

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN THE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Abstract

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Title of publication The Role of Social Media Influencers in the Consumer Decision-making Process		
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Abstract <p>This thesis explored the role of social media influencers (SMIs) during the consumer decision-making process in the context of the Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic market. In order to achieve this goal, the thesis examined the opinions of consumers about SMIs, the benefits that consumers get from SMIs during their decision-making process, and then discussed the possible practical recommendations for beauty and cosmetic brands in Vietnam regarding the use of SMIs.</p> <p>The thesis's theoretical framework is based on the classic five-stage decision-making process by John Dewey, and the literature on opinion leadership and influencer marketing. Some background information on Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic market and Vietnamese SMIs was also provided as context for the empirical research. The thesis followed an inductive qualitative approach that gathered primary data from a series of interviews with Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic consumers. Secondary data came from books, journals, articles, and electronic newspapers.</p> <p>The results of the thesis suggest that SMIs are influential throughout the three first stages of the consumer decision-making process. SMIs gain their influence through creating helpful contents and staying relevant to consumers. However, as SMIs grow in size and attract more sponsorship offers, the authenticity of their product recommendations becomes questionable. These findings reflect the current literature on social media influencers and contribute some insights from the Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic context. Through these findings, a number of practical recommendations for brands were suggested. Finally, future researchers interested in this topic may try to quantify and measure the effects of several important attributes of SMIs identified in this thesis.</p>		
Keywords Consumer decision-making process, social media influencers, Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic market.		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Vietnam is a promising market for beauty and cosmetic (B&C) companies. The country's average annual growth in the cosmetic market has reached 14% from 2001 to 2006 (Nguyen & Sirikhoon 2008), while cosmetic import to Vietnam has increased from \$500 million to more than \$1 billion in five years from 2011 to 2016 (Spencer 2017). According to Thai Trang (2019), the current Vietnamese B&C market is worth 2.3 billion dollars, 90% of which are controlled by foreign-based brands (most notably from South Korea). This market has recently seen the mass entry of big foreign cosmetic producers such as Innisfree, sulwasoo, O Hui, Shiseido, Maybelline New York, MAC, 3CE, Chanel, Lancôme, The Face Shop, The Body Shop, Laneige, Vichy, and L'Oréal, just to name a few.

As the Vietnamese people are spending more and more of their time on the Internet, brands in general, and B&C companies in particular, face the challenge of bringing their marketing activities online. According to Ashwill (2018), 81% of young Vietnamese from 18 to 29 years of age access social media everyday and rely on those sites as their source of daily news. These young consumers are a desirable and challenging market for brands, because millennials are more resistant towards traditional advertisements than ever (Kádeková & Holienčinová 2018). Woods (2016) comments that companies are quickly increasing their spending on marketing campaigns on social media, and are searching for new and more efficient ways to promote their products. One of the most talked about promotional channel is influencers, or opinion leaders.

Before the rise of the internet and social media, only celebrities can effectively spread their influence through the use of mass media. However, the growth of social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube, has created a new generation of influential people who can strongly shape others' consumption behavior. These people, called "social media influencers" in this study, can reach up to millions of potential consumers through their use of social media. According to a survey by Launch Metrics (2015), 81% of the 603 surveyed marketing professionals considered influencers effective in their marketing activities, while 84% of brands intend to launch some kind of influencer campaigns in the near future. Influencer marketing is effective because their promotional messages are often seen as authentic word-of-mouth recommendations from another consumer rather than paid advertisements (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017). Word-of-mouth marketing is more credible than other strategies, because

there is no direct link between the recommendation and the advertiser (Momtaz, Aghaie, & Alizadeh 2011).

Social media influencers (SMIs) could be a very suitable way to reach out to consumers who are spending more time on the Internet and are becoming more resistant towards traditional advertisements. However, this topic is still under-researched, since SMIs are quite new. Most of the current literature focuses on traditional opinion leaders and celebrities who are different from SMIs in several ways. For example, traditional opinion leaders have much fewer followers, less connection with brands, and do not create contents that are widely read/viewed like SMIs. On the other hand, celebrities have much more fans than SMIs, create contents that are not focused around a single industry, and are presumably less reliable than SMIs when it comes to product.

1.2 Thesis Objectives & Research Questions

Due to the significance of SMIs and the lack of research on this topic, this thesis attempts to study the role of social media influencers in how consumers make their purchase decision, which can be of interest for brands since purchase decision means sales. The thesis may help to better understand the importance of SMIs and how they are different from other factors that influence the consumer consumption behavior. The study is set in the quickly growing B&C market of Vietnam to maximize practicality for B&C brands in Vietnam, while also testing the current literature in a rather under-researched market.

According to Yeager (2008), a research question gives the overall direction for the entire study to follow. Indeed, many scholars are known to strongly emphasize the importance of a good research statement to the outcome of any study. Following the guidance by Bogdan & Biklen (2006, as cited by Morrell & Carroll 2010, 22-23), after considering the time and resource available, the potential sample, the practical importance, and the author's personal interest, the research question for the thesis is:

To what extent are Vietnamese consumers of beauty and cosmetic products influenced by social media influencers during their decision-making process?

In order to better answer the main research statement, several sub-questions are formulated as follow. These sub-questions break down the most important points of the main question and help to guide the research. For the purpose of the thesis, all of these sub-questions are set in the Vietnamese B&C context.

- *What are the opinions of consumers about Vietnamese social media influencers, in terms of reliability, relevance, and transparency?*

- *In what stage of the decision-making process are social media influencers most helpful and influential?*
- *What aspects of the contents from social media influencers are the most helpful for consumers in their decision-making process?*
- *How effective is social media influencers' product endorsement, as compared to other forms of marketing and advertisements?*
- *What are the practical recommendations for beauty and cosmetic companies on using social media influencers as a form of marketing and advertisement?*

1.3 Limitations

It is the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge the limitations of their study. According to Price and Murnan (2004), a research limitation is a bias that was not or could not have been controlled in the research design or the tools used in the research. Research limitations can affect the results of a research. Thus, acknowledging them helps readers as well as the researcher to understand the weakness of a specific research, to put it into a larger research context, and to know its credibility (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer 2013).

First of all, the thesis is set in the Vietnamese B&C market with both domestic and international brands, and involving only Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic social media influencers (VBC SMIs) and Vietnamese B&C consumers. Thus, extra precaution should be taken in making generalizations towards other markets and towards consumers of different nationalities or cultural backgrounds.

The thesis also uses an exploratory qualitative research approach with very small sample size (seven interviews in total). Due to time and resource constraints, the sample was chosen using a convenience sampling method. Thus, the interviewees were young consumers in their twenties who are more or less from the same social background. This means that the thesis's external validity might be affected, and that the results serve as a foundation for further research rather than making firm conclusions on its own.

Another limitation is that some stages in the decision-making process are quite hard to differentiate for the interviewees, especially the second (information search) and third (evaluation of alternatives) stage. It was also found through the interview results that these two stages can happen at the same time, which might have made it more confusing for the interviewees.

Finally, the different ways in which VBC SMIs can cause consumers to recognize a consumption problem (the problem recognition stage) are also hard to differentiate. Thus, although the researcher has tried to clearly explain these subtle differences, the interviewees may have made error in understanding and answering the interview questions, which may have affected the thesis' validity.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

First of all, the thesis is based on the decision-making process which was created by Dewey (1910, cited by Bruner & Pomazal 1988). This process describes the five stages that a consumer goes through when they decide to buy a product. However, most of the research effort is focused on the three first stages: problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. The reason for this is that the decision is made and can be influenced in these three stages, while in the latter two (product choice and outcome), the purchase decision has already been made and cannot be further influenced.

The second part of the theoretical framework used in the thesis is the literature on opinion leadership and SMIs. Theories on opinion leadership dates back to the 1940s-1950s with a two-step theory. In this theory, mass media influence a small number of opinion leaders, who subsequently influence the larger public. Since then, along with the development in technology and mass media, the nature of opinion leadership has changed a lot. Recently, a new class of opinion leaders have emerged who use social media to create contents and extend their influence. Some attributes of SMIs and the key differences between traditional opinion leaders, SMIs, and celebrities were identified. As SMIs are quite new, the scholarly literature on this type of opinion leaders are still lacking. Thus, a big part of the literature on this subject is from the research and experience of marketing companies/professionals. This second part of the theoretical framework ends by presenting some background information of VBC SMIs, which are generally newer and less developed than SMIs in Western countries.

1.5 Research Method and Data Collection

In order to achieve the goal of exploring the different ways in which SMIs can influence the consumer decision-making process, the thesis uses the inductive qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative research approach involves understanding the meaning that people associate with a social problem. Qualitative research has an inductive research style, which gradually builds general themes from specific observations. In the thesis, the author attempts to understand what consumers

think and feel about SMIs across their decision-making process. This knowledge is then used to suggest general themes on how SMIs influence consumers.

After the research approach has been chosen, the research methods are determined next. Research methods include the data collection and analysis that are used to produce the findings of a study (Creswell 2014). In order to understand what consumers think and feel about SMIs, the semi-structured interview method was chosen for the thesis. Thus, the data used for analysis was primary data. The interview questions were structured so that there are few variations in how the questions are asked and understood. However, the author would continue to ask more open-ended questions if the interviewee seemed to have more to say on the matter. This ensures that the data is as comprehensive as possible.

The interview questions (Appendix 1) were created based on the knowledge from the theoretical framework. More specifically, the majority of the questions are built along the 3 first stages of the consumer decision-making process, as well as other issues that were discovered during the literature review. The questions were also pilot tested with two volunteers and adjustments were made according to their suggestions.

The convenience sampling method was employed: the author asked around to look for volunteers with a number of criteria. According to Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim (2016), convenience sampling is useful when the population is really large, or when there are limited resources and time for the research. Seven interviewees were selected, all of whom were Vietnamese females (they are the main audience of Vietnamese social media influencers). Furthermore, they are all in their twenties, as older consumers are not often active on social media (Duggan & Brenner 2012) and thus, do not usually watch videos from VBC SMIs, while younger consumers consume fewer B&C products.

Two types of interview were conducted: direct interview through Skype (four interviews) and email interview (three interviews). The interviews were conducted in either Vietnamese or English, depending on how confident the interviewees are in expressing themselves in English. In the case of Vietnamese interviews, the data was transcribed and translated in English for further analysis.

The collected interview data from different interviewees was then consolidated by questions. This means that all of the answers for Question 1 were organized next to each other so that the theme around these answers could be easily recognized. The author then analyzed the answers one by one, while also trying to identify the relationship between different questions, and the possible effects that the background of the interviews could have on their opinions of SMIs.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The thesis starts with an introduction (Chapter 1) where the topic background, research questions, limitations, the important theories used, the research methodology, and the overall structure of the thesis are presented. This chapter highlights the importance of the research topic, defines the scope of work, and guides the reader through the overall progression of the thesis.

Then, Chapter 2 lays out the theoretical foundation on the consumer decision-making process as developed by Dewey in 1910 (as cited by Bruner & Pomazal 1988). The interview questions, the data analysis and interpretation, as well as the overall direction of the research are guided by this decision-making framework.

Then, in Chapter 3, information about Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic social media influencers is presented. First, the section gives an overview of the global and the Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic market as a background layer. Then, a detailed review of the relevant literature on social media influencers are given. The points discussed in this part include the definition of SMIs, the use of SMIs in recent marketing campaigns, the difference between SMIs and celebrities, the issue of authenticity and transparency in SMIs' content creation, and some background information on Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic social media influencers. Most of the materials used were in English, However, in some cases, only sources in Vietnamese were available.

Chapter 4 describes the empirical aspect of the thesis which includes the research design, the interview questions, the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 examines the findings from Chapter 4 in order to answer the research questions, and then ends by commenting on the reliability, validity, and future research suggestions.

Finally, Chapter 6 ends the thesis by summarizing the five previous chapters.

2 THE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

2.1 Overview

The consumer decision-making process was first created by John Dewey in 1910 (as cited by Bruner & Pomazal 1988). There are five stages in a consumer's purchase decision: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and outcome. Problem recognition happens when a consumer feels a desire to move from their current state to an ideal state (e.g., they want a better TV, or they run out of soap). A problem can come up by a drop in the consumer's current state (they run out of soap), or by a rise of their ideal state (they want a better TV than the old one). The next stage, information search, is a process in which consumers scan their environment for the information that helps them make a purchase decision. After the consumer has found the necessary information, they start to evaluate the alternatives, which would result in a purchase. After the product has been bought, the consumer enters the last stage of their decision-making process: outcome. In this stage, they decide whether or not they are satisfied with their purchase decision, which will influence their future purchases (Lee 2005).

Traditionally, researchers believe in a "rational perspective" in the study of decision making. The rational perspective assumes that consumers systematically and efficiently browse the information available about the products that they want to buy. The consumers then carefully weigh the pros and cons of each product to make a purchase decision (Solomon 2013, 321). However, it was later argued that this rational perspective does not describe all purchase decisions. In fact, Olshavsky & Granbois (1979) suggest that many consumer purchases are habitual and do not need a lengthy decision-making process at all. This helps both to save time (Solomon 2013, 321) and mental resources (Alba & Hutchinson 1987). Other decision-making perspectives include the behavioral influence perspective and the experiential perspective (Solomon 2013, 322). In the behavioral influence perspective, the consumers are not really involved in the decision-making process. Instead, they react to the environment around them, such as the packaging of a product. In the experiential perspective, the consumers consider a product as a whole without specifically looking at any separate characteristics. The decision here is made on an emotional basis.

Solomon (2013, 322-325) introduces a continuum of purchase decision behavior, see Figure 1. This continuum shows the amount of effort a consumer spends on a purchase decision. There are three types of behaviors: routine response behavior, limited problem-

solving, and extensive problem-solving. The extensive problem-solving process is similar to the rational perspective: the consumer follows this path when their involvement is high. They try to collect a lot of information both from memory and from outside sources (e.g. from Google search engine), and then they carefully evaluate the alternatives. In limited problem-solving, consumers are more likely to use simple "shortcuts", or decision rules, to make their decision instead of having to make a lengthy search process every time. Finally, routine response behaviors (also known as habitual decision making) are effortless choices that consumers do not even recognize they are making. These routine responses are built up from previous purchase habits and help consumers save time and mental energy. (Alba & Hutchinson 1987.)

Continuum of buying decision behaviour

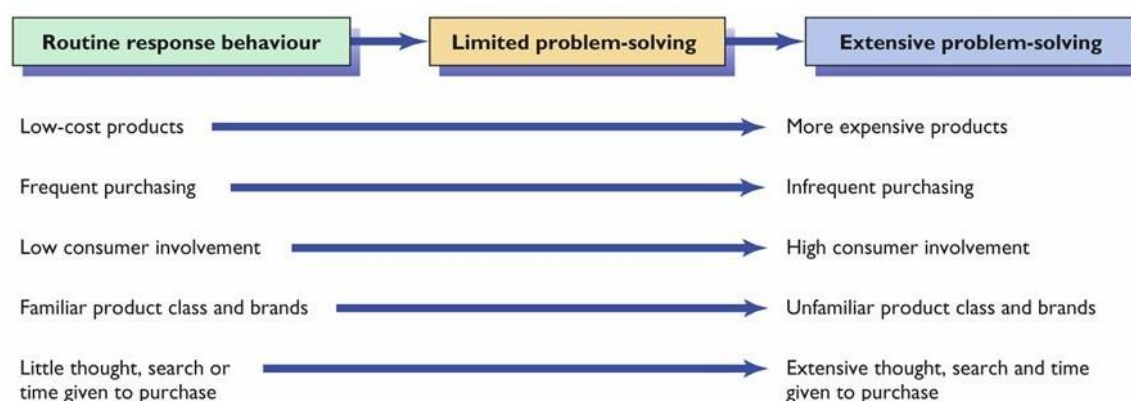


Figure 1 Continuum of purchase decision behavior

2.2 Problem Recognition

Problem recognition is the first stage of the consumer decision-making process. This stage is important because if it does not happen, there will be no purchase (Lee 2005). Figure 2, taken from Bruner & Pomazal's (1988) article outlines the flow of the problem recognition stage.

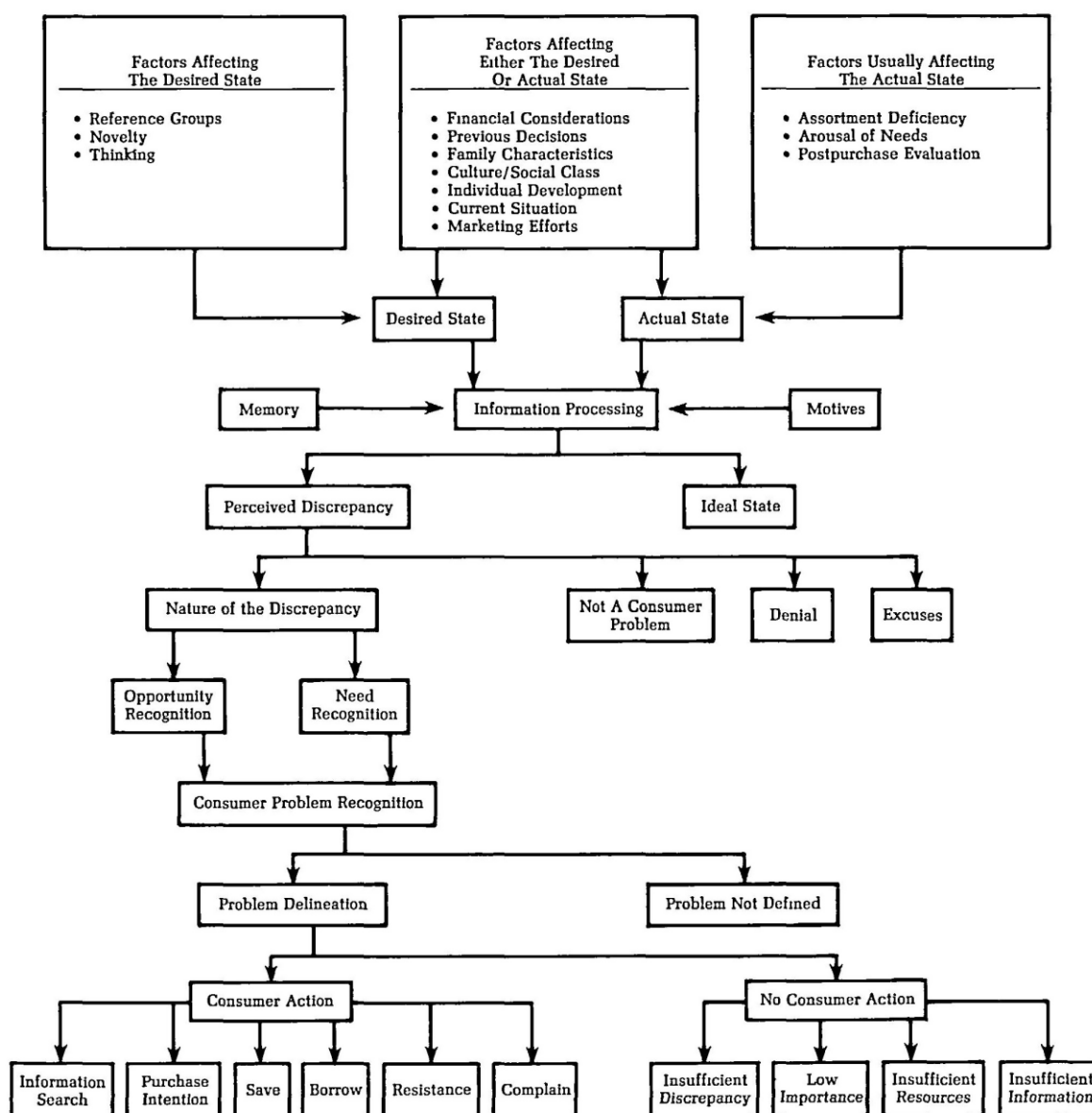


Figure 2 The Problem Recognition Stage

At the top of Figure 2, the consumer's desired and actual state are influenced by several factors. The factors that usually affect the desired state are, for example, reference groups, novelty, and thinking. Reference groups are the social environments that the consumer look at to change their consumption behaviors. Those can be a neighborhood, a workplace, a school, and so on. These reference groups set the standards of consumption such as the types of clothes to wear or things to buy. For example, if our neighbors own a specific type of cars, the chances that we might buy a car from the same brand rises significantly (Leonhardt 2005). When a consumer's social group changes or when the consumer changes in relation to their social group (e.g. a high school student starts to attend university), their desired state changes as well. The next factor, novelty, is simply a desire to try new products for variety. Finally, since people can predict the

positive experiences of consuming some product or service, their desired state can be influenced just by "thinking" about consuming something. (Bruner & Pomazal 1988.)

The actual state, according to Bruner & Pomazal (1988), is usually influenced by assortment deficiency, arousal of needs, and post-purchase evaluation. Assortment deficiency is when some existing product runs out or is broken (e.g. the housewife runs out of salt), which worsens the consumer's current state. Arousal of needs is some changes in the current state that create new needs (e.g. it starts raining, or someone gets hungry). Lastly, post-purchase evaluation refers to whether or not a consumer is satisfied with a product after buying it. If he/she is not satisfied with that product, the actual state has not been improved, and there is still a consumer problem to solve. Besides the factors that affect either the actual or the desired state, there are many others that influence both the desired and the actual state, including financial status, previous purchase decisions, family/cultural/social factors, and so on. For example, a raise in salary can raise the desired state.

Continuing with the problem recognition process, the consumer processes the information about their actual and desired state to decide if there is a gap. If there is no gap, the consumer is already in his/her ideal state and the problem recognition process stops. However, if there is a gap, the consumer may choose to deny that it exists or give excuses why it is unnecessary. Furthermore, some gaps are not consumer problems (e.g. worries about a national policy) and thus cannot be solved by product/service consumption. Next, Figure 2 shows that a consumer problem can be divided into opportunity recognition or need recognition. An opportunity arises when a consumer's desired state goes up, while a need arises when a consumer's actual state goes down. After the problem is recognized, it needs to be clearly defined if any action is to be taken. Most of the time the problem is clearly defined immediately when it is recognized (e.g. someone gets hungry and they need to buy a meal). Nonetheless, in other cases where personal image or status are involved, the problem may get very complicated and remain undefined. In these cases, the consumer is aware that a problem exists but does not clearly know what is wrong and how to fix it. Undefined problems cannot be solved, and the consumer will need to spend more time and mental effort to figure them out. Finally, a clearly defined problem can turn into 10 distinct types of action, as specified in Figure 2. (Bruner & Pomazal 1988.)

Bruner & Pomazal's (1988) model of problem recognition shows several steps where a marketer may step in to help solve the consumer problem while benefiting the marketer's own product. Moreover, the marketer can study their market segment to decide which

factors or steps from the model are the most influential in leading the consumer into choosing their products.

2.3 Information Search

Information search is the second stage of the consumer decision-making process. Information search can be defined in many ways. For example, "prepurchase search" happens after problem recognition and before purchase, while "ongoing search" is the regular search that consumers do to keep themselves updated with the marketplace. "Internal search" is the scanning of a consumer's own memory to find relevant information, while "external search" is the act of searching from the environment, advertisements, friends, and so on. (Lee 2005.)

According to Solomon (2013, 328-330), consumers do not always take part in rational information search. In the literature, there is a differentiation between the maximizing decision strategy (where the consumer tries to find the best product possible) and the satisficing solution (where the consumer tries to find a good-enough result to save energy from the decision-making process). Consumers usually adopt the satisficing solution when it comes to durable goods (household appliances, or even cars), and take the maximizing strategy when buying symbolic items like clothings.

According to Ratner, Kahn, & Kahneman (1999), consumers are known to regularly take part in "variety seeking", which is the act of looking for new products, even though they would have had more pleasure if they had kept using the old product. Variety seeking can happen even before the consumer is no longer satisfied with their existing product. The unpredictability of variety seeking is enjoyable in itself, and thus, sometimes the consumers are willing to trade product satisfaction for this kind of enjoyment. Variety seeking becomes more likely when a consumer is in a good mood (Roehm & Roehm 2005, Kahn & Isen 1993) or when they want more stimulation (Menon & Kahn 1995).

According to Punj & Staelin (1983), information search activities are seen as a way to save money. The consumer is more satisfied with a purchase not because they have done a comprehensive information search for it, but because they can save some money through that activity. Thus, in expensive purchases, consumers often do more information search. Researchers have also found an inverted-U relationship between the amount of information search done and the level of knowledge a consumer has about that product type (Solomon 2013, 334). That is, moderately knowledgeable consumers often research the most, while beginner consumers and highly experienced consumers do less information search. Furthermore, experienced consumers are usually more selective and

efficient in the type of data they look at, while beginner consumers rely more on other people's opinions and less relevant product attributes to make their decisions. Lastly, low-income shoppers surprisingly search for less information than higher-income shoppers before they make a purchase (Solomon 2013, 328-335). All of these suggest that the consumer's level of experience and income can have an effect on their decision-making process.

2.4 Evaluation of Alternatives

The third stage of the consumer decision-making process is called evaluation of alternatives. This is when consumers compare the different product options that they have in order to choose one that meets their needs. The standards and methods that consumers use to narrow down and then make a decision differ according to the decision-making process they use, that is, whether they are trying to choose the best product or just making a purchase out of habit (Solomon 2013, 337). Some of the most popular criteria that consumers use in this stage are price, brand name, and country origin (Lee 2005). These are called "evaluative criteria". Generally, criteria where products differ are more important than those where the products are alike. Those attributes that are important to the final decision are called "determinant attributes". Marketers usually try to promote the determinant attributes that highlight their product's advantage over others'. (Solomon 2013, 342 – 343.)

Often, consumers do not use a lengthy rational information search before making a purchase. Instead, they use a set of rules of thumbs, or "heuristics", to decide quickly (Shah & Oppenheimer 2008). For example, many consumers simply look at surface attributes of a product such as its design, price, or brand – to decide the quality of the product itself. The link consumers make between price and quality is especially strong in the market economy (Duncan 1990). Many consumers, especially inexperienced ones, consider price to be the only thing that they need to examine. This belief is not always right. (Monroe 1973.)

With the rise of the internet, consumers nowadays are facing a lot of options for any product they might need. In order to efficiently narrow down the options, online consumers usually rely on outside help. For example, "cybermediary" is an online middle-man website that helps organize data so that consumers can save time in evaluating their alternatives. Cybermediaries can be online directories or portals, discussion forums, user groups, and fan clubs. (Solomon 2013, 344.) Consumers also rely on product reviews (comments that previous buyers make about a product) and ratings (the overall score, usually from 0-5 that are given to a product by previous buyers) from other people to make their choice.

Hu, Koh, and Reddy (2014) suggest that ratings is important in early parts of the information search stage, while reviews is important in the evaluation of alternatives stage. In fact, the demand for these reviews have grown so fast that a whole new class of opinion-based websites, such as Yelp and Tripadvisor, are built around consumers' reviews.

When evaluating the competing products, consumers use different decision rules. There are two types of decision rules: non-compensatory and compensatory. Non-compensatory rules are those in which an under-qualified attribute cannot be compensated by other better-performing ones. For example, a consumer is said to be using the "lexicographic rule" when he/she compares all available options on the most important attributes, and works his/her way down to other less important attributes, removing any options that fall short along the way. A lexicographic consumer will stop this comparison process as soon as there is only one product left. Another non-compensatory rule is called "elimination-by-aspects". Using this rules, a consumer will remove all alternatives that do not meet a certain standards or have a certain feature, then move on to apply the lexicographic rule to the remaining options. Compensatory rules, on the other hand, allow the better aspects of a product to compensate for its bad ones. A Consumer can use the "simple additive rule" where they simply choose the product with the highest sum of positive attributes and the lowest sum of negative attributes; or they can use the "weighted additive rule" where different weights are given to different product attributes before the sums are calculated. Compensatory decision rules often require more mental effort and allow the consumers to see a bigger picture than non-compensatory rules. (Solomon 2013, 350-351.)

2.5 Purchase and Outcome

Purchase and outcome are the two last stages of the consumer decision-making process where the consumer buy one of the options that they have been evaluating (purchase), use it, and then decide for themselves whether or not they are satisfied with their purchase decision (outcome). Their experience with the current purchase can influence their later purchases of the same product. (Lee 2005.) However, in these two stages, the purchase decision has already been made and can no longer be influenced. Thus, influencers play no further role after the three first stages of the decision-making process are completed.

3 VIETNAMESE BEAUTY & COSMETIC SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

3.1 The Global Beauty and Cosmetic Market

The need to decorate or change one's appearance has been in existence since as early as the Neanderthal age, where colors found in clay or mud are applied to faces and body parts for decorative and/or ritual purposes (Kumar 2005). Other examples include castor oil as a skin balm in ancient Egypt, a simple skin cream developed in the Roman Empire, and the first stable modern skin cream produced by Nivea in 1911 (Schneider, Gohla, Schreiber, Kaden, Schönrock, Schmidt-Lewerkühne, Kuschel, Petsitis, Pape, Ippen, & Diembeck 2001). Naturally, the beauty and cosmetic (B&C) industry has steadily grown to catch up with the demand. According to Rajput (2016), the global B&C market can be divided into six groups: (1) skin & sun care products, (2) hair care products, (3) makeup/color cosmetics, (4) fragrances, (5) deodorants, and (6) others. Among these groups, skin care products make up 36.4% of the total value of the global B&C market in 2016, while hair care, make-up, and perfumes make up 22.9%, 17.3%, & 12.2% respectively (Luong, Vo, & Le 2017). Obis Research (2018, cited by Reuters 2018) evaluated the market at 530 billion US dollars in 2017 and predicted it to rise to 800 billion in 2023. The B&C market has also been growing quickly with an average of 4.5% annual growth rate during a period of 20 years (Łopaciuk & Łoboda 2013).

There are some current trends in the B&C market. A notable one is the diversification of the price range of products. Technological development has created opportunities for lower-priced products that could produce similar effects to expensive ones. This has made high quality B&C products become more available and contributes to the growth of the market. Furthermore, products that last longer per use and can save time are also on the rise, since they are viewed as more convenient and economical. More B&C products are being bought online due to the price advantage of ecommerce websites. Brands are also setting up new marketing channels on social media network to keep in touch with their customers. Lastly, organic and sustainable B&C products have become more prevalent in the market. (Łopaciuk & Łoboda 2013.)

3.2 The Vietnamese Beauty and Cosmetic Market

According to Luong, Vo & Le (2017), Asia Pacific is the current center of growth and development for large B&C companies. As of 2015, Asia Pacific contributed 36% to the global B&C markets. Among Asia Pacific countries, Vietnam is a promising market with an average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate from 2010 to 2018 of 6.23% (World Bank 2018). According to Luong et al. (2017), Vietnam's high population of more

than 90 million people and a quickly growing economy create good conditions for the development of its B&C market. Although Vietnam's economy had some setbacks during the global financial crisis, its recovery has been quick and steady.

In Vietnam, B&C products are defined as a product applied to the outer parts of the human body (skin, hair, nails, etc.) or teeth and oral mucosa with the main purpose of cleaning, aromatizing, changing appearance, adjusting odor, protecting or preserving the body (Circular on cosmetic management regulations 06/2011/TT-BYT). This definition covers most if not all of the B&C groups defined by Rajput (2016).

The Vietnamese B&C market has had an excellent average annual growth rate of 14% from 2001 to 2006 (Nguyen & Sirikhoon 2008). Pham & Do (2016) suggest three reasons for the high growth of the Vietnamese B&C market: (1) dynamic marketing activities that gradually promote branded products, (2) developments in distribution channels such as the growth of branded stores & the rise of e-commerce, and (3) economic development. Furthermore, Vietnam's tropical climate and its increasing urban air pollution have increased the demand for B&C products with protective restoring attributes such as sunscreen, whitening cream, and anti-aging serum (Luong et al. 2017). According to a survey conducted by Q&Me (2019), Vietnamese women spend on average 300,000 VND (~ 12.95 USD as of the time of the survey) on B&C products per month, and the number of non-makeup wearers have steadily dropped from 24% in 2016 to 14% in 2019. Although the spending does not sound much, Vietnam's large population enlarge the total value and creates a lot of opportunities for products that offer good price for value. (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Viljanen 2019.)

Vietnam's participation in the World Trade Organization in 2007 saw significant increases in the country's international trade (Luong et al. 2017). Furthermore, the authors also commented that both the social/economic roles of Vietnamese women and their disposable income have increased a lot over the years. These, combined with a lack of domestic B&C products, have created many opportunities for foreign B&C products to enter the Vietnamese market. As a result, 90% of the Vietnamese B&C market is controlled by foreign brands from Korea, Japan, and European countries (CIRS 2019). According to Spencer (2017), B&C imports to Vietnam are growing quickly from \$500 million in 2011 to \$1.1 billion in 2016. This number is expected to reach 2.2 billion by 2020. Figure 3 shows the market share based on import value in 2017 from top exporters of B&C products to Vietnam, excluding Thailand & United Arab Emirates (Italian Trade Agency 2018). However, it is important to note that more than 90% of the consumption of

foreign B&C products are within Vietnam's two largest cities, Hà Nội in the north and Hồ Chí Minh city in the south (Nguyen & Sirikhoon 2008).

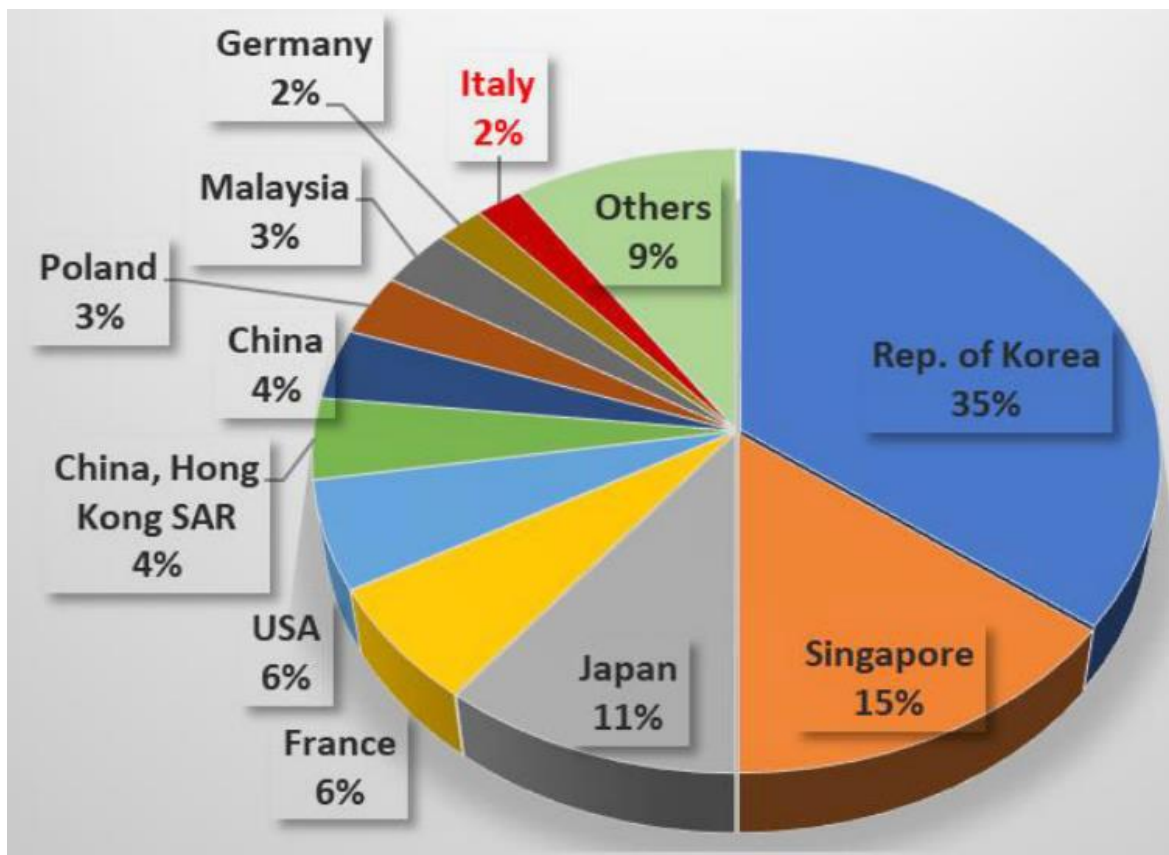


Figure 3 Market share of B&C exporters to VN

3.3 Social Media Influencers

3.3.1 Defining Social Media Influencers

Nowadays, consumers are facing more and more options in their decision-making process thanks to the increasing number of brands and access to the Internet. Thus, according to Momtaz, Aghaie, & Alizadeh (2011), rather than spending their own time and effort to consider so many options, consumers would rely heavily on trust-worthy people to make their decisions. Those trustworthy people are very influential to public opinions. Momtaz et al. (2011) also note that those people are called differently in the literature, for example opinion leaders, influentials, influential people, market mavens, and key players. A definition of this group of people can be traced to Kats & Lazarsfeld (1955, cited by Watts & Dodds 2007): opinion leaders are "individuals who were likely to influence other persons in their immediate environment". This definition has remained in the literature with few changes.

The literature on influencers can date back to the 1950s, starting with Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955, cited by Momtaz et al. 2011) and Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet's work (1948, cited by Momtaz et al. 2011). These researchers found the potential to influence public opinions of a small group of people called "opinion leaders" even in important choices like election. They proposed a two-step theory in which a small group of influencers acted as middle points between mass media and mass public opinions. Figure 4 (created by Watts & Dodds 2007) illustrates this two-step theory. In the illustration, the stars are opinion leaders, and the circles are the larger public opinions, or "opinions seekers".

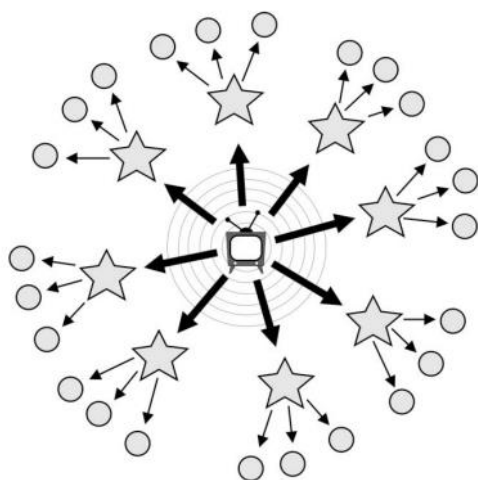


Figure 4 Two-step theory in opinion leadership

The opinions of opinion leaders are valued for many reasons. First, they may be more knowledgeable and experienced than the average consumer. Opinion leaders are usually very active and interconnected in their community. They may even have some informal titles that give their voices more weight. Additionally, despite their social status, they are still just normal members of any given community. This makes their opinions more relevant, because they still have the same values and beliefs as other members in the community. Lastly, opinion leaders tend to buy and use new products first hand and pass on their experience to other consumers. This way, they reduce the uncertainty for other consumers. Their product reviews also often contain both pros and cons of a product, unlike advertisements which focus only on positive features. Therefore, their opinions are seen as more authentic and reliable. (Solomon 2013, 439.)

The thesis, in particular, refers to opinion leaders as "influencers" – a term more widely known to business people and marketing professionals. It is, however, important to distinguish between "influencers" and "key opinion leaders" (i.e. KOLs) in a practical business context, while the literature in general does not make this distinction. Although

influencers and key opinion leaders are often used interchangeably in the business world, there are cases where there is a noticeable difference. For example, Ehrhardt (2018) and Luchyk (2018) suggest that KOLs have deep expertise in a specific industry, resulting in a small and more specific audience; while influencers appeal to a larger and more varied audience. KOLs' credibility comes directly from their knowledge and experience, while influencers' get attention from their personalities and content creation. In this sense, influencers are somewhat similar to small celebrities. Therefore, brands may on purpose use influencers for a wider reach, and KOLs' for more engagements.

The development of social media has given rise to a new class of influencers: social media influencers. Social media influencers are those with many followers on some social networking website such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, & Twitter. Through their activities on social media, they share their their lifestyle, experience, opinions, and can potentially influence their audience (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders 2017). They can be considered a form of "micro-celebrity" who have accumulated their following by creating contents where brands can insert paid advertisements (Abidin 2016). Nonetheless, product endorsements from social media influencers are often viewed as authentic recommendations, rather than as paid advertisements, since such endorsements are usually well fitted into the contents created by the influencers. Therefore, influencers' product endorsements may lead to lower resistance from consumers. (De Veirman et al. 2017.)

The reason for the effectiveness of using influencers in marketing is that their commercial message may look and feel very much like authentic word-of-mouth recommendation. Word-of-mouth (WOM) in marketing refers to the spread of information, opinions, consumption experience, etc. among the consumers themselves with no or little interference from companies (Viglia, Minazzi & Buhalis 2016). According to Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner (2010), WOM has for long been considered a very influential to purchase decisions. At first, WOM is just the exchange of information between consumers in which there is little room for brands to step in. However, it was later found that along the WOM process there are especially influential consumers, i.e. influencers, that are capable of spreading their opinions to a wide audience. It is here that opportunities for marketers come up: they can try to identify and influence these individuals, a practice known as influencer marketing. Ever since the development of the Internet with its great reach and accessibility, the usefulness of word-of-mouth (known as electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM, in the Internet context) has greatly increased for both marketers, influencers, and consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). For marketers, there are more influencers, many of whom appeal to a very specific audience, to work with. For

influencers, it is so much easier to widen their influence. For normal consumers, there are now more sources of word-of-mouth information to consult.

3.3.2 Identifying and Choosing Social Media Influencers

According to De Veirman et al. (2017), identifying and choosing the social media influencers that have a wide reach and appeal to a specific target audience is a big challenge for companies. This was confirmed by Launch Metrics' (2015) survey of more than 600 marketing professionals. In order to evaluate an influencer's reach, the most popular and easiest method is to look at the number of followers / subscribers / likes / etc. The larger an influencer's fan base is, the more consumers they can reach. Influencers can be found through browsing social media sites, joining online communities, or using search engines. Otherwise, many companies have built online platforms to find and manage relevant influencers, for example Influencer Marketing Hub, Up Influence, Traackr, just to name a few. Their technology can also measure the number of visits to a blog/website/channel and report the level of engagement on those sites (Glucksman 2017). These services can greatly improve the speed and efficiency in finding and managing influencers. However, in order to make the most use of an influencer campaign, it is very important for brands to clearly identify their objectives (i.e. what quality/attribute they are looking for from the influencers,) and consider the influencers' likeability and credibility. (De Veirman et al. 2017.)

Marketing professionals usually classify influencers as being "micro" or "macro" based on the number of followers, although the exact classification often varies a lot across countries and industries. For example, Hatton (2018) from Social Media Today – an online publication focusing on analyzing social media data – defines micro influencers as having less than 10,000 followers, while macro as having from 10,000 up to millions. On the other hand, Chue (2018) from Digimind – a social media analysis service provider – uses the 100,000 followers checkpoint to distinguish between micro and macro influencers. Generally, macro-influencers have wider reach, less relevance, lower engagement rate, and higher cost; while the opposite is true for micro-influencers (Shane 2019). Shane (2019) also suggests that because micro-influencers are better in almost every aspects to macro-influencers, they are suitable for businesses with tight budget constraints who aim for cost effectiveness and high return on investment. However, macro-influencers can provide very extensive reach at much less micro-management for bigger companies.

It is often seen in a business context that the effectiveness of influencers' endorsement depends a lot on the size of their fan base. For example, any of the fashion influencers on Lyst's list can immediately create a significant increase in sales and awareness for any

items that they endorse (Harrod 2018). Generally, the more fans an influencer has, the higher they charge for endorsements and the more effective their endorsements appear to be. However, the literature on the relationship between fan base size and opinion leadership is not conclusive. For example, Yoganasimhan (2011) found that social network size significantly affects Youtube video creator's ability to promote commercial products. Hwang (2015) found that there is a link between the number of followers and the level of opinion leadership on Twitter. On the other hand, Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, and Gummadi (2010) suggest that although indegree (the authors used this term to refer to the number of followers on Twitter) shows an influencer's popularity, it does not correlate with other important measurements like "retweets" (a re-posted content from another Twitter's users onto one's own profile) or "mentions" (a post that contains someone else's username on Twitter). According to Cha et al. (2010), retweets and mentions show how influential a user is. Similarly, De Veirman et al. (2017) argue that although a high number of followers can mean higher popularity and likeability, it does not mean real influence. More interestingly, De Veirman et al. (2017) also found that for certain products, the endorsement from influencers with high numbers of followers can decrease the uniqueness of that product, since it makes consumers think that many people would be interested in and use that product. Thus, even though a larger fan base may offer a wider reach for commercial messages, it might be more important to first consider the compatibility between the product and the influencers.

Lastly, brands should consider the personality of influencers to see whether or not that influencer is suitable for promoting the brands. Schemer, Matthes, Wirth, and Textor (2008) found that when brands are paired with negatively evaluated influencers, brands also receive negative attitudes from consumers. This also works the other way round: positively evaluated influencers cause brands to be positively thought of as well. The image of influencers has been transferred to the brands through product endorsements. Similarly, Amos, Holmes, & Strutton (2008) advise that brands should create backup plans in case negative information about the endorser comes up, since such information is bad for an advertising campaign. Because brands can often have symbolic meaning through which consumers express their own identity and evaluate others (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, and Warlop 2012), it is important that brands carefully manage the image they represent.

3.3.3 The Difference between Influencers and Celebrities

According to De Veirman et al. (2017), one biggest difference between influencers and celebrities is that celebrities tend to "sell" endorsements. They often lack expertise on the

products that they endorse. Their endorsements work mainly because they are liked by a wide audience, and many of their fans may be willing to buy into these product endorsements (Shane 2017). On the other hand, influencers are often more picky and usually only endorse products that are suitable with their own image or expertise. Celebrity endorsements are seen as similar to advertisements, while it is much harder to tell whether or not an influencer has been paid for the endorsement. That thin line between paid and unpaid endorsement, according to Woods (2016), makes influencer so much more effective, since most consumers trust personal recommendations much more than paid advertisements. Furthermore, because influencers tend to fit the endorsement smoothly into their usual contents, they are often considered more relevant and authentic (De Veirman et al. 2017). Therefore, brands usually use other tactics than just offering payments, such as sending free products or inviting influencers to exclusive events. Those events, such as birthdays parties, anniversary celebration, or photo-taking sessions, may be organized together with new product launches from brands (Abidin 2015). This is a win-win practice for both sides: the influencers gain sponsorship and more engagement with their followers, while the brands gain publicity.

Another difference between celebrities and influencers is the hierarchical distance between them and their followers or fans. For example, Marwick & Boyd (2011) note that the activities of celebrities on social media networks like Twitter show a clear message that some people (celebrities) are more important than others (fans). A celebrity would not often reply to their fan's tweet, but a fan certainly would reply to their idol's tweets. Moreover, that celebrity would most likely respond to other celebrities' activities. According to the authors (Marwick & Boyd 2011), social media somewhat reduce the gap between famous people and fans, but it does not "equalize their status". On the other hand, Abidin's (2015) ethnographic research reveals that influencers are very responsive towards their followers. They often "like" (on Facebook/Instagram/Youtube), "retweet" (on Twitter), and reply to their followers' comments and activities. These responses are seen as a sign of appreciation and acknowledgment. Influencers do not often see themselves as celebrities. They often refer to the people who value their opinions as "followers", "readers", or "viewers", rather than "fans"; because they do not like the hierarchical relationship that the term "fans" implies. Furthermore, influencers' activities on social media also show some personal aspects of their daily lives, and thus are considered more intimate and relevant by their followers.

3.3.4 Incorporating Influencers into the Marketing Strategy

Because influencers are very different from celebrities both in how they gain their influence and in their relationship with their audience, there are things marketers need to remember before incorporating them into a marketing strategy. Forbes Communications Council (2018) recommend that brands should try to set up partnership with influencers. This can be done in many ways. For example, marketers can try to target "organic" influencers – those who have trusted and used the brand's products or services. Additionally, marketers should try to understand and appreciate the influencer's audience, values, personalities, and image. Influencers have spent a lot of time building their influence and they tend to be very protective of their reputation (Influencer Marketing Hub 2019). Thus, a money payment may not work on many of the most respected influencers. Above all, an authentic attitude that seeks to build sincere relationships is the key to successful influencer marketing (Forbes Communications Council 2018).

According to Keller & Fay (2016), influencers are very active. They usually make a lot of interactions with the brands they care about, either by calling customer-service, following the brand's communication channels, or giving feedback/suggestions to the brand. This is a great opportunity for brands to talk to them and build a sincere relationship with them. Some useful tactics include giving them information before it's available publicly, ask for their opinions, acknowledge their value and expertise, and appreciate the efforts they spend in interacting with the brand.

There are plenty of room for creativity when it comes to partnership with influencers. Instead of just paying them to introduce a product/service, brands may try other methods that are both more effective and more suitable to the nature of influencers. For example, Cunha (2019) suggests joint social media contests that offer product giveaways, limited-edition products offering, discount codes, and exclusive video/content series. Lukeš (2018) notes that because no one understands an influencer's audience better than the influencer him/herself, it is also a good idea to let the influencer take greater creative control of the content/format of endorsements. They know what their audience likes, and the audience can easily recognize any unnatural addition to their influencer's contents. Moreover, the creativity does not just start from the collaboration phase, but already from the reaching-out phase. Since the respected influencers receive a lot of partnership offers, a creative approach can stand a much better chance of being noticed. For instance, joining conferences or events that some specific influencers attend or sending birthday cards/presents are great ways to grab their attention (Forbes Communications Council 2018).

3.3.5 The Issue of Authenticity and Transparency

According to Solomon (2013, 439), influencers' opinions are considered more credible and authentic than celebrities'. This status of authenticity is desirable for any influencers: they want to be seen as "real" and "ordinary" people (Marwick 2015). However, it has been suggested that the authenticity that is usually associated with influencers may cause some social problems. Schwemmer & Ziewiecki (2018) raise concerns that children and teenagers are vulnerable to the influence of Youtube content creators. According to these authors, it is difficult for young viewers to distinguish between sincere recommendations based on product quality/features and hidden product promotion motivated by money payment.

Regarding this matter, social media influencers are somewhat in a dilemma. On the one hand, their audience, through consuming their contents, helps them attract advertisers. Thus, influencers are motivated to create contents that are engaging and benefits their audience. On the other hand, brands that sponsor the influencers often want to control contents that endorse their products. (Kretz & de Valck 2010.) The dilemma occurs when the influencer feels that the promoted product is not beneficial for their audience.

However, sometimes money payments can outweigh the audience's interest. According to Wischhover (2018), many social media influencers have been accused of recommending all products that they have been paid for, ignoring product quality. One brand consultant even reveals that some influencers would publish "negative review of a competitor's product", while some brands would agree to pay more if the influencer specifically said that one product was better than another.

Influencers can often fit promotional products into their regular contents well without stating that they have been paid to promote said products. This form of advertising is called "native advertising". (Wojdynski & Evans 2015.) In general, native advertising is any paid advertisement that looks like authentic content from the content creators themselves. Native advertising is believed by advertisers to be more effective in meeting marketing goals, but it is criticized by many scholars and regulators for misleading consumers (Wojdynski, Bang, Keib, Jefferson, Choi, and Malson 2017). According to Carlson (2014) and Schauster, Ferrucci, & Neill (2016), native advertising is more effective because the audience may not recognize that it is paid content, and thus are less suspicious.

Wojdynski, Evans, & Hoy (2017) support the practice of clear and transparent communication of content sponsor. They also developed a model to measure sponsorship transparency that can help regulators to decide whether or not an online content is transparent enough. Lastly, several regulations on the disclosure of paid promotion from

influencers have been developed, such as that of the UK's Advertising Standards Agency & the US' Federal Trade Commission. (Dekavalla 2019.)

3.3.6 Vietnamese Beauty and Cosmetic Social Media Influencers

By the end of 2018, the three most popular social media platforms in Vietnam were Youtube, Facebook, and Instagram (Statista 2019). Naturally, these are also the sites where most of Vietnamese beauty & cosmetic influencers' (VBC SMIs) activities concentrate. Table 1 lists some of the most well-known VBC SMIs based on the number of their followers/subscribers. This list does not include celebrities & make-up artists that are not active on social media (although they may have a lot of influence). The list is sorted by a descending order of the number of Youtube subscribers.

Table 1 Well-known VBC SMIs (as of 6 August 2019)

Social media name	Facebook	Instagram	Youtube
Chang makeup	986.350	952.000	1.109.093
Trinh Pham	310.798	400.000	989.529
Quach Anh Makeup Artist	234.090	214.000	439.801
Quynh Anh Shyn	1.046.829	2.100.000	371.210
An Phương	91.497	204.000	344.841
Nguyen Newin	24.637	33.900	331.918
Chloe Nguyen	151.846	287.000	328.520
Mai Van Trang	28.622	133.000	192.865
Tina's beauty tips	27.371	75.300	186.906
Vanmiu beauty	563.237	9.426	178.836
Themakeaholics	76.973	103.000	153.741
Pretty much	79.744	85.200	145.431
Man Tien	Not available	974.000	66.299
Hannah Olala	380.957	35.300	36.699
Primmy Truong	46.024	102.000	33.793
Thuy Vo	174.223	36.900	10.386

In order to gain more insights into the VBC SMIs community, some background information on notable influencers will be briefly presented here. First, Chang Makeup (real name: Trang Ngo) is one of the most popular VBC SMIs. She focuses her content creation mostly on Youtube. According to Nhat Chung (2017), Ngo was a business administration student at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, before taking up making Youtube video as a hobby, and eventually as a career. She stepped into the B&C industry through making lipstick-swatching videos on Youtube. Because Ngo is one of the first Youtuber (Youtuber: someone who makes Youtube Video) to make this type of video in Vietnam, She has quickly got a large number of video views and Youtube channel subscribers (Trang Shaelyn 2015). In March 2019, Trang Ngô has become the first VBC SMI to receive the Youtube Gold Play Button as a reward for reaching one million subscribers (Dong Duong 2015). More recently, another VBC SMI has also achieved this Gold Play Button milestone: Trinh Pham. Similar to Trang Ngo, Trinh Pham is also an oversea business student. Pham started her Youtube career with makeup product reviews, but has since then created a lot of content types, including fashion, lifestyle, hand-made craft tutorial, English language coaching, & oversea studies guide (Thanh 2016). Next, Quach Anh is a professional makeup artist who is very active and influential on social media. Quach Anh runs her own makeup studio and offers professional makeup courses. Her video content focuses almost only on makeup tutorials, which showcase her skills on many makeup styles. Lastly, Quynh Anh Shyn (real name: Phi Quynh Anh), is an amateur actress and micro-celebrity who attracts 2 million followers on instagram, while also regularly releasing Youtube contents. Shyn kicked off her Youtube channel with a series of makeup tutorials, but has recently switched to lifestyle/trending/fashion content. (Quynh Anh Shyn 2020.)

Generally, it can be seen that VBC SMIs do not have formal education or work experience in the B&C industry (except for rare cases of professionally trained makeup artists like Quach Anh). Most of them are just normal people with an interest in the industry and a catchy online personality, although most of them have a lot of relevant knowledge. Their online content creation mostly include, but not limited to, cosmetic product swatches/reviews, make-up/skincare instructions/routines, fashion, travel, viral/trendy contents, promotional/commercial messages, and lifestyle.

Recently a new trend has started where several VBC SMIs try to establish their own cosmetic brands (Ngoc Tram 2019). The most notable influencer-owned brands include Trang Ngo's (Chang makeup) Ofélia and Quach Anh's (Quach Anh Makeup Artist)

Lemonade. Ofélia (full name: Ofélia Los Angeles, established in 2016) is a US-based cosmetic brand that makes mostly lipsticks, which perhaps is the result of Trang Ngo's reputation as "a queen of lipsticks" in Vietnam. In fact, it was Ngo's swatching and reviews of lipsticks that brought her to fame (Nhat Chung 2017). Ofélia's first lipstick collection, named "Nightfall", was a big hit in Vietnam. The first factory batch of 14,000 lipsticks were sold out online within an hour after launch. Ofélia's website also crashed for several hours due to the high traffic. The second batch – sold in a brick-and-mortar store in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam – created a long queue 3 hours before the store's opening time and sold out quickly. Since then, Ngô revealed, Ofélia's stock for any product never lasts more than 1 week (Nhat Chung 2017). Quach Anh's Lemonade, on the other hand, is a Hanoi-based company that was founded in September 2018 (Lemonade 2019). Since then, Lemonade has released 1 lipstick collection and 1 lipstick-cushion dual collection. Lemonade's first lipstick collection, named "Perfect Couple Lip", introduces a unique "lip filler" head on each lipstick (Bui 2018). This lip filler head fills in between the lip wrinkles to soften and smoothen the lips. The lipstick collection, although not creating a fever as hot as Ofélia's Nightfall, generated a lot of conversation, references, and reviews. Quách Ánh's in-depth experience and reputation as a makeup artist who has made up for many Vietnamese celebrities has contributed to lemonade's popularity (Irene Ng 2019).

On the other hand, an easier and less risky way for VBC SMI to take advantage of their popularity is to collaborate with existing brands and launch limited-edition products. The most notable example is Miracle Apo's (a Vietnamese cosmetic brand) collaboration with Trang Ngo (Changmakeup), An Phuong, and Quynh Anh (Chloe Nguyen). (Ngoc Tram 2019.)

B&C companies in Vietnam (most of which are foreign-based) have been quite creative in how they approach and maintain their relationship with VBCIs. One of the most popular approaches is to invite VBC SMIs (usually together with several other celebrities) to product or brand introduction. For example, La Roche-Posay has invited Mai Van Trang (VBC SMI), Phương Ly (VBC SMI – Social media name: PrettyMuchChannel), Ninh Tito (blogger), Jun Phạm (celebrity), and several others to "Derm Campus" – a two-day one-night trip that launches the "Efficlar Spot Scan" application and introduces their brand key products (La Roche-Posay Vietnam 2019). This has resulted in several vlogs (vlog: video blog), mentions, reviews, and photos of the VBC SMIs about the event. Other launching events are, for example, the Sulwasoo's Bloom Stay (invited Chloe Nguyen & Phuong Ly to Singapore), Innisfree's Green Tea Seed Serum (invited An Phương & Chloe Nguyen to Korea), and Charis' annual brand seminar (invited various VBC SMIs each year). Another approach is to send free products to influencers. Generally, VBC SMIs will make some

kind of mention and/or product review after receiving free products from brands. It is unclear, however, whether or not any money payments have been sent together with the free products.

This leads to the last point of discussion: a lack of transparency in how VBC SMIs express that they have been paid to promote some particular products. VBC SMIs often do "native advertising", that is, paid promotions that appear to be the same as authentic recommendation. The most popular method is to use a product in their videos/images and then insert promotional messages or purchase link into the videos' / images' description. The content type can be makeup tutorials, skincare routine introductions, beauty tips, daily life talk, travel tips, and so on. For example, Trang Ngo (Chang makeup) mentioned 2 fashion items, 13 cosmetic products, 2 cosmetic shops, and 1 camera in her lip care video's description (Ngo 2015, see also Tran 2017 & Quach 2018 as references). VBC SMIs do not usually mention whether or not they have been paid for these product promotions. Thus, it is generally very difficult or impossible to tell authentic recommendations apart from paid promotions. According to Wojdyski et al. (2017a), this may be considered a type of consumer deception. When the audience do not recognize paid promotions, they would be less suspicious of the messages they heard or saw (Carlson 2014). Additionally, because currently Vietnam has no regulation on the disclosure of paid promotions on social media, there is very little reason why VBC SMIs should do so.

4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Empirical Research Design

The purpose of the thesis is to explore the influence of VBC SMIs throughout the consumer's decision making process. Since there are no theoretical model available on this subject, an inductive qualitative research design has been chosen for the current study. The semi-structured interview method was then chosen: the interview questions were structured, but the interviewer would continue to ask open-ended questions if the interviewees seem to have more to say about the subject. The reason for this is to limit the variations in how the the questions are asked and understood, while still collecting rich enough data for analysis

4.2 Interview Questions

Based on the literature review on opinion leadership and the consumer decision making process, 23 interview questions were drafted. Those questions were then pilot tested with two volunteer participants to get feedback about the wording, organization, interview length, and difficulty of the interview. A total of six questions were removed to reduce the interview length and make it less confusing. Several other minor wording and organization changes were also made. The remaining 17 questions were grouped into four sections. The same version of interview questions were used in both face-to-face and email interviews. The interview questions in English and Vietnamese can be found in Appendix 1. The details of the interview questions are as follows.

Section one - Background: This section contains two background questions measuring the respondent's experience with beauty and cosmetic (B&C) products and their average monthly spending in B&C products. Demographic questions are not included because that information has already been recorded before the interview.

Section two – Opinions about Vietnamese Beauty & Cosmetic Social Media Influencers (VBC SMIs): In this section, VBC SMIs are referred to as Vietnamese beauty vloggers, or VBVs, which is a more casual term that describes B&C influencers who actively creates content on Youtube. This section has three questions that aim at exploring the respondent's familiarity with and overall opinion of VBC SMIs. More specifically, question one asks the respondent to name some VBC SMIs whose videos they have watched. Question two asks about the type of VBC SMIs' video that the respondent usually watches. Question three tries to understand the difference in how the respondent sees a VBC SMI and a traditional celebrity. According to Abidin (2015) & De Veirman et al.

(2017), influencers often appear to be more personal, intimate, and relatable than traditional celebrities.

Section three – The role of VBC SMIs in the consumer decision making process: This section has seven questions which investigate the influence of VBC SMIs through the stages of Dewey's consumer decision making process (1910, as cited by Bruner & Pomazal 1988). The three stages examined in this section are problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. Question one through four checks if VBC SMIs can influence the consumer's actual and ideal state, which, according to Lee (2005) leads to problem recognition. These four questions are built according to the model of the problem recognition process by Bruner & Pomazal's (1988). More specifically, question one asks if the respondent has ever felt that their products are unsatisfactory after watching a VBC SMI's video (a fall in the actual state). Question two asks if the respondent has ever wanted to try different brands after watching a VBC SMI's video although their current products are still satisfactory (novelty, or variety seeking, which raises the ideal state). Question three asks if the respondent has ever wanted to add a new B&C product type to their skincare/makeup routine after watching a VBC SMI's video (a rise in the ideal state). Question four asks if the respondent has ever tried to follow the lifestyle and consumption behavior of a VBC SMI (if yes, the respondent sees VBC SMIs as a reference group, & thus their ideal state will change). Question five asks about the helpfulness of VBC SMIs' videos during the respondent's pre-purchase information search stage, and whether the respondents use VBC SMIs' videos in their ongoing information search, as pointed out by Lee (2005). Question six asks about the helpfulness of VBC SMIs' videos when the respondents are evaluating between different alternatives. Question seven ends the section by verifying if any real purchase has taken place due to the influence of a VBC SMI's video.

Section four – Consumer trust in VBC SMIs: This section contains five questions that weigh how much the respondent trusts the VBC SMIs and explore the respondent's opinions about VBC SMIs' transparency. Question one simply asks the respondent to rate their trust of VBC SMIs' product reviews and recommendations on a scale from 1 – 100%. Question two asks the respondent to rank the trustworthiness of VBC SMIs against six other information source: advertisements, celebrity's endorsements, friend's recommendations, customer reviews & ratings on retailer's website, product quality awards/certificates, and discussion on social media groups/community. Question three asks for the respondent's opinions on the disclosure of sponsorship information. Question four asks how the respondent can differentiate between an authentic and a paid recommendation from a VBC SMI. Lastly, question five takes the size (i.e. number of

subscribers) of VBC SMIs into account by asking for the respondent's opinions on the trustworthiness of bigger vs. smaller VBC SMIs.

4.3 Data Collection

The interviewees were chosen using the convenience sampling method, which means that the author asked around for volunteers who match a number of criteria. A total of seven interviewees were selected who agreed to participate in the research. All of them were deliberately chosen as Vietnamese females, because they are the main consumer of the Vietnamese B&C market. Furthermore, they are all in their twenties, since older consumers in their thirties or forties tend not have much knowledge of VBC SMIs, while younger consumers in their teens have relatively limited purchasing power.

The interviews were conducted through both online calls and emails during the period from 22 August 2019 to 31 August 2019. There were four call interviews and three email interviews. All call interviews were in Vietnamese, because the Vietnamese respondents felt they could not fully express their ideas in English. Two email interviews were in English, and two were in Vietnamese, depending on the linguistic ability of the respondents. Call interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes and were conducted through Skype. The main points of the recording were then transcribed and translated into English for further analysis.

The collected interview data from different interviewees was then consolidated by questions. This means that all of the answers for question one were organized next to each other so that the theme around these answers could be easily recognized. The author then analyzed the answer one by one, while also trying to identify the relationship between different questions, and the possible effects that the background of the interviews could have on their opinions of VBC SMIs.

4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Section One: Background

The first two questions measure how experienced the interviewees think they are with B&C products (Question 1), and how much on average they spend on B&C products per month (Question 2). In case the interviewee gave a range of spending rather than a number, the average of the range is taken for visualization and analysis purposes, see Figure 5.

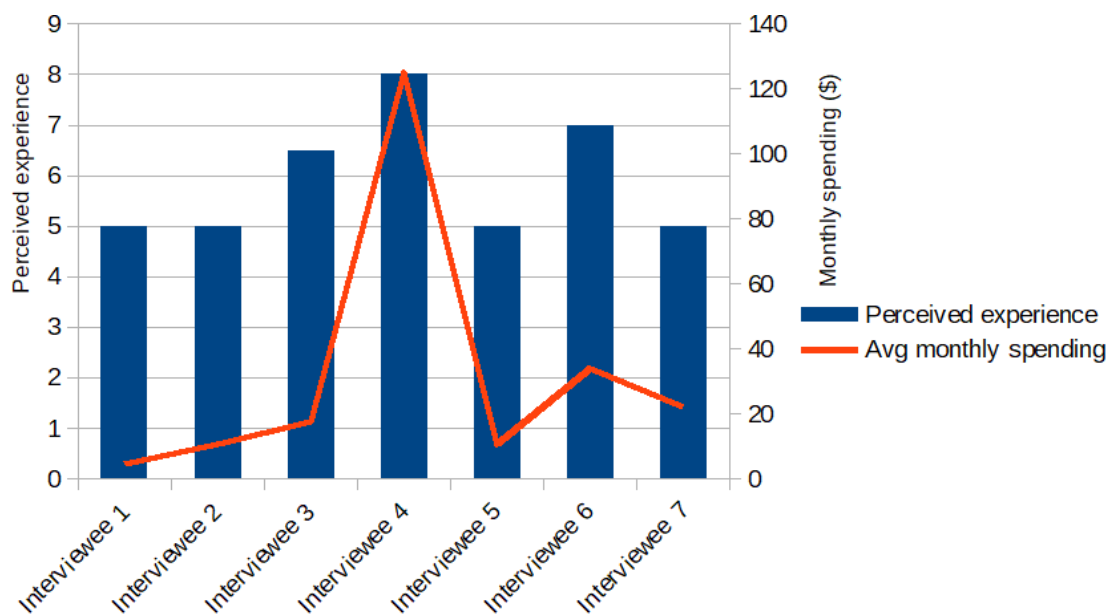


Figure 5 Interviewee's perceived experience and monthly spending

Interviewee 1, 2, 5, and 7 all rated themselves at an experience level of five out of ten, which are the lowest scores recorded in this study. These four interviewees also reported spending quite low on B&C products (less than \$22 per month). On the other hand, Interviewee 4 and 6 rated eight and seven on the experience scale, and \$100-150 and \$34 on the spending scale respectively. Interviewee 3 reported an experience level of 6,5 and a spending of 17,5 (\$13-\$22), which were quite off as compared to Interviewee 7 who reported an experience level of 5 and a spending of \$22. This can be explained by a lack of a good reference point, the vague nature of the question, the personality of each interviewee, and their own interpretation of the experience scale. In general, the results are quite consistent across the two questions in that the more an interviewee spends on beauty and cosmetic products, the more they believe they are experienced with those products.

4.4.2 Section Two: Opinions about VBC SMIs

Section two with 3 questions measures the interviewees' general opinions of VBC SMIs.

Question 1 and 1 ask about the VBC SMIs that the interviewees know and the video types from these VBC SMIs that they usually watch. In Question 1, all of the interviewees reported having watched videos from several beauty vloggers. Most of the vloggers mentioned are found in the list of the most popular VBC SMIs. The interviewees also mentioned several SMIs that are not considered VBC SMIs in the thesis, such as Vietnamese-born foreign influencers, singers, actresses, and so on. Changmakeup is the most-mentioned VBC SMI among the interviewees.

In Question 2, the most popular video types that are watched by the interviewees are makeup/skincare instructions (7/7) and product reviews (7/7). Interviewee 4 gave a long list of video types that she usually watches, which is consistent with her interest and experience and B&C products. Interviewee 7 reported that she also watched fashion and lifestyle videos from VBC SMIs.

In Question 3, all of the interviewees agreed that VBC SMIs are more like normal people with knowledge and interest in the B&C industry, rather than celebrities. The main difference pointed out was that celebrities are often actresses or singers and rely a lot of mass media; while VBC SMIs generally take up content creation as a secondary job, rely mostly on social media, and are less well-known than celebrities. This distinction is good for marketers because celebrities endorsements are often seen as advertisements, and advertisements are generally much less trustworthy for consumers (Woods 2016). The more different from celebrities that VBC SMIs are seen as, the more VBC SMIs' endorsements will look like sincere WOM recommendations. Interviewee 6 made a clear example of this: she said that celebrities would only endorse brands that pay them, while VBC SMIs evaluate many different products. Another finding from Question 3 is that VBC SMIs are seen as more reliable and relevant than celebrities. For example, Interviewee 2 noted that beauty vloggers just "share their feelings and thoughts". Interviewee 4 felt that VBC SMIs have tried the products for some time before making the reviews, while celebrities are simply getting paid for reading advertisement scripts. Interviewees 5 & 7 said that VBC SMIs use all types of B&C products, whereas celebrities only talk about fancy and expensive ones. Both Interviewees 4 and 6 agreed that VBC SMIs discuss a products pros and cons, while celebrities only focus on the pros.

Lastly, Interviewee 2 noted that beauty vloggers are more reliable, but not more intimate than celebrities. Interviewee 3 said she would not completely trust VBC SMIs. Interviewee 4 noted that some social media influencers, like Michelle Phan, are just as famous as celebrities (Michelle Phan is a Vietnamese-American beauty vlogger that gained a lot of awareness both in Vietnam and America as a pioneer in Youtube beauty content creation). She interestingly referred to social media influencers as "celebrities of the internet world". Although this is not conclusive, it could suggest that, as VBC SMIs are gaining more reach and paid endorsements, the line between VBC SMIs and celebrities are getting thinner.

4.4.3 Section Three: VBC SMIs in the Consumer Decision-making Process

Section three examines the influence of VBC SMIs throughout the stages of the consumer decision making process by Dewey (1910, as cited by Bruner & Pomazal 1988).

Question 1 examines if a VBC SMI's video could cause a fall in the actual state of consumers, which then triggers the problem recognition stage. All of the interviewees agreed that at some point a VBC SMI's video had caused them to feel that their current product then was no longer satisfactory. The frequency of these events vary from "very few", "not often", "usually", to "more than half of my B&C choices". The most influential factors in those videos are visible effects on the a VBC SMI's skin and information about the product's ingredients. Interviewee 1 and 5 said that the pricing of the products shown in VBC SMI's videos had an effect on their dissatisfaction with their current product. It is worth noting that both Interviewee 1 and 5 are inexperienced consumers with very low monthly spending on B&C products. Thus, it is likely that they are also very price-sensitive customers and may feel dissatisfied after finding out that they could have bought a cheaper or better value item.

Interviewee 2, 3, 4, 6 all noted that videos providing information about better, safer, and more gentle ingredients are more likely to have an influence on them. Three out of these four interviewees rated themselves rather high on the perceived experience scale (6,5 to 8). By contrast, Interviewee 1, 5, 7 did not include ingredient as an influential part in VBC SMI's videos, and they all chose 5/10 on the perceived experience scale. This could probably mean that more experienced consumers pay more attention to product ingredients than less experienced consumers.

Question 2 tests if VBC SMI's videos could cause a desire in consumers to look for new products just to try something new. This is called a novelty or variety seeking. It raises the ideal state in the problem recognition stage. Most (5/7) of the interviewees said that VBC SMI's videos had at times created a desire to try a different brand, even if the current product was still satisfactory. Interviewee 1 stated that it was usually expensive high-end products that caused it. However, these products are often beyond Interviewee 1's budget. Interviewee 2 said she just wanted to try new products to see if anything was suitable with her skin. Interviewee 4 revealed that the discount codes usually included VBC SMI's videos were a good motivator for her variety-seeking behavior. Interviewee 6 noted that although the desire does occur from time to time, she rarely wants to switch brand because it's quite hard to find a suitable product for her sensitive skin. On the other hand, Interviewee 3 is a little bit conservative. She answered that if the current product met all of her criteria, she would not want to try new ones. Lastly, Interviewee 5 was particularly picky: if her current product was still satisfactory, she would not be influenced by a VBC SMI's video because it was hard to find a product that was suitable to her skin type. The answers to Question 2 suggested that a consumer's variety-seeking behavior is very dependent on their skin type. If their skin is less sensitive, they are more likely to do

this. Moreover, financial consideration also plays two important roles: (1) a consumer is unlikely to try new products if their budget is too limited, and (2), discounts are effective in promoting variety-seeking behaviors.

Question 3 asks if the interviewees had ever wanted to add a new product to their makeup/skincare routine after watching a VBC SMI's video. All of the interviewees said that VBC SMI's videos are influential in their desire to expand their makeup/skincare routine. Interviewee 1 clarified that because she was already happy with her current skincare routine, she would not change it. However, she would like to add more makeup products. More specifically, she normally only used a layer of cushion foundation, but after seeing the visible effects of a cosmetic primer layer in a SMI's video, she wanted to add it to her routine. Interviewee 2 stated that although she wanted to expand her daily makeup/skincare routines, financial concerns often prevented her from doing so. On the other hand, interviewee 4, with her larger monthly budget B&C products, noted that she frequently tries new products in her routines to see if such those live up to their advertisements. This could also be considered a form of novelty/variety seeking. This is also the case with Interviewee 6, who also has a large budget on B&C products. In the past, she usually added new products to her routine as a result of watching VBC SMIs videos. However, as she thinks that her current routine is quite complete, she does not often feel the need to add more products to it. Lastly, the most influential aspects in videos from VBC SMIs include the visible effects of the products on skin, explanation on the interaction between different products, and other information such as product price, benefits, and quality.

Question 4 explores whether or not the respondents consider VBC SMIs as a social reference group and change their consumption behavior to match that of those SMIs. If this is true, VBC SMIs can perhaps influence consumers' ideal state through regularly showing their own lifestyles. For this question, most (5/7) of the interviewees stated that they do not consider VBC SMIs role models in terms of lifestyle and consumption behavior. The most noticeable theme that appeared was that the interviewees were clearly aware of the social and financial difference between them. Interviewees 2 and 3 both said that their living conditions were so different from VBC SMIs that it was not possible/desirable to follow their lifestyle. Interviewee 2 highlighted that she cannot afford to follow their consumption behavior. Interviewees/ 6 and 7, despite saying that they have not tried to follow SMIs' lifestyle, noted that they might selectively follow aspects that they think suitable. Interviewee 1 offered a unique reason: she has not found an ideal role model to follow. Lastly, Interviewee 4 and 5 noted that although they had tried to follow the lifestyle and consumption behavior of VBC SMIs, they only did so selectively. Question 4

has revealed that the financial gap between VBC SMIs and their audience could be preventing them from becoming an influential reference group.

Question 5 examines the influence of VBC SMIs in the respondents' pre-purchase and ongoing information search stage. This is the second stage, after problem recognition, in the consumer decision making process. In this question, all of the respondents confirmed that they often watch VBC SMIs' videos when they are searching for information to buy a new B&C products. Interviewee 1 (the biggest spender on B&C products) even stressed that she always watch VBVs' videos in this stage. However, the purposes of watching and the types of video watched differ among the respondents. For example, Interviewee 1 only watches review videos on makeup products such as eye shadow, eyeliner, and lipstick. She explained that the color and effect of cosmetic products can be clearly and immediately seen from those videos. On the other hand, skincare products need a long time (up to 6 months according to Interviewee 1) to make any improvements to the skin. Interviewee 1 commented that most VBC SMIs do not have that much time to test skincare products: they are under the pressure to review the products as soon as possible after they are released. Finally, she remarked that since the skin of VBC SMIs are often taken care of very well, skincare products cannot make much difference.

Interviewee 2 answered that she tries to watch reviews from people of different skin types to see if a product really works or really suits her needs before buying it. Otherwise, she is afraid that it would become a waste of money. On the other hand, Interviewee 3 wants to find out if a product receives positive or negative reviews in general, and to learn more about the technical side of the product such as its strengths and weaknesses. Interviewee 5 is more practical as she focuses on information about the price, the purchase location, and the benefits of the reviewed products. Lastly, Interviewee 7 said that watching VBC SMIs' videos helps her save time on looking for the right product.

The most frequently mentioned product in Question 5 is lipstick (Interviewees 1, 3, and 6). Interviewee 1 specified that she wants to see how the color looks on real lips, how the texture plays out, and how the VBC SMI feels about that particular lipstick. Interviewee 6, on the other hand, noted that VBC SMIs' videos portrait lipsticks more faithfully than still advertisements, because it is easier to edit still advertisements than it is to edit videos. Interviewees 6 further clarified that VBC SMIs' video reviews on lipsticks have made it more convenient for her to choose and purchase lipsticks.

Lastly, five of the seven interviewees agreed that they do watch VBVs' videos to learn more about new products that they might need in the future. This indicates that VBVs' videos may play an important role in consumers' ongoing search to keep themselves

updated with the current market. Additionally, four out of these five interviewees said that they only watch videos about products they do not currently need if the videos seem interesting or entertaining. Two of them (Interviewees 3 and 6) even specified that they do not actively look for this type of videos, but just randomly click on them as they see fit. In contrast, Interviewee 2 answered that when she is surfing Youtube, she may browse around looking for videos about products that she might need in the future. Overall, in order to increase the chance of being a part of consumers' ongoing information search, videos should be relevant and interesting.

Question 6 explores the influence of VBC SMIs during the third stage of the consumer decision-making process (evaluation of alternatives). Although all of the interviewees agreed that videos from VBC SMIs are helpful when they are deciding between different brands of a product, the level of reliance on these videos vary greatly from 40% to 80%. Most notably, five out of seven interviewees gave a reliance rating of 70% or higher. For example, Interviewee 2 gave a rating of 70% while noting that she only uses these videos as a source of reference rather than completely buying into them. She explained that when many VBC SMIs release videos on the same brand at the same time, she would doubt the information and recommendations given by them. Next, Interviewee 6 gave a rating of 80%. She cited the Vietnamese beauty Youtube channel "Happy Skin", saying that some VBC SMIs are very careful and invested in their videos. These VBC SMIs would explain the complex and hard-to-find technical details of products more clearly to her. On the other hand, Interviewees 1 and 3 gave the lowest reliance ratings, at 40% and 50% respectively. Interviewee 1 said the value she gets from watching VBC SMIs' videos at this stage is similar to that of the information search stage: she wants to see the visible effects on skin and check other information like price and allergic ingredients. Interviewee 1 further clarified that she relies just as much on customer reviews (40%) and a little on her own preference for the brand (20%). Lastly, interviewee 3 does not differentiate between brand advertising and influencer's recommendation in this question. It seems that to Interviewee 3, what matters at this stage is the information presented in the videos itself, rather than the source of the information (whether it comes from advertising or influencer's recommendation).

Question 7 ends this section by confirming if the influence of VBC SMIs had ever resulted in an actual B&C product purchase. The act of buying and consuming a product lies in the last two stages of the consumer decision making process: product purchase and outcome. These two stages are also the most measurable ones for a company because they result in sales. All of the interviewees reported having bought at least one B&C product after seeing it a VBC SMI's video. The products they bought were diverse, including clay mask,

lipstick, eye-shadow palette, and skincare lotion. A major theme that can be seen from the responses is that before the interviewees were influenced to buy by VBC SMIs, they had already been needing a particular product, or recognizing a consumer problem to solve. For example, Interviewees 1 and 2 said that the featured products were meeting their needs at that time. Interviewee 3 specified that she were needing a lipstick that would not fade during meals and saw it in a VBC SMI's video. Interviewee 4 noted that a VBC SMIs cleverly used an eye-shadow palette to create different looks and showed that the palette had met all of the criteria she was looking for. In the case of Interviewee 6, she added a skincare lotion product to her routine because her skin was rather dry at the time she saw the product in a video. Another interesting finding was from Interviewee 5 who bought a product because the VBC SMIs who reviewed it had the same skin type as her.

4.4.4 Section Four: Consumer's Trust in VBC SMIs

Section four examines the level of trust consumers have for VBC SMIs in general and what they think about VBC SMIs' sponsorship transparency, i.e. whether or not VBC SMIs should reveal that they have been paid for some specific contents or product recommendations.

Question 1 asks the interviewees to rate on a scale from 0 to 100% how much they trust product reviews and recommendations from VBC SMIs. The answers ranged from 50% to 70%. Interviewees 3 and 6 both gave 70% ratings and commented that they trust the knowledge and experience of VBC SMIs. Furthermore, both of them, as well as Interviewee 5 (60%), said that they appreciate it when VBC SMIs test the products on their own skin.

On the other hand, Question 1 reveals some potential trust issues with VBC SMIs. The 2 most doubtful respondents are Interviewees 1 and 2, with ratings at 50%. Interviewee 1 is a special case because she works in the media business and often cooperates with Vietnamese SMIs. She remarked that foreign SMIs are more trustworthy than Vietnamese SMIs. Due to her work experience, she knows some VBC SMIs who would take advertisement money and give dishonest product reviews. As she is not familiar with foreign SMIs, and because foreign SMIs often state clearly in their videos whether or not they have been paid, her feelings for them remain positive. Similarly, Interviewees 6 and 7 expressed that sponsored reviews are unreliable. Interviewee 6 used the rather strong phrase "blatantly advertising" to describe some videos.

Question 2 asks the respondents to state whether they think that VBC SMIs are more or less reliable than 6 other information sources. The included information sources are

advertisements, celebrity endorsements, friend's recommendation, customer reviews and ratings on retailer's website, product quality awards/qualification, and discussions on social media groups/community. All seven respondents believe that VBC SMIs are more reliable than advertisements and celebrity endorsements. This could mean two things. First, it confirms that SMIs' endorsements are still more effective than celebrity endorsements. Woods (2016) explained that this is because consumers often believe that SMIs' advice are personal and authentic, while celebrity endorsements are always paid for. Second, it suggests that celebrity endorsements are seen as just another type of advertisements. Thus, perhaps the advantage that celebrities bring are not their influence on customers, but their wide reach.

Information sources that are often considered more reliable than VBC SMIs include friend's recommendation (6/7 interviewees), discussions on social media groups and communities (6/7), and product quality awards/certificates (4/7). Each of these three sources have been chosen to be the most reliable one by two respondents. However, it is important to note that the most reliable information source for one person might be considered unreliable for another. For example, Interviewee 4 and 6 ranks product quality awards/certificates as less reliable than VBC SMIs, while this information source is the most reliable one for Interviewee 6.

Question 3 explores the interviewees' opinions on VBC SMIs' transparency and how it affects the image of VBC SMIs and brands. Transparency here means whether or not a VBC SMI say that they have been paid for a product review or some other contents by a brand. Six out of seven interviewees prefer a transparent influencer. The theme in their answers is that if they know beforehand that a video has been sponsored by a brand, they can be more objective in their judgments. For example, Interviewee 4 noted that she remains doubtful towards videos where sponsorship information is not disclosed. She appreciates it when VBC SMIs acknowledge their motivation. Interviewee 6 said that sponsorship transparency helps her decide whether she should watch a video. She suggests that this saves time, because she would know if a video has been sponsored anyway after watching it. Finally, Interviewee 1 said she feels like she is being lied to if sponsorship information is not disclosed.

Question 3 has also revealed some interesting findings on what the respondents feel about sponsored contents. Interviewee 4 finds the humour that some SMIs use when they introduce the sponsoring brand interesting and creative. Interviewee 5 suggests that although sponsorship does affect a VBC SMI's review of a product, its effect is limited. This is because to Interviewee 5, VBC SMIs' videos are just a source or reference and it is

up to her to believe or doubt the information. Interviewee 2 feels that being transparent means respecting both the audience and the brand.

The only respondent who does not appreciate sponsorship transparency is Interviewee 3. She specified that both types of influencers are the same to her. In deed, she believes that cooperation with a brand gives an influencers more insight knowledge about the product that they represent.

Regarding the negative effect of sponsorship transparency on the image of influencers and brands, the respondents are split up quite equally. Three Interviewees (1, 3, 5) believe that it is harmless, another three Interviewees (4, 6, 7) believe that it has a negative effect on brand and influencer image, and the remaining Interviewee (2) is somewhere in the middle.

Question 4 asks about the features of a video that help the respondents distinguish between a paid and an authentic product recommendation. A number of features, ranging from more subtle to more obvious ones, have been mentioned. Interviewee 1 referred to some of the most obvious hints, including a direct purchase link, the brand's hashtag (hashtag is a word or phrase that comes after a hash sign and is often used on social media to specify the topic of a piece of content. Hashtag example: #MakeupTutorial), discount codes, or collaborative promotion events between the SMIs and the brand. On the other hand, Interviewee 2 relies on the general content trend, as well as the focus content of a video. If a video mentions or reviews only one product, or if many reviews of the same product are released at the same time with the same type of content, it is likely that those videos are all paid for. Interviewee 3 looks at how the brand or product is referred to in a video. For example, if that brand is mentioned more often than usual, or if images/logo from the brand is larger and more emphasized than normal, she would believe that the video has been paid for. Another feature that was mentioned by Interviewee 4, 5, and 6, is that paid recommendation only includes good points about a product, while authentic recommendation includes both pros and cons.

Question 5, the last question of the interview, tries to identify the connection between the size of VBC SMIs' fan bases and their overall influence. The literature on this issue has been inconclusive. Some writer suggested that fan base sizes have a positive relationship with influence (Yoganarasimhan 2011 & Hwang 2015), while others disagree with this view (Cha et al. 2010 & De Veirman et al. 2017).

For this question, two interviewees (1 & 2) believe that VBC SMIs with more followers are less reliable with their product recommendations; two interviewees (5 & 6) believe the opposite; and the other three interviewees (3, 4, 7) remain neutral, noting that besides

reliability, there are other reasons why a VBC SMI has more followers. In Interviewee 5 and 6's opinion, popularity means reliability because being popular means that more people have trusted and verified the information that the SMIs provide. On the other hand, Interviewee 1 and 2 suggested that more popular SMIs receive more sponsorship offers, and thus their reliability is reduced. Interviewee 3 and 4 noted that, besides reliability, VBC SMIs can also gain more followers through the trendiness of their contents, their video editing and visual effects, how often they release new videos, and how persuasive they are. Lastly, Interviewee 7 gave an example from her own experience: she also follows some not-so-popular influencers who are willing to review good products for everyone.

A subsection of Question 5 asks about the criteria that the respondents use to evaluate a VBC SMI. Some of the answers include the visual quality of their videos, their style of speaking, appearance, knowledge, and skin type. Interviewee 2 interestingly noted that she would not care about a VBC SMI's appearance and the visual quality of her video. Interviewee 4 said she likes reading the comment section under Youtube videos and uses those comments, as well as the way VBC SMIs reply to those comments, as a criterion. Interviewee 6 said that she also pays attention to whether a VBC SMI is objective in her reviews, and whether she advertises too much for some particular products.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter uses the analysis in the previous chapter to provide answers to the research questions that are presented in the introduction. Then, the thesis's reliability and validity are discussed. Finally, the author made some suggestions for further research to end this chapter.

5.1 Answers to Research Questions

This section uses the findings from the interviews' analysis to answer the research questions that have been stated at the beginning of the thesis paper. The sub questions are going to be answered first, since they serve to support and clarify the main research questions.

Sub-question 1: What are the opinions of consumers about Vietnamese social media influencers, in terms of relevance, reliability, and transparency?

It can be seen from the interviews that many, if not most of, Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic (B&C) consumers follow Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic social media influencers (VBC SMIs) and watch their contents to some extent. While VBC SMIs create contents on many topics, their most watched contents are, not surprisingly, makeup/skincare tutorials and product reviews.

Although VBC SMIs are growing very quickly in terms of popularity, they are still considered by consumers to be different from celebrities. The biggest difference is their main job. Celebrities are seen as being full-time singers or actresses, while VBC SMIs are believed to be someone who usually has a day job and take up content creation in this field as a side activity. For this reason, consumers tend to think that VBC SMIs are more relevant and reliable than celebrities. Their product recommendations, as a result, are often considered quite objective and helpful. Their knowledge, experience, and willingness to test new products on their own skin are also appreciated by consumers.

Nevertheless, as VBC SMIs attract more and more sponsorship offers for their product review videos, consumers are also recognizing that their recommendations are not entirely reliable, since sponsored contents are generally believed to be less reliable than authentic contents. Some of the signs telling the viewers that a video has been sponsored include, for example, (1) several other videos with the same contents that have been released within a short period, (2) purchase incentives such as discount codes, (3) a lot of emphasis on and reference to a brand/product, and (4) no mention of a product's weaknesses. This increase in brand sponsorship may have caused VBC SMIs' product

recommendations to be seen as less trust-worthy than friends' recommendations and discussion on social media. Still, VBC SMIs are generally believed to be more reliable than celebrities and advertisements.

VBC SMIs are also not often considered a relatable reference group. A reference group is the social environment that a consumer look at to adjust their consumption behavior (Bruner & Pomazal's 1988). Although Abidin (2015) suggested that the hierarchical gap between social media influencers and their followers are much less than that between celebrities and their fans, it is still not small enough. This is likely because there is often a big financial and social gap between VBC SMIs and a lot of their viewers. VBC SMIs usually have very high income and it is a part of their job to showcase their expensive lifestyle on the internet. Thus, many consumers can see that VBC SMIs' consumption behaviors are clearly beyond their means, which prevents them from seeing VBC SMIs as a reference group. This gap may also explain why most of the respondents believe that influencer product recommendations are less reliable than friend's recommendations: they are not as relatable and intimate as friends.

The interview results have also revealed that consumers value sponsorship transparency, that is, they prefer VBC SMIs who state clearly which product recommendations and videos they have been paid for. This transparency allows consumers to be more objective in their purchase decisions. By contrast, a lack of transparency may sometimes damage the influencer's or brand's image, since the consumers may feel that they have been lied to.

Sub-question 2: In what stage of the decision-making process are social media influencers most helpful and influential?

The decision-making process used in the thesis paper was created by John Dewey (1910, as cited by Bruner & Pomazal 1988). There are five stages to this process: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product purchase, and outcome. This study is mostly concerned with the first three stages, since they are the process where a decision is being made and the consumer can be influenced, while the two latter stages are simply the final results where the decision has already been made.

The interview results have shown that VBC SMIs are influential in all of the three first stages in the consumer decision-making process, although a "most influential" stage has not been identified. In the problem recognition stage, the findings suggest that VBC SMIs can make consumers feel that their current product is no longer satisfactory (a perceived fall in the actual state), create a desire for novelty or variety seeking (a rise in the desire state), or create a desire to add a new product to their makeup/skincare routine (also a

rise in the desire state). However, there is some evidence that VBC SMIs are not often considered a social reference group (which could change consumer's desire state) due to their usually expensive living style. A reference group is a social environment that consumers look at to adjust their consumption behavior. Thus, they cannot influence consumers in this manner.

In the information search stage, VBC SMIs prove to be quite helpful for consumers. The interview results suggest that consumers often or always watch VBC SMIs during their pre-purchase information search stage (when they are actively looking for information about some products). However, during the ongoing information search stage (when consumers are not trying to buy a product, but are just keeping themselves updated with the market), consumers would only watch those videos that are more relevant and interesting to them.

Lastly, in the evaluation of alternatives stage, consumers still rely a lot on VBC SMIs to make their decisions, but there are some concerns about sponsorships causing VBC SMIs to be less honest in their recommendations

Sub-question 3: What aspects of the contents from social media influencers are the most helpful for consumers in their decision-making process?

First of all, although VBC SMIs create many types of contents, their most watched contents appear to be makeup/skincare tutorials and product reviews. These two types of contents show the knowledge and experience of VBC SMIs, which greatly helps consumers who are usually less experienced in this industry. Furthermore, consumers also value videos that explain complex technical details about B&C products such as the ingredients, potential allergens, and explanation on how different products interact with each other.

Other helpful aspects from VBC SMIs contents include the visible effects of products on their skin, and the information about products' pricing, benefits, drawbacks, and quality. However, these aspects may be valued differently by consumers with higher budgets as compared to those with lower budgets. For example, low-budget consumers may be more concerned with price comparisons in VBC SMIs' videos, while high-budget consumers pay more attention to ingredients. Nonetheless, even though high-budget consumers care less about prices, discount codes featured by VBC SMIs are still a good incentive for them to engage in variety seeking.

It has also been found that product reviews of makeup products are usually more helpful than skincare products. This might be because it is easy to see the color and effects of

cosmetic products on videos, while skin care products take much longer to show any improvement on the skin. Since VBC SMIs are often busy and have to test a lot of products, some viewers doubt that they really have time to use and give truthful reviews of the skincare products that they recommend.

As financial concerns play a big part in the decision-making process, consumers usually appreciate discount codes that are included in VBC SMIs' videos. When a consumer has financial concerns, it does not necessarily mean that she cannot afford a product and is not a potential customer: it could also mean that trying a new product is quite risky for her, since an unsuitable product is an irrecoverable cost. Therefore, discount codes in VBC SMIs' videos could be an effective way to encourage consumers to try out products without having to take too much risk.

Another aspect that benefits consumers is the information about VBC SMIs' skin types. If a VBC SMI's skin type matches that of a consumer, the reviews given by that SMI is certainly more helpful. Even if the consumer does not find any VBC SMI with similar skin, seeing a product tested on many different skin types can also make the consumer more confident in choosing that product. This naturally leads to another point of interest for consumers: they really appreciate it when VBC SMIs test new products on their own skin and then give reviews about those products.

Finally, it appears that many viewers watch VBC SMIs' videos not only to learn more about new products, but also for entertainment purposes. Consumers appreciate the effort that VBC SMIs' put in to make the videos more interesting and relevant. It is through those interesting and relevant videos that consumers passively keep themselves updated with upcoming products in the market.

Sub-question 4: How effective is social media influencers' product endorsement, as compared to other forms of marketing and advertisements?

VBC SMIs are generally considered to be more reliable than celebrities and advertisements, which agrees with Woods' (2016) assumption. On the other hand, VBC SMIs are often considered to be less reliable than friend's recommendation, discussions on social media, and product quality awards/certificates. It is important to note that this ranking is not conclusive, since the interviewees often gave conflicting answers. There is also evidence that although VBC SMIs' product recommendations are quite effective, they are not used as the only input for decision making. Instead, they serve only as a source of reference to learn more about products.

The interview results suggest that VBC SMIs are not seen as celebrities although they may have a great number of followers or fans. Instead, consumers think of them as ordinary people who know more about B&C products and share their knowledge to everyone. Thanks to this, SMIs' product endorsements can often be seen as sincere recommendations from an experienced person. This makes SMIs' product endorsement more effective than celebrities. Furthermore, while celebrities just appear in advertisements, VBC SMIs create contents that evaluate and compare different products. This type of contents brings more benefits to consumers than advertisements.

Although SMIs are more relevant than celebrities, the distance is still too large for SMIs to be considered a reference group for consumers. SMIs usually have very expensive lifestyles that consumers are not familiar with and cannot afford to follow. Thus, it could be more difficult for SMIs to affect consumption behavior as compared with friends, schoolmates, or colleagues. Furthermore, the results suggest that as an influencer gains more followers and sponsorship contracts, she is becoming less of an influencer and more of a celebrity. Some SMIs are even described as "mini-celebrities". This can further increase the distance between SMIs and consumers, making their product endorsements less effective.

Product endorsements from VBC SMIs are most effective when the audience does not think that they have been paid for it. When this happens, the recommendations from VBC SMIs seem more authentic and reliable. Thus, it might be tempting for VBC SMIs not to be transparent about their sponsorship. However, because viewers do appreciate transparency, hiding sponsorship information may damage VBC SMIs' images. Consumers may even feel that they have been lied to. Additionally, viewers have become wary of undercover sponsored contents, and have developed many ways to recognize that a video has been paid for.

Sub-question 5: What are the practical recommendations for beauty and cosmetic companies on using social media influencers as a form of marketing and advertisement?

Setting business ethic issues aside, below are the 6 recommendations for B&C companies based on the findings from the thesis paper:

1. Choice of SMIs: although the size of a SMI's fan base is important, companies should also measure how relevant a SMI is to her audience before choosing her for a sponsorship campaign. Being more relevant, rather than having a larger fan base, would ensure that a SMI's videos are watched and relied on.

2. Makeup vs skincare: because it usually takes a long time for skincare products to have an effect on skin, skincare brands might want to sponsor videos that document a longer period of time, for example, a 30-day challenge video that films the VBC SMI's skin everyday after using the product for 30 days. This type of video not only has a higher chance of demonstrating the product's effectiveness, but also has more credibility.

3. Brands should also keep track of VBC SMIs' skin types. This information is very useful in designing an influencer marketing campaign, because the brand can spread its budget across influencers with different skin types. This helps approach would brands demonstrate their products on more skin types, making the product seem more reliable.

4. Although asking VBC SMIs to release review videos at the same time may simplify the management of an influencer marketing campaign, brands should consider spacing out their influencers' videos so that they do not seem like paid contents.

5. When consumers are doing their on-going information search to keep themselves updated with the market, they only watch videos that seem relevant and interesting to them. Thus, for products that aim at long-term growth rather than short-term sales, brands might want to focus their budget on VBC SMIs with high engagement rates. This is because higher engagement rates may mean that the content is more relevant and interesting.

6. It appears from the results that different consumers have different views about information sources. An information source that is considered highly reliable by one consumer may be considered quite unreliable by another consumer. It is advisable for B&C brands to take a multi-channel marketing approach rather than relying on one major channel.

Having answered all of the research sub-question, the thesis will now be concluded by answering the main research question:

To what extent are Vietnamese consumers of beauty and cosmetic products influenced by social media influencers during their decision-making process, and how can this knowledge be applied for beauty and cosmetic companies?

Overall, Vietnamese consumers are influenced by VBC SMIs quite a lot through all of the stages of their decision-making process, but most notably in the problem recognition and the information search stage. Consumers generally benefit from the knowledge and experience of VBC SMIs. Consumers also really appreciate it when VBC SMIs test products on their own skin and give advice based on the test results. Furthermore, VBC SMIs are considered more relevant, reliable, and possibly more influential than celebrities.

This is because advice from VBC SMIs are not viewed as advertisements, but often as sincere word-of-mouth recommendations. However, as VBC SMIs are growing quickly in sizes and getting more sponsorship offers, consumers have recognized that they are not entirely trust-worthy and have gradually learned how to differentiate between paid and unpaid advice. This growth in sponsorship may have led to some concerns about sponsorship transparency. Nonetheless, these concerns are still small and some viewers seem to accept it as the norm. Lastly, besides popularity (number of followers), brands should also consider other criteria when choosing VBC SMIs for their marketing campaigns, such as relevance and skin types. After choosing suitable VBC SMIs, extra care should be taken about the type of contents that will be used to promote products.

5.2 Reliability and Validity

5.2.1 Reliability

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009, 156-157), reliability is how consistent the research method is in producing research findings. More specifically, if a study is reliable, it would produce the same results on other occasions, other researchers would have the same observations if they use the same research design, and the raw data was interpreted with transparency. There may be four main threats to the reliability of a study. Firstly, the participants might make errors when they answer interview questions. Secondly, they might be biased and think that it is better to answer in a particular way. Thirdly, the researchers themselves might make errors in conducting the research (i.e. asking interview questions). And lastly, the researchers might be biased in interpreting the collected data.

In the thesis paper, the author has taken some steps to ensure that the research method is reliable. Firstly, the interview questions are semi-structured in order to minimize the variations in how the questions are asked, while still maintaining some flexibility. All of the participants were asked the same questions. However, after they have answered all parts of the structured questions, the interviewer may continue asking further into interesting points that the participants made. This way, all of the participants would answer all central parts of the interview questions, while those who have more to say would still have the opportunity to express their opinions.

The results of this study also generally agree with the assumptions made by previous researchers. For example, it is often accepted that the words of social media influencers carry more weight than celebrities when it comes to product recommendations. The knowledge and experience of social media influencers are also of great benefits to

consumers. Lastly, the more relevant a social media influencer is to her audience, the more reliable and influential she would become. All of these have been reflected in the findings of this study, which may suggest that the study is relatively reliable.

5.2.2 Validity

There are two types of validity, internal and external validity. Internal validity is whether a study really measures what it is supposed to measure. In other words, it describes how accurate a study is in achieving its results. There could be a number of threats to internal validity. For example, the accuracy of a study might be affected by recent major events that influence the participants' opinions. The length of time of a research may also affect its validity, since a lot of things could happen during the duration of the research. The instruments that are used to conduct the study (e.g. a list of survey questions) could be inaccurate and reduce internal validity. Other threats include a loss of participants over the duration of the research, the difficulty in interpreting causal relationships, and repeated testing of the same participants over time. (Saunders et al. 2009, 157-158.)

Since there had been no major scandals or incidents related to VBC SMIs happening near the data collection dates, the history effect should not influence this study's validity. The data was also collected during a relatively short period (1 week) during which no major event happens in the B&C industry and among the SMIs community. The survey items had also been pilot tested with two volunteers and some adjustments had been made according to their suggestions. The adjustments include the organization and wording of the questions. Some survey items were also removed as they were considered hard to understand by the volunteers. Finally, all of the real participants of the interviews were interviewed only once. All of these measures help to increase the internal validity of the thesis.

External validity is also known as generalizability. It describes how the results from the study of a small sample can be generalized into the larger population. For example, a research results based on a specific company might not be true for other companies, especially if the researched company is very "different" from other companies in some way. In some cases, the purpose of a research is not to generalize its results to a larger population, but just to test some existing theories in a new context, or to learn more about what is happening in a particular context. In these cases, external validity should not be a problem. (Saunders et al. 2009, 157-158.)

Due to the nature of the interview research method, the external validity of the research is not high. Only 7 interviews were made, which were not enough to draw any strong

conclusion for generalization purposes. The study also used a convenient sampling method that chose interviewees from a similar age group social class. Thus, the findings should not be generalized to other age groups and social classes. Furthermore, unlike more developed Western countries, the social media influencer community in Vietnam is rather new and under-developed. Thus, consumers might not have formed clear opinions about them. Having said all these, since the purpose of the study is to explore opinions for future research rather than making strong conclusions, external validity is not in focus.

5.3 Suggestion on Further Research

Future researchers who are interested in VBC SMIs can conduct quantitative research to confirm, extend, or dispute the findings of this study. For example, an interesting direction would be to measure the relevance ratings of SMIs (through the number of "likes", "shares", and "comments" on their contents) and check if relevance has any effect on their ability to influence consumer purchase decision. Another direction for further research could be about SMIs' transparency in disclosing sponsorship information. Researchers may want to answer questions like "does the lack of transparency damage VBC SMIs' and brand's image?" or "does more transparency improve the overall credibility of a SMI. Lastly, other researchers may want to use this study as a reference when they study influencers in other industry to see if the results still hold true in different contexts.

6 SUMMARY

The aim of the thesis is the study the influence of social media influencers on the consumer decision-making process. The thesis has been set in the context of the Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic market, since this market is still under-researched, and Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic social media influencers (VBC SMIs) are currently very active.

After the background information and other relevant information is presented in the introduction, the author review the relevant literature on the consumer decision-making process, the Vietnamese beauty and cosmetic market, and VBC SMIs. These are the three main bodies of theory that help the author develop the empirical part of the thesis paper.

The thesis uses the inductive qualitative research approach and the semi-structured interview method in doing the empirical research. The interview included four sections that deal with the background information, the overall opinions of consumers about VBC SMIs, the role of VBC SMIs along the consumer decision-making process, and the level of trust consumers have for VBC SMIs.

The data from the interviews were then analyzed and used to answer the research questions. The interview results have shown that social media influencers are influential throughout all of the three first stages of the decision-making process, but most notably the problem recognition and information search stage. The reliability and validity of the research were then discussed. Lastly, the author commented on the possible future research that could extend the literature on VBC SMIs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Questions

In English

Section 1: Background

1. On a scale from 0-10, how experienced are you with beauty & cosmetic (B&C) products? (= "Not experienced at all", 5 = "Moderately experienced", 10 = "Highly experienced")

2. How much on average do you spend on B&C products per month?

Section 2: Opinions about Vietnamese beauty vloggers (VBVs)

1. Have you ever watched videos from any VBVs? Could you please name some VBVs that you know?

2. What type of videos from VBVs do you usually watch? (Suggestion: product tests/reviews, makeup/skincare instructions, fashion & lifestyle, travel, viral contents like Q&A & challenges, product promotion, narratives of sponsored events, collaboration with brands)

3. Do you see VBVs as celebrities/stars or as normal people with knowledge and interest in B&C? What do you think are the differences between a celebrity and a VBV? In your opinion, Are VBVs more intimate & relatable than celebrities?

Section 3: The role of VBVs in the consumer decision making process

1. Have you ever thought that your current B&C products are unsatisfactory after watching a VBV's video, and then want to switch brand? Does this often happen? What aspects from the video made you want to switch brand?

2. Have you ever wanted to try a different brand after watching a VBV's video even though your current products are still satisfactory? Does this often happen? What aspects from the video made you want to try the different brand?

3. Have you ever wanted to add a new beauty product type to your makeup/skincare routine after watching a VBV's video? Does this often happen? What aspects from the video made you want to add that product type?

4. Have you ever tried to or wanted to follow the lifestyle & consumption behavior of any VBVs?

5. When you are searching for information to buy a new B&C product, do you often watch VBVs' videos? If yes, how do those videos help you in your information search? Do you also watch VBVs' videos to learn about new products that you may need in the future?

6. Are VBVs' videos helpful to you when you're deciding between different brands of a B&C product? If yes, how do those videos help you? How much do you rely on those videos to make your final decision (0-100%)

7. Have you ever actually bought any B&C product after you saw it in a VBV's video? What made you choose that product?

Section 4: Consumer trust in VBVs

1. How much do you trust product reviews & recommendations from VBVs (0-100%) & why?

2. Below are several information sources. Please rate whether they are more or less reliable than VBVs' videos: (1) advertisements, (2) celebrity's endorsements, (3) friend's recommendation, (4) customer reviews & ratings on retailer's website, (5) product quality awards/certification, (6) discussions on Social media groups/community.

[Sample answer: 1, 5, 6 > VBVs' videos > 2, 3, 4]

=> Which source of information is the most reliable for you to choose a B&C product? (you may suggest a different source)

3. Between a VBV that states clearly if they have been paid by a brand for a video, and a VBV who does not state anything about sponsorship, whom do you prefer and why? To you, does disclosing or not disclosing sponsorship information affect the image of the VBV or the brand?

4. How do you differentiate between a paid recommendation and an authentic recommendation from a VBV?

5. Do you think that bigger VBVs (i.e. more subscribers) are more reliable than smaller ones & why? What are the criteria for you to evaluate a VBV?

In Vietnamese

Phần 1: Thông tin nền

1. Trên thang từ 0-10, bạn am hiểu về các sản phẩm mỹ phẩm và làm đẹp (MP&LD) ở mức độ nào? (0 = "Không am hiểu", 5 = "Am hiểu vừa phải", 10 = "Am hiểu chuyên sâu")

2. Bạn thường chi khoảng bao nhiêu cho các sản phẩm MP&LD hàng tháng?

Phần 2: Suy nghĩ về beauty vlogger Việt Nam (BVV)

1. Bạn đã từng xem video của BVV nào chưa? Bạn có thể kể một vài BVV mà bạn biết không?

2. Bạn thường xem video thuộc chủ đề nào từ các BVV? (Gợi ý: review sản phẩm, hướng dẫn makeup/skincare, thời trang và phong cách sống, video trend và viral, quảng bá sản phẩm, các sự kiện được tài trợ, phối hợp với các nhãn hàng)

3. Bạn thấy BVV giống với ai hơn, 1 ngôi sao / người nổi tiếng, hay 1 người bình thường có kiến thức và quan tâm vào ngành MP&LD? Bạn thấy sự khác biệt giữa 1 người nổi tiếng và 1 BVV là gì? Với bạn, BVV có gần gũi và dễ liên hệ hơn 1 người nổi tiếng hay không?

Phần 3: BVV và quá trình lựa chọn sản phẩm của người tiêu dùng

1. Đã bao giờ bạn cảm thấy sản phẩm MP&LD mình đang dùng chưa đủ tốt và muốn đổi thương hiệu sau khi xem video của BVV chưa? Điều này xảy ra có thường xuyên không? Yếu tố nào trong video đã khiến bạn muốn đổi thương hiệu?

2. Đã bao giờ bạn muốn thử dùng sản phẩm thương hiệu khác sau khi xem video của BVV, dù sản phẩm hiện tại bạn đang dùng vẫn khá tốt? Điều này xảy ra có thường xuyên không? Yếu tố nào trong video đã khiến bạn muốn đổi thương hiệu?

3. Đã bao giờ bạn muốn thêm một loại sản phẩm vào chu trình makeup/skincare của mình sau khi xem video của BVV không? Điều này xảy ra có thường xuyên không? Yếu tố nào trong video đã khiến bạn muốn thêm loại sản phẩm đó?

4. Đã bao giờ bạn muốn hoặc đã thử học theo phong cách sống và thói quen tiêu dùng của bất kỳ BVV nào không?

5. Khi tìm kiếm thông tin để mua 1 sản phẩm MP&LD mới, bạn có thường xem video của BVV không? Nếu có, những video này giúp bạn trong quá trình tìm kiếm thông tin như thế nào? Bạn có xem video của BVV để tìm hiểu về những sản phẩm bạn có thể cần sau này không?

6. Video của BVV có hữu ích với bạn khi đang phân vân lựa chọn giữa các thương hiệu hay không? Nếu có, các video ấy giúp bạn như thế nào? Mức độ ảnh hưởng của các video ấy đến quyết định mua hàng của bạn là bao nhiêu (0-100%)?

7. Bạn đã thực sự mua bất kỳ sản phẩm nào sau khi thấy nó trong 1 video của BVV chưa? Điều gì đã khiến bạn chọn sản phẩm ấy?

Phần 4: Độ tin cậy của BVV

1. Mức độ tin tưởng của bạn đối với các review và gợi ý sản phẩm MP&LD từ BVV là bao nhiêu (0-100%)? Tại sao?

2. Sau đây là một số nguồn thông tin tham khảo. Bạn hãy xếp hạng độ đáng tin cậy các nguồn này so với video của BVV: (1) thông tin quảng cáo, (2) người nổi tiếng khuyên dùng, (3) giới thiệu từ bạn bè, (4) review và rating trên website bán lẻ, (5) giải thưởng và chứng nhận về chất lượng, (6) các thảo luận trong cộng đồng hoặc nhóm trên mạng xã hội.

[Mẫu trả lời: 1, 5, 6 > Video của BVV > 2, 3, 4]

=> Theo bạn, nguồn thông tin nào là đáng tin cậy nhất trong các nguồn vừa kể trên? (Bạn có thể đưa ra các nguồn thông tin khác)

3. Giữa một BVV nói rõ việc hợp tác giữa họ và nhãn hàng trong video, và một BVV không làm rõ thông tin nhà tài trợ, bạn thích ai hơn? Vì sao? Với bạn, việc không làm rõ thông tin tài trợ có ảnh hưởng gì đến hình ảnh của BVV hoặc nhãn hàng không?

4. Làm thế nào để bạn phân biệt giữa một giới thiệu được tài trợ và một giới thiệu đến từ chính cảm nhận của BVV?

5. Bạn có nghĩ rằng BVV nhiều subscriber thì đáng tin cậy hơn BVV ít subscriber không & tại sao? Các tiêu chí mà bạn dùng để đánh giá xếp hạng một BVV là gì?