

## **CONSUMER PURCHASE FEATURES TOWARD NATURAL COSMETICS IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The trend of natural cosmetics is increasing round the world as consumers are becoming more aware of the benefits of natural products. The aim of this study is to identify the consumer attitudes towards natural cosmetic products. Also, the paper determines the consumer purchase intention towards product of natural cosmetics and the features of pre purchase consumer behaviour in online environment. The data was collected online survey research conducted in March and April 2015 on a sample of 204 respondents in the Dubrovnik-Neretva County. The descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The results suggest that most consumers have positive attitude towards products of natural cosmetics. However, the survey also found that consumers are not inclined to purchasing products of natural cosmetics in online environment. Furthermore, the results of correlation analysis indicate statistically significant, moderately strong relation between attitude toward natural cosmetics and consumers' pre purchasing behaviour toward natural cosmetic products.*

**KEYWORDS:** consumer purchase intentions, consumer attitudes, pre purchase behavior, natural cosmetics, online environment

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The trend of natural cosmetic products is increasing year by year worldwide, as consumer awareness is growing at the same time. Global climate change on one side and the need for healthier way of living, youth appearance and following trends on the other side affect natural cosmetic market as its sales are growing rapidly and will reach 16 billion US dollars in 2020 [www.vivaness.de]. Studies have documented that consumers are getting more and more educated and aware of the harmful effects of synthetic cosmetics which influences growing demand for natural cosmetic products [Rajagopal, 2007, Davis-Bundrage and Kim, 2012]. Also, consumers are getting more sensible to the state of the environment which reflects in their preferences, attitudes and the need for buying natural products [Laroche et al., 2001, Sarigollu, 2009, Kaufmann et al., 2012].

Regardless of the growth of natural cosmetics industry, the natural cosmetic market is still neglected in academic research and little has been published regarding consumer behaviour towards natural cosmetics. Studies about natural and organic personal care products are fewer in number and inconclusive as the factors that influence purchase intention [Davis-Bundrage and Kim, 2012, 196].

On the other side, the revolutionary change brought by computers and information technology has an important impact on consumers' daily lives [Lim et al., 2010, 155]. The Internet has provided consumers with more control in accessing information on products and services and has reduced the time and effort that they spend on shopping [Ko et al, 2004], although web shopping behaviour does not necessarily follow traditional consumer behaviour [Ling et al., 2010].

The aim of this study is to identify consumer attitudes towards natural cosmetics products. Also, the paper determines the consumer purchase intention towards product of natural cosmetic and the features of pre purchase consumer behaviour in online environment.

Following the introduction, the second section provides a selected literature review on attitudes and purchasing behaviour towards natural cosmetics, with a special emphasis on consumers' online buying behaviour. Data and research methodology are discussed in the third section, while the fourth presents research results and the discussion of findings. The final section of the paper draws certain conclusions and directions for future research.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The market of natural products is growing around the world in variety of industries, from food industry, fashion, cosmetics and beyond [Cervellon, Rinaldi and Wernerfeld, 2011]. Most of researches dealing with natural products are made in food industry [Gil et al., 2000, Yiridoe et al., 2005, Hughner et al, 2007, Tsakiridou, E. et al, 2008, Martić, Kuran and Mihić, 2014, Wee et al, 2014.] Above mentioned studies refer to perception, attitudes, purchase intentions and purchase of organic food and have indicated that consumers' attitudes towards organic food are the best predictor on purchase intention. Although the research from Mintel [2013] has shown many similarities in purchase behaviour regarding purchase of organic food and natural cosmetics, the determination of the same purchase patterns in these two industries is not possible [Kim and Chung, 2011] which results in necessity of investigating behaviour patterns regarding natural cosmetics.

In a cosmetic market many researches have been conducted regarding conventional cosmetics [Weber and Capitant de Villebonne, 2002, Kumar, 2005, Souiden and Diagne, 2009, Kim et al., 2013, Lopaciuk and Łoboda 2013, Deshmukh, 2015, Kumari and Natarajan, 2015] but little has been written about attitudes and purchase behaviour towards natural cosmetics. Rising awareness about environmental degradation resulted in more ecological consciousness and desire to purchase natural products [Laroche et al, 2001, Kaufmann, 2012] which led to increasing number of researches regarding natural cosmetics [Johri and Sahasakmontri ,1998, Rajagopal ,2007, Kim and Seock ,2009, Dimitrova et al, 2009, Kim and Chung , 2011, Davis-Bundrage and Kim, 2012, Hansen et al., 2012, Rybowska, 2014, Jansri and Marimuthu, 2015].

Johri and Sahasakmontri [1998] found out that the main attributes of products in process of buying natural cosmetics are colour, packaging, image of brand, skin safety, fragrance and product composition as well as value for money. Rajagopal [2007] high lightened the importance of promotional activities on natural cosmetic market in order to change preferences on behalf of green brands. Kim and Seock [2009] emphasised that consumers with high health consciousness more often purchase natural cosmetics and that high health consciousness is related to the possibility of discernment of conventional and natural cosmetics. A cross cultural study made by Dimitrova et al. [2009] showed that the level of education is very important factor that influences purchase behaviour. This research also found out that natural flavours, together with high quality, skin protection, good promotion, hypoallergenic ingredients and hydration are the most important motivational factors regarding selection of natural cosmetics. The research of Kim and Chung [2011] resulted in demonstrating that attitudes are the most important determinant of natural cosmetics' purchase intentions. Hansen et al. [2012] in their research indicated that consumers' willingness to purchase free-of cosmetics is influences by attitude and subjective norm, with attitude having the largest predicting power. Davis – Bundrage and Kim [2012] using qualitative meta-analysis emphasised multidimensionality in perceiving natural cosmetics while the research of Rybowska [2014] showed that natural

cosmetic products are recognized as expensive and unreachable and high lightened the need for its popularisation and promotion. Jansri and Marimuthru [2015] results show that environmental and health consciousness have positive and significant impacts on consumers' repurchase intention of luxury natural products.

Electronic commerce has become one of the essential characteristics in the Internet era since online shopping has become the third most popular internet activity [Osman et al, 2010, 134]. Internet has changed the way in which consumers purchase goods and services [Forsythe and Shi, 2003] while marketers have identified many factors that influence consumers' purchase decisions and their online buying behaviour [Osman et al. 2010]. Lim et al. [2010] high lightened top ten e- commerce categories, with apparel and personal care products being one of them.

Consumer online purchase intention is one of the intensive research areas in the literature [Ling et al, 2010]. Most studies examining the relationship between intention to buy online and online purchase are based on the theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen [1991] which states that behaviour can be predicted by intention, and that intention is determined by three factors, namely attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norm [social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour] and perceived behavioural control [perceived as ease or difficult of performing the behaviour].

Online purchase intention is a situation when a consumer is willing and intends to become involved in online transaction while online transactions can be described as an activity in which the process of information retrieval, information transfer and product purchase have taken place [Pavlou, 2003]. Some authors have proposed that searching for product/service information is the most important predictor of online buying behaviour so when consumers spend more time on Internet and have more online experience they tend to research and buy more [Bellman et al. 1999, Lim et al., 2010, 158]. This can also be supported by Lohse et al. [2000] "Not surprisingly, the degree of Internet usage to search for product information explained the most variation in whether someone would make an online purchase" [p.23]. The Internet users perceive Internet's role in consumer information search as one of the most important features Internet provides [Shim et al., 2001] which indicates that information search on internet will continue as a major vehicle for shopping comparison as technologies advance [Dickson, 2000].

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The data was collected online survey research conducted in March and April 2015 on a sample of 204 respondents in the Dubrovnik-Neretva County. The survey instrument was a questionnaire and the questions were structured in accordance with the objectives of the research. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the demographic characteristics of

respondents such as gender and age. The second part of the questionnaire included statements regarding consumer purchase behaviour in offline and online environment. The scale of measurement was ordinal with degrees from 1 to 5, where respondents expressed their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statement (1=completely disagree, 5=strongly agree). The Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents<sup>2</sup>

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	30
	Female	70
<b>Age</b>	18-24	30.9
	25-34	19.6
	35-44	20.6
	45-54	16.0
	55-	12.9

Source: Research findings (N= 204)

The results obtained from the survey were analysed using different analytical tools, including methods of analysis and synthesis, inductive and deductive methods, method of generalization and specialization, and different statistical methods such as descriptive and inferential statistics. Data collected were analysed using software statistical package SPSS 20.

## 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

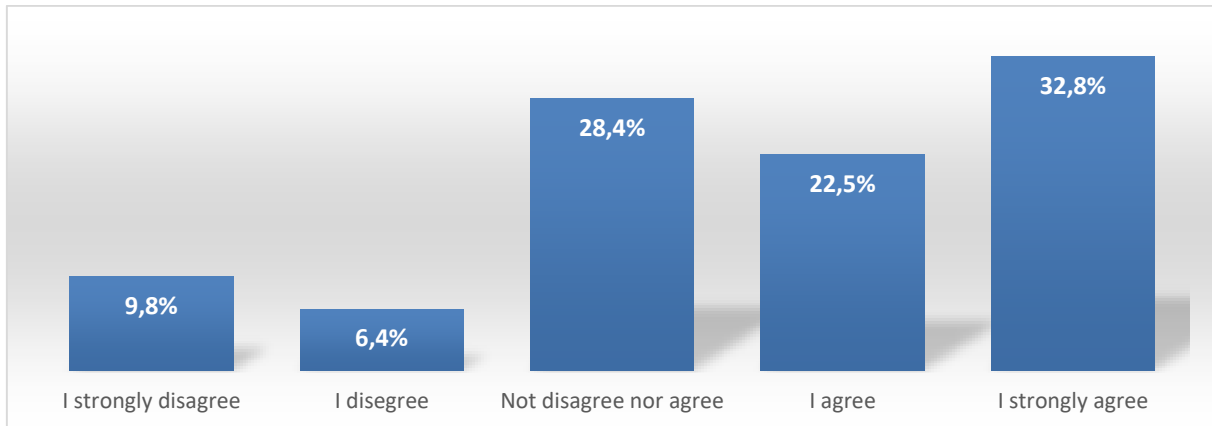
In order to examine the purchase behaviour of respondents in the online environment, the following research results are presented. The results of statements distribution „I like natural cosmetics “are presented in Table 2.

As it can be seen from the Table 2, the majority of respondents (55.3%) expressed positive attitude towards natural cosmetics products, 28.4% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, while 16.2% of respondents do not have a positive attitude towards products of natural cosmetics. The results indicate that respondents have a positive attitude toward products of natural cosmetics suggesting that they are aware the benefits provided by using natural products. Since the most of respondents are inclined toward natural cosmetics products, it would be preferable to examine whether they will also purchase such products in online

<sup>2</sup> In the context of demographic characteristics, a total of 10 respondents did not state the year of birth.

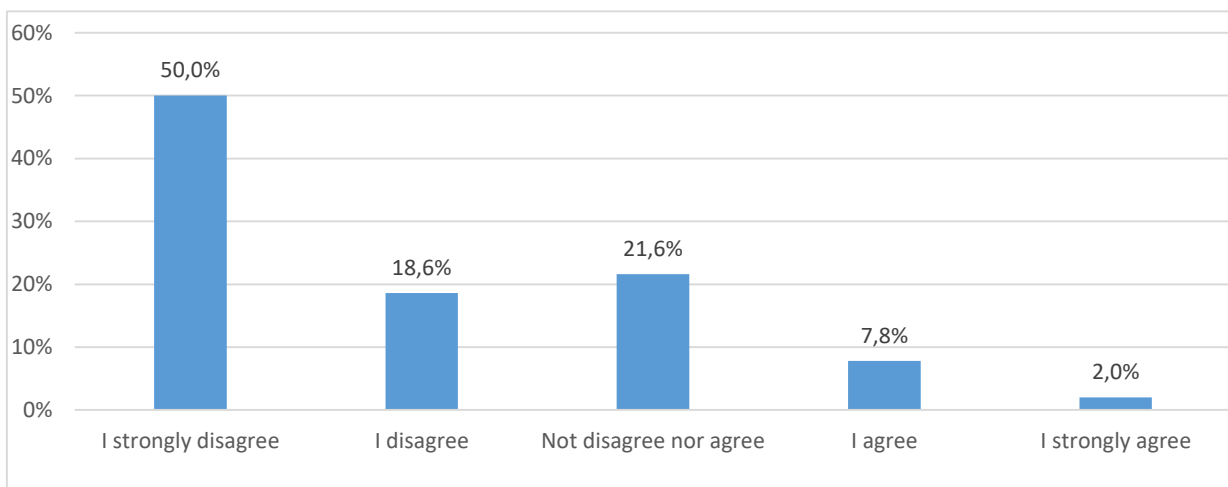
environment. Therefore, the next table shows the distribution of the statement "I purchase natural cosmetics through Internet".

Table 2. Distribution of the statement "I like products of natural cosmetics"



Source: Research findings (N= 204)

Table 3. Distribution of the statement "I purchase products of natural cosmetics through Internet"



Source: Research findings (N= 204)

Results presented in Table 3. show that most of the respondents (68.8%) do not purchase natural cosmetics through the Internet. 9.8% are purchasing natural cosmetics though Internet while 21.6% are indifferent to this form of purchase, ie. either agree or disagree with the statement. The majority of respondents in the survey sample do not buy natural cosmetics on the Internet which can be result of numerous negative elements online environment provides such as lack of trust or unsecure payments etc. The most of respondents do not buy natural cosmetics through the Internet although they have a positive attitude towards products of natural cosmetics. Although, when it comes to consumer online purchasing behaviour, most of the respondents expressed a certain level of distrust and uncertainty in the purchase of such specific products.

The further processing of data is approached by using the Spearman's correlation coefficient. Relation between attitude toward natural cosmetics and consumers' pre purchasing behaviour toward natural cosmetic products was examined. The results of correlation analysis between the attitude towards products of natural cosmetics and consumers' pre purchasing behaviour toward natural cosmetic products are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation matrix between attitude toward natural cosmetics and consumers' pre purchasing behaviour toward natural cosmetic products

I like natural cosmetics	Before purchasing natural cosmetics I compare products on the Internet	Before purchasing natural cosmetics I collect information via the Internet
	.305**	.366**
	.000	.000

Source: Research findings (N= 204)

Correlation analysis indicates statistically significant and moderately strong relation between attitude toward natural cosmetics and consumers' pre purchasing behaviour toward natural cosmetic products at a significance level of 1%. The correlation coefficients indicate the existing positive relation between observed variables i.e. growth of one variable will be accompanied by the growth of other variables. Also, regarding the relation strength, respondents who have stronger attitude toward natural cosmetics will use internet as a place to get necessary information and to compare different types of natural cosmetic products. Thus, the positive attitude towards products of natural cosmetics will influence on consumer pre purchasing behaviour in the context of searching and evaluating information on the Internet before making a purchasing decision in offline environment.

These respondents are not inclined to purchasing natural cosmetics products through Internet and they are not aware of the benefits such environment could provide. Although consumers do not buy products natural cosmetics through the Internet they use the Internet to collect and evaluate information about desire products. Also, for these respondents Internet provides a useful place for comparing different products and offers in order to get necessary information to make quality purchasing decisions in offline environment. Therefore, they will definitely use Internet for getting more information before they make a final decision to buy products of natural cosmetics.

Finally, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between observed variables which indicates that consumers who have positive attitude toward products of natural cosmetics will use the Internet as a useful place to collect information in order to make the enhanced purchasing decisions in offline environment.

## 5 CONCLUSION

While most of previous researches have been focused on exploring purchase attitudes regarding organic food, little has been done in a field of natural cosmetics. From the results of this research it can be concluded that most consumers do not purchase natural cosmetics online. Consumers still feel that traditional surroundings is a safer place for purchasing especially for products of natural origin. So, lack of trust has resulted in non-purchasing behaviour which means that consumers unwillingly purchase online, especially when it comes to natural cosmetic products they are not familiar with or purchase them for the first time. The reasons for non-purchasing can be numerous. For example it is well known that natural cosmetic products have much shorter expiration date and that such products require special delivery conditions. So, lack of trust regarding conditions and way of delivery as well as impossibility of product testing are some of the possible reasons that result in online non purchasing behaviour of natural cosmetic products.

Research analysis shows that most of the respondents (55.3%) expressed a positive attitude towards the purchase of natural cosmetics. However, when it comes to the Internet as a potential place for purchasing their preference for buying tends to fall. Analysing the consumer purchase intentions towards products of natural cosmetics in online environment, it is evident that although consumers do not purchase natural cosmetics products through Internet they still use it as an information resource where they evaluate different products. The complexity of the process of purchasing decisions in the offline environment makes the purchase challenging for modern consumers, especially in information and evaluation stage. Today, modern consumers do not have time for searching and comparing the desirable products in order to make the best purchase decision. The product selection and comparison is much easier in the Internet environment and therefore consumers are more inclined toward this form of pre purchase behaviour.

This research contributes to the literature by identifying consumer attitudes toward natural cosmetic and their pre purchase behaviour toward these products. However, the findings should be considered in the light of their limitations. First of all, it refers to a sample selection. This limited sampling frame may affect the generalization of findings. Future research sample should be extended by including other region or counties. It would also be interesting to include demographic data, i.e. the socio-economic characteristics of consumers. For example, gender differences could be identified in terms of online purchase behaviour. Moreover, other factors should also be included in the future research, primarily age, education, and household income. However, factors such as product type, prior purchase or negative characteristics of online environment could be taken into consideration. The research findings may be useful to web-retailers, marketing managers and internet marketers to recognize and understand the motives affecting their online purchasing behaviour in order to target better their consumers.



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