

Effects of Aesthetic Packaging on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

Sofia Scarmozzino

Ian Baitz

Ryerson University

23 November 2020

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge those who played a role in the completion of my thesis. First, Ian Baitz for spending countless weeks preparing the class to conduct research and compile our findings into a thesis. Next, I would like to thank Donna Razik for virtually meeting with me to help guide my paper on the right track from the beginning to the end and for giving me useful tips to properly share my findings. I would also like to thank my sister Cassandra for providing her assistance.

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the influences that contribute to consumers purchasing decisions in the context of cosmetic products and whether or not their decisions are impacted by the presentation and packaging of their products of interest. I collected data by administering my own surveys and polls that included qualitative and quantitative fields in order to most accurately analyze the responses. Results showed that packaging and presentation are in fact important aspects of cosmetic products and many customers look forward to this part of the buying experience. However, they are not considered deciding factors over other factors such as the quality and end results of products. The outcomes of my research show that products with intriguing packaging designs draw customers to the products, but they do not cause them to purchase (or repurchase) them if they have poor reviews or results.

*Keywords: packaging, appearance, cosmetics*

## **Table Of Contents**

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Effects of Aesthetic Packaging on Consumer Purchasing Decisions	5
Literature Review	6
Methods	9
Results	12
Discussion	15
Conclusion	19
References	22
Appendices	24

## **Effects of Aesthetic Packaging on Consumer Purchasing Decisions**

Today, products in the cosmetics industry have become part of many people's daily routines. During the Covid-19 lockdowns around the world, Shopify, an e-commerce business platform has noticed a particular increase in their cosmetics shops (Forbes, 2020). This is because these products are almost always useful whether they are for a night out, a self-care day at home, or for essential reasons. Since there is almost always a use for these products, there is likely always a buyer.

This study will attempt to answer the following question: how does product presentation and packaging impact consumer buying habits in the overall cosmetic industry? Packaging of products can be a deciding factor to many people when purchasing cosmetic products, as well as the overall presentation on shelves. Worth over five hundred thirty-two billion dollars, the industry is known to be associated with glamour and luxury, containing over thousands of brands and fascinating products. With such large competition within the industry, packaging and presentation are one of the main factors that differentiate one brand from its competitor. Especially in cosmetics, one's decision to purchase one item over another is heavily influenced by the presentation of packaging, and have a larger impact on consumer buying decisions than quality or prices (Lewis, 2013). Gender also appears to be a factor that contributes to buying habits. According to Farwa, Nisar, Riaz, Rashid & Wasif (2015), the industry caters to women more than men. Some of the factors that contribute to the decision to purchase include "high price, low price, colors, brand and beautiful packaging designs" (Farwa et al., 2015), as well as the inclusion of a brand name (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2015).

### **Literature Review**

After reviewing previous research that has been conducted, it is evident that cosmetic products are primarily used for self-care and to help improve one's exterior image (Farwa et al., 2015). These can include makeup, skin care, fragrance, hair products, and more. Since these products are used as a way to emphasize beauty, their packaging and presentation must represent this as well. According to Farwa et al. (2015), the main purpose of packaging is not only to protect the products inside, but to also present the product in an advantageous way. The study suggests packaging design largely impacts buyer's buying decisions and claims that packaging often convinces customers to buy items that they may not need. This tactic can also lead to customers repurchasing the products (Farwa et al., 2015). Cosmetic companies usually have smaller, lower-priced products around the cash registers in stores to give the customers something to look at while waiting to pay. Packaging initiatives are the main selling factor for these types of products because the customer is forced to make a quick decision regarding if they want the product or not. The results of the study by Farwa et al. demonstrate that packaging design is one of the most influencing factors on the decision to purchase an item that also acts as a marketing tool used to attract consumers. Findings also suggest that good packaging and well thought out designs increase sales of cosmetics. In particular, for women, this type of packaging is preferred for cosmetic gifts. A study by Medina, Mohamed & Romo (2018) discusses the effects of cosmetic packaging design on customers' buying decisions and establishes the tactics brands use to differentiate their products. Consumers observe package designs of products that they purchase subconsciously form impressions of the design as well as the product and brand. In many cases, consumers value products with attractive packaging designs and associate this factor with a satisfied purchase (Medina et al., 2018). As previously stated,

packaging plays a role in helping consumers identify a brand and is used as a marketing tool to capture consumers focuses (Medina et al., 2018). Participants in this study rated attractiveness as the most important factor when purchasing a product, followed by package aesthetics, and package functionality (Medina et al., 2018). This further proves that the visual elements of a product's package plays a significant role in a consumer's buying decision when it comes to cosmetic products. Another question of this survey asked respondents to rate four different lipsticks without knowing their brand forcing them to make decisions based primarily off of package design. The four lipsticks in the survey were Urban Decay priced at £16, Dior priced at £25, L'Oréal priced at £5, and finally, Clinique priced at £12. The respondents considered the L'Oreal lipstick to be the highest quality based on packaging, and is interestingly the least expensive option. The Dior lipstick was chosen to be the least quality, but is the most expensive option. These results further conclude that the "clever usage of the colour element and visual attractiveness" by L'Oreal heavily impacted the participants' buying decision (Medina et al., 2018).

Further exploration of literature conveyed the importance of what is included on the packaging of a product. In a study by Bulut & Tropoyan (2008), results reflected that in the cosmetics sector, package design and materials are a crucial part of the value of a product because they are used as a promotional tool. Another finding includes value being added to the products when the packages are designed for aesthetics and positive information is displayed to consumers while preserving and protecting products (Bulut & Tropoyan, 2008). When creating new product lines, companies establish packaging concepts which essentially define the ways their products should look and what it will do for the product. Packaging will be used as a protective tool as well as a promotional tool. Elements of the packaging such as shape, material, colour, and branding all work together to

support a product position and marketing strategy and significance is placed on factors such as the level of attraction, recognizability, and how much the packaging stands out from its competitors (Grundey, 2010). The results of Bulut & Tropoyan's (2008) study shows that while consumers shopping for cosmetics do not consider packaging as a significant part of product quality of functionality, they do consider it a crucial part of brand image and values, price, and customer satisfaction.

Research conducted by Grundey (2010) identifies functionality, protection and promotion as other important factor in package design for cosmetic products. Consumers often repurchase products when they are able to recognize the packaging and branding. For example, results showed that Coca-Cola products are easily recognizable on shelves without even seeing the logo, and even when the label colour was changed from red to green, the products were still easily identifiable (Grundey). Although Coca-Cola is not a cosmetic product, this study displays the importance of branding on cosmetics and packaging is how brands achieve universal recognition. Another aspect of Grundey's (2010) study interviewed participants about 4 cosmetic brands; L'Occitane, The Body Shop, Optima Linija, and BIODERMA. Out of the four brands listed, the majority of the respondents claimed that they could easiest identify L'Occitane and The Body Shop products based on their packaging. The results of the study on packaging functionality show that it plays a significant role in creating and promoting a product as well as actually selling it.

As previously mentioned, female consumers tend to take up the largest percentage for sales for cosmetic products such as makeup, skin care, fragrances, and tools. This study focuses on women and identifies how females are impacted by certain package designs. Findings suggest that most female consumers consider cosmetic packaging design and appearance to be important, and will buy products with aesthetically-pleasing packaging



over those with more basic packaging. The study also preferences varied based on ethnic background and age cohorts (Liu, 2011). Cosmetic brands are known for producing beautiful gift sets, especially around the holidays. These sets can include some of their top-selling products, essentials for a full routine, value packs, and more. They are usually appealing because they include products that people love, but also include products that one wouldn't purchase regularly which exposes consumers to a new variety of products and drives future sales. Many women send cosmetic products as gifts to send to friends and family members so a good-looking package is important when purchasing these items. According to Liu (2011), eighty-five percent of participants reported product packaging design to be a large impact on whether or not they will purchase a product, and ninety-two percent reported being attracted to products based on packaging. Although the majority of the survey respondents considered packaging to be important to them to play a role in their buying decision, they also said that they consider the price and effect of the product as well (Liu, 2011). This study clearly demonstrated that female consumers, who take up a large percentage of customers in the cosmetic industry, purchase their cosmetics products based on packaging and design.

### **Methods**

In order to gather the correct information on consumer buying habits for cosmetic products, I've decided to look at previous studies on similar topics as well as conduct primary research of my own. I used 6 scholarly articles and research papers in order to gather secondary data. To gather my primary data, I used Google's survey software and Instagram's poll feature.

### ***Participants***

Participants included 110 instagram followers with varying ages (ages 14 years old to 65 years old). 43 other participants (including colleagues,

classmates, and family members of varying ages) completed a small survey. Of the 43 participants that completed the survey on Google, a large portion of them are Graphic Communications Management students who have a background in packaging and design.

### ***Materials***

The materials used for primary data are social media polls and Google Forms surveys. A survey that included thirteen questions was administered to class mates, coworkers, and family members through Google Forms. In this survey, I included a variety of different types of questions such as rating/preference ordering, A vs B, and choosing one photo over another. In order to gather quantitative and qualitative research from my survey, I included some questions that were open ended which gave the participants the opportunity to write explanations and provide insight that I could not gather from polls or multiple choice questions. In order to gain further insight, an extra 2 question poll was also administered and answered by 110 instagram followers. Each Instagram poll had two options.

### ***Procedure***

After gathering enough secondary research from pervious studies, I then built my own survey to administer to gather my own results. After receiving results from the survey, I decided to run another two polls on Instagram to clarify some of the survey responses. After administering two different materials to capture results for my research, this information would be used to determine whether or not my instagram followers and classmates favour product presentation over functionality. The below flow chart shows the process I followed.

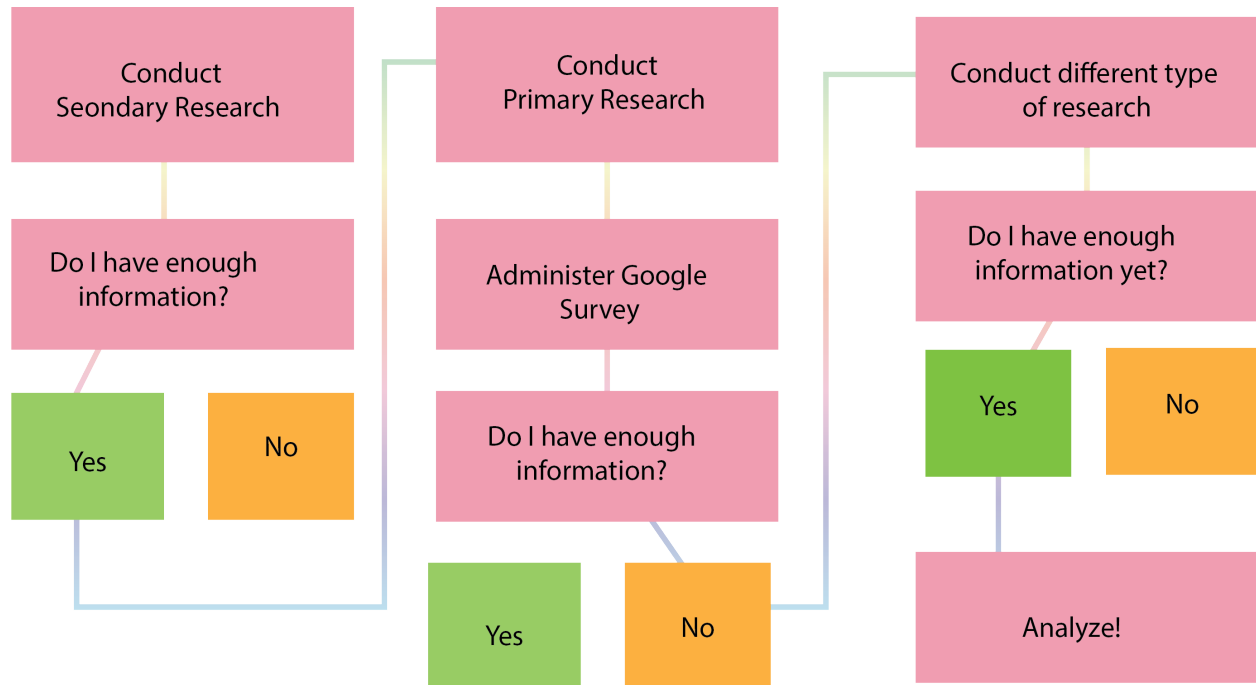


Figure 1: A flow chart demonstrating the method I used to conduct my research via self-report questionnaires.

Figure 1 represents the path I took when conducting my research to ensure that I was able to gather the right information. I started with my secondary research and searched through scholarly articles to find research on a similar topic and analyze how cosmetic packaging impacts consumer buying habits. I used previous research to influence the questions I asked in my self-report questionnaire. After completing the survey and sending it to classmates, friends, and family, I analyzed my information and felt that more data was needed. I then went on to conduct more research by using Instagram’s poll feature. Once I felt I conducted enough research, I analyzed the data and drew conclusions from the responses I received. Since I included an area to capture qualitative research where participants could share some feedback on what influences their buying decisions, I was able to yield more accurate results. The respondents shared valuable

opinions on what impacts their decisions to purchase cosmetic products which helped me reach a conclusion on my question.

### Results

Figure 2: What influences your decision more when purchasing cosmetic products?

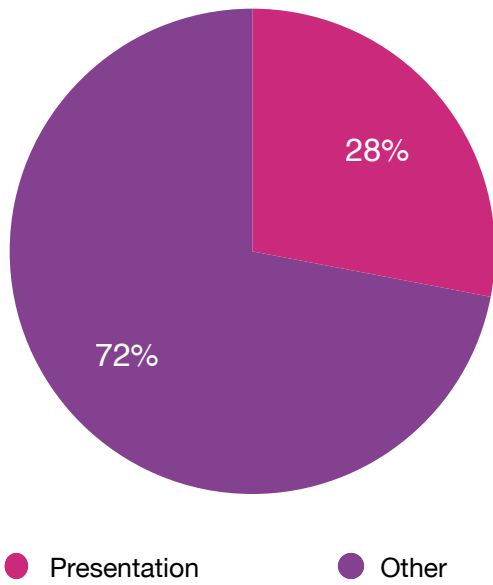


Figure 3: WRITE IN QUESTION

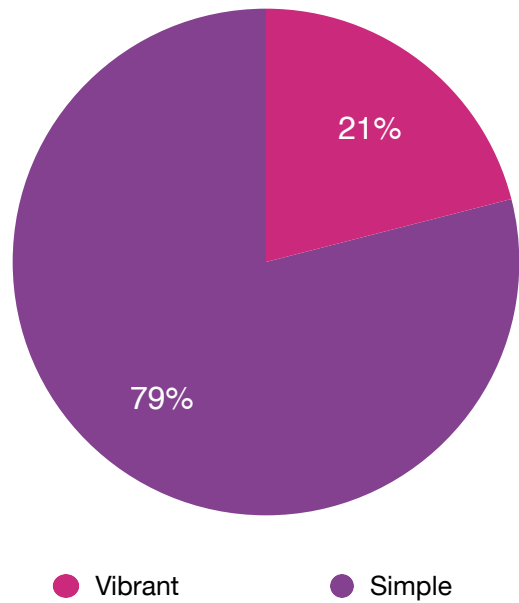


Figure 3. Do you find yourself to be drawn to products that have a visually appealing presentation? (ex. colourful, sparkly, cute terminology, minimalistic design, etc)

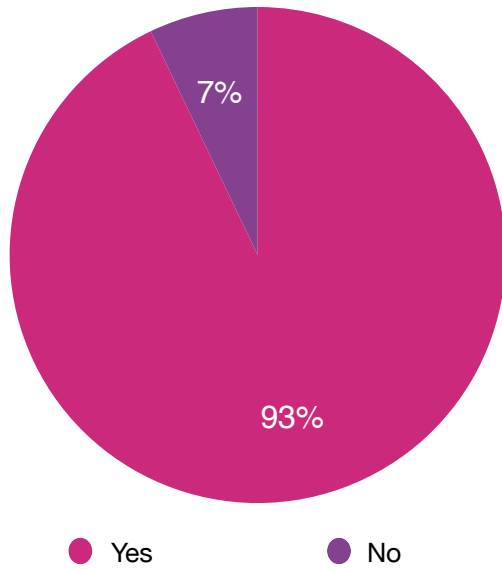


Figure 4. Respondents were asked to choose their top 3 influencing factors when purchasing cosmetics products.

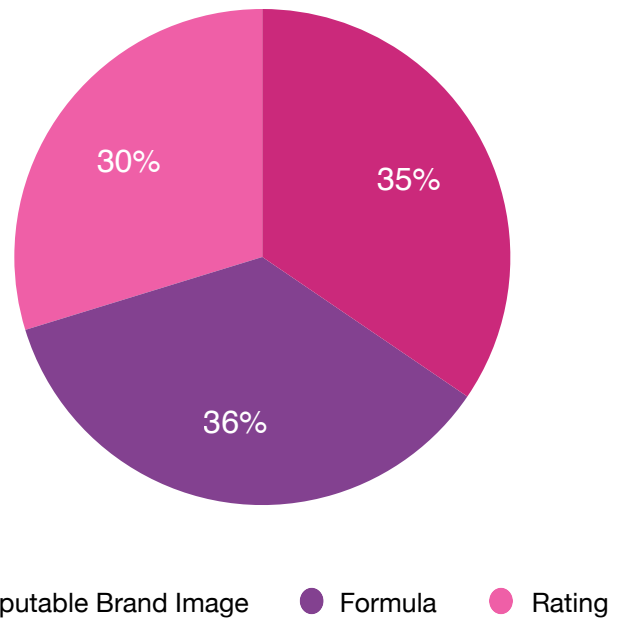


Figure 5. What other factors impact your buying decision?

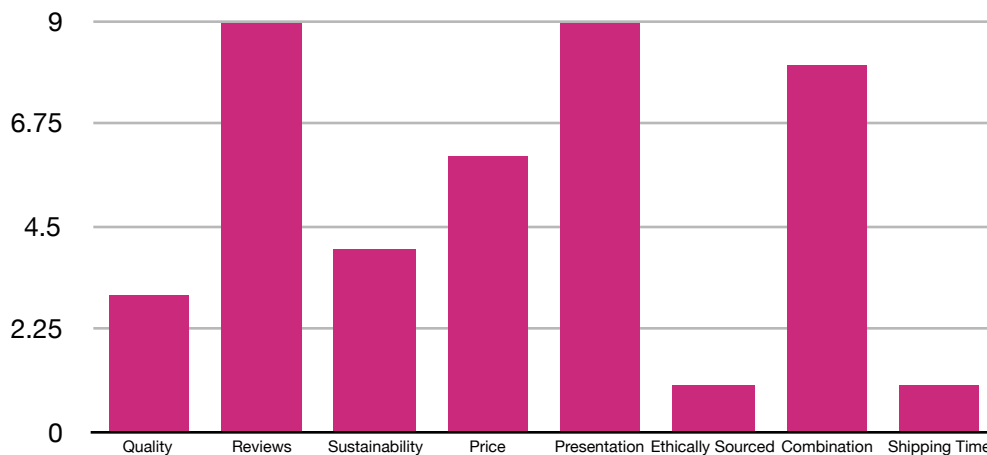


Figure 6: Photo comparisons that determine what types of products attract consumers.

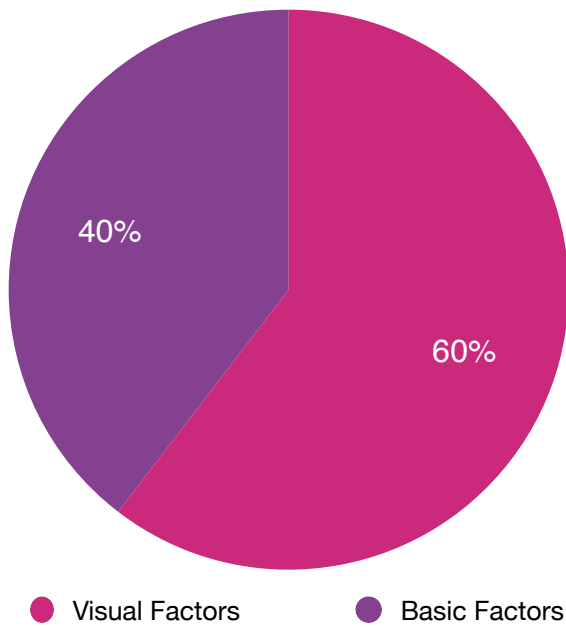
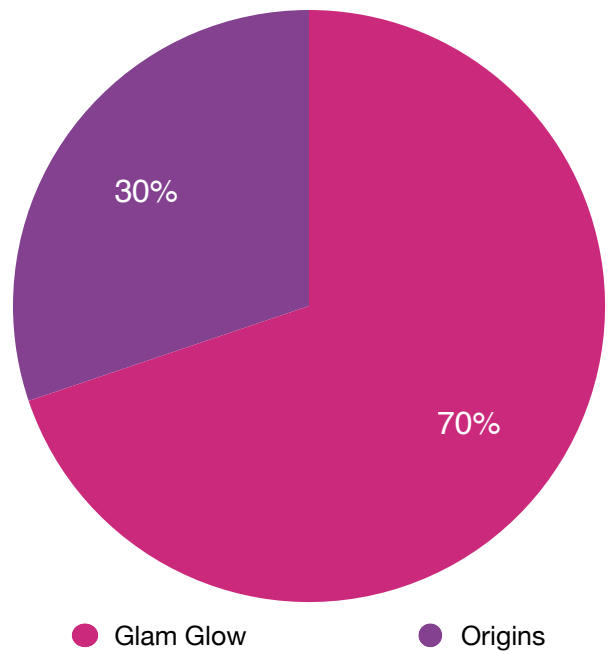


Figure 7: Photo series 1



## Discussion

After conducting primary research using Google Forms and Instagram Polls, I analyzed the the data and created graphs to understand the results. I discovered that I was slightly off with my hypothesis as the results differed from my prediction as well as the outcome of the secondary data. I predicted that the majority of my respondents would be more influenced to purchase a product with a colourful and exciting packaging for their over quality, functionality, or other factors. I predicted this because most of the products seen in beauty shops or cosmetic stores have attractive packaging and are usually exciting to look at. I also based this prediction off of personal interests and was eager to learn whether or not most people shop this way as well.

In the first Instagram Poll, respondents were asked to choose whether their purchasing decisions are more influenced by presentation or other factors. The "presentation" option included factors such as packaging, fragrance, brand, image, and visual appearance. The "other" option included factors such as quality, formula, shelf life, and product reviews. Figure 2 shows the results of my poll which indicate that 72% of the respondents actually favoured the "other" option as more of an influencing factor. This was interesting to me because some of the previous studies in my literature review supported evidence that packaging is in fact a large deciding factor for consumers in the cosmetic industry. The results from this poll conclude that packaging presentation is not as important of a factor than quality, formula, shelf life, and product reviews.

The next question asked on the Instagram Poll was "which type of packaging are you more likely to be drawn to when browsing cosmetic products?". The results for this question were also surprising because they

went against my prediction as well. The options were either "Vibrant" which included things like colourful, sparkly, textured, detailed, celebrity or character endorsed, or "Simple" which included options such as monotone, minimalistic, basic, and neutral colours. As shown in Figure 3, almost 80% of the respondents voted for "Simple". This information was interesting because I predicted that consumers were drawn to vibrant and exciting packaging. Since the majority of respondents voted, "simple", this shows that the sample group on Instagram prefers this type of packaging for cosmetic products. This doesn't mean they don't care about what the product presentation looks like, it simply concludes that they would not buy a product with poor results due to packaging over a product with proven positive results.

In the survey conducted through Google Forms, respondents were asked if they find themselves drawn to products that have a visually appealing presentation. The options were either "yes" or "no". The results were slightly different in Figure 4 as it showed that approximately ninety-three percent of participants stated that they are drawn to appealing packaging. However, a minimalistic design (which received a seventy-nine percent preference on the Instagram poll) can also be considered visually appealing. After analyzing this data with my supervisor, I realized that the Google survey was sent to a large variety of groups, including Ryerson's GCM students who have a background in package design and product presentation.

To gather more information as to what influences the respondent's buying decisions, I asked an open-ended question to ask them what *other* factors they would consider. After tallying the results into categories, Figure 5 shows that the majority of the respondents chose factors related to product review, presentation, and a combination of two or more of the categories. One of the responses included the following: " I try to look for



brands that use sustainable packaging and use ethically sourced ingredients. It's important for me to make sure my products aren't harming the environment but it's also nice when they look good on my shelf". This response mentioned that package sustainability is important as well as where the ingredients come from, but its presentation is also important. Another response read: "I have a budget but I'll spend more for quality. I always check reviews online before purchasing. Since most beauty and skincare products have nice packaging I kind of just expect that". This review talked about price of product, quality, and the reviews of the products being purchased. This respondent also mentioned that they expect nice packaging based on experiences that indicate that most beauty products already include that feature. Another interesting response said, "The reviews on a product are huge to me. I like knowing that the product I'm buying works and looks good on my skin tone. I do prefer having cute packaging for my makeup, but it doesn't drive my decision usually. And skincare aesthetic doesn't matter at all. I just like thinking that 'I'll look cute if I use cute looking make up'". These reviews are interesting because they are detailed and show that customers consider both visual aspects of the product they are purchasing as well as scientific factors such as quality and formula. Many people like to read reviews on products before purchasing which is evident in Figures 4 and 5 because it gives them a sense of reassurance especially since skin care and beauty products are usually final sale due to sanitary reasons.

As part of my questionnaire, I decided to include a series of photos for my respondents to choose from. One photo was a visually appealing product or product line with colour, glitter, and character or celebrity branding, and the other included more basic and minimal packaging. These photos included less colour, less interesting containers or dispensers, and no noticeable branding or endorsements. I felt like this type of question would help the

participants visualize the products they are being asked about, and it would represent an actual buying scenario in a store or online shopping. This result was an important metric for my research because it was realistic and the results also aligned well with the results I received in Figure 3. I've tallied up the results from each of the photo series in Figure 6 which concludes that about sixty percent of respondents chose the presentation-oriented packaging and product types, and about forty percent of participants chose the basic packaging and product types. Although the result aligns with those in Figure 3, these two questions do not account for any other factors besides image so it cannot be concluded that based on these two results, consumers prefer to purchase products that present nicely. If prices, brand names, ingredients, and reviews were shown, I presume the results would look different.

Since I was unable to conduct in-person research due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I decided to include a survey technique that included images as options instead of words so that the participants could visualize the products they would be choosing. In the photo series of questions, I asked participants to select which product they find to look the most intriguing. The brand's names are visible and the products in comparison are relatively similar. One of the questions asked participants which mud mask they would be most likely to purchase and the two options are shown to the right. The photo on the left is Glam Glow's Barbie collection mud mask, and the photo on the right is Origin's Clear Improvement mud mask. Figure 7 shows that seventy percent of participants chose Glam Glow's mask and left feedback to support



Figure 8: Images from a survey question

their choices, which were mainly related to the product's presentation. After the photo series, I asked the respondents to explain why they chose the options they did in order to get some background understanding on the results. Explanations show that in some options, they chose visually appealing options, but in others, they opted for ethically sourced options or minimalistic options. One of the respondents said, "I chose the options I did because of the presentation (they're all mostly so visually appealing), the display and colours are also very cohesive and eye catching". However, many of the respondents who chose Origin's mask explained that they felt the brand used cleaner ingredients that are more suitable to use on a face. Some respondents also explained that they chose Origin's mask because it has the "Clean at Sephora" stamp which tells buyers that the product uses natural and safe ingredients. One of the responses who chose the Origin mask said, "For the most part, I am attracted to the more visually appealing packaging, however in the mud mask example I was drawn to the green stamp of clean ingredients. Additionally, I think that attractive packaging is not just about being over embellished but also about a clean, sleek and well thought out design". The participants who left feedback to explain their choices have provided me with the most insightful information as to why they shop for their skin care products. This response said, "Personally I think that pretty packaging is only as effective as the product itself. It may result in an initial impulse purchase for me but if it doesn't meet my standards about quality, I likely won't repurchase it as I would other products".

This response is very reflective of many participants' responses as it makes reference to the appearance of a product's packaging. However, if the product does not perform well, this participant would not purchase it again.

## **Conclusion**

This research aimed to determine what influences consumers to purchase cosmetic products. I hypothesized that consumers are more likely to purchase cosmetic products that have a visually appealing packaging presentation rather than a more basic packaging. Overall, the results of my secondary research matched my expectations but the outcome of my primary research did not. My expectation was that consumers would consider packaging a more important factor than others such as quality when purchasing cosmetic products.

The data I gathered through my Instagram Poll and Google survey slightly vary because of the audiences they were delivered to. The survey was sent to a group of people with a design and packaging background who might have had a slightly different opinion than the average consumer. This survey concluded that the majority of participants prefer packaging that is visually appealing. The Instagram Poll on the other hand was available to over 100 people who have backgrounds in many different industries and they likely have different expectations in mind. The results from these polls conclude that respondents prefer quality and reviews over the presentation of the product and that they also prefer a minimalistic design over a vibrant and hard-to-miss design. Due to the nature of the platform, the Instagram polls were also slightly vague. The purpose of these questions were mainly just to get some extra data on what attracts consumers. If I were to resend this survey, I would add a question where respondents could record their age, gender, and career to help narrow down my research results. I would also do this for my Instagram Poll because I feel I would have been able to receive more accurate results.

I noticed some discrepancies when reviewing my survey outcomes and consulting my supervisor. In order to conduct more accurate research, I would need to be more clear in my hypothesis and research question. My question was, "how does product presentation and packaging impact

consumer buying habits in the cosmetic industry?”. My prediction was that one’s decision to purchase one item over another is heavily influenced by the presentation of packaging, and that this has a larger impact on consumer buying decisions than quality or prices. To further the study, I would also clarify in my survey question whether I am referring to “makeup” or “skin care” because often, the packaging design strategy for each varies. This would help narrow down the factors that influence consumers when purchasing their cosmetic products.

Limitations in the study included being restricted to using mainly tools that are virtual due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this, I was limited to a social media survey and was unable to conduct in-person interviews. The sample used in this study (social media users and peers) may not have been as representative of the population as it could have been if customers at stores were used as participants. This is because participants in stores that sell cosmetics are more likely to be regular consumers of cosmetic products whereas this is less likely when participants included were limited to a certain group of social media users. Another factor that contributes to limitations in the study involves the proximity of products to customers. If customers in a store were used as participants, it is more likely that their responses would be more accurate because the cosmetic products being discussed would be available to view.

Although there were some considerations and recommendations for future research, I was still able to gather interesting facts about the way consumers shop for cosmetic products and what factors influence their buying decisions. Based on the research methods available and the outcomes, it can be concluded that product presentation and packaging is a preference when purchasing cosmetic products, but it is not a determinant over other factors such as quality or rating of product.

### References

- Ahmed, A M. K., & Ahmed, Q. (2015). Factors influence on packaging design in an impulse consumer purchasing behaviour: A case study of Doritos pack. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 7 (6), 92.
- Bulut, Z. A., & Topoyan, M. (2008). Packaging value of cosmetics products: An insight from the view point of consumers. In *Proceeding ICOVACS, international conference on value chain sustainability, Izmir Turkey* (pp. 183-190).
- Forbes, T. (2020, July 30). The results are in: People love to shopify during a pandemic. *MediaPost Communications*. <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/357992/thanksgiving-2020-travel-down-virtual-celebratin.html>
- Grundey, D. (2010). Functionality of product packaging: surveying consumers' attitude towards selected cosmetic brands. *Economics & Sociology*, 3(1), 87.
- Liu, Y. (2011). How packaging designs of cosmetics affect female consumers' purchasing behavior. *Arcada*.

Medina, I. G., Mohamed, N. B. A., & Romo, Z. G. (2018). "The effect of cosmetic packaging design on consumers' purchase decisions." *Indian Journal of Marketing* 48.12: 50-61.

Riaz, S., Wasif, S., Nisar, W., Farwa, U., & Rashid, A. (2015). Impact of packaging designs of cosmetics on female consumer's buying behavior. *Acad. Res. Int*, 6(5), 130-142.

## Appendices

### Google Survey Questions

Answer this survey based on the way you like to shop cosmetics!

\* Required

1. Do you find yourself to be drawn to products that have a visually appealing presentation? (ex. colourful, sparkly, cute terminology, minimalistic design, etc)

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. You're browsing the beauty store for something to add to your skin care routine (i.e face masks, shower gels, bath products, appliances, serums, etc).  
Select 3 things that influence your buying decision:

*Check all that apply.*

Colourful bottle / package

Reputable brand image

Nice scent

Sample attached

Rating of product



Textured package or product (matte, shiny, holographic, glittery, furry, etc)

Photographs nicely (either in use or the physical product)

Formula / ingredients Celebrity /

character endorsed

3. You're browsing the beauty store for something to add to your makeup routine. Select 3 things that influence your buying decision:

*Check all that apply.*

Colourful bottle / package

Reputable brand image

Nice scent

Sample attached

Rating of product

Textured product or package (matte, shiny, holographic, glittery, furry, etc)

Photographs nicely (either in use or the physical product)

Formula / ingredients

Celebrity endorsed

Quality

4. What best describes you:

*Mark only one oval.*

The appearance of a product doesn't matter to me

i only buy high quality cosmetics, even if they're not visually appealing I

purchase products that look pretty!

I love flashy products and packaging (glitter, fluff, metallics!)

Usually the brands with nicer packaging are more established, so I'll spend more money on those brands

I go for the cheapest products, even if the packaging is basic

5. What best describes you when ordering cosmetics online?

*Mark only one oval.*

it makes me extra happy when i order something and it comes in a nice box i  
don't care how products ordered online come, as long as they get to me

6. What other factors impact your buying decision?

This or That

7. Which skin care line scored your purchase due to its appearance? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

A

B

8. Which box would you prefer to open after it is delivered to your door? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

A

B

9. Which eye shadow palette are you most likely to buy? \*

*Check all that apply.*

A

B

10. Which mud mask looks most interesting? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

A

B

11. Which makeup collection set are you most likely to buy based on appearance? \*

*Check all that apply.*

A

B

12. Which display are you most likely to shop or looks most interesting? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

A

B

13. Please explain why you chose those options. (quality, presentation, colours, display, etc)

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

### Instagram Questions

1. What influences your decision more when purchasing cosmetic products?
  - A. Presentation
  - B. Other
2. Which type of packaging are you more likely to be drawn to when browsing cosmetic products?
  - A. Vibrant
  - B. Simple