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Consumers' purchase behavior towards green beauty care products

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1.0 Abstract

- Problem** Consumers are increasingly looking for a more sustainable consumption. In the past years, a green trend has emerged in the beauty care market. However, even if consumers claim to want more green products, an attitude-behavior gap can be observed and the green beauty care segment remains a niche market.
- Purpose** The purpose of this study is to understand the attitude-behavior gap in this particular market. Why does the green beauty care market remain a niche segment despite the fact that consumers say they want to consume greener and more natural products?
- Research design** To answer this question, we designed a qualitative study. For this purpose, we created an interview guide that we tested before conducting interviews with consumers and one interview with a specialist to have a professional point of view.
- Findings** Our main findings are that most consumers do not buy green beauty care products because their main argument when buying beauty care products is efficiency, and they do not perceive green products as being as efficient as chemical beauty care products. But other factors such as relationship with brands, habits or availability can help explain the existence of the attitude-behavior gap.
- Keywords** *Beauty care, cosmetics, green, sustainable, natural, attitude-behavior gap, consumption habits, efficiency*

2.0 Introduction and aim

With the increasing awareness of global warming and the urge to protect and save the environment, a major change can be noted in consumption behavior in various markets. Consumers are paying more and more attention to their consumption habits, particularly in terms of impact on their health and the environment. Health appears today as the second criterion of choice of food products for example, going up in the priority of the consumers. In addition, 67% of consumers feel personally affected by environmental issues and want to take

action through their purchasing habits. (Kantar Panel Worldpanel, 2020). These new expectations have modified the food industry or the fashion industry and can also be applied to the beauty care segment that is currently undergoing a transitional phase: worldwide sales of green cosmetics increased by 8.8% from 2018 to 2019 (Alioze.com, 2020). The current study will focus on consumer behavior in the beauty care industry which represents an interesting research framework. In this study, a beauty care product will be defined as any cosmetic product such as shower gel, soap, shampoo, deodorant, cream (for face, body, hands...) but we excluded make-up products and perfumes. (Solidarités-santé.gouv.fr, 2021)

Humans have been using beauty care products for at least 10,000 years and they are now part of our daily life. The word *cosmetae* was first used to describe Roman slaves who bathed men and women in perfume (Chaudhry and Jain, 2009). Nowadays the average woman uses 9 to 15 personal beauty care products per day. On average a product contains from 15 to 50 ingredients. Thus, the average woman applies around 515 individual ingredients on her skin using beauty products each day. (Science.org, 2020). The rising concern among consumers regarding the harmful side effects of chemical and synthetical ingredients used in beauty care products has increased (Statista, 2020), and consumers claim to be more conscious of environmental protection and sustainability and pay more and more attention to the ingredients they are placing on their skin (Amberg et al, 2019). A survey from Global Web Index reports that over a quarter of global consumers say that they care if beauty products they buy are green. Another important factor for consumers is that the product they are buying is not only green but also produced in a green and sustainable way. (Statista, 2020).

However, despite a growing environmental consciousness, it appears that the green beauty care segment remains a niche market. In France in 2019, sales in the green cosmetics segment exploded by 66% (Chapuis, 2020). But it still accounts for less than 10% of beauty care product sales (Alioze.com, 2020). In this study, a green beauty product is defined as a product composed of natural and non-controversial ingredients and without chemicals, coloring additives or

other non-natural mixtures. The ingredients may or may not be organic as long as they are known not to be harmful to health. (Amberg et al, 2019).

Little research has been done to try to explain this intention-action gap in the beauty industry. According to Rashid et al. (2009), green purchase intention is conceptualized as the probability and willingness of a person to give preference to products having eco-friendly features over the traditional products. The literature has shown the existence of an “attitude-behavior gap” in the green industry, meaning that consumers report to be very concerned about environmental issues, but they are struggling to translate it into purchase. (Young et al., 2007). One explanation could be the existence of a bias when answering about their concern about green issues and an underlying pressure to give socially desirable answers (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2004). Other potential explanations could be given by Carrigan and Attalla (2001) that show that price, quality, convenience, and brand familiarity are still the most important decision factors in purchase behavior compared to green consciousness.

Furthermore, many studies are focusing on why consumers buy green products but very few studies focus on consumers' motivation to not buy green products. How to explain that there are still 90% of consumers that are buying non-green beauty products? The current study aims to fill these gaps and contribute to the understanding of the cosmetics market today by focusing on why consumers do not buy green and by drawing some concrete recommendations.

Therefore, the main question of the research is to understand to what extent consumers convert a globally positive attitude towards green beauty products into actual purchase behavior. This research aims to enrich the literature with a qualitative approach based on the French green beauty care market.

The current study found several reasons to explain the attitude behavior gap in the green beauty care industry. Based on the classification created by Amberg et al. (2019), the study focuses on consumers that buy either only “chemicals” cosmetics or both “chemicals” and green cosmetics to understand their deeper motivations through interviews.

It appears that demographics have an impact on consumers' expectations toward cosmetics, but they cannot necessarily help predict consumer behavior regarding green beauty care products. Green consciousness is globally linked to green purchase intention; however, elements such as habits, relationship with existing brands and other factors such as perceived efficiency, recommendations and green trust have a significant impact on purchase behavior. These are key elements to explain the existence of an attitude-behavior gap in the green beauty care market, and to draw concrete managerial implications regarding cosmetics.

3.0 Literature review

3.1 Consumer clusters and demographics

In the literature, consumers are classified into different clusters or categories depending on their purchase behavior or motivations. As the purpose of this study is to understand consumers' motivations to not purchase green beauty care products, the classification created by Amberg et al. (2019) is the most appropriate for this current research. In their study, Amberg et al. (2019) classified green consumers based on their purchase behavior by analyzing who buys green products and in which proportion compared to other products. With these criteria, the study defined three segments of consumers. The first segment is defined as completely green. Customers of this segment aim at purchasing natural cosmetics only since they consider both health and environment as an important factor. The second segment is composed of consumers who prefer "chemical" cosmetics since they believe in the traditional and long-time guaranteed brands. The consumers of the third segment buy both green and "chemical" cosmetics. (Amberg et al, 2019). The current study will focus on the second segment defined by Amberg et al (2019), i.e., consumers who prefer non-green beauty care products, and our goal is to investigate this segment of consumers in the beauty care market specifically.

Literature has explored the potential impact of demographics on consumer's purchase behavior toward sustainable products. D'Souza et al. (2007) underline the fact that demographic factors are one of the most influencing factors in predicting behavior towards green products. However, while Straughan and

Roberts (1999) consider that demographic variables such as age and gender are significantly correlated with ecologically conscious attitudes, Finisterra do Paco et al. (2009) found on the contrary no significant relations between age and green attitudes, and their results appear also inconsistent in terms of gender differences. Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) concluded that demographics alone do not seem very significant in defining the sustainable consumer, and considering variables such as attitudes, behavioral and personality characteristics is important to identify the ethical consumer profile (Roberts, 1996). Facing these contradictory study results, the current study aims to focus on the beauty care market to understand if demographics can help predict consumers' purchase behavior in this segment. This leads our thinking to a first research question:

RQ1: What is the impact of demographics on consumer behavior in the green beauty care segment?

3.2 Exploring the attitude-behavior gap in decision-making

Different explanations regarding the existence of an attitude-behavior gap in green purchase can be suggested according to the literature.

The first explanation is that purchase decisions are often based on habits and for example, brand loyalty. Alhedaif et al. (2016) defines brand loyalty as “the situation in which a consumer generally buys the same manufacturer-originated product or service repeatedly over time rather than buying from multiple suppliers within the category” or “the degree to which a consumer consistently purchases the same brand within a product class”. Commitment plays an important role in the relationship with a brand and is defined as the willingness to continue the relationship in the future. (Papista and Dimitriadis, 2012). Copeland and Bhaduri (2020) states that consumers engage in a relationship with a brand when they consider the perceived benefit of their transaction to be higher than the potential costs.

Literature also shows that trust is at the center of the customer-brand relationship and a condition for long-term loyalty. Consumers describe trust as the confidence that the brand will remain effective and honest in its claims but also respectful of its customers without causing any harmful side effects (Hess et al. (2011), Papista and Dimitriadis (2012)). Einwiller et al. (2006) write that identification is a more primary representation of a consumer's relationship with

a company or brand than commitment. Thus, trust in a certain brand can explain a part of this attitude-behavior gap; if a consumer trusts a certain brand, there is a greater likelihood that he will remain loyal to this brand, even if it is not a green brand.

Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) studied the link between the relationship quality and consumer-brand identification. They found out that satisfaction is a prerequisite for the duration of the relationship. Also, when consumers are asked to describe their relationship with their favorite cosmetics brands, they mainly refer to the superior and consistent performance and value they enjoy from their relationships. This superior performance capabilities are rewarded through loyal purchase behaviors and heartfelt commitment. (Papista and Dimitriadis (2012); Fournier, (1998)). Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) also found that the age of the consumer plays an important role in the relationship quality. Younger women tend to be more enthusiastic towards their favorite brands and report higher levels of commitment. (Papista and Dimitriadis, 2012).

Accordingly, behavior based on habit could be a reason for the attitude-behavior gap. Even if consumers have good intentions to buy sustainable products, once in the shop they may search for their habitual products.

Moreover, beyond the impact of consumption habits in purchase behavior to explain the attitude-behavior gap, it appears that attitude is not the only factor to determine the decision-making process. Indeed, purchase behavior is the result of a complex variety of motivations. According to Minter et al. (2004), the situational context influences choices more than environmental ethics. Therefore, factors such as knowledge, values, availability of the products or perceived quality also influence the purchase behavior, in addition to a positive attitude toward sustainability.

In their research, Hughner et al. (2007), analyze the attitude-behavior gap in the green food industry. Even if around 67% of the population says they are concerned about the environment and hold positive attitudes toward organic food, only 4 to 10% of the population actually purchase organic food. They found out that several factors such as price, lack of availability, skepticism toward labels and certifications, insufficient marketing, and satisfaction with current food sources can explain this attitude-behavior gap.

But there is a clear lack of research conducted to investigate the existence of an attitude-behavior gap in the beauty care industry, and to understand the main factors affecting the consumer purchase decision-making in this market. The goal of this study is to address this gap by understanding these elements and draw some concrete recommendations.

RQ2: How to explain the attitude-behavior gap observed in the beauty care market? To what extent do habits and relationships with brands influence consumers' purchase behavior?

3.3 Green purchase intention, involvement and green purchase behavior

Rashid et al. (2009) conceptualized green purchase intention as the probability and willingness of a person to give preference to products having eco-friendly features over the traditional features. Through the product they purchase, consumers tend to express their environmental consciousness (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Tsakiridou et al. (2008) found that environment, animal welfare, health, and quality are major motivators for consumers to buy organic. Regarding natural cosmetics purchase in particular, Matic and Puh demonstrated in 2016 that health-conscious consumers have a higher intention towards purchasing natural cosmetics.

However, many studies highlight the fact that demand for green products is uneven regarding the market segment (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996) and a huge gap exists between the intention to purchase and the actual purchase of green products (Rashid et al., 2009). According to Ross and Milne (2020), sustainability has an increasingly significant role in consumer choices, but it is not the only motivation. Peattie (2001) showed that green consumers are thought to make green purchasing decisions either by the level of compromise required to purchase a green product, or by the level of confidence for this green product.

Sustainability remains an important attribute but for some consumers, price and quality have a greater importance in their decision making. The idea of sustainability liability developed by Luchs et al. in 2010 states that the positive effect of product sustainability on consumer preferences is reduced when strength-related attributes are valued. In this case, less sustainable product alternatives would sometimes be preferred. Moreover, Newman et al. (2014) shows that consumers are less likely to purchase a green product when they

perceive that the company intentionally made the product better for the environment compared to when the same environmental benefit occurred as an unintended side effect. Indeed, intended green enhancements lead consumers to assume that the company diverted resources away from product quality.

While consumer behavior towards green products has been studied in academic research, it appears that very limited studies have been conducted on green cosmetics purchase behavior to understand consumers' value-action gap in the beauty care market. The current study aims to fill this gap.

RQ3: How does sustainability impact consumers' purchase behavior? To what extent does green consciousness generate green purchase behavior in the beauty care market?

3.4 Information, knowledge and green trust

Access to clear and reliable information is key in the process decision, as information and knowledge of green products can have a direct influence on purchase decisions (Alves et al., 2013). In this context, it appears that consumer trust and consumer's lack of information are the two major brakes to green products purchase (Cervellon et al. 2010). A study conducted by Yang et al. (2018) in the UK in 2018 underlines the fact that consumers generally prevail neutral attitudes towards green cosmetics. According to Amberg et al. (2019), health and environment-aware consumers are motivated to buy natural cosmetics but will still choose the intensity of purchase in light of knowledge and information at hand.

The lack of knowledge around green products can be amplified by a lack of standardization of green labels: manufacturers, suppliers and advertisers can establish their own definition of green/natural (Cervellon et al., 2011), and consumers are confused by multiple existing national labels, European labels, third party labels and manufacturers' claim (Horne, 2009). This information overload significantly enhances consumer confusion (Langer et al., 2008), and leads many consumers to lose interest in the underlying messages (Verbeke and Ward, 2004). Turnbull et al. (2000) define consumer confusion as "consumer failure to develop a correct interpretation of various facets of a product or service during the information processing procedure".

This confusion can lead to a deterioration of green trust: facing numerous green claims, a consumer will have less trust in the marketplace (Chen, 2010). Walsh and Mitchell (2010) highlight the fact that consumers often blame the companies for making green marketing too difficult to understand. This perceived lack of transparent or factual information generates a lack of trust in green claims.

Green trust can be defined as “a willingness to depend on a product or service based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about environmental performance” (Chen 2010), and Wang et al. (2019) underline the important role of green trust in developing behavior intention.

Therefore, a lack of green trust seems to be one of the most important barriers affecting purchase decisions (Jager et al., 2002). Consumers worry about the contrast between claims and reality (Horiuchi et al., 2009) and the idea that firms share misleading information: a report by GFK in 2013 shows that 39% of the consumers did not believe environmental claims to be accurate. Consumer confidence in green products can be destabilized by exaggerated marketing information (Yang et al., 2018) as calling a product “green” is considered as a marketing strategy for many consumers (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011), leading to a mistrust in green claims.

Therefore, companies must work carefully on green products communication. There is a lack of research exploring issues of trust in green and health claims in the beauty care market, and the impact of exaggerated marketing on consumer confidence in green cosmetics. Following the idea of sustainability liability developed by Luchs et al. in 2010, potential negative impact of sustainability on product preferences can be attenuated using explicit cues about the product’s strengths. The current study aims to bring concrete insights on the impact of consumer knowledge and green trust issues in the beauty care market.

RQ4: To what extent does consumer knowledge impact green trust and consumer behavior in the beauty care market? How does marketing communication influence green cosmetics purchase?

3.5 Perceived efficiency and quality

Consumer knowledge and green trust issues can have an impact on the perceived efficiency of the product, and thus purchase intention since efficiency is the most important factor when buying a beauty care product. (Statista, 2020) Efficiency and quality of a product will be perceived differently by all consumers. Each consumer has a certain perception of how to define and perceive efficiency or quality, and they are strongly related. There is a difference between this perceived efficiency or quality and the actual efficiency/quality. The actual efficiency or “objective” efficiency is closely related with other concepts used to describe technical superiority of a product. Zeithaml (1988) define the perceived quality as the outcome of marketing exchange that results from a product or service meeting or exceeding consumption expectations. So, the greater the subjective magnitude of difference between actual and expected outcomes, the higher the product quality and the more consumers personally benefit from product consumption. Perceived efficiency will also depend on customers’ expectations and how the products actually meet these expectations. (Zeithaml, 1988)

Völckner and Hoffman (2007) show that perceived quality is an attribute that predicts consumer purchases and so, post-purchase satisfaction in a second time. Ross and Milne (2020) demonstrate that the value anticipated by consumers from quality is linked to their personal abilities to derive utility and satisfaction from a product. And as a result, consumers have to anticipate quality as a self-oriented benefit of consumption.

Alhedhaif et al. (2016) define product quality as the product’s ability to fulfill customer’s expectations. If customer’s expectations are fulfilled, the product will be considered as acceptable or even as high quality. But if the customer is disappointed and his expectations are not fulfilled, the product will be considered of low quality. (Alhedhaif et al, 2016). In their research, Alhedhaif et al. (2016) also defined quality in terms of parameters or characteristics depending on the product. For a pharmaceutical product, these parameters include physical and chemical characteristics, medicinal effect, toxicity, taste and shelf life to be important. (Alhedhaif et al., 2016).

Völckner and Hoffman (2007) demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between price and perceived product quality. The perceived quality

is also an attribute that predicts consumer purchases and consequent post-purchase satisfaction. (Völckner and Hoffman, 2007). The perceived efficiency will also depend on the knowledge of the consumer and the information available. In the last decades, consumer's behavior has changed. They have technical knowledge about products, but they also know the possible alternatives and how to access them. (Angelova & Zekiri, 2011). Depending on what consumers know about a product, the perceived efficiency will differ among them. Customers also assess quality based on their own experience, what they have heard from their friends (word-of-mouth) and advertising. The country in which the product was manufactured influences the consumer on the quality perception. (Winter et al, 2018) And from the literature a deduction could be that the more information the consumer has, the more accurate the perceived efficiency will be and the more satisfied he will be with the product since he will know his needs, how to fulfill them and what to expect from the product.

Perceived quality and efficiency are also highly related to brand loyalty. Angelova and Zekiri (2011) show that if a customer is satisfied by the quality of a product, it will lead to repeat purchases, brand loyalty and positive word of mouth. The literature shows that the perceived quality is highly correlated with the perceived image of the brand and that loyalty can induce a higher perceived quality. (Suwantara et al. (2012); Alhedhaif et al. (2016).

In the beauty care industry, efficiency is one of the most important factors when buying a product. Thus, if a product is perceived as low quality, consumers will be less likely to purchase it. This could be one of the explanations for the attitude-behavior gap observed in the cosmetic industry and explain that consumers do not buy green beauty care products when they have a low perception of efficiency. The current study aims to fill the lack of research on factors influencing perceived efficiency of green cosmetics, and to address issues of concerns about the effectiveness of green products in the cosmetics segment.

RQ5: To what extent do perceived quality and perceived efficiency impact consumer behavior in the beauty care market?

4.0 Method

The objective of this study is to gain more insights on consumers' preconceptions of green beauty care products to understand to what extent a globally positive attitude towards green beauty products is actually converted into purchase behavior. So, in order to explain in depth, the motivations and behaviors of consumers regarding green beauty care products and to answer our research questions, we used a qualitative approach consisting of in-depth interviews.

We started by creating an interview guide (*Appendix 1*) that we developed in order to test our different research questions on our participants. We organized the questions by theme, and we wanted to have questions ranging from general to specific themes.

First, participants were asked about their general behavior and expectations towards beauty care products and brands: what kind of relationship do they have with beauty care products? What are their favorite brands and why? What do they expect from beauty care products?

Then, they were probed on the environment and their general green purchase behavior: How important is the environment for them? Do they try to reduce their ecological impact, and how? Do they usually buy green products?

Finally, they were requested to elaborate about their perceptions of green beauty care products and their purchase behavior in this particular market and how some factors such as cosmetics labels could influence their purchase intentions: how are green beauty care products perceived by consumers? Do they buy green beauty care products? What do they think of green labels and certifications?

After designing our interview guide, we tested it on two small samples. The first sample was composed of people used to do interviews or to create interview guides; the second sample was composed of people that were not familiar with interviews or interview guides. We collected their feedback to improve our guide and then we started our interviews.

The study was conducted in France in French. In total, we conducted nine interviews which lasted on average 30 minutes. We chose different profiles to

have different points of views. First, we wanted to interview students, since the young generation is generally very concerned by the environment. We interviewed three students (two boys and one girl). Then, we wanted to interview young workers, so we interviewed one young worker who is very interested in beauty care products. Finally, we decided to interview mothers and older women to have their point of view. We interviewed five working women, some of whom are moms. We decided not to interview people over 60 years old because according to the literature and our research, this generation is not yet very impacted by the green trend in cosmetics. (See the table of respondents, *Appendix 2*) The average age of our sample is 39 years old, in proportion we have 78% women and 22% men, and 33% students and 66% workers.

To complete these consumer interviews, we decided to also interview a professional to have a complementary point of view on this subject. We interviewed a scientist with a master's degree in safety and international regulation of perfumes and cosmetics. This scientist has been working in cosmetics' regulation and safety in France for five years. She also has a blog on which she talks and describes cosmetics.

French quotes are translated into English and are reported in English in the following sections.

Results of this study are presented in the following section.

5.0 Results

5.1 Expectations of beauty care products

For 90% of our respondents, the first expectation for beauty care products in general is efficiency. They want efficient products that achieve the goal they are meant for.

“When I use a moisturizing cream, I want my face to be soft, hydrated and smooth, if I use a purifying product, I want my pores to be freed.” - Respondent 1

“I want an efficient product” - Respondent 6

“I want my money's worth.” - Respondent 5

“I am looking for efficiency and seriousness in manufacturing.” - Respondent 4

Quality seems to be the second expectation regarding beauty care purchase. Respondents are looking for quality and seriousness, which are not always related to price according to 55% of our respondents. Some proven brands can therefore differentiate themselves at this level by inspiring confidence.

“I want a quality product from a recognized brand” - Respondent 2

“Price is not an indicator” - Respondent 4

“I am not buying the most expensive products, because less expensive products are very good, the price difference does not fill the gap (in efficiency, quality...), middle range products are very good and efficient.” - Respondent 1

“I want efficient products, recommended by professionals.” - Respondent 3

“For moisturizing creams, I am buying only products recommended by my dermatologist because I have a very sensitive skin.” - Respondent 9

After the expectation of efficiency and quality also comes an expectation of pleasure while using the product for 78% of our respondents. This pleasure comes mostly through different senses: smell, texture.

“I want a product that gives a sense of cleanliness and that is smooth and not too liquid.” - Respondent 1

“The product has to be pleasant to use with a pleasant texture and smell, not viscous.” - Respondent 2

“I want a product that is pleasant to apply and that smells good.” - Respondent 9

But as it is rarely the first criterion leading to purchase, 22% of the respondents are ready to give up on this pleasure for a safe and efficient product. We observed that this group of respondents is composed of the oldest respondents (people above 30). This may be because efficiency is even more important for them than for younger people.

“I want a product that smells good and is pleasant to use, but I am ready to renounce this aspect for a safe and efficient product.” - Respondent 5

“The smell is necessarily a plus, but if there is no smell it's okay.” - Respondent 7

These results provide some explanations to answer RQ5, consumers want efficient products above everything else, and if they perceive the product as not efficient, they will not buy it. With these results we have some answers for RQ1 (*What is the impact of demographics on consumer behavior in the green beauty care segment?*). There is a difference in the expectations of consumers toward beauty products in general depending on age. Older consumers tend to favor efficiency above all other aspects while younger consumers also attach importance to pleasure and senses.

5.2 Relationship with brands

To investigate our second research question RQ2 (*How to explain the attitude-behavior gap observed in the beauty care market? To what extent do habits and relationships with brands influence consumers' purchase behavior?*), we studied the consumer-brand relationship. 90% of our respondents have very strong relationships with specific brands. They trust certain brands that they have been buying for years and to which they are extremely loyal.

“I have very strong consumption habits; I end up buying the same tried and tested brands over and over again.” - Respondent 4

“I am very loyal to brands that are known and recognized for their effects and efficiency.” - Respondent 2

However, 66% of our respondents still love to try new brands or test new products from time to time.

“I am very loyal to some brands, but I am still trying many things. I have great confidence in research and there are a lot of innovations today, even if there is a lot of marketing.” - Respondent 5

“I am very loyal to some brands that are very efficient and recommended by professionals, but I am generally more loyal to a specific product that I have tested and that I love, no matter its brand, than to a brand in particular.” - Respondent 3

“I am very loyal to some parapharmaceutical brands because I trust them. They are the only brands that are really efficient for me.” - Respondent 9

All our respondents cite parapharmacy, mass consumption or luxury brands as their favorite brands. These are brands that are a sign of confidence for the consumers.

“I love parapharmacy brands because it is a sign of confidence, seriousness and the scientific side reassures me.” - Respondent 4

“I love Ducray (*a parapharmaceutical brand*) because I trust it, it was recommended by my dermatologist, and it is the only one that works on me.” - Respondent 9

But we observed that none of our respondents cited a “green” brand as one of their favorite brands.

We also noticed that recommendations play a big role in beauty product purchase. Consumers are more likely to buy a product that was recommended by a professional, by other consumers or specialists.

“I use Oral B as my toothpaste because it was recommended by my dentist.” - Respondent 3

“I am trying a new face cream because I saw that it had been awarded by “60 millions de consommateurs”.”- Respondent 7

“Usually, I am always buying the same products, but I am willing to test a product if friends tested it and gave me positive feedback.” - Respondent 9

With these results we have elements to answer RQ2. Indeed, habits and relationships with brands have a huge influence on consumers’ purchase behavior, and thus it helps to explain the attitude behavior gap. Consumers have very strong relationships with specific brands that they trust, and they keep buying the same products over time. Even if some of them like to test new products or new brands, for most of their products they always buy the same ones. The major role of recommendations in the process of purchase has also

been highlighted in the interviews to explain how consumers make their purchase decisions.

5.3 Concern about the environment

We studied how sustainability and green trust influences consumers' purchase in order to answer RQ3 (*How does sustainability impact consumers' purchase behavior? To what extent does green consciousness generate green purchase behavior in the beauty care market?*). In general, all of our respondents claim to be concerned about the environment. Some pay particular attention to the impact of products on their health and the environment.

“I am not an environmental activist, but I do something if I can.” - Respondent 3

“I am paying particular attention to the impact on health of organic and green products.” - Respondent 5

However, a third of our respondents feel that buying green or organic products (in food or beauty care for example) does not have a significant effect on the environment and thus prefer to engage in other ways to reduce their environmental impact.

“My efforts for the planet will come through other channels than organic consumption.” - Respondent 5

“I prefer to make other efforts for the planet. I consider it more efficient to sort my waste, not to waste, rather than to give priority to organic products for a very low effect on the planet.” - Respondent 1

“I am trying to reduce my ecological impact by avoiding over-packaging and over-consumption more than green and organic products.” - Respondent 1

A third of the interviewees also mentioned the fact that for them, companies have to reorganize their processes to be more environmentally friendly and that this will be more efficient for the environment. We can notice that this was mentioned only by the youngest respondents under 35 years old.

“I think that it would be more impactful for the environment if companies were eco-friendlier and tried to reorganize their processes.” - Respondent 1

“Companies should be greener, it is good to launch a green brand, but they should have been green from the beginning.” - Respondent 2

“I am not sure that a product with organic oil coming from Brazil is really better for the environment or for me than a French non-organic oil.” - Respondent 9

The answers relative to RQ3 are more mixed. In general, all our respondents say to be concerned about the environment, but it has a very different impact on their purchase behavior. In markets such as food or home care, sustainability can influence the purchase behavior and consumers will buy more green or organic products. But in the beauty care segment, green consciousness does not seem to directly lead to green purchase. Indeed, most of our respondents feel that buying green beauty care products will not have a significant enough impact on the planet and they prefer to focus on other actions such as avoiding overconsumption or recycling to reduce their ecological footprints. To answer RQ1, we also observed a difference between our younger and older respondents. Younger respondents expect more concrete actions from the companies in their processes and not only green products or green brands.

This fact has also been highlighted by the scientist that we interviewed: consumers nowadays mainly expect transparency and clear actions from companies. Selling green for green's sake makes no sense and it could even be the downfall of the French cosmetics industry by adopting short-term strategic thinking. According to her, the challenge of cosmetics companies today is to adopt a long-term strategy through consumer education, even if it is time consuming, and to show that so-called chemical products are not necessarily associated with a danger to the environment. She even underlines that on the contrary, some chemical processes used in the cosmetic industry allow the use of products and chemical ingredients that would otherwise be lost.

5.4 Preconceptions of green products

Our respondents have very different preconceptions of green products in general. Some have very positive preconceptions of green products regarding price, quality or efficiency while some others have very negative opinions of these products.

For those who have a positive preconception of green products, they think that these products are better not only for the environment but also for their health compared to regular products.

“For me, green products use less harmful or natural ingredients. They do not come from a dubious source.” - Respondent 1

“Green products have less packaging or a reusable or recyclable one, to reduce the environmental impact.” - Respondent 1

“Green products contain natural ingredients that are sourced, you know where it comes from and usually it is produced in correct conditions. These are good quality products.” - Respondent 2

“For me, organic products can be very good, but it is not because it is organic that it will be safer for me.” - Respondent 9

Furthermore, one of them does not think that green products have to be more expensive than regular products.

“For me, green products are not more expensive. Before, it was possible for companies to sell them for more, but not anymore.” - Respondent 2

Another group of respondents was less enthusiastic towards green products. They think that it is more expensive than regular products and that there is a lot more scam. They do not believe that they are safer for their health.

“I don't like the idea 'It is organic so it is better'.” - Respondent 4

“Organic products are for rich single people.” - Respondent 4

“I usually do not buy organic. Not so much for the money, but I think that sometimes it's a bit of a scam. If it is a product bought directly, it's fine, but I don't believe in organic products in supermarkets.” - Respondent 6

“I do not always trust green products, there is a lot of greenwashing.” -

Respondent 9

And about beauty care products in particular:

“I don’t trust green products more than regular products, regular products are studied to achieve a certain goal, they have no interest in damaging our skin.” - Respondent 1

We often observed a difference of perception regarding green food and green beauty care products purchases:

“I try to buy organic for raw food products (for example fruits and vegetables) to avoid pesticides. Organic has become more affordable. But it is not a reflex for other categories of products.” - Respondent 7

“I do not have the systematic reflex to go organic. I try to do it with discernment. I will prefer organic when I buy raw food products. But I feel like it is not the same between food and cosmetics: the organic will be for me a lesser argument for cosmetics products.” - Respondent 5

With these results we have elements to help answer RQ2, consumers do not always have a very positive perception of green products in general in terms of efficiency, price-quality ratio, pleasure and senses... and it creates a barrier to purchase that could possibly explain the attitude-behavior gap observed in the beauty care market specifically.

Furthermore, we can find elements of response to RQ3. Indeed, even if consumers are environmentally conscious, some do not perceive green products in general as always better for the environment or the health. For example, they differentiate the impact of their purchase between green food and green cosmetics. Most do not feel that the impact of buying green cosmetics will make up for the sacrifice of buying a green beauty care product (often perceived as less efficient, more expensive and less pleasant to use).

5.5 Perception of green beauty care products

5.5.1 Efficiency

Efficiency was one of the most important factors for our respondents when buying beauty care products. In order to answer RQ5 (*To what extent do perceived quality and perceived efficiency impact consumer behavior in the beauty care market?*), we were interested to know how they perceive the efficiency of green cosmetics and how it impacted their purchase. The responses were divided in two different groups: green cosmetics are less efficient or green cosmetics are as efficient as regular cosmetics. Thus, none of the respondents find that green cosmetics are more efficient than regular cosmetics.

The first group of respondents who do not see a difference in efficiency is composed of the youngest interviewees, so only people under 35.

“I do not perceive green cosmetics as less efficient. The goal is the same, it is just that ingredients are different, but there is no reason to be less efficient.” - Respondent 1

“I don’t see any difference in efficiency, I don’t associate inefficiency with green.” - Respondent 2

“Both products have the same efficiency.” - Respondent 3

The second group of respondents, who perceive green cosmetics as less efficient, was composed of the oldest interviewees, so only people above 35.

“I have tried a green deodorant, but I didn’t like it, it was not efficient at all.” - Respondent 4

“I am very allergic, so I will be wary of green products. If the way of production was based on being organic at the expense of performance, I'm not interested. What I am looking for is performance.” - Respondent 5

“The organic criterion does not reassure me more than that in cosmetics. For a long time, organic cosmetics were criticized. It may have changed since then, but I’ve got the image of a bad smell, of shampoos that dry out the hair etc...” - Respondent 7

“I think that green products are either as efficient as a “non-green” product or they are less efficient, but they never are more efficient than non-green products.” - Respondent 9

Some of these respondents could buy green cosmetics, but only after a professional recommendation where someone that is qualified advised and guaranteed them that the product is efficient.

“If a saleswoman guaranteed me that such organic cream is like this, does not have that, why not buy this organic product. But my first worry will always be about tolerance. So, if one day I buy an organic cosmetic product, it will not be by conviction as reason number one, but for its proven effectiveness.” - Respondent 7

These results confirmed what consumers have already told us and confirmed our response to RQ5. Efficiency is one of the most important factors when buying a beauty care product, and if a product is perceived as not efficient, they will not buy it. These results also provide explanations for RQ1. Again, we can observe a difference in age. Older respondents perceive green cosmetics as less efficient than regular cosmetics and are less likely to buy them than younger respondents that find them as efficient as regular products. The scientist explains with the example of an anti-aging ingredient that indeed Bakuchiol (natural extract) remains less effective than the retinol produced in laboratories and used for many years. Moreover, Bakuchiol comes from an endangered species which also creates an ethical problem.

5.5.2 Texture

When it comes to the texture of green products, 88% of our respondents have a negative perception. They think that the texture of green products is less pleasant and less easy to use.

“Green anti-wrinkle cream doesn’t have a pleasant texture; it is too liquid. Green shampoos are not foaming, so I don’t have the impression that they actually wash my hair.” - Respondent 4

“The green products are more solid, or too liquid but not unctuous like I want.” - Respondent 1

“I do not think that there is always a difference in texture, but for sure, green cosmetics can be less pleasant to use.” - Respondent 9

But for one of our respondents, green products have a great texture that is different from regular products and that can be very pleasant to use.

“Green products could have a natural texture or aspect, it can be exotic and different from mainstream products, so I like it.” -
Respondent 2

5.5.3 Smell

Focusing on smell, our respondents agreed that green products have less smell, but it is not always negative.

“Green cosmetics smell less strong because they have less additives.” -
Respondent 3

“The product has to smell good, green cosmetics usually smell less strong, but you can have more exotics smells.” - Respondent 2

“For me, green creams do not smell good.” - Respondent 4

“I think that because green products avoid chemicals, the smell is less strong but that is not always a problem according to the product type (cream for example).” - Respondent 9

5.5.4 Price

The perception of price divides our consumers in two different groups, two third of our respondents think they are more expensive while the last third of our respondents think it is the same price. None of our respondents think that green beauty care products are cheaper than regular products.

“I don't think that green cosmetics are more expensive, since they are not premium products, the goal is just to be green, if they were more expensive it would challenge the purpose of the product.” - Respondent 1

“Green cosmetics are more expensive than non-green cosmetics.” -
Respondent 3

“I think that green cosmetics are more expensive than other products, even if they are not more efficient.” - Respondent 9

The perception of these different factors has an influence on the purchase behavior of consumers and provide an explanation to the attitude behavior gap and RQ2. Since consumers perceive green beauty care products as more expensive, and less pleasant to use because of the texture of the products, they have little incentive to buy them. Indeed, the scientist explains in green products, many ingredients such as additives to have a better texture cannot be used (because they are not green or natural), which can make the products more unpleasant to use.

5.6 Impact of ingredients, labels, and green certifications

Finally, we wanted to study the impact of ingredients, labels, and green certifications on consumers. We wanted to understand how they influence purchase behavior and if consumers were trusting and paying attention to ingredients and labels.

5.6.1 Ingredients

All the respondents share the idea that a shorter list is better, even if it does not necessarily represent a differentiating criterion for all of them when purchasing.

“I will prefer a shorter list of ingredients.” - Respondent 4

“I don’t necessarily look at the ingredient list when purchasing, but I always take a look afterwards. I feel that an endless list is not great. But that doesn’t mean that I am going to give up processed products and make only olive oil hair masks!” - Respondent 6

We clearly noticed that 78% of our respondents claim to be confused when looking at the ingredient list, which does not give them enough information to make an informed choice.

“We don’t know what it means anyway, they are always complex names. Since we don’t know very well, we don’t pay much attention.” - Respondent 7

“I feel like it is a matter of education. I do not have enough reliable information to look at the ingredient list and have an opinion. I am not a chemist; I am not educated enough on the subject to have an objective opinion on what I put on my skin.” - Respondent 5

An element of response to RQ4, (*To what extent does consumer knowledge impact green trust and consumer behavior in the beauty care market? How does marketing communication influence green cosmetics purchase?*), will be that consumers are conscious to not always have the knowledge to understand the product entirely (ingredients list, production method...), but this is not always a disincentive to buy since they need the product. As the scientist suggests, consumers generally do not have the knowledge to understand the products, and will for example buy products with a reduced list without knowing what it implies.

5.6.2 Labels and green certifications

Labels and green certifications are made to “identify products or services proven to be environmentally preferable within a specific category. Requirements and product categories can differ, but all standards address multiple environmental and health issues” (Global Ecolabelling, 2021).

Only one third of the respondents claimed to trust labels, even if some do not always understand them.

“I feel that there are a lot of different labels today, and a lot of talk about certifications. But there is one label in particular that I know and follow for a long time: Ecocert.” – Respondent 8

“I trust labels, it means that the product respects some norms, it is healthier than other products. A label is only a bonus.” - Respondent 1

“Labels are regulated enough so I trust them, and they can be differentiating at the time of purchase between two products.” - Respondent 9

On the contrary, another third of other respondents were skeptical towards labels. They do not trust or understand them.

“I am very suspicious of certifications. They have a perverse effect; I have the impression that I am paying for the organic label.” - Respondent 5

“I don’t pay attention to labels; I am too lazy to look at all the labels and I don’t believe them because I have seen laws trying to pass around them. So, I don’t trust them. Some brands make their own labels to sell themselves in premium mode.” - Respondent 2

But in general, it is clearly noticeable that labels and green certifications generate confusion among consumers, who therefore generally do not see them as a differentiating criterion when making a purchase.

“I have the impression that they mean everything and nothing.” - Respondent 4

“There are so many that I don’t pay attention to the labels.” - Respondent 7

“I feel like there is a lack of communication and information sharing from the companies. If there are certifications that hold up, explain them to us!” - Respondent 5

“Labels are not necessarily a differentiating factor at the time of purchase.” - Respondent 3

“My purchase will depend on other criteria, if there is a label but the product looks weird, I will not buy it.” - Respondent 1

To conclude, we identified a lot of confusion and a lack of education when it comes to labels and green certifications, that generate a lack of trust towards labeled products.

“If reliable organizations are created, and if I get convincing information that a certain label really brings a guarantee to the consumer, I will trust it. But not when I see a simple stamp on the packaging.” - Respondent 5

Facing this confusion towards ingredients and labels, some participants bring up the fact that apps can be very useful when choosing a product. Since they do not have the knowledge to understand labels or ingredients lists, they are using apps to achieve this goal.

“Since I don't understand the certifications well enough, I use an app that rates products and offers detailed information when scanning the barcode of a product. It is a great alternative when I have to choose between two products.” - Respondent 7

However, some of our respondents do not really trust these apps that are created by companies and would prefer to have an app created by the state to analyze the products.

“I don't understand labels, there should be an application for a referencing made by the state more than by a company that would serve its own cause.” - Respondent 2

A response to RQ4 will be that the lack of consumer knowledge can induce some distrust in the green beauty care market. Consumers do not understand labels and ingredients, and companies have to be careful with marketing communications because consumers tend to avoid greenwashing. This point was mentioned by the scientist. According to her, there has been a real paradigm shift from "the consumer wants to know nothing" to "the consumer wants to know everything". As the industry has been slow to adapt to this new paradigm and communicate transparently about its products, it seems that apps have emerged as the solution to help consumers in their purchase decision by giving accessible information.

5.7 Additional perspectives

Another point to answer RQ2 was brought up by participants to explain their lack of purchase of green products is that there is no incentive to buy them and they are not highlighted enough. Furthermore, they feel that there are not enough choices.

“I don't really buy green products if there is not a big incentive. They must have a strong presence in the shop.” - Respondent 1

“There is not enough emphasis on green products.” - Respondent 2

“First, there is no incentive to buy green products, if I go to a shop, I just don’t see them and there are not enough choices of green products.” - Respondent 1

“I find that green brands are not very present in stores (or parapharmacy) and I do not want to go to a green store just to buy beauty care products.” - Respondent 9

To complete these consumer interviews, we asked the scientist to share her vision of this new trend in the cosmetics market, from her perspective as an expert in the international safety and regulation of cosmetics.

The scientist explained that the cosmetics industry is one of the most regulated industries. The European regulation is very strict in terms of cosmetics security. Every ingredient of cosmetics products is carefully chosen and evaluated in terms of risk for the consumer’s health before being authorized in a cosmetic product. *“We have no interest in killing our consumers.”* The regulations are evolving with scientific advances. Furthermore, in Europe animal testing is banned, and that is why some problematic such as endocrine disruptors have emerged recently because we did not have the means to identify them before.

This scientist considered that the actual problem with consumers in the cosmetic industry is that they want zero risk, and precautionary principle is paramount for them. But they have gaps in their scientific culture. Toxicity is dose and exposure dependent. And this is considered by the recommendations. *“I prefer to buy products created in a large ultra-controlled laboratory, rather than products created by a girl in her kitchen with natural ingredients.”* The problem with the emergence of all these green trends, green brands are using fear marketing. *“The term ‘clean beauty’ implies that the rest of the products are dirty, whereas these are products that meet very strict standards”.*

The scientist explained that “green cosmetics” are not always safer than “regular” cosmetics. *“It is not because a cosmetic product is green, that it will be better tolerated. With a synthetic molecule, you know exactly its structure, how it will act, its potential toxic effects, while with natural extracts, there are a lot more molecules inside and everything is blurrier.”* People are afraid of

“chemical or synthetic molecules” but they should not: *“it is safer to use proxiety-provoking discourse on cosmetics while European regulation is very strict and safe. There are committees of scientific experts and safety assessments.”*

The scientist finds that there is a lack of consumer education in the cosmetic industry. Consumers needed to be educated but the industry did not listen to them and so were apps to analyze ingredients created. *“If science does not speak, someone will speak for it.”* But these apps are not taking all factors into account. For example, the notion of penetration, absorption or concentration is not considered by apps while there are decisive factors to evaluate the potential toxicity of an ingredient. *“Apps are evaluating products with only 5% of the information, it's like asking you to evaluate the gastronomic quality of a dish with just the shopping list.”* Consumers put everything on the same level, but *“the best allergens are in nature, the most violent poisons are natural poisons.”* The problem is now that consumers want things without understanding the implications. *“They want more natural products, without conservative but this implies having a disgusting texture.”* Marketing of some green brands is using this lack of consumers’ knowledge by using fear. They boast of selling products without certain ingredients. *“It's a marketing of emptiness, we should sell our products for what's inside and not on what's not inside.”*

According to the scientist’s opinion, most of the new emerging green brands go against their values. These brands want to be green and cleaner for the planet, *“but the greenest thing is to consume less and not to create another green brand without added value and without bringing something more to consumers.”* Furthermore, according to the scientist, an ethical question arises with these green brands. Indeed, by cultivating plants for cosmetics, we are in competition with the food industry. *“Ethically we cannot sacrifice food for cosmetics and that is why we use synthetic molecules. Moreover, some natural assets cannot be local (shea butter for example), which also goes against the values of the brand.”*

For this scientist, the right solution will be a balance in the use of green and “non-green” cosmetics. *“Cosmetics are and should remain a pleasure, they are associated with the notion of well-being above all.”* The scientist says that for

her reasoned cosmetics is one of the solutions. Consumers should be looking for specific cosmetic assets that meet their needs and are effective for them.

6.0 Discussion

One of our first findings, which corroborates with the research of Finisterra do Paco et al. (2009), is that there are no significant relations between age or gender and green attitudes in general. Our results related to our first research question suggest that, as Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) found, demographics do not seem very significant in defining the sustainable consumer. Indeed, with our result we cannot classify green consciousness depending on gender or age. All of our respondents are concerned by the environment and are trying to reduce their ecological impact by different means.

However, our results regarding RQ1 suggest that demographics, and more specifically age play a role when it comes to cosmetics usage and expectations. The first expectation of beauty products that comes up for all of our respondents is efficiency. They want efficient products that achieve the goal they are meant for. The second expectation is quality and seriousness. Other factors such as pleasure and sensoriality come after. There is a discrepancy between age, as it appears that for our older respondents, efficiency is even more important than for our younger respondents. And most of our older respondents are ready to give up pleasure and senses for safe and efficient products. Furthermore, older respondents' choice of beauty care products will be less related to price. Efficiency really is the most important and preponderant argument. One assumption that could be made is that the older consumer segment may be looking more for immediate visible effects from the use of beauty products, such as anti-wrinkle creams. The primary motivation for this purchase would be effectiveness, sometimes whatever the cost. On the contrary, price can be a decisive argument for younger respondents when buying beauty products. It can even be more important than efficiency for them.

Another difference that can be observed depending on age is the perceived efficiency of green beauty care products. Indeed, it appears that respondents under 30 do not necessarily perceive a difference in efficiency between regular and green beauty care products, while respondents above 30 globally have more

negative preconceptions regarding the efficiency of green cosmetics. One explanation of this difference of perception depending on age could be the recent evolution of production methods highlighted by the scientist. A few years ago, the offer on the green cosmetic market was not as innovative as it is today and efficiency of green products might have evolved in recent years. Indeed, as our scientist explained, a lot of new green brands have emerged in the past years using new biotechnology.

Furthermore, one of our hypotheses regarding RQ2 to explain the attitude-behavior gap was that the purchase behavior of consumers was mainly based on habits. This means that even if consumers have a good attitude towards responsible and green consumption, once in the shop they may search for their habitual products. This hypothesis was confirmed with our results. We often observed strong relationships of the respondents with their favorite brands, they have built trust over the years and they mostly purchase from those brands. However, some of our respondents are very curious about new brands. They are open to the idea of testing new products or brands, trusting research and innovation, even if the majority of the products they buy are their usual products. This consumption pattern does not seem to depend on age or gender.

Regarding the favorite brands of our respondents, very often, with a majority of older respondents, parapharmacy brands were cited as their favorite. Parapharmacy brands are a sign of confidence and trust in science. Consumers know that these products are effective and of good quality, which are the two most important factors when buying a beauty care product.

We noticed that another important factor that can interfere when buying a beauty care product is recommendations. These recommendations could be made by professionals, other consumers, specialists... Regarding green products, these recommendations can lead to green purchase if efficiency is proved, but these steps are necessary to create the purchase.

Based on our conclusions, we draw some managerial implications. One of our main findings for marketers is that recommendation is the key. Most of the consumers are concerned by the environment and are not against green products,

but they need proof that the product is efficient and can be trusted to be opened to purchase it. Marketers have to keep in mind that efficiency is the first criterion when a consumer purchases a beauty product, and that some of the consumers perceive green cosmetics as less efficient. Therefore, when marketers want to sell a green beauty care product, they have to create an efficient product and make sure that consumers are aware of this efficiency. Our scientist advocates for consumer education to help them understand the ingredients of a product: why are they here? What are the benefits? If consumers have all this information, they will be able to know which product or which ingredient is efficient for them or harmful for them (if they have a sensitive skin or specific allergies for example.)

Another point that was highlighted by our respondents, and mostly by older respondents with a family, is the fact that products' accessibility has a big impact in the process of purchase. Purchasing habits are highly dependent on the stores around the consumer's location. Often, they are attached to brands that are nearby and easily accessible. And most of the respondents find that green beauty care products are not very accessible or visible in store, so they purchase their usual products. Furthermore, they do not have a lot of time during the process of purchase: so, it has to be simple and efficient.

Our recommendation for marketers will be to try as much as possible to put green products in local supermarkets, pharmacies and close shops and highlight them while being on the shelf.

Some of the students also find that there is not enough or even no incentive to buy green beauty care products while being in store. Green products are not really visible and highlighted and also, there are not enough choices.

Our recommendation for marketers who want to target young consumers will be to work on the accessibility and visibility of the products in store but also increase the product range to create more choices for the consumer.

Our research also explored the relationship between green consciousness and consumption behavior through our third research question RQ3. Our hypothesis was that even if consumers have good intentions to buy sustainable products, once in a shop they may search for their habitual products. All of the

respondents in our study claimed to be concerned about the environment. However, green consciousness does not seem to automatically lead to green beauty care purchases. Some of the interviewees feel that buying green will not have a significant impact on the environment and will prioritize other ways to act for the planet. Some of the younger respondents even question the motivations of companies in the growth of the beauty care market and their way of producing. But one of the issues is that consumers are looking for green products without really knowing what they are asking for. They want products with natural (organic) ingredients because they believe that it will be safer for their skin and for the planet. But as our scientist states, green cosmetics are not always greener. For example, is a product with shea butter coming from the other side of the earth really greener compared to a product with mineral oil that are petrochemical co-products (so produced in all cases)? And furthermore, some consumers believe that green beauty care products are safer for their health compared to “chemicals” products. But for our scientist this is because they are afraid of the word “chemical” that they associate with something negative in comparison to “natural”. Thus, it is important for the consumer to know that all ingredients of “chemical” products are meticulously chosen and respect very strict regulations. And that it is easier to detect the potential danger of a chemical ingredient than a natural one, and that a natural product does not exclude an allergic reaction.

Therefore, despite a global concern for the environment, the perception of green beauty care products differs. For a part of the respondents, green beauty products actually appear better for the environment and for health compared to regular products. Price is not always perceived as significantly different between regular and green products, especially for young respondents.

But others, mostly older respondents with a family, will rather perceive green cosmetics as more expensive and not necessarily safer for their health. The idea of a scam around the organic cosmetics market has been mentioned several times.

To understand this negative perception, the scientist that we interviewed highlighted the risks that exaggerated marketing can have on consumers. This was also studied in the literature that calling a product “green” could be considered as a marketing strategy for many consumers and lead to a mistrust in

green claims. (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011). Consumers have evolved and so have their expectations. They appear to be much more unfaithful to brands and have a need for transparency from companies. According to the scientist, we notice nowadays an anxiogenic communication on cosmetics and a generalization of fear marketing, with for example the idea that regular beauty products are directly opposed to “clean” cosmetics. This communication is not justified according to her, pointing out the fact that regulations are particularly strict in Europe and that all products are safe and clean for the consumers.

Our findings are consistent with our original hypotheses related to RQ4 on the challenge of brand communication. Facing the evolution of consumers’ expectations, it appears that companies should pay particular attention to their marketing strategy and the way they communicate about their products. A positive and transparent communication could now be the most effective way to build green trust, customer loyalty and meet customers’ new expectations. This idea of a clear and honest communication in order to avoid a negative perception from consumers is also in line with the point of view developed by Luchs et al. (2010), stating that the effective use of explicit cues about the strengths of the products can reduce the potential negative perception of green products and build trust in green claims.

As stated in the literature, the process of purchase should be directly influenced by an access to clear and reliable information. Past research underlined the impact of a limited access to information and a lack of knowledge on green purchase behavior (Alves et al., 2013). The same conclusion is reached in our study on the green cosmetics market, enabling a lack of trust towards green beauty products.

Our study aimed to understand the criteria taken into account by the respondents in their purchasing process. First, all agreed that they considered a short list of ingredients to be better. However, despite this, the characteristics of the ingredient list were not necessarily a differentiating factor at the time of purchase. The majority feel confused when looking at the ingredient list, considering that they do not have enough knowledge or information to make an informed choice. This was confirmed by our scientist. She believes that the industry made a mistake by not explaining the ingredients to consumers and now

some companies have developed apps. But for most of them, they decipher and rate products without having all the information, but very few consumers are aware of this.

Moreover, a minority of respondents, which does not seem to be defined by age or gender, said that they trust green labels displayed on the packaging. Some others, on the contrary, appear skeptical towards labels. But eventually, whether consumers trust green labels or not, we noticed a general confusion when it comes to green labels and certifications, which does not make them a differentiating criterion when making a purchase. These results highlight a lack of knowledge and education, which can lead to a lack of green trust.

Therefore, these findings help us draw managerial implications about the importance of consumer education. The profile of the green consumer has evolved in recent years. While consuming green cosmetics was at first characteristic of the completely green consumer segment (as classified by Amberg et al. in 2019) it seems that the typical profile of the green consumer has evolved since then, and most consumers are now curious to have more information about the products they consume. The scientist that we interviewed underlined the need for people to be educated by the brands on their products. Communicating about ingredients, labels, and the concrete impact of green beauty products on the environment and health could be an effective way to attract new consumers by generating a positive perceived efficiency.

7.0 Conclusion

The current study made contributions to the existing literature because there is a lot of research conducted to understand why consumers buy green products, but there is a lack of research to study why consumers do not buy green products. Our study provides some explanations to better understand the attitude-behavior gap in the green beauty care market.

7.1 Limitations

The main limitation of the research is the data collection. This study was conducted on a small panel in France. Even if many consumer segments are represented, more precise results could be obtained by generalizing this study to

a bigger and more representative panel. Moreover, the presence of an interviewer may have created a bias in the attitudes of the respondents, even if the choice of conducting open interviews was made to avoid this bias as much as possible. Furthermore, the study was conducted in France about the French cosmetics market. It could be interesting to see if these results can be generalized to other countries.

7.2 Further research

Further research could focus on other markets than green beauty care such as green home care products and see if the same attitude-behavior gap is observed and if yes, if it is for the same reason that the current study finds or for other reasons.

Further research should also try to better understand the impact of scanning apps on the purchase behavior. Some of our respondents mentioned using apps when buying products to scan and verify the composition. But the scientist underlined the fact that most of the apps do not have all the information when grading products. They only have the list of ingredients but they do not know the quantities of each ingredient. However, regulations in the cosmetics and beauty care industry are very strict and based on safety for the consumers. They are evolving according to the progress of science, and they are taking into account dose and exposure to assess the risk to the consumer. For example, an ingredient may be carcinogenic but not in small doses, if an ingredient is present, it has a specific role and presents no danger for the consumer. Further research can study how these apps are working, what is the goal of people managing these apps and how they affect consumers and the beauty care industry.

The beauty care industry is a very complex one, and some of our respondents and the scientist mentioned the lack of consumer education. Further research could be conducted to define the right method to educate the consumer without being too academic, since shopping and beauty care products are related to pleasure.

Another interesting subject for further research will be to investigate the ecological impact of green products. Are they really greener? Sometimes the ingredients come from the other side of the world, or ingredients are in competition with the food industry or need a lot of resources to grow (for

example plants used in the beauty care industry) while chemical ingredients are produced in laboratories or are based on waste from the petrochemical industry. Since consumers are increasingly questioning production methods and asking for transparency, this may be a particularly interesting topic to pursue.

8.0 References

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9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Interview Guide

To introduce our research: we explained that we are doing a study on consumers' behaviors towards beauty care products and that we want to study how consumers react to the market evolution and to new trends in this particular market.

1. How important are beauty care products to your life?
2. Do you consider yourself a frequent purchaser of beauty products - probe: more than most people or less than most people or about the same?
3. What do you expect from beauty care products? probes: smell, texture, efficiency, price...
4. What are your favorite beauty care products brand(s)? Why?
5. Are you concerned about the environment?
6. Do you consider yourself a frequent purchaser of green products such as foods, fashions, home care, etc.? probe: more than most people or less than most people or about the same?
7. Are you aware of green beauty care brands? Probes: which ones do you know, which ones have you tried?

8. What comes to your mind when you think of green beauty care products?
 1. Probes: how do they compare with normal beauty products on price? effectiveness in beautification? Why?
 2. Do you trust they are greener than regular beauty products? Why? Do you think they are safer for skin/health? Why?
 3. What about senses, are green products better, worse, same on smell, texture? Why?
9. How do these factors such as price, safety, effectiveness, smell, etc. influence your purchase and use of green beauty products?
10. Do you pay attention to cosmetics labels?
11. Do you understand and trust the labels? probe: do they influence what you buy?

9.2 Appendix 2: Table of respondents

Number	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education
1	24	Male	Student	Business School
2	22	Male	Student	Business School
3	22	Female	Student	Business School
4	50	Female	Working	University
5	51	Female	Working	University
6	48	Female	Working	University
7	52	Female	Working	University
8	55	Female	Working	University
9	32	Female	Working	Medicine