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# The Influence of Learning French Culture on Foreign Language Learners' Attitude towards French Cosmetic Brands in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Attitude influences undergraduate foreign language learners to spend their money on cosmetic brands. Despite various studies on undergraduate foreign language learners' attitudes, little is known about the main factors that influence undergraduate foreign language learners to support French cosmetic brands. In response to this gap, this study explains the elements of French culture that influence undergraduate foreign language learners and examines the influence of learning French. Nine students were interviewed and thematic analysis revealed French language learners are most influenced by the quality of the products, makeup and fashion, language, groups of people who have similar cultural knowledge, and creativity portrayed by the French cosmetic brands as luxury and elegant cosmetic brands. The findings support the importance of learning the culture of one's country which can instill interest towards the country's local brands and highlight a deeper understanding of the relationship between the cosmetic brands and the influence of learning culture.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In France, the cosmetic sector is among the most significant sector (Emeriau, 2014), and the term 'cosmetic' is indissolubly linked to the French cosmetic industry (Mutascu & Murgea, 2020). Over the last few decades, according to Mutascu & Murgea (2020), the global exchange of beauty cosmetics has experienced remarkable growth. This development can be attributed to customers' attitudes and behaviours. Attitude has a big impact on what consumers think a brand is worth (Alden et al., 2013). According to Hofstede (2011), attitudes are the foundation of behaviour, and behaviours themselves are the result of culture. Similar beliefs, attitudes, and intentions are communicated through cultural symbols by those who share them (Li & Karakowsky, 2001). According to Gelfand et al. (1996), cultural attitudes thus have a major influence on social behaviour. According to Icek Ajzen & Fishbein's (1975) definition, attitude is a learned inclination to respond consistently positively or negatively towards a given object. Therefore, it is important to highlight teenagers as they possess one of the highest disposable incomes in the world (Gentina et al., 2016).

According to Gentina et al. (2016), teens' spending power is significant and indefinite. Utilising the newly contributed corpus on French culture, the researchers implement a more dynamic approach to semi-

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structured and behavioural in-depth interviews to study the influence of French culture on undergraduate foreign language learners' perceptions of French cosmetic brands. The researchers introduce the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Asgari & Hosseini, 2015) as a framework for understanding how learning French cultural elements influences the behaviour and attitudes of undergraduate foreign language learners.

In specific sociology domains, the importance of undergraduate foreign language learners' attitudes toward cosmetic brands has been demonstrated over several decades. Research has shown that culture has multiple impacts on luxury brands (Bakir et al., 2020; Nieves-Rodriguez et al., 2017; Tefani et al., 2024). Another substantial body of literature also suggests that social influence dynamics, fashion innovativeness, and fashion uniqueness influence young shoppers' attitudes. (Gentina et al., 2016; Khan & Fatma, 2017). In addition to the study of undergraduate foreign language learners' attitudes, other researchers have shown that religion plays a role in supporting the attitude of undergraduate foreign language learners toward buying cosmetic products (Briliana & Mursito, 2017).

An important gap that remains in this growing body of research, however, is the somewhat limited scope on which existing findings are based upon, in that the vast majority of studies to date have been carried out on the business and marketing domain of the USA (Weber, 2002), France (Souiden & Diagne, 2009) and Korea (Asgari & Hosseini, 2015c; Pholvisrethkul, 2002), and the influence of religion on attitude toward halal cosmetics (Briliana & Mursito, 2017; Hashim & Musa, 2014; Ishak et al., 2020). However, none focus on the cultural influence of cosmetic brands.

Against this backdrop, the researchers attempted to address two specific concerns in the study. The first is to explain the elements of French culture that influence undergraduate foreign-language learners to choose French cosmetic brands. The second is to examine the influence of learning about French culture on undergraduate foreign language learners' perceptions of French cosmetic brands. In this way, the researchers attempted to paint a more complete picture of cultural elements and their role in predicting the cultural influence among the participants of undergraduate foreign language learners.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Undergraduate Foreign Language Learners, Young Consumers, Teens

Following a comprehensive analysis of the literature on age boundaries in the domains of young consumers, adolescents, and undergraduate foreign language learners, it is concluded that the group classified as young foreign language learners comprises individuals aged 18 to 22. Drawing upon a combination of references from the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Youth Development Policy (NYDP), and several research papers (Shien et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2019), the researchers ascertain that the age range for undergraduate foreign language learners is from 18 to 22 years. According to Shien et al. (2023) and Tan et al. (2019), the average age range for young consumers is 18 to 25 years, whereas the WHO defines adolescents as those aged 10 to 19 years. Therefore, the researchers conclude that the average age range for young consumers, adolescents, and undergraduate foreign language learners is 18 to 22 years old.

### 2.2 Influence of culture on cosmetics brands

Culture is the most fundamental determinant of a person's wants and behaviour. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, cosmetics consist of substances that you put on your face or body that are intended to improve your appearance. Kaur et al. (2022) explained that cosmetic products are applied to the skin and various body parts to make them appear attractive, smooth, and bright, thereby enhancing their appeal. Therefore, cosmetics nowadays can be classified as a "must-have" item not only for women but also for a minority of men with a metrosexual personality (Ahmad et al., 2015). Culture significantly influences fashion consumption among undergraduate students (Anyanwu & Chiana, 2022). Again it is the most fundamental determinant of a person's wants and behaviour. Culture influences consumption and decision-making patterns considerably. It is not permanent; changes occur gradually and are progressively assimilated within society (Ali et al., 2016).

Prior studies have demonstrated that cultural interest is one of the most important antecedents affecting attitude and behaviour. For example, a study by Asgari & Hosseini (2015b) shows that culture influences consumers' purchase of cosmetic products, especially when they have a cultural interest in a specific culture. Furthermore, Anyanwu & Chiana (2022) stated that ethnicity has the deepest influence, followed by culture, as they do not want to buy any products that do not reflect or value their ethnicity. Furthermore, Zimu (2023) argues that language is a crucial cultural element that influences consumer behaviour. In conclusion, culture does play a role in buying cosmetics. However, Lim et al. (2020) argue that modern consumers are increasingly driven by social media influence rather than traditional cultural factors. Their study demonstrates that social media influencers play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences during the brand selection process. In the context of cosmetics, this suggests that students may prioritize recommendations from trusted influencers, potentially disregarding the brand's cultural heritage or country of origin (Lim et al., 2017).

### *2.3 Influence of foreign culture on behaviour*

Culture provides people with a sense of identity. It is acknowledged that each consumer perceives the world through their cultural lens (Barmola, 2010). People in the same society share a culture that influences how they think, behave, understand brands, and make decisions, while also shaping their identity and what is acceptable. Page (1995) stated that much of our behaviour is determined by our culture, but that we may need contact with another culture, with different beliefs and value systems, to understand the extent to which it influences us. Cultural beliefs and values can therefore be said to be mental images that affect a wide range of specific attitudes. For example, buying specific brands, choosing among alternative products, and finally paying for a particular brand are influenced by cultural beliefs. It influences the pattern of living, consumption, and decision-making by individuals (Asgari & Hosseini, 2015c). It also enables consumers to determine what is considered a luxury and/or a necessity, and it shapes our attitudes toward foreign products. In other words, the likelihood of buying a specific foreign product is higher when we know its culture.

Much evidence shows that culture plays a crucial role in shaping students' preferences for fashion products. Culture can influence their purchasing decisions (Alkhalaf, 2008; Anyanwu & Chiana, 2022). Prior studies (Zbib et al., 2021) have demonstrated differences in attitudes and behaviours regarding the products' country of origin. For instance, the Lebanese attitude is different toward these two countries of origin, France and China. The study revealed that Lebanese consumers' perceptions of cosmetics and skin care products changed significantly when they were made aware that the product's country of origin was France, but not when it was China. It shows that French cultural influence on Lebanon contributes to a positive perception of French products. However, a study by Naik & Sharma (2021a) found that consumers believe that depicting their culture, values, and traditions, and showing their regional culture, such as language, influences behaviour more than the local culture. Hence, the influence of foreign culture can be said to be dependent on exposure.

### *2.4 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)*

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), introduced by Arnould and Thompson (2005), is a family of theoretical perspectives that examines the dynamic relationships among consumer practices, the marketplace, and cultural meanings. Unlike traditional consumer research that often relies on surveys, experiments, and data modeling, CCT emphasises the social, experiential, symbolic, and cultural dimensions of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). It challenges the view that consumer behaviour is purely rational or economic, instead seeing consumption as a means through which individuals construct social meanings, express identity, and negotiate cultural values via brands and marketplace experiences. Key contributions of CCT include the exploration of consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, socio-historical patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this study, CCT serves as the theoretical lens to understand how exposure to French culture shapes undergraduate learners' perceptions of French cosmetic brands. Rather than testing the theory's specific elements, it

provides conceptual guidance in interpreting how learners connect these products with cultural meanings learned in the classroom. While CCT offers a broad understanding of consumption in marketplace contexts, this study focuses specifically on cultural learning as the main influence on learners' perceptions.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study had two main goals: first, to explain the elements of French culture that influence undergraduate foreign language learners' preferences for French cosmetic brands. Second, to examine the influence of learning French culture among undergraduate foreign language learners towards French cosmetic brands. Based on prior research, cultural elements such as language (Fhonna, 2018; Sani et al., 2018a) and value elements (Diallo et al., 2013) were expected to influence undergraduate foreign language learners toward cosmetics. Aspects of French culture were expected to influence their attitudes and behaviours towards French cosmetic brands they encounter while learning the language. The most significant elements of French culture that affected them were identified through this study. Because prior research has yielded mixed findings on the influence of diverse demographic and cultural factors, this study examined the relationship and how their knowledge of French culture shaped their attitudes and behaviours towards French cosmetic brands. Furthermore, due to a lack of prior research, few studies have examined the influence of French culture on French language learners' attitudes toward French cosmetics.

#### 3.2 Participants and Procedures

A convenience sampling technique was used to select nine French language learners from UPM. The researchers emailed 24 French language learners, enclosing a participant information sheet and consent form. Nine responded and were interviewed (8 females and 1 male); 15 did not respond (appendix 1). The researchers concluded the data collection at 9 participants because data saturation had been achieved. The responses received became repetitive, and no new themes emerged at the 10<sup>th</sup> participant. The participants are foreign language who were in their first, second and final year of their studies. All gave written consent and agreed to the use of anonymised quotes.

#### 3.3 Procedure/Data Collections

Before data collection, approval from the Dean of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication was sought to involve students of French in this study. One of the researchers, conducted a semi-structured, in-depth interviews between 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2024 and 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, both in person and via Google Meet. Next, the researchers attempted to draft the interview questions. The questions were generated from literature reviews of 10 articles and from replicable questions derived from those reviews. Finally, the interview questions were generated from 6 articles chosen from different literature reviews (Alkhalaf, 2008; Anyanwu & Chiana, 2022; Ijbrary & Pholvisrethkul, 2002; Naik & Sharma, 2021; Asgari & Hosseini, 2015; Sani et al., 2018b) (Appendix 2). The semi-structured interview guide (Table 1) was agreed upon by the research team, informed by the existing literature and areas of divergence. These questions were shared with participants before the interviews, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, and were recorded to maintain data collection accuracy. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, all recordings were later carefully transcribed to preserve the authenticity of participants' responses. Member checking was not conducted due to time constraints and limited participant availability. Nonetheless, the researchers ensured interpretations were grounded in participants' initial answers by closely examining the transcripts. Transcriptions were not returned to participants, and there were no repeat interviews.

#### 3.4 Measures

The researchers report their findings according to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ). One of the researchers coded the data in NVivo and conducted thematic content analysis to identify emergent themes. The researchers followed six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the

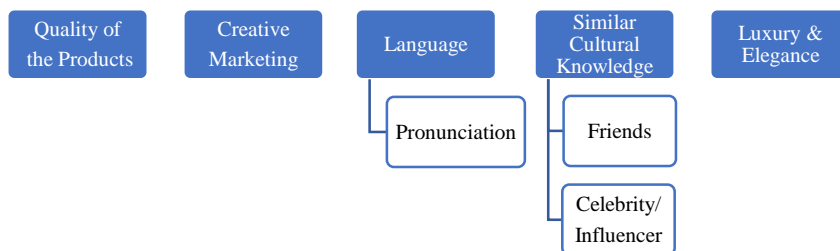
researchers used familiarisation to record the interview transcripts, take preliminary notes, and group responses by interview question. Second, the researchers use NVivo to highlight content in each interview transcript and categorize it by themes. The researchers investigate the main findings and recurring ideas using NVivo by grouping the data. Third, the codes were used to generate several themes, the majority of which were combined into one overall theme. Fourth, to ensure the themes were represented and to identify any exclusions, the researchers compared them to the raw data. Fifth, the researchers ensured the names made sense and contributed to our understanding of the data as the researchers created and named the themes. The account was finally typed up. The method used was inductive, enabling themes to emerge from the interviews after the first round of open-ended questions in the interview guide, even though the literature and debates informed the interviews on the topic being examined.

**Table 1.** Interview Questions

No	Questions	Prompts
1.	When I say cosmetics, what are the brands of cosmetics that spring to your mind?	Does learning French culture influence your answer?
2.	How would you describe French cosmetics?	What are the elements? Is it language, value, or food?
3.	Which aspect of French culture most affects your choice to buy French cosmetics?	Why?
4.	What is the impact of French cultural elements that you learned about your acceptance towards French cosmetics?	

#### 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The analysis pinpointed five themes through thematic analysis, ranging from the impact of studying French culture to the use of French cosmetics. There are three subthemes within the five main themes identified.



**Figure 1.** Themes and subthemes

The qualitative data show how exposure to French culture in the classroom influences the attitudes of undergraduate learners. Respondents 3 and 5 stated that what they have learned in French classes has piqued their interest in French brands. However, other respondents, such as respondents 4 and 7, claimed they were interested in French brands for personal reasons rather than classroom learning. This shows that the influence of cultural learning differs among undergraduate foreign language learners. In addition, brands such as La Roche-Posay and Enchanteur, mentioned by respondents 1 and 9, suggest that sensory characteristics, such as fragrance and texture, are often associated with the idea of French quality. This stereotype influences the respondents' positive perception of these international brands. Meanwhile, respondent 2's comments on Garnier show that Malaysian consumers prioritise Halal-friendly products over quality.

**Table 2.** Quality of the products

Respondents	Quotes
Respondent 1	"I like these French brands because they always smell the best, and I always look at products that have fragrance, they are high in chemicals, and I do not think it is okay to use, and it is not suitable, but French products like Echanteur are indeed something I will buy."
Respondent 2	"Good quality, long-lasting." "It (Garnier) is good and suitable for Muslims because it can penetrate the hair if you use it, so it is easy if you want to pray." "Yes, I mean hair dye. Not all brands will focus on these things."
Respondent 3	"The quality is as good as the rich people's brand even at the Watson level." "Mostly buy because of the quality, and I want to try." "Yes, I can say that studying in class is the reason I want to try something other than what I am interested in."
Respondent 4	"Good inside and out, but I know this is not because of the effect of learning from class."
Respondent 5	"Its quality influenced me." "Yes, the reason is from the class, if you want to know."
Respondent 7	"It is good if it does not have to be famous, but it is not from the learning that made me know."
Respondent 9	"higher quality than others (brands) because it is more effective for me." "Now I use Echanteur and Laroche Posay because the quality and texture are the best."

The findings suggest that the product's appearance, such as packaging, plays a significant role in shaping undergraduate learners' attitudes. Respondents 4 and 7 highlight that packaging and brand identity are the markers of authenticity and quality rather than aesthetic choices. Not only that, respondent 4 added that the unique identity, such as the shop's scent, differentiates French products from other brands. This indirectly shows that creative marketing for the brands enhances perception, as reported by respondent 8, who pointed out that creative presentation and high-level marketing methods are the primary reasons for their interest. Crucially, the data reveals a direct link between cultural pedagogy and consumer behaviour; Respondent 5 explicitly states that learning French served as the starting point for exploring and "finding" rare French products. This shows that learning French culture in class is a starting point for brand discovery, where the prestige of the French language is transferred onto the products themselves, making them more attractive to learners who seek an authentic connection to the culture they are studying.

**Table 3.** Creative Marketing

Respondent	Quotes
Respondent 4	"Packaging influences the price. The packaging is authentic and has its own identity. You cannot create a fake one because it will not be the same, and even their shop has its own smell."
Respondent 5	"Their innovation is very good." "Yes, I started exploring all this because I want to find French products since I learned the French language, and that is where I found all these rare things."
Respondent 7	"has its own identity" "advertisement influenced"
Respondent 8	"As far as I know, this French cosmetic is really good from the beginning." "Marketing is more interesting in the way of presenting skincare, perfume, etc. "I am also interested in top-level and creative marketing methods."
Respondent 9	"I like cute things, so the packaging is cute." "I am the type who is easily influenced by packaging."

The qualitative evidence demonstrated that the French people's makeup style, specifically the effortless style, is the main determinant of consumer attitude among undergraduate learners. As stated by respondents 1 and 2, the integration of academic knowledge from French class, which is information from the lecturers and cultural studies, serves as an initial source of knowledge. Furthermore, respondents 4 and 8 stated that social media, such as French influencer and actresses portraying specific cultural looks, influence perceptions of iconic elements, such as red lipstick, which creates a desire for a particular brand consumption. Respondents 6 and 9 further suggest that students view French as a means to achieve cultural authenticity, seeking specific shades and styles perceived as unique to French culture. In conclusion, the

collected data show that learning about French culture changes learners' perspectives on cosmetics from a functional necessity to a tool for identity expression.

**Table 4.** Makeup & Fashion

Respondent	Quotes
Respondent 1	"They are very popular with their effortless style. The way people do makeup is interesting and easy. That is why I was influenced to buy. Besides, since I am learning French, sometimes my lecturer talks about makeup, and I explore everything related to French when I am free. That is why I know about people's makeup style through learning that."
Respondent 2	"There is a makeup method that influences me to buy, but I want to try it, and I know that makeup method from my studies about French culture."
Respondent 4	"Culture shown in French movies, like makeup and style, makes me want to buy it." "She (influencer) tried French makeup."
Respondent 6	"Their makeup style is wow and their wearing style is interesting so I want to try French makeup to match the French makeup style" "Buy a French product because I want to find the same shade because not all shades are available in other products because it's not your culture."
Respondent 8	"The way the actress portrays French people, looking at their makeup, I see light red lipstick, so they influence me."
Respondent 9	"The way French people make up makes me interested and want to try French cosmetics."

The qualitative data reveal that the linguistic element of French cosmetics acts as a significant bridge between cultural learning and consumer engagement. For many undergraduate learners, the use of French in a brand name like YSL provides a sense of intellectual satisfaction and a connection to the language they are studying. Respondents 4, 8, and 9 stated that, as they know how to pronounce and understand the meanings of French words, it influences them to apply their studies in practical ways. On the other hand, respondents 1 and 2 suggest that language is not the main driver of their initial interest in buying French products. However, the French wording adds a layer of authenticity and cultural resonance, making the product more appealing. Furthermore, respondents 5 and 7 demonstrated an emotional attachment to the language, and buying French cosmetics becomes an act of supporting and practising the culture. This suggests that for foreign language learners, the presence of French on cosmetic products enhances the brand's prestige and creates a unique identity expression, where the consumer feels a personal sense of pride and belonging to the French cultural sphere.

**Table 5.** Language

Respondent	Quotes
Respondent 1	"Language does not influence me much, but the way they use French words on the packaging makes me interested in buying."
Respondent 2	"Talking about language, I used to think why the name is like this, then I figured it out, then I just found out, and it does retain elements of French culture, but for language, it does not affect deeply."
Respondent 4	"Know more details about French cosmetics because the label uses the French language, and it helps me a lot to know French. Because I know French culture, it influences me to buy again."
Respondent 5	"Pronunciation, wow, there is a sense of connection with French cosmetics." "There is a reason I like the language and want to support France since learning."
Respondent 7	"Language influenced me; I keep wanting to try all French cosmetics, and I am practicing the culture." "I bought it because I want to learn the language."
Respondent 8	"I just want to see it because I want to test my knowledge of French." "Language influenced me, and I bought it because I want to show off."
Respondent 9	"Talking about language, I was once interested in YSL because of how to say it."

The collected data reveal that social influences are crucial factors in shaping the consumption patterns of undergraduate French language learners. Respondents 2, 3, 4, and 8 report that peer-to-peer knowledge sharing serves as an informal mentor, sharing tips and experiences. This suggests that the classroom environment creates a collective cultural identity. Respondent 5 explicitly supports this by stating that their shared knowledge of French culture creates the same desire to purchase these products. Furthermore, respondent 4's mention of peer pressure and the ease of being influenced suggests that some students buy French products to maintain social belonging within their academic circle. It shows that the data suggest that community-based validation, where students see their peers successfully applying their cultural knowledge through product use, is a more powerful driver of positive attitudes toward French cosmetic brands.

**Table 6.** Similar Cultural Knowledge

Respondents	Quotes
Respondent 1	"Celebrities influence me." "My friends influenced me the most."
Respondent 2	"My friends always talk about French culture, lifestyle, French people, and specialties of France, so yes, I can say that my friends influence me."
Respondent 3	"Since my friends are using it, I am also interested in buying it."
Respondent 4	"My friends influenced me because they told me a lot about their experiences in France." "Peer pressure, because I am very easily influenced." "Everything is related to French cosmetics, and I think that makes me want to buy more."
Respondent 5	"Influence from friends because we study the French language together, we want to buy because we are influenced by the knowledge we have learned."
Respondent 7	"People around me use French cosmetics, so that is why I want to buy."
Respondent 8	"...because of friends." "My friends use French cosmetics from A to Z, so they always share with me some tips on how French people use their skincare."

The qualitative data reveal that the symbolic value of French cosmetics, such as elegance and prestige, shapes consumer attitudes. As stated by respondents 7 and 8, it shows that elegant packaging and the prestigious image of French products serve as a symbol of security and prominence, and are not just viewed as products but as markers of social status. Interestingly, respondent 8 notes that French products maintain a premium perception even though the price points are accessible, indicating a strong brand equity tied to their national origin. Furthermore, respondent 5 portrayed the direct impact of the academic class, where the lecturer discusses French makeup and encourages independent research to achieve an elegant, luxurious look. This suggests that the classroom experience helps the students internalize the French aesthetic.

**Table 7.** Luxury and Elegance

Respondent	Quotes
Respondent 5	"Use it because it is an international brand. I also know it (French cosmetics) because my lecturer talked about French makeup, so I did a little research on having the look of an elegant and luxurious product."
Respondent 7	"Beautiful packaging makes you want to buy it, and it looks elegant."
Respondent 8	"These items look elegant and seem to be a symbol of security for women." "French products are more prominent than other products," and "Even if the price is cheap, it still looks prestigious."

Using a thematic analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with nine French UPM students, this study provided a snapshot of the influence of French cultural learning on French cosmetic brands. The main topics of discussion throughout the study were to identify the influence of learning about French culture and to tease out the elements of French culture that influence French students to choose French cosmetic brands. Despite existing studies on the influence of culture on French cosmetic brands, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting how learning about French culture can shape students' interest

in French cosmetic brands. Moreover, our study empirically validated the relationship between learning about French culture and support for French cosmetics. However, the roles of product quality, language, shared cultural knowledge, luxury and elegance, and creative marketing have not yet been thoroughly investigated among French learners in Malaysia.

The results of the findings suggested that the primary factor influencing respondents' attitudes towards French cosmetic brands is product quality. While product quality is commonly viewed as a functional attribute, this finding can also be interpreted through the lens of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which suggests that consumers assign cultural meanings to products beyond their utilitarian value (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this context, the perception of high product quality may reflect respondents' associations of French cosmetic brands with cultural values, thereby contributing to more positive attitudes. This finding is also consistent with earlier research, as Ghazali et al. (2008) found that Malaysian consumers place an importance on the country of origin (COO) information when evaluating products, where certain countries, such as France, are often associated with higher quality and prestige. This shows that the average Malaysian consumer places greater weight on a product's perceived quality when making purchase decisions than on COO. However, another paper by Martín-Consuegra et al. (2019) argued that consumers put more emphasis on individual values (e.g., hedonic, personal pleasure) and social values (e.g., social impression and status) that can produce positive mediating effects, rather than the functional values (e.g., quality, utility) of luxury products.

The results also show that participants' perceptions of French cosmetic brands are influenced by the language used. From a Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) perspective, language can be understood as a symbolic element that shapes consumers' perceptions by evoking cultural meanings such as sophistication, authenticity, and prestige (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Zimu (2023) claims that language is a crucial cultural element influencing consumer behaviour. According to Ho et al. (2019), a product's foreign-language packaging label directly affects consumers' attention to the product. Therefore, the language on packaging labels is one of the main elements that draws attention to products. According to Harun (2023), a brand's language and linguistic components are the cultural characteristics associated with it. Furthermore, a linguistic component of a brand name was found to influence consumers' perceptions. Menon (2004) added that the linguistic component of a brand name generates symbolic information through verbal pronunciation and wording, which contribute to semantic memory and thus influence consumer buying behaviour. However, Gerritsen et al. (2010) stated that the inclusion of English in advertisements in non-Anglophone Europe increases the likelihood that consumers will misunderstand the message. Because different languages convey messages differently, people may be prevented from purchasing foreign products. Our findings corroborate this assertion, as several respondents expressed that their insufficient language comprehension prevented them from purchasing the product.

The findings indicate that participants' support for French cosmetics is significantly influenced by influencers who possess similar cultural knowledge, such as celebrities and friends. Consumer Culture Theory emphasises that consumption is socially and culturally constructed, where meanings are shaped through interactions with others. In this context, influencers who share similar cultural understanding are able to convey these meanings effectively, making them more persuasive and encouraging positive attitudes towards French cosmetic brands. Furthermore, celebrity endorsement has been demonstrated to positively impact Muslim university students' perceptions of non-halal cosmetics and image (Ngah et al., 2023). This aligns with the literature suggesting that influencers with substantial followers can effectively pique viewers' curiosity and modify their opinions and attitudes towards French cosmetics. For instance, respondents in this study reported being introduced to French cosmetics through celebrities like the K-Pop idol group Blackpink, supporting the notion that celebrity influence is substantial. However, Ganjoo (2020) observed that 60% of participants, including students, young professionals, and homemakers, would not try a new brand solely because of celebrity endorsements. The discrepancy highlights significant variation in influencers' influence across different contexts. It underscores that while some influencers wield considerable power to shape societal views, this influence is not universal and may vary by demographic and endorsement type.

Consumers seek reassurance and validation from the experiences of others who have purchased the same products or services (Zimu, 2023). Positive reviews and high ratings help build trust and confidence in the purchase decision. Furthermore, recommendations from family and friends play an important role in influencing consumer behaviour in collectivist cultures. Consumer Culture Theory suggests that people's consumption choices are shaped through their everyday social interactions and shared cultural experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), and in collectivist societies, close relationships such as family and friends often serve as key sources of information and guidance. As a result, recommendations from these social connections can reinforce culturally shared values and influence individuals' decisions when evaluating and choosing products. According to Consumer Culture Theory, consumption is shaped through social interactions and shared cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), making close social ties key sources of guidance and influence. The close, interdependent social networks common in such cultures lead consumers to place a high degree of trust in the opinions and recommendations of their loved ones. This finding aligns with Ganjoo (2020), who found that recommendations from peers, friends, and colleagues based on product experience are important for building a strong brand perception. However, according to Hennigs et al. (2012), consumers who prioritize functionality tend to adopt a more conservative, rational approach when purchasing luxury products. These consumers are less susceptible to peer pressure in their purchasing decisions.

The results also suggest that another factor influencing the respondents' attitude towards French cosmetic brands is luxury and elegance. This aligns with the idea that consumers do not merely purchase products for their functional attributes, but also for the cultural meanings, status signals, and symbolic value that these brands convey. According to CCT as articulated by Arnould and Thompson consumption is a cultural practice through which individuals construct and express their identities, social relationships, and cultural meanings, rather than just fulfil utilitarian needs. CCT emphasizes that consumers use brands and products not only for what they do, but for what they mean in terms of lifestyle, prestige, and social differentiation. This is consistent with Yurika & Hartini (2020), who stated that brand origin can convey prestige and offer an attractive perspective for luxury cosmetic products, thereby increasing the likelihood of consumer purchase. These findings align with our results, which showed that people are drawn to French cosmetics for their luxury appeal and to flaunt their wealth. However, Yurika and Hartini (2020) also indicated that some dimensions of the trait of vanity, specifically the physical dimension, did not significantly moderate the influence of luxury brand perception on luxury brand purchase.

The results suggest that another factor influencing the respondents' attitude towards French cosmetic brands is creative marketing. This aligns with Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which explains that consumers do not just buy products for their function, but as 'symbolic resources' to build their own 'consumer identity projects' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). As creative marketing typically emerges from social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok, advertisement, and content are where their interest sparks. Tunteerasin (2019) also emphasizes that advertisement is crucial for creating consumer awareness and recognition of a brand or product. For instance, Rashid et al. (2021) conclude that different types of advertisements play a vital role in consumers' purchasing decisions, particularly for cosmetic product users. They note that repeated advertisements increase the likelihood of purchasing cosmetic products among all districts of Karachi, with male respondents also showing significant interest in consuming and watching cosmetic product advertisements. This highlights that advertisements can significantly influence buyers' behaviour, recall of advertisements, and overall pleasure and stimulation associated with the advertisements. However, Martarahayu et al. (2019) found that advertisements do not always provide sufficient information about the products. Their research showed that while consumers find advertisements for Make Over products captivating and appreciate the representation of diverse skin tones, they still feel the information provided is inadequate. This is supported by some of our respondents, who also reported that they were not influenced by advertisements due to a lack of sufficient information. They pointed out that the images or videos often differ from the actual products, leading to a gap between expectation and reality.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research has successfully explained and examined the elements of French culture that influence undergraduate foreign language learners toward French cosmetic brands. The researchers identified five themes that influenced them; 1) Quality of the products; 2) Creative marketing; 3) Language; 4) Similar cultural knowledge; 5) Luxury and elegance. Additionally, 3 sub-themes: pronunciation, friends and celebrities/influencers were identified.

Several important limitations of this study need to be considered. Firstly, the participant size could be expanded to better represent the population of foreign language learners, especially French learners in Malaysia. According to Okul et al (2021), the participant size is particularly important when employing data analysis methods. However, John W. Creswell (2001) and Yin et al (2018) stated that two to ten participants are considered sufficient to reach saturation levels. Therefore, saturation was observed in the ninth informant, as the other informants repeated the same elements. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Secondly, the study may have introduced selection bias and limited the transferability of the findings due to the use of convenience sampling. According to Nyimbili & Nyimbili (2024), purposive sampling is widely used across various research paradigms as it facilitates the selection of a quality participant, thereby enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of the results. Nevertheless, convenience sampling was deemed appropriate for this study as it enables efficient data collection from a readily accessible and willing group of participants, ensuring a timely and cost-effective process while still providing valuable insights into the research topic (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

For future research, two suggestions should be considered to strengthen this study. Firstly, regarding the brand marketers, future researchers could examine others factors other than perception alone such as cultural identity and psychological element in shaping consumer preferences on foreign cosmetic brands in Malaysian context. Indeed, previous research suggest that perception alone may not fully explain the purchase intention, indicating a gap in understanding deeper psychological and cultural factors (Sukri et al., 2024) Secondly, for the field of foreign language learning, future research should explore how different level of cultural exposure may affect learners' perception towards foreign brands. This is because previous research shows that cultural background plays a vital role in shaping consumers' preferences and attitudes (Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014). These directions provide a clearer, more comprehensive understanding of how cultural learning shapes consumer behaviour among foreign-language learners.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Seri Ayu Mohammad Alwi was responsible for data collection, data curation, formal analysis, and drafting the original manuscript. She also managed the research workflow and ensured the completion of the study. Wan Ikhlas conceptualised the research idea, provided the theoretical framework, supervised the research progress, and offered guidance throughout the study. Additionally, Wan Ikhlas critically reviewed and revised the manuscript and approved the final version for submission.

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## Appendix A

No	Name of scholar	Name of instruments	Questions	Domain
1	Ahmad Abdullah Alkhalaf (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Questionnaire</li> <li>✓ T-test for independent samples</li> </ul>	What elements of culture have the strongest effect on consumer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language</li> <li>2. Custom of Community</li> <li>3. Norms of community</li> <li>4. Class of community</li> <li>5. Something assimilate with community around me</li> </ul>
			What are the commonalities with the purchasing decision-making and consuming habits across different cultures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Impulse Buying / Financial Freedom</li> <li>2. Novelty Seeking / Brand Experimentation</li> <li>3. Price sensitivity</li> <li>4. Fashion/Trend Influence</li> <li>5. Comparative Shopping</li> <li>6. Desire vs. Need</li> <li>7. Information Seeking</li> <li>8. Perception of Foreign Products</li> </ul>
2.	Elisha Chika Anyanwu & Cyril Anamelech Chiana (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Questionnaire</li> <li>✓ Simple Regression Analysis (SRA)</li> </ul>	How is your fashion consumption behaviour?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Need recognition</li> <li>2. Information seeking</li> <li>3. Deliberate decision-making</li> <li>4. Continuous learning/updating</li> <li>5. Self expression and identity</li> <li>6. Emotional satisfaction</li> </ul>
			2. What are the influence of culture on your fashion consumption?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cultural knowledge and fashion choices</li> <li>2. Belief driven style preference</li> <li>3. Moral and cultural standards</li> <li>4. Cultural representation through clothing</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What is the influence of opinion leadership on fashion consumption?</li> <li>4. What is the influence of social class on fashion consumption?</li> <li>5. Influence of family on fashion consumption</li> <li>6. Influence of reference group on fashion consumption</li> <li>7. Influence of ethnicity on fashion consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Influence of trends and retail environment.</li> <li>2. Celebrity influence on fashion choices</li> <li>3. Social expectations and fashions</li> <li>4. Information driven fashion decisions</li> </ul>
3.	Omid Asgari & Mehri Sadat Hosseini (2015)	Quantitative research methodology	What are the factors that influence purchase intention towards made-in Korean cosmetic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Country of origin (COO)</li> <li>2. Cultural interest</li> <li>3. Brand image</li> <li>4. Quality</li> <li>5. Fashion</li> <li>6. Price</li> <li>7. Advertising</li> </ul>
4	Anushka Naik and Avantika Sharma	Questionnaire	Do you think the use of culture in ads influences its credibility?	
			To what extent do you believe culture specific marketing by products (language, food preferences, clothing, etc) influence our choice?	
			To what extent do you believe culture specific marketing by procduts (language, food preferences, clothing.	

			Geographical factors etc) influence our choice?	
			How likely are you to buy a product if the advertisement uses regional languages or references?	
			Would you prefer to buy a product you previously did not buy if it changes its marketing style to highlighting your culture and region?	
			How likely are you to relate to an international product if the advertisement and promotions are done in your native language or Hindi?	
			What are the cultural factors you relate to when looking at an advertisement/product packaging?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language</li> <li>2. Brand image</li> <li>3. Morals marketing</li> <li>4. Visuals</li> <li>5. Audio (music)</li> </ol>
5.	Thitirat Pholvisrethkul	Questionnaire Quantitative ANOVA	What is your opinion on the factor of belief and attitude?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quality</li> <li>2. Unique</li> <li>3. Experiences</li> <li>4. Surrounding acceptance</li> <li>5. Product reputation</li> <li>6. Trademark</li> </ol>
6.	Azurin Sani, Masila Md Yunus & Norlida Kamaluddin	Questionnaire Quantitative	What are the effect between the cultural elements and the customer acceptance towards Global product advertisement?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language</li> <li>2. Cultural norms</li> <li>3. Religion</li> </ol>
7.	Azreen Jihan bt Che Mohd Hashim & Rosidah Musa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Focus group discussion</li> <li>✓ Thematic</li> <li>✓ Analysis</li> </ul>	When I say cosmetics, what are the brands or cosmetic spring to your mind?	
			Before you choose the cosmetic product, what are the factors that have been set in your mind and will influence you to choose the brand? Who?	
			How would you describe halal cosmetics? What are the elements or criteria to describe halal cosmetics and what drives you to use halal cosmetic?	