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The effect of Brand Experience on Consumer Satisfaction, Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty

In the Portuguese Skincare Industry

Ana Sofia Rodrigues de Oliveira

Dissertation report presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Information Management

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THE EFFECT OF BRAND EXPERIENCE ON CONSUMER SATISFACTION, BRAND TRUST AND BRAND LOYALTY

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by

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Dissertation report presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Information Management, with a specialization in Marketing Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to understand and examine the direct and indirect effects that brand experience may have on consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty, and ultimately to determine whether Portuguese women have brand loyalty when it comes to skincare products in the cosmetic sector and what can be done to improve that loyalty. The main factors that may affect the purchase of this type of products were also analyzed in order to determine which factors exert higher influence on Portuguese women when it comes to the purchase of skincare products. With this in mind, the results provided by this study will contribute to the existing knowledge in this subject with meaningful data that has clear practical application, since it can help either existing or new domestic and international companies to better understand the Portuguese market and consequently, develop their marketing strategies. A total of 255 responses were collected through an online questionnaire that targeted Portuguese women with ages between 18 and 65. The findings of this study revealed that brand experience has a significantly and positive effect on consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty. In addition, a mediation analysis showed that consumer experience and brand trust significantly mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. The findings also demonstrate that country of origin (preference for Portuguese products), price and social influence have a significative influence on brand loyalty, while the organic nature of skincare products and the use of harmful ingredients in these products don't affect brand loyalty in a significative way.

KEYWORDS

Brand Experience; Consumer Satisfaction; Brand Trust; Brand Loyalty; Skincare; Portugal

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
COO	Country of Origin
WOM	Word Of Mouth
PETA	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

1. INTRODUCTION

The way consumers experience a brand, the measurement of that experience and its effect on consumer behavior are some of the constructs that have been studied for a long time in the branding literature (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). Schmitt (1999) stated that consumers want to purchase products due to their functional attributes, quality and positive brand image, but they also want to purchase products that provide experiences. Brand trust contributes to brand equity (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005), which means that if a brand desires to benefit from the competitive advantage of brand equity, building brand trust must be a priority.

The cosmetic sector has been expanding and growing in both developed and developing countries all around the world. This industry's constant growth and evolution provides an excellent chance for companies and people who are interested in the area to promote and develop their cosmetics products. The Infarmed (Autoridade Nacional do Medicamento e Produtos de Saúde, I.P.), is a Portuguese authority that supervises and regulates, among others, cosmetic and body care products in order to guarantee their quality, safety and efficiency. According to this authority, a cosmetic product can be defined as "any substance or mixture intended to be placed in contact with the external parts of the human body (epidermis, hair, nails, lips, and external genital organs) or with the teeth and mucous membranes of the mouth with the purpose of cleaning them, scenting them, changing their appearance, protecting them, keeping them in good condition or correcting body odors" (Infarmed, 2022). Cosmetic products include, among others, shampoos, toothpaste, soaps, color cosmetics, hair colorants and styling agents, fragrance products, cleansing and moisturizing creams meant for a regular care and ultraviolet light screening preparations (Singh, 2010). The European cosmetics and personal care business was valued at 80 billion euros at retail sales price during 2021, being the world's second largest cosmetics market after the United States of America (Cosmetics Europe, 2021). The same source highlights that a big percentage of Europe's customers use cosmetic and personal care goods on a daily basis in order to preserve their health and improve their well-being and self-esteem in all phases of life, with these products providing significant practical and emotional benefits. All of these factors emphasize the importance that the cosmetic market has conquered in Europe, which is a key market for this industry.

By the end of 2019, a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was discovered in China and rapidly spread across the globe, causing an exponential growth in contamination and mortality that triggered a response from governments regarding public health systems in order to prevent further contagion (Pouso et al., 2021). This health crisis highlighted the deficiencies of our society and affected almost every industry, with the cosmetic market not being an exception. In Portugal, the first confirmed Covid-19 infection case was announced to the country in the 2nd of March of 2020 (SNS24, 2020). Since this day, the Portuguese government took many actions in order to contain the virus and its exponential growth, decreeing a general lockdown, social distancing and the mandatory use of face masks (Pais & Taveira, 2020). As it was referred before, the pandemic had a great impact on the beauty industry. Nevertheless, in Europe the skincare market is one of the best performing categories and is adapting well to the post-Covid era, being a market expected to grow to 26.2 billion euros by the end of 2022, matching 2019 levels (Euromonitor International, 2022). In Portugal, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the beauty market registered an increase of 1.0% in value and 0.9% in volume in 2019, reaching 767 million euros (Hipersuper, 2020). The same source shows that even with increased restrictions motivated by the pandemic, in the first quarter of 2020, Portugal continued to increase spending (+1.8%) and volume purchased (+3.7%), demonstrating a growing demand for skincare products even after the Covid-19 outbreak. More specifically in the hygiene and beauty market, hygiene products have played an increasingly important role in the daily Portuguese life after the epidemic outbreak, where soaps, bath gel and shampoos were among the categories that gained the most buyers in the year of 2020 (Hipersuper, 2022). During late 2020 and 2021, the world experienced a lifestyle change with social distancing and staying at home for long periods of time, where new priorities emerged. This influenced a greater connection to the digital world, the use of various filters in video calls and social networks and skincare videos that went viral, for instance on the TikTok social network. In addition to this, the usage of face masks caused some people to develop acne and other skin conditions due to their frequent and continuous use. The masks caused irritation due to the friction on the skin (making it drier and more sensitive) and increased the levels of pollution on the skin (the occlusive effect of the mask leads to heat and humidity increase due to perspiration and the CO_2 we exhale) (Bioderma, 2022). All these factors made the correct cleansing and treatment of the skin even more important, which explains the increased interest and purchase of skincare products, and the change in market direction. If on the one hand we observe a decline in the use of makeup, on the other hand, the use of cleansing and face care products has gained importance in the routine of the Portuguese population, with special attention to the tonics, facial exfoliating cream and cleansing pads, which gained new buyers, and face creams, which grew in terms of regularity of purchase (Hipersuper, 2022). In order to limit the scope of this paper, only Portuguese women between 18 and 65 years old were studied since, in general, they continue to be the biggest consumers of skincare products.

In light of all the above, this study intends to analyze the relationships between brand experience, brand trust, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, focusing on the skincare industry in Portugal, where this market has assumed such a relevant position in the past years, while also examining the purchase behavior and main factors that motivate it. In order to assess it, twelve hypotheses were tested with the support of an online questionnaire distributed to Portuguese within the targeted age. The results of this survey were further analyzed through SPSS that has been a consistently growing tool in marketing research over the years. A study contribution and importance is also covered in this research, as a part of conclusion and discussion of the results attained. Lastly, a few limitations and recommendations are also presented, with some suggestions for future studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to lack of research focusing on the preference of Portuguese women when purchasing skincare products, this study investigated factors that were considered essential when looking for these products, such as country of origin (that in this study refers to the preference for Portuguese products), price, social influence and composition. The literature review will begin by introducing the beauty industry in general and on the Portuguese context, and will later address important concepts considered relevant for this paper.

2.1. THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY

The global cosmetic market has registered a total of 380.2 billion dollars (371.4 billion euros) by 2019, and projections indicate that it should reach or exceed the amount of 800 billion dollars (781.3 billion euros) by 2025 (Forbes, 2019). However, in 2020, the global Covid-19 pandemic changed the consumer's daily routines (Sohrabi et al., 2020), with consumers using fewer products as they spent most of their time at home or, when outside in many countries, using a mask (Euromonitor International, 2021). Among many changes in this sector, there has been an emergence of a trend within the beauty industry that moved the attention of the consumer towards skincare (Hipersuper, 2020). In fact, according to Statista (2021), the global skincare market has been growing exponentially since 2012, recording a total of 148.3 billion dollars (144.8 billion euros) in 2020, and is projected to reach 189.3 billion dollars (184.9 billion euros) in 2025. In Portugal, the facial cleaning products market recorded an increase during 2019, acquiring more than 155 thousand buyers, having a 42% penetration rate in 2020 (Hipersuper, 2020).

The Portuguese beauty market shows a positive tendency with a noticeable growth in several skincare segments, and according to an article published by Abilways Portugal (2018) and with the words of Margarida Condado, marketing director of L'Oréal Paris, "there is a growing interest in products that value natural ingredients and that facilitate daily life, namely the demand for travel formats or products for SOS situations. Furthermore, distribution circuits are diversifying, offering more purchasing options to consumers". The same article refers that Portuguese consumers have shifted their habits in the last few years, with Portuguese women becoming more demanding and pragmatic in their choices, indicating that in the future these customers will expect quality skincare products at the lowest price, with the market experiencing an increasing tendency for buyers to look beyond the mass market for these products, and instead, would purchase in pharmacies, parapharmacies and single-brand stores. As a response to the attractiveness of pharmacies and parapharmacies, the main strategy of large skincare retailers has been to create/relaunch private beauty brands that have a very appealing price/quality ratio, for instance, the creation of the Wells stores as part of the Continente supermarket chain owned by Sonae MC. Currently, Wells has the widest range of cosmetic products in Portugal and given the large size of these stores (larger than the market average), they are able to offer customers all of the products from the most diverse brands, often being pioneers in launching these brands in the market (Abilways Portugal, 2018). The fact that Wells belongs to a large company such as Sonae MC brings daily advantages of which the ability to work with lower prices and offer relevant promotions to customers is a good example.

In the opinion of many market experts, the fidelization in this market is low, with younger generations being more prone to social influence in their product choices, especially on the subject of short term trends and innovations (Abilways Portugal, 2018). These experts also mention that some aspects that may have contributed to this scenario are the possibility of experimentation, greater accessibility to products and new channels and the impact of the 'word of mouth'. For instance, according to the same article, and with the aim to increase the proximity with consumers, L'Oréal Paris developed a personalized advice service to each of its customers, through chat, on the brand's website or via Facebook, making it possible to address an audience of all ages and different needs and profiles (L'Oréal Paris, 2022).

A growing tendency in the cosmetic and more recently, in the skincare market, is the demand for not only organic but vegan skincare products, with consumers taking an increased concern in the ingredients used in the different formulas. A vegan by definition does not consume any food or products that are derived from animals (Associação Vegetariana Portuguesa, 2020). In 2021, Portugal counted with more than 43 thousand vegans (sensibly more than 0.42% of the Portuguese population in 2021) where the great majority are women (The Green Revolution Portugal, 2021). The same article explores the main motivations behind this powerful vegan trend in the Portuguese market, with 73% defending their lifestyle choice due to sustainability and 69% to respect for animals. The fact that the Portuguese population is increasingly opting for veganism and organic ingredients, which are obtained without the use of artificial substances, namely chemical pesticides or fertilizers as explained by Langmaid & Corley (2007), leads brands to be more aware when it comes to the reduction of animal-derived ingredients and the update of the factors needed in order to certify a product as natural or organic. Subsequently, and taking into consideration the few studies available in this area and applied to the Portuguese market, it becomes of crucial importance to clarify these concepts of organic/natural and organic skincare products, enabling brands to reach a highly relevant and engaged audience, while constructing a selection suited to consumer's needs.

Within this context and considering all the factors referred above, there is a foundation that allows us to further explore the skincare market in Portugal. In addition to this, with the tendency of growth of this segment, there is a big opportunity for brands to communicate and guide the consumer in their new beauty rituals.

2.2. PURCHASE INTENTION

Purchase intention can be described as a decision plan made through a decision-making process to purchase a specific brand or product (Shah et al., 2012), being essential for marketing experts and cosmetics producers to comprehend and fulfil the demands and desires of their target clients. By assessing their purchasing intentions for cosmetics, it is crucial to understand the expectations of the targeted client, since customers may raise their purchase intention if they are more motivated to buy and if they desire the product more. Purchase intention refers to the potential for a customer to want to buy a thing (Dodds et al., 1991) and it is critical in the process through which consumers decide what to buy. People's intentions to buy a product and make a purchase decision may be increased in those who desire a product or have some other specific motive. When buying a skincare product, consumers take into account a number of factors, including brand, price, social influence and product composition based on their preferences. These elements will influence how people view the product, which will ultimately influence their decision to purchase it.

The consumer's overall perception of a product is known as perceived value. This perception has a great influence on purchase intention and can also help manufacturers to modify their products to improve consumer perceptions of value. Their significance lies from the fact that intentions are regarded as the primary predictors of actual behavior (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2015), making their research crucial for the success of any retailer.

This research will analyze the factors behind the purchase intention regarding skincare products of Portuguese women, with this construct taking place during the pre-purchase phase, capturing the psychological factors that exert a higher influence in consumer behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Consequently, it is important to understand the attitudes, evaluations, and internal elements that ultimately generate the purchase intent in order to forecast consumer behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977).

2.3. BRAND EXPERIENCE

The term brand experience was first introduced by Brakus et al., (2009) as "the subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, cognitive and behavioral responses) evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environment." (p.53). Nowadays, consumers no longer buy products and services to fulfill a functional need but instead, purchase the emotional experiences around it (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). These changes in consumer behavior have accentuated the need to build a superior brand and customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2009). According to an online study from company MBLM, brands with strong connections to consumers generated a profit of 2.9 billion dollars (2.8 billion euros) more when compared to those with weak connections (Fortune, 2017). On the other side, Alloza (2008) defined brand experience as the consumers' perception of the brand at each point of interaction that they have with it, whether as the brand images presented in advertising, the first personal contact, or the standard of the personal care they receive. When consumers use a brand, interact with it, share it with others, look for brand information, promotions, and events, brand experience is created (Ambler et al., 2002). The concept of a brand experience is not one of an emotional connection. Experiences are the sensations, emotions, thoughts, and behavioral reactions that a brand-related stimulus elicits. Emotions are merely one internal result of stimuli that triggers experience and brand experiences may eventually lead to emotional ties. Brand experience is therefore philosophically and empirically distinct from personality. Brand experience differs from brand assessments, involvement, attachment, and consumer delight. Consumer delight can be thought of as the emotive component of satisfaction because it is characterized by arousal and good emotions (Oliver & Varki, 1997). Brand experience, as contrast to consumer delight, happens whenever there is a direct or indirect interaction with the brand. Additionally, a brand experience can be both expected and unexpected and doesn't necessarily need to be surprising (Brakus et al.,2009).

Brand experiences can be long-lasting or fleeting, favorable or negative. Additionally, brand experience can increase consumer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and brand trust (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010; Ha & Perks, 2005).

2.4. CONSUMER SATISFACTION

Consumer satisfaction can be described as an evaluation or a state of feelings about a product or service (Olsen et al., 2005) that can be a vital indicator concerning consumer purchase intentions and loyalty (Espejel et al., 2008).When a company's product or service delivers or surpasses the consumers' expectations, the organization might be perceived as offering quality (Keller & Kotler, 2006), and consumers that are satisfied with a product or service are likely to demonstrate a higher intention of repurchase the products of the company and share a positive word-of-mouth (Reichheld & Covey, 2006). As a result, the satisfaction of a consumer leads to a superior level of commitment and loyalty to the brand, which leads us to conclude that satisfaction has a direct influence on loyalty (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001).

2.5. BRAND TRUST

Brand trust is normally characterized in two ways. The first conceptualization refers to the customer willingness to rely on the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), and the second presents the motivations behind it, such as the intentions and ability to satisfy its promises to consumers (Dalziel et al., 2011), being related to the insights and expectations based on beliefs that a brand has competent, consistent and credible traits (Naggar & Bendary, 2017). Additionally, authors like Abimbola et al. (2012), affirm that brand trust is a key element on the customer behaviors before and after the purchase of a product, creating reinforcing long-term relationships between the brand and the consumer, which leads to brand loyalty (Naggar & Bendary, 2017). According to Garbarino & Johnson (1999), brand trust is also a result from prior experiences and interactions and it illustrates the process of learning over time.

2.6. BRAND LOYALTY

Oliver (1999), defines loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or a repatronize deeply held commitment to rebuy a preferred product/service consistently in the future, theory causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (p.33). Aaker (1991) characterized brand loyalty as a situation that exhibits consumers' tendency to switch to another brand, particularly when the brand changes its price or product attributes. Brand loyalty also refers to a circumstance in which customers who have made the same purchases in the past and will do so again in the future and recommend the product to others or plan to make additional purchases (Keller, 2003). In addition, the attitude of brand preference for a product is represented by brand loyalty (Deighton et al., 1994). Meanwhile, Keller (2003) explained brand loyalty in terms of the bond and similarity between customers and a product, stating that customers who are more loyal to a brand are said to have greater "brand resonance". On another perspective, Assael (1998) defined brand loyalty as consumers continuing with the same brand and fulfilling their past experiences, which therefore results in repeat purchases. Thus, brand loyalty simply means that customers will stick with one brand and not take other brands into account when making a purchase (Baldinger & Rubinson, 1996; Cavero & Cebollada, 1998). Three perspectives - behavioral, attitudinal, and choice perspectives - can be used to understand brand loyalty (Javalgi & Moberg, 1997). A brand's purchase volume is considered from a behavioral viewpoint; brand preferences and dispositions are considered from an attitudinal perspective; and brand options are highlighted from a choice perspective. In contrast, Rossiter & Percy (1987) argued that brand loyalty is typically characterized by a positive attitude toward a brand as well as the consistent repeat purchase of the same brand. It is also important to examine brand loyalty from an attitudinal perspective, where it is defined as the degree of firmly held commitment to some particular brand-related ideals (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Oliver (1997) defined brand loyalty as customers' capacity to stick with the primary brand. Consumers' intentions to buy the brand as their first option, despite the marketing efforts of rival businesses, can exhibit this behavior. Baldinger & Rubinson (1996) added that the presence of both behavioral and attitudinal components is a requirement for true brand loyalty. Consumers are said to have false brand loyalty if they are only driven by one of these two criteria.

Brand loyalty is regarded as being equal to brand equity, being the ultimate goal and meaning of brand equity according to Travis (2000). This allegation was reinforced by empirical data from researches developed by Solomon (2009), who noticed that purchasing decisions based on loyalty may develop into habits, leading to brand equity. Additionally, brand loyalty was defined by Aaker (1991) as the attitude that consumers have towards a brand and what motivates them to constantly buy that brand. The empirical study conducted by Khan et al. (2015) to examine the relationship between brand equity dimensions and the impact of each component on Malaysian consumers' purchase intention in the fashion industry provided support for this conclusion. Brand loyalty is the most important factor influencing purchase intention, according to the study's findings.

On the other hand, loyalty is a feature of people and not something intrinsic to brands, despite what the term brand loyalty may suggest (Uncles et al., 2003), and is a component of brand equity (Aaker et al., 2001), having an important role in commitment and trust (Khan & Fatma, 2019). Loyalty is strongly connected to the level of bonding created between a customer and a brand and loyal consumers are defined by being unwilling to switch brands whenever they feel satisfied with a given brand (Coelho et al., 2018), being less sensitive to price variations, and eager to pay more for a specific brand given that consumers may have a perception of unique value in the brand (Percy et al., 2011). In addition to this, according to Morrison & Crane (2007), brand experiences promote loyalty through the emotional connections that are established in an engaging, dependable and compelling context or environment.

2.7. Country Of Origin

The country of origin (COO) as an image of a product has been highlighted and deemed as an influencing factor in the consumer's perception of a brand by some authors, such as Kim (1995), and was defined by Thakor & Kohli (1996) as "the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its customers" (p.27). COO image reflects the perception consumers have towards a brand or product, which can be whether "positive" or "negative", depending on the situation and country (Cateora & Graham, 1999), being a stereotypical understanding of customers regarding this country's representative products or brands (Nagashima, 1970; Roth & Romeo, 1992; Bluemelhuber et al., 2007). In addition, according to Dobrenova et al. (2015), there is a significant influence on consumer's judgment and intention to buy a product if they have a better and positive country of origin image. This perspective is supported by other researchers that also state that consumers can hold different opinions depending on the product and its country of origin, which influences their intention to search for certain goods, with Dobrenova et al. (2015) proving a positive country of origin image by the buyers leads to a critical impact on their purchase intention. Other authors, such as Azadi et al. (2015), Yasin et al. (2007) and Yoo & Donthu (2001) have consistently proved that the brand's country of origin image for some products strongly influences the brand equity dimensions, and Ayyildiz & Cengiz (2007) and Shahin et al. (2012) have demonstrated that in fact, brand awareness/ association, brand image and brand loyalty of a product are influenced by the country of origin image that a consumer holds.

In the Portuguese context, relevant data presented by Nielsen in its article "ShopperTrends", indicates that the country of origin is one of the most determinant factors that affects the purchase intention of the Portuguese buyers, with 72% of the national respondents considering it important when choosing products, while 31% is willing to pay more for products made in Portugal (Nielsen, 2018). The study further states that for 60% of Portuguese consumers the option for products of Portuguese origin only occurs if they have the same price.

Based on this literature, this study aims to determine if country of origin of a skincare product strongly influences brand loyalty towards it in the Portuguese market.

2.8. PRICE

Price has always played an important part during a consumer's purchase decision and is frequently associated with perceived quality (Keller et al., 2011). As per Alfred (2013), regardless of the product type, some consumers will not pay beyond a specific price, while others may purchase it. In addition, some categories of products with high prices are considered high quality products and vice versa, being the perception by the consumer a crucial external element in the form of available information during decision making when purchasing a product (Ralston, 2003).

Other authors such as Khraim (2011) understand that a consumer will buy a specific product regardless of the price if its perceived value is beyond the cost. Singh & Pattanayak (2014) add that purchase intention will not significantly be affected by price if a consumer demonstrates brand loyalty, being more eager to pay more for a specific product or brand even when the price increases in order to avoid any perceived risks. An article written by Joana Nobre and published by Sapo Portugal in 2021 explores the price applied to the cosmetic market, and why it is important for the consumer to understand the reasons behind the pricing of each specific product. The article begins by stating that the pricing of these products is always the result of analytical management work and ensures that the product is profitable, covers costs, and at the same time is competitive and attractive to customers. On the other hand, the quality of the product along with its perception is related to two crucial aspects: the formulation and the marketing of the product. The product's formula results from very particular specifications, according to several criteria such as the choice of raw materials (technology involved and concentrations), the texture, the fragrance (or lack of it), the efficacy tests (that can be more complex and independent depending on the investment made by the brand) and skin tolerance. The second aspect referred above, marketing, translates into the choice of the packaging, which must be compatible with the formula and ensure its preservation but also be appropriate to the product's image, the sales support tools, advertising and the ambassadors who will eventually be associated with the product. All of these aspects will influence the final price of the skincare product, depending on what is more privileged by the brand, which is largely conditioned by its positioning, its target market and its brand values. As also mentioned in the article referred above, the margin, or profit that the brand hopes to make, is the last aspect to be considered when defining the price of a product and the more a brand tries to increase its profit margin, the more it will reduce the cost price of its product.

As far as Portugal is concerned, the price still plays a major role when it comes to decide which product to buy, with 80% of the Portuguese respondents stating that price is the most important factor during the purchase decision (Oney Bank, 2020). The importance attributed to this factor is mostly due to the effect of the post-pandemic crisis that also influenced the skincare market, with Portuguese consumers increasingly demanding quality products with attractive prices. In order to meet this demand, most of the times it becomes necessary to use packaging common to other products, plastics instead of glass or even to use more common and ordinary raw materials rather than innovative and more expensive materials and ingredients (Publico, 2019). In contemplation of this, stores have also adjusted and have become more affordable to the Portuguese, improving this category through the creation of private beauty brands by large retailers like the Wells stores, an example already referred in this study (Marktest, 2020). The products offered by these commercial surfaces are dermatologically tested, as it happens with the best brands, and allow Portuguese consumers to get top cosmetics and skincare products at a much more affordable price.

When searching for skincare products, consumers often tend to associate a high or premium price with a more effective product (Palazon & Delgado, 2009). However, low-priced products are not necessarily worse than more expensive ones, at least from a toxicological point of view and in regulatory terms all cosmetics are regulated by the same entity, which in Portugal is Infarmed. All cosmetics have to comply with the same regulation and are supervised in the same way. Price is not always a reliable sign of quality owing to the fact that the companies' marketing budgets for a certain product are frequently more than the formulation budget. The issue is that these are the brands we are most familiar with since they can afford to spend more on advertising than on the calibre of their own goods (Marktest, 2020).

Based on this discussion, this paper will study the effect of price on brand loyalty regarding skincare products among the Portuguese female population.

2.9. SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Many studies have been stating the importance of social influence in consumer behavior, expressing how people impact our emotions, actions or beliefs (Dahl, 2013), being defined as social pressure on a consumer from a significant other such as a family member of a friend (Zahid & Dastane, 2016). According to Wong & Boh (2010), social influence has a variety of effects on a person. Based on the social influence idea, people get different social cues and knowledge from other people, which they then apply when an uncertain circumstance presents itself. This social influence from peers, family members and influential bodies can stimulate emotional reactions throughout some factors, of which modelling, social persuasion and instruction are some examples (Wang, 2014). In the context of this paper, authors such as Hillhouse et al. (2000) have been emphasizing the significant effect that social influence has on behavioral intention in respect of skincare products. Nowadays, and with the internet evolution, social influence regarding e-commerce is also impacted by social media interaction ties and social media commitment, and online consumer reviews are a relevant factor during the purchase decision making, allowing consumers to get more information about product experiences. These consumer reviews evaluate different options which will consequently influence consumer buying decision, with men being less influenced by the recommendations of others than females as regards to online purchase (Ling et al., 2014).

In addition, when we discuss social influence, there is a need to mention the importance of the word of mouth (WOM), defined by Bakewell & Mitchell (2006) as "the informal transmission of ideas, comments, opinions and information between two people" where the receiver "gains information about behaviors and choices" by a second subject who "increases his/her confidence in the personal product or behavior choice by persuading others to do the same" (p.533). The same author refers that the WOM offers trustworthy information regarding a product or brand stating that "the more positive information consumers get about a product from peers, the more likely they will be to adopt the product" (p.533). Social factors that derive from social influence also include reference groups, social roles, classes and family, where each one of them influences consumer behavior (Keller & Kotler, 2015).

Therefore, this study also aims to analyze the effect of social influence in buying behavior, and consequently in brand loyalty towards skincare products.

2.10. COMPOSITION OF SKINCARE PRODUCTS

When it comes to skincare products, we are often confronted with concepts like "natural", "organic" and "vegan". But what is the real difference between these concepts? The clarification regarding the difference between natural and organic cosmetics was possible with the publication of the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) norm 16128, which contains two parts. The ISO 16128:1 presents a guide of definitions regarding the composition of organic and natural cosmetic products and the ISO 16128:2 describes the methods used to calculate the indexes regarding natural, natural origin, organic and organic origin, where the values indicate if a cosmetic product meets the definitions referred in part 1. According to this source, natural ingredients are the ones obtained from plants (including macro fungi and algae), animals, minerals (not of fossil origin, for instance petrolatum) or microorganisms. It also includes those obtained from these materials through physical processes (such as grinding, drying, or distillation), natural fermentations that result in molecules present in nature, or other processes that do not involve intentional chemical alteration (such as solvent extraction). In other words, a natural product must be free of synthetic or artificial ingredients or additives. Even though natural ingredients have been used for skincare purposes for many years, their use is becoming more predominant in nowadays formulas with herbs, minerals, flowers, leaves, fruits, water and land being some of the main sources of these natural ingredients (Fowler et al., 2010). Additionally, the usage of plant extracts in skincare products is highlighted by the growing awareness of the customer regarding the purchase of environmentally friendly products. By supplying the nutrients required for healthy skin, natural skin care products enhance skin tone, texture, and appearance and due to their ability to reduce pigmentation, decrease oxidative damage, and have antibacterial effects, herbal extracts are frequently included in skincare formulas to help treat and prevent a variety of skin disorders (Fowler et al., 2010; Ribeiro et al., 2015).

When it comes to organic ingredients, the ISO 16128:1 also defines them as natural ingredients acquired exclusively through organic farming or wild harvesting methods. Natural cosmetics may contain organic ingredients, but they are not necessarily organic products, whereas organic cosmetics must always contain at least 95% of organic raw materials obtained through organic methods in order to get that certification. In addition to this, many synthetic and potentially harmful ingredients can still be found in high quantities in skincare and cosmetic products, which has many health risks associated regarding for instance, phthalates, parabens, petroleum-based chemicals and aluminum salts, raising more awareness to the composition of these products, contributing to the recent rise in the popularity of organic and natural skincare (Ribeiro et al., 2015). These organic and natural skincare products are based on multifunctional and modern formulations that provide skin-lightening, anti-aging and moisturizing properties that consumers have been seeking, which leads organizations to attempt to follow the natural and organic trend of skincare.

On the other hand, there has been a considerable increase in the number of people who are vegan, including in the Americas, Europe, and different regions of Asia (Earle & Hodson, 2017; Janssen et al., 2016). This increase has motivated several studies to try to understand this movement, seeking the different perspectives and approaches from companies, physicians and non-vegans (Raggiotto et al., 2018). Veganism is not only a trend or a diet but a chosen lifestyle that is gaining more expression in Portugal with food, clothing and cosmetics being among the most required products in this country. A vegan product is defined by the Vegan Society (2022) as one that doesn't contain any animal origin ingredients, thus containing natural and organic plant-based ingredients. Moreover, according to a report published by Valuates Reports from 2022, the global vegan cosmetic market has registered a total of 16 billion dollars (15.6 billion euros) in 2021 and is expected to reach 21.8 billion dollars (21.3 billion euros) until 2028. This report also mentions that social media has played a major role in this trend, being estimated that the skincare category will rank first in sales by 2028. If a few years ago veganism was perceived by the Portuguese population as a "strange" movement, and some didn't even knew about it, nowadays we face a different scenario. With more information regarding this theme, more and more Portuguese are opting for a vegan lifestyle or, even if they haven't adopted it yet, there are also more people interested in the subject (Visão, 2020). The concern with the preservation of the environment and animal well-being has led many companies to adopt these principles in their business management, focusing on sustainability and investing in different products in order to fill the existing gaps. Skincare products have also experienced some changes over time. The information on the packaging stating that they are cruelty-free, i.e., they do not support cruelty to animals and the products and ingredients have not been tested on animals in any stage of production, has played a relevant concern in consumers' decisions. In fact, skincare products do not lose quality by being vegan, nor are they harmful, and the conscious purchase of this type of products has proved to be more related to moral beliefs than to the improvement of the product itself (Wescombe, 2019). When looking for skincare or other cosmetic products, the most reliable and well-known label that indicates that no animal was harmed during production, is the cruelty-free label from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals).

Especially after the Covid pandemic outbreak in 2019, there has been a notorious shift regarding consumer preference with an increased demand for healthier cosmetics options, such as natural, organic and vegan products. Moreover, there has been an increasing consumer awareness of the usage of animal-derived ingredients, being the millennial customers the most affected by this trend due to their attraction to innovative products (Mordor Intelligence, 2022). The same source states that in Europe there has been a higher demand for natural and organic products as a result of the growing concern regarding the harmful effects of some ingredients (such as aluminum and paraben, present in some skincare products), which generated a rise in the search for safe, natural, organic and vegan products more lately.

Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate if the composition of a skincare product (natural and organic ingredients or harmful ingredients to health) is considered in the decision making process, and if they have a significant impact on brand loyalty.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3.1. MODEL DESIGN

This research intends to study and understand, among Portuguese women, the factors that can have an influence on brand loyalty regarding skincare products, also aiming to explore which factors exert a higher influence and contribute to brand loyalty. Ultimately, this study's purpose is to examine the factors that will contribute to the consumer's purchase intention towards skincare products. As so, there was a need to develop a model to better explain the elements and processes involved in this scenario, based on previous literature review.

Gosling & Gonçalves (2003) describe a conceptual model as "an attempt to explain how reality behaves", being "however, necessary to verify if what is imagined (the sketched model) really translates reality" (p.2). The conceptual model of this dissertation can be divided in two parts, with the first part being adapted and inspired on existing models, such as the ones presented by Başer et al. (2015) and Sahin et al. (2011) and the second being developed based on the literature presented. The mentioned first part of this model explains the relationship among brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty (from hypotheses H1 to H5), including also an analysis of the mediating effect of consumer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty (H6) and the mediating effect of brand trust in the relationship between the same two variables (H7). The second part explores the influence of country of origin (in this particular case, by evaluating the respondent's preference for Portuguese products), price, social influence, organic nature and harmful ingredients usage factors in brand loyalty (hypotheses H8 to H12), with this last factor ultimately influencing the purchase intention regarding skincare products.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, several reasons lead consumers to search and use skincare products. Therefore, due to the importance and growth of this segment and type of products, the present study proposes the model presented below in Figure 1, establishing the antecedents and consequences when it comes to purchase intention and behavior of Portuguese individuals, since all of the factors referred before will weight on the on the consumer when choosing a skincare product.

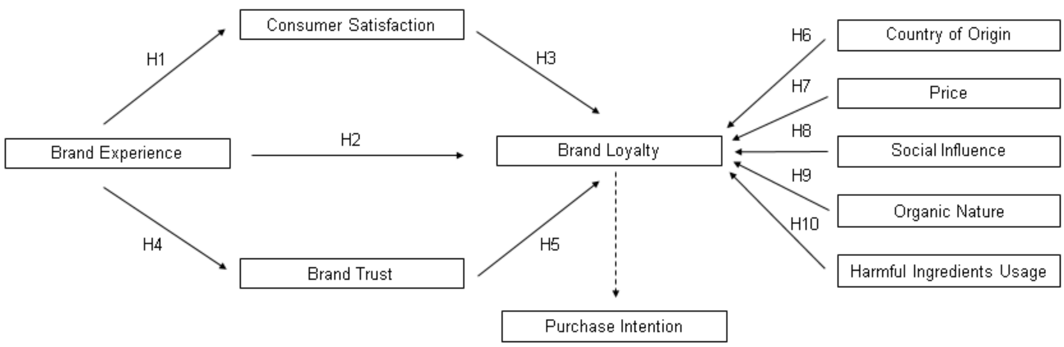

Figure 1 – Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

3.2. Research Hypotheses

On the basis of the literature review presented above, the following research hypotheses were formulated to be tested in this study:

H1: Brand experience has a significantly positive effect on consumer satisfaction.

H2: Brand experience has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty.

H3: Consumer satisfaction has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty.

H4: Brand experience has a significantly positive effect on brand trust.

H5: Brand trust has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty.

H6: Consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

H7: Brand trust mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

H8: Country of origin (preference for Portuguese products) has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

H9: Price has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

H10: Social influence has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

H11: The organic nature of skincare products has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

H12: The usage of harmful ingredients for health has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. TARGET

In order to perform this research, the data was collected through an online questionnaire in Qualtrics that targeted Portuguese women with ages between 18 and 65 years old. The reason a quantitative method was chosen, in this case, a questionnaire, is due to the fact that we can collect standardized data from a large population sample that we can easily compare in a very fast and economical way (Ponchio et al., 2021). This questionnaire was shared via link to the target sample above, in order to test the set hypotheses as well as to describe the consumer attitude, perceptions and behaviors on the concerned variables. The collection and analysis of the data will also allow us to understand the strategies that have an effect in the consumption of skincare products in Portugal. The survey was implemented in Portuguese, since the purpose is to analyze the buying behavior of Portuguese women that are expected to have experience regarding the use of skincare products or at least have an interest to use them, being also expected to be the decision makers when it comes to the purchase of these products for their personal use. In order to create some customer clusters, a set of demographic questions were presented at the end of the questionnaire, allowing us to know from which part of Portugal the respondents are.

4.2. RESEARCH PROCESS AND PROCEDURE

The measurement scales used in the study's construct development were adapted from previous studies, and the questions presented were either open-ended questions, multiple choice or questions where the measurement was made using seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (=strongly disagree) to 7 (=strongly agree). The reason behind the choice of a seven-point Likert scale instead of a five-point one is supported by existing literature on this type of scale that states that having in consideration the reliability of the responses from participants in a given survey, there is a high possibility that the seven-point scale will perform better due to the choice of items on scale determined by the survey's design (Chang, 1994; Joshi et al., 2015). In addition, the seven-point scale offers a higher variety of alternatives, increasing the probability to achieve results that match the objective reality of individuals. As a seven-point scale exposes more information about the motif, it appeals to the participants' "faculty of reason" (Chang, 1994; Cox, 1980).

The questionnaire was subjected to a pre-test of 31 people before it was published and sent to Portuguese women, in order to make sure that all the questions could be fully understood and that the link worked as intended. Only after this pre-test, an anonymous link for the final survey was sent to Portuguese women through email and social media channels such as LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook. It was also asked for the participants to share the anonymous link of the questionnaire with friends and members of their family that belonged to the intended target.

The questionnaire design (see Appendix 8.10) took into consideration all of the relevant factors derived from the literature review and consisted of five parts. The first part begins by asking respondents to indicate a skincare brand, and if possible, the specific product, that they have been using on a daily basis. Then, respondents were told to answer all subsequent questions with respect to that brand, where these questions measure brand experience, brand trust, consumer satisfaction, brand loyalty and also relate to their opinion regarding the weight that country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and harmful ingredients usage plays in the purchase decision of that skincare brand. The second part asks respondents to indicate a skincare brand they own but don´t use as often and the third part asks them about a skincare brand that they have never used but that someone they know (friend or family member) uses often. In these two last parts, it was also asked to specify the product if possible and all the subsequent questions were the same presented in the first part, measuring the same factors. Part four of the questionnaire consisted mostly in more specific questions about skincare preferences, focusing on gathering information about the determining factors that influence Portuguese women in their choice in skincare products. The last part of the data collection tool consists of gathering demographic data, asking the respondents about their age, higher level of education, occupational situation, income and residence area in Portugal.

5. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents

Regarding the results of this survey, the sample of the present study consists of 255 Portuguese women and Table 1 of the Appendix explores the socio-demographic characteristics of this sample in more detail. There we can see that the majority of the female respondents are aged between 18 and 28 years old (73.3%). When it comes to the higher level of education, they have at least a college level education with a bachelor's degree and a master's degree (45.7% and 44.4%, respectively). The results also let us know that the majority of the female respondents are working under a permanent employment contract (37.7%) or studying (26.5%), have a monthly income ranging from 1000€ to 2000€ (37.5%), which is a little above from the national average at the time of the questionnaire (665€). As for the geographical distribution of the sample, it can be seen that most of the women are from the Lisbon region (64.2%).

5.2. Data Analysis

With the intention of having a better understanding of the consumption habits of the respondents, questions were asked for this purpose, and all details regarding the characterization of the sample can be found from Table 2 to Table 7 of the Appendix, that reference the preferred type of skincare products and the main reasons behind their usage, the frequency of purchase and the main aspects that the respondents pay attention to when watching a skincare product advertising, the most referred brands during the survey and also the importance given to natural, vegan and cruelty-free products.

According to Table 2, the facial cream (21.3%) and the sun screen (17.5%) are the most preferred types of skincare products, closely followed by body lotion (16.8%) and cleanser (16%). Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents use skincare products for a healthy skin (57.2%) and to moisturize (22%) and with Table 4 we can conclude that most Portuguese women buy their skincare products once every three months (51.2%). Additionally, Table 5 indicates that the promised effects (30.2%), price (23.8%), brand (19.5%) and the usage of natural ingredients that are not harmful to health (18.1%) are the most important aspects that the respondents pay attention to in skincare products advertising. Table 6 of the Appendix displays the most referred brands during the questionnaire. The results indicate that when asked which brand the respondents used often, the majority referred Nivea (20.4%), followed by Bioderma (17.6%) and Garnier (10.6%). When asked to indicate a brand they own but don't use as often, the three most referred brands were The Ordinary (16.5%), Cien (12.9%) and O Boticário (11.4%). Lastly, the most referred brand when it was asked to the respondents to refer a brand someone they know uses often, Nivea (18%), Garnier (17.3%) and Bioderma (14.5%) were the top brands.

Finally, and given the current times and the literature review presented, the results obtained through the questionnaire also facilitated the gathering of information related to the importance that Portuguese women give to natural products, vegan products and cruelty-free products. The results obtained with question 11 of the questionnaire (where it was asked to classify several factors by the importance they play while planning to buy a skincare product, in a scale of 1- less important - to 7 -

most important), 61.6% of the respondents attributed a score of 5 or higher to the importance of a natural composition in a product. The same question also showed that 64.2% of the respondents allocated a score of 5 or higher to the importance of a product being vegan and not tested on animals. Question 12 of the survey (where respondents specified from a scale of 1 – strongly disagree – to 7 – strongly agree – with what intensity they agreed with a set of sentences, also demonstrated that most consumers are willing to pay more for a skincare product if this product is vegan (52.8% attributed a score of 5 or higher to this factor). These results express a growing concern for the usage of natural and vegan ingredients on products, also indicating a preference for cruelty-free products among Portuguese women. The expressed results concerning these variables are displayed in Table 7 of the Appendix.

In this particular study, to test hypotheses H1 to H5, a regression analysis was used, after all the preliminary analysis indicated that this test could be used on this particular sample. To further explore the variables presented in these hypotheses, a Paired Samples t-Test was also used, in order to compare the means within the participants' answers for all three scenarios and groups (group 1 – skincare brand they use often; group 2 – skincare brand they own but don´t use as often; group 3 – skincare brand that someone they know uses often). Using this statistical test, we were able to compare group 1 with group 2 and group 1 with group 3 for all variables. The reason this test was deemed adequate is the fact that the same group of respondents answered the same questions for three different scenarios that were described above and that can be considered in detail in Appendix 8.10. In order to analyze their responses, there was a need to compare the means of the three groups to see if there are any significant differences regarding brand experience, brand trust, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. With the purpose of making the most out of the data obtained through the questionnaire, a mediation analysis was also performed in order to test hypotheses H6 and H7, considering consumer satisfaction and brand trust as mediator variables while analyzing their effect on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

On the other hand, in order to test hypotheses H8 to H12, a regression analysis was again the method that made possible to accept or reject these hypotheses. A Pearson Correlation test was applied to the data before, allowing us to investigate the relationship between variables and examine the strength and direction of the relationship between them. The correlation coefficients (r) demonstrate the strength of association between two variables, which are suitable for hypotheses testing (Malhotra, 2007). In this particular case, the correlation between variables country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and use of harmful ingredients was explored. This analysis was made within the three different questionnaire groups once again, making it possible to examine the major differences between the groups.

5.3. Reliability Analysis and Preliminary Analysis

When testing the hypotheses set previously, there was a need to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, which was done through the use of Cronbach's Alpha, measuring internal consistency and establishing if certain items within a scale load into the same factor, measuring the same construct. The value of Cronbach's Alpha was determined using SPSS, measuring the average of quantifiable elements and their correlation. This value was determined to make sure that we could create a single variable that would measure brand experience, brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand loyalty and price of skincare products, since there was more than one item present in the scale of the questionnaire that was measuring these variables. To examine the three groups of the survey, the Cronbach's Alpha was calculated and applied to each of the groups as it is reflected in Table 8 of the Appendix, since we intend to study these variables in the three different contexts. For exploratory research, the value of this coefficient ranges between 0 and 1, with values above 0.7 being considered desirable and reliable (Pallant, 2020; Marôco, 2018). As it can be seen in Table 8 of the Appendix, all the values obtained using this method are higher than 0.7, which demonstrates good reliability and internal consistency for every variable.

With regard to the preliminary analysis, these were made in order to test the normality of all the variables under study and also to justify the use of parametric tests to study them. For this data, there were no severe deviations from normality found, with all variables presenting $|Sk| < 3$ and $|Ku| < 8$ (Kline, 2005). In addition, the Durbin-Watson value (between 2 and 4) was also deemed acceptable for all the variables within the three groups, indicating that there is no noticed autocorrelation in the data sample. Finally, multicollinearity analysis was also conducted, where VIF values were all below 5 and tolerance values were all above the recommended value of 0.10.

5.4. Hypotheses Testing

With the aim to understand our data and to test the proposed hypotheses, this study was divided into two different studies that derive from the presented conceptual model: the first will explore and test hypotheses H1 to H7 which include variables that have been more commonly tested and studied over the years (such as brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand trust) and ultimately their effect on brand loyalty; and the second will focus on the remaining hypotheses (H8 to H12), including variables that haven't been as discussed as the previous ones (country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and harmful ingredients usage) and their effect on brand loyalty regarding skincare products used by Portuguese women.

5.4.1. Testing hypotheses H1 to H5

5.4.1.1. Paired Samples t-Test

Firstly, and since we have three different groups in the questionnaire, where the same participants answered the same questions regarding three different contexts (in group 1 the questions refer to a brand they use often, group 2 to a brand they own but don't use as often and group 3 to a brand someone they know uses often), it was considered interesting to analyze variables brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty using a Paired Samples t-Test. By using this analysis, we compared group 1 with group 2 and group 1 with group 3 for all the mentioned variables, considering that each variable has the corresponding group number attributed (for instance, the variable BrandExperience_1 refers to the results of these variables in group 1, BrandExperience_2 refers to the results in group 2 and so on for each of the presented variables). Figures 2 to 9 present the output obtained through SPSS.

In Figure 2, we can see the results in SPSS after the Paired Samples t-Test was performed to compare the variable brand experience in the first group and in the second group.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BrandExperience_1	4,0874	183	1,32124	,09767
	BrandExperience_2	3,7486	183	1,32689	,09809

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	BrandExperience_1 - BrandExperience_2	,33880	1,46238	,10810	,12550	,55209	3,134	182	,001	,002

Figure 2 – Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Brand Experience in Groups 1 and 2

When conducting a Paired Samples t-test regarding brand experience between groups 1 and 2, we can conclude that this test was found to be statistically significant with t(182) =3.13, p=0.002. The results indicated that on average, brand experience in group 1 (M = 4.09, SD = 1.32) is significantly greater that brand experience on group 2 (M = 3.75, SD = 1.33). In addition, the 95% confidence interval includes zero, which means that a zero mean difference is well within the range of likely population outcomes.

In Figure 3, we can compare brand experience between groups 1 and 3.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BrandExperience_1	4,0404	165	1,35790	,10571
	BrandExperience_3	3,6626	165	1,47425	,11477

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	BrandExperience_1 - BrandExperience_3	,37778	1,49232	,11618	,14838	,60717	3,252	164	<,001	,001

Figure 3 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Brand Experience in Groups 1 and 3

In this case, the mean difference between groups 1 and 3 is also statistically significant (t(164) = 3.25, p<0.001), with the group answering after a brand they often use demonstrating a higher brand experience (M = 4.04, SD = 1.36) than the group answering after a brand that someone they know uses often (M = 3.66, SD = 1.47).

In Figures 4 and 5 are presented the results for the variable brand trust.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BrandTrust_1	5,4863	183	1,03168	,07626
	BrandTrust_2	4,7732	183	1,17047	,08652

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	BrandTrust_1 - BrandTrust_2	,71311	1,31598	,09728	,52117	,90506	7,331	182	<,001	<,001

Figure 4 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Brand Trust in Groups 1 and 2

For this variable, the mean difference between the two groups is statistically significant (t(182) = 7.33, p<0.001), with group 1 displaying a higher mean (M = 5.49, SD = 1.03) regarding brand trust in skincare products than group 2 (M = 4.77, SD = 1.17).

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BrandTrust_1	5,4394	165	1,02676	,07993
	BrandTrust_3	4,4394	165	1,36573	,10632

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	BrandTrust_1 - BrandTrust_3	1,00000	1,41529	,11018	,78245	1,21755	9,076	164	<,001	<,001

Figure 5 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Brand Trust in Groups 1 and 3

On the subject of group 1 and 3, the mean difference is also statistically significant for this variable (t(164) = 9.08, p<0.001), with group 1 displaying again a higher brand trust (M = 5.44, SD = 1.03) than group 3 (M = 4.44, SD = 1.37)

When we analyze the variable consumer satisfaction having always as reference group 1, we obtain the results displayed in Figures 6 and 7.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	ConsumerSatisfaction_1	5,7486	183	,89393	,06608
	ConsumerSatisfaction_2	4,7404	183	1,22232	,09036

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	ConsumerSatisfaction_1 - ConsumerSatisfaction_2	1,00820	1,34397	,09935	,81217	1,20422	10,148	182	<,001	<,001

Figure 6 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Consumer Satisfaction in Groups 1 and 2

As presented in the figure above, we can assume that the mean difference concerning consumer satisfaction between groups 1 and 2 is statistically significant (t(182) = 10.15, p<0.001), with this variable acquiring more relevance in group 1 (M = 5.75, SD = 0.89) than group 2 (M = 4.74, SD = 1.22).

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	ConsumerSatisfaction_1	5,6970	165	,89152	,06940
	ConsumerSatisfaction_3	4,1394	165	1,37440	,10700

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	ConsumerSatisfaction_1 - ConsumerSatisfaction_3	1,55758	1,48509	,11561	1,32929	1,78586	13,472	164	<,001	<,001

Figure 7 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Consumer Satisfaction in Groups 1 and 3

Between groups 1 and 3, the test in Figure 7 shows that there is also a statistically significant mean difference concerning consumer satisfaction ($t(164) = 13.47$, $p<0.001$), with consumer experience being more expressive in the group where the respondents answered after a product they use often ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 0.89$) than in the group where they answered after a brand that someone they know owns ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.37$).

The last variable to be analyzed with a Paired Samples t-Test is brand loyalty, as seen in Figures 8 and 9.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BrandLoyalty_1	4,3807	183	1,29484	,09572
	BrandLoyalty_2	3,0055	183	1,33903	,09898

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	BrandLoyalty_1 - BrandLoyalty_2	1,37523	1,68852	,12482	1,12895	1,62151	11,018	182	<,001	<,001

Figure 8 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Brand Loyalty in Groups 1 and 2

Between group 1 and 2, Figure 8 shows that there is a statistically significant mean difference ($t(182) = 11.02$, $p<0.001$), with group 1 demonstrating a higher brand loyalty regarding skincare products ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.29$) than group 2 ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.34$).

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BrandLoyalty_1	4,3475	165	1,30631	,10170
	BrandLoyalty_3	2,3879	165	1,21435	,09454

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	BrandLoyalty_1 - BrandLoyalty_3	1,95960	1,64777	,12828	1,70630	2,21289	15,276	164	<,001	<,001

Figure 9 - Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test for Brand Loyalty in Groups 1 and 3

The same happens for groups 1 and 3, where there is also a statistically significant mean difference ($t(164) = 15.28$, $p<0.001$), being this difference the most accentuated for this variable and with group 1 displaying the highest brand loyalty again (M = 4.35, SD = 1.31) when in comparison with group 3 (M = 2.39, SD = 1.21).

5.4.1.2. Correlation Analysis

After computing means and standard deviations for each variable tested from hypotheses H1 to H5, a correlation matrix of all these variables was created, being displayed in Table 9 of the Appendix, with means, standard deviations and correlations, with the use of a Pearson's Correlation test. This analysis was made prior to the regression analysis to check the viability of this test in order to accept or reject hypotheses H1 to H5. According to Table 9, in Group 1 most of the respondents expressed a higher level of consumer satisfaction (M = 5.68) regarding a product brand that they use often in their skincare routine. This was followed by brand trust (M = 5.39) and brand loyalty (M = 4.27), with brand experience being the lowest item (M = 4.00). On the other hand, in the group that refers to a product brand that isn't used as often, group 2, brand trust registered the higher value (M = 4.77), being closely followed by consumer satisfaction (M = 4.74) and then brand experience (M = 3.75). The lowest value is attributed to brand loyalty (M = 3.01). Finally, in group 3 where the respondents answered after a brand that someone they know uses often, brand trust registered the higher value (M = 4.44), being this variable followed by consumer satisfaction (M = 4.14), while brand experience (M = 3.66) and brand loyalty (M = 2.39) record the lowest results. After analyzing Table 9, we can also see that all the variables (brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty) have positive and statistically significant correlations in the level $P<0.01$.

5.4.1.3. Regression Analysis

To explore and test the proposed hypotheses from H1 to H5 that are part of the presented conceptual model, a regression analysis via SPSS was performed. In order to do it, three separate regression analysis were made for each of the three groups. In Model I, the regression analysis was made considering brand experience as the independent variable and consumer experience as the dependent variable. Table 10 presented below shows that, in the three groups, brand experience significantly predicted consumer satisfaction (group 1: $F = 20.718$; $R^2 = 0.076$; $P<0.001$; group 2: $F = 24.032$; $R^2 = 0.117$; $P<0.001$; group 3: $F = 145.218$; $R^2 = 0.471$; $P<0.001$). These results clearly show the positive effect of the independent variable on consumer satisfaction (group1: $P<0.001$; $\beta = 0.190$; group 2: $P<0.001$; $\beta = 0.315$; group3: $P<0.001$; $\beta = 0.640$). Therefore, H1 is supported by this study.

In Model II, the regression analysis had as dependent variable brand trust and as independent variable brand experience, in order to test H4 for each of the three groups. Once again, the regression model was statistically significant for the three groups, indicating that brand experience had significantly positive effect on brand trust, which supports H2 of this study, with Table 10 presenting the summary of these findings.

Model III presents a multiple linear regression with brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand trust as independent variables and brand loyalty as the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant for the three groups as confirmed from the values of Table 10, confirming that brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand trust have a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty. Thus, H2, H3 and H5 are accepted and supported by this study. The

Table 10 below also shows that Model III is the one with higher R^2 regardless of the group. In group 1, $R^2 = .445$, which depicts that the model explains 44.5% of the variance in brand loyalty; group 2 presents $R^2 = .415$, where 41.5% of the model explains the variance in the dependent variable; and in group 3, $R^2 = .412$, with 41.2% of the variance in brand loyalty being explained by model III. These results indicate that the variables that better predict brand loyalty are brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand trust.

TABLE 10: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Hypotheses Tested	Beta Coefficient	R^2	F	P-value	Hypothesis Supported
Group 1					
Model I					
H1	.190	.076	20.718	<.001	Yes
Model II					
H4	.260	.112	31.690	<.001	Yes
Model III					
H2	.164	.445	66.830	<.001	Yes
H3	.353	.445	66.830	<.001	Yes
H5	.455	.445	66.830	<.001	Yes
Group 2					
Model I					
H1	.315	.117	24.032	<.001	Yes
Model II					
H4	.323	.134	27.964	<.001	Yes
Model III					
H2	.287	.415	42.347	<.001	Yes
H3	.349	.415	42.347	<.001	Yes
H5	.225	.415	42.347	<.001	Yes
Group 3					
Model I					
H1	.640	.471	145.218	<.001	Yes
Model II					
H4	.518	.312	73.940	<.001	Yes
Model III					
H2	.225	.412	37.622	<.001	Yes
H3	.338	.412	37.622	<.001	Yes
H5	.045	.412	37.622	<.001	Yes

5.4.2. TESTING HYPOTHESES H6 AND H7 (MEDIATION ANALYSIS)

In order to test hypotheses H6 and H7 presented earlier in this paper, this study also examined two mediating effects, applied to each of the three groups of the questionnaire. In order to make this analysis, the Process Macro extension in SPSS was used and the results were interpreted according to the guidelines defined by Hayes (2018). The objective of this analysis was to examine the possible mediation effect of consumer satisfaction and brand trust (the mediators) on the relationship between brand experience (the independent variable, X) and brand loyalty (the dependent variable, Y). The first mediating effect that was analyzed was the effect of the mediator consumer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, as displayed below in Figure 10.

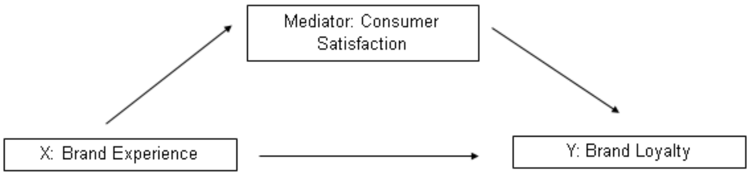

Figure 10 – Mediating effect with consumer satisfaction as mediator

The results obtained through SPSS allow us to observe the indirect effect of brand experience (X) on brand loyalty (Y) via the mediator variable consumer satisfaction. For group 1, the SPSS output for this analysis is presented below in Figure 11, for group 2 the results are in Figure 12 and group 3 has its results in Figure 13. The results were all deemed significant for every group (p-value ≤ 0.05).

The results presented below in Figures 11, 12 and 13 show that the total indirect effect of brand experience on brand loyalty through the mediator consumer satisfaction was significant in the three groups (group 1: Effect = 0.13; SE = 0.03; CI = 0.08 to 0.19; group 2: Effect = 0.16; SE = 0.05; CI = 0.07 to 0.25; group 3: Effect = 0.24; SE = 0.05; CI = 0.15 to 0.33). This leads to conclude that the higher the brand experience, the higher the brand loyalty or vice-versa through consumer satisfaction. These results lead us to accept the proposed H6.

```
************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI       c_cs
      ,3491      ,0552     6,3199      ,0000      ,2403      ,4579      ,3699

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI      c'_cs
      ,2155      ,0488     4,4178      ,0000      ,1194      ,3116      ,2283

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
             Effect     BootSE   BootLLCI   BootULCI
Consumer      ,1336      ,0299      ,0777      ,1956
```

Figure 11 – SPSS output for mediation analysis with mediator variable consumer satisfaction (group 1)

```
************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI       c_cs
      ,4699      ,0664     7,0795      ,0000      ,3390      ,6009      ,4657

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI      c'_cs
      ,3137      ,0621     5,0476      ,0000      ,1911      ,4363      ,3108

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
             Effect     BootSE   BootLLCI   BootULCI
Consumer      ,1563      ,0462      ,0701      ,2517
```

Figure 12 – SPSS output for mediation analysis with mediator variable consumer satisfaction (group 2)

```
************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI       c_cs
      ,4649      ,0533     8,7285      ,0000      ,3597      ,5701      ,5644

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI      c'_cs
      ,2284      ,0683     3,3444      ,0010      ,0935      ,3633      ,2773

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
             Effect     BootSE   BootLLCI   BootULCI
Consumer      ,2365      ,0464      ,1473      ,3296
```

Figure 13 – SPSS output for mediation analysis with mediator variable consumer satisfaction (group 3)

The second mediating effect studied was the one presented in Figure 14 below, where the mediator examined is now brand trust.

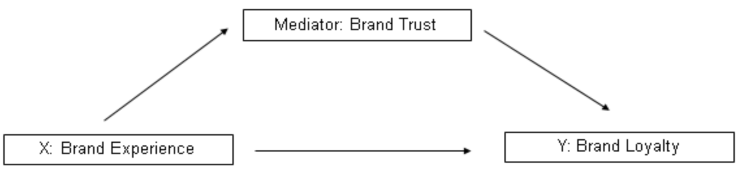

Figure 14 – Mediating effect with brand trust as mediator

The results obtained are presented below for group 1, 2 and 3 which correspond, respectively, to results from Figures 15, 16 and 17.

************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
,3491	,0552	6,3199	,0000	,2403	,4579	,3699

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_cs
,1731	,0484	3,5756	,0004	,0778	,2685	,1834

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
BrandTru	,1760	,0349	,1133	,2505

Figure 15 – SPSS output for mediation analysis with mediator variable brand trust (group 1)

************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
,4699	,0664	7,0795	,0000	,3390	,6009	,4657

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_cs
,3158	,0643	4,9149	,0000	,1890	,4426	,3130

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
BrandTru	,1541	,0377	,0823	,2309

Figure 16 – SPSS output for mediation analysis with mediator variable brand trust (group 2)

```
************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI       c_cs
      ,4649      ,0533     8,7285      ,0000      ,3597      ,5701      ,5644

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI      c'_cs
      ,3469      ,0622     5,5742      ,0000      ,2240      ,4698      ,4212

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
             Effect     BootSE   BootLLCI   BootULCI
BrandTru      ,1179      ,0390      ,0452      ,1992
```

Figure 17 – SPSS output for mediation analysis with mediator variable brand trust (group 3)

Similarly to what happened with the consumer satisfaction variable when studied as a mediator, having brand trust as a mediator also indicated that the total indirect effect of brand experience on brand loyalty through brand trust was also significant in the three groups (group 1: Effect = 0.18; SE = 0.04; CI = 0.11 to 0.25; group 2: Effect = 0.15; SE = 0.04; CI = 0.08 to 0.23; group 3: Effect = 0.12; SE = 0.04; CI = 0.045 to 0.19). This means that brand trust significantly mediates the relation between brand experience and brand loyalty, which means that H7 is accepted by this study.

5.4.3. Testing Hypotheses H8 to H12

5.4.3.1. Correlation Analysis

On the other hand, and with a focus on hypotheses H8 to H12, in Table 11 we can see the results obtained from Pearson Correlation Analysis, with the attributed p-value, between the variable brand loyalty and the independent variables country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and use of harmful ingredients. Table 11 also provides insights regarding these variables means and standard deviations. The results demonstrate that many of the independent variables are positively and strongly correlated with brand loyalty, with the variable price presenting the higher strength of association (0.5 < |r| < 1.0) at a significant level (p-value below 0.001) in the three groups according to Cohen's (1998) guidelines. The variables country of origin and social influence also present significative positive and strong correlations with brand loyalty in each of the three groups. Variables organic nature and use of harmful ingredients present a non-significant positive correlation with brand loyalty in group 1, a weak although significant positive correlation with brand loyalty in group 2 and a moderate and significant positive correlation with the dependent variable in group 3, as confirmed by the values in Table 11.

Table 11: Mean, Standard Deviation and Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (two-tailed)
Group 1				
Country of Origin	3.24	1.67	.569(**)	<.001
Price	4.20	1.52	.754(**)	<.001
Social Influence	3.35	1.61	.582(**)	<.001

Organic Nature	4.80	1.65	.109	.111
Use of Harmful Ingredients	1.55	1.06	.178	.004
Group 2				
Country of Origin	2.80	1.53	.536(**)	<.001
Price	2.69	1.35	.820(**)	<.001
Social Influence	2.64	1.47	.584(**)	<.001
Organic Nature	4.54	1.89	.280(**)	<.001
Use of Harmful Ingredients	1.50	1.17	.283(**)	<.001
Group 3				
Country of Origin	2.34	1.31	.690(**)	<.001
Price	2.28	1.25	.860(**)	<.001
Social Influence	2.48	1.38	.549(**)	<.001
Organic Nature	3.96	1.93	.446(**)	<.001
Use of Harmful Ingredients	1.57	1.27	.385(**)	<.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.4.3.2. Regression Analysis

After the correlation analysis, a multiple linear regression was employed with the aim to investigate the relationship between variables country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and use of harmful ingredients with brand loyalty, where the five independent variables are examined as the predictors of brand loyalty in each of the three groups. These variables are all part of model I, whose summary is presented below on Table 12. The R^2 value is very high for the three groups analyzed. In group 1, $R^2 = 0.610$, which means that model I reflects that 61.0% of the variance of brand loyalty is influenced by the tested independent variables. Group 2 and group 3 also present a high R^2 value of 0.690 and 0.793, respectively, which means that the model is a very good predictor of brand loyalty in the three different scenarios.

Table 12: Model Summary

Model Summary	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error of the Estimate
Group 1				
Model I	.781[a]	.610	.600	.873
Group 2				
Model I	.831[a]	.690	.679	.779
Group 3				
Model I	.890[a]	.793	.785	.594

a. Predictors: (constant), country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and use of harmful ingredients

b. Dependent variable: brand loyalty

The model's p-value of the F-test presented in Table 13 below confirms that the regression model is significantly predicted by at least one construct in every group (group 1: $F = 65.021$; p-value < 0.001; group 2: $F = 65.867$; p-value < 0.001; group 3: $F = 100.128$; p-value < 0.001).

TABLE 13: REGRESSION OF MODEL I

Regression (Model I)	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Group 1					
Model I	247.818	5	49.564	65.021	<.001
Group 2					
Model I	200.317	5	40.063	65.867	<.001
Group 3					
Model I	176.599	5	35.320	100.128	<.001

a. Dependent variable: brand loyalty

The value of the beta correlation and p-value that are presented in Table 14 below were used to test hypotheses H8, H9, H10, H11 and H12 regarding a significant effect on brand loyalty.

TABLE 14: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EACH VARIABLE AND BRAND LOYALTY

Model I	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	P-value
Group 1					
(Constant)	1.384	.244		5.670	<.001
Country of Origin	.175	.043	.219	4.053	<.001
Price	.464	.051	.532	9.061	<.001
Social Influence	.134	.047	.161	2.833	.005
Organic Nature	.000	.037	.000	-.003	.998
Use of Harmful Ingredients	-.030	.058	-.024	-.517	.606
Group 2					
(Constant)	.557	.194		2.878	.005
Country of Origin	.119	.051	.139	2.315	.022
Price	.710	.070	.725	10.083	<.001
Social Influence	-.022	.060	-.024	-.356	.722
Organic Nature	.058	.034	.080	1.682	.095
Use of Harmful Ingredients	.024	.058	.021	.414	.680
Group 3					
(Constant)	.032	.143		.223	.824
Country of Origin	.126	.056	.135	2.274	.025
Price	.636	.062	.654	10.321	<.001
Social Influence	.083	.043	.093	1.957	.052
Organic Nature	.099	.028	.148	3.463	<.001
Use of Harmful Ingredients	.033	.042	.034	.775	.440

With the results obtained, it was then possible to either reject or accept the five defined hypotheses.

H8: Country of origin (preference for Portuguese products) has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

According to Table 14, the only group where the p-value was below the significant level of 0.05 was group 1 (p-value < 0.001), reflecting that in this group there is a significant relationship between country of origin (preference for Portuguese products) and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the beta correlation is positive (Beta = 0.219), indicating a positive relationship between these two variables. Besides the fact that in both groups 2 and 3 the relationship between these variables isn't significant, since group 1 referred to the context where Portuguese women answered after a brand they use often and that they directly chose and purchased, this study considers that H8 is supported and the country of origin (preference for Portuguese products) has a significative influence on brand loyalty, which shows that Portuguese women demonstrate a preference towards Portuguese skincare products.

H9: Price has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

When it comes to the variable price, the p-value was lower than 0.001 in all groups, less than the significant level of 0.05, reflecting the significant relationship between price and brand loyalty. The beta correlation is also positive in every group (group 1: Beta = 0.532; group 2: Beta = 0.725; group 3: Beta = 0.654), which points to a positive relationship between price and brand loyalty. By looking at Table 14, we can also perceive that price was the variable with a higher beta correlation in every group and that reflected a significant relationship in every context represented by the three groups. Therefore, H9 is supported by this study, with the variable price being a very good predictor of brand loyalty and having a significant influence on this variable, being a valued factor by Portuguese women.

H10: Social influence has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

In the case of the variable social influence, only group 1 presented a p-value of 0.005 which is lower than the significant level of 0.05, being a lower p-value than the one attributed to the variables country of origin and price. Nevertheless, it reflects a significant relationship between social influence and brand loyalty, but a less significant one that the one demonstrated by country of origin and price. In addition, group 1 and 3 showed a positive beta correlation value (group 1: Beta = 0.161; group 2: Beta = 0.093), denoting a positive relationship, while group 2 (brand that the respondents didn't used as often) has a negative beta correction (group 2: Beta = -0.024), reflecting a negative relationship between social influence and brand loyalty when it comes to products that the respondents didn't use as often. Nonetheless, since group 1 is our reference context, H10 is supported by this study, with social influence having a significative influence on brand loyalty, being price the most important variable from the ones analyzed, when it comes to predicting brand loyalty among Portuguese women.

H11: The organic nature of skincare products has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

With regards to the organic nature of skincare products, the p-value was only significant in the third group (group 3: p-value < 0.001, less than the significant level of 0.05), being this the only group with a significant relationship between the independent variable and brand loyalty. Moreover, groups 2 and 3 displayed a positive yet low beta correlation (group 2: Beta = 0.080; group 3: Beta = 0.148), which indicates a positive relationship. However, the main group and the reference group in this study, group 1, presented a beta correlation of 0.000 (Beta = 0.000). Our H11 is thus rejected, implying that the organic nature of skincare products doesn't have a significative influence on brand loyalty and that Portuguese women don't consider this variable as a relevant one in a skincare product.

H12: The usage of harmful ingredients for health has a significative influence on brand loyalty.

The last variable to be analyzed, the usage of harmful ingredients for health, didn't provide a significant p-value in any group, as confirmed by Table 14. The beta correlation was negative in group 1 (Beta = -0.024) and positive and weak in groups 2 and 3 (group 2: Beta = 0.021; group 3: Beta = 0.034). Consequently, we can conclude that H12 is rejected by our study, since the usage of harmful ingredients for health doesn't have a significative influence on brand loyalty, meaning that Portuguese women aren't very bothered by the use of harmful components in their skincare products.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has provided various insights into the female consumer buying behavior in Portugal, with regards to skincare products. It is acknowledged by marketers that identifying and comprehending target customers and segments are crucial steps in differentiating items and boosting sales potential. Keeping this in mind, the goal of this study was to examine how brand loyalty factors affect the respondents' opinions of skincare brands, since brand loyalty is key for a business to maintain consumer awareness of its product and keep them from switching to other brands. The extensive literature review showed that there are various factors that can play an important role on buying behavior. As a matter of fact, since there are so many different perceptions when it comes to studying buying behavior, there was a need to choose among some factors for analysis, given that it would be very difficult to take into account every possible factor in just one study. Therefore, this paper chose to focus on a set number of factors that seemed to best relate to this research, investigating their impact on brand loyalty. The study of these factors was divided into two different studies, the first focusing on brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty; and the second examining the relationship and effect of country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and use of harmful ingredients in brand loyalty. Since there was very little theoretical information available that related and studied the influence of these variables on brand loyalty within the skincare market in Portugal, this study intended to fill in that gap, providing meaningful information to be explored and to also serve as a reference and starting point for future studies related to the theme.

In order to achieve the objectives defined previously, an online questionnaire was sent to Portuguese women with ages between 18 and 65 years old, whose results were later analyzed with the support of the statistical software IBM SPSS, enabling the characterization of the sample and the statistical analysis of the data as to make possible the testing of the hypotheses set formerly in this study.

The findings of this paper revealed that brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand trust have a significantly and positive effect on brand loyalty when it comes to skincare products, leading to the acceptance of hypotheses H2, H3 and H5. At the same time, the results also show that brand experience has a significantly positive effect on consumer satisfaction, which proves that H1 is accepted by this study, and that brand experience also has a significantly positive effect on brand trust, which results in the support of H4. The results for the variable brand experience and its effects on other variables are supported by what was predicted in previous studies regarding these variables, such as the findings from Zarantonello & Schmitt (2000), Has & Perks (2005) and Brakus et al. (2009). In this particular study brand experience is defined as the subjective reactions evoked by specific brand-related experiential features in different contexts. The results for the variable consumer satisfaction are also in corroboration with previous studies that also demonstrated that satisfaction with a given brand is one of the determinants of brand loyalty. Some papers that arrive to the same conclusions are, for instance, the studies of Mittal & Kamakura (2001) and Reichheld & Covey (2006). The effects of brand trust on brand loyalty have also been studied over the years, with authors such as Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) also concluding that brand trust leads to brand loyalty, being this last factor what drives the ongoing process of establishing and preserving a significant and valuable relationship established through trust. A customer that has trust in a brand is more likely to stay loyal to it, paying a premium price for that brand, purchasing new products launched by it in existing and new categories, and also to recommend the brand to others. In order to further explore the relationship between the mentioned variables, a mediation testing presented results that indicated that consumer satisfaction and brand trust mediate the brand experience effect on brand loyalty, supporting hypotheses H6 and H7.

The second part of this dissertation explored the effect of country of origin, price, social influence, organic nature and use of harmful ingredients on brand loyalty. The consequent results have supported the acceptance of hypotheses H8, H9 and H10, since country of origin (preference for Portuguese products), price and social influence proved to have a significative influence on brand loyalty in the context of skincare products, being the price the most relevant predictor, followed by country of origin and then social influence. These results are also aligned with the existing literature, especially when it comes to price, being a very important factor in the minds of consumer when choosing a skincare product. As for the organic nature and the usage of harmful ingredients for health, the results were different. Hypotheses H9 and H10 were rejected by this study, showing that these last two factors don't exert a significative influence on brand loyalty.

Another goal of this study was to constitute a knowledge base that could be used by companies that operate in the Portuguese market, since the ability to segment consumers and markets for brands and marketing communications can be aided by marketers' understanding of how loyalty factors may influence the consumer purchasing behavior. Companies can improve their marketing efforts to increase customer satisfaction and grow their client base by looking at how skincare products usage affects brand perceptions. Additionally, by discovering the brand personalities that draw customers, businesses can determine the qualities people seek in a product, which can then be employed to improve brand image.

6.1. Study Contribution and Importance

Regarding academic contributions, the current study seeks to fulfil a gap in the existing literature that never really sought to understand the Portuguese female skincare habits in depth. As a result, the research conducted in this paper explores the Portuguese consumer behavior towards the purchase of skincare products, increasing the existing knowledge about those intentions by analyzing which factors exert a more relevant influence on purchase intentions as well as the relationship between brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty in this market, adding value to the existing literature. The relevance of this study is further enhanced by the preponderant role that the Covid-19 pandemic played in the skincare market in Portugal, making the population rethink their skincare habits in light of the successive lockdowns and the continued use of face masks to contain the virus infection. As a result, the insights obtained analyze the skincare habits after the pandemic outbreak, something that lacks real and practical intelligence, especially in the Portuguese context. Therefore, this study ends up contributing to the knowledge advancement by assessing an unexplored context, while also providing practical knowledge for all the companies in the sector that operate in the Portuguese market, that can leverage on this data in order to make strategic decisions regarding their skincare products, adapting to the new trends and lifestyles of the Portuguese consumer.

6.2. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study and results present several limitations that can be explored in terms of future research. On the first hand, the conclusions were based on the findings related to the random sample of women that volunteered to answer the online questionnaire. As a result, not every demographic and behavioral profile in this market might be covered by this research, since the sample focused on Portuguese women between 18 and 65 years old, where lifestyle and income may present some relevant differences. The topics discussed above highlight the main limitations that can be pointed out in this study, which are the fact that it targets only women with Portuguese nationality. A future study could include studying other geographic regions or studying the male skincare market in Portugal. This last suggestion is supported by a study conducted by the beauty brand L'Oréal in 2022, which revealed that Portuguese men are increasingly demonstrating more concern when it comes to personal and beauty care, seeking beauty products in order to feel good about their image and themselves (L'Oréal Portugal, 2022). This trend could be further investigated, focusing the analysis on Portuguese men and the main factors when it comes to the choice and purchase of skincare products.

Since this study only focuses on the factors leading to the purchase of skincare products, another interesting path could be to study the post-purchase behavior regarding skincare products, studying what happens after the consumer purchases the product. Another research recommendation would be to compare and examine the differences in consumer behavior related to various types of skincare products.

Furthermore, another way to strengthen this study could be to conduct a study that included a qualitative approach in order to measure purchase intention, taking advantage of the benefits associated with the use of focus groups with the purpose of evaluating the barriers, perceptions and different backgrounds of the participants, which would add some value to the findings of the research.

To conclude, examining the connections between brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty is one of the main objectives of the current study. Nevertheless, it is also important to understand the impact that brand experience has on other brand related notions, which could be a starting point for future papers that could observe the relationships between brand experience and, for instance, brand attachment, brand reputation, brand equity and brand value, among other concepts.

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8. APPENDIX

8.1. Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-28	187	73.3%
29-39	38	14.9%
40-50	12	4.7%
51-61	11	4.3%
62-65	7	2.7%
Education level		
Bachelor's Degree	74	45.7%
Master's Degree	72	44.4%
High school	15	9.3%
PhD	1	0.6%
Occupation		
Working under permanent employment contract	61	37.7%
Student	43	26.5%
Student-worker	29	17.9%
Working under temporary employment contract	19	11.7%
Retired	6	3.7%
Unemployed	4	2.5%
Income		
1000€-2000€	60	37.5%
Under 665€	44	27.5%
665€-1000€	43	26.9%
2000€-3000€	10	6.3%
Over 3000€	3	1.9%
Portugal region		
Lisbon region	104	64.2%
Centre region	40	25.0%
North region	11	6.8%
Algarve region	5	3.1%
Alentejo region	2	1.2%

8.2. Table 2: Preferred Type of Skincare Products (respondents could choose more than one option)

Type of skincare products	Frequency	Percentage
Facial cream	163	21.3%
Sun screen	134	17.5%
Body lotion	129	16.8%
Cleanser	123	16.0%

Exfoliation cream	55	7.2%
Serums	48	6.3%
Eye cream	44	5.7%
Toner	37	4.8%
Anti-aging cream	21	2.7%
Makeup remover	3	0.4%
Hand cream	3	0.4%
Micellar water	1	0.1%
Body balm	1	0.1%
Lip balm	1	0.1%
Face essence	1	0.1%
Specific treatments/masks for skin problems	1	0.1%
Cleaning soap	1	0.1%
Foot cream	1	0.1%
For acne	1	0.1%
Self-tanner	1	0.1%

8.3. TABLE 3: MAIN REASONS FOR THE RESPONDENTS' USAGE OF SKINCARE PRODUCTS

Main reasons for the usage of skincare products	Frequency	Percentage
For a healthy skin	95	57.2%
To moisturize	36	22.0%
To treat a specific skin condition (e.g acne)	25	15.1%
To maintain a wrinkle-free skin	8	4.8%
To treat rosacea	1	0.6%
To go to the beach	1	0.6%

8.4. TABLE 4: FREQUENCY OF PURCHASE OF SKINCARE PRODUCTS

Frequency of purchase	Frequency	Percentage
Once every three months	85	51.2%
Once a month	48	28.9%
Once every six months	19	11.5%
More than once a month	11	6.6%
Once a year	1	0.6%
When necessary (which ranges from every month to once in a year)	1	0.6%
Rarely	1	0.6%

8.5. Table 5: Most Important Aspects In Skincare Products Advertising (respondents could choose three options)

Most important aspects in skincare advertising	Frequency	Percentage
Promised effects	132	30.2%
Price	104	23.8%
Brand	85	19.5%
Use of natural ingredients that are not harmful to health	79	18.1%
Package	15	3.4%
Country of origin	11	2.5%
Brand ambassador	5	1.1%
Being cruelty-free	2	0.5%
Having zero fragrance	1	0.2%
Being recommended by dermatologists	1	0.2%
Sustainability	1	0.2%
Being a specific product to treat my skin condition	1	0.2%

8.6. Table 6: Most Referred Skincare Brands During the Survey

Top 10 of the most referred skincare brands	Frequency	Percentage
Skincare brands respondents use often		
Nivea	52	20.4%
Bioderma	45	17.6%
Garnier	27	10.6%
La Roche Posay	20	7.8%
CeraVe	18	7.1%
Cien	16	6.3%
Avène	14	5.5%
Vichy	12	4.7%
Uriage	9	3.5%
L'Oréal	8	3.1%
Skincare brands respondents don’t use as often		
The Ordinary	42	16.5%
Cien	33	12.9%
O Boticário	29	11.4%
Bioderma	26	10.2%
Nivea	24	9.4%
The Body Shop	21	8.2%
My Label	19	7.5%
Rituals	16	6.3%
Clean & Clear	15	5.9%
L'Oréal	14	5.5%
Skincare brands that the respondents’ family members/friends use often		
Nivea	46	18.0%

Garnier	44	17.3%
Bioderma	37	14.5%
CeraVe	33	12.9%
La Roche Posay	31	12.2%
Vichy	29	11.4%
Cien	27	10.6%
Avène	25	9.8%
L'Oréal	18	7.1%
Eucerin	16	6.3%

8.7. Table 7: Importance of natural, vegan and cruelty-free products (above 5 scale)

	Frequency	Percentage
Question 11 of the questionnaire *		
Natural product (free of synthetic or artificial ingredients or additives).	101	61.6%
Product is not tested on animals/ is vegan (without animal origin ingredients).	106	64.2%
Question 12 of the questionnaire **		
I am willing to pay more for a skincare product if it consists completely of natural ingredients.	78	47.9%
I am willing to pay more for a skin care product if it is vegan (no animal ingredients and not tested on animals).	86	52.8%

*Importance above 5 attributed to the following (1=less important and 7=most important)
** Score above 5 regarding how strongly the respondents agreed with the sentences (1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree)

8.8. Table 8: Reliability Analysis with Cronbach's Alpha

Items	Brand Experience	Consumer Satisfaction	Brand Trust	Brand Loyalty
Group 1 (Brand that the respondent uses often)				
This brand is an emotional brand.	.840			
This brand stimulates my curiosity.	.852			
I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.	.835			
I expect to be satisfied if I buy this brand.		.892		
The products of this brand never disappoint me.		.892		
I believe that this brand is honest and sincere.			.914	

I believe that the promised effects will be met by this brand.			.914	
This brand would be my first choice when choosing among different skincare brands.				.802
I prefer to buy this brand, even if another brand has the same features and same quality.				.816
I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.				.849
Group 2 (Brand that the respondent don't use as often)				
This brand is an emotional brand.	.778			
This brand stimulates my curiosity.	.866			
I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.	.868			
I expect to be satisfied if I buy this brand.		.885		
The products of this brand never disappoint me.		.885		
I believe that this brand is honest and sincere.			.912	
I believe that the promised effects will be met by this brand.			.912	
This brand would be my first choice when choosing among different skincare brands.				.861
I prefer to buy this brand, even if another brand has the same features and same quality.				.874
I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.				.824
Group 3 (Brand that someone the respondent knows uses often)				
This brand is an emotional brand.	.823			
This brand stimulates my curiosity.	.814			
I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.	.919			
I expect to be satisfied if I buy this brand.		.911		
The products of this brand never disappoint me.		.911		
I believe that this brand is honest and sincere.			.940	

I believe that the promised effects will be met by this brand.			.940	
This brand would be my first choice when choosing among different skincare brands.				.894
I prefer to buy this brand, even if another brand has the same features and same quality.				.911
I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.				.836

8.9. Table 9: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Analysis

	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3
	Group 1					
1	Brand experience	4.00	1.42			
2	Consumer satisfaction	5.68	0.98	.276(**)		
3	Brand trust	5.39	1.10	.334(**)	.722(**)	
4	Brand loyalty	4.27	1.34	.370(**)	.577**)	.619(**)
	Group 2					
1	Brand experience	3.75	1.33			
2	Consumer satisfaction	4.74	1.22	.342(**)		
3	Brand trust	4.77	1.17	.366(**)	.726(**)	
4	Brand loyalty	3.01	1.34	.466(**)	.559(**)	.532(**)
	Group 3					
1	Brand experience	3.66	1.47			
2	Consumer satisfaction	4.14	1.37	.686(**)		
3	Brand trust	4.44	1.37	.559(**)	.753(**)	
4	Brand loyalty	2.39	1.21	.564(**)	.609(**)	.492(**)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

8.10. English Version of the Questionnaire

Hello, I'm a student at NOVA IMS and if you are a Portuguese woman, I would like to ask for your help in completing this questionnaire about your skin habits. It will only take about 5-8 minutes of your time and will be of great help in completing my master thesis. The answers are completely anonymous and all the information collected will be treated confidentially, for academic purposes only. Thank you very much for your participation!

Next you will find 3 starter questions where you will be asked to name 3 brands of a skin product in 3 different contexts. Please note that afterwards each of these questions will have a set of questions (assigning a scale of 1 to 7 to certain statements) that will be identical for the 3 contexts.

Part 1

1. Please indicate a skincare brand that you have been using on a daily basis (if possible, specify the exact product name)._

2. Keeping the brand you referred before in mind, answer the following questions by attributing a number from 1 to 7, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”.

   This brand is an emotional brand._
   This brand stimulates my curiosity._
   I find this brand interesting in a sensory way._
   I believe that this brand is honest and sincere._
   I believe that the promised effects will be met by this brand._
   I expect to be satisfied if I buy this brand._
   The products of this brand never disappoint me._
   This brand would be my first choice when choosing among different skincare brands._
   The price of this brand is something that weighs on my decision to buy it._
   I prefer to buy this brand, even if another brand has the same features and same quality._
   I would shift to other brands if someone, a friend or family member, recommended that to me._
   The use of ingredients that are considered harmful to skin is something I care about when buying this brand._
   I would be more willing to buy this brand if it was “made in Portugal”._
   I consider myself to be loyal to this brand._
   I would be more willing to buy this brand if it had a totally organic composition._

Part 2

3. Please indicate a skincare brand that you own but don’t use as often (if possible, specify the exact product name)._

4. Keeping the brand you referred before in mind, answer the following questions by attributing a number from 1 to 7, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”.

   This brand is an emotional brand._
   This brand stimulates my curiosity._
   I find this brand interesting in a sensory way._
   I believe that this brand is honest and sincere._
   I believe that the promised effects will be met by this brand._
   I expect to be satisfied if I buy this brand._
   The products of this brand never disappoint me._
   This brand would be my first choice when choosing among different skincare brands._
   The price of this brand is something that weighs on my decision to buy it._
   I prefer to buy this brand, even if another brand has the same features and same quality._
   I would shift to other brands if someone, a friend or family member, recommended that to me._
   The use of ingredients that are considered harmful to skin is something I care about when buying this brand._
   I would be more willing to buy this brand if it was “made in Portugal”._
   I consider myself to be loyal to this brand._
   I would be more willing to buy this brand if it had a totally organic composition._

Part 3

5. Please indicate a skincare brand that you have never used but that someone you know (friend or family member) uses often._

6. Keeping the brand you referred before in mind, answer the following questions by attributing a number from 1 to 7, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”.
   This brand is an emotional brand._
   This brand stimulates my curiosity._
   I find this brand interesting in a sensory way._
   I believe that this brand is honest and sincere._
   I believe that the promised effects will be met by this brand._
   I expect to be satisfied if I buy this brand._
   The products of this brand never disappoint me._
   This brand would be my first choice when choosing among different skincare brands._
   The price of this brand is something that weighs on my decision to buy it._
   I prefer to buy this brand, even if another brand has the same features and same quality._
   I would shift to other brands if someone, a friend or family member, recommended that to me._
   The use of ingredients that are considered harmful to skin is something I care about when buying this brand._
   I would be more willing to buy this brand if it was “made in Portugal”._
   I consider myself to be loyal to this brand._
   I would be more willing to buy this brand if it had a totally organic composition._

Part 4

7. What type of skincare products do you use? (you can choose more than one option):

   Facial cream_
   Body lotion_
   Eye cream_
   Serums_
   Sun screen_
   Exfoliation cream_
   Cleanser_
   Toner_
   Anti-aging cream_
   Other (please specify)_

8. What is the main reason for your usage of skincare products?

   For a healthy skin_
   To treat a specific skin condition (e.g acne)_
   To maintain a wrinkle-free skin_
   To moisturize_
   Other (please specify)_

9. How often do you purchase skincare products?

More than once a month_
Once a month_
Once every three months_
Once every six months_
Once a year_
Other (please specify)_

10. To which aspects do you mostly pay attention in a skincare product advertising? (Choose the three most important for you):

    Brand_
    Promised effects_
    Package_
    Brand ambassador_
    Use of natural ingredients that are not harmful to health_
    Price_
    Country of origin_
    Other (please specify)_

11. Please classify the following factors by the importance they play when you plan to buy a skincare product (1 = Less Important until 7 = Most Important).

    Product quality: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Brand: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Price: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Being a Portuguese product: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Product recommend by a friend/family member: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Product advertised by a celebrity I like: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Usage of ingredients that are not harmful to health: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Natural product (free of synthetic or artificial ingredients or additives): 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    Product is not tested on animals/ is vegan (without animal origin ingredients): 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_
    The product is suitable to my skin type: 1_ 2_ 3_ 4_ 5_ 6_ 7_

12. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following sentences by using a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”.
    Expensive skincare products are better than cheaper ones._
    If I am satisfied with a skincare product from a specific brand I purchased, I would be more prone to buy other products from that brand._
    The opinions and recommendations of friends influence the skincare products I purchase._
    I believe that skincare products that only contain natural ingredients are better for skin that products that don´t contain natural ingredients._
    I am willing to pay more for a skincare product if it consists completely of natural ingredients._
    I am more likely to buy a skin care product that only contains organic products in its composition (organic = no harmful fertilizers or pesticides were used in agriculture).
    I am willing to pay more for a skincare product if it consists completely of organic ingredients._
    I am willing to pay more for a skin care product if it is vegan (no animal ingredients and not tested on animals)._

13. What is your skin type?

Normal skin_
Oily skin_
Dry skin_
Combination skin_
Sensitive skin_
I don't know_

Part 5 - Demographic section

14. What is your age? (please insert only numeric values)

15. What is your higher level of education?

Elementary school_
High school_
Bachelor's degree_
Master's degree_
Doctorate's degree_

16. What is your occupational situation?

Student_
Working under temporary employment contract_
Working under permanent employment contract_
Student-worker_
Unemployed_
Retired_

17. Income level per month (including allowance from parents and salary):

Under 665€_
665€-1000€_
1000€-2000€_
2000€-3000€_
Above 3000€_

18. From which part of Portugal are you from?
North region_
Lisbon region_
Centre region_
Alentejo region_
Algarve region_
Madeira Autonomous region_
Azores Autonomous region_