

**Discovering Green Marketing Opportunities in Social Media
For the South Korean Cosmetics Industry**

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discover the potential to utilize social media as a green marketing platform for South Korean cosmetics industry. Through the methods of content analysis and surveys, the perception of South Korean consumers on green cosmetics advertisements on social media was measured. Results show that females born in 1990s and onwards respond the most to these advertisements. Skin benefits was the most important value associated with green cosmetics products, and organic ingredients was the most popular environmental component of concern. Advertisements emphasizing anti-animal testing resulted in most positive impressions, while those focusing on organic ingredients were the most effective in leading to purchase decisions. The work presented here has implications for future studies examining relationships of green marketing with social media and may contribute to expanding the currently lagging green consumerism in South Korea.

KEYWORDS

green consumerism, environmentalism, organic ingredients, anti-animal testing, eco-packaging

INTRODUCTION

Green marketing is prevalent and effective in many Western countries, in which 70% of people willing to pay more for sustainable products (Yazdanifard & Mercy 2011), but it has not yet been actively practiced in South Korea. Both eco-friendly products and advertising materials emphasizing environmental benefits are rarely found or in demand. This lack may be a result of Korean consumer reluctance to pay a higher price for environmentally-friendly products (Song et al. 2011). However, South Korea has shown an increasingly higher level of sustainable behaviors (Minton et al. 2012) and public awareness in eco-friendliness, suggesting that there is space for improvement (Kim & Yoon 2017). The percentage of South Koreans interested in eco-friendly products increased from 58% in 2005 to 81.9% in 2011, although there was no evidence that this would increase green consumerism; South Korean consumers, while already active in the use and disposal processes of green consumption, are passive with green purchases, often due to high prices, low quality, or limited options (Park and Sohn 2018). Nevertheless, Korea's collectivist culture has significance for predicting green purchase practices (Kim 2011), as peer pressure from community members can affect individual decisions to engage in social movements given the right platform (Cialdini et al. 1999). Since there has been no clear communication platform to promote social issues, green marketing is hardly utilized in South Korea, and consumer behavior is often unaffected by environmental concerns.

This need for a potential green marketing platform can be fulfilled by rising social media usage in South Korea, which has already been bridging the communication gap between companies and consumers through a new, trendy platform. South Korea has one of the highest levels of social media involvement globally, exceeding those of Germany and the United States (Minton et al. 2012). Thus, many Korean companies are investing in social media marketing and hosting young social media influencers in their advertisements on Facebook, the most popular platform (Jung et al. 2015), and Instagram, the fastest growing social media (Hwang & Cho 2018). With these virality strategies, they can promote their social values in two-way communications with the target audience (Achen 2017). Therefore, social media may also have the potential to expand the currently low green marketing opportunities in South Korea. As the mass opinion displayed on social media easily shapes individual behaviors in South Korea (Jung et al. 2015), it

may act as an effective platform for encouraging eco-friendly purchasing behavior and green marketing.

The cosmetics industry, especially popular in South Korea, has also used social media marketing, and aims to join the current organic trend that could further be expanded into promoting environmentalism. Due to its popularity, more startups are emerging in the industry and using social media as the primary marketing tool to promote their brands (Muchardie et al. 2016). As the new trend towards organic ingredients and environmentally-friendly choices spread through Twitter in South Korea (Meza 2015), how consumer behavior can change depending on social issues is worth examining. Koreans already react passionately to social media articles regarding environmental issues or animal rights, but education in environmentalism is still lagging. Thus, social media can be further used to inform them of environmental systems, increase awareness, and consequently create consumer responsiveness, which is an important factor for successful green marketing implementation (Ginsberg 2004). Although cosmetics companies have implemented social media strategies, incorporation with green marketing is yet unknown and should be further explored.

To fill this gap in the literature, I raise the central research question: How do South Korean consumers perceive eco-friendly brands and advertisements for cosmetics products on social media? To address this question, I explore the following sub-questions: 1) who responds to these advertisements?; 2) what value do people see in these products?; and 3) what are the most effective marketing strategies that appeal to consumers? I address each sub-question through a content analysis of specific social media posts and online surveys to evaluate perceptions.

Background

This study aims to fill in the current gap in literature by discovering how a lagging environmental movement can prosper through social media in cosmetics industry within the context of South Korea. Previous studies have touched on increasing power of social media (Jung et al., 2015) or failure of green marketing (Villarino and Font, 2015) but have not integrated the two areas to project potential synergy. As social media is an online platform, and because Korean eco-friendly cosmetics brands are more often found online, this study will focus specifically on the online cosmetics industry. In addition, to prevent ambiguity, the range of “environmentally-

friendly” products will be restricted to those with organic ingredients, anti-animal testing process, and eco-packaging. To fully grasp the relevant context before the research, some key literatures need to be reviewed.

Research framework

To understand the current context in South Korea regarding green marketing and social media, it is necessary to review two key literatures addressing each area: Predicting Green Advertising Attitude and Behavioral Intention in South Korea by Kim and Yoon, and Sustainable Marketing and Social Media by Minton et al. Both literatures reveal the particularities of Korean society in environmentalism and social media trend that can contribute to interpreting the results of my research.

Kim and Yoon have identified factors that influence South Korean perceptions towards green marketing and social behaviors, outlining important criteria for this study. Some significant factors of attitude towards green advertising in South Korea include perceived benefits as well as positive perceptions of past interaction with green marketing. Greenwashing is highly discouraged as previous experiences influence the future reactions significantly. For intentions to adopt environmentally-friendly behaviors, perceived benefits, perceived efficacy, perceived knowledge, and social norms played a major role. Respondents wanted to know how to execute such behaviors and ensure that they will be effective before practicing them. These findings indicate the important factors to consider to successfully implement green marketing strategy in South Korea while suggesting possible reasons for previous failure. For objectivity, they used the health belief model (HBM) and conducted an e-mail survey to 240 undergraduate students enrolled in Consumer Psychology courses at three universities in South Korea. While the diversity of sample respondents could be a limitation considering the narrow range of ages and education, the value of their study lies in discovering current responses to green marketing in South Korea among the young generation who are more environmentally aware and social media friendly. With South Korean green marketing attitudes identified, we can connect the information to the potential of social media in expanding green marketing.

For the context of social media, Minton et al. have conducted a survey study in a larger field, examining its relationship to sustainability. They highlighted the connection between social

media and environmental initiatives, addressing a part of my research question. Their research revealed some distinctive characteristics of South Korea in this area in comparison to other countries. South Korea showed the most activity in social media leading to sustainability, especially powered by its collectivist culture, which proposes an important reason behind using social media for green marketing in my research. It also had a substantially high level of technological adoption and thus expected a more prominent role of social media in the future. Such result supports my intention of appointing social media as an effective platform for green marketing. As for objectivity, they used sampling, survey, and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationship between level of attitude commitment to social media motives and sustainable behaviors. Data was gathered from 1,018 respondents limited to active internet users to ensure credibility. While their research limited to motives or responsibilities on social media rather than how consumers perceive green marketing materials, it has several important values: 1) linking South Korea's highest result in social behavior engagement to its collectivist culture in comparison to other Western countries; 2) showing potential for improvement in green practices; and 3) proving that advertisement plans should differ when targeting different countries. To further build on these findings to explore more on green marketing aspects of social media, a different approach in methods is needed.

Through methodology of content analysis and surveys, I aim to discover the relationship between usage of social media and potential for green marketing in Korean cosmetics industry. By reviewing the green marketing materials on social media, content analysis will lead to answering the first two sub-questions regarding the value people see in these products and the effective strategies appealing to consumers. Survey results will build on the second sub-question and answer the third, regarding who responds to these advertisements. Perceptions on specific social media examples displayed through content analysis and surveys, interpreted with findings from key literatures, can imply a direction for future marketing initiatives that will expand green practices in South Korea. Possible concerns include subjectivity in content analysis and sampling bias in surveys; thus, a well-structured method will minimize the potential errors in results.

METHODS

Data collection methods

To explore effective green marketing strategies and create a basis for the survey, I performed a content analysis, gathering social media marketing posts promoting green brands or products and the consumer reactions to them. 10 social media posts, each with an average of 203 comments, were collected, 5 from Facebook and 5 from Instagram. Facebook posts were found through searching phrases such as “eco-friendly cosmetics” and “vegan cosmetic products,” and Instagram posts were gathered based on popularity from hashtags such as “#antianimaltesting” and “#naturalingredients.” As most of the simple brand advertisements did not have any comments, I chose the ones that included giveaway events or participation incentives because they had enough comments to analyze. Of the 10 posts, 3 were brand campaigns and the other 7 had giveaway event features. Also, of the 10 posts, 5 addressed anti-animal testing, 4 addressed organic ingredients, and 1 covered both anti-animal testing and organic ingredients. Eco-packaging advertisements with many comments were nonexistent and thus excluded.

To explore all three sub-questions (demographics, value demanded, and effective strategies), I conducted an online survey that explored consumer responses to example advertisements, public perception on green marketing, and potential target demographics. The survey consisted of 38 questions, took approximately 9 minutes to complete, and included 4 sample advertisements from the brands addressed in the content analysis. To compare the results, 4 advertisements covered eco-packaging, anti-animal testing, organic ingredients, and free giveaway event. The survey was promoted on my travel social media including Facebook and Instagram and garnered 383 responses. To encourage participation, the participants were given a free travel guide file.

Data analysis methods

To discover who responds to green marketing materials, I categorized survey respondents into several demographic groups based on age, gender, education, region, employment status, social media usage, and purchase frequency. I used a chi square test to test whether there were

demographic differences between groups that responded to certain green marketing advertisements and had previous experience in buying green cosmetics products.

To examine the second sub-question of determining the common consumer perceptions on green marketing products, I analyzed responses to consumer perception questions in the survey. The core question here was “When making a purchasing decision for environmentally-friendly cosmetics products, how important are the following factors?” Possible responses included environmental efforts, skin benefits, attractive design, high-end image, trend following, and recommendations. I ranked Likert scale responses (“completely unimportant” to “extremely important”) on a scale of 1 to 5. The same method was applied to the next question, “How important are these qualities in cosmetics products to you?” Possible responses included eco-packaging, anti-animal testing, and organic ingredients, to compare the three and find out the most popular value in environmentalism. To examine perception on the three issues, respondents were asked to rate from a scale of 1 to 5 the association of each issue with 9 keywords, including “healthy,” “ethical,” “necessary,” and “expensive.” Again, association with each keyword was then evaluated based on the total score it received, with “extremely relevant” given a score of 5 and “not relevant at all” given a score of 1.

Finally, to find out what green marketing strategies are appealing on social media, I measured engagement outcomes from posts in the content analysis and created example advertisements based on the posts with high engagement to use on the survey. I categorized comments from 10 posts in the content analysis into either positive or negative towards the environment and the brand. I then calculated the ratio of positive to negative comments to determine how successful each post was, relating it to the type (photo or video, campaign or event feature) and the theme (anti-animal testing or organic ingredients) of the post. Afterwards, I displayed 4 example posts in the survey to discover consumer reactions and validate assumptions. The likelihood of positive behaviors after viewing each example was given a score (5 for “likely,” 3 for “neither likely nor unlikely,” and 1 for “unlikely”) to determine which environmental issue was more appealing when adopted in marketing materials. In addition, I added up responses on the possible areas of improvement for each advertisement to suggest methods for making the strategies more effective.

RESULTS

Demographic profile

For the demographics of target customers, the survey identified more female respondents than male for having previous experience in using green cosmetics products, as well as a higher percentage for people born in 1990s. Among the female respondents 60% had used an environmentally-friendly cosmetics product, while the percentage dropped down to 48.7% for male respondents (Table 1). In contrast, 9.6% of females had not previously used one, while the percentage increased to 27.3% for males. The total number of female and male respondents were 135 and 121, respectively. The percentage of people who had previously used green products increased to 50% as the birth year moved to 1990 and onwards, whereas it remained at 40% and 41% respectively for people born in 1970s and 1980s (Figure 1). On the other hand, the percentage of people who had not used one dropped to 16% for those born in 1990s and even further to 9% for those in 2000s, while it showed a greater amount of 20% and 30% for those born in 1970s and 1980s. In addition, 82% of those born after 1990s responded with a positive impression of the example ad with a giveaway event feature, while for those born in 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s the results were 0%, 0%, and 11% respectively. There was no significant relationship found in residence area, education level, employment status, and purchase frequency with green consumer behavior.

Table 1. Responses to “Have you previously used an environmentally-friendly product?” based on gender.

Gender	Responded “Yes”	Responded “No”	Responded “Unsure”	Total Responses
Female	81 (60.0%)	13 (9.6%)	41 (30.4%)	135 (100.0%)
Male	59 (48.7%)	33 (27.3%)	29 (24.0%)	121 (100.0%)

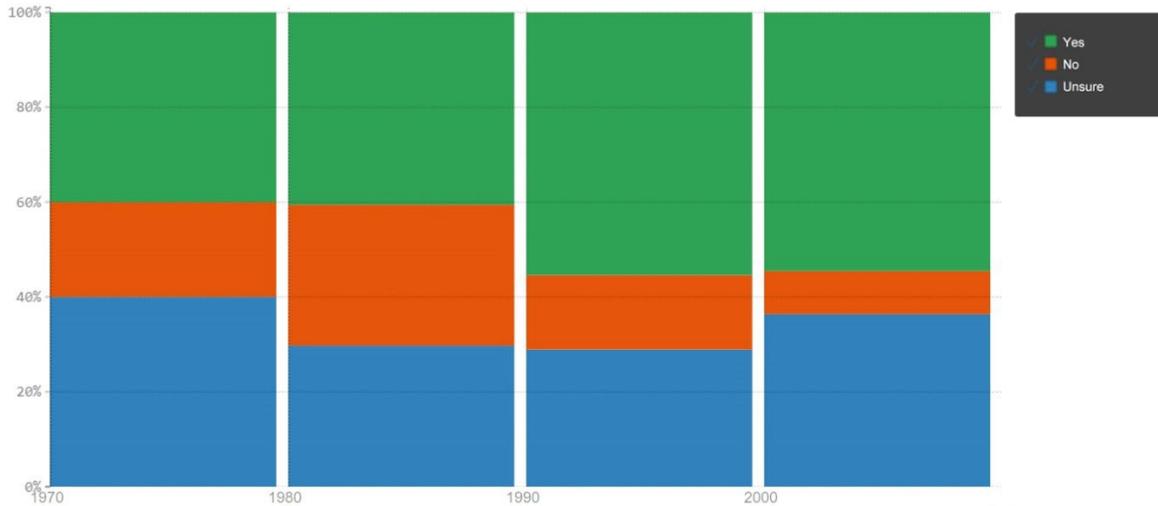


Figure 1. Percentages of those who have previously used a green cosmetics product based on birth year.

I also found that certain personal interests were related to green purchasing behaviors. 38.6% of the people who ranked ingredients first for areas of consideration in purchasing decision had previously consumed eco-friendly cosmetics products, showing a correlation. There was also a correlation between valuing organic ingredients as an environmental issue and using eco-friendly products (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between importance of organic ingredients and previous experience in using green cosmetics products.

Importance of organic ingredients	Have previously used a green cosmetics product	Have not previously used a green cosmetics product
Extremely important	66.0%	14.9%
Moderately important	52.5%	20.8%
Somewhat important	34.4%	6.3%
Slightly unimportant	33.3%	22.2%
Completely unimportant	12.5%	37.5%

Values demanded

I found that the most important value related to purchasing green cosmetics was the skin benefits among other values. 80% of the respondents marked it as “extremely important (score of 5),” giving it an average score of 4.78 (Figure 2). 0% marked it as “slightly unimportant (score of

2)” or “completely unimportant (score of 1).” The second highest score was 3.88 of “recommendations from friends,” closely followed by 3.86 of “environmental efforts.”

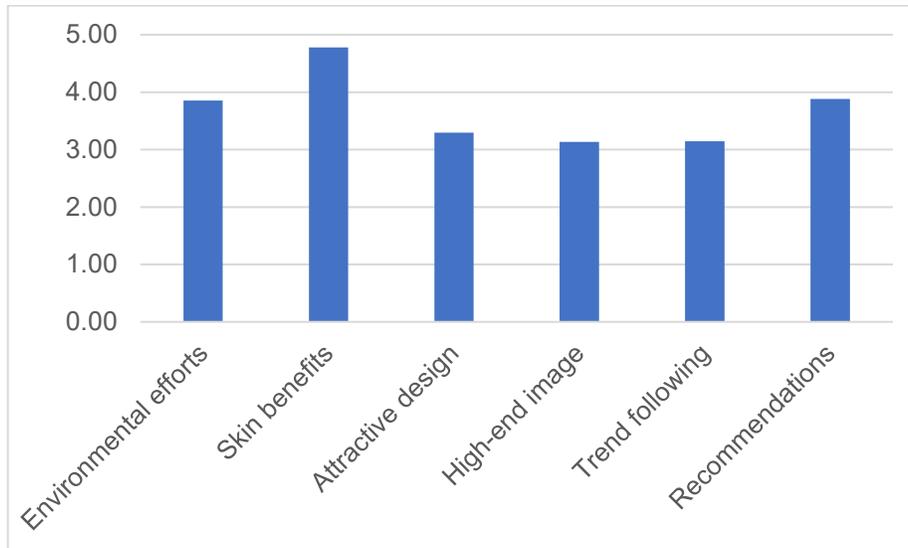


Figure 2. Average score for factors of consideration when purchasing green products.

Furthermore, I found that the environmental component the people found most important in cosmetics was usage of organic ingredients, followed by anti-animal testing and eco-packaging. 36% responded that using organic ingredients was “extremely important (score of 5),” in contrast to 25% and 14% for anti-animal testing and eco-packaging, respectively (Table 3). As a result, the average score for organic ingredients was 4.08 out of 5, higher than 3.65 for anti-animal testing and 3.42 for eco-packaging. The keywords people mainly associated with organic ingredients were “eco-friendly,” “healthy,” and “expensive”; “ethical,” “eco-friendly,” and “healthy” were the top associated keywords in order with anti-animal testing, and “eco-friendly,” “healthy,” and “ethical” with eco-packaging (Table 4). The keyword “eco-friendly” was most highly associated with organic ingredients (4.51), followed by eco-packaging (4.45) and anti-animal testing (3.96). The keyword “healthy” was also most highly associated organic ingredients (4.50), followed by eco-packaging (3.74) and anti-animal testing (3.51). For necessity, anti-animal testing had the highest score (3.14), followed by organic ingredients (3.00) and eco-packaging. (2.86). Regarding trendiness, the scores were lower, with organic ingredients scoring the highest (3.12), followed by anti-animal testing (2.90), and eco-packaging (2.75). The keywords “difficult” and “complicated” showed significantly low results for all three.

Table 3. Importance of each environmental component in green products.

Environmental component	Extremely important (5)	Moderately important (4)	Somewhat important (3)	Slightly unimportant (2)	Completely unimportant (1)	Average score
Eco-packaging	14%	45%	17%	18%	6%	3.42
Anti-animal testing	25%	39%	17%	14%	5%	3.65
Organic ingredients	36%	46%	12%	3%	3%	4.08

Table 4. Mean values for keyword association with environmental components.

Associated keywords	Eco-packaging	Anti-animal testing	Organic ingredients
Eco-friendly	4.45	3.96	4.51
Healthy	3.74	3.51	4.50
Expensive	3.44	3.16	4.07
Ethical	3.69	4.41	3.12
Trendy	2.75	2.90	3.12
Complicated	2.14	2.28	2.33
Difficult	2.06	2.28	2.24
Necessary	2.86	3.14	3.00
Western	2.24	2.52	2.41

I received varying responses regarding willingness-to-pay for environmental cosmetics products. As the price increased, more people were willing to pay the premium for organic ingredients compared to the other two components, with a spike for anti-animal testing products in paying above 50% of original price as the premium (Figure 3). Purchasing products with eco-packaging was more likely when the premium was cheaper (0-10%).

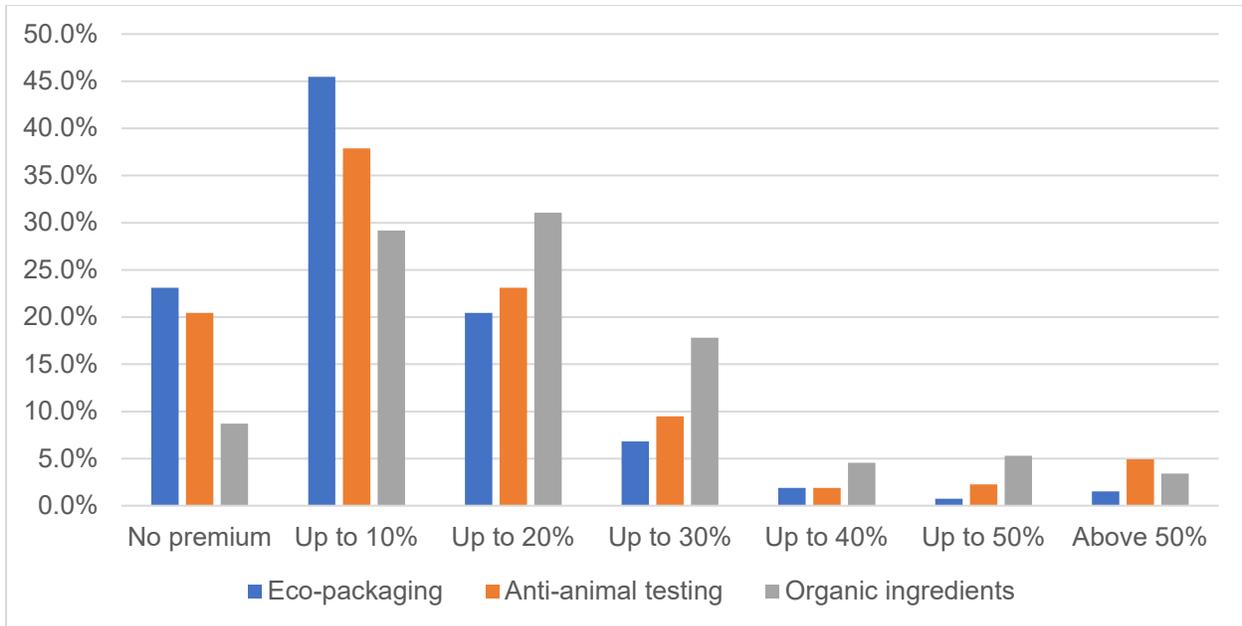


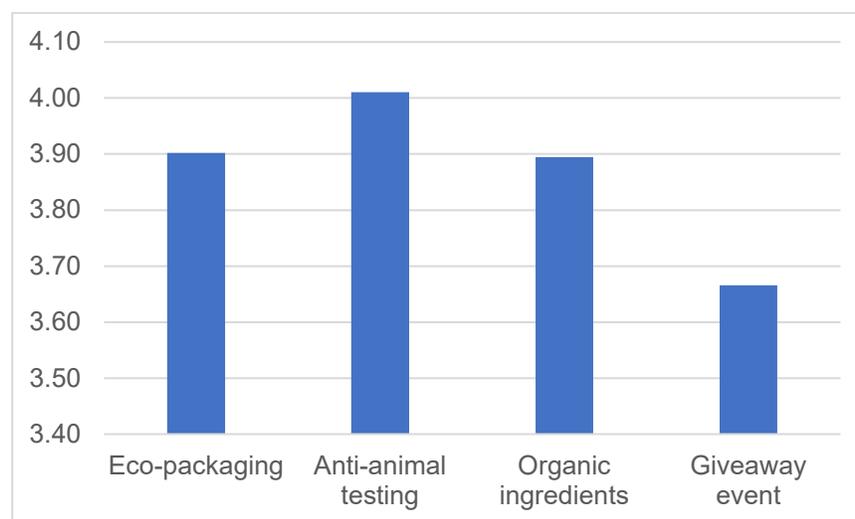
Figure 3. Willing-to-pay premium of original price for products with environmental components.

Effective strategies

As a part of effective strategies, I discovered that emphasis on different environmental components had different outcomes. From the sample advertisements reaction survey, anti-animal testing brought the most positive reactions, receiving the highest score in all areas except from “I will consider purchasing this product,” in which organic ingredients outnumbered (Table 5). It also had the highest overall impression score of 4.01 (Figure 4). What people liked the most about this post included the content clarity and eco-friendliness (Table 6). The advertisement with inclusion of organic ingredients brought the highest likelihood of purchasing, and its most appealing strength was the skin benefits stated. Eco-packaging was not as popular as the other two components for follow-up behaviors, although it brought a slightly more positive overall impression than organic ingredients and people liked its eco-friendliness above other posts. The results showed some consistency with those of the content analysis, in which anti-animal testing advertisement events brought higher percentages of positive comments compared to organic ingredients advertisement events (Table 7).

Table 5. Likelihood of positive behaviors after viewing sample advertisements.

Positive reactions	Ad 1: Eco-packaging	Ad 2: Anti-animal testing	Ad 3: Organic ingredients	Ad 4: Giveaway event
1. If I were to post a comment, it will be positive.	3.86	3.98	3.84	3.80
2. I will consider purchasing this product.	3.37	3.53	3.65	3.12
3. I will research further into the brand before making a purchasing decision.	3.57	3.71	3.69	3.48
4. I will consider purchasing a different product from the same brand that is more relevant to my needs.	3.44	3.57	3.49	3.32
5. I will share this information onto friends.	3.10	3.48	3.35	3.41
6. I will remember this brand for future reference.	3.64	3.73	3.61	3.45
Average Score	3.50	3.67	3.61	3.43

**Figure 4. Overall positive impression score for sample advertisements.****Table 6. Areas of strength score for sample advertisements.**

Areas of strength	Ad 1: Eco-packaging	Ad 2: Anti-animal testing	Ad 3: Organic ingredients	Ad 4: Giveaway event
Design	3.54	3.39	3.63	3.52
Content clarity	3.30	3.71	3.57	3.45
Product type	3.59	3.43	3.77	3.42
Product feature	3.39	3.25	3.58	3.11
Eco-friendliness	4.30	3.99	3.75	3.62
Detailed information	3.20	3.50	3.37	3.14
Event feature	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.76

Table 7. Types, themes, and outcomes of advertisement posts in content analysis. AAT stands for “anti-animal testing” and OI stands for “organic ingredients.”

Post #	Post type	Post theme	% positive comments for brand	% negative comments for brand	% positive comments for environment	% negative comments for environment
1	Campaign	AAT	0%	0%	33%	33%
2	Campaign	AAT	5%	3%	7%	1%
3	Event	AAT & OI	45%	0%	36%	0%
4	Event	OI	26%	0%	9%	0%
5	Campaign	AAT	2%	3%	33%	39%
6	Event	OI	21%	0%	9%	0%
7	Event	OI	25%	0%	19%	0%
8	Event	OI	56%	0%	35%	0%
9	Event	AAT	63%	0%	65%	0%
10	Event	AAT	56%	0%	46%	0%

I gained conflicting results from the content analysis and the survey for the events feature of the advertisement. In the content analysis, the posts that included free giveaways brought the highest comment engagement through encouraging participation. However, the survey indicated that the giveaway event had much lower positivity of 3.67 in overall impression (Figure 4). In addition, it scored the lowest in almost all positive reactions, especially for likelihood of purchasing (Table 5).

I also found that holding anti-animal testing campaigns could bring controversial outcomes. While those types of posts resulted in the highest number of comments from the content analysis, they triggered negative comments for either the brand or the environment, which was never found in posts with giveaway events (Table 7).

In addition, I discovered that for a more effective strategy product features and detailed information were needed to be shown. Across all four example advertisements, respondents wanted to see more product features on the actual skin benefits and detailed information on the product itself, each getting an average of 123.75 and 129 votes, respectively (Figure 5). On the other hand, emphasis on eco-friendliness did not need much improvement, receiving one of the lower votes of 43.75.

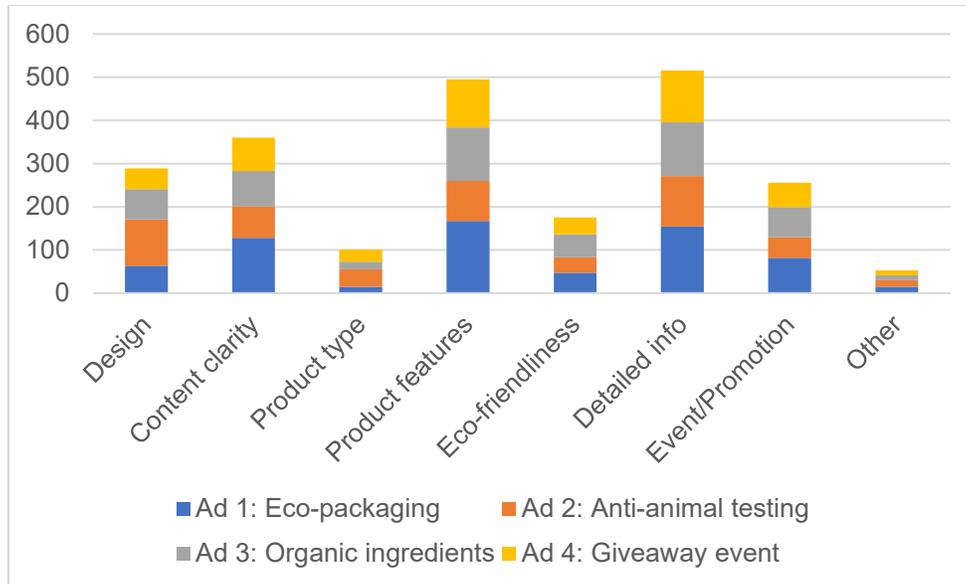


Figure 5. Areas of improvement score for sample advertisements.

DISCUSSION

From the results, I interpreted several implications for South Korean cosmetics businesses in approaching green marketing, largely grouped as target customer identification, consumer perception, and strategies evaluation. The results and interpretations, while some in line with existing literature, reveal the uniqueness of the cosmetics industry and South Korea in comparison to general green consumerism in other countries. They therefore successfully address the previous gap in knowledge of connections between green marketing, social media, and cosmetics industry in South Korea.

Target customer identification

Relationship with gender and age

Findings on gender and age in relation to green cosmetics suggest that the main target customer segment should be females born in 1990s and onwards. More female respondents having previously used an environmentally-friendly cosmetics product intuitively seems obvious; however, this area has had conflicting results in previous literature. Some research indicates that

there is no difference between gender in green consumerism (Ichsan et al. 2018). On the other hand, other research concludes that green purchase intention is stronger among females compared to males (Chekima et al. 2016). As my study is geared towards cosmetics, which females are more heavily involved with, the results may have differed due to general interest in cosmetics industry itself over green consumerism. In addition, green cosmetics products are increasing in use towards younger generations, especially highlighting the potential capacity of using social media as the platform to expand environmentalism in cosmetics industry.

Other factors of consideration

Correlation between personal interests in ingredients and use of green cosmetics products suggests another factor to consider in targeting. This finding, unknown in previous literature, indicates the most significant cause driving consumers towards environmentally-friendly cosmetics products in South Korea. It also provides reasoning for the general trend in Korean green cosmetics that is heavily leaning towards organic and natural ingredients over any other environmental issues.

No significant relationship found between education level and green cosmetics products contrasts findings from other research. A previous study has found that high education level tends to have a stronger relationship with purchase intention of green product (Chekima et al. 2016). This difference may be due to differing study sites, Malaysia and South Korea; their different levels of environmental education could be a possible cause.

Consumer perception on green cosmetics product values

Prioritized values

Finding of skin benefits as the most important value for green purchasing decisions suggests that the current purpose of environmentalism for Korean consumers is not about the environment itself but more about personal benefits. The fact that no one in the survey perceived skin benefits as slightly or completely unimportant shows the importance of maintaining the fundamental purpose of cosmetics products. In addition, this relationship indicates that people tend

to perceive green products as natural and healthy. It is noteworthy that to consumers, skin benefits, as the main reason of green purchase, is more important than actual environmental contributions. Environmental efforts, while less of importance than skin benefits, is still one of the top reasons for purchasing eco-friendly cosmetics products.

At similar importance with environmental efforts was recommendations from surroundings, implying the influence of collectivist culture in South Korea. The fact that recommendations is a slightly more significant driving factor in green purchases than the actual environmentalism itself proves the tendency of South Koreans to rely heavily on public opinions. This finding is in accordance with previous studies stating that Korea's community peer pressure affects involvements in social issues (Kim 2011). Given the high engagement in social media in South Korea, such reliance on public opinions and recommendations can be a unique factor to promote involvement in green consumerism for cosmetics.

Consumer perceptions on environmental components

Different levels of interest for each environmental component in green cosmetics products indicates which green trend the cosmetics industry should follow to attract consumers. The most popular component, usage of organic ingredients, had the highest association with "eco-friendly" and "healthy," in accordance with the top two factors of consideration in green purchase, which were skin benefits and environmental efforts. The fact that the keyword "eco-friendly" was most associated with organic ingredients above other components implies that South Korean consumers perceive environmentalism mainly as being natural, rather than engaging in sensitive activism regarding animal testing or packaging. However, its another highly associated keyword, "expensive," may suggest the reason for the current lag in environmentalism in South Korea. While anti-animal testing and eco-packaging both showed high association with "eco-friendly," and "healthy," they received lower association scores than organic ingredients. While they had much higher score for "ethical" compared to organic ingredients, this keyword was not directly related to the drive for green purchase, illustrating the lower popularity of these two components. In particular, eco-packaging ranked the lowest for association with the keyword "necessary," explaining the lack of interest as well as lack of related advertising materials. The keyword "trendy" did not receive a high association score in comparison to other keywords, indicating that

improvement in this perception is needed to increase social peer pressure from collectivism. The findings related to specific environmental components in South Korean cosmetics industry and their associated keywords had no previous data in literature, filling in the gap.

Pricing

Findings related to willingness-to-pay for environmental premiums indicate that green consumerism in South Korea is expanding. Previous studies have noted Korean consumer reluctance to pay a higher price for green products (Song et al. 2011). However, my results suggest otherwise; more than 50% of the respondents were willing to pay more for eco-friendly cosmetics products, and the number even went above 90% for products with organic ingredients (Figure 3). While this contrasting trend may be limited to the cosmetics industry as people perceived eco-friendly products to be directly related to personal health, positive willingness-to-pay behaviors towards environmental premiums highlight potentials for growth in green purchase practices in South Korea.

Evaluation of green marketing strategies

Inclusion of green components that appeal to consumers

The consumer preference of certain green components proposes directions for designing effective strategies depending on the primary goal of the company. To build on branding and gaining positive word-of-mouth, businesses should promote their anti-animal testing philosophy, as it resulted in highest positive impressions. On the other hand, if the main purpose of advertisements is to increase direct sales, advertisements emphasizing organic and natural ingredients would bring the highest number of purchases.

Controversial aspects of current strategies

The conflicting results from the content analysis and survey results indicate that high engagement, such as the number of likes and comments, and positive consumer perceptions are

unrelated. While posts that included an event feature gained the highest number of comments, seemingly indicating positive outcomes, they did not drive consumers into further interests or purchase decisions; rather, the events were overly emphasized that the products were obscured. Such risk questions the effectiveness of these types of advertisements and suggests a change in the current trend of social media marketing.

Furthermore, the largely negative sentiment towards anti-animal testing campaigns shows that Koreans passionately engage in issues presented on social media, while presenting the need to be cautious in promoting certain issues if controversy is not resolved. The events did not gain any negative comments like campaigns did even though they also addressed anti-animal testing; the main difference here is that campaigns were requesting sensitive engagements such as signing petitions. The outcome here suggests that while collectivism on social media can be utilized for social movements, it can also greatly backfire if the mass public opinion is negative.

Possible improvements for more effective strategies

The need to provide more detailed information regarding environmental and health benefits on the advertisements highlights the main problem in current green marketing strategies in South Korea. As eco-friendliness was not the main area of concern for improvement, advertisements should focus more on communicating the product values to the consumer to meet their direct needs rather than merely emphasizing greenness. This finding is in line with other studies that emphasized the need to clearly highlight product benefits when developing packaging (Lee et al. 2019). As knowledge is a powerful factor to facilitate green purchase behavior (Park and Sohn 2018), providing information that directly meets consumer needs would be the key to encourage purchases.

Limitations and future directions

Some limitations existing in this study includes sample bias, unclear definitions, and direct relationship with social media usage. The survey respondents, due to the particularity of my methods, were mainly my social media followers mostly in 20s or 30s with interests in traveling. While they are the target generations for green consumerism, it would have been more accurate to

have an even number of respondents spread across broader generations to test the significance. Moreover, as the respondents are already active social media users, the results provide insights on utilization of social media but do not accurately distinguish how results may differ with people not active on social media. Another area of limitation is the definitions. Even though respondents highly associated environmentalism with organic ingredients, it is unclear if everyone agrees on defining organic products as eco-friendly, suggesting a possible error in the survey result regarding previous experience using green products. Another unclarity lies on if the term “recommendations” extends to “peer pressure” in collectivism or simply means reliance on experience or advice. Finally, while findings suggest that South Korea has a heavy social media usage and that social media can be an effective platform for green marketing considering its connection to Korean collectivism the age of target customers, results indicated that there is no correlation between time spent on social media and usage of green cosmetics product. Investigations on how to make this relationship stronger would be helpful in deciding the degree to utilize social media for green marketing.

Further research can be done to improve the completeness of this study. More information is needed to specifically address the connection between peer pressure and environmental behaviors, rather than defining it under “recommendations,” to further support the capability of social media in expanding green consumerism. Also, while social media is big in South Korea, it is necessary to examine if marketing green cosmetics products could be more effective in other platforms or if social media would be the optimal solution. In addition, while social media can be a powerful tool to sway mass opinion, whether it always works in line with the intention of the companies is unknown. The overarching negative reactions towards anti-animal testing campaigns held by some brands shows that there is a risk of backfire using this tool. Thus, further direction for businesses in correctly utilizing social media would be beneficial in determining its strengths as a strategy for green marketing.

Broader implications

The significance of this study lies in building a connection between green marketing and the current social media strategies of cosmetics companies. The findings prove that consumers would have positive perceptions on green advertisements on social media if the specific needs are

met, such as detailed information on environmental or health benefits. Addressing these direct consumer needs would thus be the primary step, before branding or promoting green campaigns, to successfully implement environmentalism in cosmetics advertisements on social media.

This study shows further implications for addressing the passive green purchasing behavior among South Koreans due to high prices, low quality, or limited options. For cosmetics industry in specific, quality, especially skin benefits, was the core factor determining purchase decisions, while prices mattered less with most people willing to pay the premium. Considering the environmental awareness and sufficient demands for green products in South Korea, the possibility of promoting green purchasing behavior then lies in providing more options for consumers, indicating that expanding green marketing would meet the demands and ultimately benefit businesses.

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