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Decoding the Dilemma: Ethical Consumerism in the Beauty Industry – Are Cruelty-Free Products a Contradiction?

Research Aim:

To investigate the role of emotions in ethical consumerism of beauty products in the UK.

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York St John University.

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Abstract

Ethical consumerism has emerged as a social pressure that companies must respond to (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). As consumers are becoming more aware of their role and potential effect of changing the products they buy (Gillani and Kutaula, 2018).

Movement towards cruelty-free products has gained traction, with many brands changing strategy to alter their core operations towards 'cruelty-free' (Chitrakorn, 2016; Cruelty Free International, 2020).

There remains scope to understand why consumers continue to purchase brands that test on animals. Thus, the underlying aims of this study are to examine trends, increasing awareness and acceptability of cruelty-free products within society, and examine views that have contributed towards ethical consumerism.

Literature Review

Ethical Consumerism

- Ethical consumerism can be defined as a voluntary decision by a consumer to buy goods and services, aiming to positively affect certain social and/or environmental issues (Doane, 2001; Jones, 2017).
- Ethical consumerism has emerged as a social pressure that companies are having to respond to (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001).
- Consumers report positive attitudes towards ethical goods, but their intentions and behaviour often do not follow suit (White, MacDonnell and Ellard, 2012).

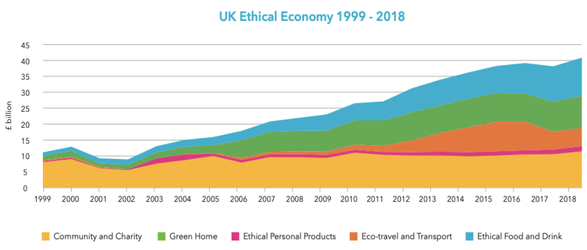

Figure 1: UK Ethical Economy (Ethical Consumer, 2019, p.2).

In 2020 ethical consumer spending hit a new record of £100bn, reaching a new high and showing a clear increase. The market for ethical personal products has only slightly increased (Ethical Consumer, 2023).

Beauty Industry

- In 2022, the global cosmetics market experienced a growth of over 16%, compared to the previous year. Skincare, haircare, make-up, perfumes, toiletries, and oral cosmetics are the main product categories of the cosmetic market (Statista, 2023).
- The UK beauty industry is worth £27 billion and is the seventh-largest cosmetics market, with the USA and China taking the two top positions (Johnson, 2020).
- The hair and beauty sector contributes £6.6 billion per annum to the UK economy (British Barbers Association, 2022).

Figure 2: Cruelty-Free Logos (Adapted by Owens, 2022).

Cruelty-Free

- Cruelty-free means that no animals were harmed by the companies or suppliers in the creation of the final product (Cruelty Free International, 2023a).
- Due to legislation, companies also must declare whether they test on animals, given demand from the public and increased political momentum relating to such issues (Chitrakorn, 2016).
- A total of 3.06 million procedures were completed on animals in Great Britain in 2021 (UK Government, 2022; PETA, 2023).
- Out of the total number of procedures only 10% were required by law, the rest were conducted voluntarily (Cruelty Free International, 2023c).
- The animals typically used for the procedures are rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats, and mice (De Pauliny, 2021).
- It has been shown that non-animal methods in cosmetic testing have shown better results in predicting human responses in the real-world than the animal tests they replace (Humane Society International, 2023).

Significate Points in History of Cruelty-Free

1959 - Animal rights activists Muriel Dowding founded Beauty Without Cruelty, encouraging companies to manufacture faux fur (Piccioni, 1993).

1980s and 1990s - Cruelty-free language became prevalent, according to Levinson and Horowitz (2016), the term started to refer to animal testing and personal care products.

1987 - PETA launched their cruelty-free certification and developed a long-term initiative to dissuade companies from testing personal care products on animals.

1990s - Cruelty Free International created the Leaping Bunny Programme (Cruelty Free International, 2023b).

Figure 3: History of Cruelty-Free (Author Own, 2023)

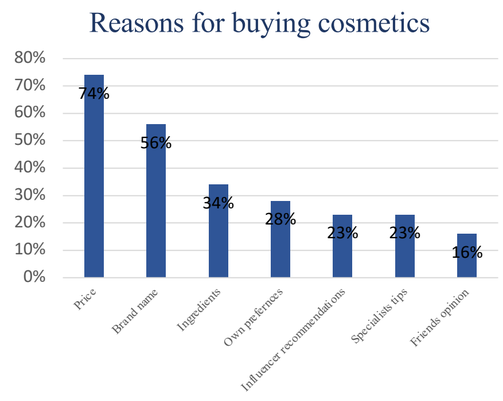

Figure 4: Buying Behaviour (Adapted by Anjana, 2018)

Emotions

Cohen and Areni (1991) suggest emotions to be markers, which are stored in an individual's memory and subsequently recovered to inform a decision.

- Primary emotions - Sadness, joy, fear, anger, disgust and surprise.
- Secondary emotions - nostalgia, compassion, pride and remorse.

Methods

Qualitative semi-structured interviews will be conducted with female participants. As British women spend on average £400 annually on cosmetics (Read, 2020), the highest in Europe (Statista, 2020) with 60% of women wearing makeup on a weekly basis (Waldersee, 2019).

It is proposed that 15-30 interviews are conducted or until saturation is reached on this topic, to ensure accurate findings.

The data analysis will utilise thematic analysis. In the aim of providing an in-depth insight into ethical consumerism, to understand participants buying behaviour and views of cruelty-free products.

Summary

As such, there remains scope to further investigate gradual movements towards the increasing development of cruelty-free products.

Determining and understanding why consumers continue to purchase brands that test on animals.

Thus, the underlying aims of this study are to examine gradual trends towards cruelty-free products, increasing awareness and acceptability of cruelty-free products within society, and to examine emotions that have contributed towards ethical consumerism amongst some people and groups.

Next Steps

Finish literature review draft by January 2024.
Review and apply for ethical approval for data collection.
Take part in a conferences, to gain presentation skills and feedback from researchers.

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