

Adolescent Cosmetic Consumption: Exploring Societal Influences, Safety Concerns, and Post-Pandemic Market Shifts

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Abstract: Adolescence is a formative period where identity and consumer behaviors are significantly influenced by societal norms and media portrayals. This research delves deeply into the engagement of adolescents with cosmetics, meticulously scrutinizing the persuasive power of advertisements and the profound implications of societal beauty standards on teenagers. By applying a critical lens, the study examines the presence of harmful substances in cosmetics that lack regulatory approval, uncovering potential threats to skin health and underscoring the necessity for stringent regulatory oversight and comprehensive consumer education. Furthermore, the study explores the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer patterns within the cosmetics sector. It illustrates a discernible pivot towards skincare and wellness-oriented products, reflecting a shift in adolescent preferences. The research concludes with evidence-based recommendations for the cosmetics industry to effectively navigate post-pandemic challenges. It advocates for a focus on safety, transparency, and alignment with the evolving preferences of a health-conscious adolescent demographic, emphasizing the importance of meeting the demands for safe and effective cosmetic products in a rapidly changing market landscape.

Keywords: adolescent consumption, cosmetic safety, societal influences, COVID-19 pandemic, cosmetics industry strategies.

1. Introduction

Adolescence, a critical juncture in the developmental trajectory, is characterized by a confluence of identity formation and heightened vulnerability to societal influences [1, 2]. This period is particularly salient in the context of cosmetic consumption, where media portrayals, peer pressure, and the desire for self-expression significantly intersect [3]. The choices adolescents make regarding cosmetic products are not only a reflection of their burgeoning sense of self, but are also heavily influenced by external narratives that shape their perceptions of beauty and attractiveness [4].

A study presents a critical examination of adolescent consumption behaviors, focusing on the impact of cosmetic advertisements and societal beauty standards on teenagers in Medan City [5]. This research is particularly timely given the widespread use of cosmetics among adolescents and the potential health risks associated with certain ingredients, such as hydroquinone and mercury. These substances, often found in non-Badan Pengawas Obat dan Makanan (BPOM, which is the National

Agency of Drug and Food Control in Indonesia) labeled cosmetics, pose significant threats to skin health and overall well-being, necessitating a robust understanding of the factors that drive adolescents' cosmetic choices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated this landscape, leading to a pronounced shift in consumer behavior and market dynamics within the cosmetics sector. The pandemic's imposition of mask-wearing and increased time spent at home has catalyzed a reorientation towards skincare, with a concomitant decline in traditional makeup demand. This pivot has prompted the industry to recalibrate its strategies, focusing on the development of products that cater to the evolving needs and preferences of consumers.

This paper aims to provide an extensive exploration of the intricate interplay between adolescent consumption attitudes, societal influences, cosmetic safety, and the pandemic's impact on the cosmetics market. By examining the findings of research alongside the broader societal and market adaptations, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the factors that influence adolescent cosmetic consumption [5]. Furthermore, it presents strategic recommendations for the cosmetics industry to navigate the complexities of the post-pandemic landscape, ensuring the safety and satisfaction of its adolescent consumer base.

Through a meticulous analysis of the existing literature, empirical research, and market trends, this paper endeavors to contribute to the discourse on adolescent cosmetic consumption, advocating for a more informed, discerning approach to cosmetic product selection. It emphasizes the need for educational interventions, regulatory oversight, and industry responsiveness to promote the health and well-being of adolescents in their cosmetic choices.

2. Adolescent Consumption Attitudes and Behaviors

Adolescence represents a pivotal phase in the developmental trajectory of individuals, marked by the interplay of identity formation and heightened susceptibility to societal influences. Within this context, cosmetic consumption emerges as a significant area where media portrayals, peer pressure, and the pursuit of self-expression converge. Adolescents' choices regarding cosmetic products reflect not only their burgeoning sense of self but are also significantly shaped by external narratives that influence their perceptions of beauty and attractiveness.

A study offers a critical examination of adolescent consumption behaviors, with a particular emphasis on the impact of cosmetic advertisements and societal beauty standards on teenagers in Medan City [5]. This research is timely, considering the widespread use of cosmetics among adolescents and the potential health risks associated with certain ingredients, such as hydroquinone and mercury. These substances, often present in cosmetics lacking BPOM labeling, pose significant threats to skin health and overall well-being, thereby underscoring the necessity for a robust understanding of the factors that drive adolescents' cosmetic choices.

The study conducted a cross-sectional investigation involving a diverse sample of 385 adolescents [5]. Through rigorous statistical analyses, the study aimed to elucidate the influence of cosmetic advertisements on the cosmetic choices of teenagers. The findings highlight the substantial impact of pervasive beauty narratives, frequently perpetuated by media, peer groups, and cosmetic advertisements, on the cosmetic selection decisions of teenagers. The study posits that "attitudes and cosmetics advertisements play a crucial role in the decisions of cosmetic selection among teenagers", underscoring the importance of educational interventions that encourage a discerning approach to cosmetic advertisements [5].

The pervasive influence of societal beauty standards, as portrayed by media and advertising, can significantly shape the self-perception and consumption behaviors of adolescents. This influence can lead to a range of outcomes, from the pursuit of unrealistic beauty ideals to the potential misuse of cosmetics. The study underscores the importance of understanding the underlying factors that drive

these consumption behaviors, enabling the development of effective educational strategies to guide informed decision-making regarding cosmetic choices [5].

Moreover, the study's findings suggest a need for a more critical examination of the role those cosmetic advertisements play in shaping the perceptions and choices of teenagers [6, 7]. The influence of these advertisements can have far-reaching effects, impacting not only immediate cosmetic choices but also the long-term health and well-being of adolescents. Therefore, it is essential to consider the broader implications of these findings and to develop strategies that can mitigate the potential negative impacts of cosmetic advertisements on teenagers.

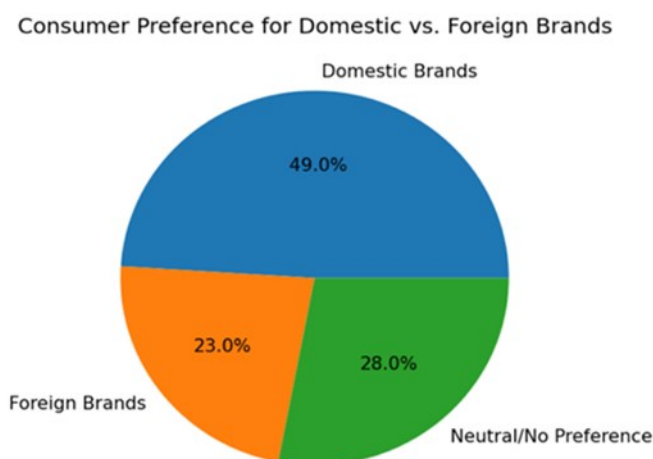


Figure 1: Consumer preference for domestic vs. foreign brands.

Adolescents represent a significant segment of the consumer market, whose preferences and purchasing behaviors significantly influence market trends. Recent market research data reveals distinct preferences among adolescents when choosing between domestic and foreign brands. In a survey targeting this demographic, as shown in Figure 1 above, 49.0% of respondents indicated a preference for domestic brands, likely due to their competitive quality, innovation, and pricing. Conversely, 23.0% showed a higher inclination towards foreign brands, possibly due to their technological edge and brand image in certain sectors. Additionally, 28.0% of the respondents expressed neutrality or no particular preference for brand origin, suggesting that some adolescents prioritize the product itself over the brand's background.

Delving deeper into the decision-making factors for adolescents, it is evident that product categories significantly influence purchasing behavior. In the non-food category, as shown in Figure 2 below, quality and functionality are the most critical factors for adolescents, with 60% of the respondents citing these as their primary considerations. This indicates that adolescents value the actual performance and user experience of a product. In the food category, while quality and functionality remain important, price also holds a considerable weight, likely due to the daily consumable nature of food products, where adolescents consider cost-effectiveness in their purchases.

Online resources further supplement these data points. For instance, some studies suggest that adolescents are increasingly concerned with the sustainability and social responsibility of products, which may influence their brand choices. Moreover, social media and online word-of-mouth play an increasingly vital role in adolescents' purchasing decisions, as they tend to use online platforms to gather product information and user reviews to inform their buying choices.

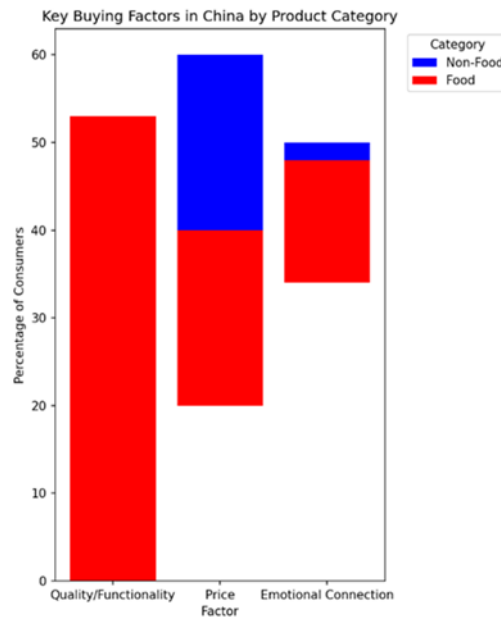


Figure 2: Key buying factors in China by product category.

In summary, the consumption attitudes and behaviors of adolescents are diverse and complex, influenced by a multitude of factors. Brands aiming to attract this demographic need to deeply understand their needs and preferences and make strategic adjustments in product quality, pricing, brand image, and social responsibility.

3. Cosmetic Safety Issues

The safety of cosmetics, particularly for adolescents, is a multifaceted issue that warrants careful consideration. The study reports on the use of non-BPOM labeled cosmetics among teenagers, raising significant concerns due to the presence of harmful substances in these products [5]. The prevalence of such cosmetics among the younger demographic may stem from a lack of awareness or understanding of the potential health hazards associated with their use.

Hydroquinone and mercury are substances often found in cosmetics that are not regulated by the National Agency of Drug and Food Control, and both can have harmful effects on skin health. Hydroquinone, which is frequently used in products intended to lighten skin, can cause skin irritation, allergic reactions, and may sometimes result in a condition known as exogenous ochronosis, which leads to a blue-black discoloration of the skin. Mercury, a powerful neurotoxin, can result in various health problems, including neurological disorders and damage to the kidneys.

The study underscores the imperative for robust regulatory frameworks within the cosmetics industry [8]. It advocates for stringent measures to ensure the safety of cosmetic products, such as comprehensive safety assessments and the enforcement of bans on harmful ingredients. Transparent labeling is also recommended, enabling consumers to make informed decisions about the products they use.

Furthermore, the study calls for public health initiatives aimed at educating adolescents about the potential risks associated with the use of cosmetics containing harmful ingredients. Education is a vital tool in empowering young consumers to prioritize their health and well-being over the immediate aesthetic benefits offered by certain cosmetic products.

4. The Societal and Pandemic Impacts on Adolescent Cosmetic Consumption and Market Adaptations

The adolescent phase is instrumental in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors, with media and peer pressures exerting a substantial influence on their choices, particularly in cosmetics. The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated this landscape, leading to a pronounced shift in consumer behavior and market dynamics within the cosmetics sector. The pandemic's imposition of mask-wearing and increased time spent at home has catalyzed a reorientation towards skincare, with a concomitant decline in traditional makeup demand. This pivot has prompted the industry to recalibrate its strategies, focusing on the development of products that cater to the evolving needs and preferences of consumers.

The profound impact of the pandemic on perceptions of beauty and the demand for cosmetic products was exposed through an in-depth analysis [9, 10]. As the global population spent more time at home and faced the realities of mask-wearing, a notable pivot towards skincare products addressing these new concerns emerged. The mandatory mask-wearing imposed by the pandemic has diminished the traditional demand for makeup products, as the opportunities to wear makeup have been limited. However, this has not resulted in a universal decline across cosmetic categories. Instead, eye makeup products have seen a significant surge in interest, as the eyes become the primary medium for facial expression when other features are concealed. This behavioral shift has led cosmetic companies to reevaluate their product development and marketing strategies, aligning with the new consumer priorities shaped by the pandemic.

5. Market Strategy Recommendations

In response to the pandemic-induced changes in consumer behavior, the cosmetics industry must recalibrate its strategies to align with the evolving preferences and priorities of consumers. The development of safe and efficacious skincare products is paramount, as consumers are increasingly seeking solutions for at-home self-care routines. By accentuating the safety and efficacy of their ingredients, companies can cultivate trust among health-conscious consumers.

The digital realm presents a fertile ground for engagement and education. Virtual consultations, online tutorials, and social media campaigns can serve as effective platforms to educate consumers on the safe use of cosmetics, addressing their concerns and promoting product benefits in a relatable and accessible manner.

Sustainability has emerged as a key consumer preference, with an increasing number of consumers gravitating towards eco-friendly products. The cosmetics industry would do well to assess the environmental impact of their packaging and production processes, adopting sustainable practices that resonate with the values of the younger generation.

Lastly, agility and responsiveness are pivotal in navigating the dynamic landscape of consumer behavior. By keeping a finger on the pulse of market trends, actively soliciting customer feedback, and being willing to iterate and innovate, companies can maintain a competitive edge and stay relevant in the eyes of consumers.

Therefore, the cosmetics industry must evolve its strategies to align with the changing dynamics of consumer behavior, with a focus on safety, digital engagement, sustainability, and agility. By doing so, the industry can continue to meet the needs of consumers and maintain its relevance in a post-pandemic world. This includes a continuous assessment of consumer feedback, market trends, and the integration of innovative technologies to enhance product offerings and consumer experiences.

6. Conclusion

The adolescent journey through the cosmetics landscape is a complex voyage, significantly sculpted by societal narratives and peer influences, with the media playing a formidable role in shaping perceptions of beauty and attractiveness. This paper has underscored the profound impact of these factors on adolescent consumption behaviors, highlighting the critical need for educational interventions that foster a discerning approach towards cosmetic advertisements. The COVID-19 pandemic has further recalibrated the dynamics of the cosmetics market, steering focus towards skincare and propelling the industry to innovate and adapt. The paper's analysis of adolescent consumption patterns, cosmetic safety, societal influences, and market adaptations offers a holistic view of the current landscape, advocating for strategies that prioritize consumer health, digital engagement, sustainability, and market agility. It concludes that while the cosmetics industry faces the challenge of evolving consumer needs and societal expectations, it also has the opportunity to lead with safety, transparency, and innovation.

Despite the comprehensive exploration presented in this paper, there are inherent limitations that warrant acknowledgment. The study's focus on English-language data and the specific context of Medan City may not fully encapsulate the global adolescent experience with cosmetics. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of consumer behavior in response to the pandemic suggests that ongoing research is essential to capture emerging trends and consumer sentiments. Future studies should expand the scope to include diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives and consider the long-term implications of the pandemic on cosmetic consumption. Additionally, as the cosmetics industry continues to evolve, research should investigate the effectiveness of new marketing strategies, the role of technology in consumer engagement, and the impact of regulatory changes on product safety and innovation. This will ensure a continuous, relevant discourse that supports the well-being of adolescents and the sustainability of the cosmetics industry in an ever-changing world.

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