
- **H1b**: Societal norms significantly impact consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf market.

H2: Market entry strategies (direct export, franchising, joint ventures, online sales platforms) that align with consumer preferences shaped by cultural factors and social norms are expected to lead to greater success for the brand in the Arabian Gulf.

- **H2a**: Market entry strategies that align with beauty standards are expected to result in greater success for the brand in the Arabian Gulf.

- **H2b**: Market entry strategies that align with societal norms and luxury preferences are expected to result in greater success for the brand in the Arabian Gulf.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. A mixed-methods design integrates both forms of data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In this case, the mixed-methods approach was chosen to gain deeper insights into how cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies influence the cosmetics industry in the Arabian Gulf. The qualitative component, in the form of in-depth interviews, captures the nuanced perspectives of individual consumers, while the quantitative component, using a structured questionnaire, allows for the statistical analysis of broader trends within the population.

The cross-sectional design was selected as it enables the collection of data from a specific population at a single point in time, which is ideal for understanding current consumer behaviors and preferences. Cross-sectional designs are particularly useful in market research, as they allow for the analysis of relationships between variables in a given context without the need for longitudinal follow-up (Lavrakas, 2008). This method is well-suited for capturing a snapshot of consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf, where the influence of cultural and societal norms on purchasing behavior is expected to be significant.

The qualitative data in this study was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 10 respondents. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual perceptions regarding beauty standards, societal pressures, and preferences for luxury brands. The use of qualitative interviews is a valuable tool in mixed-methods research as it helps to provide context and depth to the findings from the quantitative data (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview format also enabled the interviewer to probe for further information when necessary, ensuring rich and detailed data collection.

The quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered to 300 respondents. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale format to assess consumer attitudes towards cultural factors, preferences, and market strategies. This method allows for the quantitative measurement of variables and enables the use of statistical techniques to analyze relationships between them (Bryman, 2016). By combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, this mixed-methods approach provides a more holistic understanding of the research topic.

Data Collection Methods

1. **Questionnaire (Appendix A)**: A structured questionnaire with 40 questions, based on Likert scale responses (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), was distributed to 300 respondents through . The questionnaire was divided into sections focusing on cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies. The demographics section captured key information such as age, gender, nationality, and purchasing frequency. The survey covered areas such as the influence of beauty standards, societal norms, luxury brand perceptions, and the role of social endorsements.

The quantitative data for this study was collected through a structured questionnaire, designed and distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire, comprising 40 Likert-scale questions, was divided into sections addressing demographic details, cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies. The questionnaire was distributed through social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, allowing for easy access and participation from a wide range of respondents across the Arabian Gulf.

The survey link was shared publicly and targeted towards regular consumers of cosmetic products within the region. The data collection process lasted for two weeks, ensuring a broad demographic reach, with participants encouraged to share the survey link within their networks to increase responses.

2. **Interviews (Appendix B)**: In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 respondents. These interviews aimed to gather qualitative insights into consumer perceptions regarding local beauty standards, societal pressures, global beauty trends, and the preference for luxury brands or online shopping. The interview questions were designed to complement the questionnaire data, offering a deeper exploration of consumer attitudes and behaviors.

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted via Zoom meetings. A total of 10 participants were selected based on their willingness to provide detailed insights into their cosmetic purchasing behaviors. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, allowing for in-depth discussions on topics such as local beauty standards, societal pressures, luxury brand preferences, and online shopping habits.

Participants were contacted via email or social media, and interviews were scheduled based on their availability. The Zoom platform facilitated an interactive, face-to-face conversation while allowing for the flexibility and convenience of remote participation. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and the data was transcribed for subsequent thematic analysis.

This dual approach—using a Google Forms questionnaire distributed via social media and interviews conducted through Zoom—ensured both wide quantitative participation and deep qualitative insights for the study.

Sample Selection

1. **Target Markets**: The study focuses on consumers in the **Arabian Gulf market**, particularly in countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain. The European market is considered for future comparative analysis but is not the primary focus for this phase of the study.
2. **Consumers**: The 300 respondents for the questionnaire were selected through non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, to capture a broad representation of cosmetic consumers in the Arabian Gulf. Respondents were required to be regular cosmetic users, and the sample was designed to include individuals of varying ages, income levels, and nationalities across the Gulf.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire used in this study, the **Cronbach's alpha** test was conducted to measure internal consistency for each of the sections related to cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies. The Cronbach's alpha values for all sections of the questionnaire were **greater than 0.7**, indicating a high level of internal reliability across the survey items.

- **Cultural Factors Section**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.78
- **Consumer Preferences Section**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.82
- **Market Entry Strategies Section**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.80

These results confirm that the questionnaire items are consistent in measuring the constructs they are intended to assess, ensuring reliable data collection across respondents.

Validity

The validity of the study's instruments was established through content validity and construct validity.

Content Validity: The questionnaire and interview questions were carefully designed based on existing literature and expert input to ensure they comprehensively cover the key areas of cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies in the cosmetics industry. The alignment of the questions with well-established theories (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior, Cultural Dimensions Theory) ensures the relevance and appropriateness of the content.

By combining strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7) with comprehensive content and construct validity, the reliability and validity of the study's data collection instruments are well-established. This ensures that the findings are both trustworthy and applicable to the broader context of the cosmetics industry in the Arabian Gulf.

Data Analysis Techniques

1. **Quantitative Analysis**: The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using **statistical methods**. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) were calculated to summarize responses for each question. Additionally, inferential statistical techniques, such as correlation and regression analysis, were used to explore relationships between cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies. Data was processed using SPSS for detailed statistical analysis.

2. **Qualitative Analysis**: The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic coding was employed to identify key themes, such as the influence of societal norms, the importance of luxury, and the role of social influencers. Patterns and themes that emerged from the interviews were compared with the quantitative findings to provide a richer interpretation of the data. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed manually, focusing on recurring motifs that highlight cultural and societal impacts on consumer behavior.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which examined the influence of cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies on the cosmetics industry in the Arabian Gulf. The results are derived from both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The quantitative analysis includes descriptive statistics, such as frequency tables, graphs, and charts, providing an overview of respondents' preferences and attitudes. Additionally, inferential analysis using one-sample t-tests was conducted to test the study's hypotheses, with a test value of 2 representing disagreement. The qualitative findings from the interview thematic analysis further explore key themes related to beauty standards, societal norms, and consumer behavior. Together, these analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping consumer behavior in the Arabian Gulf cosmetics market.

Demographics

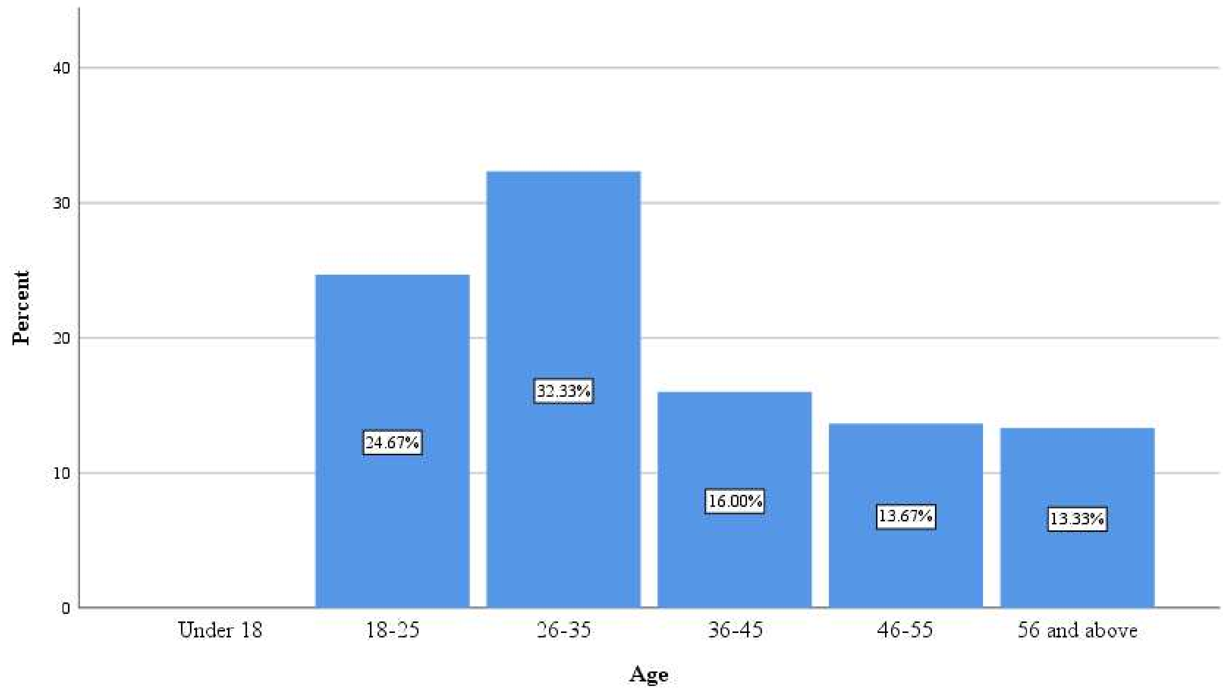

Figure 2 : Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

This bar chart displays the age distribution of a group of survey respondents across six age categories. The highest percentage of respondents falls within the 26-35 age group, representing 32.33% of the total. The next largest group is the 18-25 age category, accounting for 24.67% of participants. The 36-45 age group constitutes 16.00%, followed by the 46-55 and 56 and above groups, both with similar percentages of 13.67% and 13.33%, respectively. No respondents are represented in the "Under 18" category. This data highlights that the majority of respondents are concentrated in the 18-35 age range.

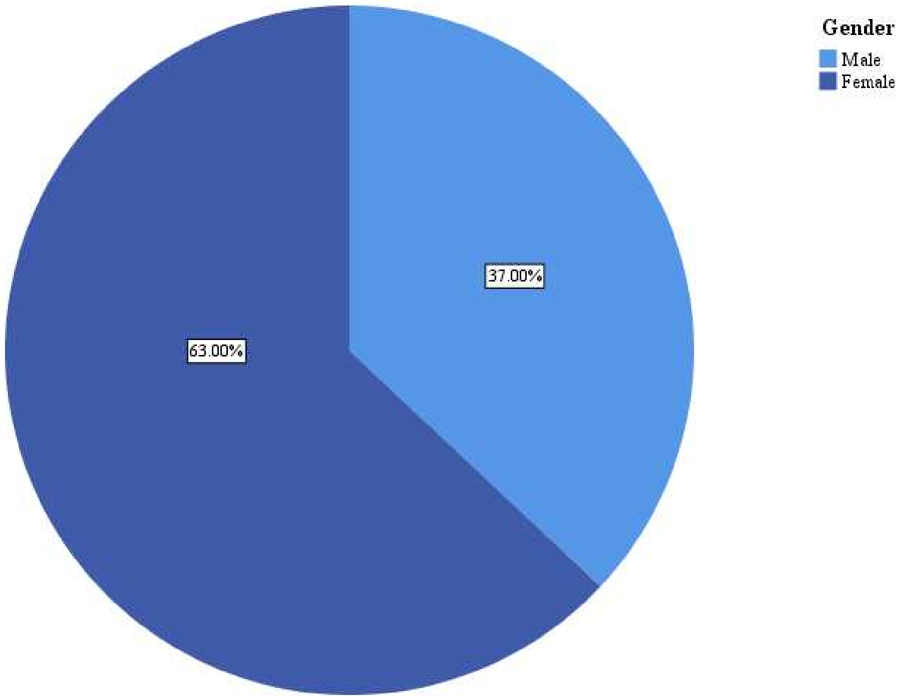

Figure 3 : Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

This pie chart illustrates the gender distribution of the survey respondents. The majority of the participants, 63%, are female, while 37% are male. This indicates that the female respondents significantly outnumber the male respondents in this survey. The chart provides a clear visual representation of the gender composition, highlighting a notable disparity between the two groups.

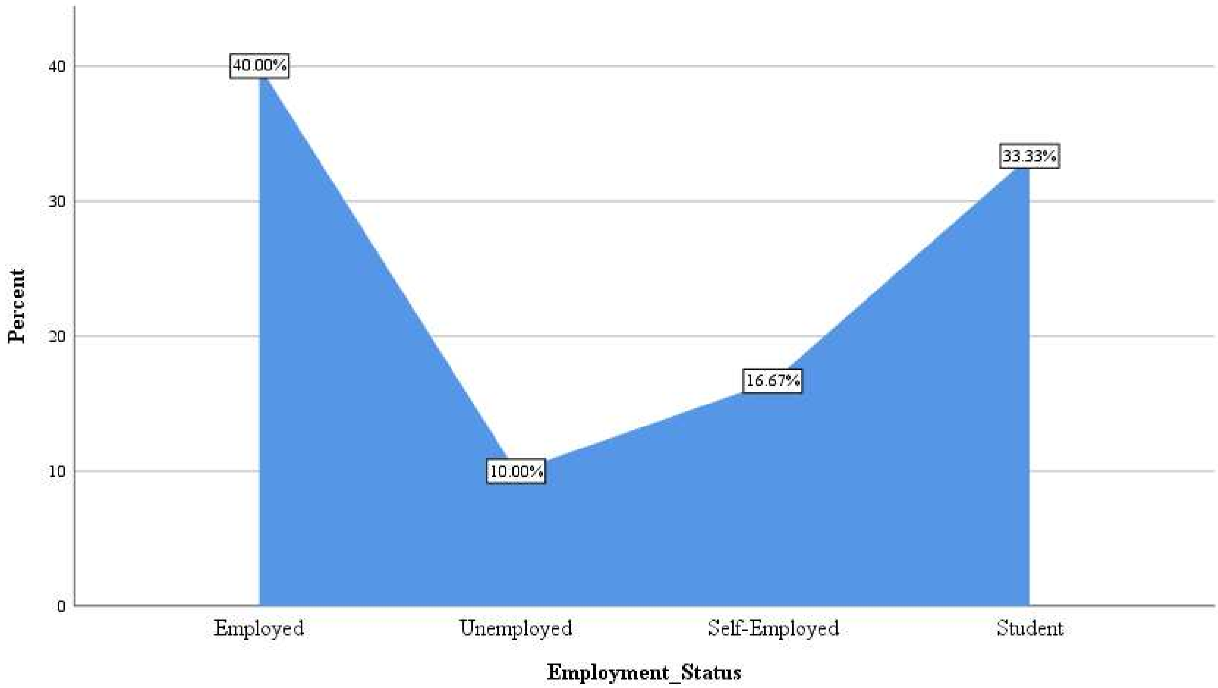

Figure 4 : Employment Status Distribution of Survey Respondents

This bar chart illustrates the distribution of survey respondents based on their employment status. The majority, 40%, are employed, making up the largest group. The second-largest group consists of students, accounting for 33.33%. Self-employed respondents make up 16.67% of the total, while the smallest group, the unemployed, represents only 10%. This data suggests that the survey was completed by a diverse group, with the highest representation from employed individuals, followed closely by students.

Table 1: Nationality Distribution of Survey Respondents in the Gulf Region

		Count	Layer N %
Nationality	UAE	19	6.3%
	Saudi Arabia	74	24.7%
	Kuwait	10	3.3%

	Oman	99	33.0%
	Qatar	20	6.7%
	Bahrain	78	26.0%

This table presents the nationality distribution of survey respondents from six Gulf countries. The highest proportion of respondents, 33.0%, are from Oman, followed by Bahrain at 26.0% and Saudi Arabia at 24.7%. Respondents from Qatar and the UAE make up smaller percentages, with 6.7% and 6.3%, respectively. Kuwait has the smallest representation, with only 3.3% of the total. This data highlights a wide representation from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with a significant concentration of respondents from Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Table 2 : Monthly Income Distribution of Survey Respondents

		Count	Layer N %
Monthly_Income	Less than $1,000	70	23.3%
	$1,000 – $3,000	50	16.7%
	$3,001 – $5,000	100	33.3%
	Above $5,000	80	26.7%

This table outlines the monthly income distribution of survey respondents across four income brackets. The largest group, 33.3%, earns between $3,001 and $5,000 per month, followed by 26.7% of respondents who earn above $5,000. Those earning less than $1,000 make up 23.3%, while the smallest group, 16.7%, falls in the $1,000 to $3,000 range. This data indicates that the majority of respondents earn within the mid to high-income brackets, with a smaller portion earning less than $1,000 per month.

Table 3 : Educational Level Distribution of Survey Respondents

	Count	Layer N %

Education_Level	High School	80	26.7%
	Bachelor's Degree	50	16.7%
	Master's Degree	130	43.3%
	PhD/Doctorate	40	13.3%
	Other	0	0.0%

This table showcases the educational level distribution among the survey respondents. The majority, 43.3%, hold a Master's degree, followed by 26.7% who have completed high school. Respondents with a Bachelor's degree make up 16.7%, while 13.3% hold a PhD or Doctorate. There are no respondents in the "Other" education category. This data indicates that the majority of respondents have pursued higher education, with a significant portion holding advanced degrees (Master's and PhD/Doctorate).

Table 4 : Purchase Frequency Distribution of Survey Respondents

		Count	Layer N %
Purchase Frequency	Rarely	30	10.0%
	Once a month	70	23.3%
	2-3 times a month	50	16.7%
	Weekly	60	20.0%
	More than once a week	90	30.0%

This table outlines the frequency of purchases among survey respondents. The largest group, 30.0%, makes purchases more than once a week, followed by 23.3% who make purchases once a month. Respondents who purchase weekly account for 20.0%, while those who buy 2-3 times a month make up 16.7%. The smallest group, 10.0%, rarely makes purchases. This data indicates that a significant portion of respondents are frequent purchasers, with a majority making purchases at least weekly or more.

Descriptive statistics

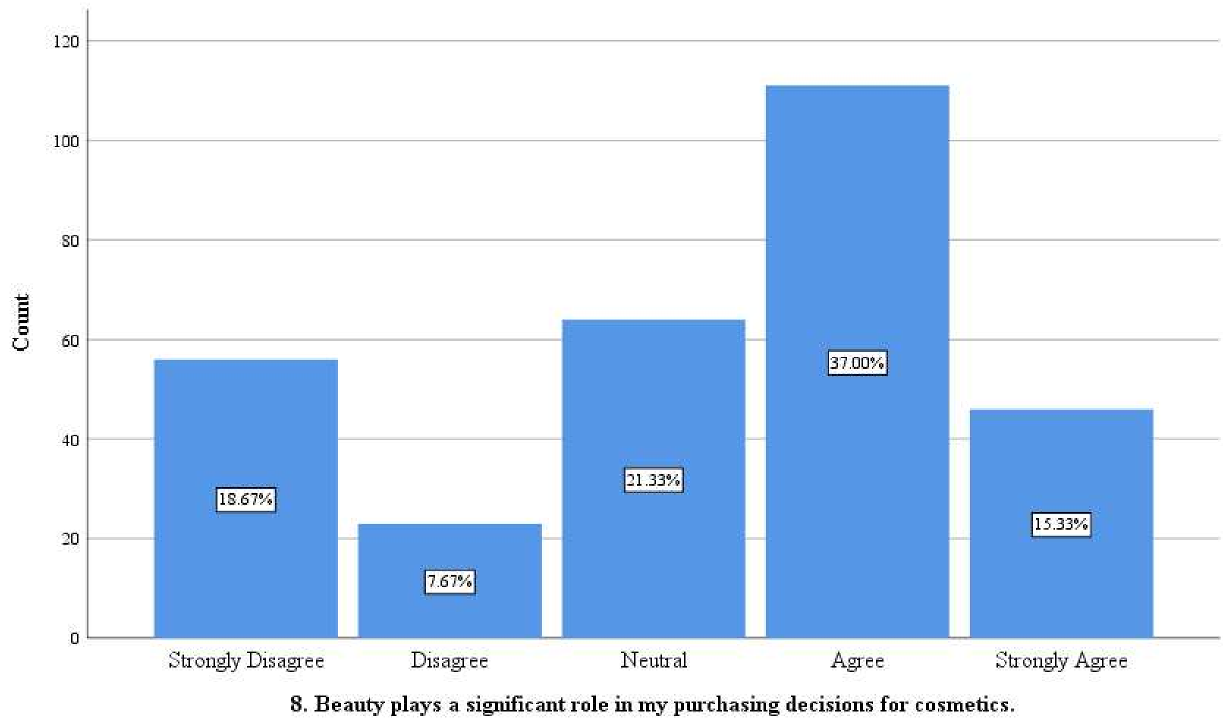

Figure 5 : Influence of Beauty on Purchasing Decisions for Cosmetics

This bar chart illustrates respondents' opinions on the role beauty plays in their purchasing decisions for cosmetics. The largest group, 37%, agrees that beauty significantly influences their cosmetic purchases. A smaller group of 21.33% remains neutral on the matter. Meanwhile, 18.67% strongly disagree, and 7.67% disagree with the statement, suggesting that beauty does not play a significant role for them. Lastly, 15.33% of respondents strongly agree that beauty is a major factor in their purchasing decisions. This data highlights that the majority of respondents feel that beauty plays an important role in their cosmetic purchase decisions, though a notable portion remains neutral or disagrees.

Table 5: Preferences for Cosmetics Based on Cultural, Local, and Global Beauty Norms

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %
9. I prefer cosmetic products that align with traditional beauty standards in my culture.	78	26.0%	38	12.7%	64	21.3%	75	25.0%	45	15.0%
10. I often choose cosmetics that enhance my physical appearance according to local beauty norms.	48	16.0%	30	10.0%	96	32.0%	84	28.0%	42	14.0%
11. I believe cosmetics that reflect global beauty trends are more appealing.	89	29.7%	43	14.3%	61	20.3%	80	26.7%	27	9.0%
12. The cosmetic brands I purchase must reflect elegance and luxury.	78	26.0%	23	7.7%	73	24.3%	81	27.0%	45	15.0%

This table examines respondents' preferences regarding cosmetics aligned with cultural beauty standards, local norms, global trends, and luxury appeal. For traditional beauty standards, 26.0% strongly disagree, while 25.0% agree, showing a balanced split. When considering cosmetics that enhance physical appearance according to local norms, 32.0% remain neutral, while 28.0% agree, indicating a tendency toward local influence. In terms of global beauty trends, 29.7% strongly disagree, but 26.7% agree, reflecting a divided opinion. Lastly, 27.0% agree that the brands they purchase should reflect elegance and luxury, while 26.0% strongly disagree. These results suggest varied influences on cosmetic preferences, with a notable balance between traditional, local, and global beauty considerations.

Table 6 : Influence of Societal Expectations and Social Circles on Cosmetic Choices

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %
13. Societal expectations influence my choice of cosmetic products.	60	20.0%	8	2.7%	71	23.7%	81	27.0%	80	26.7%
14. I prefer cosmetics that are popular among my friends and family.	61	20.3%	95	31.7%	61	20.3%	39	13.0%	44	14.7%
15. People in my community value luxury cosmetics and premium brands.	33	11.0%	49	16.3%	44	14.7%	119	39.7%	55	18.3%

16. Societal norms about personal appearance encourage me to invest in high-quality cosmetics.	51	17.0%	59	19.7%	46	15.3%	64	21.3%	80	26.7%
17. I choose cosmetic brands that are well-regarded and endorsed by influential people in society.	37	12.3%	73	24.3%	40	13.3%	80	26.7%	70	23.3%

This table explores how societal expectations, social circles, and community values impact cosmetic purchasing decisions. For societal expectations, 27.0% agree and 26.7% strongly agree that they influence their cosmetic choices, while 20.0% strongly disagree, reflecting a broad influence from society. Regarding preferences aligned with friends and family, 31.7% disagree, showing that a notable group does not prioritize popularity among their social circles, while 20.3% remain neutral. Community value for luxury cosmetics is significant, with 39.7% agreeing and 18.3% strongly agreeing. Societal norms around personal appearance encourage 26.7% to invest in high-quality cosmetics, though 19.7% disagree. Lastly, 26.7% agree and 23.3% strongly agree that well-regarded brands endorsed by influential figures impact their choices, with 24.3% disagreeing. The data indicates that societal factors play a significant role in shaping cosmetic preferences, though personal and social dynamics vary across different respondents.

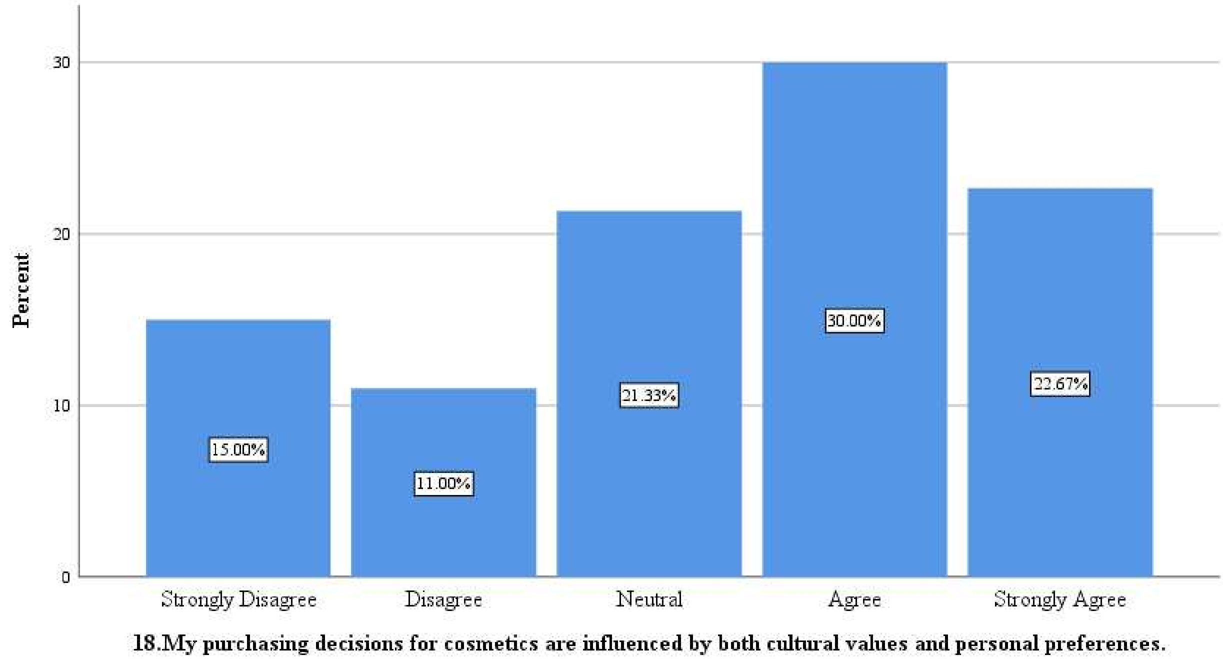

Figure 6 : Influence of Cultural Values and Personal Preferences on Cosmetic Purchasing Decisions

This bar chart presents respondents' views on whether their purchasing decisions for cosmetics are influenced by both cultural values and personal preferences. The largest group, 30%, agrees that both factors influence their decisions, while 22.67% strongly agree. A notable portion, 21.33%, remains neutral on the matter. Meanwhile, 15% strongly disagree and 11% disagree, indicating that these factors do not significantly impact their cosmetic purchasing behavior. This data shows that the majority of respondents acknowledge the role of cultural values and personal preferences in shaping their purchasing choices, though a significant number remain undecided or unaffected by these influences.

Table 7 : Impact of Societal and Cultural Values on Cosmetic Purchasing Behavior

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %
19.I am more likely to buy cosmetics that align with societal values, even if they are expensive.	53	17.7%	68	22.7%	62	20.7%	53	17.7%	64	21.3%
20.I tend to prefer local brands of cosmetics over international ones.	84	28.0%	19	6.3%	60	20.0%	89	29.7%	48	16.0%
21.I am willing to pay more for cosmetic products that meet local cultural standards (e.g., halal certification).	36	12.0%	53	17.7%	56	18.7%	59	19.7%	96	32.0%
22.Cultural values in my country have a direct impact on my cosmetic buying behavior.	38	12.7%	67	22.3%	59	19.7%	58	19.3%	78	26.0%

This table analyzes how societal and cultural values influence cosmetic purchasing decisions, even in the context of cost. For buying expensive cosmetics that align with societal values, respondents are evenly distributed, with 22.7% disagreeing, 21.3% strongly agreeing, and 17.7% agreeing or strongly disagreeing, showing mixed sentiment. In contrast, when considering local versus international brands, 29.7% agree they prefer local brands, but 28.0% strongly disagree, indicating a significant divide. A majority of respondents (32.0%) are willing to pay more for cosmetics that meet local cultural standards, such as halal certification. Cultural values also have a strong influence on purchasing behavior, with 26.0% strongly agreeing and 19.3% agreeing that these values directly affect their cosmetic choices. This data suggests that cultural and societal factors play crucial roles in shaping purchasing behavior, with significant attention to local standards and cultural alignment.

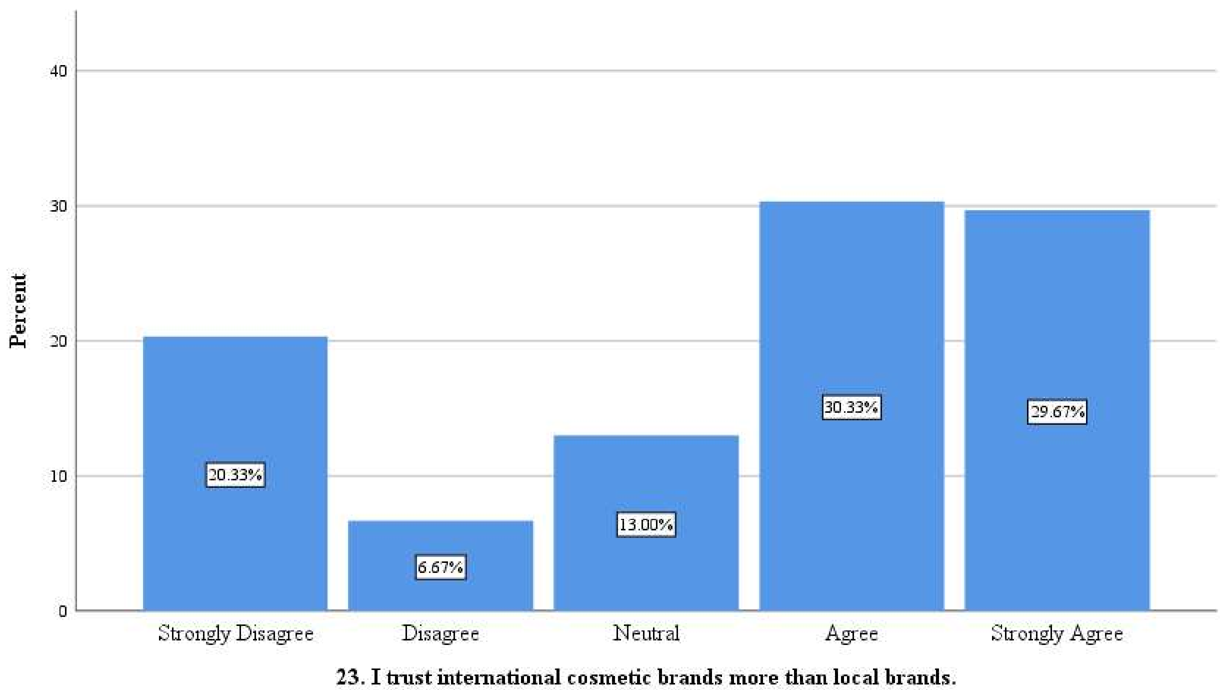

Figure 7 : Trust in International vs. Local Cosmetic Brands

This bar chart illustrates respondents' trust in international cosmetic brands compared to local brands. The largest groups are those who agree (30.33%) and strongly agree (29.67%) that they trust international brands more than local ones. A smaller portion, 13%, remains neutral on this issue. On the other hand, 20.33% strongly disagree, and 6.67% disagree, indicating that they trust local brands equally or more. This data suggests that the majority of respondents tend to favor international cosmetic brands over local ones, though a significant minority either disagree or remain undecided.

Table 8 : Perception of International Cosmetic Brands in Terms of Variety, Quality, and Status

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %
24. I often purchase international cosmetic brands because they offer more variety.	88	29.3%	60	20.0%	30	10.0%	90	30.0%	32	10.7%
25. I believe international brands offer better quality than local cosmetic products.	56	18.7%	54	18.0%	65	21.7%	30	10.0%	95	31.7%
26. International brands meet my expectations in terms of luxury and status.	83	27.7%	34	11.3%	45	15.0%	42	14.0%	96	32.0%

This table explores respondents' perceptions of international cosmetic brands regarding variety, quality, and luxury. When asked if they purchase international brands due to greater variety, responses are split: 30.0% agree, while 29.3% strongly disagree, reflecting a near-even divide. Regarding the perception of better quality, 31.7% strongly agree that international brands are superior to local products, though a combined 36.7% either disagree or strongly disagree. When considering luxury and status, 32.0% strongly agree that international brands meet these expectations, while 27.7% strongly disagree, again showing a split between preference for international brands and skepticism about their superiority. Overall, while many respondents favor international brands for variety, quality, and luxury, a significant portion remains unconvinced.

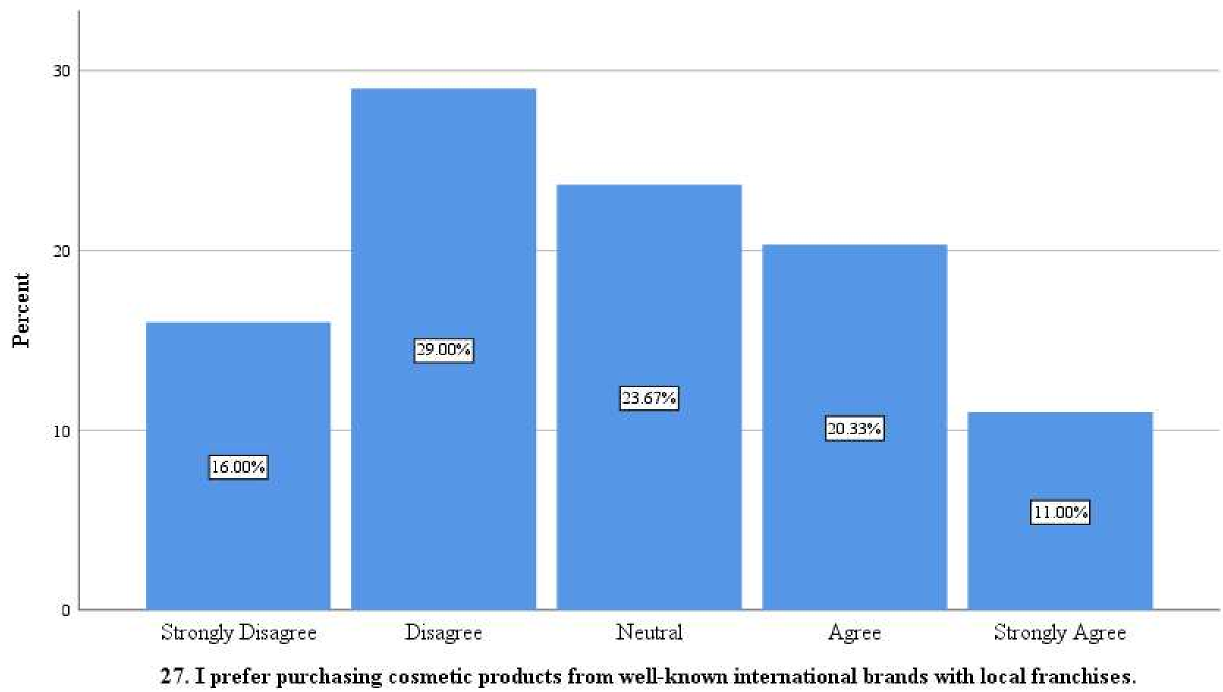

Figure 8 : Preference for Purchasing International Cosmetic Brands with Local Franchises

This bar chart depicts respondents' preferences for purchasing cosmetic products from well-known international brands that have local franchises. The largest group, 29%, disagrees with this preference, followed by 23.67% who are neutral. Meanwhile, 20.33% agree, and 11% strongly agree that they prefer purchasing from international brands with local franchises. On the other hand, 16% strongly disagree. This distribution indicates a relatively mixed sentiment among respondents, with a slight majority leaning toward disagreement or neutrality, suggesting that local franchises of international brands may not be a significant factor in their purchasing decisions.

Table 9 : Trust and Confidence in Locally Franchised International Cosmetic Brands

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %
28. A local franchise of an international brand gives me confidence in product authenticity.	45	15.0%	43	14.3%	97	32.3%	59	19.7%	56	18.7%
29. I trust locally franchised international brands because they are regulated by local authorities.	65	21.7%	80	26.7%	50	16.7%	33	11.0%	72	24.0%

30. I believe that local franchises are better at understanding my preferences compared to directly imported brands.	52	17.3%	64	21.3%	69	23.0%	71	23.7%	44	14.7%

This table examines respondents' trust and confidence in locally franchised international cosmetic brands. Regarding product authenticity, 32.3% remain neutral, while 19.7% agree and 18.7% strongly agree that a local franchise gives them confidence in authenticity. However, 29.3% either strongly disagree or disagree, showing mixed views. Trust in locally franchised brands due to local regulation is also divided, with 26.7% disagreeing and 24.0% strongly agreeing. Finally, opinions on whether local franchises understand consumer preferences better than directly imported brands are similarly split, with 23.7% agreeing and 23.0% neutral, while 38.6% disagree to varying degrees. Overall, respondents display diverse perspectives on the trustworthiness and relevance of locally franchised international brands.

Table 10 : Perceptions of Collaborative Efforts Between Local and International Cosmetic Brands

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %

31. I am more likely to trust a cosmetic product if it is the result of collaboration between a local company and an international brand.	61	20.3%	56	18.7%	47	15.7%	64	21.3%	72	24.0%
32. Cosmetic brands that collaborate with local companies tend to offer products that better match my needs.	56	18.7%	35	11.7%	81	27.0%	95	31.7%	33	11.0%
33. I think joint ventures between local and international brands are more likely to produce high-quality products.	51	17.0%	61	20.3%	52	17.3%	68	22.7%	68	22.7%
34. I prefer buying cosmetics from brands that blend local cultural values with international standards.	64	21.3%	35	11.7%	79	26.3%	48	16.0%	74	24.7%

This table examines respondents' trust and preferences for cosmetic products resulting from collaborations between local companies and international brands. A significant portion, 24.0%, strongly agree that they are more likely to trust a product born from such collaborations, though 20.3% strongly disagree. Regarding the alignment of products with consumer needs, 31.7% agree that collaborations offer better-suited products, while 27.0% remain neutral. Opinions on joint ventures producing higher-quality products are divided, with 22.7% agreeing and strongly agreeing, but 20.3% disagreeing. Lastly, 24.7% strongly prefer brands that blend local cultural values with international standards, though 21.3% strongly disagree. Overall, respondents express mixed feelings, with many recognizing the potential benefits of collaborations, but some remain skeptical.

Table 11 : Trust and Preferences for Online Cosmetic Purchases

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %	Count	Layer N %
35. I often purchase cosmetics online because it is more convenient than visiting stores.	72	24.0%	48	16.0%	73	24.3%	44	14.7%	63	21.0%

36. I trust online cosmetic platforms that provide a wide range of international products.	9	3.0%	56	18.7%	74	24.7%	86	28.7%	75	25.0%
37. I am more likely to purchase cosmetics from online platforms that offer detailed product descriptions and reviews.	82	27.3%	26	8.7%	46	15.3%	80	26.7%	66	22.0%
38. I feel more confident buying cosmetics online when they are endorsed by social media influencers from my region.	59	19.7%	58	19.3%	92	30.7%	60	20.0%	31	10.3%
39. Online platforms that cater specifically to consumers in my country are more trustworthy than global e-commerce platforms.	74	24.7%	40	13.3%	57	19.0%	69	23.0%	60	20.0%

40. I prefer buying cosmetics online because it offers access to a variety of local and international brands.	54	18.0%	44	14.7%	86	28.7%	72	24.0%	44	14.7%

This table explores respondents' attitudes toward purchasing cosmetics online. Convenience plays a significant role, with 24.0% strongly disagreeing and 24.3% remaining neutral, while 21.0% strongly agree that online shopping is more convenient than visiting stores. Trust in online platforms offering international products is high, with 28.7% agreeing and 25.0% strongly agreeing, while only 3.0% strongly disagree. Product descriptions and reviews significantly influence purchasing decisions, with 26.7% agreeing and 22.0% strongly agreeing. However, endorsements by regional influencers have mixed impact, with 30.7% neutral and 20.0% agreeing. Regarding trust in local vs. global platforms, 24.7% strongly disagree with a preference for local platforms, but 23.0% agree they are more trustworthy. Finally, 28.7% are neutral on the access to variety online, while 24.0% agree that it enhances access to both local and international brands. Overall, respondents express varying levels of trust and preference for online shopping, with product variety and platform trustworthiness being key factors.

Inferential statistics

Analysis for H1: Cultural factors (beauty standards and societal norms) significantly influence consumer preferences in the cosmetics industry in the Arabian Gulf.

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 2					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
8. Beauty plays a significant role in my purchasing decisions for cosmetics.	16.010	299	.000	1.227	1.08	1.38
9. I prefer cosmetic products that align with traditional beauty standards in my culture.	11.025	299	.000	.903	.74	1.06
10. I often choose cosmetics that enhance my physical appearance according to local beauty norms.	15.781	299	.000	1.140	1.00	1.28
11. I believe cosmetics that reflect global beauty trends are more appealing.	8.972	299	.000	.710	.55	.87

12. The cosmetic brands I purchase must reflect elegance and luxury.	11.943	299	.000	.973	.81	1.13
13. Societal expectations influence my choice of cosmetic products.	16.743	299	.000	1.377	1.21	1.54
14. I prefer cosmetics that are popular among my friends and family.	9.132	299	.000	.700	.55	.85
15. People in my community value luxury cosmetics and premium brands.	18.930	299	.000	1.380	1.24	1.52
16. Societal norms about personal appearance encourage me to invest in high-quality cosmetics.	14.395	299	.000	1.210	1.04	1.38

17. I choose cosmetic brands that are well-regarded and endorsed by influential people in society.	15.691	299	.000	1.243	1.09	1.40

Based on the one-sample test results, with a test value set to 2 (representing disagreement), the findings assess how **cultural factors** (beauty standards and societal norms) significantly influence **consumer preferences**. Below is an analysis of the results for each hypothesis:

Analysis for H1: Cultural factors significantly influence consumer preferences

H1a: Beauty standards significantly impact consumer preferences

- **8. Beauty plays a significant role in purchasing decisions for cosmetics**:
  - $t = 16.010$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.227
  - Significant agreement exists that beauty standards play a role in purchasing decisions, with a mean score well above 2, supporting **H1a**.
- **9. Preference for cosmetic products aligning with traditional beauty standards in culture**:
  - $t = 11.025$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.903
  - Preference for products aligning with traditional beauty standards is present, though the mean difference suggests moderate influence.
- **10. Frequent choice of cosmetics that enhance physical appearance according to local beauty norms**:

- $t = 15.781$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.140
- A significant preference exists for cosmetics aligning with local beauty norms, providing strong support for **H1a**.

- **11. Belief that cosmetics reflecting global beauty trends are more appealing**:
  - $t = 8.972$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.710
  - Global beauty trends are somewhat appealing, though the influence of global trends is weaker compared to local beauty norms.
- **12. Cosmetic brands purchased must reflect elegance and luxury**:
  - $t = 11.943$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.973
  - Elegance and luxury are important factors, indicating a moderate to strong influence of luxury within beauty standards.

H1b: Societal norms significantly impact consumer preferences

- **13. Societal expectations influence choice of cosmetic products**:
  - $t = 16.743$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.377
  - Societal expectations significantly influence cosmetic purchases, providing strong support for **H1b**.
- **14. Preference for cosmetics popular among friends and family**:
  - $t = 9.132$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.700
  - Preferences for cosmetics popular among friends and family are significant but weaker compared to societal expectations.
- **15. Community values luxury cosmetics and premium brands**:
  - $t = 18.930$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.380

    - Strong influence exists from community values on luxury cosmetics, indicating that societal norms heavily emphasize luxury.
- **16. Societal norms about personal appearance encourage investment in high-quality cosmetics**:
    - $t = 14.395$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.210
    - Societal norms around personal appearance strongly encourage investment in high-quality cosmetics.
- **17. Choice of cosmetic brands that are well-regarded and endorsed by influential people in society**:
    - $t = 15.691$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.243
    - Endorsements by influential people play a significant role in consumer preferences, further supporting **H1b**.

Summary of Findings for H1a and H1b:

- Both **beauty standards** and **societal norms** significantly influence consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf.
- **Beauty standards** strongly influence local beauty norms and luxury, with **global beauty trends** having a secondary role.
- **Societal norms** significantly impact consumer choices, particularly in terms of **luxury preferences**, **community values**, and **influence from peers** and **societal figures**.

Analysis for H2: Market entry strategies that align with consumer preferences shaped by cultural factors and social norms are expected to lead to greater success for the brand in the Arabian Gulf.

Table 12: Direct export in entry strategies

One-Sample Test: Direct export in entry strategies						
	Test Value = 2					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
23. I trust international cosmetic brands more than local brands.	16.628	299	.000	1.423	1.25	1.59
24. I often purchase international cosmetic brands because they offer more variety.	8.829	299	.000	.727	.56	.89
25. I believe international brands offer better quality than local cosmetic products.	13.570	299	.000	1.180	1.01	1.35
26. International brands meet my expectations in terms of luxury and status.	11.877	299	.000	1.113	.93	1.30

According to the table:

- **23. I trust international cosmetic brands more than local brands**:
  - t = 16.628, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.423
  - Strong trust in international cosmetic brands over local brands suggests that **direct export** can be an effective entry strategy in the region, as consumers place high confidence in international brands.
- **24. I often purchase international cosmetic brands because they offer more variety**:
  - t = 8.829, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.727
  - International brands are valued for their variety, though the mean difference is smaller, indicating variety is an important but not overwhelming factor.
- **25. I believe international brands offer better quality than local cosmetic products**:
  - t = 13.570, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.180
  - The perception that international brands offer better quality further supports the effectiveness of **direct export** as a strategy.
- **26. International brands meet expectations in terms of luxury and status**:
  - t = 11.877, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.113
  - Consumers associate international brands with luxury and status, reinforcing the value of positioning the brand as premium through direct export.

Conclusion for Direct Export: The test results indicate that consumers trust international brands, particularly for their quality, variety, and luxury, making **direct export** a promising strategy for success.

Table 13: Franchising in entry strategies

One-Sample Test: Franchising in entry strategies

	Test Value = 2					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
27. I prefer purchasing cosmetic products from well-known international brands with local franchises.	11.339	299	.000	.813	.67	.95
28. A local franchise of an international brand gives me confidence in product authenticity.	15.073	299	.000	1.127	.98	1.27
29. I trust locally franchised international brands because they are regulated by local authorities.	10.396	299	.000	.890	.72	1.06

30. I believe that local franchises are better at understanding my preferences compared to directly imported brands.	12.755	299	.000	.970	.82	1.12

According to the table:

- **27. I prefer purchasing cosmetic products from well-known international brands with local franchises**:
  - $t = 11.339$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.813
  - Franchising is seen positively, especially for well-known international brands, suggesting that consumers value the local presence of global brands.
- **28. A local franchise of an international brand gives confidence in product authenticity**:
  - $t = 15.073$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.127
  - Consumers trust the authenticity of products from local franchises of international brands, indicating franchising can enhance brand credibility.
- **29. I trust locally franchised international brands because they are regulated by local authorities**:
  - $t = 10.396$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.890
  - Local regulatory oversight boosts trust in franchised brands, further supporting franchising as a viable entry strategy.

- **30. I believe that local franchises are better at understanding my preferences compared to directly imported brands**:
  - $t = 12.755$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.970
  - Franchised brands are perceived to understand local preferences better than direct imports, emphasizing the importance of **local adaptation** in franchising.

Conclusion for Franchising: Franchising is an effective strategy in the Arabian Gulf, as consumers trust local franchises of international brands for authenticity, regulation, and better understanding of local needs.

Table 14: joint ventures in entry strategies

One-Sample Test: joint ventures in entry strategies						
	Test Value = 2					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
31. I am more likely to trust a cosmetic product if it is the result of collaboration between a local company and an international brand.	12.932	299	.000	1.100	.93	1.27

32. Cosmetic brands that collaborate with local companies tend to offer products that better match my needs.	14.229	299	.000	1.047	.90	1.19
33. I think joint ventures between local and international brands are more likely to produce high-quality products.	13.905	299	.000	1.137	.98	1.30
34. I prefer buying cosmetics from brands that blend local cultural values with international standards.	13.231	299	.000	1.110	.94	1.28

According to the table:

- **31. I am more likely to trust a cosmetic product if it is the result of collaboration between a local company and an international brand**:
  - $t = 12.932$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.100

    - Trust in joint ventures is high, indicating that collaborations between local and international brands are seen as trustworthy and potentially successful.
- **32. Cosmetic brands that collaborate with local companies tend to offer products that better match my needs**:
    - $t = 14.229$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.047
    - Consumers believe joint ventures are better at addressing their specific needs, making this strategy appealing.
- **33. Joint ventures between local and international brands are more likely to produce high-quality products**:
    - $t = 13.905$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.137
    - Perception of joint ventures producing higher-quality products adds to the potential success of this strategy.
- **34. I prefer buying cosmetics from brands that blend local cultural values with international standards**:
    - $t = 13.231$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.110
    - The blend of local and international standards through joint ventures appeals to consumers, making this strategy highly viable.

Conclusion for Joint Ventures: Joint ventures are expected to be successful, as they provide a blend of local relevance and international quality, which resonates strongly with consumers in the Arabian Gulf.

Table 15: online sales platforms

One-Sample Test: online sales platforms	
	Test Value = 2

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
35. I often purchase cosmetics online because it is more convenient than visiting stores.	11.054	299	.000	.927	.76	1.09
36. I trust online cosmetic platforms that provide a wide range of international products.	23.340	299	.000	1.540	1.41	1.67
37. I am more likely to purchase cosmetics from online platforms that offer detailed product descriptions and reviews.	12.182	299	.000	1.073	.90	1.25

38. I feel more confident buying cosmetics online when they are endorsed by social media influencers from my region.	11.349	299	.000	.820	.68	.96
39. Online platforms that cater specifically to consumers in my country are more trustworthy than global e-commerce platforms.	11.832	299	.000	1.003	.84	1.17
40. I prefer buying cosmetics online because it offers access to a variety of local and international brands.	13.645	299	.000	1.027	.88	1.17

According to the table:

- **35. I often purchase cosmetics online because it is more convenient than visiting stores**:
    - $t = 11.054$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.927
    - Convenience drives online cosmetic purchases, suggesting that **online platforms** can effectively capture consumer interest in the region.
- **36. I trust online cosmetic platforms that provide a wide range of international products**:
    - $t = 23.340$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.540
    - Trust in platforms offering a variety of international products is extremely high, indicating strong potential for success through online sales.
- **37. I am more likely to purchase cosmetics from online platforms that offer detailed product descriptions and reviews**:
    - $t = 12.182$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.073
    - The availability of detailed product information is critical for online purchases, highlighting the need for robust product descriptions on e-commerce sites.
- **38. I feel more confident buying cosmetics online when endorsed by social media influencers from my region**:
    - $t = 11.349$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 0.820
    - Regional influencer endorsements increase confidence in online purchases, suggesting that **social media marketing** can enhance the effectiveness of online platforms.
- **39. Online platforms catering to consumers in my country are more trustworthy than global e-commerce platforms**:

- $t = 11.832$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.003
- Consumers trust **local e-commerce platforms** over global ones, reinforcing the need for regionally tailored online platforms.

- **40. I prefer buying cosmetics online because it offers access to a variety of local and international brands**:
  - $t = 13.645$, $p < 0.001$, mean difference = 1.027
  - Access to both local and international brands drives online purchases, making **online sales platforms** a viable entry strategy.

Conclusion for Online Sales Platforms: Online platforms have strong potential due to convenience, trust in international product variety, and the influence of regional endorsements. Tailoring platforms to local needs will enhance success.

Summary of Findings for H2:

- **Direct export**, **franchising**, **joint ventures**, and **online sales platforms** all show significant alignment with consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf market.
- **Direct export** is favored for the **trust** and **luxury** associated with international brands, while **franchising** and **joint ventures** benefit from their ability to adapt to **local preferences** and build **trust** through collaboration.
- **Online platforms** are appealing due to **convenience** and **trust** in international brands, but success will depend on regional adaptation and influencer marketing.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Responses

The thematic analysis is aimed at identifying key themes across the 10 interview responses to uncover insights related to **cultural factors**, **consumer preferences**, and **market entry strategies** in the Arabian Gulf cosmetics market. Here are the major themes that emerged:

1. Influence of Local Beauty Standards

Theme: Local beauty standards play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions, particularly with a preference for modesty, natural looks, and cultural alignment.

- **Example from Respondent 1**: "Local beauty standards play a big role for me. I prefer products that fit the natural, modest look common here."
- **Example from Respondent 9**: "Local beauty standards strongly influence me, particularly for modest, natural looks."

Analysis: Most respondents mentioned that local beauty standards, especially around modesty and natural looks, are key influencers in their cosmetic purchasing behavior. This aligns with the cultural values of the Arabian Gulf, where consumers often seek products that align with their traditional beauty ideals. Local standards also guide purchasing decisions for skincare products, which are expected to fit local climate needs.

2. Role of Global Beauty Trends

Theme: Global beauty trends are of interest, but consumers often adapt them to fit local contexts or personal preferences.

- **Example from Respondent 3**: "I follow global trends but tend to adapt them to suit my personal style."
- **Example from Respondent 2**: "Global trends are fun, but I don’t always feel they’re practical here."

Analysis: While global beauty trends attract attention, respondents are selective in how they apply these trends. The influence of global trends is secondary to local beauty standards, and trends are often modified to fit cultural appropriateness. This demonstrates the balance between global influences and maintaining a local identity in purchasing behavior.

3. Societal Pressure and Expectations

Theme: Societal pressure, especially in professional or social settings, significantly affects cosmetic choices. Respondents feel the need to conform to community expectations.

- **Example from Respondent 3**: "Societal pressure is strong, especially for women. There's an expectation to always look your best."
- **Example from Respondent 9**: "Societal pressure definitely plays a role, especially in professional settings."

Analysis: Societal norms and the pressure to present oneself well in public or social settings play a strong role in shaping cosmetic purchases. There is an implicit understanding that meeting societal expectations, particularly in terms of appearance, is important. This pressure is particularly evident in professional environments and social gatherings, where personal appearance is closely scrutinized.

4. Importance of Luxury and Brand Reputation

Theme: Luxury and brand reputation are seen as critical components in cosmetic purchasing decisions. Consumers associate luxury brands with quality and social status.

- **Example from Respondent 4**: "Brand reputation is very important to me, and I lean towards luxury brands for skincare."
- **Example from Respondent 10**: "Luxury brands are important because they provide better quality, in my opinion."

Analysis: Luxury brands and their reputations are significant influencers for many respondents, especially in a market where status and prestige play a role in consumer behavior. High-end products are associated with higher quality and greater confidence in their effectiveness. Respondents frequently mentioned luxury skincare products, suggesting that consumers see skincare as a product category where quality (and therefore luxury) matters most.

5. Influence of Social Endorsements (Family, Friends, Influencers)

Theme: Social influence, particularly from family and friends, plays a critical role in shaping purchasing behavior, though influencer marketing is also impactful for some respondents.

- **Example from Respondent 5**: "Family recommendations matter more to me than influencers."
- **Example from Respondent 4**: "Influencers play a big role in my decisions, especially if they have similar skin concerns."

Analysis: Social networks, especially family and friends, are major influences in purchasing decisions. While influencers do have an impact on some respondents, most place a stronger trust in recommendations from people they know personally. Influencers are more influential when they share personal experiences that resonate with consumers' specific needs, such as skincare concerns.

6. Preference for International Brands vs. Local Collaborations

Theme: Respondents generally prefer international brands, though some express interest in collaborations between international and local companies.

- **Example from Respondent 6**: "I lean towards international brands because of their reputation for quality."

- **Example from Respondent 2**: "I like collaborations between local and international brands. It feels like the best of both worlds."

Analysis: International brands are favored for their perceived higher quality and wider variety of products. However, respondents are also open to local brands or collaborations between local and international companies, as they see this as a way to balance quality with cultural relevance. Collaborations are seen as an opportunity to merge global expertise with local understanding.

7. Online Shopping vs. In-Store Experience

Theme: Convenience is the primary driver for online shopping, though many respondents still value the in-store experience for product testing and personalized service.

- **Example from Respondent 8**: "Online shopping is convenient, but I sometimes visit stores to try out products."
- **Example from Respondent 10**: "I mostly shop online because it's more convenient, but I visit stores occasionally."

Analysis: While online shopping is appreciated for its convenience and variety, some respondents still prefer the tactile experience of in-store shopping, particularly for trying out new products. This indicates that online platforms need to offer features like detailed product descriptions and virtual try-ons to replicate the in-store experience as closely as possible.

From the thematic analysis, it is evident that local beauty standards, societal pressure, and luxury branding are dominant cultural factors influencing cosmetic purchasing behavior in the Arabian Gulf. Respondents demonstrate a balanced approach, showing interest in global beauty trends while maintaining a strong connection to local norms and values. Luxury brands are highly valued for their quality and status, and social influence from close networks plays a pivotal role in decision-making. Online shopping is favored for its convenience, but many still appreciate the in-store experience for its tactile benefits. Lastly, international brands are preferred, but collaborations with local entities are seen positively as they can provide culturally relevant products without sacrificing quality.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Interpretation of the results

Interpretation of H1: Cultural Factors Significantly Influence Consumer Preferences in the Arabian Gulf Cosmetics Industry

The analysis of H1 demonstrates that both beauty standards and societal norms play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf cosmetics market. These cultural factors heavily influence purchasing decisions, with specific emphasis on local beauty ideals and societal pressures.

H1a: Beauty Standards Significantly Impact Consumer Preferences

The findings for H1a suggest that beauty standards, especially those linked to local beauty norms, strongly influence consumer preferences. The test for the statement "Beauty plays a significant role in my purchasing decisions for cosmetics" yielded a highly significant result ($t = 16.010$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that consumers in the Arabian Gulf are deeply influenced by beauty standards when choosing cosmetics. This result highlights the importance of aligning product offerings with local beauty ideals, such as a focus on modesty, natural looks, and skincare products that suit the regional climate. The preference for cosmetics that align with traditional beauty standards ($t = 11.025$, $p < 0.001$) further emphasizes this point, though it suggests a more moderate influence compared to other factors. This could reflect the evolving nature of beauty standards in the region, where traditional values coexist with more modern or globalized trends.

Local beauty norms, in particular, have a strong impact, as seen in the result for the statement "I often choose cosmetics that enhance my physical appearance according to local beauty norms" ($t = 15.781$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that brands entering the Arabian Gulf market should prioritize products that cater to local beauty preferences—products that enhance natural beauty and modesty, both of which are valued in the region. Moreover, the moderate influence of global beauty trends ($t = 8.972$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that while international trends have some appeal, they are secondary to local customs. This offers brands an opportunity to introduce globally inspired products but adapted to local tastes. The association of luxury and elegance ($t = 11.943$, $p < 0.001$) with beauty standards further reinforces the importance of positioning premium cosmetic brands as elegant and high-status offerings in the market.

H1b: Societal Norms Significantly Impact Consumer Preferences

The results for H1b demonstrate the powerful role of societal norms in influencing cosmetic purchases. Societal expectations exert significant pressure on consumers, as indicated by the result for the statement "Societal expectations influence my choice of cosmetic products" ($t = 16.743$, $p < 0.001$). In the Arabian Gulf, social status and appearance are highly valued, and consumers feel compelled to meet community standards. This finding reflects a broader cultural emphasis on public image and social conformity, where individuals are expected to adhere to societal norms around appearance, particularly in professional and social settings.

The influence of community values, particularly with regard to luxury and premium brands ($t = 18.930$, $p < 0.001$), is another critical finding. Consumers in the Arabian Gulf associate luxury cosmetics with status and quality, suggesting that brands targeting this market should emphasize their premium positioning and high-quality offerings. The pressure to invest in high-quality cosmetics ($t = 14.395$, $p < 0.001$) underscores the importance of ensuring that products are perceived as superior and worthy of investment, particularly as consumers navigate social and professional environments where appearance is scrutinized. The impact of influential societal figures ($t = 15.691$, $p < 0.001$) on purchasing decisions also highlights the role of endorsements in shaping consumer behavior. Consumers are more likely to choose cosmetic brands that are endorsed by celebrities, influencers, or prominent societal figures, reinforcing the value of influencer marketing in the region.

Interpretation of H2: Market Entry Strategies that Align with Consumer Preferences Shaped by Cultural Factors and Social Norms Are Expected to Lead to Greater Success

The analysis for H2 provides strong support for the notion that market entry strategies which align with consumer preferences influenced by cultural factors are likely to result in greater success in the Arabian Gulf. This is particularly relevant for brands considering strategies such as direct export, franchising, joint ventures, and online sales platforms. Each strategy was evaluated in terms of how well it meets consumer expectations for trust, quality, variety, and convenience.

Direct Export

The results indicate that direct export is a highly effective strategy, largely due to the strong trust in international cosmetic brands ($t = 16.628$, $p < 0.001$). Consumers in the Arabian Gulf tend to view international brands as offering superior quality and variety, which makes direct export a promising approach for brands looking to enter the market. The belief that international brands provide better quality than local products ($t = 13.570$, $p < 0.001$) reinforces this strategy, as consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that are associated with global standards. Moreover, the association of luxury and status with international brands ($t = 11.877$, $p < 0.001$) aligns well with the cultural emphasis on prestige and high status in the region. For brands entering the Arabian Gulf via direct export, it will be crucial to emphasize their global reputation and luxury positioning in their marketing efforts.

Franchising

The results for franchising suggest that this strategy is highly effective, particularly for well-known international brands that establish local franchises ($t = 11.339$, $p < 0.001$). Consumers in the region appreciate the authenticity and credibility that local franchises provide ($t = 15.073$, $p < 0.001$), as these entities are perceived to be regulated by local authorities and better equipped to understand local preferences. The local presence of international brands helps build trust, as evidenced by the belief that franchises are better at addressing local needs than direct imports ($t = 12.755$, $p < 0.001$). For brands entering through franchising, the ability to adapt products and services to local tastes and preferences will be key to success. Additionally, ensuring that local franchises maintain the global brand's reputation for quality and luxury will help strengthen consumer trust and loyalty.

Joint Ventures

The analysis shows that joint ventures between local and international brands are seen as highly favorable by consumers, who view such collaborations as offering products that better match their needs ($t = 14.229$, $p < 0.001$). Joint ventures allow for the blending of local cultural values with international standards, which appeals to consumers seeking products that reflect both global expertise and local relevance ($t = 13.231$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the perception that joint ventures produce high-quality products ($t = 13.905$, $p < 0.001$) reinforces the potential success of this strategy. Brands entering the Arabian Gulf through joint ventures can leverage local knowledge and distribution networks while maintaining the international brand's quality standards. This strategy is particularly advantageous in a market where local authenticity and global quality are both highly valued.

Online Sales Platforms

The results indicate that online sales platforms are a viable entry strategy, particularly due to their convenience ($t = 11.054$, $p < 0.001$) and the trust consumers place in platforms offering a wide range of international products ($t = 23.340$, $p < 0.001$). The importance of detailed product descriptions and reviews ($t = 12.182$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that consumers rely heavily on online platforms for information and recommendations, making it crucial for brands to provide comprehensive and trustworthy content on their e-commerce sites. Additionally, the influence of social media endorsements ($t = 11.349$, $p < 0.001$) highlights the value of influencer marketing in driving online sales. Consumers feel more confident purchasing cosmetics online when products are endorsed by regional influencers, further underscoring the importance of localized marketing strategies. However, brands should also focus on tailoring online platforms to meet local consumer needs ($t = 11.832$, $p < 0.001$), as consumers show a preference for platforms that cater specifically to their country.

Overall, the findings suggest that all four market entry strategies—direct export, franchising, joint ventures, and online sales platforms—have strong potential for success in the Arabian Gulf market. Each strategy aligns with consumer preferences shaped by cultural factors and societal norms, particularly in terms of trust, quality, luxury, and convenience. Brands entering this market should carefully consider how to adapt their strategies to meet local expectations while maintaining their global brand identity.

Interpretation of Thematic Analysis from the Interview Responses

The thematic analysis from the 10 interview responses provides valuable insights into the cultural, social, and market factors that shape cosmetic purchasing behavior in the Arabian Gulf. Several key themes emerged from the analysis, highlighting the complex interplay between **local beauty standards**, **global trends**, **societal expectations**, **luxury preferences**, and **social influence**. These themes are critical for understanding consumer behavior and designing effective market entry strategies.

1. Influence of Local Beauty Standards

The theme of **local beauty standards** plays a central role in shaping cosmetic purchasing decisions. Respondents expressed a strong preference for products that align with local norms of **modesty** and **natural beauty**, which are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the Arabian Gulf. This aligns with the broader societal values of the region, where maintaining a modest and natural appearance is often viewed as ideal.

For instance, Respondent 1 emphasized the importance of selecting products that fit the "natural, modest look common here," while Respondent 9 echoed a similar sentiment, highlighting the strong influence of local beauty standards. This suggests that brands aiming to succeed in this market must tailor their products to these standards, offering cosmetics that enhance **natural beauty** without appearing overly bold or extravagant. Furthermore, local climate conditions also shape consumer preferences, particularly for **skincare products** that are suited to the region's hot, dry environment. This indicates a need for product formulations that cater to local skin care needs, including hydration and sun protection.

2. Role of Global Beauty Trends

While **global beauty trends** are of interest, the analysis reveals that consumers in the Arabian Gulf adapt these trends to fit local contexts. Respondents expressed a level of enthusiasm for international beauty trends but were selective in how these trends were incorporated into their personal routines. As Respondent 3 noted, global trends are followed but often adapted to suit personal style, suggesting that while global beauty influences are present, they do not override local cultural values.

This selective adoption highlights the balance between **global influences** and **local identity**. Brands that offer globally inspired products must be mindful of the need to **localize** these offerings to ensure they are culturally appropriate. While global beauty trends may draw attention, products must still align with the region's **modest aesthetic** and **natural beauty ideals**. For instance, bold, unconventional looks that are popular in global markets may not resonate as strongly with consumers in the Arabian Gulf. Therefore, brands should focus on offering globally recognized products that are adapted to fit local preferences, such as **subtle enhancements** and **skin-friendly formulations**.

3. Societal Pressure and Expectations

The interviews also underscored the significant influence of **societal pressure** on cosmetic choices. Respondents frequently mentioned the expectation to conform to community standards, particularly in professional and social settings. Respondent 3 highlighted that there is an expectation for women to "always look your best," reflecting the strong cultural emphasis on **public appearance** and **social conformity**.

This pressure is particularly evident in **professional environments** and **social gatherings**, where personal appearance is closely scrutinized. As a result, consumers feel compelled to invest in high-quality cosmetics that enhance their appearance and help them meet societal expectations. This suggests that brands should emphasize the **prestige** and **status** associated with their products, positioning them as tools for achieving socially desirable looks. Furthermore, product marketing that highlights the **confidence-boosting** benefits of cosmetics may resonate strongly with consumers who are navigating societal expectations in their day-to-day lives.

4. Importance of Luxury and Brand Reputation

Luxury and brand reputation emerged as crucial factors in purchasing decisions. Many respondents expressed a preference for luxury brands, associating them with quality and social status. For instance, Respondent 4 mentioned that brand reputation is very important and tends to lean towards luxury brands for skincare. Respondent 10 also emphasized the importance of luxury brands, citing better quality as a key reason for their preference.

In the Arabian Gulf market, where status and prestige play significant roles in consumer behavior, luxury skincare and cosmetic products are highly valued. The association between luxury branding and perceived higher quality further supports the idea that premium products are likely to succeed in this region. Therefore, brands entering this market should focus on cultivating a reputation for excellence and luxury, which can help attract affluent consumers who are willing to invest in high-end products. Furthermore, skincare emerged as a particularly important category where consumers prioritize luxury, indicating that brands in this segment should emphasize advanced formulations and scientifically backed claims.

5. Influence of Social Endorsements (Family, Friends, Influencers)

Social influence from family, friends, and influencers also plays a critical role in shaping purchasing behavior. Respondent 5 noted that family recommendations matter more than influencer endorsements, while Respondent 4 highlighted the role of influencers who share similar skin concerns.

This finding suggests that personal networks and close relationships are highly influential in the decision-making process, often taking precedence over marketing efforts from influencers. However, influencers still play a significant role, particularly when their experiences align with consumers' personal needs. For instance, skincare influencers who share their own struggles with specific skin concerns can resonate with consumers, offering authentic and relatable product recommendations. Brands should consider leveraging both family-oriented marketing and influencer partnerships that focus on genuine, personal experiences to build trust with consumers.

6. Preference for International Brands vs. Local Collaborations

The interviews revealed a general preference for international brands, with some interest in collaborations between international and local companies. Respondent 6 expressed a preference for international brands due to their reputation for quality, while Respondent 2 mentioned a positive view of collaborations between local and international brands, describing it as "the best of both worlds."

This highlights the perception that international brands offer higher quality and more variety, which makes them attractive to consumers. However, local collaborations are seen as a way to balance global expertise with cultural relevance, suggesting that joint ventures between international and local brands may be particularly successful in the Arabian Gulf market. These collaborations allow brands to maintain their global standards while catering to local preferences and cultural sensitivities.

7. Online Shopping vs. In-Store Experience

Lastly, the theme of online shopping versus in-store experience emerged as an important factor in consumer behavior. While online shopping is valued for its convenience, some respondents still prefer the tactile experience of in-store shopping, particularly for testing out products. Respondent 8 noted that while online shopping is convenient, visiting stores is sometimes necessary to try out products.

This suggests that while e-commerce platforms have significant potential, they must offer features that replicate the in-store experience as closely as possible. Brands should focus on providing detailed product descriptions, customer reviews, and possibly virtual try-on tools to build consumer confidence in online purchases. At the same time, maintaining a strong in-store presence for product testing and personalized service will remain important for engaging customers who prefer a hands-on shopping experience.

Discussion of Study Results in Light of the Literature Review

The findings of the study align well with existing consumer behavior theories and market entry strategies outlined in the literature review. The results provide key insights into how cultural factors, consumer preferences, and market entry strategies are interconnected in the Arabian Gulf's cosmetics industry. The study's implications are consistent with several established frameworks, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, and Cultural

Dimensions Theory, as well as market entry models such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Internationalization Process Model.

Role of Beauty standards in Purchasing Decisions

According to the results 37% of respondents agree that beauty significantly influences their cosmetic purchasing decisions, while 21.33% remain neutral, and 18.67% strongly disagree. This variation in responses suggests that beauty standards play a major role in the purchasing behavior of a large portion of consumers, but not universally. The results align with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), which highlights that attitudes towards beauty and cosmetics can significantly influence behavior. The large proportion of respondents agreeing with beauty's role indicates that attitudes and subjective norms around beauty are powerful motivators in this market, supporting the TPB's framework.

This finding is further supported by Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1980), particularly the dimension of collectivism, which is characteristic of the Arabian Gulf. In collectivist societies, social conformity and appearance are emphasized, which explains why beauty-related norms significantly influence purchasing behavior. However, the significant minority of respondents who disagree with beauty's influence suggests that for some individuals, personal preferences may outweigh cultural pressures, pointing to the importance of tailoring strategies for diverse consumer segments.

Preferences for Cosmetics Based on Cultural, Local, and Global Beauty Norms

Respondents show varied preferences for cosmetics that align with traditional, local, and global beauty norms. For instance, 25% agree that they prefer cosmetics aligning with traditional beauty standards, while 26% strongly disagree. This split reflects a balance between consumers who favor traditional cultural values and those who may be more influenced by global beauty trends. This is consistent with Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), which suggests that some consumers may prioritize products that align with local and traditional standards, while others may favor foreign brands due to perceptions of higher quality or modern appeal.

Similarly, 32% of respondents remain neutral regarding cosmetics that enhance their appearance according to local beauty norms, while 28% agree, suggesting that local beauty standards play a significant role for a considerable portion of consumers, though not universally. The literature supports this finding, with Al-Awadhi & Afiouni (2019) emphasizing that in the Arabian Gulf, local and traditional values often coexist with modern trends. Brands entering this market should therefore offer products that balance local cultural relevance with global appeal to cater to diverse preferences.

In contrast, the appeal of global beauty trends is less pronounced, with 29.7% of respondents strongly disagreeing that global trends are more appealing, while 26.7% agree. This finding highlights the importance of localizing global products to meet cultural expectations, as emphasized by Weber and De Villebonne (2002), who found that cultural differences significantly shape consumer behavior. This split in preferences underscores the need for brands to adapt global trends in ways that resonate with local beauty ideals.

Influence of Societal Expectations and Social Circles

The results highlight the strong impact of societal expectations on cosmetic purchases, with 27% agreeing and 26.7% strongly agreeing that these expectations influence their decisions. This finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that subjective norms, or social pressures, are critical determinants of consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In collectivist societies like the Arabian Gulf, societal expectations around personal appearance are highly influential, particularly in professional and social settings. This is consistent with Cultural Dimensions Theory, where high power distance and collectivism contribute to the importance of conforming to social standards (Hofstede, 1980).

The study also found that preferences aligned with friends and family were less influential, with 31.7% disagreeing. This suggests that while societal norms are important, social circles may have a more limited impact on individual purchasing decisions. This finding is somewhat unexpected given the role of social influence in many collectivist cultures, but it may indicate a growing shift toward individualism in consumer preferences, particularly among younger generations. However, social endorsements, such as those from influential people and celebrities, were still impactful for a significant portion of respondents, highlighting the importance of influencer marketing in this region.

Impact of Cultural and Societal Values on Purchasing Behavior

The results shows that cultural and societal values play a substantial role in shaping purchasing decisions, with 32% of respondents willing to pay more for cosmetics that meet local cultural standards, such as halal certification. This aligns with Institutional Theory (Scott, 1995), which emphasizes the need for brands to comply with local regulations and cultural expectations to succeed in foreign markets. In the Arabian Gulf, where religious and cultural practices strongly influence consumer behavior, brands that align with these values are more likely to succeed (Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019).

The study also reveals mixed sentiments regarding local versus international brands, with 29.7% agreeing that they prefer local brands, while 28% strongly disagree. This split reflects a tension between cultural loyalty and the perceived superiority of international brands, as noted by Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). While some consumers prefer local brands for their cultural relevance, others are drawn to international brands for their reputation for quality and variety.

Trust in International vs. Local Brands

The results show that the majority of respondents (60%) trust international brands more than local brands, a finding that resonates with Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, but with a twist. While ethnocentric consumers might typically favor domestic products, the preference for international brands in the Arabian Gulf highlights the region's emphasis on quality, luxury, and status, as noted by Jin & Cedrola (2019). This is also consistent with Kim et al. (2013), who found that global perceptions of quality often drive consumer preferences in emerging markets. The prestige associated with international brands plays a critical role in the purchasing decisions of Gulf consumers, particularly in the cosmetics industry, where status and luxury are key factors.

Perceptions of International Brands in Terms of Variety, Quality, and Status

According to the results international brands are favored for their variety, quality, and status, with 31.7% strongly agreeing that international brands offer better quality than local products, and 32% agreeing that they meet expectations for luxury and status. This aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), which suggests that international brands leverage their unique capabilities—in this case, quality and luxury branding—to gain a competitive advantage. The Internationalization Process Model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) also highlights the importance of building a global reputation to succeed in foreign markets, which is evident in the Arabian Gulf's preference for luxury international brands.

Trust in Locally Franchised International Brands and Collaborative Efforts

Regarding respondents' trust in locally franchised international brands and collaborations between local and international companies. The mixed results suggest that while some consumers appreciate the authenticity and cultural relevance offered by local franchises and collaborations, others remain skeptical. For instance, 24% strongly agree that they trust products resulting from local-international collaborations, but 20.3% strongly disagree. These findings are consistent with Institutional Theory, which underscores the importance of local adaptation and compliance with cultural standards in gaining consumer trust (Scott, 1995). However, as noted by Ferdinand & Ciptono (2022), brand positioning and perceived quality play a more significant role than local partnerships for many consumers, which may explain the skepticism toward local franchises.

Influence of Cultural Factors on Consumer Preferences

The study's findings confirm the significant role that beauty standards and societal norms play in shaping consumer preferences in the Arabian Gulf, aligning closely with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to TPB, behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, local beauty standards, especially around modesty and natural looks, emerged as crucial determinants of purchasing behavior, reinforcing the idea that subjective norms strongly influence consumers' intentions. The study also found that societal pressure, particularly in professional and social settings, affects cosmetic choices, which supports the TPB's focus on social norms as a key driver of behavior.

These findings mirror existing research, such as the work of Al-Awadhi & Afiouni (2019), who emphasize that consumers in the Arabian Gulf place high value on luxury and premium brands. The influence of societal expectations, as observed in this study, is consistent with Cultural

Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1980), particularly the dimensions of collectivism and power distance. In collectivist societies like those in the Arabian Gulf, social approval and adherence to community standards are paramount, which explains the significant impact of societal pressure on cosmetic purchasing decisions.

The study also echoes the findings of Weber and De Villebonne (2002), who compared consumer behavior between France and the USA, highlighting how cultural differences shape preferences. In the Arabian Gulf, as in other regions, consumers' desire to conform to societal norms underscores the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to local cultural expectations.

The Role of Consumer Ethnocentrism and Brand Perception

While the Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory suggests that consumers often prefer domestic products due to a sense of national pride (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), the findings of this study highlight a preference for international cosmetic brands over local ones, particularly due to their association with luxury and quality. This divergence from traditional ethnocentric behavior could be attributed to the high prestige associated with international brands in the Arabian Gulf. The region's consumers, as reflected in this study, trust international brands for their perceived superiority in quality, variety, and status—factors that are less emphasized in the ethnocentrism model.

Similar patterns have been observed in markets like Saudi Arabia, where consumers lean toward luxury international products despite nationalistic tendencies (ALsahli & Ahmed, 2021). This finding suggests that while ethnocentric tendencies may be present in certain product categories, cosmetics, especially in the luxury segment, are more influenced by global brand perceptions and the prestige associated with foreign brands.

Market Entry Strategies and Cultural Adaptation

The study's exploration of market entry strategies demonstrates how aligning entry modes with consumer preferences shaped by cultural factors leads to greater potential success. This finding is consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasizes leveraging a firm's unique resources and capabilities—such as branding and product quality—to achieve a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). In the context of the Arabian Gulf, the study found that direct export, franchising, and joint ventures all showed significant alignment with consumer preferences, particularly in terms of trust in international brands and the need for local cultural relevance.

These results align with the work of Kim et al. (2013) and Weber and De Villebonne (2002), who highlight the importance of tailored marketing strategies that resonate with local consumers. In the Arabian Gulf, franchising and joint ventures emerged as particularly effective entry strategies due to their ability to blend international quality with local adaptation, a theme supported by the Internationalization Process Model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). This model emphasizes gradual market involvement and the importance of building local networks to reduce risks—a strategy that proved to be highly favorable in the context of the Arabian Gulf.

Furthermore, the study's results support Institutional Theory (Scott, 1995), which underscores the importance of navigating local regulatory environments and institutional frameworks. Franchising and joint ventures allow international brands to comply with local regulations, such as halal certification and cultural norms, while maintaining their global reputation. This regulatory alignment is crucial for gaining consumer trust, particularly in regions where religious and cultural factors significantly impact product acceptance (Al-Awadhi & Afiouni, 2019).

Strategic Importance of Luxury Branding and Social Influence

The study also highlights the strategic importance of luxury branding and social influence in the Arabian Gulf, a finding that resonates with previous studies on market entry success. Respondents emphasized the prestige and quality associated with luxury brands, aligning with the work of Jin & Cedrola (2019), who argue that brand positioning as luxury is critical for success in markets like the Arabian Gulf. The role of social endorsements from family, friends, and influencers further reinforces the need for brands to leverage social networks to build credibility and trust. This is consistent with the findings of Al-Hashimi and AlDhari (2019), who highlight the importance of social norms and community influence in consumer behavior within the beauty and SPA sector in Bahrain.

Additionally, online shopping emerged as a growing trend in the region, particularly due to its convenience and the wide variety of products available through international platforms. This aligns with Sun's (2021) study on Chinese consumers, which found that brand credibility and cultural preferences are key factors influencing online cosmetic purchases. In the Arabian Gulf, the study found that while consumers appreciate the convenience of online shopping, they still value the tactile experience of in-store shopping for product testing, which mirrors findings in other culturally driven markets.

The results of the study are well-supported by existing literature on consumer behavior theories and market entry strategies. The findings demonstrate the critical role of cultural sensitivity, local adaptation, and luxury positioning in shaping market success for SMEs in the Arabian Gulf cosmetics industry. The study echoes previous research by highlighting the need for brands to understand local cultural norms, navigate institutional barriers, and employ strategic market entry models that align with consumer preferences. By leveraging global brand prestige and adapting to local expectations, international brands can successfully enter and thrive in the Arabian Gulf's competitive cosmetics market.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study's findings underscore the significant role of cultural values and societal expectations in shaping consumer behavior in the Arabian Gulf cosmetics market. Respondents demonstrated a strong preference for products that align with local cultural standards, such as halal certification, and many expressed a willingness to pay more for such products. This supports the Institutional Theory's emphasis on the need for brands to comply with local regulatory and cultural standards to succeed in this market. Additionally, the influence of social endorsements from family, friends, and influencers was found to be impactful, suggesting that social networks play a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions.

The study also found that while some consumers favor local brands for their cultural relevance, many others prefer international brands due to their global reputation for quality and luxury. This duality highlights the need for brands to balance global appeal with local authenticity to capture a wider audience in the region.

The results suggest that the success of market entry strategies is closely tied to how well they align with consumer preferences shaped by cultural factors. Direct export emerged as a promising strategy due to the strong trust that consumers place in international brands, particularly those associated with luxury and quality. However, the study also highlighted the importance of local adaptation, with many respondents expressing trust in local franchises of international brands due to their ability to meet cultural expectations and adhere to local regulations. This supports

Institutional Theory, which emphasizes the need for firms to navigate regulatory environments and cultural norms when entering new markets.

Joint ventures between local and international brands were also perceived favorably by respondents, as these collaborations offer a balance between global expertise and local relevance. Respondents indicated that products resulting from local-international collaborations tend to better meet their needs, providing a strong case for brands to consider joint ventures as a viable market entry strategy. Online sales platforms were seen as convenient, with many respondents appreciating the variety of both local and international products available online. However, the study found that while convenience is a key factor driving online purchases, in-store experiences are still valued for product testing and personalized service.

Market entry strategies like joint ventures and local franchising can enhance brand trust by blending global expertise with local relevance. Additionally, while online sales platforms offer convenience, in-store experiences remain important for product testing and personalized service. Brands entering this market should prioritize luxury positioning, cultural adaptation, and social influence to achieve success.

Implications of the study

The implications of this study are significant for brands looking to enter the cosmetics market in the Arabian Gulf. The findings highlight that cultural factors, particularly beauty standards and societal norms, play a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences. Brands must adapt their product offerings and marketing strategies to align with these cultural influences to enhance their appeal and potential success in the region. The study also underscores the importance of peer and family influence in purchasing decisions, suggesting that leveraging word-of-mouth marketing, local influencers, and community-driven campaigns could greatly benefit brand visibility and credibility. Furthermore, understanding the balance between luxury perceptions and price sensitivity will allow brands to position themselves effectively in a market where premium and affordable luxury products are both valued. These insights provide actionable strategies for market entry, emphasizing the need for a localized approach that respects the unique cultural landscape of the Arabian Gulf.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, here are 10 actionable recommendations for the brand as it prepares to enter the Arabian Gulf market:

1. Prioritize Consumer Preferences Related to Beauty Standards

- Since **beauty standards**—specifically, the **role in purchasing**—significantly influence consumer preferences, the brand should focus on aligning its products with local beauty ideals. Offering products that enhance **natural beauty** or **modest looks** can help meet consumer expectations.

2. Leverage Societal Influences in Marketing

- With **societal norms** (such as family and friend recommendations) playing a key role in shaping consumer preferences, the brand should capitalize on **word-of-mouth marketing** and **social proof**. Encouraging **peer recommendations** and **community-driven campaigns** can enhance brand credibility.

3. Develop Products that Align with Popular Local Trends

- As **popularity among friends and family** significantly impacts consumer choices, the brand should closely follow **local beauty trends** and ensure that its products are perceived as **trendy** and **desirable** within social circles.

4. Adapt Product Offerings to Local Cultural Expectations

- The negative impact of **societal expectations** suggests that some consumers may feel constrained by societal norms. The brand can differentiate itself by offering a range of products that cater to both **traditional** and more **innovative or global beauty trends**, allowing consumers to express individuality while maintaining cultural relevance.

5. Emphasize the Role of Luxury in Marketing

- While **luxury cosmetics** showed a mixed relationship with consumer preferences, a focus on **affordable luxury** or positioning products as **premium but accessible** may appeal to a broader audience. Highlighting the **quality** and **luxury** elements without alienating price-sensitive consumers will be key.

6. Collaborate with Local Influencers to Enhance Brand Appeal

- Given the importance of **societal norms** and **peer influence**, collaborating with **local influencers** who are well-respected in the region can enhance the brand's visibility and acceptance. Influencer marketing can bridge the gap between local tastes and global beauty trends.

7. Invest in Customizable or Personalized Products

- To tap into the **individualism** of consumers, the brand should offer products that allow for **customization** or **personalization** to fit different beauty standards and preferences. This can help satisfy both the desire for **individual expression** and **social conformity**.

8. Target Family and Group-Oriented Marketing Campaigns

- The study indicates that **family and friends** play a crucial role in purchasing decisions. The brand could benefit from marketing campaigns that target **families** or **groups**, offering **group discounts** or **referral programs** to encourage consumers to introduce the brand to their social circles.

9. Consider Local Partnerships to Improve Cultural Fit

- For a successful market entry, the brand should explore **joint ventures** or **franchising** with local companies that understand the cultural nuances of the Arabian Gulf market. Local partnerships can help the brand build trust and adapt its products to fit regional needs.

10. Use Social Media as a Key Platform for Engagement

- Since **popularity** is a significant factor, the brand should be highly active on **social media platforms** like Instagram and TikTok, where beauty trends often originate and spread. Engaging with the local beauty community and participating in relevant beauty conversations will help the brand stay relevant and visible in the market.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that may impact the generalizability of its findings. First, the sample size, particularly for the qualitative interviews, was relatively small, limiting the depth of insight into consumer preferences across diverse demographic groups in the Arabian Gulf.

Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which can introduce response bias, as participants may not always provide accurate or fully honest answers. The cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, meaning it may not account for changes in consumer behavior over time. Finally, the study focused on a specific geographic region, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other markets with different cultural dynamics. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal design, larger sample sizes, and additional geographic areas to enhance the validity and applicability of the results.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Customers Questionnaire

Instructions for Respondents:

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by choosing the corresponding number (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Consumer Preferences and Market Entry Strategies in the Cosmetics Industry: Survey

Section 1: Demographics

1. **Age**:
    - Under 18
    - 18-25

- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56 and above

2. **Gender**:
   - Male
   - Female
3. **Nationality**:
   - UAE
   - Saudi Arabia
   - Kuwait
   - Oman
   - Qatar
   - Bahrain
4. **Employment Status**:
   - Employed
   - Unemployed
   - Self-Employed

- Student

5. **Monthly Income**:
    - Less than $1,000
    - $1,000 – $3,000
    - $3,001 – $5,000
    - Above $5,000
6. **Education Level**:
    - High School
    - Bachelor’s Degree
    - Master’s Degree
    - PhD/Doctorate
    - Other
7. **How often do you purchase cosmetic products?**
    - Rarely
    - Once a month
    - 2-3 times a month
    - Weekly
    - More than once a week

Section 2: Cultural Factors and Consumer Preferences

Beauty Standards

8. Beauty plays a significant role in my purchasing decisions for cosmetics.

9. I prefer cosmetic products that align with traditional beauty standards in my culture.

10. I often choose cosmetics that enhance my physical appearance according to local beauty norms.

11. I believe cosmetics that reflect global beauty trends are more appealing.

12. The cosmetic brands I purchase must reflect elegance and luxury.

Societal Norms

13. Societal expectations influence my choice of cosmetic products.

14. I prefer cosmetics that are popular among my friends and family.

15. People in my community value luxury cosmetics and premium brands.

16. Societal norms about personal appearance encourage me to invest in high-quality cosmetics.

17. I choose cosmetic brands that are well-regarded and endorsed by influential people in society.

Section 3: Consumer Preferences as a Mediator

18. My purchasing decisions for cosmetics are influenced by both cultural values and personal preferences.

19. I am more likely to buy cosmetics that align with societal values, even if they are expensive.

20. I tend to prefer local brands of cosmetics over international ones.

21. I am willing to pay more for cosmetic products that meet local cultural standards (e.g., halal certification).

22. Cultural values in my country have a direct impact on my cosmetic buying behavior.

Section 4: Market Entry Strategies Adapted to Consumer Preferences

Direct Export

23. I trust international cosmetic brands more than local brands.

24. I often purchase international cosmetic brands because they offer more variety.

25. I believe international brands offer better quality than local cosmetic products.

26. International brands meet my expectations in terms of luxury and status.

Franchising

27. I prefer purchasing cosmetic products from well-known international brands with local franchises.

28. A local franchise of an international brand gives me confidence in product authenticity.

29. I trust locally franchised international brands because they are regulated by local authorities.

30. I believe that local franchises are better at understanding my preferences compared to directly imported brands.

Joint Ventures

31. I am more likely to trust a cosmetic product if it is the result of collaboration between a local company and an international brand.

32. Cosmetic brands that collaborate with local companies tend to offer products that better match my needs.

33. I think joint ventures between local and international brands are more likely to produce high-quality products.

34. I prefer buying cosmetics from brands that blend local cultural values with international standards.

Online Sales Platforms

35. I often purchase cosmetics online because it is more convenient than visiting stores.

36. I trust online cosmetic platforms that provide a wide range of international products.

37. I am more likely to purchase cosmetics from online platforms that offer detailed product descriptions and reviews.

38. I feel more confident buying cosmetics online when they are endorsed by social media influencers from my region.

39. Online platforms that cater specifically to consumers in my country are more trustworthy than global e-commerce platforms.

40. I prefer buying cosmetics online because it offers access to a variety of local and international brands.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B: Interview

Interview Guide

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview. We are conducting research to better understand how cultural factors and consumer preferences shape decisions in the cosmetics industry, particularly in the Arabian Gulf. Your insights will help us gain a deeper understanding of the key factors influencing your purchasing decisions.

1. How do you think local beauty standards influence your choice of cosmetic products?
2. How important are global beauty trends to you when selecting cosmetics?
3. In your opinion, how does societal pressure or expectations shape your decisions when buying cosmetics?
4. Can you describe the role that luxury and brand reputation play when you choose cosmetic products?
5. How do endorsements from influencers, friends, or family impact your cosmetic purchasing decisions?
6. Do you prefer purchasing cosmetics from international brands, local brands, or collaborations between the two?
7. How does the convenience of online platforms compare with the in-store experience when buying cosmetics?