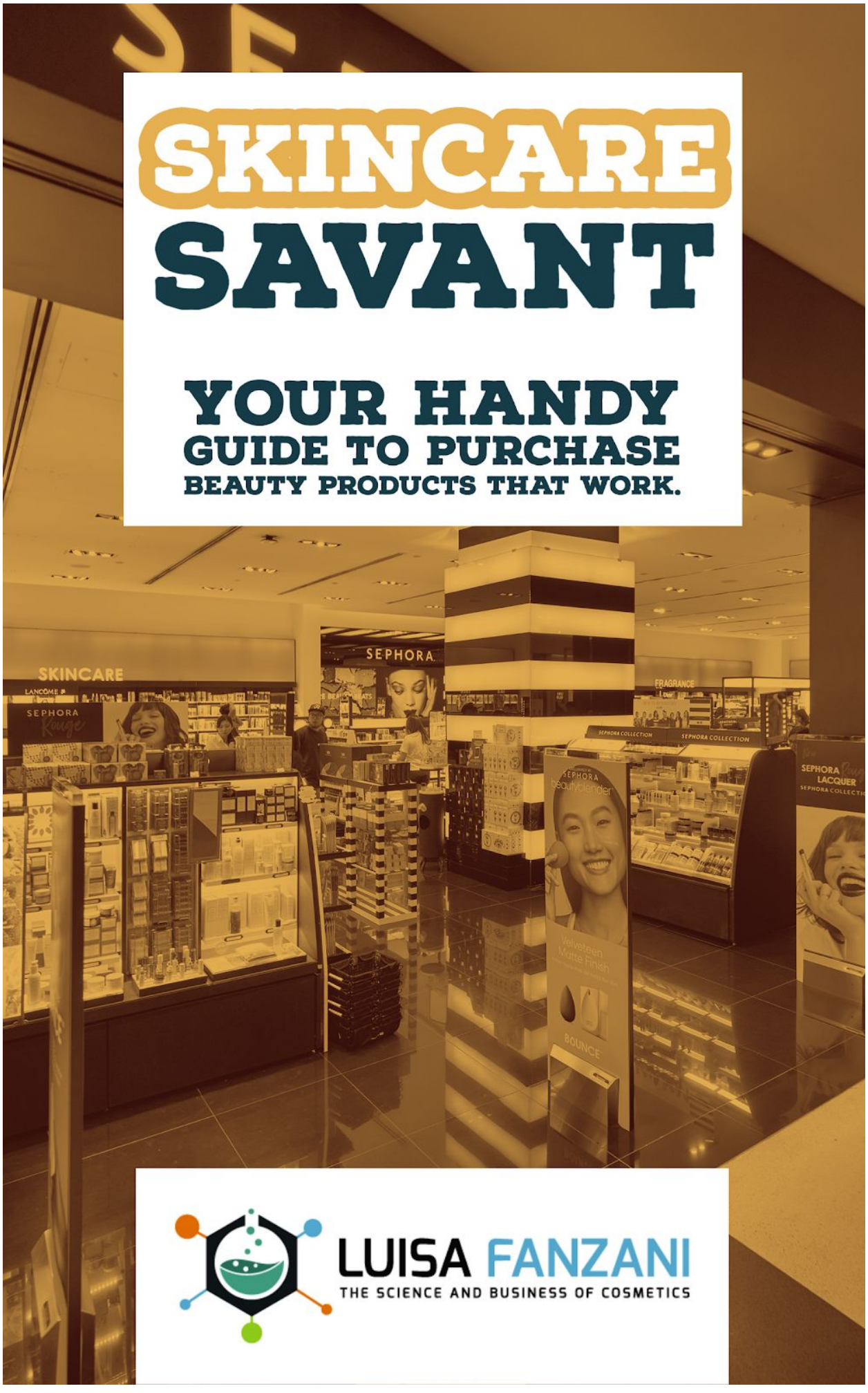
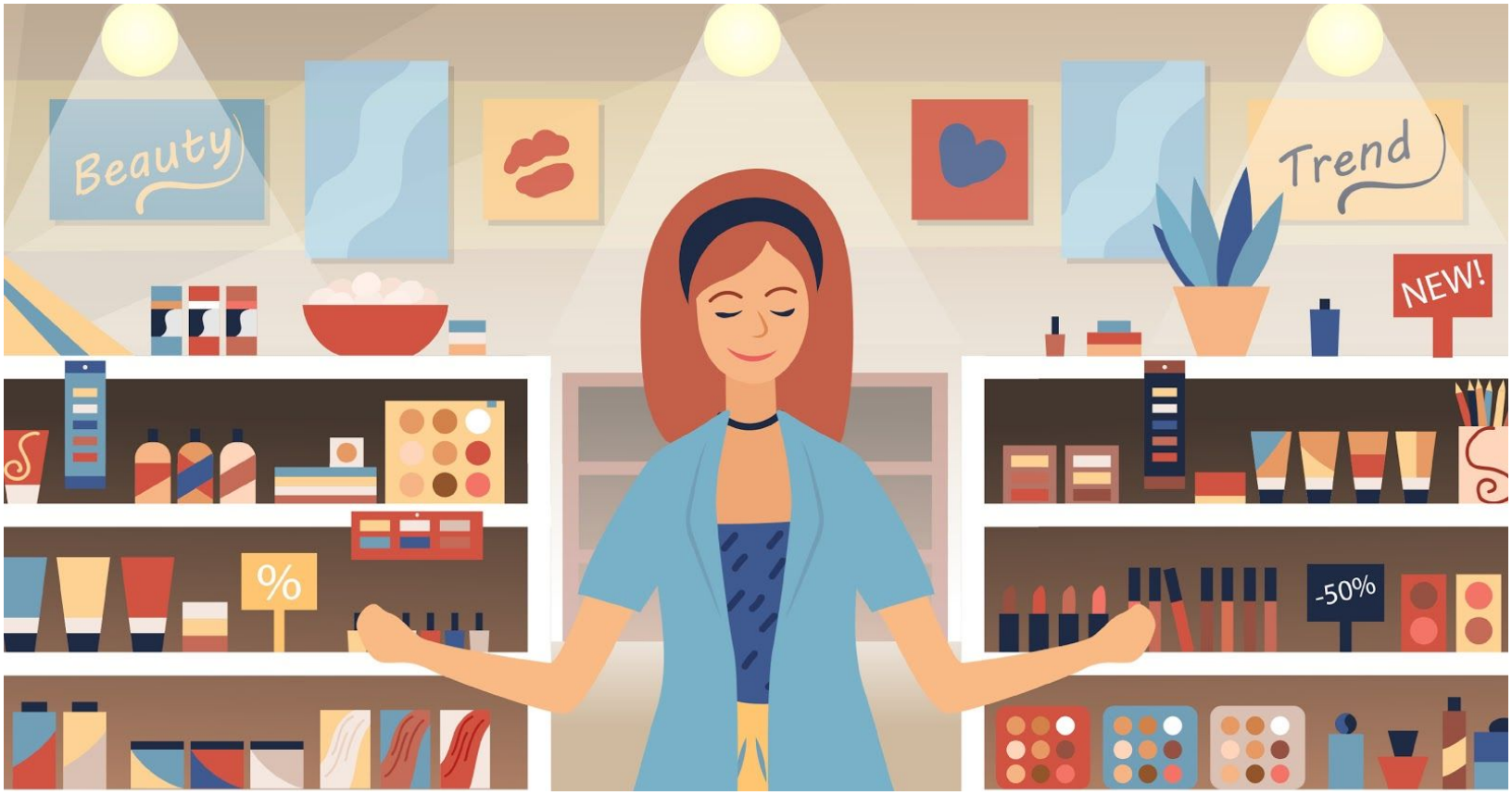
SKINCARE SAVANT

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO PURCHASE BEAUTY PRODUCTS THAT WORK.



LUISA FANZANI
THE SCIENCE AND BUSINESS OF COSMETICS



Beauty products are everywhere

Introduction

Target, Walmart, Amazon, you name it...the amount of skincare brands and products that big box stores offer is astonishing.

Shopping online? Even worse!

There are 30x more products online compared to what's available in Italy where, for the most part, people still shop at the local small pharmacy or market where a sales lady recommends products to buy.

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As a cosmetic chemist and industry expert, I'm all too well aware of the dirty marketing tactics that companies use to sell their products. So, I want to teach you how to make informed decisions when it comes to beauty products so:

1) You reach your skincare goals without feeling overwhelmed and stressed after a shopping session at Sephora.
2) You stop wasting money on products that don't deliver.
3) You gain the confidence of leaving the house without makeup.
4) Your friends, family members, and others will recognize you as a "skin guru" and ask for your opinions and feedback.
5) You gain the knowledge you need to control how your skin looks, rather than having cosmetic companies control you.

As I've already mentioned, the beauty industry offers so many products that there will be exceptions to what I share with you here. But remember: *exceptions are not the norm* and should be considered for what *they are: extremely rare cases*.

> Your skin is a precise reflection of what's going on in your life.
>
> -Luisa Fanzani

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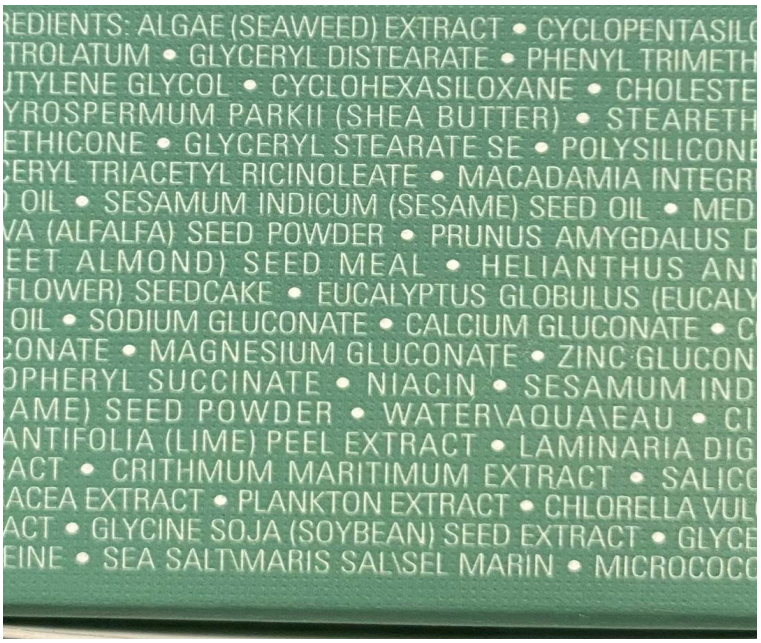
These are the 5 elements to evaluate when choosing skincare products.



The ingredients.

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Ingredients are listed in descending order; that is, the ingredient with the highest % is the first you'll see on the ingredients panel. Here's what you need to know:

1) **The backbone of a formula is made of its first 4 or 5 ingredients.** All ingredients that follow may be present in such low amounts that you wouldn't notice if they weren't there at all. (They are ineffective in such small amounts.) But not all ingredients need to be present in high amounts to be effective. This the case with peptides, for example, which are okay to find at the bottom of the panel.

Another thing you must know to interpret an ingredients panel is that ingredients below 1% don't need to be listed in any particular order. This is important because sometimes an ingredient listed in the middle of the panel exists in a super-low amount, too, sometimes as low as 0.001%.

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Here's an illustration as just one example. This is the ingredients panel of a popular serum:

Camellia Sinensis (Green And White Tea) Leaf Extract, True Botanicals Bioferment™ [Water, Alaria (Seaweed), Sodium Chloride], Santalum Album (Sandalwood) Water, Glycerin ,Cucurbita Pepo ***(Pumpkin) Seed Oil****, Squalane Glucosamine ,Tocopherol ,Algin ,Niacinamide , Phenethyl Alcohol, Salix Nigra (Black Willow) Bark Extract, Helichrysum Stoechas (Helichrysum) Extract, Olea Europea (Olive) Leaf Extract, Sodium Hyaluronate, Magnesium Ascorbyl Phosphate Ethylhexglycerin, Rosmarinus Officinalis (Rosemary) Leaf Extract, Xanthan Gum, Propanediol, Lavendula Hybrida (Lavender) Oil.*

The first three ingredients are all fancy names for... **water**. I've highlighted the pumpkin seed oil because, most likely, it is where the 1% and less ingredients start.

This is also an example of an overpriced product.

Again, I highlighted pumpkin seed oil because, in my opinion, it is where the 1% starts. I came to this conclusion knowing that glycerin is usually never higher than 4% and tocopherol is rarely higher than 1%.

I don't see an emulsifier in this list. (Emulsifiers are what keep water and oil from separating.) IF/WHEN there's no emulsifier, oil is present in very low amounts; if that weren't the case, the oil would float separately on the surface, away from the other ingredients. EWWW!

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The above-described product retails for $140!!!!!

My suggestion? **Opt for products that clearly state the amount of active ingredients.**

Ingredients are important, but they don't tell the whole story.

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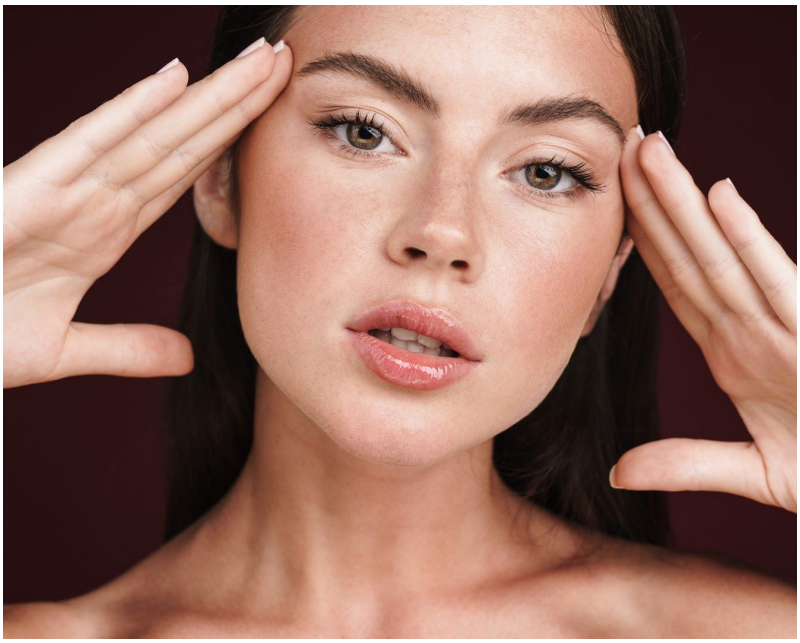
The second factor to consider is



The claims.

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Claims are important because they give you the bigger picture.

Ask yourself the following:

What's the product promising? Is it a reasonable claim, or a word salad signifying nothing?

Let's use the same product example shown above because we're already familiar with its ingredients. The claims the company makes about the product page follow:

WHAT IT IS: Wake up to clearer, more youthful looking skin. Our Clear Repair Serum is a concentrated powerhouse that visibly improves skin clarity and moisture while helping treat breakouts and blemishes. Naturally scented with sandalwood, helichrysum, and cypress to invigorate the senses.

BEST FOR: All Skin Types

ADDRESSES: Breakouts and Blemishes, Fine Lines and Wrinkles

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Are these claims reasonable, based on the ingredients?

Not really.
Here's why.

- "Improves skin clarity." I don't see any brightening ingredient on the panel. There's some vitamin C, but at less than 1%, it's not active as a brightening agent.

-" Improves moisture." This claim **makes sense** since there's some glycerin and hyaluronic acid.

-"Treat breakouts and blemishes". The word "treat" is misleading. It makes you think this product will help you with acne; it won't! Despite what they say, willow bark extract isn't a viable alternative for salicylic acid. If it really was as effective but less irritating, only an idiot would continue to use salicylic acid. Think about it! And essential oils are known to be skin irritants, so they're something to avoid if you already have blemishes and breakouts!

Let's see what else they say about the product:

WHY IT WORKS

Traditional blemish treatments only target one thing—blemishes—without addressing your overall skin health. Fortunately, our face serum does both. Skin-strengthening hyaluronic acid, which can hold up to 1,000 times its weight in water, combines with clearing, replenishing, and restorative ingredients.

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Ahem!!!

They can't be possibly be claiming that their 90% water product is "fixing skin health", but that's exactly the message they're conveying without saying which ingredients are "restorative and replenishing." Only hyaluronic acid addresses skin hydration.

How do they prove their claims? In this case, the company mentions some double-blind clinical studies. While the term leads us to imagine the rigor and accuracy of pharmaceutical tests, the reality is very different.

Renew Pure Radiance Oil + Renew Repair Serum Really Performs (and outperforms Crème de La Mer, too)
In an Independent Scientific Clinical Study (a randomized, comparative, double blind trial conducted October 20 – December 10, 2013), we learned that Renew Pure Radiance Oil + Renew Repair Serum not only delivers amazing results, it also out performs the iconic Crème de La Mer across every test measurement—from increased hydration to reduction in visible fine lines and wrinkles.

Summary of Results

After 45 days:	**Renew Duo**	**La Mer**
Increase of hydration	48.8%	36.4%
Reduction in appearance of fine lines and wrinkles	27.2%	17.6%
Increase in appearance of smoothness	20.5%	18.0%
Increase in appearance of firmness	16.4%	12.6%
Reduction in appearance of pores	14.4%	6.2%

First, they don't mention the number of subjects involved in the study. Second, they don't share any details on the procedures they followed or the parameters they evaluated.

Now, I want to show you an example of claims that actually make sense and *aren't* exaggerated.

This is a moisturizer from a super-famous brand (Clinique).

What It Does

- Silky lotion delivers 8-hour hydration.
- Slips on easily, absorbs quickly.
- Helps strengthen skin's own moisture barrier so more moisture stays in. Skin that holds onto moisture has a youthful-looking glow.

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All these claims make sense considering the ingredients present and the fact they refer to a moisturizer. They're not saying anything extravagant to make you buy. This is an example of a product that does what it says. Plain and simple.

Water\Aqua\Eau, Mineral Oil\Paraffinum Liquidum\Huile Minérale, Glycerin, Petrolatum, Stearic Acid, Glyceryl Stearate, Sesamum Indicum (Sesame) Oil, Urea, Lanolin Alcohol, Triethanolamine, Hordeum Vulgare (Barley) Extract\Extrait D'Orge, Cucumis Sativus (Cucumber) Fruit Extract, Helianthus Annuus (Sunflower) Seedcake, Propylene Glycol Dicaprate, Sodium Hyaluronate, Butylene Glycol, Pentylene Glycol, Trisodium Edta, Phenoxyethanol, Yellow 6 (Ci 15985), Yellow 5 (Ci 19140), Red 33 (Ci 17200).

BRAND

The brand.

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After analyzing the claims and the ingredients, take a look at the brand promoting the skincare product.

I always recommend buying only from reputable companies. By reputable, I mean companies that have been around a while **and** are popular (note the "and" because being an old company doesn't automatically mean it's good). I'm not saying you shouldn't buy anything from smaller, newer companies. What I am saying is, when you're in doubt between two different products, with everything else almost the same (ingredients and claims-wise), choose the one from the well-established company.

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Why?

Large companies have more funds to attract and hire the best chemists and experts. And because of their large sales volumes, these companies are often subjected to FDA inspections, which means they are rigorous when it comes to regulations and testing.

The price.

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Someone asked me if she should buy a $1,000 skincare routine her facialist recommended.

Hear me out, here: ***no matter the brand or the ingredients, anything that expensive is always a fraud.***

Don't get me wrong. Products can be okay, even good, but they don't contain anything special to justify that hefty a price. With $1,000, you can have clinical treatments like botox, which beats any skincare regimen. Be smart!

Cheap products may or may not be of good quality. It depends. It's impossible to generalize, but here are some guidelines:

Cheap Cleansers, shampoos, and conditioners: most of the time they're very drying (*lots of foam* identifies the worst offenders). For these products, opt for medium-range prices.

All other products: okay to buy cheap if they fulfill the above criteria.

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Conclusion

The four things that most affect the quality of skincare products are: the ingredients (formulation), the claims (are they reasonable?), the price, and the companies that make them.

Take the time to learn more about ingredients and formulations, especially if you have a skin condition or concern. You're not being vain; you're being savvy!

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About the author

My name is Luisa, I am a cosmetic chemist and the founder of LF Cosmetics Lab. I graduated from the school of pharmacy of Milan, Italy, and ever since I've been on a journey to demystify skincare, beauty, and life.

When I'm not working I like to exercise, drink coffee, take pictures, and travel.

Join me in this journey!

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