

# How Consumer Choice is Influenced by Labor and Environmental Conditions in the Global Cosmetics Industry: A Study of Students' Purchasing Decisions at the University of Victoria

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## Introduction

**Research Question:** How are consumers' purchasing decisions impacted by knowledge about labor and environmental conditions in the cosmetics industry?

Existing literature identifies several factors that may influence consumers' purchasing decisions, including attitude, social pressure, product knowledge, emotional and sensory experience, environmental and health benefits, price, perceived value, and function of the product. However, these studies often do not include all the factors mentioned, and they are limited to countries in which cosmetics products are manufactured. Furthermore, these studies often have a limited sample size. Thus, there is a need for further studies that examine the connection between consumer choice and labor and environmental conditions in the cosmetics industry. This project will offer a unique evaluation of the purchasing patterns of students at the University of Victoria.

## Objectives

1. What types of cosmetics products students at the University of Victoria use? How many cosmetics products do students use?
2. Does knowledge about labor and environmental regulations in the cosmetics industry impacts students' purchasing decisions?

## Methodology

During my study, I conducted a questionnaire and series of interviews to gather information about what cosmetics students at the University of Victoria use, and what factors influence their purchasing decisions. The questionnaire was composed of multiple choice, ranked, and open-ended questions. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given the option to indicate interest in participating in a follow-up interview, and a few participants were randomly selected to do so. The interview questions were open-ended and allowed students to reflect on their use and knowledge of cosmetics products in-depth. Together, the questionnaire and interviews reveal what students at the University of Victoria know about the cosmetics industry, and what factors influence their purchasing decisions.

## Online Questionnaire

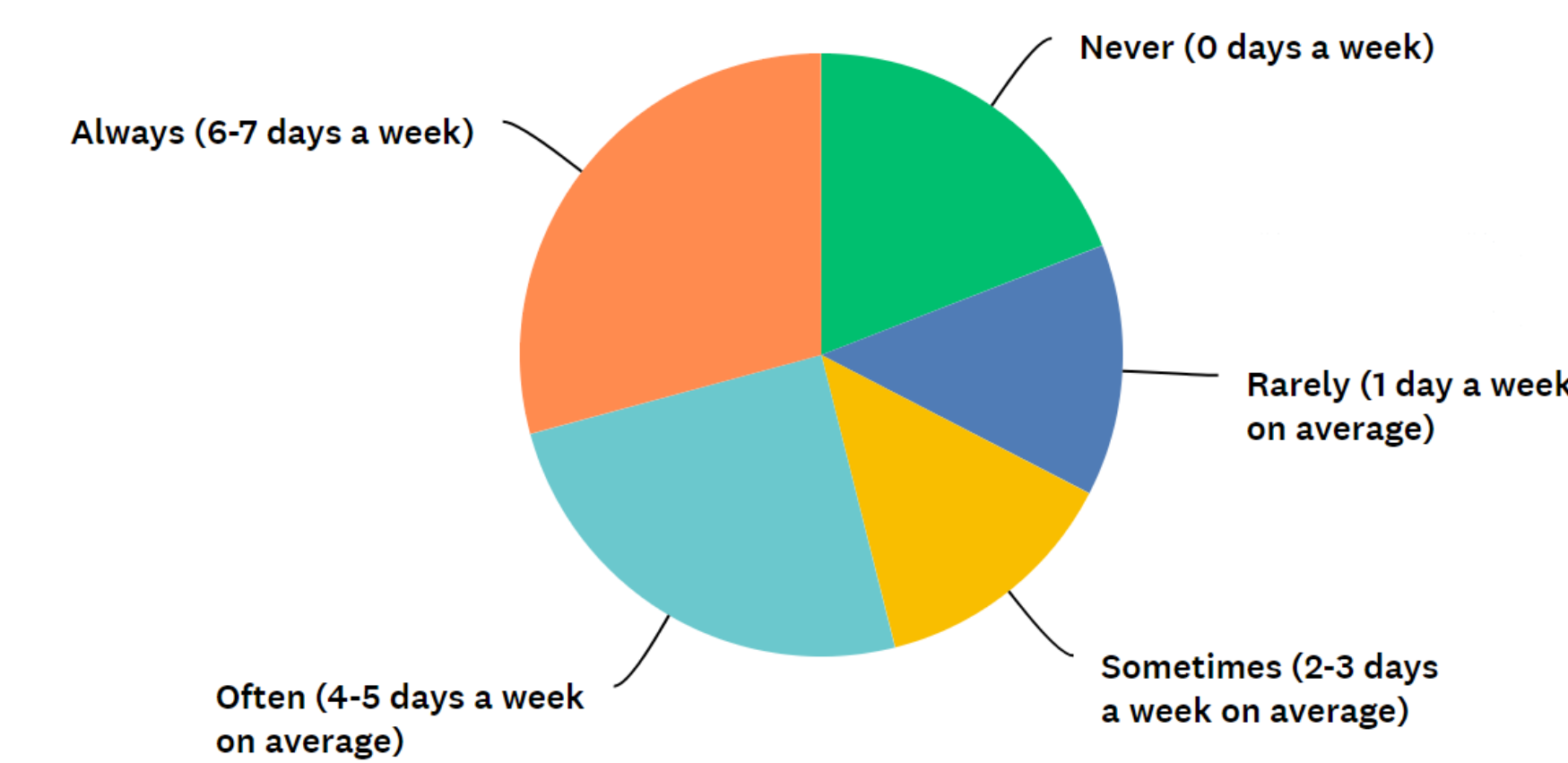
1. How often do you use cosmetics products?
2. What types of cosmetics products do you use? Select all that apply
3. What brands do you purchase cosmetics products from?
4. How many cosmetics products do you buy a month?
5. What factors influence what cosmetics products you purchase? (ranked)
6. How much, on average, do you spend a month on cosmetics products?
7. Do you avoid purchasing any specific cosmetics products? If so, what are they, and why?
8. Do you avoid purchasing from any specific cosmetics brands? If so, what are they, and why?
9. For those who answer that they "never" or "very rarely" wear makeup: Why do you not frequently wear makeup?
10. For those who answer that they "never" or "very rarely" wear makeup: Do you have any thoughts about the cosmetics industry? Please explain.
11. Would you be interested in participating in a 30-60 minute interview about your thoughts about the cosmetics industry and use of cosmetics products?

All participants were asked the first and last questions. If a participant selected "rarely" or "never" in response to the first question, they would be directed to questions nine, ten, and eleven. If a participant selected "sometimes," "often," or "always" in response to the first question, they would be directed to questions 2-8 and eleven.

## Results/Findings

How often do you use cosmetics products?

Answered: 89 Skipped: 0

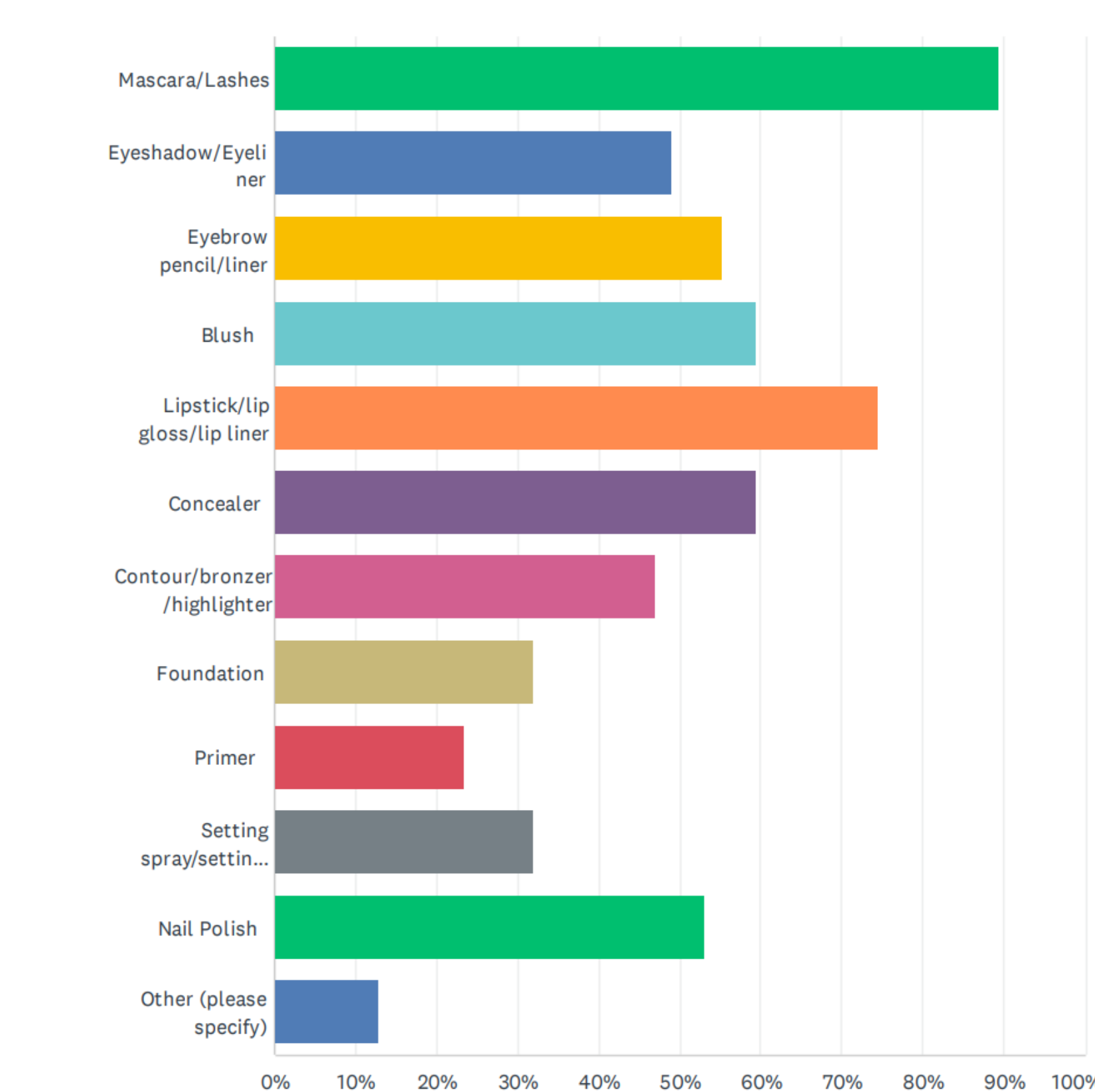


### Key Findings

- Nearly 30% participants responded that they "always" use cosmetics products
- Over 50% participants reported that they use cosmetics four or more days per week
- 94% respondents purchase an average of 1-4 cosmetics products per month
- 87% respondents spend less than \$50 per month on cosmetics products

What types of cosmetics products do you use? Select all that apply

Answered: 47 Skipped: 42

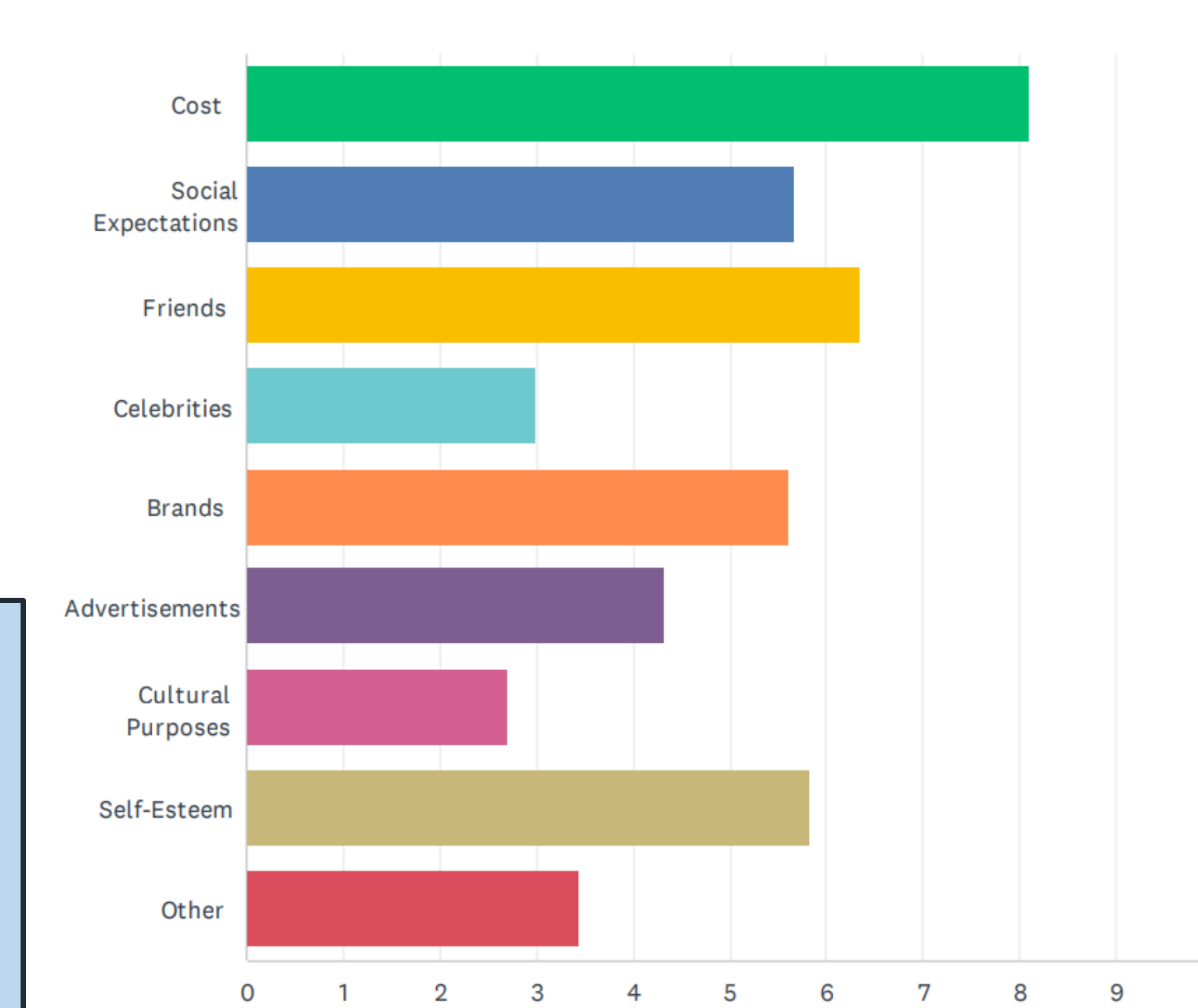


### Interview Findings

- Ten students were contacted and five students confirmed interest in participating in an interview, but only two interviewees attended their scheduled interviews
- Both students used cosmetics products everyday, and both students did not have any knowledge about where ingredients in their cosmetics products were sourced, or what labor and environmental conditions they were manufactured in
- Two interviewees is too small of a sample size to draw any general conclusions about the student body
- Further research could expand on this project by conducting several, more in-depth interviews over a longer period of time

What factors influence what cosmetics products you purchase? (ranked)

Answered: 46 Skipped: 43



### Findings from Open-Ended Questions

**"Do you avoid purchasing any specific cosmetics products? If so, what are they, and why?"**

- 56% participants skipped this question
- Responses included: Not avoiding any specific products; avoiding products that the consumer was allergic or sensitive to, and; avoiding products with undesirable performance
- Seven respondents reported avoiding products that were tested on animals
- Outlier responses included: Purchasing vegan products; avoiding products from brands that were "criticized for racism," and; avoiding products that were not environmentally conscious

**"Do you avoid purchasing from any specific cosmetics brands? If so, what are they, and why?"**

- 54% participants did not respond to this question
- Most respondents indicated they did not avoid purchasing products from specific brands
- Aversion from particular brands is due to: Allergic reactions; poor performance of the products; celebrity branding; and animal cruelty

**"For those who answer that they 'never' or 'very rarely' wear makeup: Why do you not frequently wear makeup?"**

- Not feeling compelled to wear cosmetics products due to masculine gender roles
- Feeling that wearing cosmetics products frequently was a waste of time
- Concerns about the cosmetics industry being exploitative and making money from people's insecurities
- Not having the skills to apply make-up
- Feeling uncomfortable when wearing cosmetics products
- Feeling that makeup application is unsanitary

**"For those who answer that they 'never' or 'very rarely' wear makeup: Do you have any thoughts about the cosmetics industry? Please explain."**

- Nearly 50% of these written responses mentioned concerns about human rights or the environment.
- Human rights and environmental concerns were almost always presented at the end of a list of other personal concerns

## Discussion/Conclusion

### Key Findings

- Cost was ranked as the most important factor students consider when purchasing cosmetics products
- Allergies and sensitivities, animal cruelty, and product performance were listed as additional factors students consider when making cosmetics purchasing decisions
- A higher percentage of students who "never" or "rarely" used cosmetics products cited concerns about labor and environmental impacts of purchasing cosmetics products than students who used cosmetics products "sometimes," "often," and "always"
- Responses from the open-ended questions suggest that the primary focus of cosmetics consumers when purchasing products is cost and the performance of the products, rather than political or environmental concerns
- The data collected in this study is consistent with the findings of numerous other studies on consumer behavior in the cosmetics industry that identify cost as the most significant factor consumers consider when purchasing cosmetics products.

These findings suggest that most students who "sometimes," "often," and "always" use cosmetics products are unaware of or do not consider unethical labor and environmental practices in the cosmetics industry when making purchasing decisions. Supply chain transparency must be increased so consumers can make more informed decisions about the products they purchase.

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