

Sustainable Consumption, Ethical and Environmental Factors in the Context of Cosmetic Product Preferences

Dursun Yılmaz¹

Abstract

This study aims to explore the extent to which consumers consider sustainable consumption, ethical values, and environmental factors when selecting natural and organic cosmetic products. In the contemporary era, increasing environmental awareness and the growing demand for healthier products have contributed to the rising popularity of natural and organic cosmetics. This research seeks to analyze consumer attitudes toward these products, their reasons for preference, and the role of media in shaping these behaviors through an examination of sustainable consumption patterns. The study was conducted using a survey approved by the Ethics Committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University. The questionnaire included items addressing participants' demographic information, cosmetic product usage habits, attitudes toward environmental and ethical factors, and the influence of media on their consumption behaviors. The collected data were analyzed using percentage distributions and statistical evaluations to identify consumer trends. The findings indicate that 92.2% of participants consider environmental factors when purchasing natural and organic cosmetic products. However, only 27.5% consistently take these factors into account, whereas 64.7% sometimes do, suggesting that environmental concerns are significant but not always the primary determinant of consumer choices. Additionally, 65.7% of participants expressed a preference for eco-friendly packaging, demonstrating a growing awareness and demand for sustainable packaging solutions. However, while 24% exhibited moderate interest in this issue, 10.3% showed little to no concern for eco-friendly packaging. Furthermore, 77.6% of respondents reported following environmental awareness campaigns in the media, underscoring the crucial role of media

1 Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Vocational School of Health Services, Hair Care and Beauty Services, Tokat, Türkiye.

in promoting environmental consciousness and the adoption of natural cosmetics. Nevertheless, the proportion of participants who regularly engage with such campaigns remains relatively low at 14.6%. Notably, 50.7% of participants believe that brands utilize ethical and environmental claims primarily as a marketing strategy, reflecting a skeptical stance toward corporate sustainability messaging, while 41.5% remain undecided on this matter. Additionally, 79.2% of participants expressed a desire for more information regarding the environmental impact of natural cosmetic products, highlighting the need for increased consumer education in this domain. The study reveals that while consumers place importance on environmental and ethical considerations when purchasing natural and organic cosmetic products, these factors do not always serve as the principal motivation for their choices. The media plays a significant role in fostering environmental awareness, yet skepticism regarding corporate ethical and environmental claims persists. Furthermore, there is a growing demand for eco-friendly packaging, but a lack of adequate information and education remains a barrier to consumer engagement. To address these concerns, brands should enhance transparency and credibility in their ethical and environmental claims to build consumer trust. Additionally, providing more information on the environmental impact of natural cosmetic products could help raise awareness and promote sustainable consumption. Companies should also increase their investment in eco-friendly packaging initiatives while educating consumers on their benefits. Lastly, media outlets should develop more effective campaigns on environmental awareness and sustainable consumption, ensuring that consumers are regularly informed. Implementing these recommendations would constitute important steps toward fostering sustainable consumption behaviors and enhancing environmental consciousness among consumers.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the increasing global awareness of sustainability and environmental consciousness has significantly influenced consumer behavior, leading to profound transformations across various industries, including the cosmetics sector. The growing concern over environmental degradation and the rising demand for safe and healthy products have substantially contributed to the popularity of natural and organic cosmetics. These products are often perceived as environmentally friendly, ethically produced, and free from harmful chemicals, aligning with the principles of sustainable consumption. Consequently, consumers are increasingly considering environmental and ethical factors in their purchasing decisions, compelling brands to adapt their marketing strategies and product offerings to meet these evolving demands.

The cosmetics industry is undergoing a significant transformation, particularly as consumers become more conscious of the environmental and ethical implications of their choices. Issues such as animal testing, the use of synthetic chemicals, and non-biodegradable packaging are being scrutinized more than ever, driving demand for products that are not only effective but also environmentally responsible. This trend is further reinforced by the influential role of media, which shapes consumer perceptions and behaviors through campaigns, advertisements, and influencer endorsements. However, despite the growing interest in sustainable and ethical cosmetic products, there remains a gap in understanding the extent to which these factors influence consumer preferences and the challenges brands face in meeting these expectations.

This study aims to examine the role of sustainable consumption, ethical values, and environmental factors in the preference for natural and organic cosmetic products. By analyzing consumer attitudes and behaviors, as well as the impact of media on decision-making processes, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the modern cosmetics market. Additionally, the study explores consumers' awareness of brands' environmental and ethical claims and the extent to which these claims influence purchasing decisions. Through a comprehensive analysis of survey data, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on sustainable consumption and offer practical recommendations for brands seeking to align with consumer values.

The findings of this study aim to identify the key factors driving the demand for natural and organic cosmetic products, the role of media in promoting environmental awareness, and the challenges consumers face in making informed choices. Furthermore, by examining the implications of these trends for brands, the study underscores the importance of transparency, credibility, and innovation in meeting consumer expectations. By addressing these issues, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more sustainable and ethical practices within the cosmetics industry and ultimately promote the creation of an environmentally conscious and socially responsible marketplace.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is structured around the concepts of sustainable consumption, ethical values, and environmental factors. These concepts are considered complementary elements in understanding how natural and organic cosmetic products influence consumer preferences.

Sustainable consumption refers to consumers making purchasing and usage decisions by considering environmental, social, and economic impacts (United Nations, 2015). In the cosmetics industry, this manifests through the preference for natural and organic ingredients, the use of recyclable packaging, and the avoidance of animal testing (Peattie & Peattie, 2009).

Ethical values concern the moral principles and responsibilities that influence consumers' purchasing decisions. In the cosmetics industry, ethical values encompass issues such as the prohibition of animal testing, fair trade practices, and respect for workers' rights (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Consumers, particularly the younger generation, tend to place greater trust in ethically responsible brands, necessitating transparency in production processes (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005).

Environmental factors refer to the elements related to environmental awareness and sustainability that influence consumer choices. Among the reasons for the increasing preference for natural and organic products, avoiding chemical ingredients, utilizing recyclable packaging, and adopting eco-friendly production processes play a crucial role (Kumar, Prakash, & Kumar, 2017). Particularly in Turkey, several studies have shown that young consumers are increasingly sensitive to environmental factors, leading to a higher demand for organic cosmetic products (Akbaş & Özkan, 2018).

The role of media emerges as a critical component in this context. Social media, television advertisements, and influencer endorsements significantly shape consumers' awareness of products and influence their purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Research has shown that media plays a key role in raising awareness of ethical consumption and eco-friendly products, thereby guiding consumers toward more conscious choices (Schmeltz, 2012).

Environmental Awareness in Cosmetic Consumption, Ethical Marketing, and Green Consumer Behavior

The cosmetics sector is a rapidly growing industry that significantly influences consumer behavior on a global scale. In recent years, topics such as environmental sustainability, ethical marketing, and green consumer behavior have gained prominence. Peattie and Crane (2005) examined the impact of green marketing strategies on consumer behavior and highlighted that environmental awareness plays a substantial role in brand preferences. Similarly, other studies indicate that ethical marketing strategies significantly contribute to the increasing preference for natural and organic products (Chen, 2010).

Green consumer behavior is essential for understanding consumers' interest in eco-friendly products and the motivations behind their preferences. Straughan and Roberts (1999) analyzed the determinants of these behaviors, emphasizing that environmental concerns are a primary factor. It has been observed that individuals living in large cities and possessing higher education levels exhibit more distinct green consumption habits (Karaosmanoğlu & Melek, 2019).

In conclusion, environmental awareness, ethical marketing, and green consumer behavior are playing an increasingly significant role in cosmetic consumption. Further research in these areas is crucial for understanding consumer behavior and developing sustainable marketing strategies.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study aims to examine the extent to which consumers consider sustainable consumption, ethical values, and environmental factors when choosing natural and organic cosmetic products. A descriptive research method was adopted, and a survey was used as the data collection tool. A total of 410 participants were included in the study, consisting of 305 women and 105 men, selected through convenience sampling. The demographic distribution of the participants is diverse.

The survey consists of three sections: demographic information, cosmetic product usage habits, and attitudes toward sustainable consumption, ethical values, and environmental factors. The validity and reliability of the survey were ensured through expert opinions and a pilot study. Data collection was conducted via an online survey platform over two months.

The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS program. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate demographic characteristics and usage habits, while correlation analysis examined the relationships among sustainable consumption, ethical values, and environmental factors. Factor analysis was conducted to test construct validity, and t-tests and ANOVA were used to analyze the impact of demographic variables on consumer preferences.

Participant confidentiality was strictly maintained, and it was stated that personal information would be protected and used solely for academic purposes. The study was approved by the Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Ethics Committee (Ethics Committee Approval No: 527945). The primary limitations of this study include the restriction of the sample to Turkey, the reliance on an online survey method limited to participants with internet access, and the exclusive use of quantitative methods for data collection.

RESULTS

This section systematically examines consumer perceptions and attitudes toward environmental factors in the context of natural and organic cosmetic products. The findings emerging from the data analysis have been categorized along three primary dimensions: (1) sustainable consumption trends, (2) eco-friendly packaging preferences, and (3) the influence of media on consumer behavior. The quantitative data presented in the accompanying table summarizes the empirical findings of this study, while the subsequent section provides a detailed interpretation of these results.

Table 1. Consumer attitudes toward natural/organic cosmetic products and environmental factors

| Question | Response Options | Percentage (%) | Commentary |
|--|----------------------|----------------|--|
| When choosing natural/organic cosmetic products, do you consider environmental factors? | Yes, always | 27.5 | While environmental factors are an important consideration for consumers, only 27.5% consistently take them into account. |
| | Yes, sometimes | 64.7 | The majority (64.7%) occasionally consider environmental factors, indicating that sustainability is a decisive yet variable criterion. |
| | No | 7.8 | A small proportion (7.8%) do not consider environmental factors at all. |
| How important is it to you that the cosmetic products you purchase have eco-friendly packaging? | Very important | 28.9 | 65.7% of respondents (very important + important) consider eco-friendly packaging significant. |
| | Important | 36.8 | Packaging emerges as a key factor in consumer decision-making. |
| | Moderately important | 24.0 | 24% remain neutral regarding packaging concerns. |
| | Slightly important | 7.1 | A small segment assigns low priority to eco-friendly packaging. |
| | Not important at all | 3.2 | Very few consumers disregard this factor entirely. |

| Question | Response Options | Percentage (%) | Commentary |
|---|------------------|----------------|---|
| Do you follow media campaigns promoting environmental awareness and natural cosmetic products? | Yes, regularly | 14.6 | While the media serves as an information source, only a small proportion (14.6%) follow these campaigns consistently. |
| | Occasionally | 63.0 | The majority (63.0%) follow environmental awareness campaigns sporadically. |
| | No | 22.5 | Over one-fifth (22.5%) do not follow such campaigns at all. |
| Do you believe natural/organic cosmetic brands use ethical and environmental values as a marketing strategy? | Definitely yes | 18.8 | 50.7% of respondents (definitely yes + yes) believe these values are leveraged for marketing purposes. |
| | Yes | 31.9 | Consumers remain cautious about brands' ethical claims. |
| | Undecided | 41.5 | A significant proportion (41.5%) are uncertain, suggesting a need for greater brand transparency. |
| | No/Definitely no | 7.9 | A small minority reject the notion that brands use these values strategically. |
| Would you like more information on the environmental impact of natural cosmetic products? | Yes, definitely | 35.7 | 79.2% of consumers demand further education on this topic. |
| | Yes | 43.5 | This reflects a strong consumer appetite for knowledge. |
| | Undecided | 13.7 | A small segment remains indecisive. |
| | No | 7.1 | Few consumers feel no need for additional information. |

Analysis of Research Findings

The data presented in Table 1 reveals several key trends in consumer attitudes toward environmental factors. The main findings of our study can be summarized as follows:

While a significant majority of consumers (64.7%) occasionally consider sustainability, only 27.5% consistently prioritize these factors in their purchasing decisions. This suggests that environmental concerns serve as a determinant yet inconsistent factor in consumer behavior. Regarding packaging specifically, 65.7% of consumers consider eco-friendly options

important, indicating that sustainability is becoming increasingly critical in product design.

Environmental awareness campaigns through media channels reach 77.6% of consumers, yet regular engagement remains relatively low (14.6%). This finding highlights a significant gap between information access and active participation. Consumer skepticism toward brands' sustainability claims is particularly noteworthy: over half of respondents (50.7%) believe these values are used as marketing strategies, while a substantial 41.5% remain undecided.

One of the most striking findings is that approximately 80% of consumers demand more information about the environmental impact of natural cosmetic products. This result demonstrates a significant knowledge gap in the industry and indicates consumers' expectations for more transparent communication.

In conclusion, the research reveals that while consumers show interest in sustainable products, they exhibit caution toward brand claims coupled with information deficiencies. These findings suggest that brands need to communicate their environmental commitments more consistently and transparently.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the extent to which consumers consider sustainability, ethical values, and environmental factors when choosing natural and organic cosmetic products. The findings reveal that while a significant majority of consumers value environmental and ethical considerations (92.2%), these factors do not always constitute primary decision-making criteria. Only 27.5% of respondents consistently prioritize environmental factors, whereas 64.7% do so occasionally, indicating their conditional rather than absolute importance in purchasing decisions.

Regarding packaging preferences, 65.7% of participants consider eco-friendly packaging important, reflecting growing consumer awareness and demand for sustainable solutions. However, 24% remain moderately interested, while 10.3% show minimal concern for packaging sustainability.

Media influence emerges as another significant factor, with 77.6% of consumers following environmental awareness campaigns to some degree. Nevertheless, only 14.6% engage with such content regularly, suggesting room for improved outreach strategies.

Consumer skepticism toward brands' ethical claims is noteworthy - 50.7% perceive them as marketing strategies, while 41.5% remain undecided. This underscores a critical trust deficit that brands must address. Furthermore, 79.2% of respondents demand more information about products' environmental impacts, highlighting both an information gap and consumer appetite for greater transparency.

Strategic Recommendations:

1. **Brand Transparency:** Companies must substantiate ethical and environmental claims through verifiable, transparent reporting of production processes and supply chains to build consumer trust.
2. **Educational Campaigns:** Comprehensive informational campaigns about cosmetic products' environmental impacts should be implemented through social media and other communication channels to promote sustainable consumption.
3. **Sustainable Packaging:** Investments in recyclable and biodegradable packaging solutions should be prioritized, accompanied by consumer education about their environmental benefits.
4. **Media Engagement:** More effective, regularly scheduled environmental campaigns should be developed, particularly leveraging social media platforms for greater reach and engagement.
5. **Consumer Education:** Educational programs and seminars should be organized to enhance understanding of environmental and ethical considerations in cosmetic purchases.
6. **Product Accessibility:** Expanding product ranges and improving affordability across different income segments can increase adoption of sustainable cosmetic products.

These recommendations provide a strategic framework for promoting sustainable consumption patterns and enhancing environmental awareness. By implementing these measures, brands can simultaneously increase consumer satisfaction and contribute to the development of an environmentally conscious market. The findings collectively suggest that while environmental considerations are gaining importance in consumer decision-making, systematic efforts are required to transform this interest into consistent purchasing behavior.

References

- Akbaş, G., & Özkan, M. (2018). Türkiye’de çevre dostu kozmetik ürünlerine yönelik tüketici eğilimleri. *Journal of Consumer Studies*, 10(2), 45-63.
- Carrigan, M., & Attalla, A. (2001). The myth of the ethical consumer – Do ethics matter in purchase behaviour? *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18(7), 560-577.
- Chen, T. B. (2010). The impact of environmental labels on consumers’ perception and purchase intention. *International Journal of Marketing Research*, 25(4), 213-229.
- De Pelsmacker, P., Driesen, L., & Rayp, G. (2005). Do consumers care about ethics? Willingness to pay for fair-trade coffee. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 39(2), 363-385.
- Karaosmanoğlu, K., & Melek, S. (2019). Green consumer behavior and eco-friendly product preferences: A study on urban consumers. *Sustainable Marketing Review*, 15(3), 112-130.
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing Management* (15th ed.). Pearson.
- Kumar, A., Prakash, G., & Kumar, G. (2017). Does environmentally responsible purchase intention matter for consumers? A predictive sustainable model developed through an empirical study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 34, 206-213.
- Peattie, K., & Peattie, S. (2009). Social marketing: A pathway to consumption reduction? *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 260-268.
- Peattie, K., & Crane, A. (2005). Green marketing: Legend, myth, farce or prophesy? *Qualitative Market Research*, 8(4), 357-370.
- Schmeltz, L. (2012). Consumer-oriented CSR communication: Focusing on ability or morality? *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 17(1), 29-49.
- Straughan, R. D., & Roberts, J. A. (1999). Environmental segmentation alternatives: A look at green consumer behavior in the new millennium. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 16(6), 558-575.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations.

Acknowledgment

There are no individuals or institutions to acknowledge.

Conflict of Interest

“The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest”.

Author Contributions

This is a single-author study