



COSMETIC BRANDS PERCEPTION BY GENERATION Z THROUGH THE PRISM OF CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of conscious consumption concept as a way to can help to build confidence and attract sustainability-driven young consumers of cosmetic brands. We first discuss theoretical approaches to understanding the phenomenon of conscious consumption, a specific trend in consumer behavior in which the consumer is guided by a conscious need, ethical and environmental considerations. Based on the academic literature, we conclude that conscious consumption should not be considered as an isolated phenomenon, but is an integral part of a wider system where politics, economics and social expectations interact to form sustainable practices. The empirical results presented in the literature confirm that there are specific features characterizing Gen Z consumers as more conscious than older generations. In our research, we used these particular features as basic to put forward hypotheses concerning conscious consumption impact on Russian Zoomers’ behaviour. Then we present and discuss the empirical data obtained through online survey conducted in March-April 2025. The analysis of survey results leads to the conclusion that there is a segment of young Russian conscious consumers focused on sustainable development, but not all Zoomers are ready to give preference to skin care cosmetic brands due to their eco-friendly characteristics.

Keywords: conscious consumption, Generation Z, cosmetic brands, Russia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, academics and practitioners pay growing attention to issues of sustainable development (Cherenkov et al., 2020; Biyase et al., 2024). More and more people are on the path of rethinking the process of consumption and its consequences for the environment and human health. As a result, the trend of conscious consumption has developed (Carr et al., 2012; Garg et al., 2024).

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In existing studies, it is widely believed that young educated consumers belonging to Generation Z are most concerned about the importance of conscious consumption, compliance with ethical standards by brands, as well as the social and environmental consequences associated with traditional, non-ecological consumption (Michel et al., 2023).

In particular, the concept of conscious consumption has had a major impact on the cosmetics industry (Rocca et al., 2022, 2023; Venciute et al., 2023). Cosmetics manufacturers now care about cosmetic products made from natural raw materials and incorporate principles of sustainable development at all stages of production (Acerbi et al., 2023).

The Russian cosmetics market is currently undergoing a significant transformation. The cosmetics industry, like many other segments of the consumer market, proved to be sensitive to changes in aggregate demand and the level of disposable income of the population during periods of turbulence. Some multinational companies have exited the market in 2022, leaving empty niches. In this situation, buying habits and preferences of Russian consumers are changing, and the opportunities for Russian producers and newcomers to fill the niches became obvious. After a temporary decline in 2022-2023, there was a noticeable resumption of positive dynamics in 2024. Such a significant increase indicates a recovery in domestic demand and a strengthening of domestic producers, who have managed to adapt to the new conditions by diversifying their product range, introducing innovative developments and revising their marketing strategies. The growth in production volumes was the result of an integrated approach, including increased investment in research and development, the use of modern equipment and a flexible response to market demands in the context of rapidly changing trends.

In this paper, we present the results of the study conducted in 2024-2025. The main research goal was to identify how Russian young consumers perceive the responsible marketing efforts of cosmetic firms, with the focus on the prospects of conscious consumption approach in development and promotion of skin care cosmetics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conscious consumption

Research on the concept of conscious consumption, as well as the conscious consumers behaviour and consumer perception of conscious brands, is becoming more and more numerous (Wang et al., 2014; Mingazova et al., 2025; Zhuang et al., 2021; Vuong & Bui, 2025). This trend has become widespread due to the popularization of the principles of sustainable development: more and more people began to think not only about the impact of human activities on the environment, but also about social aspects (Haider et al., 2022).

Many authors focus on the actual purchase, or on the purchase intention, or on these two aspects in terms of measuring the gap between them (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Lebel & Lorek, 2008; Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021).

Research in the field of responsible marketing emphasizes the importance of understanding individual behavior in order to influence consumer choices between competing products or brands (Sharma, 2021). The conscious consumer behavior implies evaluating a wider range of alternatives, including conscious choices to reduce consumption (Amoako et al., 2022; Kaur et al., 2022) or finding other ways to satisfy their desires that do not involve purchasing a product. The level of trust or skepticism with which consumers assess product claims of companies, as well as their environmental claims, has a significant impact (Farooq & Wicaksono, 2021; Sun et al., 2021; Szabo & Webster, 2021; Tee et al., 2022).

The process of making a purchase itself can be considered a significant act in terms of conscious consumption (Zhang & Dong, 2020), since the actions performed by an individual

will have different impact on the environment. In addition, the concept of conscious consumption aims to maximize the use of a product, and to arrange its subsequent disposal with minimal negative impact (Peattie, 2010; Jeswani et al., 2021).

In general, the results obtained by many researchers show that conscious consumption is a multifactorial phenomenon. Along with personal characteristics, social pressure, awareness and the availability of incentives from state and business play an important role. One should not consider conscious consumption as an isolated phenomenon. It is an integral part of a wider system where politics, economics and social expectations interact to form sustainable practices.

2.2. Generation Z (Zoomers) key features

In the contemporary world, the new “rules of green marketing” increasingly characterize the purchasing preferences of new generations (Ottman, 2011, p.xiii). In particular, Gen Z consumers tend to be more inclined towards responsible shopping and conscious consumption.

An important feature of Gen Z is the emphasis on individuality and self-expression. Zoomers strive for uniqueness in their lifestyle and consumption. They choose brands not only for the quality of their products or services, but also for their ability to reflect personal values and beliefs. Concepts such as inclusiveness, transparency, sustainability, fair value products resonate with this consumer segment (Sheresheva et al., 2023). This creates a significant challenge for companies: it is necessary not only to sell a product, but also to create a whole story around it that will resonate with the target audience (Channa et al., 2025).

Social activity also plays an important role in the lives of representatives of Generation Z. They are inclined to support social movements and participate in the discussion of current issues through social media platforms (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023).

Generation Z is characterized by a desire for immediacy and convenience when making purchases (Sisodiya & Vaidya, 2023). They have high expectations regarding the speed of service - they prefer online shopping with fast delivery or the ability to pick up goods without queues in stores. This requires businesses to implement new technologies to optimize the purchasing process.

Zoomers' trust in peer reviews is significantly higher compared to previous generations (Herrando et al., 2021; Thangavel et al., 2022), meaning that companies must actively work on their brand reputation online. A negative review can significantly influence a potential customer's purchase decision (Ahn & Lee, 2024). One should also mention that bloggers and their recommendations have a more significant impact on purchasing decisions than traditional advertising, as well as reviews from other consumers (Belanche et al., 2021).

Awareness of global environmental and social issues motivates Gen Z to choose environmentally friendly products or services from socially responsible companies (Khalil et al., 2021; Halicka et al., 2025). They prefer to shop with companies that are actively involved in local communities and support social initiatives. In addition, they tend to support local and small businesses that offer environmentally friendly and ethically produced goods. Brands must actively demonstrate their efforts to reduce negative environmental impacts and their commitment to social issues to attract the attention of this audience.

Generation Z shows interest in “zero waste” and “slow fashion” concepts which reflects their desire to reduce the number of unnecessary purchases and choose high-quality, durable products (Zhang et al., 2022; Gurova, 2024). This leads to the growing popularity of secondary markets, renting and exchanging goods, which reduce resource consumption and waste.

An important element of Gen Z conscious consumption is also ethical consumption. Zoomers prefer to support brands that adhere to fair trade principles and provide decent working conditions (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). This means that companies that do not pay attention to the ethical aspects of their activities risk losing the loyalty of this audience.

Another important trend in conscious consumption is the use of technology to increase transparency and awareness. Generation Z actively uses applications and platforms that allow you to track the origin of products, their composition and environmental characteristics. This creates additional opportunities for interaction between brands and consumers.

Based on the academic literature, one can conclude that there are specific features characterizing Gen Z consumers as more conscious than older generations. In our research, we used these particular features as basic to put forward hypotheses concerning conscious consumption impact on Russian Zoomers' behaviour.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the study, we put forward five hypotheses concerning Russian Zoomers' behaviour depending on their awareness of the conscious consumption concept (H1), level of education (H2), cosmetic brand social responsibility importance (H3), commitment to a healthy lifestyle (H4), commitment to the principles of conscious consumption (H5).

To obtain empirical data, we developed a questionnaire for an online survey, most questions using Likert Scale. Respondents were Zoomers using skin care cosmetics from different Russian regions. The online platform Google Forms was chosen to conduct the survey. Questionnaires were distributed in social networks. The information was collected anonymously and did not imply the processing of the respondent's personal data. Respondents were informed that the results of the survey would only be used in an anonymous form as part of the study.

390 completed questionnaires were received. In addition, the survey included two open questions; after excluding answers that were not relevant in meaning, we received 228 responses to the first open question and 127 responses to the second open question.

In the sample, 78% of the respondents were women, 22% were men. The largest share of respondents are residents of the megacities and big cities. 5% of respondents assessed their income as high, 29% - above average, 13% - below average, the largest number (42%) answered that their income is at an average level, and 11% do not have their own income.

4. RESULTS

The obtained results were as follows:

Russian Zoomers' *awareness of the conscious consumption concept* has a positive effect on the perceived quality of cosmetics produced by eco-friendly brands, and on the willingness to use eco-cosmetic products.

Russian Zoomers' *level of education* has a significant positive effect on the perceived quality of cosmetics produced by eco-friendly brands.

The degree *cosmetic brand social responsibility importance* for Russian Zoomers has a significant positive effect on the willingness to use eco-cosmetic products, and on the recognition of cosmetic brands that use eco-friendly methods and components in skin care products.

Russian Zoomers' *commitment to a healthy lifestyle* has a significant positive impact on the willingness to use eco-friendly cosmetic products, and on the recognition of cosmetic brands that use eco-friendly methods and components in skin care products.

Russian Zoomers' commitment to the principles of conscious consumption has a significant positive impact on the perceived quality of cosmetics produced by eco-friendly brands, and on the perception a cosmetic brand image if this brand adheres to the conscious consumption principles.

At the same time, there were respondents who were indifferent to the issues of conscious consumption, having price as the main criterion to choose skin care cosmetics. Thus, there is a segment of young Russian conscious consumers focused on sustainable development, but not all Zoomers are ready to give preference to skin care cosmetic brands due to their eco-friendly characteristics.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After conducting a survey, we can conclude that Zoomers represent a new generation of conscious consumers who actively seek to minimize the negative impact of their purchases on the environment and society. In this regard, the trend to conscious consumption is a quite promising way to differentiate cosmetic products and increase young consumers' loyalty to cosmetic brands in a changing social and cultural paradigm. It makes sense to develop cosmetic products taking into account that responsible shopping and conscious consumption grow in importance. Green characteristics of cosmetic brands can help to build confidence and attract sustainability-driven young consumers. At the same time, the lack of knowledge about conscious consumption principles may prevent Zoomers from evaluating the attractive points of green cosmetic products.

The research results offer some practical implications for providers of cosmetic products for young Russian consumers.

Firstly, cosmetic firms should institutionalize the environmental and social agenda, making it part of the corporate mission and officially declared values.

Secondly, it is necessary to develop a community-oriented marketing model that takes into account the high importance of the Gen Z reference group.

Thirdly, cosmetic brand communication strategy should integrate an educational component that reveals the essence of the conscious consumption concept and demonstrates how this particular brand implements the concept in practice.

To sum up, cosmetic firms have to adapt their marketing strategy to the growing interest of young generations to the conscious consumption.

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