Do consumers assume that natural ingredients in skincare are more sustainable than synthetic ingredients?

A qualitative study on consumer behavior in regards to natural versus sustainable ingredients in skincare products

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Abstract

The demand for sustainability in the cosmetics industry has gained significant attention in recent years due to the growing environmental concerns and increased consumer awareness. Consumers are increasingly considering the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions, leading to a shift in attitudes towards greener consumption and driving the concept of green marketing. However, navigating the complexities of sustainability in the cosmetics industry is a challenge, as natural does not always equate to sustainability, and companies may resort to greenwashing to capitalize on consumer trust. This thesis examines theoretical and managerial challenges in the cosmetics industry, including consumer preferences, purchase intentions, and brand loyalty. Furthermore, it addresses consumer behavior and their role in this question. By addressing these issues, this study aims to shed light on the importance of sustainability in cosmetics and provide insights for both consumers and businesses in their pursuit of a more sustainable future.

Furthermore, the thesis uses a qualitative method to explore and research the themes in question. The empirical findings were collected through semi-structured interviews with consumers of the cosmetic industry. The results were examined and compared with the existing literature to determine their similarities and differences.

The conclusion of this thesis discusses how consumers in fact do assume that natural products are more sustainable than other alternatives. However, literature findings prove that this is not the case which is discussed in the analysis as well.

Keywords: Sustainability, consumer behavior, green marketing.
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1.1. INTRODUCTION

The authors present a comprehensive introduction to the main topics that will be discussed in this dissertation in the initial chapter. Following the background, the chapter proceeds by examining the importance of these subjects for researchers as well as companies and consumers, while simultaneously emphasizing the detected gap in research. The final section of the chapter involves the exposition of the research questions, the purpose of the thesis, and its limitations.

1.1 Background

Out of the seventeen sustainability goals put up by The United Nations for 2030, one of them is to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns” with the motivation being that
people consume beyond earth's capacity and that the once so vast resources of nature are withering out due to not have been procured in a responsible way. Therefore adapting a sustainable consumption pattern as well as production is vital to turn this harmful impact on the climate, environment and people's health around (United Nations 2022).

The environment inevitably affects both consumers and businesses. Therefore, both must take actions towards a more sustainable future. In connection to the increase of environmental issues, consumers' awareness of how consumption and businesses affect the environment have also increased, which is the reason why the two main factors influencing greener consumption are consumers' awareness and attitudes (Chalimatuz et al. 2017; Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul 2016; Liobikien & Bernatoniene 2017) which in turn is also what drives green marketing (Kurnia, Narda & Sitio, 2022). In recent years there has been a noticeable change in the way consumers think about cosmetics and skincare products. There has been a shift from consumers only shedding concern over how these products affect their own well being, to also taking the production's actual footprint on the planet into consideration. Meaning consumers pay more attention to a product's packaging, transportation, water usage and so on. Not only this but consumers have started to contemplate which product is more sustainable. Is it the one with created molecules or the one with real flowers grown ecologically but perhaps from the other side of the world? For instance the famous designer and known eco- activist Stella McCartney works with synthesized scent molecules in her perfumes for the sheer belief that wild flowers should be left alone in nature on top of that cultivations - even ecological ones - need massive resources for watering (Ahlgren & Grahn 2020). Because of this, customers are turning to those companies which have ethical principles underpinning their supply chain, that are against animal cruelty and do not damage landscapes and practice unsustainable farming (Morosini 2019). According to the Swedish Trade Federation (2022) as much as 82 percent of Swedish consumers think it is important that products from the beauty and health category are manufactured with the most careful consideration of the environment as possible (Vrenius 2022).

Faced with consumers demanding more transparency, and various environmental taxes as well as threatening prognosis of raw material scarcity, the cosmetics industry is pushed to become “greener” since the entire cosmetics supply chain can have an impact on sustainability. In short businesses must adopt sustainable practices particularly in order to be successful (Bom et al. 2019). In some cases this drives companies to “greenwashing”, where they take advantage of consumers' trust in expressions such as “natural” and “ecologic” or in logos, pictured with something nature related, that they use on the label to make consumers believe that it actually stands for the company having a well founded sustainability praxis (Naturskyddsföreningen 2021). Herein lies the problem, sustainability is such a multilayered concept particularly with skincare where it is easy to presume that “natural” is always the better option both for the body and the planet. However, no beauty product is free from chemicals, that would be
impossible and natural is not always the better option when it demands massive resources instead of creating the exact same fragrance in a lab (Ahlgren & Grahn 2020).

Between 2012 and 2017 several countries of the European Union banned microplastics in rinse-off cosmetics such as shower cream, body scrub and facial cleansing and managed to decrease this pollution with 97,6 percent, which translates in 4250 tons of plastic that wound up in the oceans (Bom et al. 2019). In Swedish Östersjön alone it was estimated that about 40 tons of micro plastics from cosmetic products was a part of it and accidentally consumed by both creatures of the sea as well as birds that bring it onshore (Hedlund 2017). Since 2018 beauty products with microplastic have been prohibited in Sweden though it is believed to still be one of the contributing factors that Östersjön still to this day is so exposed to this issue. An estimate of 15 000 billion plastic particles per year washes out from Sweden's drains and into the oceans where they remain for hundreds of years. Behaviors from producers, consumers and authorities alike need to change (Bjurer 2022). Raising awareness particularly from an early age is what Jan Söderhielm, in charge of the expedition to save Östersjön, regards as one of the most crucial steps in order to change our ways. Which makeup brands you choose as well as other chemicals used in the home that winds up being washed down the drain is of utmost importance to change the fate of our water supplies (P4 Blekinge 2022).

Pollutant chemicals in the wilderness tend to gather on a higher level in the feeding chain. This gave a PhD student Wiebke Dürig from the university Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet (SLU) in Uppsala the idea to compare samples of muscle tissue gathered from the lynx animal and sea eagle - dating back to 1965 - with recently collected ones, in order to monitor chemicals in nature. In the case with the sea eagle, 14 substances had increased over the years and six of these were either derived from medicine, makeup or industrial chemicals. In order to stop these chemicals from finding its way into the environment, Wiebke Dürigs advice is for consumers to consider options that are marked with green chemistry symbols and also to follow instructions to properly discard the waste from products. On a more positive note a pesticide (EPTC) used in Sweden between 1972 -1997 that was banned in 1999 showed no trace in any sample of the lynx collected after 2008 and onwards. This illustrates how a prohibition of a dangerous substance actually could reverse environmental pollution in a relatively short amount of time (SLU 2021). Unfortunately there are of course exceptions with chemicals that are non-degradable and therefore of utmost importance to hinder from winding up in nature. One of these chemicals is a common component used in hygiene, cosmetics, hair and skin care products despite there being much better alternatives and it is called PFAS.

PFAS is a chemical group of highly fluorinated substances often referred to as “forever chemicals” since as far as researchers know they are non-degradable. A study carried out by the Swedish Environmental Research Institute (IVL) showed that cosmetics was one of the most prominent carriers of PFAS with 3,7 percent. This figure might sound low but is very
significant since it is rinsed off and winds up in nature. Depending upon the chemical composition and characteristics of each PFAS substance they spread in different ways to plants and animals. Birds of prey, minks, seals and even polar bears in Arktis have had high levels of these substances. PFAS is easily absorbed by the human body as well where the chemicals bind with proteins that accumulate in the bloodstream, liver, lungs and kidneys. It can even be transmitted to fosters through the placenta and to newborn babies through breast feeding (Naturvårdsverket 2023).

In 2017 Swedish Society for Nature Conservation wanted to test whether makeup products on the Swedish market contained any dangerous chemicals or not. The results showed that twenty out of twenty two tested products not only contained PFAS but it was not even declared on the label. Out of these twenty products, seventeen contained PFOA, a PFAS-substance classified as being carcinogenic. The products containing the highest amounts came from Lumene and from The Body Shop (Hendersson 2017). After this discovery the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation started a campaign on Instagram directed at teenagers to make these companies stop using PFAS chemicals in their products. 1500 young activists answered the call and through e-mails they managed to convince not only Lumene and The Body Shop but Isadora, H&M, Kicks and L’Oréal to stop using PFAS in their production (SVT Nyheter 2018).

The current situation with PFAS chemicals is that, The Swedish Chemicals Agency have formed an alliance with authorities overseas to constrict the usage of about 10 000 PFAS-substances within the European Union. However this proposal will come into pass earliest in 2025 (Regeringskansliet 2023). Until then, it is not easy for consumers to interpret the label of chemical compounds, however: PTFE, “polytet”, “perfluoro” and “polyfluoro”, are all PFAS substances (Kemikalieinspektionen 2023).

Europe has one of the most extensive laws about cosmetics in the world where it is specified which substances are allowed, the ones with limitations and the forbidden ones. Some chemicals in cosmetics can give allergic reactions, this is often due to artificial components but this can also be the case with natural components, just because it is natural it does not necessarily mean that it is safer. Before a cosmetic product is allowed on the market the producer must put it through scientific safety testing and then send the results to said department of the European Union in order to be approved. Each country in the European Union is responsible for supervision of their own markets (ECHA 2023). In Sweden it is The Swedish Medicines Agency that is the central supervisory authority when it comes to cosmetic products. Together with the communes they make sure that products and operations follow the rules regulated by the Swedish courts environmental code and if not they have authority to decide about sanctions and adjustments. The rules for cosmetics are the same for all countries within the European Union where the central idea is to ensure that the products are safe for consumers to use (Läkemedelsverket 2020). So there are rules and regulations for how products affect us, though not as heavily regulated when it comes to the impact it does on nature (Grahn 2021).
One of the most sought after natural ingredient is the avocado fruit also referred to as the green gold (Mondragón & López-Portillo 2020), recognized for its many health beneficial characteristics (Sánchez-Quezada et al. 2021). With its increased global popularity, avocado orchards have started to cause environmental problems (Mondragón & López-Portillo 2020). On average it takes 1173 liters of water to grow one kilo of avocado, though this can vary between parts of the world and also where the water in use comes from whether it is from irrigation, groundwater or rivers makes a difference as well (Hanell 2017). In Mexico, Michoacán the avocado orchards have resulted in deforestation which have compromised not only livelihoods but the water supply to local communities and Mexico City as well as the vegetation in protected areas that are essential to the survival of insect’s (Mondragón & López-Portillo 2020).

This is where innovation is of extra importance within the skincare and cosmetics industry not only in trying to find suitable replacements for harmful ingredients but also to improve and make the most of processes as well as dealing with by-products in the form of skins and peels from fruits and flowers. These otherwise worthless waste are now thanks to new techniques being transformed into something useful (Sánchez-Quezada et al. 2021). The Body Shop that was one of the pioneering companies in grounding its practices in an ethical philosophy also incorporates oil from the “Hass” avocado in one of their product lines derived from their own production in South Africa though they clearly state on their website that they use a technique that saves the water supplies (The Body Shop 2023). Nevertheless all consumption leaves a footprint and each consumer needs to assess which aspect of sustainability is the most valuable to them (Grahn 2021).

1.2. Problem Discussion

1.2.1. Theoretical problem

Research has previously been conducted on how green marketing as well as cause-related marketing are both business strategies based on corporate social responsibility (CSR) that trigger customer's purchase intention and brand image. According to Chalimatuz et al. (2017) working ethically can benefit companies in terms of establishing a positive brand image in the eyes of consumers as well as gaining customer loyalty. Furthermore Mendon et al. (2019) establishes that cause-related marketing, where companies engage with a good cause such as a charity, is partly because it will make consumers think more highly of them and thereby the potential for brand love increases (Mendon et al. 2019). Findings have also supported that consumers are willing to pay a higher price if qualities such as cruelty free, safe for both health and environment as well as fair labor are proclaimed by companies (Chun 2016).
The term sustainability has a complex definition that embraces so much more than the environmental aspect. As suggested by John Elkington's theory “Triple Bottom Line” sustainability besides the environment also includes both social and economical factors (Elkington 1997). Sustainability within the cosmetics industry therefore needs to assess not only how ingredients affect the health of their customers but also how they are being sourced, by whom and whether this source is renewable or not.

In accordance with Chuns (2016) findings it is extremely important for a corporate social responsibility brand to identify exactly which ethical character traits their consumers value the most in order to meet their preferences. Question is therefore whether information about their environmental impact would cause customers to gravitate towards something less environmentally questionable. What does the average consumer of cosmetics value more? Natural ingredients or sustainability?

As one can read above, previous research within the field of “green” cosmetics and skin care products in relation to sustainability, has mainly been on how it affects consumers' cognitive relation with brands, their attitudes, purchase intention and brand loyalty.

Even though extensive research has been conducted within sustainability, green marketing, consumer behavior etc, the angle of this research has not been explored.

**1.2.2. Managerial problem**

Due to media reports on research of environmental issues such as pollution, safety of products and global warming the cosmetic industry was pointed out as being the major culprit. The online environment only accelerated this wave which has resulted in many brand crises. Cosmetic consumers of today are informed and make decisions both rationally and emotionally, searching for ethical and clean products (Grădinaru et al. 2022).

This type of consumerism has significantly affected several businesses into conforming their praxis and operational procedures. However, marketers still need to assess which factors affect and trigger consumers’ purchase intention toward green products (Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul 2016)

Sustainability within the cosmetics industry therefore needs to assess not only how ingredients affect the health of their customers but also how they are being sourced, by whom and whether this source is renewable or not (Bom et al. 2019).

Considering the concept of sustainability, it does seem almost impossible to satisfy all aspects when manufacturing a product. One must often prioritize, compromise and sacrifice something else in order to pursue the path of diminishing the footprint.

Each phase of a cosmetic product life cycle will have a cause and consequence on sustainability. Companies have to consider the risks at each stage from the initial design to the consumers' usage of the product and disposal of the packaging (Bom et al. 2019).

Declining supply of petrochemical feedstock and consumer demand are forcing the cosmetics industry to find safer options for their formulas. Sustainability and performance of the
ingredients are often in conflict with one another. Consumers expect the same efficacy and aesthetics that they are used to with a “non-sustainable” alternative, which has presented one of the cosmetic industries greatest challenges (Bom et al. 2019).

Even highly recognized ethical companies such as e.g. The Body Shop have what could be considered problematic ingredients, for example oil from the Hass avocado and from the shea nut in their assortment collections. Question is therefore whether information about their environmental impact would cause customers to gravitate towards something less environmentally questionable. What does the average consumer of green skin care value more? Natural ingredients or sustainability?

If consumers get more aware of the fact that natural ingredients don’t necessarily have to be more sustainable, they might not buy products that are labeled natural as frequently. This could also lead to mistrust in brands and be perceived as green washing. By taking this into consideration, this study could help companies get aware of the…. Companies might even be able to

If sustainability regulations were to get stricter in the future, it would affect companies in many ways. Depending on the extent of change in regulations, companies would have to adapt their practices

1.3. Research Gap and Research questions

In skin care and cosmetics, consumers associate a natural ingredient with being the better option over a synthetic. It is not common knowledge that there are factors and scenarios where it is better if the natural source remains untouched where it belongs and a synthetic can take its place without causing any footprint. Researchers have reported on consumers' behaviors with awareness about environmental issues but what hasn't been reported is consumers evaluation when knowing that natural is not always the better option. Therefore our research questions are:

- How do consumers of the cosmetic industry value sustainability over natural ingredients, and how does it affect their buying decisions?

1.4. Purpose /Aims

The aim of this study is to examine how consumers of the cosmetic industry value sustainability - such as more environmentally friendly and ethically produced products - over natural ingredients in skincare products. This study will also examine how this affects their buying decision.
1.5. Delimitations

This thesis is limited to evaluating the attitude of a group of skincare customers towards sustainable vs. natural ingredient products. The interviewees of our qualitative study will be limited to individuals who fall into the category of skin care users, meaning they identify themselves as consumers of skincare products. However, to get a broader perspective on the matter, the interviewees are not chosen based on to what degree they use skincare products; there is no limitation on the amount of skincare they use or how frequently they use it.

This thesis will briefly touch upon other sustainability issues such as packaging and the ingredient of the product as well as the production of it, however the main focus will be on consumer behavior and how it is affected by green marketing.

2. Literature review/conceptual framework

The following chapter is the literature review. This chapter will go through the Triple bottom line, consumer behavior in relation to green products, Green marketing strategies, Green products, Ingredients, innovation and a summary of the theoretical framework as well as the conceptual framework.

2.1. Triple Bottom Line - People, planet, profit

As defined by Grădinaru et al. (2022) the “triple bottom line” (TBL) can be summarized as the three p:s (people, planet, profit), is not just a metaphor but represents a highly valuable and applicable theoretical framework that helps firms to achieve sustainable development goals. They will even go as far as declaring it “the emerging 21st century business paradigm situated at the forefront of branding”. The social dimension - being about equality in pay, opportunities, and work conditions - have become a differentiator tool within the cosmetic industry, that both motivates employees, and strengthens ties with external stakeholders (Grădinaru et al. 2022).

As mentioned by Singh et al. (2022) Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a societal expectation, and in some parts of the world it has become more of a mandatory practice. Young people will be the decision makers of the future, so it is easy to understand that Gen Z is concerned about sustainable initiatives of companies. Their perception of a company is influenced both by the sustainable way of producing products and services as well as their ethical standards (Singh et al. 2022; Grădinaru et al. 2022).
2.2 Consumer behavior in relation to green products

It is important to understand customers’ purchase intentions because they can usually be used to predict customers’ behavior (Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul 2016). Today, consumers are becoming more engaged and considering sustainability regarding their consumption. A great example of this is the results of a study conducted by Deloitte in 2020, where it was found that over 66 percent of the respondents preferred elimination of single-use plastic and thought that this was the most popular strategy for promoting sustainability. On the other hand, the study also shows that factors like price and comfort can discourage customers from going green. Customers who have a higher awareness regarding environmental problems are more inclined to spend money on, or have a positive “attitude” meaning beliefs and feelings toward consuming green products (Bulut et al. 2022).

However, concerns regarding skincare products are not limited to sustainability issues. According to Hansen, Risborg and Steen (2012), the growing concern about certain ingredients in cosmetics has led to consumers attempting to avoid particular components and resulted in a free-of trend. Free-of customers choose cosmetics made without chemicals and other artificial elements since they believe that these substances could be harmful to their health. The authors claim that consumer free-of behavior is influenced by personal values (Hansen, Risborg & Steen 2012).

Emotional benefits is the sensation of psychological satisfaction that courses through the consumer in the event of newfound ownership over a product that enables them with more than just a basic need. When Mendon et al. (2019) wanted to show how emotional benefits factor into organic cosmetics they explained how these emotional benefits can act as a mediating variable in order to engage trust. The authors referred to prior research where
emotional benefits are the correlation between expensive products and trust as well as brand image and trust (Mendon et al. 2019).

A psychological contract between customers and companies is made when customers buy their products. Customers expect to purchase high-quality products, but they also hope that businesses will do good deeds for their societies. Through these expectations, the customer and the business create a psychological connection. Because psychological contracts are based on subjective understanding, they will not be upheld if the two parties disagree about what is stated in the contract because they think differently. A psychological contract violation occurs when one party feels that another party failed to fulfill their obligations under the agreement, leaving them emotionally hurt (Alyahya et al. 2023). This can be connected to greenwashing, which can be described as the practice of deceiving customers about an organization's environmental policies or the environmental advantages of a good or service (De Jong, Harkink & Barth 2018).

According to Grădinaru et al. (2022) environmental concerns and trust positively affect green purchase intentions. However, consumers trust more in green brands that have been established as such for a longer period of time since this is a testament to the company's commitment for acting ethically. Brand image therefore has a significant influence on the intention to buy a cosmetic product. 41 percent of consumers from around the world are willing to pay more for organic cosmetics when the company’s are perceived as sincere (Grădinaru et al. 2022). One exception would be in terms of economic crises, for instance when Europe suffered the crash in 2009, consumers of green cosmetics clearly got more price-sensitive (Liobikien & Bernatoniene 2017).

Hsu, Chang and Yansritakul (2016) explains the significance of brand image and how it exerts itself to comprise of informational cues such as “Country Of Origin” that factors into the customers evaluation of products in the same way as price does. Price plays two different roles in consumers’ assessments of product alternatives, namely, as a measure of sacrifice and as an informational cue. This means if a product's country image is negative even this can affect the consumer to not buy it. With green skincare products, these authors' recommendations were to keep the products reasonably priced and stressed the importance of clearly defining the quality of the green skincare in order for the customers to understand the price difference between green and non-green products. This can quite simply be done by offering relevant certification such as eco-labels (Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul 2016).

### 2.3 Green marketing strategies

There are a number of different ethical issues associated with cosmetics such as the protection of the environment, the use of chemical ingredients in production processes, and animal rights (Chun 2016). Knowledge of environmental issues and concern, meaning the consumer's awareness and attitude are the two major drivers of greener consumption (Chalimatzu et al. 2017; Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul 2016; Liobikien & Bernatoniene 2017).
Promotion of green purchasing is now viewed as one of the ways to minimize the environmental impact of products and achieve sustainability (Liobikien & Bernatoniene 2017). Therefore consumers are now pushing industries and the cosmetics industry in particular to become “greener” (Bom et al. 2019).

Companies use green marketing communication to inform, persuade and remind consumers about environmental actions that they have taken and want to communicate to its customers. Green marketing is fueled by the public's and businesses' growing concern for the environment and scarce resources, including the consequences of global warming, non-biodegradable solid waste, the dangers of toxins etc. (Kurnia, Narda & Sitio 2022).

Kurnia, Narda and Sitio (2022) claim that by communicating the company's green actions, the brand image can improve. The authors also claim that green marketing can greatly affect customers' purchase desire. Similarly, Chalimatuz et al. (2017) and Chun (2016) claim that green marketing is a dynamic issue that when undertaken by the company can improve a good image in the eyes of consumers.

Kurnia, Narda and Sitio (2022) mention three steps within green marketing: ecological green marketing, environmental green marketing, and sustainable green marketing. The first step is focused on lowering people's dependence on products that are remarkably harmful to the environment. Ecological green marketing is then followed by the next step which is to lessen environmental harm by satisfying customer demand for green products while also making them a competitive advantage. Sustainable green marketing, which is the last step, is a more revolutionary approach to society that forces businesses to work toward covering all costs associated with production and consumption that are environmentally friendly in order to build a sustainable economy (Kurnia, Narda & Sitio 2022).

Furthermore, “cause campaigning” can capture emotional benefits and trust at the individual level and is according to Mendon et al (2019) crucial for corporations to base their strategy on in order to be successful over competitors. However Chun (2016) stresses that even though CSR is a powerful differentiator with cosmetics brands, the positioning will only work if consumers believe in it. Consumers choose brands in accordance with how well it reflects their own values and ability to enhance their image (Chun 2016).

Dai and Pelton (2018) claim that consumer patronage is both functional and highly symbolic and reflective of self-expressive behavior and because of this they will always seek congruence between themselves and brands. Therefore they prefer products that match their own self-image or ideal self-image (Dai & Pelton 2018). If they on the other hand can identify a gap between themselves and the brand or between the brand and its messages, this adds to their dis-identification process. Dis-identification meaning when the individual identifies a gap between their own defining attributes and the ones characterized by an organization which could potentially lead to boycotting of the companies products (Chun 2016). To illustrate this Chun (2016) took The Body Shop as an example, since this company was founded on an ethical philosophy as a means to build emotional attachment with its customers and is regarded as the pioneer for CSR-leading skin and cosmetics companies
During the 1980s, this strategy was brand new and The Body Shop flourished though this took a turn during the following decade due to fierce competition which eventually resulted in a takeover by L’Oréal. This company was regarded as just another giant corporation who cared for nothing and were known to test their products on animals as well as using harmful chemicals in production. Therefore all of a sudden there was a dis-identification process between The Body Shop and its customers. Their view of The Body Shop as a holistic brand with integrity was shattered since L’Oréal represented the opposite. To make matters worse 26 percent of L’Oréal was owned by Nestlé, only the most detested and boycotted company in Great Britain. Hence the more consumers identify with a CSR-led cosmetics brand such as The Body Shop, the more likely they are to believe in its ethical positioning as a good corporate citizen. Therefore it is of utmost importance to pinpoint which ethical character traits their consumers are looking for (Chun 2016). Also Grădinaru et al. (2022) reveals that if there are discrepancies detected between the brands promises, and its activities, this lowers consumers' trust and purchase intentions and they will even want to “punish” these brands.

2.4 Green Products

Hsu, Chang and Yansritakul (2016) defined green skincare products as products that use botanically sourced ingredients with a natural carrier of chemical agents that are manufactured in such a way to preserve the integrity of the ingredients.

This is a product category that deviates from the rest as acknowledged by Grădinaru et al. (2022) first because of its complexity, covering a wide range of products and multifunctioning roles, from basic hygiene to social status. The other reason it stands out is because it has been disputed in the media and by consumers that the cosmetics industry in particular is to blame for environmental issues. Because of this scrutiny many companies have been extra attentive to their CSR-practices. It is extra challenging having to measure up to different criterias of both production requirements and the expectations of stakeholders, not to mention the three levels of sustainability standards; people, planet, profit. For these reasons many cosmetic businesses are today leading examples of ethical practices (Grădinaru et al. 2022).

Liobikien & Bernatoniene (2017) noticed this complexity of the category when they reviewed marketing research concerning purchase behavior of “green products", spanning from 2011-2017. Curiously enough they noticed that there were a lot of variations between the results when it came to the organic cosmetics group. They arrived at this was due to the respondents defining this category in different ways and therefore recognized a need to divide the green cosmetics group into two separate categories namely: “necessity” and “luxury” goods. Whilst necessity goods are consumed on a daily basis, chosen habitually and considered as low-involvement products, the purchase of luxury and durable goods entails a more complex, decision making process. With luxury goods the brand itself and quality is of great significance in order to be able to reflect the consumer's status. Because of this the authors
suggested a model for researchers to consider, where “color and styling cosmetics” were attributed to luxury products whereas “personal care” were attributed to necessity products. Based upon this model, their findings indicated that consumers of luxury goods were primarily interested in the product quality and not too concerned about environmental protection, at least not as a decision making factor.

Whilst health consciousness was the most important factor influencing attitude and purchase decision towards organic personal care products. Since the cosmetics industry uses a wide range of chemicals that with long-term exposure may cause cancer and allergies. Consumers believe that green products are better for their body and are safer than traditional cosmetics (Liobikien & Bernatoniene 2017; Rádis-Baptista et al. 2023).

One of the great concerns that consumers have related to the cosmetics and skin care industry is that of not knowing exactly what the formulas contain since it often refers to a chemical group instead of disclosing the exact origin on the label of the products. Fragrances, for instance, are most commonly referred to as “parfum” or “aroma” making it impossible for consumers to know whether it is synthesized or extracted from a herbal or even an animal there is no telling whether the fragrance component of Musk for instance, is naturally extracted from deer or not. With many synthetic ingredients, petrochemicals are the raw material which do not comply with the definition of sustainable, because it is not renewable, (Bom et al. 2019).

Unfortunately as demonstrated by Rádis-Baptista et al. (2023) these cheap synthetics based on petroleum can be found in our cosmetics and household products for the purpose to induce pleasant aromas. Not only do they impact negatively on the indoor air quality but also pose considerable risks to both human health as well as marine life due to washing and rinsing the chemicals down the drain. There are over six thousand organic chemicals known as fragrance ingredients that have been clustered into chemical groups. This means that the term “fragrance” and “perfume” may comprise from dozens to hundreds of undisclosed chemicals. These could individually or in combinations with repetitive exposure cause allergic reactions, headaches, asthma attacks, breathing difficulties and in worse cases even promote cancer. There is also the problem with secondary pollutants that could react with personal care and household products who otherwise have been assigned as low risk that could impose on the indoor air quality. This means that even fragrances from natural origin as well as essential oils that are volatile could be reactive due to emissions from secondary pollutants such as formaldehyde. Rádis-Baptista et al. (2023) explains that because of this there is a need for constant assessment of the fragrance chemicals in personal care and household products.

2.5 Ingredients

According to Bom et al. (2019) a common belief is that nature based ingredients are always the better option then the ones created in a lab. However natural, organic and green does not necessarily mean sustainable, they only refer to the ingredients originating source or lack of
synthetic substances whilst sustainability considers all the possible impacts associated with the product life cycle (Bom et al. 2019).

According to Bom et al. (2019) “sustainable” in terms of defining a cosmetic product has no single, universal definition, but refers to a product with ethical, social and economic responsibility. While natural ingredients often seem to be the most sought after preference in cosmetic products, they may carry sustainability concerns as well. To illustrate this they provided an example of a scent component that is slightly hay-like and very popular in perfumes and soaps which is naturally derived from the sassafras tree found in Asia. With this aroma's popularity in manufacturing, farmers in Asia increased the rate with which they cut down these trees solely for the sake of their roots. The tree's salvation came when International Flavors & Fragrances Inc. (IFF) managed to develop a molecule called “Helional”, so similar in scent that one could not tell the substitute apart from the real sassafras root. The creation of Helional resulted in more than 110,000 trees being spared per year. This case is a perfect example of how a synthetic ingredient can play a vital role in preserving of raw materials and therewith be an important factor in sustainability measures. Synthetics can be sustainable, as long as they have been produced using “green chemistry” defined as the design of chemical products and processes that seek to use renewable sources, minimize energy usage, prevent waste and to avoid the use of toxic and/or hazardous chemicals during production. Synthetics developed through green chemistry can have several sustainable advantages such as endurance performance and also it could prove to be less expensive than using the natural alternative (Bom et al. 2019).

With the definition of Sustainability being so complex it is seemingly an impossible endeavor to fulfill all conditions when sourcing ingredients. Shea butter for instance, is a component frequently used in the cosmetics and confectionery markets (Glew & Lovett 2014). Not only does shea butter share the same properties of these other vegetable fats but even exceeds them in performance, though it is much more expensive (at least three-times the price of palm oil). Shea butter is derived from the nut of the shea tree which originates from the Sahel Savannah region in sub-Saharan Africa. Traditionally, women from the surrounding communities once a year set out to the parklands where they pluck the nuts that have already dropped to the ground. Then as a first step in the process of extracting the virgin butter is boiling the fresh nuts. Shea butter has been considered to have a minimal carbon footprint (measurement of greenhouse gas emissions derived from products/processes) which is an established methodology with International Standard protocols, used within industry and academic research. However Glew and Lovett (2014) wanted to evaluate the carbon footprint on the entire shea butter supply chain. What they found was that 1 kilo of hand-crafted shea butter in cosmetic products is responsible for 10.374 kilo CO2eq which actually was higher than calculated for alternative vegetable oils. 75 percent of these emissions was mainly caused by firewood in the process when boiling water for the butter extraction. Packaging and transport were also significant as it is packed in plastic containers almost causing a fifth of the emissions and then shipped from Africa to Europe (1.3 percent). Glew and Lovett (2014) suggested how these emissions could be decreased between 19 and 37 percent, either
by using more efficient stoves or implementing mechanical extraction. Though they realized that implementing changes such as these raises other sustainability problems regarding the socio-economic aspects since shea butter is vastly important to the local African communities. Changing their way of collecting and processing the shea nuts manually must be done in a way as not to bereave them of their source of income. It could so happen that industrializing this handcrafted process could possibly result in relocating production altogether, building factories in other locations (Glew & Lovett 2014). Bearing this in mind when it comes to the properties of sustainability one might need to consider other factors during the evaluation of an ingredient. Each ingredient is unique and needs to be evaluated as such (Bom et al. 2019).

2.6 Packaging

According to Drobac et al. (2020), plastic is the most frequently used material for cosmetics and personal care products. This has been a highly lucrative industry that has grown each year but is now facing challenging times ahead due to consumers' demand for greener products made with as little energy resources and waste as possible. Europeans in particular have an aptitude for green and vegan products with environmentally-friendly packaging. With Europe being the epicenter of cosmetics with an annual 77 billion euros consumption, this has motivated cosmetic companies to be more creative and innovative. For instance “Alverde” a natural cosmetics brand from Germany came up with a box made out of 80 percent recycled raw materials where even the print was a biodegradable created by using electricity, from renewable sources. Others turn to refill tactics like Esté Lauder’s which encourages consumers to return their empty packaging to stores in exchange for a free eye shadow (Drobac et al. 2020).

The aesthetics and design has previously been the most important trait of cosmetic packaging but with increasing expansion of e-commerce, the practicality of packaging such as lightweight and durability are getting more relevant. With the shift in design mowing towards becoming more minimalistic this has paved the way for renewable materials such as cork which is waterproof and 100 percent biodegradable and bamboo that is extremely durable. Other options that have been tried out successfully are seaweed, mushroom fibers and avocado nuts. Not to mention innovations such as “Soapack”, which is bottles and jars made out of vegetable oil-based soap that actually melts away once they are empty, even the “paper” instructions dissolve in water and Instead of a cap, a thin layer of beeswax that keeps the contents from leaking (Drobac et al. 2020).

2.7 Innovation

One of the main challenges for the cosmetics and skin care industry is how to replace unsustainable synthetic ingredients for sustainable alternatives without compromising the consumer aesthetic preferences of functionality, stability of the formula and its performance. Therefore innovation is extra important in organic skin care (Bom et al. 2019).
Younis et al. (2021) were inspired by green synthesis in the form of fruits and vegetables peel dumped in huge quantities, that proved to be a goldmine for production of valuable nanoparticles, thereby presenting a solution for waste reduction. These nanomaterials have been described as a medical phenomenon and a highly successful approach with skin rejuvenation. Younis et al. (2021) realized the benefits of using these magnesium oxide nanoparticles (MgONps) when they wanted a more careful process with extracting rose oil which is very delicate and sensitive to higher temperatures. Roses are very attractive to the skincare cosmetic industry because of its natural source of antibacterial and anti aging agents and the rose oil is established as one of the most exquisite in the world. More than 300 volatile compounds have been identified in rose oil in which citronellol ester and phenyl ethyl alcohol are the major components. The extraction method plays a crucial role in the chemical profile both considering the floral scent and the quality of the oil. Younis et al. 2021 saw how the traditional methods such as steam distillation and hydro-distillation caused the delicate compounds in the oil into a state of decomposition and saw the potential in green synthesis. By using non toxic, antibacterial magnesium oxide nanoparticles much more tolerant to higher temperature it proved to be a compatible success as the nanocarrier in the process of extracting the rose oil (Younis et al. 2021).

An ingredient or product is said to be biodegradable when it decomposes into simple, non-toxic components under environmental conditions in a short time (Bom et al. 2019). Vegetal wastes are currently a source of pollution due to the excess of organic compounds in the environment (Sánchez-Quezada et al. 2021). Therefore sustainability strategies are very focused on recycling techniques where processes of fermentation fully complies with the rules of green chemistry (Bom et al. 2019).

Sometimes this can be done through simpler means as demonstrated by Sánchez-Quezada et al. (2021) who researched the avocado fruit since it has increased its worldwide popularity and consumption in recent years and thereby also waste. The Hass avocado was estimated between 0.83 – 0.85 kg of per capita consumption in 2020. Since they are a source of various nutritional compounds it makes them extra suitable for usage within the cosmetic or pharmaceutical industry. Though as the avocado wastes are composted or disposed of in the environment, it gets high in contamination levels where the byproduct in the form of the seeds represents up to 30 percent of the fruit. Approximately 70 percent of the antioxidant compounds from the avocado fruits come from the seed which are naturally high in minerals and vitamins. These benefits of the seed apparently do not diminish as the fruit ripens, though a higher concentration of polyphenols has been informed for ripe and overripe avocado seed. Since the avocado fruit changes in color over the ripening stages, Sánchez-Quezada et al. (2021) suggested that this could be used as an indicator to determine the opportune moment for industries when to make use of the seeds (Sánchez-Quezada et al. 2021).
2.8 Summary

As the research indicates, environmental and ethical issues have come to affect consumers purchasing decisions, forcing companies to take action and communicate in new ways. This has resulted in concepts such as The Triple Bottom line to be described as a business paradigm, because of its major impact (Grădinaru et al. 2022). Even though consumers are increasingly considering sustainability when it comes to their consumption, factors like price and comfort can discourage customers from going green (Bulut, et al. 2022). However, emotional benefits can act as a mediating variable in order to engage trust in organic cosmetics (Mendon et al. 2019).

With consumers pushing industries, and the cosmetics industry in particular, to become “greener”, businesses have had to use green marketing to inform, persuade and remind consumers about environmental actions that they want to communicate to its customers (Kurnia, Narda & Sitio, 2022). Brand image has a significant influence on the intention to buy a cosmetic product, with 41 percent of consumers willing to pay more for organic cosmetics when the company is perceived as sincere (Grădinaru et al. 2022).

To clearly define the quality of green skincare, Hsu, Chang, and Yansritakul (2016) advise keeping product prices reasonable and providing necessary certification like eco-labels. This can help customers understand the price difference between green and non-green products. Many consumers believe nature based ingredients are always the better option then the ones created in a lab. However, natural, organic and green is not necessarily the most sustainable option. They only refer to the ingredients originating source or lack of synthetic substances, whilst sustainability considers all the possible impacts involved in the product life cycle (Bom et al. 2019).

Plastic is the most commonly used material for cosmetic products, but is facing challenges due to consumers' demand for greener products. Europeans have an aptitude for green and vegan products with environmentally-friendly products, which in turn has motivated companies to be more creative and innovative (Drobac et al. 2020). Innovation is essential in skincare products to replace unsustainable synthetic ingredients for sustainable alternatives without compromising aesthetic preferences of consumers (Bom et al. 2019).

2.9 Conceptual Framework

According to Kumar et. al. (2023), the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is one of the most popular theories in the study of consumer behavior, which establishes the groundwork for the conceptual framework's development. This model was introduced by Fishbein in 1967 and is based on social psychology (Kumar et. al. 2023).

Before engaging in an alternative behavior, the person considers its effects. The person then prefers the behavior that will enable them to achieve their goals. The intention behind
engaging in the activity determines the behavior. The purpose of the person plays a key role in determining how conduct is shaped and contains the driving forces that influence the action. Behavioral attitudes and subjective norms are the two sources of behavioral intention (Mataracı & Kurtuluş 2020), and according to Hansen, Risborg, and Steen (2012) it is possible to predict the behavior of consumers based on these variables. Particularly in studies on green consumption, attitudes are the only reliable tool, while social norms are weak predictors of purchase intention (Mataracı & Kurtuluş 2020).

Figure 2: Theory of reasoned action (TRA).

3. Method
The following chapter consists of the chosen research method for this thesis, following the data collection and analysis, operationalization, ethical considerations, sustainable considerations. Finally, it is rounded off with quality of research.

3.1 Research approach
3.1.1 The three research approaches
Wilson (2010) defines deductive approach as a research process that involves formulating hypotheses based on existing theory or prior knowledge, followed by designing a research strategy to test those hypotheses. Gulati (2009) describes deductive reasoning as a process of drawing logical conclusions based on a set of premises or assumptions in research design. Babbie (2010) explains the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning in research. Deductive reasoning involves starting with a theoretical expectation or hypothesis and testing
it against observations, while inductive reasoning begins with observations and seeks to find patterns or relationships within them.

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) discuss how abductive reasoning offers a unique approach to scientific inquiry that combines elements of deductive and inductive reasoning. Bryman and Bell (2015) build on this concept by highlighting how the abductive approach can be used to generate new insights and advance the understanding of a particular field. In their approach, the research process begins with the identification of "surprising facts" or "puzzles" that cannot be explained by existing theories. From there, the researcher seeks to choose the best explanation among many alternatives. The researcher uses a combination of numerical and cognitive reasoning to explain the observed phenomenon, and the resulting insights can lead to the development of new theories or the refinement of existing ones.

The authors are confident that an inductive method approach is the most suitable for their research, which relies heavily on interviews as the primary source of empirical findings. Furthermore, the authors believe that this approach will allow them to dive deeper into the subject in question. By using an inductive method, the authors can gather data and draw conclusions from it, which is particularly useful when exploring a topic that has not been studied extensively before. This method enables the authors to identify patterns and themes that might not be immediately apparent using a deductive approach. The inductive approach to research involves starting with specific observations or data and seeking to find patterns or relationships within them. The approach is commonly used in qualitative research, where the goal is to develop a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Researchers utilizing the inductive approach need to be open to the emergence of new patterns and relationships and be flexible in adapting the theory or hypothesis as the data shapes it (Goddard & Melville 2004).

Bernard (2011) highlights that inductive research involves searching for patterns and developing theories or explanations based on those patterns through the formulation of hypotheses. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) clarify that the inductive approach does not mean ignoring theories when formulating research questions and objectives. This method aims to extract meanings from the dataset collected to identify patterns and relationships and construct a theory. However, the inductive approach does not prevent the researcher from utilizing existing theories to formulate research questions for exploration. In essence, inductive reasoning involves learning from experience by observing patterns, resemblances, and regularities in the data collected to draw conclusions and generate theory.

Overall, the inductive approach is a valuable research method that allows researchers to develop new theories or explanations based on the data collected. This approach is particularly useful in qualitative research, where the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The flexibility of the inductive approach allows for the emergence of new insights and theories that may not have been anticipated at the outset of the research.
In conclusion, the authors firmly believe that an inductive method approach is the most appropriate for their research. They are optimistic that this approach will yield rich and valuable insights into the beliefs surrounding natural product sustainability, and excited to dive deeper into this topic using this approach.

3.2 Research method

This part of the report begins with an overview of the various approaches, strategies, and methodologies employed by the authors to offer the reader insights into the research process. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012), the research method is the general strategy for answering the research question. It is essential that the research method has precise objectives derived from the research question. Moreover, They explain that determining how to collect data is a component of research design. According to Bryman and Bell (2012), qualitative data refers to words or images, whereas quantitative data refers to numbers.

3.2.1 Types of research methods

Qualitative studies, as opposed to quantitative ones, base their conclusions on the experiences of the individuals who were studied. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research does not focus on simplification for the sake of evaluation. To "make visible characteristics of the world," as qualitative researchers put it, is to engage in a "situated activity that locates the observer in the environment" (Cheek, Onslow & Cream 2004).

Scerri and James (2009) suggest that in order to understand the complexities of sustainability issues and create useful sustainability indicators, a comprehensive approach is required. So, it is common practice to mix qualitative and quantitative approaches to study in order to acquire a complete view of sustainability concerns. Research conducted by Liubkina-Yudovich (2010) on sustainable packaging design at Eastman Kodak Corporation shows the value of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, despite the limits of each method taken alone. The study's findings highlight the need for a multidisciplinary approach that takes into account both commercial and environmental factors.

The authors have chosen to use a qualitative approach as it yields a wider variety of findings, which can assist researchers to obtain a deeper knowledge of sustainability challenges. With this study, corporate leaders will have a better grasp of the interplay between the various players at their disposal. Therefore, the interviews and questions formed in this report will consist of a qualitative nature to research.
3.3 Data collection and analysis

3.3.1. Type of data
The data that will be collected will consist of primary data from the interviews conducted by
the authors, as well as secondary data collected from theoretical findings in the form of
academic peer-reviewed articles spanning from no more than ten years prior to the
publication of this thesis, retrieved from databases such as OneSearch, Business Source
Ultimate etc, as well as books.

Interviews provide crucial primary data. By using semi-structured interviews meaning ‘non
standardized’ often referred to as ‘qualitative research interviews’ (Saunders, Lewis &
Thornhill 2012) they offer interviewers the opportunity to ‘probe’ answers meaning making
the interviewees elaborate further on their responses (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012).
The semi-structured interviews will help the authors get relevant perspectives, experiences,
and insights. Face-to-face or remote interviews enable for flexible questions and greater
participant insights. Interviews may provide qualitative or quantitative data. The authors will
also transcribe and record the interviews with the consent of the interviewees. This was done
to acquire insights, as well as categorize data and examine it.

3.3.2 Data collection

For empirical data collection, the authors opted for a qualitative approach and conducted
semi-structured interviews. The primary focus is on analyzing the responses and
interpretations of respondents regarding sustainable work. A semi-structured interview guide
was developed to encompass topics pertinent to our study, providing a clear focus as opposed
to a broad exploration. The conversations with interviewees can be more flexible when using
semi-structured interviews because the questions in the interview guide do not need to be
posed in a specific order.

The authors contacted twenty five participants to present the proposed research study. Those
who indicated a willingness to participate came from Kalmar, Växjö, and Sollefteå. The
interview dates, times, and locations were determined based on the respondents' availability.
Interviews contained in the interviews were conducted individually, with each interview
lasting between around 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted via video link or
face-to-face. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed, except for the ones that were
transcribed in real time, in order to facilitate data analysis. The purpose of the transcription
was to ensure that no information was overlooked and to highlight specific details that
contribute to a clearer overall comprehension, thereby facilitating interpretation and drawing
conclusions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that "data analysis" refers to the process
employed to address the research questions at hand. In their view, the collection and analysis
of qualitative data are regarded as interconnected stages within the same overarching
procedure. This perspective highlights the inseparable nature of data collection and analysis
in qualitative research. As researchers embark on their study, they strive to acquire relevant
and meaningful data that aligns with their research questions. Subsequently, they engage in a
meticulous process of analyzing the gathered data to extract key insights and address the research objectives effectively. The process of data analysis entails various techniques and approaches depending on the nature of the data and the research design. Researchers immerse themselves in the collected qualitative data, often consisting of interviews, observations, or textual materials, with the intention of identifying patterns, themes, and emerging concepts. Through systematic coding and categorization, they organize the data into meaningful clusters, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns and relationships.

### 3.3.3 Data Analysis

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) describe that in the field of data analysis, there are two widely utilized approaches are thematic analysis and grounded theory. Thematic analysis facilitates the identification of significant themes, and the formulation of a conclusion to research. The grounded theory approach, as defined by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), is frequently considered a prototypical illustration of an inductive approach. However, this viewpoint is overly simplistic. The more precise perspective is to perceive it as a fusion of both inductive and deductive reasoning, commonly known as "theory construction." The grounded theory approach is especially advantageous for research endeavors that seek to forecast and clarify behavior, with a focus on the development and construction of theoretical frameworks. Given that numerous elements of business and management are intertwined with human conduct, including consumer or employee behavior, the utilization of a grounded theory approach enables the investigation of a diverse array of business and management concerns.

#### 3.3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) outline the thematic analysis approach which involves identifying the patterns or meaning of the data collected from the interviews. The authors have therefore chosen to employ the thematic analysis approach to their thesis. Furthermore, the authors attempted to identify consistent patterns in the data. These patterns included locally derived categories, metaphors employed to express ideas, variations and similarities in participants' discussion on the same subject matter, and instances of absent data where participants were prompted to provide further elaboration on their answers. The responses provided by the participants are collated and organized into an empirical section for further examination.

### 3.3.4 Respondents

The following table shows the respondents to the interviews for this thesis. This is done to clarify the empirical findings as well as the analysis part of the thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Face-to-face</td>
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</table>

**Table 1.**
3.4 Operationalization

The chosen conceptual framework for this thesis is Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Based on this framework, the interview questions explore the scientific bases of how individuals make purchasing decisions in relation to environmental impact and ethical considerations in the cosmetics industry. They aim to understand the factors that influence consumer choices, particularly in relation to the source of ingredients and a company's sustainability practices. The following headlines express the themes chosen by the authors to explore the research question, which are all based on the theoretical and conceptual framework.

3.4.1 Environmental Impact and Ethical Considerations
Chalimatuz et al. (2017), Hsu, Chang and Yansritakul (2016), Grădinaru et al. (2022) and Liobikien and Bernatoniene (2017) are all researchers within the field of green skincare consumption patterns. They all start their thesis by pointing out how environmental issues, global warming in particular, have increased consumers' awareness of how consumption and businesses affect the environment. Consumers' awareness and attitude are proposed as the two main drivers of greener consumption (Chalimatuz et al. 2017; Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul 2016; Liobikien & Bernatoniene 2017) and this is why it was relevant to probe the interviewees how this factors into their evaluation of products.

3.4.2 Source of Ingredients and Sustainability:
As ascertained by Bom et al. (2019) natural isn't enough for an ingredient to be considered sustainable. Whether it be from a vegetable, animal or synthetic source one must also consider the way a substance has been extracted and/or purified (Bom et al. 2019). By including the source of ingredients in the questions, the authors seek to understand the importance consumers place on the origin and quality of ingredients when choosing cosmetic products. This aligns with the scientific understanding that sustainable sourcing practices can have a significant impact on environmental conservation and ethical considerations.

3.4.3 Natural vs. Synthetic Ingredients:
Even though “natural” often seems to be associated with the best alternative, particularly with green skincare, there can be serious underlying issues that go against preservation of animals, plants and trees (Bom et al. 2019). By inquiring about the preference for natural or synthetic ingredients, the questions tap into consumer perceptions and beliefs surrounding the sustainability of these alternatives.

3.4.4 Prioritizing Cruelty-free and Sustainable Products:
The questions specifically ask whether consumers prioritize cruelty-free and sustainable products. As Chun (2016) explained animal rights are an ethical issue highly related to cosmetics and skincare industry, and if a company acts unethically, this can trigger a dis-identification process within consumers which potentially leads to boycotting of products and brands. If companies on the other hand promote cruelty-free products, consumers are
willing to pay extra since it constitutes a higher ethical value (Chun 2016). Understanding consumer preferences in this area can therefore shed light on the effectiveness of efforts to promote cruelty-free and sustainable alternatives.

3.4.5 Packaging Waste Reduction:

Since plastic is the most frequently used material for cosmetics and personal care products (Drobac et al. 2020) and Bulut, et al. (2022) referred to a survey where the most popular strategy for promoting sustainability was to eliminate single-use plastic (Bulut, et al. 2022). This question delves into consumers' willingness to bring their own containers to reduce packaging waste. This addresses the scientific understanding of the environmental consequences of excessive packaging waste in the cosmetics industry and the importance of sustainable packaging practices.

3.4.6 Stricter Regulations for Companies:

Because the cosmetic industry has and still is referred to as being a major cause for environmental concern, this has put extra pressure to lead by example. In order to measure up to different criterias of both production requirements and the expectations of stakeholders many cosmetic companies are now working ethically (Grădinaru et al. 2022). By asking about consumers' beliefs regarding stricter regulations for companies, the questions acknowledge the role of regulations in promoting sustainability practices. This reflects the scientific consensus that well-defined regulations can help drive positive changes in the industry and mitigate environmental and ethical concerns.

3.4.7 Cosmetics Companies' Role in Raising Awareness:

The questions explore the perception of cosmetics companies' role in raising awareness of environmental issues. This aligns with scientific research such as the work of Liobikien & Bernatoniene (2017), that highlights the potential influence of companies in promoting environmental education and engagement among their customers, fostering a sense of responsibility and promoting sustainable practices.

3.4.8 Consumer Actions for Encouraging Sustainability:

Consumers' preference to support businesses that practices ethically throughout their value chain is what has made companies conform and adapt to greener strategies (Bom et al. 2019). Today Corporate social responsibility is almost mandatory for industries and the younger generations, Gen Z in particular, are concerned with companies sustainability praxis and ethical standards (Singh et al. 2022).
By asking about consumer actions to encourage sustainability, the questions recognize the importance of individual behavior in driving positive change. It aligns with scientific research that emphasizes the collective impact of consumer choices and the potential for consumer-driven approaches to incentivize companies to adopt sustainable practices.
3.4.9 Effective Communication of Sustainability Practices:

The questions inquire about beauty companies that effectively communicate their sustainability practices to consumers. This acknowledges the role of transparent and effective communication in building trust, enhancing consumer awareness, and promoting sustainable choices. Scientific research emphasizes the importance of clear and credible communication in influencing consumer perceptions and behavior.

Overall, the interview questions are grounded in scientific understanding and aim to explore consumer attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs related to environmental impact, ethical considerations, and sustainability practices in the cosmetics industry. By gathering insights in these areas, the questions can contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer preferences and inform efforts to promote sustainability in the industry.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This research project places a strong emphasis on conducting the study in an ethical and responsible manner. The interviewees will give their informed consent in order to participate, and no one shall be coerced into participating (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). Confidentiality and privacy of sensitive information are also key principles guiding this research. As stated by Baribeau and Royer (2009), the data collected will be kept strictly confidential, both within the study framework and in a personal capacity. The authors of this thesis are committed to comply with all data protection laws applicable to this research.

The interviews in this study will be prioritized in regard to the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. As Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) note, the ethical principles will be adhered to from the planning stages to the finalization of the published report. To avoid violating the General Data Protection Regulation, participant privacy will be ensured at all times.

To ensure that no personal relationship influenced the answers given by the interviewees, the writers of this thesis interviewed each other's candidates, with no prior acquaintanceship.

The interviews were conducted anonymously either at a certain place of their choice or using platforms like Zoom or other video conferencing software. The interviews that were time sensitive and where the interviewer was not able to transcribe the answers in real time, were recorded. The participants had to give their consent to being recorded, and were informed that the recordings would not be used in any other circumstance than to be transcribed for the purpose of this research. There was no recording of the participants' names, only their age and gender as they identify themselves were recorded for further analysis. For video conferencing, extra care was taken to ensure accurate recording of the answers, given the increased possibility of technological disruptions and misinterpretations. Finally the collected data were not selectively reported or distorted when analyzed. The authors of this thesis have
ensured that personal differences have not interfered with their research work, and the results are not biased by conflicts of interest. All results are justified by the sources indicated in this report, and the conclusions drawn are original to this study. The answers were summarized in the Empirical findings chapter of this research to identify patterns (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009).

3.6 Sustainable considerations

The authors’ approach to the research study was guided by the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, which emphasizes the consideration of economic, social, and environmental aspects to ensure the well-being of both people and the planet (Elkington, 1998).

From an economic perspective, the study did not involve any financial expenses or compensation for the participants. All individuals volunteered their participation without receiving any economic benefits. This approach ensured that the study did not impose any financial burden on the participants and maintained a focus on the non-monetary aspects of their decision-making process.

Regarding the social aspect, the authors made conscious efforts to prioritize the well-being of the participants. This included accommodating their preferences regarding the timing and location of the interviews, ensuring that they felt safe and secure throughout the process. By adapting to the needs and preferences of the participants, the authors aimed to create a comfortable and inclusive environment for open and honest discussions.

In terms of the environmental aspect, the authors were mindful of minimizing resource waste during the research process. The interviews were primarily conducted through online links, eliminating the need for unnecessary travel and reducing carbon emissions associated with transportation. With the long and energy consuming production of paper in mind, the interviews were also transcribed directly digitally to not waste paper. This approach contributed to a more sustainable and eco-friendly research methodology.

By considering the economic, social, and environmental dimensions throughout the study, the authors aimed to conduct research that not only generated valuable insights but also upheld ethical and sustainable practices.

3.7 Quality of research:

Qualitative research, as argued by Cheek, Onslow, and Cream (2004), can shed light on people's lives, experiences, and perspectives; however, it may only provide a limited understanding of the phenomena being studied. In order to direct the research design and choose the appropriate methods and approaches, a theoretical framework is essential. Findings from qualitative research can only aid our understanding of a topic so much without the benefit of a theoretical framework. For a thorough analysis of the nuanced facets of the problem or situation, theoretical background is required.
This study consists of primary data from interviews. The quality, validity and reliability are of highest regard in this study as the theoretical findings are peer reviewed and the interviewers have strived to be unbiased when collecting the information and only doing so directly from the participants.

3. 7. 1 Validity
The concept of validity applies to the extent to which the outcomes accurately reflect the intended phenomenon. The inquiry pertains to the extent to which the association between two variables can be deemed as causal (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2009). Despite the fact that the biggest target group for skincare and cosmetics are women (Chalimatuž et al. 2017; Mendon et al. 2019). The authors have chosen to interview both men and women since both have some sort of relationship with the broad product category of skincare and cosmetics. More importantly the question in relation to sustainability should not be limited to one gender. The participants were recruited from different locations in Sweden, with different socio-economic backgrounds as well as different ages where the youngest was 18 and the eldest 52. This was done to get as many perspectives and points of view as possible in order to gain insights related to answering the research question.

3. 7. 2 Reliability
According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), reliability can be threatened by various factors. The first potential threat is subject or participant error, where the timing of data collection may influence responses. For example, if studying employee enthusiasm, completing a questionnaire on different days of the week could yield different results due to varying moods. This was not an issue in the thesis at hand seeing as participants were informed approximately 2-3 days before the interviews took place, and we the authors adapted to a time that fit the participants.

Another challenge is subject or participant bias, where interviewees may provide responses they believe their superiors want to hear (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill. 2009). The authors are no superiors of the participant, they were from each of the authors social circles, but as mentioned before, the interviews were conducted in a matter of professionalism, seeing as the authors did not interview their own social circles.

Observer error as described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) is another potential threat to reliability. If multiple interviewers are involved, differences in how questions are asked may lead to variations in responses. Using a highly structured interview schedule, can help minimize this threat to reliability. The authors have used semi structured interviews to allow participants to elaborate their answers if there was a wish to do that.

Lastly, observer bias can also affect reliability, as different interpretations of replies may occur. To address this, it is important for researchers to remain aware of their own biases and strive for impartial analysis(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill. 2009). The authors have in this
thesis transcribed the participants answers word for word to ensure that observer bias is not an issue. Therefore making it irrelevant for this thesis.

The participants were a part of the interviewers own existing contacts. However the authors swapped the participants with each other so as not to interview their own personal contacts. This was done in order to assure that the reliability of the data since interviewing acquaintances could affect the respondents answers.

Inviting participants from each of the authors existing contacts, helps to establish mutual trust and credibility. It also minimizes the possibility of harm to either party, as noted by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009).

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS CHAPTER

The authors will in this chapter present the empirical data that have been acquired through semi-structured interviews. The data has been organized and summarized under each category defined in the chapter, in accordance with the research question.

4.1 Consumers preferences of ethical, natural and sustainable products.

The interviewees were asked if they would buy a company's products even if they knew that this company used animals as test subjects. To this the majority answered that they were against buying the products however whilst some were stricter and answered a plain and firm no, others were more ambivalent and felt that it is not always easy knowing which companies test on animals and which ones do not. Others answered that this issue is not something that they normally would research beforehand or even contemplate whilst making a decision, therefore they could buy a non cruelty-free product without even realizing it. However if they knew this information they would opt for another alternative.

P. 13, said that she was not opposed to animal testing in regards to medicine but for the purpose of cosmetics she was against it. P. 12 answered that if she looks for a product she would not buy it if it was not known to be cruelty-free; however she rarely changes products but sticks with products that work for her when she finds it and therefore she said: “I think it would still take a lot for me to change. I know it's horrible, but I don’t like to change products and rather stick to the ones I like.”

Three people (P.3, P.15 and P11) out of twenty five respondents answered that they still would buy the company's products due to aspects of quality and safe products. P. 3, responded that she could go for the cruelty-free option, however she felt that the options weren’t that great.

“I usually first look for what I need or want, and if it's cruelty free that is like a plus, because I hope that the regulations and laws are good enough.” P. 15, answered that if there aren’t many other alternatives to get safe products, he believes he would still buy it. Lastly, there was P. 11, who believed it would not affect her purchase decision.
Considering the research question, the interviewees were asked about their preference between a natural scent versus a synthetic one, given that the scent is exactly the same. The only difference is that one ingredient is harvested from nature and the other one created in a lab. To this the majority answered that they would prefer the scent derived from real flowers. Some respondents even expressed that by choosing this option they felt that it was not only safer but better and more fresh for the skin (P.2, P.3, P.4, P.12, P.15 and P.19), and that it also would smell better (P.11).

P. 18 mentioned that she believed it to be the most environmentally-friendly option. Also, P.1. elaborated on her choice of choosing the natural flowers, by expressing concern about artificial fragrances and that they could consist of different chemicals that could have negative effects on one's physical being, possibly causing allergic reactions.

P.8 and P. 22 expressed some doubt. P. 8, felt that even though the natural option felt like the best option of the two, he added that he is not very knowledgeable when it comes to this very topic. P. 22, also agreed that the real flowers sounded better and that he probably would get it when confronted with it in a store but then again he also reflected over the possibility that the flowers could be a protected flora.

Lastly there was a category consisting of six people (P. 7, P. 9, P. 10, P.13, P. 17 and P. 23) that felt that it did not matter in the slightest whether natural or synthetic. They would buy a product based on criteria if the scent appealed to them and for the quality of the product.

Then there was the question to establish whether the participants associated natural products with sustainability. Here the majority answered that they did indeed. P. 24 answered: “It feels much better to use what is already natural in the environment than to create something new.” P.3, felt that it was better both for nature and for the skin. However there were also participants that were highly skeptical in this matter.

P.7 and P. 14, felt that even though they instinctively believed natural products to be sustainable they expressed doubt that it was the truth. P.14, said yes but then added that one must also consider production and manufacturing since there are cultivations that can be harvested incorrectly.

Three participants (P. 4, P. 8 and P. 10) answered that they confuse these two terms and believe them to have the same meaning even though they realize deep down that there is a defined difference. Two other participants (P. 7 and P. 9) answered that the branding of natural products would add to their confusion and influence them to think that natural and sustainable go hand in hand.

Out of the twenty five interviewees four participants opposed this association (P.14, P.22, P.23 and P.25). P. 23 said that she would not necessarily draw this parallel, even if it feels good with “natural” there is so much behind the concept of sustainability. “I mean natural flowers
in a field can be sprayed with pesticide and so I am skeptical”, she said. As P. 22 phrased it:
“On the top of my mind, I'd say no. I mean ivory, pelts and bark from rainforests are all
natural components but nothing I would want in my products or associate with
sustainability.”

P.14 and P. 25 explained that even though natural products have the potential to be sustainable, in the end it all comes down to the brand's overall sustainability practices and commitment to responsible sourcing and production.

4.2. Consumer behavior in relation to environmental considerations.

When exploring how important the source of ingredients were to the interviewees when purchasing skincare and cosmetic products, the opinions were divided into two main categories. Participants such as P. 23 expressed that it was extremely important: “If I buy shampoo I avoid anything with for example: SLS and silicones. I buy ecological skincare and usually look online where there are lists in order to find out what the ingredients are and what the chemicals actually do”. While others did not prioritize the source of ingredients or were unaware of its significance. These participants primarily focused on the specific ingredients and their potential benefits rather than where they were sourced from. As P. 18 answered: “I don't check the ingredients before buying because the text is too small, and I don't have the patience to read it.”

The group that felt it was important had the majority with thirteen against twelve but out of those there were a range of perspectives, where some considered ingredient sourcing to be very important (P. 5, P. 10, P.12, P.21, P. 23 and P. 25) while others felt that it only mattered with skincare for the facial exterior (P.3, P.6 and P.7).

P. 17 and P. 19, who are in their early thirties said that price was the main determinant in their purchasing decisions, overshadowing the importance of ingredient sourcing. P. 17: “With skincare such as moisturizers that you put on your face I care much more than with makeup. I would rather buy more expensive and qualitative skincare. The price to me is an indicator of quality”.

P. 12 and P. 15 also indicated that external factors, such as recommendations from conscious and knowledgeable individuals, influenced their consideration of ingredient sourcing. P.12: “My sister has influenced me a lot, because she is very conscious and educated, but at times I get lazy too. But most times I think about the ingredients.”

Twelve of the participants (P. 1, P. 2, P. 3, P. 8, P.11, P.13, P.15, P.16, P.18, P. 20, P.21 and P.24) admitted that they don’t “check” or “scan the label” for purchasing decisions regarding ingredient sourcing but some indicated that this was due to their lack of knowledge. As P. 20 answered: “It's not that I don't care about it but I am not always that aware, and it is not always that companies provide the information”. There was a desire to be more informed but that the participants' sensation of resignation towards interpreting the label was much too
overpowering. “Even when you are in a shop and ask the staff they can hardly answer”, as P. 22 viewed it and said that he therefore must place his trust in higher authorities, such as company supervisors or regulations, to ensure product safety and prevent harmful substances from being used.

When enquiring about the interviewees preferences regarding the environmental impact and ethical considerations related to the production of ingredients, the participants expressed varying levels of concern.

Six participants said they were not that concerned (P. 8, P. 11, P. 14, P. 15, P. 17 and P. 20) and six other participants answered that they did not actively prioritize ethical considerations in their shopping (P. 1, P. 4, P. 13, P. 18, P. 19 and P. 24). However, P. 13, P. 4, P. 8 and P. 9 expressed a desire to be more knowledgeable and regarded this as the very barrier in order to make more informed decisions regarding the environmental and ethical aspects of ingredient production. P. 13: “If I knew more about the production, I could make a more informed decision. One should always consider the alternatives available, and if there is an ethically produced alternative, I would choose that, of course.”

P. 12 and P. 6 contemplated the environment at the same time as they emphasized their skin. P. 12: “It has more to do with personal preference such as what is good for my skin, less about other factors. I try not to choose products with microplastics, that affects both me and the environment.”

Eleven participants answered yes (P. 2, P. 3, P. 5, P. 7, P. 9, P. 10, P. 16, P. 11, P. 12, P. 23 and P. 25) and on the one hand stressed the importance of avoiding products associated with unethical production methods, but on the other realized the challenges in knowing which products were truly sustainable. Ethical concerns that were highlighted were contributing to child labor, poor working conditions and animal welfare. P. 19: “I don't think animal testing should be allowed as well as non vegan products. So I would say that those are my preferences.”

Several participants expressed a sense of climate anxiety and a general concern for the environmental impact of various productions. This is what one of the female participants had to say: P. 2: “The production of products can affect the world in many different ways, so of course there is some concern about how companies choose to proceed. The environment is probably the main concern as it is a crisis we are already in where we must take action quickly, and many companies that manufacture various products have a great opportunity to influence this. I prefer to buy from a company that thinks about the environment in the production of their products and makes changes accordingly, such as reducing plastic etc.”

On the question of whether the participants would consider bringing their own containers for refills of skincare products as a means to save packaging waste only P. 13 and P. 17 said that they probably wouldn't, the rest were more or less for trying it.
The majority, sixteen participants, expressed that they were more than willing to do this. They saw it as an environmentally friendly and cost-effective solution that promotes sustainability. P. 4, said: "A hundred percent! because I already refill my own bottles and do not use the original packaging because I have a certain aesthetic in my bathroom, so that would really be helpful."

However, concern about the hygiene aspect when using the same container for refills was mentioned with those who were more skeptical of this offer. P. 10, P. 18 and P. 19 expressed a desire for companies to find solutions that address this concern to ensure a hygienic experience while still reducing packaging waste.

P. 8, P. 12, P. 13, P. 14, P. 15 and P. 18 were not completely opposed but their decision would depend on certain conditions, such as cost reduction or the convenience of carrying containers. While some participants expressed a willingness to do it regardless of the price, others mentioned that cost reduction would motivate them to adopt this practice more consistently.

When the interviewees were asked how they balance considerations with other factors, such as price and convenience, price consistently emerged as a significant factor in the participants' purchasing decisions. Many participants mentioned that price plays a crucial role in their choices where some felt they had to compromise based on their budget. P. 25: “While environmental considerations are important to me, I also take price and convenience into account when making purchasing decisions. I aim to strike a balance by seeking out affordable and convenient options that still meet certain sustainability criteria. It's about finding practical solutions that align with my values without sacrificing too much in terms of cost and convenience.”

Eleven participants (P. 1, P. 2, P. 8, P. 10, P. 11, P. 12, P. 14, P. 16, P. 17, P. 23 and P. 24) emphasized the importance of quality and value when making purchasing decisions and that they were willing to pay more for products they believed to be of higher quality, especially in the case of skincare. P. 16: “I usually buy the somewhat more expensive products because then you know that it is good. Though I try to look for the cheapest place, I never compromise with my standards for something cheaper.”

While price was important, participants also expressed a genuine concern for environmental considerations. They showed a willingness to pay more or prioritize environmentally friendly options when the price difference was reasonable or not too significant. P. 7: “Price is of course a factor that plays a big role, especially when you are a student and don't have good financial conditions, but sometimes I can buy expensive products as long as I know they are of high quality, especially when it comes to skincare. Accessibility is also important, I prefer to buy skincare in stores but online shopping is also an option when the products are not available in stores in my city.”
Convenience and accessibility were also mentioned by some participants, but they were generally not as prominent as price and environmental considerations. P. 25: “While environmental considerations are important to me, I also take price and convenience into account when making purchasing decisions. I aim to strike a balance by seeking out affordable and convenient options that still meet certain sustainability criteria. It's about finding practical solutions that align with my values without sacrificing too much in terms of cost and convenience.”

Further it was mentioned by participants that they had a preference for physical stores, but also acknowledged the convenience of online shopping when products were not readily available.

Brand recognition and trust were also mentioned as factors that influenced their purchasing decisions. They were more willing to pay higher prices for products from brands they were familiar with and had positive experiences with.

4.3. The responsibility of companies and consumers

Apart from four participants (P. 14, P. 17, P. 18 and P. 24) the rest felt very passionately that there should be much more enforced regulations for companies where someone even suggested that there ought to be penalties, should they not comply. P. 9: “I feel like there HAS to be stricter regulations! Companies do the most damage, so therefore they should have very strict regulations. Why should companies have the right to destroy the planet as they please for their own benefit?”

Not only did the participants want stricter regulations for companies regarding sustainability but they wanted to see it throughout the whole supply chain. P. 8 wished to see that companies should be forced to better inform about the product's ingredients in order to improve the customers' odds to make more educated decisions.

Some of the interviewees expressed that companies who prioritize sustainability should be rewarded with e.g tax cuts to make companies want to take more environmentally friendly actions. Whilst others believe that the regulations within the European Union are strict enough. However, the interviewees knowledge on current regulations is unknown to the writers of this thesis and hard to establish.

P. 18 and P. 24 felt that there already are rules, one answered that Sweden has high requirements in this matter but that there is potential for future development, whilst the other said that: P. 24: “Difficult question. There are already rules and someone always has to supervise. I don’t necessarily think that rules are the only and righteous way to go, in general when companies do something good for sustainability there are already benefits for businesses and I think that is a good system.”

P. 14 and P. 17 felt unsure where one wasn't familiar with what the praxis of today entails and therefore felt inept to answer and the other answered: P. 14: “Probably there should be
strict regulations. I don’t know the regulations very well, but they can’t be enough.”

When it comes to the role companies play in raising their customers' awareness of environmental issues, the answers differ between the interviewees. There seems to be two groups of people; the ones who feel strongly that companies should educate their consumers, and the group of people who believe that companies' only goal is profitability, therefore they don’t have any obligation to educate their customers.

Even though the answers differ, it does not necessarily mean that the interviewees disagree. A few of the ones who believe that companies don’t have any obligation to educate their customers, still would like to see more companies take more responsibility “in a perfect world” as P. 3 mentioned. The reason the answers may differ could also have to do with the way they perceive the question.

Many of the ones who believe that companies should educate their consumers seem to think that companies are the ones to blame for the sustainability issues. P: 12: “Since they are the ones affecting us and making us buy the products, they play a big role. They should definitely have a bigger responsibility to educate customers. As a private person I can only do so much, big companies have the power to actually make a huge change.” one interviewee explained.

Close to all interviewees seem to believe that a company's sustainability practices highly impact their reputation and brand image. That it can only benefit the company to be transparent with their CSR practices and result in building trust, fostering customer loyalty, and strengthening brand image.

Some of the interviewees seem to be aware that there is a difference between communicating sustainability and branding a company as sustainable and actually being a sustainable company and takes this into consideration in their answer.

P. 3 expressed that since more and more companies are claiming to be sustainable, it must affect the way people view their brand and their marketing and therefore must be effective. P. 25 expressed: “Neglecting sustainability can harm a company's reputation, leading to consumer backlash and potential long-term damage to its brand.” The answers to these questions all point to sustainability practices impacting brand reputation and brand image more and more in today's society.

The most common answers to the question of what actions consumers can take to encourage cosmetic companies to prioritize sustainability seems to be to avoid brands that do not prioritize a sustainable practice. In order to do this most of the participants felt that consumers themselves could support the cosmetic companies that prioritize sustainability, “vote with the wallet” but also to first and foremost become educated themselves in order to make these more informed decisions. As P. 2, put it: “It is important that consumers choose to buy from companies that clearly show adaptation to sustainability and boycott the companies that test on animals or similar. If you see a drastic increase in consumption by companies that protect the environment and animals, for example, other cosmetics companies
will take measures themselves in order to increase consumption. This is a chain reaction that benefits all parties in the end.”

Secondly the most common response was suggested to simply stop buying from “bad” companies and boycott their products. Many also mentioned making your voice heard with the help of social media, leaving online reviews for other consumers to see and contacting the company in different ways.

There are some interviewees that express that they do not know how to take action and some who disclosed that they did not think it should be to the customers to take action, but rather that it is up to the companies, or governments to set stricter regulations as well as rewards. P. 4 answered: “Honestly, I don’t think it’s as easy as just stop buying certain products, because there is such a wide range of products and it is very hard to do all the research to find the most environmentally friendly ones. So in the end you might just end up buying what you have to anyway… I don’t think it is that much in the customers hands, but the more people as a whole start buying into sustainability, the more popular it becomes and companies see the direction the market is moving towards.”

On the question if the participants had noticed any company that is doing a good job of communicating their sustainability practices to consumers, twelve interviewees mentioned The Body Shop (P. 3, P. 4, P. 5, P. 6, P. 11, P. 12, P. 14, P. 15, P. 18, P. 19, P. 24 and P. 25). How this company manages to advocate for the rights of animals as well as economically vulnerable countries. One of the male participants admitted that he wasn't a customer but nevertheless he described that it is the feeling you get from visiting their stores and from their market communication. One of the interviewees expressed: P. 3: “They care a lot about it, and employees often inform customers about where the products come from, how they are manufactured, and why their products can be better."

Another frequently mentioned company was Lush Cosmetics, for never failing to promote their ethical sourcing, cruelty free products, and minimal packaging, through social media, their website as well as in their in-store displays. P. 9 also mentioned that customers can hand in your empty containers to be reused, and that you’ll get a new product for free if you hand in a certain amount of packages, which encourages customers not to throw away the packaging as well as making use of them for new products.

Both The Body Shop and Lush seem to give the interviewees a feeling of sustainability through much of the shopping experience. Where both companies are perceived as being very clear in their communication through their products and advertising as well as in their actions, both offering customers recycling of the empty plastic packages. Other companies that were mentioned were Hjärligt and Dove.
5. ANALYSIS CHAPTER

In this chapter, the authors will examine the empirical findings obtained through primary data collection and analyze them in relation to the existing literature. By drawing connections between the findings and the literature review, the authors aim to provide a comprehensive analysis. The analysis will not only explore the empirical findings but also highlight any similarities and differences between these findings and the existing body of literature. By following the same structure as presented in the empirical findings, the authors maintain consistency and facilitate a clear understanding of the relationships between the two.

5.1 Ethical perspective in skincare

One of the major ethical issues related to cosmetics is that of animal rights (Chun 2016). On the topic of cruelty-free being important for the participants or not, most responded that it was however it was only one person who actively looked for these products. A lot of the ones who said that they would prefer cruelty-free also added that they hardly knew which companies are and aren’t and that they forget about this aspect when they shop for products. P. 9: “Unfortunately I sometimes completely forget about this when I shop. I only think about the product itself and not so much on the production, therefore I probably buy products that aren’t cruelty free”. There were those who expressed that companies should promote this more clearly then it would be a differentiator. As explained by Hsu, Chang and Yansritakul (2016) the benefits with green products must be clearly defined on a label so that consumers understand why they may be more expensive.

P. 4 answered that she could go for a cruelty-free option but she felt that the options for this category lacked in prestanda and the quality that she was used to and wanted. This is precisely what Bom et al. (2019) pointed out that performance and the ingredients of green products often clash with the consumers expectations since they are used to non-green alternatives with chemicals that can be tricky to replace. This presents the biggest challenge for cosmetic companies of green products since consumers are not willing to compromise the efficacy and aesthetics that they are used to. This is why eco-innovation as well as sustainable innovation is crucial for companies to invest in since synthetics can potentially both be more potent, longer lasting and cheaper to manufacture (Bom et al. 2019). Just like Younis et al. (2021) found that using magnesium oxide nanoparticles (MgONps) were a more gentler way to process the fragile components of rose oil and thereby improving both the scent and quality of the oil.

5.2 Ingredients - natural versus synthetic

Out of twenty five participants, six people answered that it did not matter to them, the rest of the participants picked the natural flowers over the synthesized. The most common motivations to this choice was that it felt better and safer for their skin. This rhymes well with Liobikien and Bernatoniene (2017) that found that the health factor was the most important
driver influencing attitude and purchase decision towards organic personal care products. As explained by Rádis-Baptista et al. (2023) who exposes the risk with repetitive usage of synthetics based on petroleum which can be found in cheaper cleaning, cosmetics and skincare products. The fear of being exposed to dangerous chemicals in hygiene and skincare products is therefore not irrational and has sparked movements such as the free-of trend where consumers choose these products made without chemicals and artificial components (Hansen, Risborg and Steen 2012). As P. 23 mentioned she always goes through lists of ingredients published online before buying a new shampoo though she missed some sort of online network where consumers can share information about brands and their ingredients. P. 23: “When you are on your own it is easy to get lazy instead of checking the facts.”

Only one person (P. 18) mentioned that they would pick the real flowers because she felt it would be the most environmentally-friendly option. It transpires that the participants with the exception P. 18 as well as P. 8 and P. 22 who wavered in their decision, did not contemplate the aspect of sustainability when choosing ingredients. As demonstrated by Bom et al. (2019) with the sassafras trees in Asia being cut down for the sheer purpose of their roots, that a synthetic can make a huge difference for sustainability. Therefore each ingredient must be evaluated by its uniqueness and circumstances (Bom et al. 2019). Only P. 22 reflected briefly about this concern, that it could have some kind of repercussion on the environment when sourcing these flowers.

Drawing from Bom et al (2019) it is interesting to compare this question of ingredient sourcing with whether or not the participants associate natural products with sustainability. What transpired was that even though the majority did, there were a few who felt skeptical to connect those parameters. P. 25 who previously had answered that she would choose the real flowers expressed that even though natural products have the potential to be sustainable it depends on the companies overall practices.

P. 23 answered that she didn’t mind natural or synthetic, either one would suffice as long as she enjoyed the scent. However, on the question of natural being the same as sustainable she said not necessarily since natural flowers in a field could be sprayed with pesticide and therefore not qualify as sustainable.

Even though most consumers instinctively go by the notion that what grows in nature would equal sustainability there are some that are starting to contemplate the complexity of sustainability. Something that at first seems as the better option can turn out to be worse from a different perspective as asserted by Glew and Lovett (2014) when they evaluated the carbon footprint of shea butter, thought to be much better than other vegetable oils and Sánchez-Quezada et al. (2021) who assessed the sustainability problem with toxic byproducts from the avocado fruit.

The whole product cycle needs to be assessed in order to realize these problems in order to come to terms with them. Sometimes the solution can be quite simple. In order to diminish the waste from the avocado fruits that has become a problem with increased consumption
Sánchez-Quezada et al. (2021) suggested to simply look at the exterior of the fruit in order to
tell the opportune ripening stage for its usage within each industry. At other times it is more
complicated like with Glew and Lovetts (2014) case, they had different solutions for
decreasing the emissions from sheaproduction but then it could be devastating for the
populations that harvests and processes the shea nuts, disrupting their culture and livelihood.

This is what Chun (2016) meant by advising companies to assess which ethic quality it is that
their target group treasures the most. Even the minority that was reflecting about the
complexity of sustainability still choose natural ingredients over synthesized. Conclusively,
the participants don’t think about the ingredients in skincare and cosmetic products in relation
to sustainability. They care about the products being safe and nurturing for them to use and
that the products appeal to their olfactory sense.

5. 3. Ethical Production

When the candidates were asked about the importance of the ingredients source, it transpired
that most did not consider it. However many expressed that this was due to that they felt inapt
to interpret the label. This is in accordance with Bom et al. (2019) saying that it is difficult for
consumers to know exactly what the formulas contain since it often refers to a chemical
group. Furthermore as mentioned by Rádis-Baptista et al. (2023) these groups are referred to
a category such as “perfume” though it could comprise from dozens to hundreds of
undisclosed chemicals which the consumer would know nothing about. No wonder this
makes consumers feel disheartened and wind up buying what they believe to be the best for
them.

As previously stated by Grădinaru et al. (2022) and Liobikien & Bernatoniene (2017) this is a
complex product category, with multifunctioning roles. Some participants felt that the
importance of ingredients varied by usage area like P. 2 said: “If it is something I am going to
eat or apply to my face, for example, I am more careful about what the product contains.
Beyond that, I don’t usually check so carefully.” This concern for the face in particular
seemed to be more important to the candidates. P. 17: “With skincare such as moisturizers
that you put on your face I care much more than with makeup. With makeup I don’t care as
much.”

Regarding concerns and or preferences of production the majority answered that they had
general concern for the environment, in relation to the production they mentioned issues such
as it not being fair-trade, involving child labour, animal testing and concern about finding
out later on about having exposed oneself to something toxic.
Many of those who answered that they did not actively think about either aspect in their
evaluation of products also said that this was probably because they did not have enough
knowledge of the area. As P. 24 answered: “I don’t search for information myself, however if
I am aware or hear something bad about a brand it stays with me and I choose not to buy it.”
A bad corporate reputation spreads even more rapidly these days through the online sphere
(Grădinaru et al. 2022) and as explained by Chun (2016) this adds to the consumer's dis-identification process with brands and could potentially lead to boycotting of products.

5.4 Green price and ethical standards.

When it came to price and availability the majority of the participants did mention that the price was the main factor in their purchasing decisions whilst availability was not a huge factor.

P. 19: “In today's economy I would say that price unfortunately is the biggest factor. With a war going on, prices have gone up and some might not afford this. So today I would say that there isn't much balance between the environment, price and convenience, because price is the biggest factor.”. This is also confirmed by Liobikien & Bernatoniene (2017), who mention that with economic crises, consumers of green cosmetics get more price-sensitive.

Just the way Hsu, Chang and Yansritakul (2016) indicated that price is an informational cue In consumers' assessments of product alternatives, several participants associated a higher price with a higher quality. P. 17: “With skincare I opt to buy more expensive and better products. When it is more expensive I think it must be the best alternative.”

Bulut, et al. (2022), Chalimatuz et al. (2017), Chun (2016) and Grădinaru et al. (2022) claims that consumers are willing to pay more for a brand which is perceived to be ethical and this was also a pattern with the participants. There were also those who expressed a willingness to pay more knowing that the brand was vegan or if the company worked ethically, or sustainably. P. 6: “It depends on the price. If there is a huge difference I might go for the cheaper option, but if the difference is not too big, I would go for the environmentally friendly option.” This is also where strategies such as cause campaigning can play a major part. As P. 22 said: “If a brand wins me over, then I would be willing to pay more.” This is in accordance with Mendons et al. (2019) references to trust being the leveraging emotion when buying more expensive products, that can trigger the consumers emotional benefits.

There were those who said that they would not compromise their standards for something cheaper. P. 21: “It's important to me to find a balance between environmental considerations, price, and convenience. I try to choose products that align with my values by opting for environmentally friendly options when they are reasonably priced and easily accessible.” This quote is in tune with Dai and Pelton (2018) who claim that consumer patronage is both functional and reflective of self-expression and because of this they will always seek congruence between themselves and brands. Therefore they prefer products that match their own self-image or ideal self-image (Dai & Pelton 2018).

5.5 The role of companies

On the question of whether these companies should have more regulations it was almost unanimously a yes, with pressure of jurisdictional enforcements and penalties. Judging by
this, people feel that there is much more that companies can do even if it so happens that many brands in this particular industry are leading by example when it comes to working ethically as suggested by Grădinaru et al. (2022). Plastic was brought up as P. 22 mentioned that it is horrendous the amounts of single-use plastic that companies still use.

Following Drobac et al. (2020) that plastic needs to be replaced due to consumers' demand particularly with European consumers. As well as the findings from a study done by Deloitte in 2020 (Bulut, et al. 2022), where the respondents saw that the elimination of single-use plastic was the most obvious choice for promoting sustainability, the participants of this thesis seemed very positive and open to this option. Out of the few who were more reserved, hygiene as well as the actual bringing and remembering to bring the containers were given as reasons to why they would not consider it. However, most of these skeptics would probably reconsider it if it was cheaper. P. 12: “Depends on the price I think, because if it's not cheaper I would probably forget to bring my own bottle most times.” Even one person who at first was strictly opposed to following this procedure mentioned that if it involved a cost reduction, she would have done it.

On the topic of whether or not companies have a role to play in raising their customers' awareness of environmental issues, most participants felt that companies owe it to consumers to take responsibility. After all they are the ones causing the most problems with their productions and because they have the power. This is in accordance with Singh et al. (2022) findings that CSR from companies is today expected and in some places it is even mandatory practice. P. 5, P. 12 and P. 25 also motivated how companies can work proactively in this matter by sharing information and educating their consumers on how to adopt eco-friendly practices, such as recycling and upcycling packaging and thereby empower them to make more informed choices.

When it came to what consumers can do in order to encourage companies to work sustainably Most answered that they could educate themselves better in order to make informed decisions and also to boycott products from unethical brands. This supports Alyahya et al. (2023) that when businesses work charitably this enables a psychological contract between customers and companies in their business exchange.

P. 23 answered that consumers must vote with their wallets and buy things that are branded as sustainable, at the same time the consumer must also look up if it is accurate or just greenwashing (De Jong, Harkink and Barth, 2018).

The participants also felt that if a brand communicates its green practices this can only benefit their reputation and therefore evoke trust and loyalty in consumers. Which is testified by Kurnia, Narda & Sitio (2022) and by Chalimatuz et al. (2017) that it can help to establishing a positive brand image and Mendon et al. (2019) how cause-related marketing can lead to brand love (Mendon et al. 2019). The one company that was acknowledged the most by the participants when it came to mention any brand who successfully communicates their CSR practice, was The Body Shop.
Although there could potentially be differences in perspective of sustainability from generation to generation, there were no significant differences in the answers based on the age of the interviewees.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The authors will revisit the research objectives and summarize the main findings obtained throughout the study, as well as critically examine the implications of these findings and discuss their broader significance in the context of the field. Furthermore, they will address the limitations of our research, providing a transparent and honest assessment of the study's boundaries. Finally, they will conclude recommendations for further research and potential practical applications that stem from our research insights.

6.1 Answering the research question

With the Research Questions of this thesis being “How do consumers of the cosmetic industry value sustainability over natural ingredients, and how does it affect their buying decisions?”, this report has shown that skincare consumers do confuse natural products as sustainable, even if that is not always the case. This in turn affects their buying decisions since they believe that the products are sustainable if they are branded “natural”. Since the definition of concepts such as natural, green and organic only refer to the ingredients originating source or lack of synthetic substances. This means that it does not take into consideration the three levels of the triple bottom line model and how they are impacted during a product's life cycle.

It is therefore important to note that not all products labeled as "natural" align with sustainable practices. While natural ingredients can have their merits, the sustainable aspect encompasses a broader set of considerations, including ethical sourcing, production methods, packaging, and overall environmental impact. By assuming that natural products are automatically sustainable, consumers may inadvertently overlook other crucial factors when making their purchasing decisions.

This thesis highlights the need for consumer education and awareness to bridge the gap between natural and sustainable skincare products. By providing accurate information and transparent labeling, consumers can make more informed choices that align with their values and contribute to a more sustainable cosmetic industry.

6.2 Theoretical implications

This specific topic is still largely unexplored. Although there is plenty of research on topics such as sustainability, consumer behavior, green marketing and branding etc on their own, the angle of this thesis is fairly unique. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings of this thesis
contribute knowledge in the complex topic of sustainability versus natural ingredients and how skin care consumers resonate.

The topic addressed in this thesis holds considerable potential for further exploration. While there exists a significant body of research on various subjects such as sustainability, consumer behavior, green marketing, and branding individually, the specific angle taken in this thesis brings a unique perspective to the discourse. The examination of the interplay between sustainability and natural ingredients in the context of skincare consumers remains relatively underexplored.

By exploring this uncharted territory, the thesis fills a gap in existing literature and offers fresh insights. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings presented in this thesis contribute to the understanding of the intricate dynamics surrounding sustainability and natural ingredients, particularly within the realm of skincare consumption. The exploration of how these factors resonate with skincare consumers unveils new layers of knowledge in this complex and evolving field.

Overall, the unique perspective and contribution of this thesis lie in bridging the gap between sustainability and natural ingredients within the skincare context. By exploring this relatively unexplored territory, the research adds valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge and opens avenues for further exploration and debate.

6.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this thesis may help companies increase awareness of the behavior of consumers related to this issue. By taking advantage of the knowledge that this thesis contributes, companies will be able to be early in adapting the necessary changes that will follow as consumers get more sustainably conscious, as environmental and ethical issues advance.

Although, there might be companies that chose the other track; taking the fact that consumers confuse the term natural as sustainable to their advantage and try to deceive customers. That might work and be effective for the company short term. However, with more companies being accused of greenwashing, and the negative effects that might follow from that, the authors of this thesis would suggest to instead be transparent and clear, which would have positive effects for the brand long term.

6.4 Social, ethical and sustainable implications
The present thesis explores the social, ethical, and environmental implications linked to these products. The objective was to offer an in-depth understanding of their importance by taking into account the wider context and impact.

A crucial aspect of the thesis centered on the evaluation of consumer perception regarding natural and sustainable skincare products. The objective of the thesis is to comprehend the preferences, incentives, and perspectives of individuals in regards to selecting these products as opposed to traditional options. By examining consumer behavior and decision-making processes, the authors aimed to uncover the factors that influence their choices and the extent to which environmental considerations play a role.

In general, the thesis explores the social, ethical, and sustainable consequences of utilizing natural and sustainable commodities in the realm of skincare, in association with an awareness of consumer attitudes, enhances the comprehension of this subject matter. The insights offered by this can prove to be of immense value in driving positive changes in the industry, steering consumer choices, and fostering responsible and sustainable practices.

6.5 Limitations

This study has evidently been limited in time as well as in resources to be able to dive deeper into this issue and study the topic in a bigger context. This has been identified as the biggest limitation that could affect the quality of the thesis as well as the possibility to efficiently answer the research questions.

Another limitation of this qualitative study, that is connected to the limited time and resources, is that we interviewed consumers and did not take as much consideration to the perspective of companies. However, with our main focus being consumer behavior, this is not something that has affected the study to a high degree.

6.6 Suggestions for future research

As stated above, it is clear that consumers do confuse natural ingredients in skincare as a sustainable alternative, even though that does not have to be the case. Because of the current environmental issues, more research is needed within this specific topic. The authors of this thesis suggest that future research be focused on whether consumers are willing to choose the option that is better ethically and for the environment (through sustainable ingredients in skincare) over personal benefits (as in natural products). Our prediction is that consumers are not going to use less skincare products, therefore it is crucial that new innovative sustainable alternatives are given more attention.
Another suggestion for future research is to explore this topic in relation to any demographic differences. The attitude and consumer behavior regarding natural versus sustainable ingredients could differ generationally, based on age, geographically etc. If the research would show that there are significant differences, it would be important for companies to consider this in any business strategy related to this issue.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Operationalization

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<td>Examining consumer behavior in relation to environmental considerations in a thesis helps us understand the drivers and barriers to sustainable consumption and advances our knowledge of how individuals contribute to or mitigate environmental issues through their choices.</td>
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Appendix B - Interview guide - English version

The questions included in the appendix are designed to assist the authors during the semi-structured interviews.

Interview Guide

1. A cosmetics company is known to NOT be cruelty free, would you still purchase their products?

2. If you get to choose a product that contains scent from real flowers or the same scent though it is synthetic created in a lab, which one do you choose?

3. How important is the source of the ingredients in your purchasing decisions?

4. Do you have any concerns or preferences regarding the environmental impact or ethical considerations related to the production of these ingredients?

5. If a store offered you the option of bringing your own container in order for it to be refilled with their skin care products, would you bring this in order to save package waste?

6. Do you think there should be stricter regulations for companies when it comes to sustainability practices?

7. How do you balance environmental considerations with other factors, such as price and convenience, when making purchasing decisions?

8. In what way would you say that cosmetics companies have a role to play in raising their customers' awareness of environmental issues.
9. How do you think a company's sustainability practices impact their reputation and brand image?

10. What actions do you think consumers can take to encourage cosmetic companies to prioritize sustainability?

11. Have you noticed any beauty company that is doing a good job of communicating their sustainability practices to consumers?

12. Do you associate natural products as sustainable products?

Appendix C - Interview guide - Swedish version

Frågorna som ingår i bilagan är utformade för att hjälpa författarna under de semistrukturerade intervjuerna.

1. Om du vet att ett kosmetiskt företag testar sina produkter på djur, skulle du fortfarande köpa deras produkter?

2. Om du får välja en produkt som innehåller doft från riktiga blommor eller samma doft fast den är syntetisk skapad i ett labb, vilken väljer du?

3. Hur viktigt är ingredienserna/innehållet i en produkt när du tar ett köpbeslut?

4. Har du några preferenser eller någon oro kring miljöpåverkan eller etiska aspekter kopplade till produktionen av dessa produkter?

5. Om en butik erbjöd dig alternativet att ta med din egna flaska för att få det påfyllt inom skincare, skulle du fortfarande ta med det för att spara på förpacknings-avfall?

6. Tycker du det borde finnas striktare regelverk för företag när det kommer till hållbarhetspraxis?

7. När du tar ett köpbeslut, hur stor påverkan har pris och tillgång till ditt val?

8. På vilket sätt skulle du säga att kosmetikaföretag har en roll att spela när det gäller att öka kundernas medvetenhet om miljöfrågor?

9. Hur tror du att ett företags hållbarhetspraxis påverkar deras rykte och varumärkesbild?
10. Vilka åtgärder tror du att konsumenterna kan vidta för att uppmuntra kosmetikaföretag att prioritera hållbarhet?

11. Har du lagt märke till ett visst kosmetikaföretag som gör ett bra jobb med att kommunicera deras hållbarhetspraxis till sina kunder?

12. Associerar du naturliga produkter till ett mer hållbart alternativ?

Appendix D - Authors Individual Contribution - Fjona Ljutviu

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### Appendix E - Authors Individual Contribution - Zana Sekiraca

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Appendix F - Authors Individual Contribution - Erika Torell

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