

# Literature review: How COVID-19 pandemic has affected perception of cosmetics products.

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**Abstract.** During COVID-19 pandemic, protective measures were taken around the world, such as isolation at home and mandatory wear of face masks. Consequently, common habits of using cosmetics products have changed. People were afraid of getting infected, increasing the use of cleaning products, and some problems related to face masks were noticed by consumers. Furthermore, with the stores' closure, the brands had to find new channel sales. So, this study aims to analyze the impact of the spread of the pandemic in the perception and market of cosmetic products. This study is a literature review and a narrative review was adopted. The results have shown a positive effect in cleansing and skincare products, in which the responders stated an improvement of skin appearance when they were following a full face care routine. But the same was not detected in the wear of makeup. Moreover, with store closing and fear of getting infected by the virus, the frequency of visits to physical stores decreased and online shopping expanded after the outbreak. Hence, without the touch experience, people spent more time looking for reviews on the Internet and found out people that just didn't share their opinion about products but also about their lives. As a consequence, consumers started to trust more on these digital influencers. Therefore, COVID-19 has indeed changed consumers' preference of cosmetics, and, as some people intend to maintain some habits acquired during the pandemic, the companies need to be aware of the development of new technologies that attend to the new requirements. Moreover, the brands had also to adapt to new ways of sales and marketing to continue to deliver everyone.

**Keywords.** Skincare, makeup, maskne, online shopping, digital marketing

## 1. Introduction

On March 11th, 2020, World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) outbreak a global pandemic and also announced guidelines to protect against COVID-19, the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, such as lockdown, social-distancing, hand washing, hand sanitizer and others. As a result, daily activities had to be done at home, increasing the free time and the use of video calls.

Thus, once people had more time, they started to pay more attention to their appearance and to interest more about it. Besides that, there was also a concern about cleaning, then it was observed an increase in the use of cosmetic products like soap, hair conditioner, and shower body gel, mostly because of the fear of getting infected. On the other hand, the interest in makeup decreased due to the face mask that consumers had to wear. So, there has been a change in the cosmetics routine since then. [1,2]

In addition, both because of the fear in finding a positive person and closure of stores, there was a

reduction in the frequency of going out. Consequently, consumers started to buy in e-commerce, including cosmetics. Social media has a great effect on this as well. Influential media figures began to have more and more impacts on people's opinion, conforming they shared their opinion in the media, inducing a new way of marketing and sale. Although, a new preoccupation arises: are people aware of all adverse reactions that beauty products have? With all the fake news and doubtful sources, it's important to evaluate if consumers have received correct information to avoid any skin problems. [2-4]

Therefore, the current study aims analyse how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the consumers' preferences about cosmetic products and the channels of sales.

## 2. Research Method

The current study is a literature review, based on 10 references which were selected using representative journal search website such as Scopus and Pubmed

and their quality evaluated by Journal Impact Factor.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 The effects on skincare products

The closure of the majority stores has had a positive effect on skincare habits. The wearing of a face mask can cause some skin problems, like blackheads, irritation, and the main one, acne. Actually, because of this last one, a new term appeared “maskane” because of this correlation between acne and mask. Furthermore, with the video calls, consumers stated that they noticed new characteristics of their appearance which they didn't like, and all these effects were still intensified by the stress and anxiety. As consequence, they started to spend more time searching about products related to the skin and this was shown in a study made through global social network and big data analysis, which says that skincare related terms appeared in larger groups of searches whereas before the COVID-19 it was classified in compact groups. [5-7]

Moreover, it was also observed a significantly interest in proper facial care. A research made in Ireland revealed that advanced skincare routine outperforms the simple one, principally with the use of eye cream, and consumers are becoming to agree with it. Another study made in Poland stated that the percentage of women who provided themselves with full face care (makeup removal, peel/exfoliation, serum, mask, and cream) everyday increased from 14% to 20%, and of who did it 2-3 times a week from 15% to 46%, namely people acquired more knowledge about the benefits of skincare. However, in Nepal, the use of sunscreen showed almost constant before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It may be explained by the result achieved by a group of researchers in Turkey which says that people who already had a proper routine continued to have it, but contradict the result achieved among Polish women, which says that 58% of them changed their skincare products during the pandemic. Then, realize that there isn't a pattern about changing skincare routine, it varies from one country to another. In addition, both in Nepal, Poland and Ireland most of the responders said that they have seen an improvement of the skin after they started to dedicate more in skincare. [1,7-9]

About the sources, among Polish women, 43% searched about cosmetics routines in social networks and websites, 14% with cosmetologists, 11% with relatives and friends, also 11% in books, 2% in newspapers and 1% in TV or radio. It is worth to say that, as clinics and hospitals were only open for more severe cases, the appointment with doctors were usually made using video/phone calls and also by websites. Furthermore, 18% of the survey participants stated that they did not seek advices or instruction at all, evidencing that a significantly percentage are not conscious about the consequences of using some products that are not indicated for them. [7]

### 3.2 The effects on makeup products and beauty salon

The perception of the makeup, nonetheless, was negatively affected. Makeup has a historical relation in society. It has been used to improve self-esteem, to express since, depending on how it is used, the person can reveal a thought, to look younger or older, among other goals. However, with the obligation to wear face masks in almost all the countries, this habit has changed. As shown by [5] the research of makeup related-terms has decreased significantly, [1] and [2] have also declared consumers reduced the use of makeup, for example, according to [9] 43.9% of the women never wear makeup while they are wearing a face mask, being the color transfer on face mask one of the main complaints as studied by [10]. Furthermore, people started to associate makeup with acne, so a habit which was related to wellbeing has become a bad thing. In addition, a new problem surged: as makeup has a social impact, not wearing makeup may also have a meaning in some cultures. Consequently, this affected negatively women, because the society impose that female wear it but, in some of them, this act was damaging their skin, creating an internal judgment that mainly affects self-esteem. [5]

Even when the beauty salons opened with the protective guidelines, the visits to these places stayed low. Consequently, procedures like hair removal, hair color and nail polish decreased. However, most of the Nepalese and Polish responders said they would like to do these things again. So, it would be interesting new research about how people return to their habits that they had before the COVID-19 pandemic, and compare to the present results of this study. [1,7]

### 3.3 Online purchases

The development of technology has advanced the “untact” marketing, namely a new sales channel where no meet face-to-face is necessary, and even before COVID-19 it was already a trend. Although, what was a complement with the normal stores, became a competition. Due to the fear of COVID-19 infection, both women and men didn't feel safe going out, even to supermarkets that continued to open during the lockdown. Consequently, the brands had to adapt to online marketing. For example, the e-commerce sales of L'Oreal, a big cosmetic company, grew up by 52.6%. In addition to online sales, the cosmetic companies have also made virtual courses and lives on online platforms to present new products as a way to get close to customers, once there wasn't the typical physical experience. [3,7]

The fact that the new technology, such as Virtual Reality and “online mirrors”, provides a good and real experience at home's comfort and safety has made people change their thought and intent about online shopping even for post-pandemic. As shown by [3] 67.7% of the survey responders do not plan in returning their visits to traditional and offline stores.

Furthermore, data about the intent in buying cosmetics shows how crucial the companies adapt to the new reality. With the skin improvement and wellbeing brought by skincare habits, 31% of the polish women said that they had already bought new products and were planning to buy more and 24% hadn't bought any but had intention to buy some. [7]

### 3.4 Virtual marketing

Moreover, a new mechanism of marketing has been emerging: advertisements made by influencers on social media. This global phenomenon, named Wanghong Broadcasting in China, shows that the brands are preferring to make marketing with influential media figures. As there isn't the physical experience with the cosmetic products, people started to look for online reviews made by influencers. However, these people not only share reviews but also their lives in Internet and, as result, a strong relation was created. Consumers see influences as ordinary people and, then, trust more in them than the most celebrities. So, the brands had to change the classic way of marketing to the digital influencer one. In addition, the expansion of Internet users broadens the range of influencers' influence. However, some of these digital influencers do not accurate or do not do great research before posting, as result it's rather common to find incorrect information on social media, increasing the spread of fake news. [2]

### 3.5 Are consumers aware of all cosmetic products effects?

People usually use cosmetic products to improve their appearance, and sometimes do not pay attention to the adverse reactions which are related to these products. Besides the fact that 18% of the responders don't search about cosmetic and still use it, [7] has also shown in its results that of the responders who said that was doing full face care (makeup removal, peel/exfoliation, serum, mask, and cream), 20% was doing it every day, being the recommended it is only 2 or 3 times a week, and the excessive exfoliation of the epidermis can destruct the skin natural hydrolipidic barrier, cause hypersensitivity, and others. So, it is noticed that maybe consumers are not well informed about skincare routine.

Furthermore, a study made in Malaysia has also shown that various individuals aren't properly aware of the danger of cosmetic product use. In fact, 48.9% are uncertain if the side effects of cosmetics are proven by scientific studies, 79.8% declared they were uncertain about the problems in sharing cosmetics, and 39.9% were not certain if the information on labels were trustworthy. Furthermore, in the same research, it was discovered that 47.5% of the responders prefer to have a good and improved skin rather than know what side effect that product can cause. Nonetheless, a lot of issues can be caused by a cosmetic that is not certified by a scientific studies and organizations that regularize the approval of a product, for example, incidence of bacteria and fungi, irritation, rhino conjunctivitis, etc. For instance, a multicenter study made in Turkey stated that, about the dermatological complaints,

45.2% was acne/rosacea and 4.4% fungal and other skin infections, and all these problems may be caused by the use of cosmetic products. [4,9]

### 3.6 Cosmetics and the "Zoom Effect"

COVID-19 caused a significant growth in the use of online platforms to video call and conference, for example Zoom (Zoom Video Communication, Inc., San Jose, CA). In the cameras, everyone looks a bit different. Because of the distance between the person and the lens and the fact that a camera transforms a 3D image to a 2D, the images seen in smartphones and computers are distorted. But this may affect in a very harmful way people who suffer with body dysmorphic disorder or/and eating disorder, being this specific group already affected by the anxiety and stress caused by the nature of a pandemic. In addition to this, in video calls, because of the camera, people also saw their images. It was as if they stare at themselves for a long time in a row and for several days a week. Consequently, all these situations were affected negatively, since people started to have problems with their appearance. This event has been called by "Zoom Effect". [6,9]

In fact, the results achieved by (6) shows that 27.2% of the responders said that they kept looking for their own face during the whole video conference, and 42.4% reported that they saw different aspects of their appearance which they didn't like. Moreover, it was reported the use of filters during the online meeting to camouflage the "imperfections". As a result, these people started to have more interest in the use of cosmetics to improve the skin problems, besides nonsurgical cosmetic treatments, for example antiwrinkle injections and dermal fillers. [6]

## 4. Conclusion

The attitudes taken during the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the use of cosmetic products. In fact, the results have shown that wearing a face mask is related to skin problems, like acne and irritation, because there are alterations to biophysical characteristics of skin. Due to this, consumers saw in skincare routine a way to improve their appearance, and most of the responders reported an improvement of their skin condition especially when it was used an advanced skincare routine. However, the same didn't happen with the makeup habits. Because of the face mask and problems associated with it, people decreased the use of makeup with except for eye products since this area continued to be visible. Visits to beauty salons were negatively affected as well, both because of the fear of getting infected and the protective measure that determined their closure.

Nonetheless, some of the consumers declared they intend to maintain some habits acquired during the pandemic, then the brands should be heedful about new developments of skincare products, mainly of: customized ones which are becoming trend as a consequence of the more knowledge of the benefits

that people are getting, and also because, as emphasized by (7), a significantly part of the survey participants reported that they didn't have time for skincare and probably won't have after this period, so they need practical products, in other words just a few ones that make all the work, and this is achieved by customizing; and lastingness technology, once one of the reasons for not wearing makeup was that it degraded during the moments they were with the face mask.

Furthermore, an impact was also seen in the sale channels. With the closing stores, the online market became stronger than the offline ones, since people should avoid going out. In addition, the marketing was affected as well. The rise of influencers' influence on consumer opinion made cosmetic companies change the typical marketing with celebrities. In other hand, the facility in getting information had not only positive effects. The lack of knowledge about the adverse reaction in using cosmetic products was noticed as well. In fact, the complaints about fungal and other infections, and other skin problems, emphasize this issue. Therefore, it's essential that the brand and digital influencer highlight the importance of share accurate information and choose safe products and procedures, because it is just worth to spend time and money in beauty and face care products if their health is not affected.

In addition, it stands to reason that the digital market has also connected more distant places. The possibility of acquisition of many people who lived in small towns was limited by the fact that some cosmetics brands did not have stores there. But, with the expansion of online sales made this access able to happen. Moreover, it's worthy of consideration to highlight the importance of post mails. Their service has been more and more required by the new demands. So, it's also crucial for the development of this area.

To conclude, it is explicit how important this study is important to cosmetic brands. The 21s century is already known as a century of pandemic and epidemic among scientists, and, as shown by this current review paper, all these events can directly affect the market of cosmetics. So, it is crucial that the companies be prepared for similar future situations to survive.

## 5. Acknowledgment

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