

**Impact of Instagram and Influencer
Marketing on Taiwanese Female Millennials'
Skincare Behaviors During COVID-19 and
Post-COVID-19**

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Abstract

The primary focus of this study is to explore the effects of Instagram and influencer marketing on the skincare behaviors among Taiwanese female millennials, in/ post-COVID-19 pandemic. The study looks at how consumer tastes and purchasing decisions have changed as a result of the shift to digital platforms that led to social distancing and higher online activity. The report analyses the growth of Instagram, its relationship with younger consumers and assesses how this platform has become a primary channel through which skincare brands or influencers reach out to this group by inciting awareness and preference for products — predominantly Korean /Japanese vanguard ones. The qualitative interviews show that Instagram influencer recommendations were considered more trustworthy than traditional advertising and influenced skincare routines, as well as loyalty to brands. Not only have the researcher printed that words, but also locked in influencer with this new consumer fears and behaviors really into a long future history of skincare marketing evolution. The information revealed presents useful learnings for any brand looking to pursue the post-Covid market opportunity and use Instagram, as well as influencer collaboration more broadly, in gaining — or holding onto its gains — within the context of skincare.

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Acknowledge

Without many others, this study could not have been finished; to them I must thank you. Though a flurry of emotions, this has been an amazing journey—a tremendous experience I am privileged to have at this age. Without you all, this seeming unachievable task cannot be finished.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Submission of Thesis and Dissertation	2
Thesis Submission Form	3
AI Acknowledgement Supplement	4
Acknowledge	5
List of Figures and Tables	9
Chapter 1 Introduction	10
1.0 Research Background	10
1.1 Research Justification	11
1.2 Gaps in the Literature	12
1.3 Research Aims and Objectives	13
1.4 Overview of the Dissertation Structure	14
Chapter 2 Literature Review	15
2.0 Overview of the Taiwanese Cosmetics Market	15
2.0.1 Market Size and Growth Trends	15
2.0.2 Consumer Demographics	17
2.1 Skincare Market in Taiwan	19
2.1.1 Market Overview	19
2.1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on Skincare Trends	21
2.2 Skincare Preferences and Behaviours among Taiwanese Millennial Women	24
2.2.1 Characteristics of Millennial	24
2.2.2 Preferences and Behaviours Related to Skincare Products	26
2.3 Customer Journey in Skincare	29
2.3.1 Customer Journey Definition	29
2.4 Marketing Channels: Instagram	36
2.4.1 Overview of Digital Transformation in Cosmetics Marketing	36
2.4.2 Introduction to Instagram	36
2.4.3 Influence of Instagram on Consumer Behaviour and Preference	37
2.4.4 Influencers and Brand Collaborations on Instagram	39
Chapter 3 Research Objectives and Methodology	41
3.0 Research Objectives	41
3.1 Methodology Introduction	43
3.2 Research Philosophy	44
3.2.1 Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological	45
3.2.2 Interpretivism and Positivism	46
3.3 Research Approach	47

3.3.1 Deductive and Inductive	47
3.4 Research Strategy	48
3.4.1 Qualitative and Quantitative	49
3.4.2 Sample Strategy	51
3.5 Data Collection and Data Analyze	52
3.5.1 Data Collection	52
3.5.2 Data Analyze	53
3.6 Ethical Considerations	54
3.7 Research Limitations.....	55
Chapter 4 Findings, Analysis and Discussion	56
4.0 Objective 1 - To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and skincare regimen before COVID-19 and after.	56
4.0.1 Theme 1: Skincare Routine Evolution	56
4.0.2 Theme 2: Changes in Product Usage	58
4.0.3 Discussion	59
4.1 Objective 2 - To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and reactions to advertising and marketing campaigns of skincare before COVID-19 and after.	63
4.1.1 Theme 1: Engagement with Advertisements.....	63
4.1.2 Theme 2: Influence of Marketing Channels.....	66
4.1.3 Discussion	67
4.2 Objective 3 - To evaluate the influence of Instagram on skincare products' awareness and choices through the customer journey.....	69
4.2.1 Theme 1: Impact of Instagram on Awareness and Choices.....	69
4.2.2 Discussion	72
4.3 Objective 4- To analyze the influence of social media influencers on Taiwanese female millennials' skincare product perceptions and purchasing decisions.....	74
4.3.1 Theme 1: Influence of Social Media Influencers	74
4.3.2 Theme 2: Engagement with Influencers	76
4.3.3 Discussion	77
Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations.....	79
5.0 Overview	79
5.1 Development in Skincare Routines and Consumer Behaviour	79
5.2 Influence of Social Media Influencers	80
5.3 Effectiveness of Marketing Channels	81
5.4 Practical Implications for Marketers	81
5.5 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research	82

5.6 Summary	83
Bibliography.....	84
Appendices.....	100
Appendix 1- Consent Form.....	100

List of Figures and Tables

List of Figures

Figure 1 Taiwan's Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics Revenue.....	17
Figure 2 Decorative cosmetics users in Taiwan.....	18
Figure 3 Top Skincare Products in Taiwan by Region (July 2021).....	20
Figure 4 Customer Journey.....	29
Figure 5 Affected Factors for Selecting Skincare Products Percentage.....	32
Figure 6 Proportion of Sales Channels for Cosmetic Products.....	34
Figure 7 The Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019).....	44

List of Tables

Table 1 Analyze the Type of Influencers.....	75
Table 2 Analyze the Degree of Influencer Impact on Purchasing Decision.....	75

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Research Background

COVID-19 has been a remarkable event for the whole of society, which has changed many jobs, markets and industries dramatically. How to adjust the marketing strategy has been a big issue when marketers face this kind of tragedy. The skincare industry has been influenced seriously by COVID-19 since it totally changed people's lifestyles, for example, people start to study and work from home, and they don't need to meet each other face to face. In addition, the mandatory regulation of wearing masks caused skin issues like acne and irritation, increasing the demand for specific skincare solutions.

At the beginning of COVID-19, Taiwan implemented social restrictions and community activity, like keeping social distance and limiting group social activities. In addition, to the policy of soft lockdown, citizens are advised to stay at home, but won't be punished for going out. Therefore, students could study online at home and the employees could decide if they prefer to work from home (WHM). As a result, people stayed at home more often, and their anxiety about shopping at physical stores increased online shopping dramatically (Theodorou et al., 2023). The evolution of mandatory mask regulation and consumer behaviour, accordingly, the consumer preference shifted toward skincare products and pursues affordable and convenient products (Gardner et al., 2021).

This dissertation will explore the marketing strategy change from face-to-face to non-face-to-face during COVID-19 and change in post-COVID-19. The study will also zoom in on Taiwanese female millennials and the transformation of Taiwan

skincare market as a result. It will also explore the impact of digital platforms, notably Instagram and so-called social media influencers on Generation Y consumerism and spending habits. This research examines how such a crisis changes consumers' consumption patterns and provides the evolution of dynamics in skincare industry during this pandemic, along with some suggestions for future marketing strategies applicable to similar crises.

1.1 Research Justification

Specifically, Taiwanese female millennials have significantly changed the skincare industry in the wake of COVID-19. For one, this demographic shift demands a nuanced understanding of shifting consumer habits considering prolonged periods spent at home and obligatory mask-wearing which combine to worsen skin issues such as acne or irritation. Thus, this paper will address these shifts in skincare regimen and purchasing habits as a result of the changes—mirroring the general trends observed by Gardner et al. (2021).

More importantly, the spread of digital platforms is further catalyzed by COVID-19 and social media – especially Instagram becomes a key channel for consumer's engagement behaviour and marketing (Hood et al., 2023; Liao et al., 2021). The era of social media influencers has hit the skincare market hard, with an increasing number of Taiwanese female millennials leveraging influencers on these platforms to find and buy products. Through this research, the extent of influence these influencers hold will be investigated as well as an insight into their credibility and trustworthiness when it comes to influencing buying decisions (Castillo et al.2022).

Last but not the least is that research on skincare consumers in Taiwan, and how social media influences them specifically has been scarce to non-existent. Sharing this gap in the knowledge will help inform future studies to equip marketers for better strategic planning, maximize their digital marketing outputs and identify opportunities with influencers. This can further inform consumer behaviour in the skincare industry, particularly under a global-scale pandemic as COVID-19 (Liao et al., 2021).

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

Despite considerable focuses on social media impact consumer behaviour, COVID-19 has significantly affected markets and creating an understanding gap general of this in terms within the Taiwanese skincare market are even less well understood among contested topics: Taiwanese female millennials. Libunao et al. (2022) highlights the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviour, but some gaps remain regionally such as a focus on Taiwan. Similarly, Castillo et al (2022) shows that while influencers affect purchasing intentions in Generation Z Filipinos, the research scope needs to be diversified among different demographics, such as Taiwanese female millennials.

Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 on skincare behaviour has been thoroughly carried out worldwide; however, how far its meticulous link with Taiwanese informs is still unknown (Dewi 2022). This study fills this gap by investigating how social media and the pandemic shaped skincare purchasing behaviours in Taiwanese female millennials that marketers can benefit from understanding about their market.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

Considering the reasons, behind the research and areas where more investigation is needed this study seeks to delve into what drives Taiwanese female millennials when it comes to buying skincare products. The main focus is on how COVID 19 and influencers on Instagram and social media impact their purchasing behaviour. With the paced shift towards platforms and the key role of social media in how consumers interact it's vital to grasp how these factors influence decisions, about buying skincare products.

To accomplish this goal the researcher has outlined objectives for exploration in this study:

1. To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and skincare regimen before COVID-19 and after.
2. To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and reactions to advertising and marketing campaigns of skincare before COVID-19 and after.
3. To evaluate the influence of Instagram on skincare products' awareness and choices through the customer journey.
4. To analyze the influence of social media influencers on Taiwanese female millennials' skincare product perceptions and purchasing decisions.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction — background, justification, research gap, research aims and objectives, and organization.

Chapter 2: Literature Review — overview of the Taiwanese cosmetics market, consumer demographics, and the impact of COVID-19 on skincare trends.

Chapter 3: Research Objectives and Methodology — detailing research objectives, methodology, research philosophy, and data collection methods.

Chapter 4: Findings Analysis and Discussion — presentation and discussion of research findings.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations — summary of findings, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Overview of the Taiwanese Cosmetics Market

2.0.1 Market Size and Growth Trends

Taiwanese cosmetic market has shown dramatic growth, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. A study by Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs (MEA) claims that the income of the cosmetic market in 2022 ranked the level before the epidemic, exceeding NT\$ 2,000 billion (US\$66 billion). This significant recovery could be attributed to highly focus on health, nutrition, and beauty in an aging society. Therefore, this kind of change leads the revenue of the pharmaceutical and cosmetic retail industry to grow steadily, and this growth includes both pharmaceutical products and cosmetics since consumers seek to maintain and improve their health and appearance (Hu, 2023).

In the global market, the revenue of the beauty and personal care market expects to reach US\$227.03 billion in 2024. In addition, this market is also expected to maintain the strong steady growth, and with an annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.32% from 2024 to 2029, resulting in an estimated US\$338.90 billion market volume in 2029 (Statista, 2024a). These global trends reflect the highly increased demand for beauty and personal care products, which could be attributed to the increase in disposable income, the improvement of urbanization, and the enhancement of awareness of personal beauty and health (Łopaciuk & Łoboda, 2013). Compared with the global market, Statista (2024) estimates that the Taiwanese skincare market will also grow steadily and reach an approximate CAGR of 4.7% in 2028. According to the analysis report from Mckinsey & Company (2023), Asia and North America are two domain markets of the beauty

industry, which might lead the intense competition and more challenges.

The beauty industry is facing a significant change in structural and competitive changes, so the global strategies need to be evaluated again. The move from traditional to e-commerce (Longli & Kesumahati, 2023), the rise of niche and indie brands because of accessibility and cost efficiency (Panwara & Sharmab, 2022), and the raising concern for sustainability and moral behaviour (Ajayi et al., 2024) are all examples of structural changes. Competitive changes include tougher competitive from local brands (Khairani et al., 2022), the affect from social media influencers (Panwara & Sharmab, 2022), and the integration of new technologies in marketing and product development.

Traditional and homogeneous global strategies become inefficient, which encourage the brands to use more customized and detailed methods. In the past, Asian women preferred to adopt global brands, because of the desire for uniqueness, and associated global brands with high quality and prestige (Rehman et al., 2018), which made their look more cosmopolitan. Geographic diversification is becoming more and more essential (Thrassou & Vrontis, 2006; Cavusgil, 1996; Nguyen, 2016). Therefore, brands need to tailor their marketing strategies and products to fit with the local preference, for instance, using local ingredients and applying local beauty preference.

In Taiwan, the cosmetic industry also reflects these global trends, MEA (2024) statistics the revenue of pharmaceuticals, medical suppliers and cosmetics wholesale industry in Taiwan (see Fig.1) and the revenue data from 2019 to 2024 demonstrate a rising trend. In addition, the revenue of 2023 reached NT\$ 683

million (US\$22.54 million), which revealed the strength and potential of the Taiwanese market. This development is driven by many factors, including the convenience of E-commerce (Longli & Kesumahati, 2023), the raising awareness of skincare and beauty products (Longli & Kesumahati, 2023), and influencing by social media and beauty influencers (Tan et al., 2023; Satryo & Megawati, 2022).

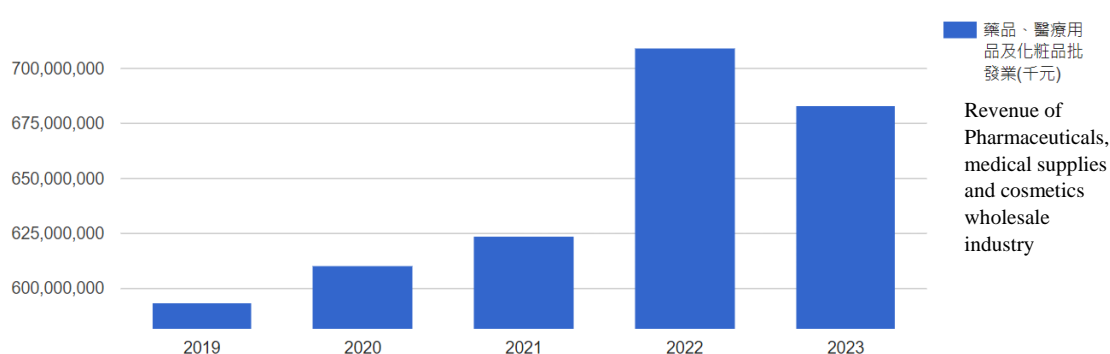


Fig.1 Taiwan's Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics Revenue

*Source: Department of Statistics, Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs,
(<https://dmz26.moea.gov.tw/GMWeb/investigate/InvestigateEA.aspx>)*

2.0.2 Consumer Demographics

According to Statista (2023), the segment of decorative cosmetics users in Taiwan reveals an interesting generational group. Millennials, the generation born between 1981 and 1996, include the largest user group at 36%, as the first generation of digital natives, their familiarity with digital marketing and the social media influence, thus promoting the beauty products heavily (Smith, 2012). Gen X consumers, born between 1965 and 1980, at 37%, which shows the truth that even when they enter middle age, but still have an interesting in self-care and appearance. Gen Z at 19% who born after 1996, and they are similar with

millennials since their digital-native status makes them easily affected by online beauty trends and influencer marketing. Baby boomers (born in 1946-1964) present the smallest user group, at 7%, which might be their different cultural attitudes for cosmetic product usage. In conclusion, these data reveal the obvious trend of cosmetic product usage in Taiwan's each generation. Millennials and Generation X dominate the market, but Generation Z exhibits more and higher interest. Generation Z has grown up in the digital age, with high connectivity with digital platforms and social media, where skincare brands and influencers promote the products (Castillo et al., 2022). Because they constantly exposed to the digital marketing and online beauty community, which strongly influence their purchasing decisions (Castillo et al., 2022). Therefore, the market has the potential to expand constantly, especially following by the constant improvement of digital marketing strategy.

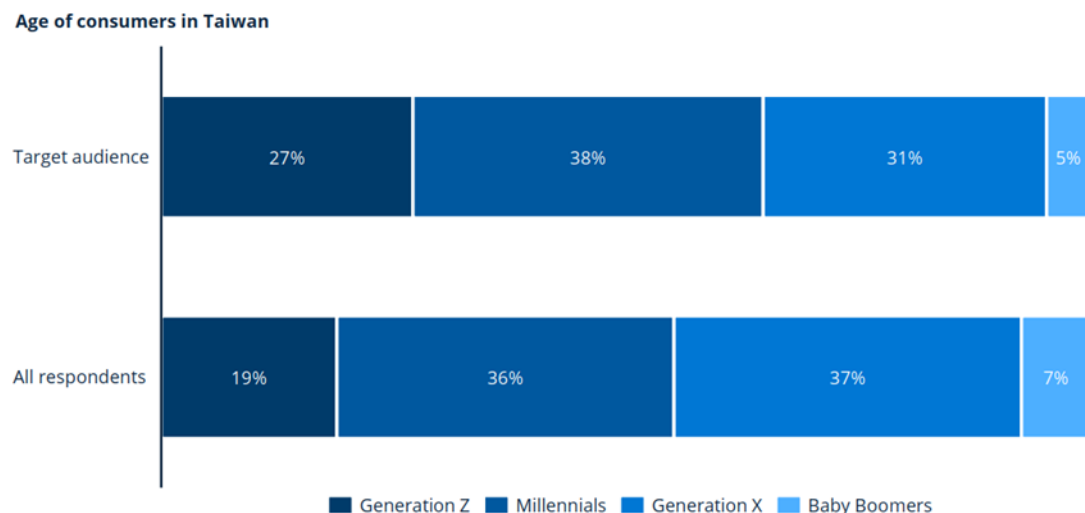


Fig.2 Decorative cosmetics users in Taiwan

Source: Statista Consumer Insight Global

[\(https://www.statista.com/study/125850/decorative-cosmetics-users-in-taiwan/\)](https://www.statista.com/study/125850/decorative-cosmetics-users-in-taiwan/)

2.1 Skincare Market in Taiwan

2.1.1 Market Overview

The main cosmetic products sold in Taiwan are skincare, anti-aging products, hydrating, sunscreen, color makeup, and particularly whitening cosmetic products (Chen et al., 2017). However, the feature of Taiwanese cosmetic market is the strong fusion of local and international brands. The leading local brands are including Dr. Wu which is famous for its dermatology expertise and medical-grade skincare products, Naruko which is focus on natural ingredients and eco-friendly practice, My Beauty Diary is particular popular since its affordable and effective mask, and 1028 Visual Therapy is specialized to give the fashionable and affordable makeup solution. On the other hands, the global brands have SK-II which is famous for its unique ingredient—Pitera and luxury skincare solutions, Kiehl's attracts consumers with mix of nature and science, Estee Lauder which is linked to luxury and quality, and MAC Cosmetics which is known for its professional-grade makeup and wide range of colors. All of them build up the significant market presence.

Kantar Taiwan (2022) reveals a ranking of the most chosen consumer brands by applying Consumer Reach Point (CRP). CRP is explained Female Population multiplied by Penetration multiplied by Consumer Choice, which can evaluate the most popular and fast growing brands from real consumption frequency. For skincare, most chosen counter brands are Shiseido (1.32 million CRP), Kiehl's (0.82 million CRP), and Lancôme (0.75 million CRP); most chosen cosmeceutical skincare brands are Dr. Morita (1.48 million CRP), La Roche-Posay (0.9 million CRP), and Avène (0.82 million CRP); most chosen

skincare mass brands are Bioré (2.9 million CRP), Neutrogena (2.1 million CRP), and SENKA (2.0 million CRP).

A survey conducted in July 2021 by Statista revealed a preference for Japanese skincare products among Taiwanese consumers. Over half, at 59%, reported using Japanese skincare in their routines. Korean beauty products trailed behind at 34%, while European options were a distant third at only 20%. This survey highlights the dominance of Asian skincare products in the Taiwanese market, with a combined market share of 93% for Japanese and Korean brands. Other regions, including the US and Singapore, accounted for a smaller portion of the market, at 18% and 1% respectively. Interestingly, the survey also identified a significant segment, 25%, that did not use any of the listed skincare product regions, suggesting a potential market for alternative or niche brands.

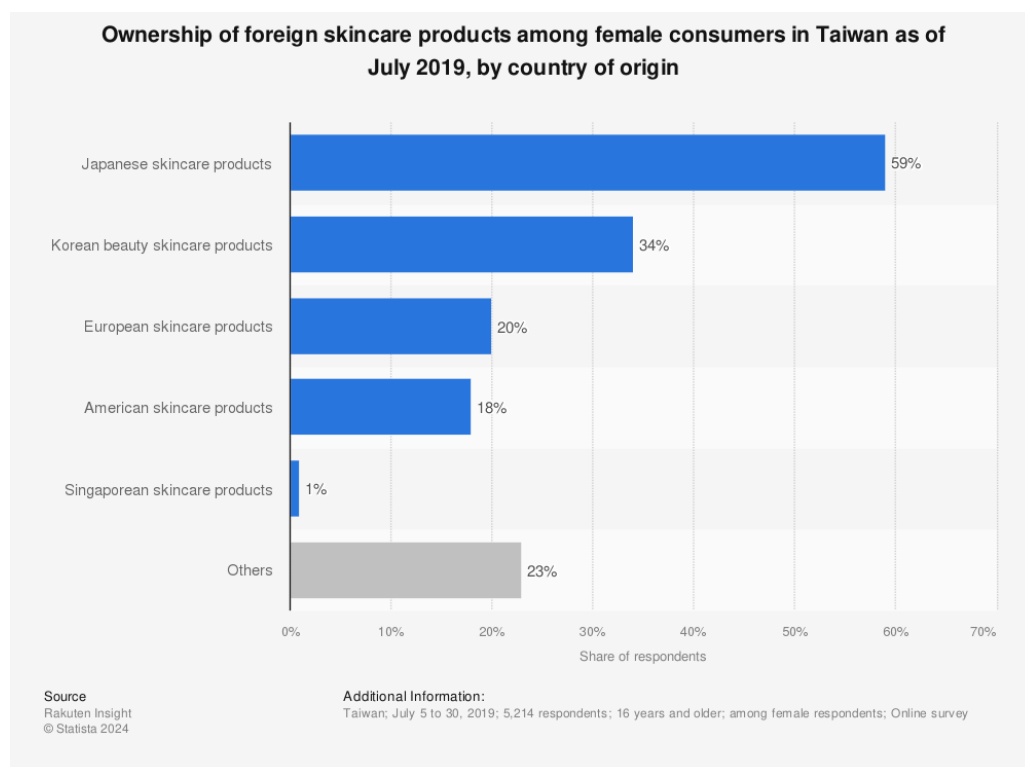


Fig.3 Top Skincare Products in Taiwan by Region (July 2021)

Source: Statista

(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1273705/taiwan-popular-skincare-products-by-region-of-origin/>)

This data also reflected the previous discussion about geographic diversification. In the past Asian female preferred global skincare brands to pursue uniqueness and high quality and prestige. However, the data showed the customer preference shift from global skincare brands regional brands. The following factors have influenced Asian women's brand preferences: 1. Asian women feel local skincare brands are more suited to their skin type and condition and can handle issues unique to Asian climates, such as oily skin and melasma (sun exposure-induced tan discolouration) (Charinsarn, 2019). 2. Considering Asian skincare brands to be a reflection of their culture and identity, and selecting these products as a means of self-expression (Charinsarn, 2019).

Additionally, the study showed that Asian women are more willing to believe that Asian brands are better suited to their needs because they are aware of the subtle differences between Asian and Western products (Charinsarn, 2019).

2.1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on Skincare Trends

During the pandemic, the cosmetic industry faced greater changes since consumer behaviour and preferences had to adapt to new realities. The widespread lockdowns, store closures and changes in economic condition, such as loss of earnings, which forced consumers to change their purchasing behaviour. The paper will explore every factor which affected the skincare segment of the

cosmetic industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

a. Policy Affected

The Taiwanese government implemented restrictions on public gatherings to offset community transmission prevention, as well as mandatory face mask wearing regulations, social distancing and mandating soft lockdown etc. (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2020). The regulation of mandatory mask wearing and soft lockdown affected the skincare industry significantly.

Due to mandatory face mask wearing “maskne” or acne and irritation became a widespread consequence for many Taiwanese civilians. Therefore, the demand of skincare products which sought to resolve these problems increased, such as acne treatment, gentle cleanser and the moisture aim to protect and repair the skin barrier (Rubin, 2020). In addition, consumer interest in skincare products had a positive impact, and cleanser, sunscreen, cream and serum gained more attention (Choi et al., 2022).

Soft lockdown severely restricted mobility meaning Taiwanese civilians had to study online and work from home, which made people start to focus on daily skincare and look for the products which can improve their skin condition. The total demand for cosmetic products decreased because people have less of a desire or chance to use makeup (Biskanaki et al., 2020). However, this situation couldn't fit with all the cosmetic products. Customers were experiencing acne by wearing masks for extended periods of time, and they were putting greater emphasis on specialist skincare products as a result (Rubin, 2020). Hence, the products, which could improve skin quality and sense of life rituals, like skincare

and fragrance, became the focus items.

b. Consumer Behaviour Changed

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the mortality rate increased, and people started to feel panicky, depressed and anxiety. In addition, there are several risk factors because of the pandemic, including social isolation, elevated stress, prolonged periods of 'leisure' time that were spent on internet related activities such as shopping which resulted in meteoric online revenues for adaptive brands (Niedermoser et al., 2021; Beech, 2020; Brunelle & Grossman, 2022).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 virus was transmitted through contact and droplets, which also increases people's anxiety and fear of staying outside. People felt anxiety about purchasing at the physical store, which became a key point, that online shopping increased during the pandemic (Theodorou et al., 2023). However, physical stores are always an advantage of the cosmetic industry, and people would like to try the shade at a store, to ensure it is suitable for them. However, this physical sampling practice was severely suffered by the pandemic. This change in consumer behaviour is due to the concerns about physical touch, which led the sales figures of physical stores dropped dramatically from 35.6% to 23.2% during the pandemic (CMRI, 2020), consequently, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic struck the cosmetic industry seriously (Gardner et al., 2021).

c. Consumer Preference Changed

COVID-19 has resulted in Taiwanese women abandoning their usual cosmetic

practices (Altman, 2020) such as skincare treatments at beauty salons and undertaking their own skincare at home. A lot of women are going bare-faced and emphasizing skincare habits in their place (Chernikoff, 2020). Even though people were less interested in beauty products, sales of skincare products showed a different direction. There was a move toward to skincare around the world (Dewi, 2022), which demonstrated that the consumer preferences changed in skincare because of the pandemic (Choi et al., 2022). This change suggests that when there is a crisis, people's attitudes toward skin care items change to focus more on self-care and health (Dewi, 2022).

Affordable and convenient skincare products are becoming more and more popular. Even the luxury brands maintain their brand loyalty, practical and affordable products are becoming more important. Consumer preferences are constantly changing; therefore, the brand should focus on making makeup look more natural and virtual try-on tools (Gardner et al., 2021). In addition, consumer behaviours changed during the pandemic, people focused more on cleaning and simple beauty practices (Dewi, 2022), which fit in well with the trend toward natural beauty.

2.2 Skincare Preferences and Behaviours among Taiwanese Millennial Women

2.2.1 Characteristics of Millennial

Millennials, who are born between 1981 and 1992, have grown up in a technology-dominated world. Their connections with the internet, mobile phones, and social media have raised a generation that is specialist in exploring the world

online and with highly brand awareness (Smith, 2012). Unlike previous generations, Millennials consider the experience in advance instead of possessions, and they focus on the unique products and services which can improve their lifestyle (Wang, 2009). This focus on experience allows them to become an essential power whether in China or the international market (Wang, 2009). Millennials are quick to embrace the new products with their disposable income and clever, therefore, they often show more impulsive buying behaviour. Additionally, the combination of their technological fluency, independence and young perspective creates a powerful and more influence consumer demographics (Wang, 2009; Simon, 2016).

Urban millennial females are the main consumers of the cosmetic industry, and have a strong purchasing power. In addition, the older generation is affected by millennial generation deeply, and they are the trend leader in each industry (Kraljević & Filipović, 2017). This group focus on innovate skincare solution, personalized beauty products (Gebrina et al., 2022), and seamless online shopping experience. Besides, their preference for nature and sustainable beauty products also makes the brands focus on it and meet their demand (Peixoto, 2021). This strong purchasing power, trend leadership, and specific cosmetic preferences make millennial females have an important influence on beauty industry in the future.

Millennials focus on unique and customized experiences, which are also reflected on their skincare method. They are willing to invest the products which support their values, such as the practice of sustainability and cruelty-free, and enjoy exploring new innovative products (Peixoto, 2021). Therefore, the brands

have to adopt marketing strategies with sustainable practices and transparency because this generation seeks the products that are ethical and eco-friendly (Shim et al., 2024), and millennials focus on personal value and social responsibility has a strong influence on their purchasing decisions, which make them as an important group to engage with these areas.

Compared with other generations, Taiwanese millennial females show strong purchasing power and a high percentage of purchasing the luxury cosmetic products in 2023. The interesting point is the late millennials, 25-34 years old, are sensitive to good value, rely on people's recommendation when making purchase decision, and prefer to buy word of mouth product compare with other generations (KANTAR, 2024). This reliance on peer recommendation and social proof shows the importance of influencer marketing and community engagement for brands to reach this group (Hood et al., 2023), and the purchasing behaviour and preference of Taiwanese millennial females show the brands need to focus on value, trust and community in their marketing to reach and attract this influential group (Chen et al., 2017).

2.2.2 Preferences and Behaviours Related to Skincare Products

Rising level of living standards have resulted in more and more females to become more sophisticated in their beauty regimes and purchasing behaviours. Taiwanese female millennials drive the Taiwanese skincare market to grow successfully, and reflecting the unique integration of digital affection and the desire for innovation. Their choices are based on multiple things like quality of the product, brand reputation and price. This is similar to the Indonesian

demographic that values products proven to be effective and also in alignment with their health belief (Gebrina et al., 2022, Jannah et al., 2023).

In Taiwan, moisturizing ability, product ingredients, and efficiency are paramount considerations, similar to the preferences in other regions with similar climates. Of these, moisturizers are the most popular for rehydration of skins and reduction in fine wrinkles as well as acne scars (Wolff & Fitzpatrick, 2008). Due to weather conditions being the same as Indonesia, Taiwan females also focus on moisturizing ability and efficiency. A moisturizer keeps the skin hydrated and helps to avoid dryness (Wolff & Fitzpatrick, 2008). Depending on the kind and needs of the skin, a wide variety of moisturizer products with different substances are available. Moisturizers are often used to minimize fine wrinkles, hydrate the skin, and even treat scars from acne and dark spots. In the beauty keyword analysis from LnData (2023), “Skincare” definitely is the most important keyword, followed by “Moisturizing”, “Ingredient Formula”. Female millennials have more understanding of skincare ingredients in Taiwan, and they request higher concentration and efficacy, and expect to see a clear ingredient list, such like anti-aging ingredient A alcohol and whitening ingredient Vitamin C are popular (LnData, 2023). Furthermore, they prefer to choose the products with natural and organic ingredients, which include efficiency and safety.

As mask-wearing became necessary due to the global pandemic, we proceed toward skincare as a universal trend of product development, masks make it easier for skin problems (maskne) and wearing masks long-term can be expected that concerns over those kind of products will continuously expand in the market

place(Choi et al., 2022). Armed with this knowledge, Taiwanese millennials turn to acne products that not only combat the condition but also adhere well to their trend-seeking nature—and quickly adapt these remedies into their on-the-go life. There is more interest in products that heal acne, irritation and other skin issues caused by masks; thus demand for proven-effective soothing & hydrating topicals (Choi et al. 2022)

According to LnData (2023), the biggest choice of Taiwanese millennial women for skincare information is internet, while word-of-mouth and TV ads follow this. For acne-specific concerns, digital channels like Instagram,, YouTube, and beauty blogs become even more critical, providing not only peer reviews but also guidance from trusted influencers (Tauhit & Asmadi, 2024).

Several of these are as a result of digital platforms, which shows the necessity for us to understand how women negotiate through their consumer journey from being conscious about acne issues (the zero moment truth) till they look-out and procure solutions. Each of these stages has its own information and messaging that are critical to the journey. This fact will give us more perspective of the decision-making process of Taiwanese millennial women when it comes to choosing acne treatment products, and how brands can position themselves in each stage efficiently.

2.3 Customer Journey in Skincare

2.3.1 Customer Journey Definition

Customer journey is more appropriately defined as the process that consumers experience over different stages and touchpoints when deliberating to purchase a product or service (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). It comes under three important categories- Pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef 2016). There are particular consumer to brand interactions manifesting during each of these phases hence contributing towards the customer experience.

One of the best ways to examine this is by looking at messages and interactions exchanged over each stage in journey. The zero moment of truth is possibly the most important phase in this journey as it approximately represents when consumers first realize they have a need, or problem and start researching solutions to that need (Solomon 2018). This concept, including a more in depth breakdown of each phase will be discussed in the next sections.

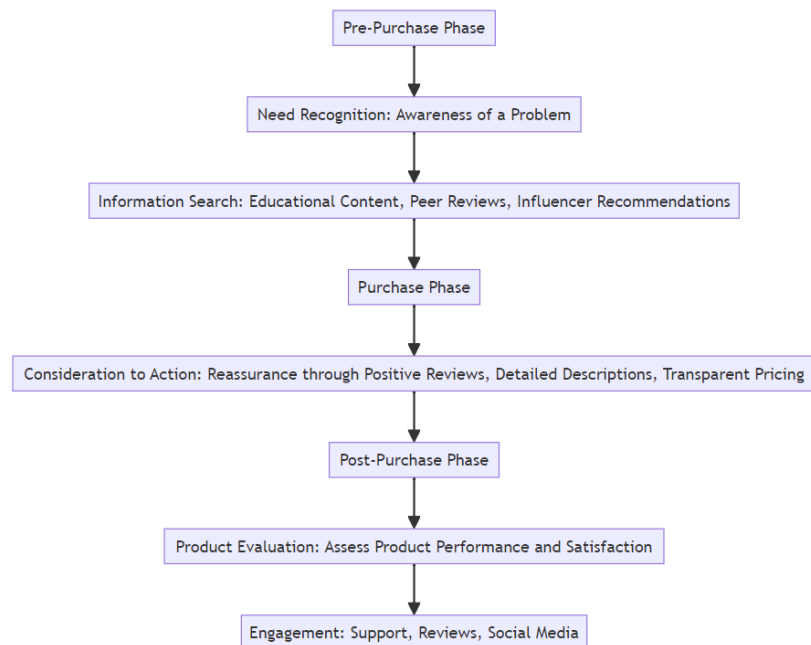


Fig. 4 Customer Journey

Pre-purchase Stage:

Indonesian millennial women are very selective in choosing skincare products; they read the comments on social media and alliteratively experience to assess quality before making a purchase (Gebrina et al., 2022). This corresponds with the experience that is part of general digital trends where these platforms have a sizeable impact on consumers when it comes to making decisions. During the “zero moment of truth” — in the critical phase when consumers first need recognition and begin seeking information (Solomon, 2018)) —millennials especially pay attention to platforms such as Instagram for following brands which affects their purchase decisions significantly (Nelson et al., 2019). Further, Kennedy and Guzmán (2017) discovered that millennials cherish their capacity to shape brand on Instagram. This has a positive effect on how they perceive the brand and their willingness to buy it..

In this stage influencers and beauty content creators hold sway as their genuine opinions are often viewed as trustworthy compared to conventional brand representatives (Jannah et al., 2023). This viewpoint is widely endorsed in research highlighting the importance of influencers authenticity and relatability, in influencing consumer behaviour (Nelson et al., 2019). Nevertheless certain studies suggest that the impact of influencers may vary, with some consumers considering expertise or seeking input, from various sources before making a decision. This suggests that while influencers wield influence they are one aspect of a decision making process that involves peer reviews and traditional brand communications (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020; Sumanti et al., 2024).

Social media platforms such, as Instagram, YouTube and Facebook play a role in shaping the skincare preferences of millennials. Influencers have an impact on introducing products and trends to this demographic (LnData, 2023). The increasing popularity of K beauty in Taiwan fueled by the success of K drama and K pop has had an influence on the skincare market capturing a 34% market share (Statista, 2021). Millennials are shifting away from celebrity endorsements. Are more inclined towards influencers they perceive as relatable and trustworthy (Hood et al., 2023). This transition implies that the success of K beauty in Taiwan is likely attributed more to influencer marketing than, to celebrity endorsements.

Purchase Stage:

LnData (2023) reveals the rank of affected factors for selecting skincare products, and the first one is the product ingredients, 75%, which is also the factor that affects Indonesia millennial female's purchasing decisions (Jannah et al., 2023). In addition,, this also means that compare with claimed effect, consumers trust themselves more to check the ingredient labels.

Price is a factor, for 73% of consumers often associated with perceived product quality. In todays era influencers play a role. They are seen as relatable and trustworthy influencing consumer choices significantly. Their recommendations hold weight than marketing due to the personal insights and genuine reviews they offer to their followers (Castillo et al. 2022; Sumanti et al. 2024)). Additionally convenience and user friendliness are crucial, for individuals. Influencers often emphasize these aspects in their content helping consumers envision how a product can seamlessly integrate into their lives (Castillo et al.

2022).

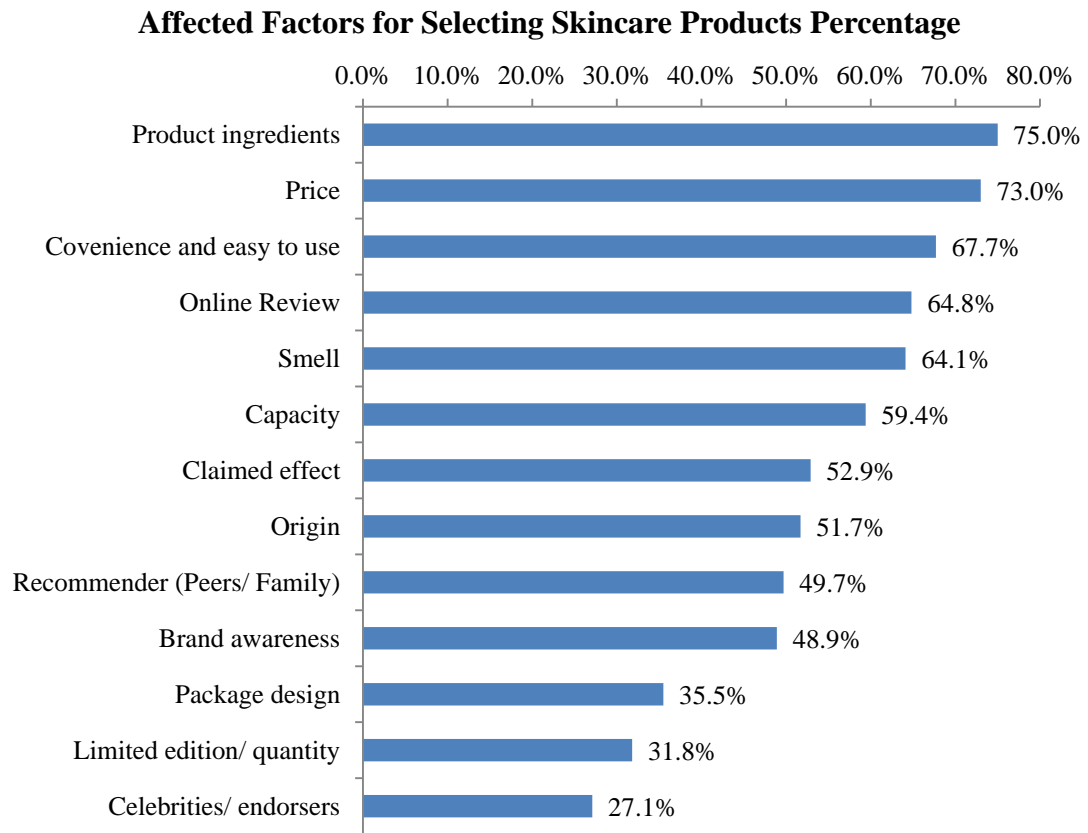


Fig.5 Affected Factors for Selecting Skincare Products Percentage

Source: LnData

(<https://lndata-taiwan.medium.com/beauty-market-2023-bd4462727ca>)

The purchasing channels of Taiwanese millennial females for skincare are online and offline, however, the preference of online shopping has been increasing in recent years. E-commerce platforms—Shopee and PChome, and social media have become popular online channels for Taiwanese millennial females when purchase the skincare products (LnData, 2023). Convenience, wider product selection and online reviews are the factors which affect their online purchasing decisions.

While traditional shopping avenues such, as brick and mortar stores and department stores still hold significance in the realm of skincare shopping the consumer journey is evolving into a blend of offline and online experiences. According to LnData (2023) consumers value the hands on experience of examining and testing products in store to feel confident about their choices. Nonetheless the ultimate decision to make a purchase often involves price comparisons and reviews indicating a thoughtful and strategic shopping approach.

This combination of in store sampling followed by research for details and better deals highlights the importance of seamlessly merging offline and online channels. As noted by Theopilus et al. (2021) influencers and online reviews play roles in providing assurance and social validation necessary, for finalizing purchase decisions. This shift signifies how integrating both offline and online elements has become increasingly crucial in todays skincare shopping landscape.

Proportion of Sales Channels for Cosmetic Products

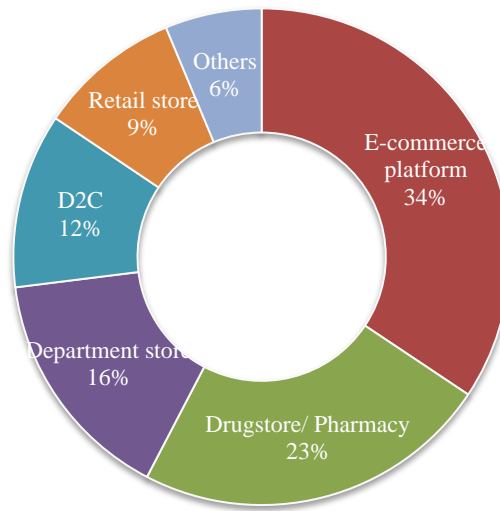


Fig.6 Proportion of Sales Channels for Cosmetic Products

Source: LnData

(<https://lndata-taiwan.medium.com/beauty-market-2023-bd4462727ca>)

Postpurchase Stage

Certain elements come into play when millennial women choose skincare products (Theopilus et al., 2021). Considered a major determinant of repurchase intentions is whether the order arrives safely and on schedule. Furthermore, the quality of the bought items is equally important, and making it obvious when it expires might help to win over the clients. Moreover, boosting the confidence of repurchasing depends on the return and refund policy (Theopilus et al., 2021).

Millennial women often share their shopping adventures, on media platforms like Instagram not just to flaunt their purchases but as part of a larger trend called collaborative consumption (Hood et al., 2023). This trend sees digital natives sharing photos of products to seek approval and advice from their circles

(Solomon, 2021). Receiving feedback and support from friends can raise their satisfaction leading to repeat purchases and affecting the buying decisions of others around them (Solomon, 2021). Social sharing comes in here as, after making a purchase, consumers can express their happiness, keep connected with people and be loyal to certain brands (Solomon, 2021). This indicates that businesses should not only ensure a buying process but also engage customers post purchase. Encouraging customers to share experiences can foster a brand community, which results in repeat purchases and organic word of mouth referrals that cement the brands market presence (Solomon, 2021).

Millennial women often share their shopping adventures, on media platforms like Instagram not just to flaunt their buys but as part of a larger trend called collaborative consumption. In this trend young digital natives post images of products to seek feedback and guidance from their circles. Receiving responses from friends can boost their satisfaction levels leading to repeat purchases and influencing the shopping decisions of others in their network.

This sharing behaviour holds importance after making a purchase allowing consumers to express contentment bond, with minded individuals and strengthen brand loyalty. For businesses it underscores the significance of not delivering a seamless buying experience but also engaging with customers post sale. Encouraging customers to share experiences can build a sense of community around the brand fostering repeat business and generating word of mouth endorsements that solidify the brands market position.

2.4 Marketing Channels: Instagram

2.4.1 Overview of Digital Transformation in Cosmetics Marketing

In Taiwan, purchasing cosmetic products offline was the main method; people bought the skincare products from the drugstores, department stores and beauty salons. Due to the development of digital channels, cosmetic products started to shift to online platforms and e-commerce (Jung, 2023). Besides, customers started to search the products and reviews on the social media which led cosmetics industry to rely on social media (Watanabe et al., 2021). However, COVID-19 speeded up this transformation. The pandemic can be seen as a significant point for people to change from offline to online because of the soft lockdown and the anxiety for physical face-to-face. This transformation led beauty brands to adjust their marketing strategy to focus more on digital platforms and social medias. In addition, the pandemic also made brands use virtual consultations and online interaction with customers to promote sales. Social media platforms have become the most popular marketing channels to run the campaigns because of their large users, low building costs, and no regional limitations (Jung, 2023).

2.4.2 Introduction to Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform which can support users' online social behaviour, including ongoing communication, engagement, enjoyment and leisure. Besides, it is a social network service owned by Facebook which can share photos and videos. Instagram was released into the market in October 2010 and created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. The users can upload photos and videos with a variety of filters and arrange them using tags and location data. In addition, posts from the account can be reviewed by the public or by followers

who have been authorized. Users may check popular materials and other users' posts by tags or locations (Liao et al., 2022). Furthermore, Instagram Reels offers short videos like TikTok, which allows users to edit the video in an easy framework and has different filter effects at the same time. At this point, Reels on Instagram is replacing photos and becoming the main feature of video (Liang & Wolfe, 2022; DataReportal, 2024).

The Instagram usage of the Taiwanese young generation takes a huge percentage, 55.28% for 18-29 years, and 16.42% for 30-39 years (Statista, 2022). In addition, a report from Statista (2024) reveals that 60.8% of females aged 18 and above in Taiwan are reached by Instagram advertisements, which also means that Instagram is a suitable and effective platform. Overall, the above reports show that Instagram has a strong influence on Taiwanese millennial females.

2.4.3 Influence of Instagram on Consumer Behaviour and Preference

Social media has completely transformed the way people lead their lives connect with others and make purchases. In January 2024 Taiwan had a 19.20 million social media users (DataReportal). Instagram, a platform reaches 47.4% of Taiwans population (Data Reportal, 2024). The widespread use of media plays a role, in shaping consumer behaviour. For instance individuals often turn to networking sites to gather information about products or services from companies, where they can read reviews and learn from the experiences of users (Putri & Wandebori 2016). Social platforms offer a channel for customers to engage with brands on product related issues while also fostering stronger relationships and loyalty between them (Tsai & Men 2013). Additionally building brand awareness

through networking sites can influence purchasing decisions positively (Bilgin, 2018). To effectively target groups like young adults or families, with children, different marketing strategies tailored to meet their specific needs and preferences can be implemented on these platforms (Jung,2023).

Instagram changes the consumer behaviour and preference of skincare products in Taiwan. Because of its visual and word content design, it is suitable for skincare products to promote. The skincare brands can share images and interesting content to attract consumers (Imron, 2023). Moreover, the advertising on Instagram catches consumers' attention which affects their purchasing decisions (Imron, 2023). It also allows users to share their experience with skincare products in reviews, comments, and posts (Imron, 2023). Instagram has become a hub where influencers share the latest skincare trends and information, which could resonate with people with the new products and information (Libunao et al., 2022).

In the world of Instagram influencers are players, in shaping how consumers view things in the time following COVID 19. They've adjusted their approach by using methods like demos to showcase skincare products in action offering real time feedback and building trust through authenticity (Lie & Aprilianty 2022; Imron, 2023). Sharing stories through Instagram Stories and Reels creates narratives that connect with followers and can influence buying decisions (Tauhit & Asmadi 2024; Hood et al., 2023). These tactics have shown results; studies indicate that campaigns led by influencers often lead to boosts in brand engagement and sales (Libunao et al., 2022).

Instagrams impact and the content creators on the platform have turned it into a hub for skincare trends and product details. This setting not helps skincare brands reach an audience but also enables deeper connections, with consumers by capitalizing on the trust and genuineness that influencers bring to their endorsements.

2.4.4 Influencers and Brand Collaborations on Instagram

Influencer marketing has become one of the most effective marketing strategies in Taiwan, and around 75 percent of people follow at least one influencer on social media (Statista, 2023a). Moreover, slightly over 50 percent of them said that they had bought the products the influencers had recommended (Statista, 2023a).

Credible and relatable Influencers play a significant role in shaping the skincare trends. Consumers follow them because of their authenticity and trust when they display professional knowledge, honesty and no bias to review the products, which makes people believe them, especially without the brand sponsored (Castillo et al., 2022). When people notice that they have similar beliefs, lifestyles and skin issues with the influencers, they will build a connection with the influencers easily, which makes consumers think their suggestions are more personal and important (Lie & Aprilianty, 2022). Influencers share their skincare using reviews, tutorials and demonstrations, which allow people to understand the new brands and products so that people start to pay attention to new skincare trends and be encouraged to try and follow the new trends (Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

Influencer endorsements have a significant effect on brand perception, consumer trust and sales. When the influencers combine their image and value with the brands, they can shape brand perception (Libunao et al., 2022), since people trust the influencers they follow, and think they are authentic and reliable (Bakri, 2023), which leads people to more aware and like the brand (Sumanti et al., 2024). Because influencers build up trust through their honest review (Sumanti et al., 2024), people are more likely to accept the recommendations from the influencers and think they are credible and knowledgeable (Lie & Aprilianty, 2022). In addition, influencer endorsement guides consumers to product pages and encourages purchase which leads the sales figure to rise (Sumanti et al., 2024); the promotion events they partnered with the brands also raise the purchasing intention, almost 55 percent of people were convinced by the promotion from the influencer and bought the product in Taiwan (Statista, 2023b). By collaborating with the right influencers and actual content, brands can use influencers' influence to improve their marketing goals. Furthermore, brands can also reach a wider audience and increase their visibility in the market through influencers (Castillo et al., 2022).

Chapter 3 Research Objectives and Methodology

3.0 Research Objectives

There are two aims of this research: The first one is to examine how Taiwanese female millennials approach shopping for skincare products during and after COVID-19 which allows for greater understanding how the pandemic affected this cohort's engagement concerning skincare regimes, as well as, identifying change's in their skincare routines, product preferences and frequency usage, and find out the key factors boosting the skincare purchasing in post-COVID-19. This research will investigate the impact of the pandemic, on how young women in Taiwan engage with skincare ads on Instagram. It will explore their reactions to marketing tactics before and after the how features such as reels, stories and posts on Instagram as well, as social media influencers influence their decisions regarding skincare products.. Specifically, the study will investigate how Instagram influences Taiwanese female millennials' skincare preference and purchasing decisions after COVID-19, which allows us to explore how Instagram has influenced their awareness of different skincare brands and products after the pandemic, check at the types of contents—such as reels, stories, or postings—that most affect their awareness and interest. Furthermore, the study sets out to analyze how social media influencers affect audiences' opinion on skincare products, and their purchasing decisions.

The general objectives of the research have their foundations in the material presented in previous chapters. Inspired by Choi et al., (2022) who investigated the consumer behaviour changes during the pandemic, such like increasing interest in skincare, and paying more attention to skin health (like “maskne”

caused by wearing masks), which raised writer's interest if there was similar situation among Taiwanese female millennials. Besides, soft-lockdown limited people's outdoor activities and what kind of channels can build up the connections at that moment, Hood et al., indicated the shift of consumer purchasing from offline to online during the pandemic— social media platforms, especially Instagram, and this situation still exist after pandemic (Dewi, 2022). Influencer marketing is getting more popular, and Libunao et al. (2022) highlighted the impact of influencers on consumer purchasing decisions.. The objectives listed below intend to answer the research question—how has Instagram affects Taiwanese female millennials skincare purchasing decisions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? Good research starts with a well defined research question, which guides the methodology (Saunders et al., 2019.). A good research question is one which fits the scientific method in that it can be addressed by observations under controlled settings and that it can be replicated under the same conditions by others (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). The research question should not so broad as to prevent logical methodologies from being able to address it.

Considering four objectives that align with gaps and areas of interest in the literature, they are:

1. To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and skincare regimen before COVID-19 and after.
2. To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and reactions to advertising and marketing campaigns of skincare before COVID-19 and after.

3. To evaluate the influence of Instagram on skincare products' awareness and choices through the customer journey.
4. To analyze the influence of social media influencers on Taiwanese female millennials' skincare product perceptions and purchasing decisions.

3.1 Methodology Introduction

The methods used for collecting and analyzing the data for this research will be covered in this chapter. Besides, there will be a thorough explanation provided about the research approach and strategy. Drawing from Saunders Onion's, this study will use an interpretive stance and hence a qualitative methodology.

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill Research Onion is made up of three layers: the outer, inner, and core layers, each of which indicates a certain kind of research avenue/action. According to Saunders et al. (2019), the Research Onion (Fig.7) is a structure for representing what steps are required in choosing a methodology for doing research and collecting data. The philosophies and potential approaches that should be considered at the beginning and first stages of the study's design are represented by the top layer of Saunders' onion. In addition, the outer layers of the onion indicate the importance of considering many approaches and strategies that may be applied in the research, while the onion's core stands for data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, the limitations and ethical issues of the study will be within the other subjects of discussion. The main purpose of this study is to investigate how Instagram affected skincare marketing strategies used to reach Taiwanese female millennials during and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

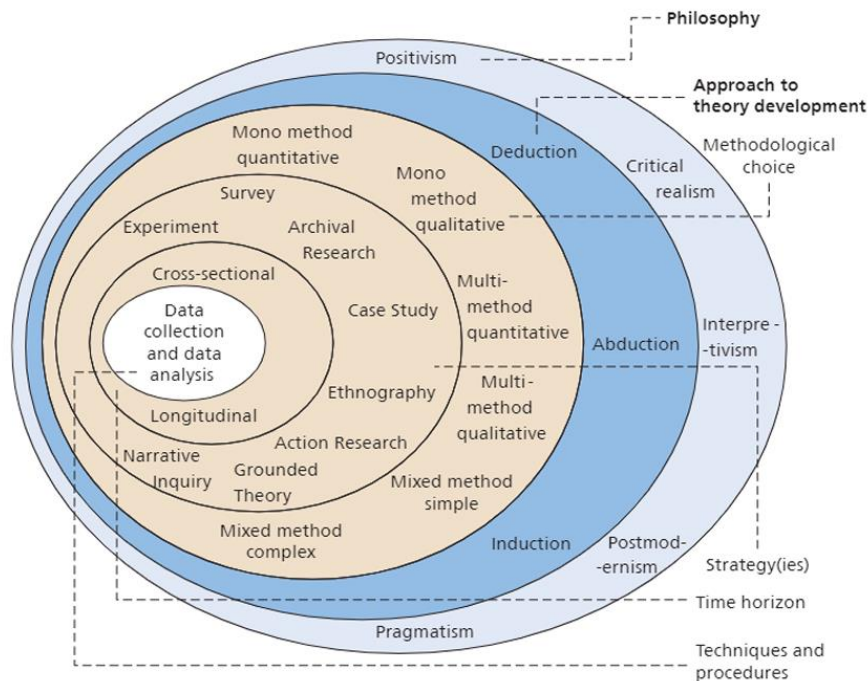


Fig.7 The Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019)

3.2 Research Philosophy

The first outer layer of the research onion concerns research philosophy, Saunders et al. (2019) state that it is the idea of knowledge acquired during the research investigation. According to Johnson and Clark (2006), a research investigation suffers from a lack of comprehension of the research philosophy. Therefore, the first thing for the methodology is to distinguish which research philosophy fits the study. Based on (Saunders et al., 2019), there are three main categories into which philosophy may be divided: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. Every one of these influences the methodology a researcher uses for their research.

3.2.1 Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological

The philosophical foundations are crucial when researchers discuss the different assumptions that they can make on the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, and the place of values on study. Ontology considers the nature of reality and what makes life possible (Saunders et al., 2019). By using this philosophical method, a researcher sets out to find how one can realise the ‘reality’ of the specific subjects they are exploring. The research, in focus here aims to explore how the behaviours and preferences of Millennials have evolved during the COVID 19 period. The main emphasis is on understanding these changes than getting into debates about reality. This method is in line with a perspective that values interpretation suggesting that skincare and cosmetics are subjective with each person having an personal experience. Ethics and values are the focus of axiology (Saunders et al., 2019), and this study won’t focus on examining the value systems that are behind these behaviours or to judge them ethically. It's important to ensure that the researchers personal beliefs do not unduly influence the research or its findings. To maintain objectivity best practices such as self reflection transparency, throughout the research process and crafting interview questions carefully to avoid leading or prompts will be implemented.. On the other hand, epistemology is the study of knowledge, justification, and the spread of knowledge (Schwandt, 2001). Epistemology can make us focus on how we gain knowledge from these changes. As a result, the epistemological approach—which is essentially the study of knowing—is adopted.

3.2.2 Interpretivism and Positivism

There are two primary schools of thought in epistemology: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism assumes an objective reality which is measurable without considering personal subjective experience (Saunders et al., 2019). In addition, positivist data is based on causal explanations of facts and figures and is quantitative in nature. It requires a scientific method and a removal of persons from the process (Aliyu et al., 2015). Positivism, however, is unsuitable for this study as it seeks to understand individual and subjective behavioural changes for skincare products as well as investigate how and why these changes have taken place. Positivism may not be the approach, for this research, which aims to delve into the changes in skincare routines among Taiwanese Millennials. Positivism relies heavily on quantitative methods to measure events and draw general conclusions (Aliyu et al., 2015) often neglecting personal experiences and contextual influences. Qualitative methods on the hand are more adept at capturing these subtleties (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example positivist research might overlook the meanings that people attribute to their actions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) making it less suitable, for examining the personal aspects of consumer behaviour in this specific scenario. On the other hand, interpretivism will be a more suitable method for our study. Interpretivism believes that knowledge and facts come about via subjective analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). This method allows researchers to delve into the social influences, on behaviour which's valuable for gaining insight into how Taiwanese Millennials view and react to skincare products amidst and post the COVID 19 era. In contrast to positivism interpretivism acknowledges the diverse nature of experiences a crucial aspect, for this study.. Consequently, interpretivism is very appropriate for studies that

focus on the behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals (Alharahsheh & Pius., 2020).

This research employs techniques such, as interviews to delve into individuals personal experiences and viewpoints in line with interpretivism. In contrast to positivism which emphasizes data (Aliyu et al. 2015) interpretivism recognizes the subjective aspects of consumer behaviour. This methodology is well suited for unraveling the intricacies of skincare habits and buying patterns among women both during and post COVID 19 (Denzin & Lincoln 2018) making it a pivotal choice, for this study.

3.3 Research Approach

Understanding the purpose of the research and what kind of findings are under the research question, then finding the suitable research approach can let researchers get the answer effectively. Therefore, upon examining the layers of research approaches, two approaches can be applied: Deductive and Inductive.

3.3.1 Deductive and Inductive

The deductive method is a discussion process from generality to specificity, which is based on the direction of a review of existing literature, establishing specific hypotheses on the research subjects and coming to certain findings during the research process (Bradford & Weisberger, 2017). Furthermore, large sample sizes and the quantitative approach to research are typical features of the deductive method (Saunders et al., 2019). Deductive thinking starts with an expected pattern unlike induction, which starts with observations and searches for patterns. This

method comes "up to the bottom." A lot of researchers who use induction learning object to the deduction approach for its rigidity and lack of other theories for study results (Saunders et al., 2019). On the other hand, the inductive method utilizes the qualitative approach and smaller numbers of samples (Saunders et al., 2019). The inductive method moves from the specific to the general (Saunders et al., 2019). Continuously collecting data and regularly reviewing literature are crucial for researchers to enhance their analysis and gain perspectives during the study.. However, when using the inductive method, researchers do not need to make assumptions but explain and analyze based on the existing literature and new data, and then propose new theories or research findings (Bradford & Weisberger, 2017).

The literature review reveals the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on skincare purchasing behaviours for Taiwanese female millennials, detailing changes in policy, consumer behaviour, preferences, and how social media influence the customer journey. Our study uses a method that allows participants to share their habits in their words emphasizing specific observations to make broader conclusions. This approach is ideal, for research. Follows recommended methods. (Saunders et al., 2019; Bradford & Weisberger, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.4 Research Strategy

After reviewing the literature and distinguishing which research approaches for the study, the next step is to arrange the research strategy. Based on the research onion, there are two strategies— Qualitative and Quantitative.

3.4.1 Qualitative and Quantitative

The quantitative method needs extensive data collection and analysis, so that researchers can identify patterns, relationships and trends, and it normally uses statistical tools to test hypotheses and make predictions (Saunders et al., 2019). In contrast, to approaches quantitative research is characterized by its nature, objectivity and ability to be applied broadly. It involves gathering data through surveys, experiments and analyzing existing data sets. This approach helps reduce the risk of interviewer bias and prevents the researchers values from impacting the research process. It be used for larger populations, and make the results reliable (Bryman, 2016; Fowler Jr, 2014; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Although using methods can help minimize researcher bias it may still be influenced by the researchers framework making it more bound by the researchers viewpoint than the adaptability provided by qualitative approaches (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.425). According to Saunders et al. (2019), the qualitative method is to recognize phenomena from a social and theoretical perceptive, and normally come with interview, focus groups, ethnography and case study as data collected tool (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). According to Perrier et al., (2020) qualitative research usually consists in open-ended inquiries and helps to grasp attitudes, behaviour, language, sounds, feelings, and emotions. Qualitative method can provide a rich, in-depth, detailed data, which leads to a deep insights so that we can understand participates thought, feeling and behaviour (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example research such, as Hood et al. (2023) and Tauhit & Asmadi (2024) opted for methods to explore the personal encounters shaped by social media even with the risk of researcher influence and the need, for extensive data gathering. In addition, it is more flexible since

research design can be adjusted when the study goes on and new results come (Bell & Bryman, 2007), and researcher allows to get a full picture by recording the situations when the observed behaviour happen (Maxwell, 2013). According to Bell & Bryman (2007), qualitative interviews are the most effective approach of collecting data since they provide reliable interpretations of the participant's experiences. Saunders Research Onion is, in line with this idea backing the interpretivist perspective by highlighting techniques such, as interviews that enable participants to share their experiences and actions. Adhering to this method guarantees that the study captures the truths for comprehending intricate social occurrences. Therefore, qualitative method is more suitable for this topic to explore Taiwanese female millennial experiences and perceptions of skincare product purchasing behaviour during COVID-19 and after, this method offers a deep understanding of what factors affected these behaviours.

As described below, semi-structured interviews are the type of qualitative method used:

1. Six interviews were conducted as part of the data collection. According to the research conducted by Guest et al (2006). they discovered that saturation typically happens after conducting six to twelve interviews with significant themes starting to emerge as the sixth interview. As a result it was determined that conducting six interviews would be satisfactory, for delving into participants experiences and ensuring an inclusive data collection process.
2. The 30 minutes interview was conducted with each participant.
3. The chosen participants were all Taiwanese female millennials and have skincare routines.

4. The purpose of this research is to obtain the viewpoints of participants on twenty questions that are closely relevant to the study subject.

3.4.2 Sample Strategy

The research methodology, for this study included sampling, specifically targeting Taiwanese women in the millennial age group who showed an interest in skincare products both pre pandemic and post pandemic. This particular demographic was selected due to their use of platforms with a particular emphasis, on Instagram, which plays a key role in examining how social media impacts consumer behaviour in the skincare industry.

The group of participants, in the study included women usually born between 1981 and 1996 who are avid users of Instagram and frequently buy skincare items. Six individuals were interviewed, following the idea that data gathering stops when no new themes arise (Guest et al. 2006). This number of participants was selected to gather information while delving into each persons unique experiences.

The research used a sectional method gathering information at one specific moment (Bryman, 2016). This method was selected to capture how individuals reflected on their routines during a time affected by the pandemic. A cross sectional approach is well suited for this study as it offers a glimpse into participants experiences and enables the examination of behaviours pre pandemic, during the post pandemic all, within the timeframe (Levin, 2006). Other options of this method could have been a study conducted over a period to observe

changes, over time or using a bigger randomly selected group to make findings more applicable. However these other methods were not as appropriate for the nature of the study, which aims to reveal in depth insights to the context rather than general conclusions (Creswell & Poth 2018). The cross sectional approach is well suited for recognizing patterns and themes, among participants at this point in time (Bryman, 2016).

The selective sampling and snapshot method are, in line with the framework of the study allowing for an examination of individuals personal skincare encounters during the pandemic (Denzin & Lincoln 2018; Creswell & Poth 2018). This approach prioritizes delving into the details than covering a wide range aiming to uncover the reasons and methods behind behaviours. Although the studys small sample size and specific focus may not be broadly applicable, to the population these constraints are acknowledged as the research aims to gain nuanced insights than making sweeping generalizations (Creswell & Poth 2018).

3.5 Data Collection and Data Analyze

The study's collecting and analyzing data are covered in this last layer. Getting back to layer three, because this study is qualitative in nature, it was crucial to gather and analyze the data that was obtained from the interviews.

3.5.1 Data Collection

The method used was semi-structured interviews, which were audio recorded, performed remotely, and allowed participants to share their opinions on the study's subject. In order to help with the gathering and accurate data analysis, the

interviews were recorded. Furthermore, Yin (2016) identified four alternative approaches to data collection: observation, interviewing, collecting, exploring, and feeling (p. 169). Face-to-face interviews can take place wherever that is convenient. The purpose of the questions was to prevent bias or confusion on the interviewee's side by being simple and straightforward. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to dig more into the subject (Quinlan et al., 2015). A thematic question guide that included questions judged acceptable for the specific part and followed themes found in the literature was created to set the stage for discussion. The topics covered in the interviews included: Skincare Routines, Changes in Purchasing Behaviour Due to COVID-19, Impact of Social Media, and Role of Social Media Influencers. The researcher took notes throughout each interview to make sure that any emotions or expressions could be recorded, which is essential for ensuring descriptive validity, which is crucial for qualitative research (Huberman & Miles 2002). All of the interviews were audio recorded using the Voice Memos iOS mobile application to guarantee descriptive authenticity. The audio recording of the interview and its use in the study were disclosed to each participant. The recordings were approved by each participant. The audio recordings were transcribed with GoodTape. Then sorted thematically to facilitate coding and identification of key patterns and themes, for analysis.

3.5.2 Data Analyze

When using the qualitative method, the researcher must be able to pay close attention to what participants say and thoroughly analyze their meaning (Yin, 2016). According to Yin, there are five essential workouts to get the data

completely in order to perform this properly. (1) Paying attention; (2) Being curious; (3) Being considerate of other people's time. (4) Distinguishing between primary, secondary, and conventional information; (5) Integrating data from several sources.

Thematic approaches, which are one kind of grounded theory method, were chosen for this study. According to Saunders et al. (2016), Thematic Analysis is a stand-alone analytical tool that may be used to any philosophical perspective and regardless of whether the investigation is inductive or deductive. Thematic analysis, which looks for connections between the subjectively expressed words of individuals, is helpful when dealing with vast amounts of disorganized qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2016). This method involves closely reading and recording every interview in order to identify any important words, thoughts, or ideas that develop. Two approaches are available for codes to become visible, according to Saunders et al. (2016): through participant words, through a set of data that the researcher labels, or through keywords found in relevant theory and literature.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher carefully assessed the considerations before starting the research ensuring that all participants would receive care and respect. Participants were given information, about the study's goals, their involvement and the voluntary aspect of their participation. They were assured that they could opt out of the study at any point without facing any repercussions. This information was communicated verbally. In writing to the interviews. A document outlining these

procedures was submitted to National College of Ireland as part of the research proposal. Was approved based on these guidelines.

3.7 Research Limitations

Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) pointed out that study limitations are weaknesses that could impact the results. This particular research, which involved six interviews acknowledges the potential, for bias and limited generalizability, which's typical in qualitative studies that prioritize depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth 2018). Bryman and Bell (2007) mention that different individual perspectives can make it challenging to correlate themes especially when there are varying levels of exposure to practices. While conducting interviews could have improved the study constraints on time and resources limited the sample size – an obstacle, in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman 2016). These limitations are acknowledged within the context of the study.

Chapter 4 Findings, Analysis and Discussion

4.0 Objective 1 - To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and skincare regimen before COVID-19 and after.

4.0.1 Theme 1: Skincare Routine Evolution

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwanese female millennials experienced significant changes for skincare routines, especially in their daily practice and product using steps. Most of the interviewees had simpler skincare routines before the pandemic, such as washing the face, and using toner and lotion.

Interviewee E *“My skincare routine was very simple. I just washed my face, used toner, and applied lotion. That is it”*

Interviewee F *“Lotion and then cream.”*

However, the lifestyle changed during the pandemic, which made participants add more steps in their skincare routines to address problems of wearing masks and increasing skin concerns. In addition, they focused on oil-control and acne-preventing products because of the acne caused by wearing masks.

Interviewee E *“Because wearing a mask can make your pores feel suffocated... I had to adjust my routine to keep my skin moisturized but not oily. Before, I only used toner and lotion, but later I started using toner, a gentle cleanser, lotion, and serum to lock in moisture.”*

Interviewee D *“Because of wearing masks and working from home...However, wearing masks caused acne, so I bought more oil-control and acne-preventing products. I used masks to improve my skin condition.”*

Post-pandemic, many participants indicated that they keep these evolved routines. Another participant also talked about the continuous commitment to thorough skin care routines, because of external factors—air pollution and internal factor—effectiveness.

Interviewee B *“Now, even though mask-wearing has decreased, I still maintain a thorough routine because of pollution and other factors”.*

Interviewee C *“I have basically maintained the skincare habits I developed during COVID-19 and continued them”*

Interviewee E *“After the restrictions were lifted, I continued the skincare habits I developed during COVID-19 because they worked well for me.”*

Interviewee E continued to follow her skincare routine that she developed during the pandemic even after the restrictions were lifted. To combat 'maskne' she incorporated serums and moisturizers that control oil into her regimen. Despite wearing masks she found that these changes had lasting benefits such, as smoother skin and fewer breakouts prompting her to stick with them. Moreover the pandemic influenced her preference for Korean skincare brands as they proved more effective, in meeting her skin requirements at that period.

4.0.2 Theme 2: Changes in Product Usage

The pandemic led to notable changes in the various types of skincare products which were used by Taiwanese female Millennials; they paid more attention to moisturizers and treatment to address the skin problem caused by wearing masks while the makeup usage dropped significantly. Before the pandemic, several participants noted that they consistently used the basic skincare products, such as cleansers, toners, and light moisturizers.

Interviewee D *“I usually washed my face in the morning, applied a moisturizing mask, and then put on makeup. After coming home from work, I washed my face again, used a cleansing mask, and then applied a moisturizing cream”*

However, the mask policy carried out and became routine, people started to shift their skincare attention to treatment for skin issues caused by masks.

Interviewee B *“...when I started wearing a mask to work... I got acne on my face so I started using mud masks for oil control and to address the dirtiness caused by the mask..”*

Interviewee D *“Because of wearing masks... I bought more oil-control and acne-preventing products... I mainly used masks to improve my skin condition”*

Moreover, some participants highlighted a significant shift in product focus, and the brand preference changed toward Japanese and Korean products due to better effectiveness. Particularly in managing skin issues exacerbated by

mask-wearing

Interviewee C *“I found that after trying Japanese brands, I preferred their moisturizing effect over the local brands I used before, so I switched to Japanese brands”*

Interviewee E *“...I tried European products but found them less suitable because of mask-wearing. I returned to Japanese and Korean products which worked better for my skin during that time”*

Some individuals also noted that these adjustments were motivated not by the requirement to address skin issues caused by wearing masks but also by a newfound recognition of the enhanced effectiveness of such products, in tackling enduring skin issues such as moisturization and barrier restoration. This change had such an impact that numerous individuals persisted in using these products after the demand, for masks decreased.

4.0.3 Discussion

The findings showed that consumer behaviour shifted during crises and indicated significant changes in skincare practice when people face external challenges. The evolutions of participants' skincare routines—from basic applications of a few products to entire regimens, were supported by the research of Choi et al (2022), they stated a wider trend that consumers re-adjust their skincare practices to address emergent skin problems, and in this case caused worse by masks and increased pollution. Dewi (2022) discovered that in times of crises such, as the

COVID 19 individuals tend to prioritize skincare over cosmetics opting for products that improve skin health. Rubin (2020) pointed out that the pandemic has hastened a trend, towards addressing issues like 'maskne.' Additionally Gardner and colleagues (2021) observed that crises like these consumers to look for products that cater to requirements while also promoting long term skin well being.

Post-pandemic, many participants reported that they maintain the more complex skincare regimens which developed during the pandemic, and this indicated these habits could have become ingrained into long-term routines. These results line up with results from research examining long-term customer behaviour, Ścieszko et al (2021) stated that the habits developed during extraordinary circumstances often exist after those circumstances. For instance, Interviewee B mentioned continuing thorough skincare routines due to pollution, a point echoed by Interviewee C, who stated that she has “*basically maintained the skincare habits I developed during COVID-19 and continued them because they still meet my needs.*” Similarly, Interviewee E emphasized the lasting impact of these routines, noting that they “*worked well for me, so I see no reason to change them.*”, These comments emphasize the concept those constant changed lifestyles can help to reinforce these new routines (Dewi, 2022).

Additionally, the findings indicate an obvious shift in product usage. Participants are focusing more on hydrating serums, intensive moisturizers, and targeted treatments, such as acne control products and skin barrier repair creams, to address skin issues related to the pandemic, such as acne, which has resulted in a decrease in makeup usage. This trend is supported by Choi et al (2022) whose

study highlights the importance of skincare products over makeup products during health crises—Amid the COVID 19 outbreak individuals placed emphasis on skincare, than makeup citing worries about skin well being and the necessity of wearing masks. Research revealed a shift towards therapeutic skincare items such as moisturizers, serums and acne remedies with a decline, in the usage of makeup following reduced gatherings (Choi et al 2022). Furthermore, Interviewee B's experience of switching to treatments like mud masks for acne further underscores the emphasis on skincare rather than makeup enhancement. The shift in consumer focus from makeup to skincare indicates a change in prioritization, among Taiwanese women aligning with the global trend of placing greater importance on skincare throughout the pandemic (Choi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the findings reveal significant changes in brand preference. Participants prefer Japanese and Korean skincare products due to they are more effective than European and local brands. Participants have a preference, for Japanese and Korean skincare products due to reasons. They believe that these products are more suitable for their skin types in terms of hydration, oil control and sensitivity. The lightweight and gentle formulas of these products are considered ideal for Taiwans weather. Moreover participants appreciate the quality and innovative nature of these brands as they blend skincare technologies with traditional Asian beauty methods making them more beneficial, for addressing their skin issues. This comment fits with the statement of Choi et al. (2022.), consumers' perception of brand trust and product efficacy is changing, particularly when consumers navigate new skincare needs. Consumers seem to be favoring the effectiveness of Korean brands, over the luxury appeal of brands indicating a shift towards prioritizing results, over prestige (June, 2023; Bakri,

2023). While European brands focus on luxury they may not always cater to the requirements of consumers especially concerning skin issues related to humidity. This trend suggests that practicality and suitability are gaining importance compared to brand perception when it comes to consumer decision making (Shim et al., 2024).

These findings reveal that people focus more on skincare routines and product efficacy, which can help tailor the product development and marketing strategies in the future. When millennial consumers prioritize these factors in their purchasing decisions, brands need to consider adjusting their strategies to emphasize the benefit of skin health and the effectiveness of products (Jannah et al., 2023). In addition, Brand loyalty is seen to shift towards Korean products posing a challenge, to the dominance of European and local brands known for their luxury appeal. Research indicates that European brands may fall short in catering to the requirements of consumers in places like Taiwan, where issues like humidity and skin sensitivity're significant factors (Rehman et al., 2018; Charinsarn, 2019). This emphasizes the importance for these brands to tailor their offerings according to consumer preferences for quality and performance than solely banking, on brand reputation.

Gardner et al. (2021) suggest that consumer behaviour is now more influenced by outcomes than loyalty, to specific brands particularly in times of crisis. This implies that European and local brands need to adapt and come up with ideas to remain competitive in a market that values effectiveness, over reputation.

4.1 Objective 2 - To analyze Taiwanese female millennials' experiences and reactions to advertising and marketing campaigns of skincare before COVID-19 and after.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Engagement with Advertisements

From pre-pandemic days to the COVID-19 period, Taiwanese female millennials' engagement with skincare advertisements showed a notable change. Before the pandemic, participants mostly interacted with traditional advertising channels, such as TV advertisements and in-store promotions. Besides, participants emphasised that they preferred to test products in person which is the key factor during the purchasing process, and this kind of behaviour reveals the focus on physical retail spaces and traditional media revealed a customer base that valued tactile experience.

Interviewee C *“Before the pandemic, I purchased in-store, influenced mainly by recommendations from department store staff and TV commercials”*

Interviewee A *“Before the COVID-19, I prefer physical stores because I can see the actual product size and try samples.”*

The restrictions limited the physical shopping experience, therefore, most of the participants switched to digital platforms, particularly social media. During the pandemic individuals shared that they turned to Instagram because of its engaging visuals and the convenience it offered in finding products promoted by influencers and targeted advertisements. This kind of attention transformed from traditional advertisement to social media that matched the home-bound lifestyle

of young customers.

Interviewee C *“During the pandemic, I was influenced by Instagram ads”*

Many participants emphasized the significance of influencers, in their skincare decisions highlighting that they relied on suggestions, from influencers who shared skin types or concerns.

Interviewee A *“Influencers impact my decisions if their skin type is similar to mine.”*

Interviewee F *“When influencers share feedback from other users, it influences my decisions”*

The transition, from advertising to media and influencer created content has greatly changed how consumers interact with skincare brands. Relying on influencers, for trust has become vital impacting buying choices and nurturing lasting brand loyalty particularly in times of uncertainty.

Interviewee B *“I find myself inclined to trust these influencers because they show genuine results over time.”*

After the pandemic, the stores started to reopen, participants showed a mix of online and physical purchasing behaviour. Their comments revealed a comparison behaviour in the customer journey—testing the sample in the physical stores, and then comparing the price between online and physical stores.

This way of comparing behaviours suggests a customer journey that's well informed and strategic combining the experience of, in store shopping, with the convenience and wealth of information found in online shopping environments.

Interviewee C *“Now that things are back to normal, I still try products in physical stores and compare prices. If online is cheaper, I might buy from online platforms.”*

Interviewee D *“Now, it's about half and half. I go to physical stores to try products and listen to staff recommendations, but I also check online prices and buy online if there are discounts. If physical stores have discounts, I buy there.”*

Influencers have become crucial for building trust with consumers finding products they promote genuine compared to advertisements. This trust influences their buying choices. Strengthens their loyalty, to brands giving them assurance, in selecting skincare products amidst times of uncertainty.

Interviewee B *“I find myself inclined to trust these influencers because they show genuine results over time”*

The way people interact with skincare brands has been transformed by the pandemic. Although traditional advertisements and, in person shopping experiences remain media and influencers have become pivotal in influencing the buying decisions of young Taiwanese women. In the future brands must find a balance between digital interactions to cater to consumers who appreciate the trustworthiness of, in store shopping well as the ease and genuineness of online channels.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Influence of Marketing Channels

The marketing channels for skincare product promotion revealed a significant shift in Taiwanese female millennials' behaviours and preferences before and after the pandemic. Before COVID-19, traditional media channels like TV were considered as the most influential ones, but personal recommendations also played a crucial role. In addition, people normally purchased products in physical stores where they could interact with the products directly before the pandemic.

Interviewee D *“Mostly recommendations from friends and family influenced my skincare product choices before the pandemic”*

However, the pandemic completely changed these relationships. Instagram was one of the most effective marketing channels during the pandemic, and it allowed the brands to overcome the limitations of physical interaction. The participants emphasized the changed of their skincare purchasing.

Interviewee C *“During the pandemic, I switched to social media for recommendations because I couldn't go out”*

After the pandemic people started incorporating both offline shopping into their buying routines showing a change, in how consumers behave. Participants indicated that they always used online platforms to compare the prices, and back to physical stores to test the products, which combine both digital and physical channels into their purchasing habits.

Interviewee D *“Now, it’s about half and half. If I see something in-store, I’ll compare prices online—or buy directly if there’s a discount”*

The combination of physical shopping channels demonstrates a profound merging of digital and, in store retail experiences, where each channel serves a supportive function. Online shopping offers convenience, for conducting research and making informed decisions while brick and mortar stores offer peace of mind through hands on product testing. Today consumers blend both channels to enhance their shopping journey.

4.1.3 Discussion

During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a shift, in how Taiwanese female millennials interact with skincare adverts showing a change in their shopping preferences. Previously their favored methods like TV commercials and, in store promotions that focused on physical shopping experiences. Furthermore, this reliance on physical engagement reflects the study of Chen et al. (2017), who indicated that consumers intend to believe personal experiences and suggestions in a familiar environment.

However, the participants’ attention turned to digital platforms because of the limitations of physical shopping during the pandemic. Besides, Instagram became the key source of skincare recommendations, which indicated the importance of social media as a marketing channel, particularly when physical interactions were restricted (Liao et al., 2021). Amid the pandemic when face, to face interactions were limited people turned to Instagram more for skincare tips showing a trend

towards putting faith in information (Choi et al., 2022). Influencers had an impact, on this shift as individuals trusted their reviews and reached out for tailored recommendations (Castillo et al., 2022). The transition, from in person to interactions highlights a pattern in which social media platforms such as Instagram have become essential for discovering and making decisions (Hood et al, 2023). The growing reliance on influencers and the shift towards engagements indicate that after the pandemic social media will maintain an important influence, on consumer habits. Companies need to adjust by producing reliable captivating material that connects real world encounters.

In addition, the participants showed mixed purchasing behaviour in post-pandemic, in which consumers tend to combine their previous tactile experiences with newly acquired digital conveniences. Consumers started to test the products in the physical store and compare the prices online at the same time, which revealed the importance of the connection between physical and digital in today's marketing environment (Bakri, 2023). Consumers today view offline and online shopping as two sides of the coin. They desire the reassurance of, in person interactions combined with the ease and knowledge provided by channels. This shift highlights the importance for brands to have an omnichannel approach, where physical stores and digital platforms collaborate harmoniously to cater to changing consumer demands.

The implication of these findings is pragmatic, that skincare marketers need to work on an effective integration strategy - one combining digital and traditional channels. The pandemic exposed the shift of customer trust to transparency and effectiveness, especially in collaboration with influencers. Furthermore, the brand

or firms have to think about if they want their business and marketing strategy should be.

4.2 Objective 3 - To evaluate the influence of Instagram on skincare products' awareness and choices through the customer journey.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Impact of Instagram on Awareness and Choices

The interviews revealed that Instagram has a significant impact on consumers' awareness and purchasing decisions for skincare products. The participants indicated that they were influenced by Instagram influencers' shared content so that they had an idea about the different/new skincare brands and products. This attitude reflects a common theme throughout the participants that they think influencer endorsements have higher credibility than traditional brand advertisements.

Interviewee A *"I trust influencers with professional knowledge more than regular endorsers."*

Interviewee B *"Mostly through influencers. Brand advertisements are less attractive unless endorsed by someone I trust."*

Influencers are commonly viewed as genuine. This perception is now being challenged more and more. Research indicates that when influencers engage in activities their trustworthiness can diminish, particularly if their followers suspect they are promoting products, for payment (Weismueller et al., 2022).

Recent revelations have heightened skepticism resulting in decreased faith, in influencers (Castillo et al., 2022). Consequently companies need to prioritize transparency in their partnerships with influencers to uphold credibility and prevent harm to their image.

The participants showed a specific preference for Instagram content types. One person said that a clear and interesting format is appealing, which showed that dynamic visual content is necessary to get people's attention. In addition, attention- grabbing content is a key factor in influencing customer engagement. This inclination is commonly linked with Instagram. It is not exclusive, to this platform. Comparable patterns can be seen on social media sites such as TikTok and YouTube where captivating and interactive content plays a role, in capturing the interest of users.

Interviewee B *“Reels where the influencer demonstrates using the product and provides recommendations, are the most appealing”*

Interview C *“I prefer reels because they provide more substantial content, showing the entire process from using the skincare product to the end”*

Interviewee E *“Even if I don’t know the person, well-made videos and catchy titles can attract me to watch, and follow their recommendations”*

After going through the information six participants mentioned that they would approach their buying decisions with care and thoughtfulness opting for prudence, over impulsivity.

Interviewee B *“After viewing the content, I look for more references and see if others also recommend the same product”*

Interviewee D *“I gather more information first, looking at other user reviews and possibly trying the product in a physical store before deciding”*

Interviewee Ds strategy reflects a move, towards well informed buying behaviour reducing the risks associated with shopping by depending on user feedback and in person store visits. This points to a growing preference among customers for a mix of research and physical store interactions. Companies should respond to this trend by offering online product details and ensuring a presence, in brick and mortar stores for interactive customer experiences.

Instagram significantly influences how consumers choose products, with one participant noting that exposure to influencer content has made them more careful and informed in their selections. This reflects a broader shift towards deliberate, research-driven purchasing, where trust and relatability play key roles. Consumers now prioritize product qualities like ingredients and brand reputation, often seeking validation from influencers they perceive as authentic. This change shows that consumers are active participants in the evaluation process, and brands must build transparent relationships with influencers to resonate with these values.

Interviewee D *“I look at their skin conditions and follow those with similar conditions to mine because their opinions are more relevant”*

Interviewee E *“Now, I consider if the product suits my skin type. Ingredients and brand reputation are also important, but suitability is key”*

4.2.2 Discussion

The findings provide valuable insights into how Instagram influences consumer skincare awareness and purchasing decisions, particularly highlighting the significant role of social media in shaping consumer behaviour among Taiwanese female millennials. The study emphasizes how Instagram, through influencer content and visual engagement, plays a crucial role in these consumers' decision-making processes.

The respondents relied more on influencers because they were more reliable and credible. This matched with the research of Castillo et al. (2022), which highlighted that consumers, particularly young consumers, trust influencer marketing more than traditional marketing, and they think it is truer. However, according to a study conducted by Weismueller et al, 2020 the rise of influencer marketing, in the business sphere has resulted in a growth in consumer doubt. When influencers promote products their genuineness may diminish, causing certain consumers to doubt the reliability of their posts. This highlights the significance of transparency, in upholding trust. In addition, the preference for professional knowledge influencers also reinforces the research of Van Driel and Dumitrica (2021), who indicated that influencers with professional knowledge build up higher credibility in consumers' minds. Furthermore, the findings reveal that participants prefer dynamic visual formats, such as Instagram Reels, which

can attract user's attention effectively. This idea fits with Imron's (2023) research, which reveals how important visual content is in digital marketing. Particularly, the illustrated usage and step-by-step demonstration increase user engagement.

The results show that consumer behaviour evolves during the process of choosing a product with various types of media impacting each step of the customers path. Initially consumers come across products through Instagram influencers then rely on reviews and comparisons, for details and eventually look for, in store validation before making a purchase. It is important for brands to incorporate these touchpoints to lead consumers from discovery to buying.. Participants collect information from various sources before purchasing, which mean people are more cautious about purchasing skincare products. Participants for example shared how they collect insights, from platforms like media, influencer suggestions, product evaluations and physical store visits to gain viewpoints and lower the chances of disappointment. In a vein according to Castillo and colleagues (2022) consumers are now more active, on media to verify information showing a greater understanding of the potential drawbacks of buying skincare products and a willingness to minimize them.

Skincare companies can effectively utilize Instagram by collaborating with influencers who truly share their values and connect with their followers. It's important to select influencers recognized for their sincerity and openness guaranteeing that the advantages of the products are conveyed in a manner. Companies should also offer details, about their products. Consistently evaluate the success of these collaborations to uphold consumer confidence and establish lasting loyalty. In addition, when skincare brands create their marketing strategy,

they should focus on high quality visual content which can resonate with the target audiences. Furthermore, organizations need to keep an eye on how consumers interact with digital platforms as they change so they can improve their marketing strategies, stay relevant, and win over customers in a saturated market.

4.3 Objective 4- To analyze the influence of social media influencers on Taiwanese female millennials' skincare product perceptions and purchasing decisions.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Influence of Social Media Influencers

The interviews reveal that social media influencers have a significant impact on Taiwanese female millennials, especially on platforms like Instagram. All of the participants indicated that influencers' suggestion strongly impacts their perception and purchasing decisions on skincare products. Because of their obvious expertise and track record of success with the products, influencers' endorsements are often considered as reliable, demonstrating their authority and trustworthiness.

Interviewee D *“If an influencer I trust, like Grace or Wang Junping, recommends a product, I pay attention. They usually have good skin, so I want to know their skincare routines”*

Interestingly, participants didn't pay attention to the kind of influencers they followed; rather they prioritized those who seemed trustworthy and easy to relate to. However, from the analysis of the interview contents, two of the participants

followed micro-influencers, and four of the participants followed macro-influencers.

Interviewee B *“I don’t look at follower counts but at the content. If an influencer consistently uses and recommends a product, it’s more believable.”*

Participants	Followed Skincare Influencers	Followers on Instagram
Interviewee A	serendipity_leana	22.1k
Interviewee B	Rice and Shine	772k
Interviewee C	Peachi	178k
Interviewee D	Yanna	39.1k
Interviewee E	Wang Junping	978k
Interviewee F	Rui	127k

Table 1 - Analyze the Type of Influencers

In addition, many interviewers indicated the degree of influencer impact on their purchasing decisions, one participant indicated *“About 70-80% of my purchases are influenced by them, especially if their recommendations match my current needs”*. This data reinforces the perception— that influencers’ recommendations play a significant role of shaping consumer habits.

Participants	Degree of Influencer Impact on Purchasing Decision
Interviewee A	70%
Interviewee B	60-70%
Interviewee C	80%.
Interviewee D	70%
Interviewee E	60%
Interviewee F	80%

Table 2 - Analyze the Degree of Influencer Impact on Purchasing Decision

Instagram influencers have an impact, on what people buy because they are good at earning trust sharing content that fits the audience showing that others like the products and creating attractive posts. Influencers don't just sell things; they also influence how people shop by understanding what their followers want and going through. Companies should make sure that their collaborations with influencers prioritize, to connect with and interesting content that speaks to customers.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Engagement with Influencers

The participation of Taiwanese female millennial and influencers in social media is very diverse, making skincare choices even more important. Many respondents recounted their interactions with influencers either via DMs, comments or through engaging with their content. Consumers can easily engage with influencers, on platforms, like Instagram building trust and enhancing the credibility of recommendations. It is vital for brands to encourage influencers to maintain interactions as this not boosts consumer trust but also influences their buying choices.

Interviewee B *“I save influencer recommendations to a shopping board in the save collection. When I need new products, I review these saved recommendations before deciding”*

Believing in influencers hinges, on how genuine and open they seem both vital for shaping what consumers choose. With influencer marketing evolving into a business keeping this trust intact poses a hurdle. People are growing more doubtful

underscoring the need, for disclosure of sponsored posts. Brands should collaborate with influencers valued for their realness to guarantee their endorsements ring true and connect with buyers.

Interviewee F “Interviewee F noted, “Online interactions are very transparent, and influencers need to maintain their reputation, so I believe they wouldn't risk damaging it.”

4.3.3 Discussion

The findings highlight that social media influencers have a significant impact on Taiwanese female millennials’ skincare product perceptions and purchasing decisions. The participants trust influencers' recommendations, due to their professional knowledge and relatable content. Therefore, they think influencers are reliable sources. This is consistent with what Castillo et al. (2022) state, that influencers increase the credibility and brand visibility through social media engagement.

In line, with studies (Lie & Aprilianty 2022; Castillo et al., 2022) this research emphasizes that consumers prioritize credibility over the influencers size whether they are macro or micro. While macro influencers have a reach their recommendations may come across as genuine. On the hand micro influencers, who cater to more specialized audiences are often viewed as more authentic and relatable. Consumers place a value on honesty and openness than, on follower numbers with trust being the factor influencing their buying choices. Interestingly, participants stated that social media endorsements impact their purchase decisions

by a significant margin (70-80%). This resonates with Castillo et al. (2022) finding— consumers' buying choices are heavily influenced by their sense of trust.

The relationship, between followers and influencers shows that building trust relies on engagement. People appreciate influencers who share content and interact with their audience by responding to comments and providing thorough reviews. This interaction creates a bond of trust and credibility leading followers to be more inclined to trust and act on their recommendations. This is in line with research conducted by Lie and Aprilianty (2022) as Castillo et al. (2022) which underline the significance of authenticity and in depth information, in influencer marketing. For businesses teaming up with influencers who prioritize engagement can greatly boost the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

These outcomes have practical implications for brands and marketers targeting this demographic. The companies can enhance influencer relationships and prioritize reliable endorsement which can make marketing more effective in an ever-changing skincare industry. Further studies could explore multiple platforms as well as different types of influencers to delve deeper into what drives skincare consumer behaviour.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the research findings. It introduces the development in skincare routine and consumer behaviour of Taiwanese female millennial, influence of social media influencers, and the effectiveness of marketing channels. Moreover, it also discusses the practical implications for marketers, describes the study's limitations, and gives recommendations for future research .

5.1 Development in Skincare Routines and Consumer Behaviour

This research has significantly increased the understanding of Taiwanese female millennials' skincare routine and consumer behaviour, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The skincare routine underwent a transformation, during the pandemic as individuals grappled with skin issues like acne and irritation stemming from prolonged mask wearing. Previously many individuals adhered to skincare practices such as cleansing and moisturizing. Nevertheless the introduction of mask wearing protocols and increased indoor activities prompted people to adopt elaborate skincare routines, amidst the COVID 19 era.

Participants reported that they added more steps to the skincare routines, such as using gentle cleansers, serums, and treatments to deal with mask-caused skin problems. This change reveals people focus on skincare more than makeup, because consumers prioritize maintaining the healthy skins during the crisis. Moreover, this study also highlights the strong preference for Japanese and Korean skincare products among Taiwanese female millennials, not European

and local brands. The participants think these products are more effective and suitable for their skin types, which emphasizes the importance of product efficacy and suitability in consumer choice.

5.2 Influence of Social Media Influencers

In today's age, social media personalities play a role, in influencing consumer choices and buying decisions with a particular focus, on Instagram influencers. Research has also shown that influencers who showcase their expertise in an area and share content are seen as more trustworthy, than traditional advertising methods. This trustworthiness of influencers plays a role in shaping consumers' buying choices with individuals indicating that they often consider influencers' recommendations when making purchases.

When compared to ads, influencers' detailed reviews, tutorials and personal stories come across as authentic. The preference for engaging formats like Instagram Reels underscores the importance of creating appealing content, in influencer marketing. Reels can attract users' attention and raise engagement with its step-by-step demonstration and relatable description.

Interestingly, the study reveals that the type of influencer is not crucial, no matter if it is a micro influencer with few followers or a macro influencer with many followers. The most important point is the credible and relatable content. The participants prefer influencers with similar skin types and worried, because this relatability makes their recommendations more trustworthy and helpful.

5.3 Effectiveness of Marketing Channels

The effectiveness of marketing channels has transferred obviously from traditional media to digital platforms, especially Instagram. During the pandemic, the limitation of physical stores led people to rely more on digital platforms for providing skincare suggestions. This shift highlights the important of digital marketing channels in attracting consumers during the period of limitation of physical interaction.

After the pandemic, there has come a mixed approach which combines digital and physical channels.. The participants usually test the products in the physical stores, and then compare the prices online, which combine with tactile experiences and the convenience of e-commerce. This approach indicates how important is to integrate the marketing strategies, that use both online and offline to attract consumers effectively.

5.4 Practical Implications for Marketers

The marketers should improve their nuanced digital marketing strategy to effectively engage varied consumers, especially on Instagram. Moreover, brands can cleverly collaborate with knowledgeable influencers to authentically build credibility and trust through their professional expertise. High-quality, compelling visual content is paramount to meaningfully build connections with targeted customers. Brands would be wise to invest in crafting intriguing Reels, insightful tutorials, and personally shared experiences displaying authentic product efficacy and real-world results.

While digital campaigns should focus on showcasing genuine product effectiveness and suitability for diverse local skin types, highlighting natural ingredients and contextualizing local relevance can help earn consumers' trust. Furthermore, consumers have become increasingly discerning regarding the skincare products they rely on. Therefore, transparently communicating verified ingredient lists and substantiated benefits is key to strengthening a brand's credibility and loyalty. Skilled marketers that tap into human psychology to engage audiences through varied yet cohesive messaging across platforms will see the most return on their efforts.

5.5 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Due to limited time, the small sample size might affect the generalizability of the findings. The future study should include bigger and multiple samples to confirm these results. Moreover, the demographic range should be expanded to include different age groups, regions, and social economic backgrounds, so that people can comprehensively understand consumer behaviour. This study mainly focuses on Instagram, so the future research should investigate the impact of other social media platforms on skincare purchasing decisions, such like TikTok and YouTube.. Each platform has its unique features and users demographics, which could influence consumer behaviour in different ways. Besides, exploring pandemic's long-term effects on customer behaviour can help brands to adjust their marketing strategies accordingly. Future research can use mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative methods. Even qualitative interview can give a deep insight of consumer behaviour, but quantitative surveys can offer wider generalizability and statistical proof.

5.6 Summary

This study has provided valuable insight on Taiwanese female millennials' changeable skincare routines and consumer behaviour. It emphasizes the importance of social media influencers and digital marketing channels. The research results also emphasize the shift, toward skincare routines the influence of Instagram and its influencers and the importance of combining digital and physical channels in marketing strategies. These results also offer insights for marketers, such as emphasizing interaction and product effectiveness to establish a strong connection with contemporary consumers. Additionally future research should explore a range of social media platforms include more diverse samples and investigate the long term effects of the pandemic on consumer behaviour. These findings could serve as a basis for developing marketing approaches, for the beauty industry.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Consent Form

Consent Form

Name of Researcher: Pei-Han Lai

Title of the Study:

Impact of Instagram and Influencer Marketing on Taiwanese Female Millennials' Skincare Behaviors During COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19

Consent to take part in the above research.

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in the above research.
- I understand that even if I do agree to participate at this moment, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any ramifications of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within 2 weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that my personal information and the information which I provide as part of this study will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality at all times.
- I understand that when reporting on the results of this research within the final dissertation, my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by replacing any names with a numeric number and discussing any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I may mention.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final dissertation.
- I understand that thorough written notes will be taken and voice recording will take place throughout my interview. This will be kept in a secure location until results of the dissertation are confirmed by the Examination Board and for a further 2 years after this.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the Examination Board.
- I understand that signed consent forms will be retained in a secure location until results of the dissertation are confirmed by the Examination Board.
- I understand under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information which I have provided at any time whilst it is being stored as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher of this study to seek further clarification and information if required.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____