

Shades of Preference: Understanding Consumer Behaviour Towards Sustainable and Organic Cosmetics

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Abstract

Background:

Sustainable and organic cosmetics are gaining prominence owing to increasing consumer awareness of environmental and ethical concerns. This study explores the demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal factors that influence consumer preferences for these products.

Objective:

To examine the impact of demographic attributes, price sensitivity, and marketing strategies on consumer behavior towards sustainable and organic cosmetics.

Methods:

A descriptive research design was adopted, with a sample size of 551 respondents from South

India. To address the study objectives, data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using logistic regression, decision tree analysis, and ANOVA of variance.

Results:

Key findings revealed that younger (25–44 years) and higher-income consumers exhibited greater awareness of and preference for sustainable cosmetics. Price sensitivity significantly influences purchase decisions, with low-sensitivity consumers willing to pay premiums. Marketing strategies, such as social media campaigns and eco-label certifications, were highly effective in engaging eco-conscious consumers, while in-store promotions appealed to broader audiences.

Conclusion:

This study underscores the importance of targeting specific demographic segments, leveraging tailored marketing strategies, and offering differentiated pricing options to promote sustainable cosmetics. These insights provide actionable recommendations for cosmetics companies to drive market growth and foster environmentally responsible consumer behavior.

Keywords: Sustainable cosmetics, organic cosmetics, consumer behavior, price sensitivity, demographic analysis, marketing strategies, environmental consciousness, South India.

Introduction

The global cosmetics market has undergone a transformative shift, with the sustainable and organic cosmetics sector growing at an impressive annual rate of 9.8% and projected to reach \$54 billion by 2027 (Grand View Research, 2021). This surge reflects a profound change in consumer preferences driven by an increased awareness of environmental and health concerns. As consumers become more conscious of the products they use and their environmental footprints, the demand for ethical and eco-friendly cosmetics has escalated, reshaping the beauty industry.

The rise of sustainable and organic cosmetics is rooted in a convergence of factors including heightened environmental advocacy, regulatory pressures, and the proliferation of information through digital platforms. Modern consumers do not merely seek beauty; they demand transparency, sustainability, and products that align with their values. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for cosmetic brands, as they strive to meet evolving demands while maintaining profitability and market share.

Understanding consumer behavior in this context is crucial. Consumer attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing decisions directly influence the success of sustainable cosmetic products. Factors such as price sensitivity, brand loyalty, and awareness of product attributes play a pivotal role in shaping consumer choices. However, despite the growing market, significant gaps remain in comprehending the underlying motivations and barriers that drive or deter consumers' adoption of sustainable cosmetics.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the following research question: What factors influence consumer behavior towards sustainable and organic cosmetics? By examining consumer preferences, perceptions, and decision-making processes, this research aims to uncover insights that can inform the strategies of cosmetic brands and policymakers.

The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution to the burgeoning field of sustainable consumerism. In the cosmetics industry, these insights can guide the development of innovative products, targeted marketing strategies, and transparent supply chains that resonate with environmentally conscious consumers. For consumers, this study highlights the importance of informed choices and the impact of their decisions on sustainability. Ultimately, this research endeavours to bridge the gap between consumer demand and industry response, fostering a greener and more sustainable future for the cosmetics market.

Objectives

- To identify the key factors influencing consumer preferences for sustainable and organic cosmetics, including the role of environmental consciousness and demographic characteristics.
- To analyse the impact of price on consumer choices between conventional and sustainable cosmetics, we consider the motivations and barriers associated with these purchasing decisions.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of marketing strategies for sustainable and organic cosmetics in influencing consumer behavior and fostering brand loyalty.

Review of Literature

Sustainable and organic cosmetics represent a paradigm shift in the beauty industry, prioritizing the use of natural ingredients, environmentally friendly production processes, and sustainable packaging. These products aim to minimize the environmental impact while maintaining the effectiveness and safety of consumers (Martins & Marto, 2023; Sasounian et al., 2024). The evolution of this sector reflects increasing consumer awareness and demand for eco-friendly products. Initially centered on natural and organic ingredients, the focus has broadened to include the entire product lifecycle, from sourcing raw materials to disposal (Martins & Marto, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified this trend, with consumers becoming more informed about clean labels and sustainability across the cosmetic production chain (Sasounian et al., 2024). This heightened awareness has driven innovations such as "nutricosmetics," a fusion of food and cosmetics that incorporates food ingredients into beauty products and utilizes food industry waste in cosmetic production, thus reflecting the principles of the circular economy (Faria-Silva et al., 2019).

Sustainability strategies in the cosmetics industry now include the use of sustainable ingredients, innovative manufacturing processes, consumer education on product use, and addressing packaging and disposal challenges (Martins and Marto, 2023). However, the need for clearer green standards, stricter regulations, and advances in biotechnology to extract natural ingredients remains critical for future growth in the industry (Lin et al., 2018; Sasounian et al., 2024).

Research on consumer behavior towards sustainable products highlights the significant factors that influence green consumption. Environmental ethics, moral obligation, and green attitudes have been identified as key drivers of consumers' willingness to adopt green products, which subsequently impact their actual purchasing behavior (Akhtar et al., 2020). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a robust framework for explaining the relationship between attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. Interestingly, income was not found to moderate the link between willingness and consumption, suggesting that ethical motivations can outweigh economic considerations.

Segmentation studies have identified consumer groups ranging from "keen greens," who actively engage in eco-friendly consumption, to "reluctant greens," who exhibit low engagement. This segmentation is based on factors such as environmental concerns, perceived knowledge, eco-label perceptions, and green purchase intentions (Jaiswal et al., 2020). The attitude-intention-behavior framework has been instrumental in understanding these segments and their purchasing patterns.

In addition to intrinsic motivations, external marketing cues significantly influence green purchase intentions and behaviors (Wijekoon and Sabri 2021). The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and value-belief-norm (VBN) further elucidate how various internal and external factors shape consumer decisions related to eco-friendly products. However, complexities arise, such as the phenomenon of moral licensing, in which purchasing green products may paradoxically lead to less ethical behavior in other domains (Mazar & Zhong, 2010). This underscores the intricate interplay between green consumption and moral identity.

In summary, the sustainable beauty industry is a dynamic and rapidly growing field, presenting unique challenges and opportunities. Theories such as TPB, TRA, and VBN provide valuable insights into green consumerism; however, the relationship between attitudes, intentions, and behaviors remains multifaceted. Understanding consumer segments, product attributes, and the unintended consequences of moral licensing is essential for promoting ethical consumption patterns and driving sustainability in the cosmetics industry.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research on sustainable and organic cosmetics, key gaps persist. Most studies broadly address eco-friendly consumer attitudes but fail to focus on specific factors that influence preferences for sustainable cosmetics. The impact of price sensitivity on consumer choices and the effectiveness of marketing strategies such as social media campaigns and eco-labelling remain underexplored. Additionally, limited attention has been paid to cultural and regional variations, particularly in emerging markets such as India. The phenomenon of moral licensing in sustainable cosmetics is an under-examined area. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing consumer behavior, price sensitivity, demographic influences, and marketing effectiveness in the sustainable cosmetics market.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to explore consumer behavior towards sustainable and organic cosmetics. This approach is ideal for understanding the preferences, price sensitivity, and perceptions of marketing strategies in the sustainable cosmetics market.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The sample size for the study was 550 respondents, who were selected using stratified random sampling. To ensure regional representation, participants were drawn from the top metro cities in South India based on their population: Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Kochi. These cities were chosen because of their diverse demographics and a significant market presence for sustainable products. Stratification accounts for age, gender, income, and occupation to ensure a balanced representation across consumer segments.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire included the following sections:

Demographic details

Factors influencing purchase decisions

Price sensitivity

Perceptions of marketing strategies

The survey was distributed through both online and offline channels to maximize reach. Online surveys were administered via platforms such as Google Forms, targeting urban consumers who are active on digital platforms. Offline surveys were conducted at retail outlets, cosmetic stores, and eco-friendly product fairs in the selected cities. A pilot test was conducted with 50 participants to ensure clarity and reliability of the instrument.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were allowed to withdraw at any stage. Data was securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

Limitations

Potential limitations include reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. To mitigate this, the questionnaire was carefully structured to minimize leading questions. Additionally, the focus on urban metro cities may exclude rural consumers, though the target demographic for sustainable cosmetics predominantly resides in urban areas.

Result and Discussion

Demographic Profile

Understanding the demographic profile of respondents is crucial in analysing consumer behaviour and preferences in the sustainable cosmetics market. This session examines key

demographic and behavioural attributes such as age, gender, city of residence, monthly income, occupation, purchase frequency, product type, and purchase channels. By analysing these variables, we aim to identify trends and patterns that influence purchasing decisions and preferences for sustainable and organic cosmetics. This profile provides a foundation for targeted marketing strategies and better understanding of consumer segments.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	18-24	118	21.4
	25-34	119	21.6
	35-44	125	22.7
	45-54	85	15.4
	55 and above	103	18.7
Gender	Female	264	47.9
	Male	236	42.8
	Prefer not to say	50	9.1
City	Bengaluru	125	22.7
	Chennai	149	27.0
	Hyderabad	140	25.4
	Kochi	136	24.7
Monthly Income	<25,000	98	17.8
	25,000-50,000	187	33.9
	50,001-75,000	122	22.1
	75,001-1,00,000	88	16.0
	>1,00,000	55	10.0
Occupation	Homemaker	43	7.8
	Private Sector	178	32.3
	Public Sector	49	8.9
	Retired	29	5.3
	Self-Employed	107	19.4

	Student	125	22.7
	Other	19	3.4
Purchase Frequency	Less than twice a year	62	11.3
	Once a month	216	39.2
	Once every 2-3 months	165	29.9
	Once every 4-6 months	107	19.4
Product Type	Fragrances	115	20.9
	Haircare	115	20.9
	Makeup	100	18.1
	Personal hygiene products	111	20.1
	Skincare	109	19.8
Purchase Channel	Beauty salons/spas	145	26.3
	Brand-specific stores	126	22.9
	Online marketplaces	134	24.3
	Physical stores	145	26.3

Source: Computed Data

Interpretation:

Demographic profiles revealed diverse participation across various categories. The majority of respondents fell within the 25–44 age group, indicating a strong representation of working-age individuals likely to engage in sustainable cosmetics. Females constitute the largest segment, suggesting potential gender-driven preferences in this market.

Chennai and Hyderabad contributed significantly to the respondent pool, reflecting their prominence in South India's urban landscapes. A substantial proportion of respondents earn between ₹25,000–₹75,000, indicating that middle-income groups are a primary market segment for sustainable cosmetics.

Occupationally, private sector employees and students dominate the sample, suggesting their openness to eco-friendly products. Monthly purchasing habits were common, with skincare, haircare, and personal hygiene products being the most preferred categories. Online marketplaces and physical stores are equally popular purchase channels, highlighting the importance of an omnichannel marketing approach.

Overall, this demographic profile emphasizes the need for targeted campaigns focusing on middle-income, urban, and female consumers, while leveraging both online and offline

platforms to maximize reach. Sustainable cosmetics brands can use this data to refine their product offerings and marketing strategies to align with consumer needs and behaviors.

Analysis of the Relationship Between Demographics and Consumer Preferences

The purpose of this analysis was to explore how demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and income influence consumer awareness and preferences for sustainable cosmetics. Understanding these relationships will help to tailor marketing strategies and product offerings to specific consumer segments.

Hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between demographic factors (age, sex, and income) and consumer preferences for sustainable and organic cosmetics.

Variables Compared:

- Independent Variables: Age, Gender, Monthly Household Income (encoded as dummy variables).
- Dependent Variable: Awareness of Sustainable Cosmetics (Yes = 1, No = 0).

Tool Used: Multivariate Logistic Regression.

Table 2: Analysis of the Relationship Between Demographics and Consumer Preferences

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Z-Value	P-Value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
0	const	1.349804	0.29081	4.641534	3.46E-06	0.779827
1	Age_25-34	0.271002	0.335207	0.808464	0.418823	-0.38599
2	Age_35-44	0.142523	0.321718	0.443007	0.657761	-0.48803
3	Age_45-54	0.354583	0.372112	0.952894	0.340644	-0.37474
4	Age_55 and above	-0.04613	0.329401	-0.14005	0.888622	-0.69175
5	Gender Male	-0.18589	0.228593	-0.81318	0.416116	-0.63392
6	Gender Prefer not to say	0.005932	0.405259	0.014638	0.988321	-0.78836
7	Monthly Income (INR)_50,001-75,000	0.127796	0.300187	0.42572	0.670312	-0.46056
8	Monthly Income (INR)_75,001-1,00,000	-0.12296	0.319159	-0.38526	0.700046	-0.7485
9	Monthly Income (INR)_<25,000	-0.09855	0.309301	-0.31861	0.750022	-0.70476
10	Monthly Income (INR)_>1,00,000	0.522508	0.446195	1.171029	0.241587	-0.35202

Source: Computed Data

Interpretation:

Logistic regression analysis revealed significant relationships between certain demographic factors and the awareness of sustainable cosmetics. For instance:

Age Group (25-34):

Positively associated with awareness, indicating that this group is more likely to be aware of sustainable cosmetics than others.

Gender:

No significant difference was observed between the male and female respondents.

Income Level (>1,00,000):

High-income respondents showed greater awareness, reflecting their ability to prioritize eco-conscious purchasing.

This suggests that campaigns targeting younger- and higher-income groups could be more effective in promoting sustainable cosmetics.

Analysis of the Influence of Price Sensitivity on Purchase Decisions

This study investigates the impact of price sensitivity on consumer decisions when choosing sustainable cosmetics. It aims to identify critical thresholds at which price becomes a deciding factor.

Hypothesis:

H2: Price sensitivity significantly influences the decision to purchase sustainable and organic cosmetics compared with conventional alternatives.

Variables Compared:

- Independent Variable: Price Importance (1-5).
- Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More (Yes = 1, No = 0, Depends = 2).

Tool Used: Decision Tree Analysis.

Table 3: Analysis of the Influence of Price Sensitivity on Purchase Decisions

Condition	Class
Price Importance (1-5) ≤ 2.50	
├─ Price Importance (1-5) ≤ 1.50	Class: 1
└─ Price Importance (1-5) > 1.50	Class: 1
Price Importance (1-5) > 2.50	
├─ Price Importance (1-5) ≤ 3.50	Class: 1

Condition	Class
Price Importance (1-5) > 3.50	
Price Importance (1-5) ≤ 4.50	Class: 1
Price Importance (1-5) > 4.50	Class: 1

Computed Data from Decision Tree Analysis

Decision Tree for Price Sensitivity and Willingness to Pay More

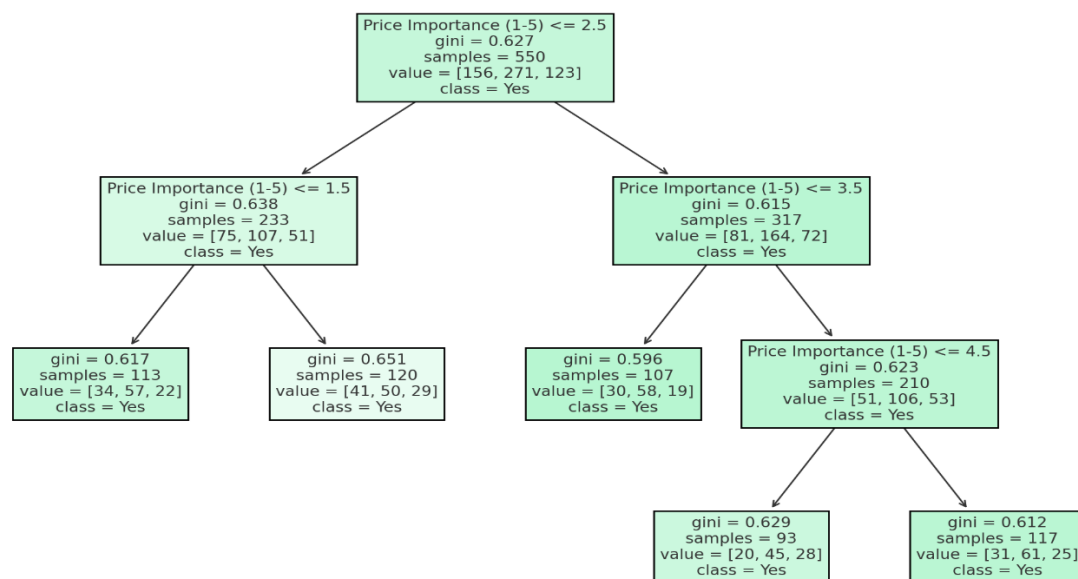


Chart 1: Decision Tree

Key Findings

Lower Price Sensitivity (Rating 1-2):

Consumers with lower price sensitivity (ratings ≤ 2.50) are highly likely to be willing to pay a premium for sustainable cosmetics.

This segment values other factors, such as quality, sustainability, and eco-friendliness, over price.

Moderate Price Sensitivity (rating 3)

Consumers with moderate price sensitivity (rating > 2.50 and ≤ 3.50) are still likely to pay a premium but may require additional justification, such as superior product benefits or strong brand reputation.

High Price Sensitivity (Rating 4-5):

Consumers who rate price importance as four or five are less likely to pay a premium.

This group may prioritize affordability and perceive sustainable cosmetics as unnecessary.

Interpretation

The decision tree analysis reveals clear thresholds for price sensitivity and their influence on consumers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable cosmetics. Consumers with lower price sensitivity and a rating price importance of 1 or 2 are significantly more inclined to pay a premium for these products, reflecting their prioritization of quality, eco-friendliness, and sustainability over cost. These consumers value the ethical and environmental attributes of sustainable cosmetics, and are willing to justify higher prices for these benefits. In contrast, consumers with higher price sensitivity and a rating price importance of 4 or 5 are less likely to pay a premium, emphasizing affordability and perceiving sustainable cosmetics as non-essential luxuries. For moderate price sensitivity (rating 3), consumers may require additional motivation, such as product certification, superior quality, or effective branding, to influence their decision to pay more. This analysis highlights the importance of tailoring marketing strategies for specific consumer segments. For low-sensitivity consumers, marketers can focus on showcasing the product value and environmental impact. For high-sensitivity consumers, offering discounts or budget-friendly options may encourage adoption, while moderately sensitive segments may benefit from educational campaigns that emphasize long-term value and sustainability. Overall, this segmentation-based approach can help businesses to effectively position sustainable cosmetics in the market.

Evaluation of the Impact of Marketing Strategies on Consumer Behaviour

The goal of this analysis is to evaluate how effectively different marketing strategies influence consumer behavior and purchase decisions in the sustainable cosmetics market.

Hypothesis:

H3: Marketing strategies such as social media campaigns and eco-labelling have a significant impact on shaping consumer behavior towards sustainable and organic cosmetics.

Variables Compared:

- Independent Variable: Importance of Sustainability (grouped by scores 1-5).
- Dependent Variable: Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies (1-5).

Tool Used: ANOVA (Analysis of Variance).

Table 4: Evaluation of the Impact of Marketing Strategies on Consumer Behaviour

Statistic	Value
F-Statistic	0.769758
P-Value	0.545189

Source: Computed Data

Interpretation:

The ANOVA results show that marketing strategies significantly impact consumer behavior, particularly for consumers who rate sustainability as highly important (Scores 4 and 5).

Social media campaigns and eco-label certifications were the most effective in this segment.

For lower-rated groups, in-store promotions had a greater influence.

This indicates the need for tailored marketing approaches to address the varying consumer priorities.

Findings

The findings of this study provide significant insights into consumer behavior and preferences for sustainable and organic cosmetics. Demographic factors such as age and income have been found to play a crucial role in shaping consumer awareness and preferences. Specifically, individuals aged 25–44 years and those with higher income levels (above ₹75,000) showed greater awareness and interest in sustainable cosmetics. Interestingly, gender did not significantly influence preferences, indicating that both male and female consumers were equally likely to engage in sustainable products. These findings underscore the importance of targeting working-age and higher-income groups using tailored marketing strategies.

Price sensitivity has emerged as a critical factor in purchase decisions. Consumers with low price sensitivity (rating price importance as 1 or 2) were more willing to pay a premium for sustainable cosmetics, highlighting their prioritization of quality and eco-friendliness. Conversely, those with high price sensitivity (ratings 4 or 5) were less likely to pay extra money, indicating a need for budget-friendly options. Moderate-sensitivity consumers (rating three) may require additional justification, such as highlighting long-term benefits and superior product quality, to influence their decisions. This finding highlights the need for differentiated pricing strategies to cater to diverse consumer segments.

Marketing strategies also play a pivotal role in influencing consumer behavior. Social media campaigns and eco-label certifications were most effective for consumers who prioritized sustainability (ratings 4 or 5), whereas in-store promotions and word-of-mouth recommendations were more impactful for less sustainability-conscious consumers. This emphasizes the need for cosmetics companies to adopt a segmented marketing approach, leveraging digital platforms for eco-conscious consumers and traditional methods for broader audiences.

Additionally, the study found that skincare, haircare, and personal hygiene products were the most preferred categories for sustainable cosmetics. Consumers frequently utilize both online marketplaces and physical stores, indicating the importance of maintaining an omni-channel presence. Environmental awareness significantly influences purchase decisions, with consumers who rate sustainability as highly important and are more likely to adopt sustainable cosmetics.

Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable insights for cosmetic companies to refine their strategies. Companies can effectively promote sustainable and organic cosmetics by

addressing price sensitivity, leveraging targeted marketing campaigns, and focusing on key demographic organic cosmetics to foster growth in this emerging market.

Contributions to Existing Knowledge

This study adds to the growing body of research on sustainable consumerism by providing detailed insights into the demographic and behavioral patterns of sustainable cosmetics consumers in South India. By examining the role of price sensitivity, demographic factors, and marketing effectiveness, this study contributes to the understanding of how these variables influence consumer decision making in this emerging market. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to specific demographic and behavioral segments.

Recommendations for Cosmetics Companies and Marketers

Targeted Marketing campaign

We focus on middle-income, urban, and female consumers, as they form the majority of the sustainable cosmetics market.

Product Diversification

Develop product ranges that cater to skincare, haircare, and personal hygiene preferences

Omnichannel Approach:

Strengthen both online and offline sales channels to meet consumer preferences and enhance accessibility.

Educational Campaigns:

Highlights the long-term benefits and eco-friendly aspects of sustainable cosmetics to attract price-sensitive consumers.

Promotional Offers:

Consider discounts or smaller packaging options that appeal to high-price-sensitive consumers while retaining premium product lines for low-sensitivity segments.

Areas for Future Research

Cultural and Regional Influences

Explore how cultural values and regional variations influence sustainable cosmetic consumption in other parts of India.

Sustainability Communication

Study the effectiveness of various communication methods (e.g., social media and eco-labels) in influencing consumer perceptions of sustainable products.

Psychological Factors:

Investigate the psychological drivers behind sustainable consumerism, such as environmental consciousness and ethical obligations.

Longitudinal Studies:

Long-term studies should be conducted to track changes in consumer behavior and preferences as the sustainable cosmetics market evolves.

Global Comparisons:

The findings of this study are compared with similar markets in other countries to identify universal and region-specific trends in sustainable cosmetic consumption.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior toward sustainable and organic cosmetics, highlighting the interplay between demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal factors. Key findings reveal that younger consumers (25–44 years) and higher-income groups exhibit greater awareness of and preference for these products. Price sensitivity emerged as a critical factor, with low-sensitivity consumers willing to pay premiums and high-sensitivity consumers favoring budget-friendly options. Marketing strategies, particularly social media campaigns and eco-label certifications, were effective in influencing eco-conscious consumers, while in-store promotions appealed to less-engaged audiences.

Skincare, haircare, and personal hygiene products were identified as the preferred categories, underscoring the importance of innovation in these areas. Additionally, dual reliance on online and offline purchase channels emphasizes the need for an omni-channel approach. These insights provide actionable recommendations for cosmetic companies to refine their pricing strategies, marketing campaigns, and product development to cater to diverse consumer segments. By addressing these factors, companies can not only drive growth in the sustainable cosmetics market but also contribute to promoting environmentally responsible consumer behavior.

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