

SUSTAINABLE COSMETICS: A MAJOR INSTRUMENT IN PROTECTING THE CONSUMER'S INTEREST

Luiela Magdalena CSORBA, Vanina Adoriana BOGLEA

„Aurel Vlaicu” University, Faculty of Economics, Romania
vanina.boglea@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Recently, many alarms have been raised in connection with cosmetics consumption. Only a small portion of consumers realize that hygiene and beauty products are responsible for their health. All consumers who are really concerned about their health must know that many substances used in these products are dangerous not only for the environment, but also for the integrity of their bodies, because they are absorbed by the body through the skin. Most manufacturers use chemical cocktails in their cosmetics and beauty products. These „cocktails” are not only damaging to the skin but also to our everyday environment. Consumers must be able to make an informed choice regarding which manufactured cosmetics to buy and to use every day. The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the green cosmetics market, underlining the relationship between green cosmetics, firms' environmentally-friendly strategies, and consumer protection policies. Using a comparison between green and synthetic cosmetics that shows the high risk involved in using a lot of dangerous chemicals contained in the latter, the article attempts to build up environmental awareness and interest among consumers in healthy and safe consumption, consumption that is sustainable in nature and not harmful to their own health.

Keywords: green marketing, natural cosmetics, environmental awareness, consumer protection

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, managing businesses so as to minimize the adverse impact on the environment attracts an enormous amount of media and public attention. Green marketing of products and services is an important development in the context of the contemporary emerging economies. By adopting resource conserving and environmentally-friendly strategies in all the stages of the value chain, the firms can satisfy the growing environmental concerns of the humanity.

Concerns over the environment, pollutants, clean air and water, safe products and foods, are realities which determined a series of disasters during the 1980s: decimation of the Black Forest by acid rain, accidental release of toxic chemicals into the Rhine River, spread of a nuclear cloud from Chernobyl etc. That's why The Green Movement has put unexpected pressure while the EC has passed more than 200 regulations and directives relating to all aspects of the environmental pollution.

The last three decades have increased the public awareness of environmental issues. The environmental awareness or „green movement” has made „greening” an important issue for managers and marketers. Many managers view aspects of the

green movement as possible niches for product and marketing efforts. These behavior attempts to follow the three R's: reduce, reuse and recycle (*Coddington, 1990*).

However, in the West, business firms face social and legal pressures to adopt environmentally-friendly business strategies. At the same time, many corporations responded to these pressures and adopted environmentally-friendly strategies.

In that way, Green became first a marketing tactic and then, with time, it evolved into something approximating to a religion, with nearly every public act of the company closely geared to saving, nurturing or restoring the environment. But Green means also a safe life, a good health, because it's directly related with the consumers' security. That's why it can't be deny the relationship between sustainability, the environmental issues and the consumer protection policy.

In 1991, during the negotiations to finalize the European Community, „Green” activists exerted enough influence on ecological concerns to bring changes to the EC's Cosmetic Directives too. That way, it was established an undeniably active movement to market „green products”, coming from some companies, especially in the cosmetic business, movement which sustains both: the environmentally-friendly strategies and the consumer protection interest.

Of course, Green as a concept in cosmetic product formulation is neither new nor startling. Some segments of the cosmetic industry already had a head start on the Green Game, since the business had experienced at least two waves of natural products: botanicals and fruit-based formulas in the early and mid 1970s, and a second similar but stronger phenomenon that began in the mid-1980s and has carried through today.

Caswell-Massey had been almost single-handedly carrying the message for decades, selling cucumber-based soaps and pineapple hair rinses from the shelves of its Lexington Avenue apothecary shop, to a special clientele. Providing strong motivation during the second wave from Europe was The Body Shop, which used the Caswell-Massey concept to develop a wide range of products in simple packaging for sale, in stores devoted to the concept of „natural” or „environmentally friendly” cosmetics, bath products and fragrances. Minimalist wastes of resources were part of the picture, a new image of a company philosophy that encouraged the environment protection strategies. Most of the attempts at capitalizing on the green movement have been focused on recycled products and environmentally friendly consumer products and packaging.

As is pointed out in Ottman's book, „...is about more than simply marketing products as green. It's about ensuring that those products genuinely are green... ensuring that the entire company is green. This process doesn't begin in the marketing department, it ends there.” But what justification can there have been for such a profound change in the corporate awareness of the environment as a marketing strategy? Ottman opines that the Three Mile nuclear power plant disaster, the Exxon oil spill, the depletion of the ozone layer and other indications of threats to the global climate - all combined in the late 1980s and early 1990s - creates an environmentally wary consumer, one especially responsive to products and market concepts that seemed to be responding to those concerns (*Ottman, 1993*).

From the “Green philosophy”, which covers an entire range of ingredients, formulations, packaging, advertising and general image, to the sustainable philosophy, there is just one step.

Sustainable is defined as using natural resources that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations. Sustainable cosmetics are readily available and we all should begin to shift our focus on products which will help us to live on this planet a little better.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Nowadays, consumers have a huge choice of beauty and body care products or services available to them. When considering using these items or services, it is important for consumers to understand the health risks, the financial implications and how sustainable using them, can be.

Cosmetics help to develop a desired look, however, they do have an upkeep cost and some can contain chemicals or synthetics that could be harmful to the skin and the environment. It's proven scientifically that chemical cosmetics are linked to disorders like dermatoid allergies, cancer and birth defects.

Our skin is the largest organ of our body and a kind of litmus paper to our general state of health. The skin is a very permeable organ, so it's important to know exactly what we are putting on it.

Cosmetics are often the most chemical-laden culprits in the beauty market and they're applied directly on the skin. The chemicals aren't healthy for the consumers and for the environment. Consumption of cosmetics and toiletries is not restricted to the female population alone. Male grooming products have also emerged as an attractive segment. Skin and hair care products, face cleansers and premium shaving products are proving attractive offerings for the male grooming products market. Rising environmental concerns, growing awareness about sustaining resources, carcinogenic nature of synthetic cosmetic ingredients have propelled growth of natural and organic ingredients in cosmetics.

Because manufacturers can be tricky with their “made from coconut/corn” advertising claims, consumers have to make sure and to watch out for the worst chemical offenses in the realm of cosmetics (*Csorba*, 2006).

One of the most harmful ingredients present in cosmetics is a sort of industrial plasticizer called Phalates. Surprisingly, Phalates are not listed by manufacturers in the ingredient chart of products as they are banned in a majority of countries, excluding the United States. An average consumer is totally unaware of the presence of Phalates in the products they buy; Phalates are more prominently found in nail polish, tanning agents and hand rinse solvents.

The accumulation of Phalates in the body will eventually lead to mutation, hormone disruption and abnormalities in the reproductive tracts. An overuse of Phalates by an expectant mother can cause abnormalities in the reproductive system of the foetus, particularly of the boy child. The study reports of the University of Rochester solidify the claim that Phalates lead to irregular development of genitals

in the form of undescended testes or relatively smaller penises in babies and even to demasculinisation of the male reproductive system. A research report published by Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (CSC) tells us of an upsetting fact that two thirds of health and beauty products tested were positive for Phthalates presence.

Another hazardous ingredient which was brought in to the limelight recently was Para Hydroxy Benzoate, better known as Parabens. Parabens are used in cosmetics as a preservative to prevent microbial growth. Paraben traces are found more in deodorants and nail polish and are classified as a direct carcinogenic agent, cancer causative. The presence of Parabens was confirmed recently in breast cancer tissue. It isn't only Parabens, but other cosmetic ingredients like formaldehyde and toluenes, which are also classified under the genre of carcinogenic agents.

Thickening agents like Propylene Glycol and Polyethylene Glycol are broadly used in beauty products to alter their stability. These polymeric derivatives are widely used in the preparation of hair gel, anti-perspirants and aftershaves. The same polymers are used in brake fluids, anti-freeze solutions and oven cleaners.

More unsettling is the fact that uncommon cancers like Multiple Myeloma and Non Hodgkins Lymphoma are affiliated to the use of hair dye. Study reports by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and by the American Cancer Society show that hair dye users are prone to cancer four times more than non hair dye users. Similarly, anti-wrinkle lotions and creams containing Alpha Hydroxy Acids make the user's skin sensitive to sunlight and Ultra Violet Rays, eventually causing skin cancer.

Now, let's synthesize the existing hazardous substances in the synthetic cosmetics:

- *Phthalates* - these estrogen-mimickers may cause unwelcome hormonal effects;
- *Lead* - certain types of hair dye still contain it. Lead acetate has been rated by - the Environmental Working Group's database of product information - as a number 10 toxin.
- *Petroleum Products* - These substances - also called petrolatum - can be difficult to spot due to their plethora of aliases. BHA, a petroleum derivative, has been linked to cancer, developmental and reproductive damage, immune system toxicity, endocrine disruption, neurotoxicity and environmental harm. Called trioxaundecanedioic acid, toluene and 4-amino-2-hydroxy-tuolene in many common products, this ingredient might be missed because of its many names, but if we follow the "I don't recognize this and it's not easily pronounced" rule, we'll probably be able to avoid it.
- *Mercury* - Also called thimerosal, this is the controversial ingredient blamed for children's autism because of its use in vaccines. While even the vaccine industry has removed most thimerosal from most of its products, some cosmetics still contain it, especially some cake-style mascaras. Some homeopathic formulas have been tagged by Skin Deep for having mercury compounds in them, but the minuscule amounts found in these products are likely not going to cause harm.
- *Fragrance* - This ingredient is so unregulated that cosmetics companies don't even have to list what is in their fragrances. Many fragrance ingredients are chemically-based, neurotoxic and allergenic. Hundreds of different chemicals may be used in its manufacture.

- *Formaldehyde* is used as a preservative. It has been linked to cancer, cell changes, neurotoxicity, developmental and reproductive harm. It is primarily used in nail polishes and hair bleach.
- *Propylene Glycol* - used as a wetting agent, propylene glycol is found in many lotions, moisturizers and liquid foundations. It has been linked to cancer, mutagenic changes, endocrine disruptions, skin irritation and skin rashes.
- *PABA (para-aminobenzoic acid)* - use to be a common ingredient in many products, including sunscreen, until its possible carcinogenic properties were discovered. Yet we can still find it in some lip balms, shampoos and body washes. PABA has been linked to cancer, developmental damage, reproductive damage, cell level changes and neurotoxicity.

There are many other ingredients that extensive research reveals as harmful to humans (not the mention the planet). That way, the list could be endless. Thousands of cosmetics are touted in every form of media imaginable. So, how does a consumer know which one to choose? The best defense against toxic cosmetics is to read with huge attention the label of the products.

Other tips for the consumers, to counter the negative effects of cosmetics, are:

- to consult a dermatologist or a registered cosmetician before using any of these products;
- to buy the cosmetics only from a reputed retail store where sales transfer is high;
- long shelf life of cosmetics can cause increased carcinogenic reactions; so strictly use the products before the stipulated time;
- to check whether the personal care products confirm the FDA or European Union standards;
- to perform a skin patch test for allergies before applying the product;
- to reduce the usage of synthetic products and treat the skin with natural derivatives;
- to wash their faces from the makeup applications thoroughly with water, to keep the skin pores open before sleep;
- to scrub the skin often to get rid of dead cells and to look rejuvenated;
- to subscribe to health magazines and to be aware of the effects and defects of beauty products.

With all of the chemicals and preservatives that are in today's cosmetics, more people are turning to the benefits of the natural products that don't contain these harmful ingredients. There are now more organic and natural products available on the market. These have moved many consumers away from the chemical compounds traditionally used in beauty products, which many argue can be bad for our health and damaging to the environment, if not used in the correct manner. These natural cosmetics are a cut above the rest of the products on the market, containing no ingredients that can damage delicate skin. And most of them are not tested on animals.

As with the aloe vera phenomenon in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there are hundred of marketers espousing the Green message in cosmetics. Ingredients cover a wide range: macademia nut oil, jojoba oil, almond, babassu oil, olive oil, shea

butter, vanilla, mandarin oil, corn flower, tangerine, cyprus, herbal extracts, eucalyptus, menthol, kiwi, grape seed and hazel nut oils, chamomile, aloe vera, cucumber, rosemary, caffeine, camphor and so on.

For example, a natural substitute for the petroleum products is a combination of olive, wheat germ, peanut and coconut oils, without adverse effects.

We have to take a look below at just a few of the many reasons why we should consider switching to a natural cosmetic line.

1. *Less breakouts*: One of the biggest benefits of switching to natural products is the fact that the skin will experience fewer breakouts. Many of the popular commercial cosmetic lines use oils as the base for their products. In all the natural cosmetics, the base is typically water-based and many are „mixed at home”.
2. *No animal testing*: Throughout the last fifty years, cosmetics companies around the world have been boycotted by animal rights activists. Many of these types of companies test their products on lab animals, in order to make certain that their cosmetics do not cause harm to the human consumers.

The Green companies use to claim that their ingredients are 100% free of toxins, pesticides, allergenic substances, radiation and other pollutants, that they are biologically degradable. At the same time, the use of recycled paper packaging and of biodegradable plastic contributes to the Green image of the firm, being attributes used in conserving natural resources or avoiding waste by not adding to the ecological problem the waste disposal (*Davis, 1995*).

As we know, ads can be misleading and as an educated consumer we can easily make the right choice. There are five easy ways to find out if a cosmetic may receive the name „Green beauty”.

1. A very important measure of going green is to make sure that all the cosmetics or beauty products are not tested on animals;
2. The use of natural and/or organic materials to make cosmetics is essential. Most truly green products are certified natural, organic and/or vegetarian by the world's most reliable independent third party organizations;
3. Green product companies gave back to „Mother Earth” the natural gifts received, by planting trees, investing in green research or donating to green causes. This can be easily researched on the internet;
4. You need to understand the meaning of organic and natural when looking for green beauty products. Organic means that the ingredients are grown without toxins, chemical pesticides or herbicides, using sustainable farming practices. Natural basically means the ingredient is just that: „Natural”.
5. Green packaging is also important when you purchase beauty products. The use of recycled paper, boxes, etc. tells you the company you are dealing with is actually making an effort to save our planet.

If companies aren't green, they aren't going to take the time to send the information listed here.

Natural cosmetic sales in Europe are increasing at a fast rate with revenues doubling every five years. Most demand for natural cosmetics was initially from

consumers who suffered from ailments like skin irritation; however the consumer base has expanded in recent years. Natural cosmetics are gaining favour as they contain low levels of possibly harmful substances like Parabens. Other consumers are turning to natural and organic cosmetics because of the functionality of natural ingredients and /or traceability of organic ingredients.

Retailers are responding to greater consumer interest by introducing natural cosmetics, some under their private labels. Drugstores, supermarkets and even discount stores are introducing private label products. Organic food retailers and herbalist shops are expanding shelf-space for natural and organic cosmetics.

The German and French markets are the fastest growing in Europe. French sales have boomed since 2005 when media reports highlighted the possible dangers of synthetic substances in cosmetics and toiletries. Natural cosmetics are the most widely available and most competitively priced in Germany. High growth in the German market is being driven by increasing distribution in mainstream retailers.

Although the natural cosmetics market is reporting high growth, the share of total cosmetic sales remains low. The market share is highest in countries like Germany and Austria where natural cosmetics comprise about 5% of total cosmetic sales. Although the U.K. market has been showing high growth rates, the market share of total cosmetic sales remains below 3%. However, the market share is about 2% in most other European countries. Natural skin care products have the highest market share of all product categories, whilst colour cosmetics and deodorants have the lowest share.

The absence of industry regulations and lack of harmonisation of private standards are factors that are preventing higher market growth rates. Unlike organic foods, there are no national and EU regulations for natural and organic cosmetics. Legitimate products are therefore competing against conventional cosmetics that are labelled as „natural” because they contain some natural ingredients.

This first-ever report on the European natural cosmetics market gives recommendations to new entrants and existing suppliers. Producers and retailers are advised to undertake marketing campaigns to educate consumers on the differences between natural and conventional cosmetics. Manufacturers are advised to adopt strategies based on product differentiation and positioning to succeed in this emerging market.

New research by Organic Monitor demonstrates that the mainstreaming of the European natural cosmetics market is leading to increased market segmentation; new entrants and existing suppliers are developing products for specific consumer segments and sales channels.

Most developments are in the U.K. market, with many new product launches targeted at distinct consumer segments. In the last 18 months, new products have been introduced -especially for babies and children, teenagers and male grooming.

The trend of increased segmentation is also manifesting itself in retailer private label products. The U.K. and German markets have witnessed the largest number of natural cosmetic product launches under private labels. Natural and organic products have been launched under own brands of supermarkets, drugstores, organic food retailers and even discounters. Private labels are the most successful in the German market, where they comprise more than 10% of total natural cosmetic sales.

Customers in Germany spent about EUR 672 million on natural cosmetics in 2008, a significant increase of 9.7% compared to the previous year (2007). The organic and „near-natural“ segments already represent around 10% of the German market. The rising environmental consciousness and health awareness among consumers, as well as the desire for sustainability are fuelling the growth. That means, these market isn't saturated, yet.

At least but not at last, the mission of sustainable cosmetics is to provide the consumers with natural and organic products that will not only enhance their beauty, but are a „greener alternative“ that helps the environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Everyday, massive amounts of shampoos, toothpastes, hair gels, deodorants, facial wipes are being used and then put into our waste systems and environments. Natural and sustainable alternatives are available and will allow our environment and waste systems to break them down more easily. Many consumers are always demanding better, more sustainable alternatives.

With so many naturally sourced or mineral based beauty products available, consumers can use more sustainable products.

When you are buying beauty care products, you should consider all the environmental aspects even whether the product packaging can be recycled. You should look at the information on the label to see whether the product is:

Eco-friendly

You can look to see whether the product contains only natural and/or organic components. There are many organizations that promote the use of organic or natural ingredients. They offer information and symbols on the packaging that help to guarantee the validity of claims.

Using non-harmful ingredients

There are a number of products available that are allergy tested to reduce the irritation and health risks for eyes and skin, for example. You should check to see whether the product is dermatologically tested, particularly if you have sensitive skin. You may also need to check for any potential allergens in the product, before you use them.

Tested on animals or uses animal products

You should look for the rabbit symbol on products, as this will help you to ensure that the items you are purchasing are not tested on animals.

Using environment-friendly packaging

Many products now have packaging that has been reduced, is reusable or is recyclable. There are a number of recycling symbols that have now become familiar to consumers (Csorba, 2010).

- The alum symbol is used on aluminums products such as deodorant bottles;

- The eco-label is used to show that the product keeps environmental impact to a minimum;
- The recycle symbol is often printed in black or green and indicates that product has been made from reusable sources or that it can be recycled.

Sometimes consumers may prefer to buy and use cosmetics at home because they are cheaper and may be more comfortable. Before using beauty products at home, consumers should consider how they are going dispose the waste created.

Consumers are able to recycle many boxes and plastic bottles, but certain items can have chemical residues that need to be disposed of carefully. Some products may also stain your bathroom or furniture so it is essential that you follow any guidelines on the packaging of the item. You should also pay particular attention to any allergen information and use any safety products that are provided. If consumers are using any of these products at home, it is essential to follow the guidelines given with the product. Cosmetic manufacturers are required to list all of the ingredients in each product with the highest quantity listed first and then others in descending order as well as any allergen information.

On cosmetic or toiletry labeling, there may be words that are not familiar for the consumers, taking time to discover what these mean before the use of the product. For example, a particularity is if you have skin sensitivity issues or allergies.

A number of chemicals used in beauty products have been banned as there was evidence that they were very harmful to the environment. The most familiar example is the banning of CFCs in 1987 by the Montreal Protocol. CFC's were found in many cosmetic products such as deodorants and hairsprays but they had a hugely detrimental impact on the environment.

As consumer, you should also consider the environmental impact that flushing and showering chemicals into the water system can have. Concerns for aquatic life and other environmental issues are growing as increased levels of cosmetic and synthetic ingredients found in products like shower gels and soaps are working their way into ecological environments.

CONCLUSIONS

Not all the companies have nowadays the power to embrace Green as the wave of the future. Many appear to have reservations about preservative efficacy, about consistency, about what ingredients they are included. It is probably significant that so much of the market activity is being generated among small to mid-sized companies. But, lots of name brand cosmetic giants have Green or „natural” ingredients in their formulations. Even companies that didn't start out Green have evolved over time in that direction.

Which will be the future of the Green marketed cosmetics? Speakers at the Natural Cosmetics Conference 2009 in Nuremberg (Germany) have debated the future of organic and natural cosmetics in Europe and the USA. They consider that the segment still has a high potential for growth but need more consistency at all the levels: from standards to retail concepts. Since years, natural cosmetics represent a growth segment and without doubt this trend continues and will exert influence on the whole cosmetics

market. Considered worldwide, sales are growing by US\$ 1 billion per annum and are currently estimated at around US\$ 7 billion in total. As in the case of organic food, the great demand for natural cosmetics is concentrated on Europe and North America.

Indeed, the natural cosmetics business is one of the few economic sectors that show favorable development rates. Increased media presence and the rising number of distribution channels are also important factors of growth. The segment is currently evolving from a demand-driven to a supply market, which means new challenges for everyone involved.

As more consumers demand safety in their beauty products, the natural cosmetics industry has responded with increasing quality and diversity. But as with all cosmetics, there is no regulation of ingredients or legal standards for terms such as „natural” or „pure.” Organic can be especially misleading - products may use oils from organically grown fruits and still be loaded with chemicals.

Because of that, it depends on the consumers if they want to pay more for „natural” and/or ecologically helpful products and if they continue to become more confident about using them. But it remains important for all the cosmetics companies to concerns about acid rain, warming of the earth's atmosphere, holes in the ozone layer, pollution of water and soil, closing of landfills and alternative garbage disposal and to produce biodegradable packages and natural produces, which are not able to harm neither the environment, nor the consumer's health.

REFERENCES

- Coddington, W. (1990): Environmental marketing: positive strategies for reaching the green consumer. New York, McGraw Inc
- Csorba, L. (2010): Consumer protection in the market economy. „Aurel Vlaicu” University Publishing House, Arad
- Csorba, L. (2006): Consumatorismul în industria cosmetic. In: Revista de Comerț, 8. 29-36. p.
- Davis, D.A. (1995): Green Cosmetics: The Definition Undergoes Broadening but Consumer Interest Remains High. In: Drug & Cosmetic Industry review, 1 February
- Ottman, J. (1993): Green marketing: challenges and opportunities for the new marketing age. New York : NTC Publishing
- Răducanu, I., Stancu, A. (2004): Securitate și siguranță în utilizarea produselor cosmetic. Sesiunea de comunicări științifice, Tîrgoviște

Online references:

- <http://www.articlesbase.com/cosmetics-articles/sustainable-cosmetics-5-helpful-tips-to-going-green>
- <http://greenlivingideas.com/2008/05/20/mineral-cosmetics-healthy-or-hazardous/>
- <http://www.organicmonitor.com/100160.htm>
- <http://www.premiumbeautynews.com/The-natural-cosmetics-market-needs>
- <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10201/1073855-314.stm#ixzz1F9aTUvbk>
- http://www.chillibreeze.com/articles_various/artificial-cosmetics.asp