

Exploring female consumers' attitudes toward green cosmetics

İpek Kazançoğlu¹, and Şirin Gizem Köse^{2}*

¹Ege University, Department of Business Administration, 35040 İzmir, Turkey

²MEF university, Department of Business Administration, 34396 İstanbul, Turkey

Abstract. As consumers' interest in green cosmetics and their desire for the presence of natural, eco-friendly ingredients in cosmetic products increase, the green cosmetics market has also grown increasingly. The aim of this study is to examine female consumers' attitudes towards green cosmetics with a qualitative approach. Research data was collected by in-depth interview method and analysed by content analysis. Within the scope of the study, first of all, the packaging preferences of the participants in cosmetic products were examined and how the participants defined green cosmetics was investigated. Then, the themes that positively and negatively affected the participants' attitudes towards green cosmetics were revealed. According to the study results, limited product availability, perception of high price, scepticism, and attitude-behavior gap negatively affect attitudes, while WOM [word of mouth] and social media, emotional value, health consciousness, and price-value image positively affect attitudes.

1 Introduction

The cosmetics industry, which is an economically important industry worldwide, has production processes that cause chemical pollution, water scarcity, waste management problems, ecosystem imbalances, and deterioration of human health [1]. Increasing awareness among consumers about the toxic effects of traditional cosmetic products attracts consumers' interest in green cosmetic products.

One of the environmental damages caused by the cosmetics industry is the constant use of plastic and cardboard products. Plastic packaging and bottles that come with many cosmetics products are one of the top environmental concerns [2]. Studies define the term "green" using a variety of terms, including "sustainable," "environmentally friendly," "environmentally responsible" and "pro-environmental consumer behavior [3]. Increasing environmental problems encourage consumers to purchase green products. During the production process, these products use less water, material, and energy have little or no pollution to the natural environment, and their packaging is recyclable [4]. Consumers pay more attention to the content, supply, production methods, and packaging of the products, they use in terms of their ethical and environmental dimensions [5].

* Corresponding author: koseg@mef.edu.tr

The use of natural and organic ingredients has led to the emergence of ecological cosmetics based on environmentally friendly packaging and ethical production processes [6]. In this respect, eco-cosmetic products are generally made from natural and organically grown ingredients that do not contain harmful chemicals and additives [7, 8].

Consumers consider green cosmetics to be healthier than their alternatives. In this way, consumers also contribute to general welfare by purchasing these products [6]. In addition, companies use eco-labels on their products to increase consumers' environmental awareness and encourage them to purchase environmentally innovative and sustainable products [9].

2 Methodology

The study aims to analyze women's attitudes toward green cosmetic products and to determine the factors affecting purchasing behavior. In this context, the findings will be used as useful data to generate marketing strategies. Women are more conscious and knowledgeable about environmental sustainability than men, and have the right attitudes and behaviors regarding environmental concerns [10]. For this reason, the sample group consists of women in the study. The research questions are:

- What are female consumers' cosmetics packaging preferences?
- How do female consumers define green cosmetics?
- What factors negatively influence female customers' attitudes toward green cosmetics?
- What factors positively influence female customers' attitudes toward green cosmetics?

Data was obtained from 18 women via in-depth interview technique which is a qualitative data collection method. The data was analyzed with content analysis. Themes and sub-themes were identified as a result of the analysis.

3 Research Findings

Research findings consists of 4 themes and 8 sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes were determined based on the interviews made with participants. The study involved 18 participants with varying ages, educational backgrounds, and income levels. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 26 years. Most participants were in their mid-twenties. Educationally, the group was nearly evenly split between those with a Bachelor's Degree (10 participants) and those with a Master's Degree (8 participants). The majority of participants fell into the 13000-23000 TL (Turkish Lira) and 23000-33000 TL income brackets, with a few participants in the lowest income bracket (13000 TL and below) and only one participant in the highest income bracket (53000 TL and above). This diverse range of participants provided a broad spectrum of data for the study. Since this study is qualitative, the aim is not to generalize findings, but to provide insights.

3.1 Theme: Participants' cosmetic packaging preferences

Consumers' awareness of the environmental damage caused by plastic packaging waste in the cosmetics industry, along with increasing environmental concerns, has increased consumer interest in environmentally friendly packaging [11, 12]. Hence, consumers prefer packaging that reduces packaging waste and addresses the environmental pollution problem [13]. Consumers pay attention to the durability, refill mechanism, safety, and cleanliness of the packaging design of sustainable packaged cosmetic products [14]. Consumers' preferences mainly consist of paper, glass, and cardboard packaging. Glass, especially

reusable packaging, preserves the product for a longer time [15]. Consumers prefer durable and easy-to-clean packaging [16]. The participants' statements regarding the preferences of cosmetics packages are as follows [P represents participant]:

- "I make sure that the packaging of my foundation is glass. This way I check how much is left. I prefer to see inside most products. I prefer pump-type products for washing my face and wiping my body. There is no difference for me for shampoo packages. But I prefer tonic packs that I can pour. Pumped products cause more product use and shorten the life of the product. But it is also very comfortable to use" (P1).

- "I prefer glass packaging. Even if there is cream or perfume inside, I prefer glass so that it does not adversely affect the material inside when exposed to light" (P3).

- "I prefer the pump and glass ones. I can reuse the pump ones. For skin products, I prefer glass ones. I am sensitive to buying natural products. When it is glass, it preserves the natural product inside better" (P5).

Ease of use and durability of the packaging also play an important role in the packaging preferences of the participants.

- "I prefer the ones with lids. It's easier to travel with the ones with lids" (P2).

- "I prefer transparent and pumped products; they are both easy to use and provide more controlled use" (P4).

- "I make sure that the packaging is sturdy so that it does not break and shorten the life of the product" (P13).

- "If the foundation is liquid, I would like it to be glass, but I didn't pay much attention. I make sure that the eyeshadow palette is solid" (P10).

The packaging of cosmetic products is also perceived by participants as a sign of naturalness and environmental friendliness.

- "For some reason, the ones in the tube, the shrunken ones, seem more natural to me." (P8).

- "When I see signs like paraben free and vegan on it, it makes me want to buy it." (P12).

- "Even if it at least has the phrase "made of recycled material" on its packaging, it would be eye-catching, even if it does not have any effect on purchases" (P9).

- "For example, a small leaf on the packaging attracts my attention and I read the back, and that's usually the product I choose" (P15).

- "The packaging should contribute to recycling, it should not pollute the environment, and I should be able to say that these products are recyclable" (P18).

3.2 Theme: Definition of green cosmetic products

Consumers have expressed that the definitions of environmentally friendly cosmetic products are similar to other studies in the literature. Consumers have defined cosmetic products as healthy products that protect their skin and prevent environmental damage [17]. Consumers associate green and eco-friendly products with natural ingredients, no harmful chemicals, using recyclable packaging, no animal testing, and fair trade [18]. The participants' statements regarding the definition of green products are as follows:

- "I think the sustainability of the product is very important because the less and the longer intervals a product is produced, the better. This is because most of the environmental damage occurs during production. Therefore, for a product to be environmentally friendly, it needs to be sustainable, use minimal resources in its production, and produce minimal waste afterward" (P13).

- "I can define it as a product that causes minimal harm to the environment and tries to use minimal resources from the production phase to the consumer" (P8).

- “It tells us about the existence of a slightly more sustainable product. I think it is a product that can be recycled and can be presented to consumers as a product that can provide maximum benefit with scarce resources” (P3).
- “It mostly comes to my mind as a product that contains green products, does not harm human and environmental health and that we can recycle. I think of it as a product that is not difficult to dissolve in nature” (P4).
- “Products can go through many stages while being produced. Green and environmentally friendly products are products that are produced by taking certain things into consideration at these stages” (P12).
- “I think its packaging should be recyclable, its content should be vegan, and it should not harm the nature too much. I think they are products that can be produced in easier ways that do not harm the environment much during the production phase” (P14).

3.3 Theme: Factors influencing participants' attitudes negatively

3.3.1 Sub-theme: Limited product availability

Limited product availability is one of the barriers to green purchasing behavior [19, 20, 21]. Product availability has significantly influenced consumer attitudes towards green and eco-friendly cosmetic products [22, 23]. When consumers have difficulty accessing green cosmetics, they are less likely to purchase these products [24, 25, 26]. Therefore, consumers tend to prefer traditional cosmetics over green cosmetics that are easily available in the market [3, 27]. The majority of working women prefer to purchase green cosmetic products regularly if they are available near where they live [28].

Participants underlined that the accessibility of environmentally friendly products is limited. Limited product availability causes consumers to not be able to find eco-friendly products even if they want to buy them, or to spend a lot of time and effort to find them. Therefore, consumers can give up searching for green product alternatives, especially when they have little time. Participants expressed the following statements:

- “Due to socio-economic reasons, sometimes there may be inaccessible products that are not available here” (P1).
- “Not everything we consume can be a product that is subject to recycling. But if there are options, I also make my choice in this direction” (P3).
- “I know it is plastic, but I have limited time and I don't want to choose another option. That's why I have to use it” (P9)
- “I was very careful before, but I don't have much time to search for right now. I can't pay much attention” (P4).
- “These products need to be in more places, it's important for the environment. Less conscious people should also be able to access these products” (P11).

3.3.2 Sub-theme: Perception of high price

Although consumers have a positive attitude toward green cosmetic products, they do not want to buy green cosmetic products due to the perception of high prices [29, 24, 30]. Green cosmetics compared to traditional cosmetics, are generally charged a higher price due to the costs of the production processes [31, 32]. The additional cost of green products can affect consumers' purchasing behavior by selling them more expensive than ordinary products [33]. The following sentences show the statements of the participants:

- "Unfortunately, their prices are very high and it is very difficult to choose them as a student. Environmental friendliness of the products is a criterion, but it is not the only criterion because it is expensive" (P6).
- "There is a perception that environmentally friendly products are expensive, as is the case with food and detergents, and a prejudice is forming that it will be the same in cosmetics" (P8).
- "The prices of the products appealed to people with a certain income and education level. I think that there are products that only an elite class or people who are idealistic in this regard can buy, I think the prices should be more reasonable" (P9).
- "I think it's because they are more expensive. Normally, it's a little more expensive because you're paying for a higher quality material, but it's ridiculous when you pay 2-3 times more than it should be" (P1).

3.3.3 Sub-theme: Skepticism

Skepticism towards green products refers to negative situational attitudes towards green products [34]. Skepticism consists of mislabeling, misinterpreting, or misrepresenting products [35]. Consumers feel deceived and skeptical because companies exaggerate their environmental claims about their products in their social media communication efforts [36, 37, 38]. Therefore, companies should avoid excessive communication that will cause suspicion in consumers [39]. In addition, terms such as "ecological", "bio", and "eco-friendly" for green products are blurred or incorrectly expressed. This situation, together with the inadequacy of consumers' current information, causes consumers to experience confusion and distrust towards these products [40, 41, 42]. This situation gives rise to postponed purchasing decisions for green products.

- "It's as if the price automatically increases when you become environmentally friendly. I think this is also a bit of a marketing strategy. At some point, this goes beyond good intentions" (P15).
- "I don't find charging higher prices ethical of course, you'll set a slightly higher price, but if you try to turn this into an opportunity, I won't buy it" (P16).
- "It would be great to get advice from someone reliable, but the advertisements that every influencer does on the same day at the same time have started to become very off-putting. Misperceptions can be generated just to make money. Balance is important here, and excessive advertising reduces my confidence in the product" (P13).
- "Some companies are taking very good actions, using recyclable cups and straws. But they also use plastic. While you are protecting the environment, you are also destroying it. It's nice that they even take a step, but sometimes I think that environmentally friendly product is used purely as a strategy" (P1).

3.3.4 Sub-theme: attitude-behavior gap

Inconsistency and gap arise between consumers' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors when purchasing green products [43, 44]. Customers do not buy green items, even if they have a favorable attitude toward the environment and eco-friendly consumption [45, 46]. Studies have showed that although 30-50% of consumers have a positive attitude or purchase intention towards green products, only 3-5% show purchasing behavior [45, 47]. The following are the statements made by the participants.

- “I cannot completely describe myself as an environmentalist. My thoughts and actions do not match at all, because sometimes we can choose practicality” (P8).
- “I think I have friends who only talk about this to have status. People talk but do the opposite” (P1).

3.4 Theme: Factors influencing participants' attitudes positively

3.4.1 Sub-theme: Word of Mouth [WOM] and social media

WOM represents communication about a brand, product, service, or company between consumers and potential buyers [48]. WOM as a source of information has a significant influence on consumers' pre-purchase. It has a positive impact on consumers' environmental and health concerns, attitudes, subjective norms and purchase intentions towards green cosmetics [49]. Consumers take into consideration WOM recommendations when making purchasing decisions, thus increasing their awareness of the brand and product [6, 48, 50]. Since the cosmetics industry is experience-based, WOM is a persuasive strategy among consumers [18, 48, 51].

Social media, which is presented as a source of information, has developed into a crucial medium for content creation, idea sharing, and the expression of thoughts and knowledge [52]. In this sense, social media affects consumers' positive attitudes and purchasing intentions toward green and ecological cosmetic products [53, 54]. Consumers perceive social media as a useful and reliable tool. They change their purchasing behavior in order to be similar to their peers through being influenced posts and interactions [52]. Social media messages also widely encourage consumers to obtain environmentalist behaviors such as reducing, reusing, and recycling. Especially the sharing of educational content by reliable, talented, and attractive famous people on social media platforms has an impact on the intention to purchase green cosmetic products [55, 56]. Therefore, businesses need to provide more informative materials on social media and implement better communication strategies, and collaborate harmoniously with brands, celebrities, or influencers. In this way to increases consumers' motivation and purchase intention towards green cosmetics [52]. The participant statements are listed below.

- “If an influencer that I find sincere suggests a product, I then look at the comments a lot. If I understand that it is a useful product, such as those animations, it affects me a lot. If she uses it herself, I can buy it” (P14).
- “Since I am a person who cannot remain indifferent to the environment in general, I can make this an issue and talk about it in my communications in my social life” (P3).
- “We talk a lot about the environment. We talk a lot about animals in general, water consumption. This is the same for cosmetics” (P5).
- “The climate crisis is a topic that is talked about from time to time. We influence each other for the purchases” (P7).
- “I don't care if the product's packaging or stand is green, so I don't go and look, but if I saw it on social media and it caught my attention, I'll check it out” (P14).
- “We talk a lot about global warming. Summer came suddenly with abnormal temperatures. We didn't care much before, but now the world forces us to care” (P15).

3.4.2 Sub-theme: Emotional value

Emotional value is the feeling that stimulates emotions (comfort, joy, etc.) from using a product or brand [57]. Consumers have stated that using green cosmetic products met their emotional expectations. Consumers, who exhibit environmentally friendly behavior, have stated that using these products made them feel good [18, 58]. A participant's statement shows the emotional value of green purchasing behavior.

- "Contributing to an activity that benefits nature and personally feeling good about it is significantly important." (P1).

3.4.3 Sub-theme: Health consciousness

Health consciousness is "the degree of readiness to perform health actions" [59]. Health-conscious consumers prefer products that are safe for their skin and are less likely to contain harmful chemicals or allergens [60]. Therefore, health consciousness affects consumers' attitudes and purchasing preferences toward natural cosmetic products [35, 56, 6]. Likewise, women buy green cosmetics for their health concerns rather than for environmental concerns [61, 22, 62]. The main reason for purchasing green skin care products is health concerns [30]. The following are the participants' statements.

- "I have sensitive skin and I prefer what suits my skin's needs, but I make sure that the products I buy are not tested on animals. I try to choose products that do not use animal testing if it does not threaten my health." (P9).

- "I care about this issue in cosmetics. I attach great importance to products that touch my skin and also deodorants. I make sure that there are no harmful ingredients such as aluminum that will harm human health." (P1).

- "I do not want the contents of the products to harm my health." (P10).

3.4.4 Sub-theme: Price-Value Image

Purchase intention for green products has a positive impact on perceived price. The higher perceived price of green products causes the consumer to have more trust and may have a greater impact on purchasing intention [58]. The participant statements are listed below.

- "I prefer high-priced eco-friendly cosmetics. My priority here is to choose products that do not test on animals and are vegan. At the same time, since my skin is sensitive, I would prefer it to be priced higher and meet my expectations" (P2).

- "The costs of natural cosmetics are actually much higher. While 1% usage is sufficient for chemicals, this is not possible for natural cosmetics. Therefore, it is normal for the price to increase slightly" (P5).

4 Conclusion

This study aims to provide insight into developing marketing strategies in the field of green cosmetics by revealing consumers' attitudes towards green cosmetics. The research results offer a holistic perspective by examining both positive and negative attitudes of consumers towards green cosmetics.

According to the study results, limited product availability, perception of high price, skepticism, and attitude-behavior gap negatively affect attitudes, while WOM [word of mouth] and social media, emotional value, health consciousness, and price-value image positively affect attitudes.

The results of the study demonstrate that the elements of usability, hygiene, and transparency are important in the packaging preferences of the participants. The findings of the study have pointed out that participants' packaging material preferences are mostly glass. According to participants, glass packaging makes the product easier to see, and also the product inside is perceived as healthier and more natural. It is also thought that when the product's packaging is glass, it can protect the product better. Participants' expressions generally stated that green cosmetic products should be sustainable, consume little energy and resources, be recyclable, and have ingredients that are harmless to nature and human health.

Cosmetics companies can use factors that positively affect attitudes towards green cosmetics in their segmentation and communication strategies, and can benefit from these factors when developing a marketing plan.

On the other hand, by understanding the factors that negatively affect attitudes towards green cosmetics, companies can be able to reduce these factors by applying appropriate marketing and product management strategies. The findings of the study underline the need to increase product diversity, make prices competitive and inform consumers in order to grow the green cosmetics market. Increasing the perceived emotional value of green cosmetics and further improving the value price image may also be an important strategy. The relationship between green cosmetics and health can also be emphasized. In this regard, the research results are expected to contribute to the green cosmetics industry and the environmental friendliness of the sectors.

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