

Do we buy cosmetics because they are useful or because they make us feel good?

July 21 2011



People who use cosmetics buy these products primarily for emotional reasons.
Credit: SINC

A study by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) shows that people who use cosmetics buy these products primarily for emotional reasons. The study was carried out on facial creams (hydrating and nutritive ones, coloured or non-coloured, and anti-wrinkle creams) and body creams (firming and anti-cellulite creams).

"The study shows that both the emotional and utility aspect of cosmetic brands have a significant impact on [consumer satisfaction](#), but that the emotional component has a greater effect", Vanessa Apaolaza, a researcher from the UPV and lead author of the study, which has been published in the *African Journal of Business Management*, tells SINC.

Some of the main positive emotions aroused by beauty products include "the sensation of [wellbeing](#) gained from eliminating or reducing feelings of worry and [guilt](#), which is the factor with the greatest impact", the author explains.

The scientists carried out personal surveys on 355 women aged between 18 and 50, who were selected in a random sample. They were asked to evaluate various aspects of their perceptions of the functional and [emotional factors](#) of the cosmetics they used, as well as their degree of satisfaction with them.

The results showed that "consumer satisfaction is greatest when the cosmetics brand helps to strengthen positive emotions through the [perception](#) of 'caring for oneself' and removing feelings of worry and guilt about not taking care of one's appearance", says Apaolaza.

Paradoxically, in order for the brand to provide this positive [emotional experience](#), it must first cause consumers to have [negative feelings](#) about themselves, such as concern about and [dissatisfaction](#) with their appearance.

"One way of achieving this is by subtly telling them they are ugly – something that many cosmetics adverts achieve implicitly and very effectively by showing images of unusually beautiful women", the study points out.

"The theory of social comparison has been used in various research studies to explain how using very attractive models in advertising can affect consumers", says Apaolaza.

"The basic premise of these studies is that consumers compare their own level of physical attractiveness with that of the models used in adverts, and that these comparisons give rise to negative effects in the way they

perceive their own physical attractiveness and on their self-esteem. These effects are most heightened among people with the greatest awareness of their public image", she adds.

The study points to the need to eliminate these negative emotions and to soothe women's worries about looking good as one of their main psychological motivations for buying cosmetics.

Emotional need to attract the opposite sex

"Our emotions often dictate our decisions. In our buying behaviour, we make emotional decisions and justify them rationally. These emotions are in part learned and in part instinctive", points out Apaolaza.

For example, one thing that could explain the importance assigned to the unconscious emotional desire "to be attractive to the opposite sex, to be sexually attractive", and which encourages people to buy cosmetics, can be found in one of the most basic programmes of the human being, explained in the Darwinist approach to attraction – beautiful faces and well-formed bodies are important biological indicators of a person's value as a sexual partner.

Of the emotional brand-related components studied, "the positive feeling gained from experiencing greater success in social interactions" has the greatest impact on pleasure, the author says.

From a utility perspective, the researchers found that the design of the bottles or containers (attractive, making the product or brand seem technically superior, exceptional and unique) also has an impact on purchasing decisions.

"These results serve as a recommendation to the market to use persuasive strategies focused more on emotional aspects than functional

ones", the researcher concludes.

More information: Apaolaza-Ibañez, Vanessa; Hartmann, Patrick; Diehl, Sandra; Terlutter, Ralf. "Women satisfaction with cosmetic brands: The role of dissatisfaction and hedonic brand benefits". African Journal of Business Management 5(3): 792-802, 2011.

Provided by FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

Citation: Do we buy cosmetics because they are useful or because they make us feel good? (2011, July 21) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-07-cosmetics-good.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--