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Consumers' Intention to Purchase Green Skincare Products: Evidence from China

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Abstract: This study examines factors affecting customers' intention to purchase green skincare products in China to provide some managerial recommendations to existing companies. The theory of planned behavior was applied to formulate our research hypotheses and establish our proposed model. A total of 121 Chinese consumers responded to a survey we conducted online. Process and structural equation modeling are also employed to test the moderation effect (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). We find that consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control significantly affect their purchase intention. Moreover, the country of origin and price sensitivity has a moderation effect on the above relationships. The above findings can help green skincare companies to understand customer purchase behaviors in these modern times. This study contributes to the literature by addressing the gap in previous research on green skincare products in Mainland China. The respondents comprise Chinese university students who will become the main customers in the next few years. This study provides novel findings and inspires skincare companies to increase customer purchase intention by changing their strategy based on its influencing factors.

Keywords: country of origin, customer purchase behavior, green skincare products, price sensitivity, and theory of planned behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Prior studies stated that attention to appearance affects consumers' purchase behaviors or choice of make-up (Debevec et al., 1986; Bloch & Richins, 1992; Reingen & Kernan, 1993; Miller & Cox, 1982). Pudaruth et al. (2015) reported that women believe that eco-friendly cosmetics and skincare products can benefit their appearance while reducing health risks, which leads to the growing demand for these products. Chin et al. (2018) also

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showed that usage experience, green information, brand image, sales representative, and social influences affect customer purchase behavior toward green skincare products.

Chinese research on the green skincare market from a business perspective remains lacking. Most studies in this field focus on chemistry or biology about how to make a green skincare product. China has the biggest potential green skincare market in the world (Ma et al., 2018; Lu, 2019; Crini et al., 2020). Zhou et al. (2019) found that Chinese customers are interested in organic products, and the demand for these products will have a sharp but steady increase. However, the interest of Chinese customers does not extend to the skincare industry. Their intention to purchase green skincare products is lower than traditional cosmetics because of the high price and few choices (Lin et al., 2018; Chen & Jin, 2019; Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019; Zhang & Dong, 2020). Thus, transferring customers' interests to actual purchase behavior in green skincare products is an urgent problem that needs to be solved.

Based on the above discussion, the current research has two main objectives. First, we aim to determine the factors that affect Chinese customers' intention to purchase eco-friendly skincare products. Second, we aim to provide managerial suggestions to encourage purchasing behavior toward eco-friendly skincare products among female Chinese customers.

The above research objectives are significantly relevant to Mainland China. China has a gross domestic product of $13,608,151.86, and it remains the most populated country in the world (World Bank, 2018). It also has the biggest potential cosmetics market (Lu, 2019). Chen & Jin (2019) reported that the Chinese skincare and cosmetic product industry earned a sales revenue of 358.7 billion RMB in 2018. Among them, the market share of green skincare products has increased in recent years. Chen & Jin (2019) predicted that organic skincare products would reach 110 billion RMB ($15.98 billion) worth of sales in 2020. A survey also showed that the demand for organic cosmetics is increasing in China (Lu, 2019). Inspired by Chin's research (2018) in Indonesia, investigating further the Chinese green skincare market is critical for its growth.

Thus, the current study investigates the relationships between experiment variables and determines whether the country of origin (COO) and price sensitivity moderate these relationships. To do so, we apply the theory of planned behavior to construct our proposed model. We conduct an online survey to collect data, which we analyze on SPSS. Process and structural equation modeling are also employed to test the moderation effect (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). We find that customers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control have a significant relationship with their purchase intention. COO and price sensitivity can strengthen these effects when they are low rather than high. Surprisingly, the association between attitude and customer purchase intention moderated by price sensitivity is not significant. This finding is unique to this study, which contradicts those of previous research.

This study contributes to the literature as follows. This study fills the research gap on the green skincare market and customer behavior in Mainland China. It changes the norm wherein most Chinese studies on green skincare products focus on chemical and biological perspectives. By doing so, this study will greatly benefit Chinese skincare companies. We also consider the moderating effect of COO on the relationship between consumers' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control and their purchase intention. We specify green skincare products from the whole green product market by considering the price sensitivity as the variables. Finally, our findings can encourage local companies to build a good reputation to increase customer attitude toward green skincare products, thereby facilitating their purchase behaviors. An honest service strategy like showing the product information to customers and emphasizing the difference between green products and non-green products may increase their willingness to pay for extra and benefit their purchase behaviors.

METHODS

The sampling population comprised Chinese university students with ages ranging from 18 to 24 years. In this study, university students were considered the main participants for two reasons. First, young students are future customers, and external factors can easily influence them. Second, people who have a high educational background tend to accept the concept of sustainability (Hsu et al., 2017). Vermeir & Verbeke (2008) predicted that if the respondents have an awareness of sustainability, their attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, COO, price sensitivity, and behavior for sustainable products would be imaginary, and the research findings would be highly hypothetical.

We surveyed by posting our questionnaire online. A total of 203 questionnaires were collected. After deleting incomplete responses, 121 remained and used as the final sample. Table 1 shows the demographic result. The majority of the respondents were female (66.5%) and aged more than 22 years (48.77%). Most respondents reported a monthly income of more than 3000 RMB (37.93%) and 1000–2000 RMB (22.66%).

Table 1 Demographic Result

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	68	33.5%
Female	135	66.5%
Age		
≤18	20	9.85%
19	17	8.37%
20	27	13.3%
21	40	19.7%
≥22	99	48.77%
Income (RMB)		
<1000	38	18.72%
1000–2000	46	22.66%
2001–3000	42	20.69%
>3000	77	37.93%

The following items on the questionnaire pertained to the research constructs used in this study: AT - attitude; SN - subjective norms; PBC - perceived behavioral control; COO – the country of origin; PS - price sensitivity; PI - purchase intention. The constructs of AT, SN, PBC, COO, PS, and PI had at least two questions each. The attitude was evaluated using scale items adapted from Chin et al. (2018). Sample items were "For me, using the green skincare is wise" and "For me, using the green skincare is favorable/enjoyable." Subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, COO, and price sensitivity were measured using the question adapted from Trafimow (2000), Han et al. (2010), Glass et al. (1981), and Laroche et al. (2001), respectively. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree").

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We determined Cronbach's alpha to verify the reliability of the items used in this study. Cronbach's alpha is a numerical coefficient of reliability (Cronbach, 1951). If this number is greater than 0.70 (0.77–0.89) in each construct, the survey instrument has high reliability. The results showed that all variables had high reliability ranging from 0.704 to 0.776, as shown in Table 2. Thus, no items were deleted as they were all within the acceptable range.

Table 2 Test of Reliability

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Attitude	3	0.746
Subjective norms	3	0.716
Perceived behavioral control	3	0.704
COO	4	0.776
Price sensitivity	3	0.754
Purchase intention	4	0.702

To test the validity, we used variance inflation factors (VIF) to detect multicollinearity. VIF measure the extent to which multicollinearity has increased the variance of an estimated coefficient. The generally acceptable value of VIF is smaller than 10. The rule of thumb is that VIF > 4 corresponds to the tolerance value of 0.25 (1/0.25 = 4). A product of VIF and tolerance around 1 indicates that the study is in good shape. Table 3 shows that multicollinearity does not exist in this study. VIF ranges from 1.271 with a tolerance of 0.618 to 1.800 with a tolerance value of 0.769.

Table 3 Test of Validity

		Tolerance		VIF	
Variables	No. of questions	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest
Attitude (AT)	3	0.556	0.769	1.301	1.800
Subjective norms (SN)	3	0.618	0.787	1.271	1.618
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	3	0.643	0.784	1.275	1.556

The correlation test determines the relationship among the independent, moderating, and dependent variables. Attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control achieved a value range of (r = 0.760, p = < 0.01), (r = 0.640, $p \leq 0.01$), and (r = 0.720, $p \leq 0.01$), respectively, as shown in Table 4. Thus, all independent variables had a significant effect on purchase intention. COO as a moderator had a significant correlation with purchase intention (r = 0.640, $p \leq 0.01$) and all independent variables, i.e., attitude (r = 0.562, $p \leq 0.01$), subjective norm (r = 0.504, $p \leq 0.01$), and perceived behavioral control (r = 0.608, $p \leq 0.01$). Similarly, price sensitivity as a moderator had a significant correlation with purchase intention (r = 0.725, $p \leq 0.01$) and all independent

variables, i.e., attitude ($r = 0.723$, $p \leq 0.01$), subjective norm ($r = 0.565$, $p \leq 0.01$), and perceived behavioral control ($r = 0.655$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Table 4 Correlation Test

	AT	SN	PBC	COO	PS	PI
Attitude (AT)	1	0.576**	0.673**	562**	0.723**	0.760**
	—	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Subjective norms (SN)	0.576**	1	0.531**	0.504**	0.565**	0.640**
	0.000	—	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	0.673**	0.531**	1	0.608**	0.655**	0.720**
	0.000	0.000	—	0.000	0.000	0.000
Country of origin (COO)	0.562**	0.504**	0.608**	1	0.565**	0.640**
	0.000	0.000	0.000	—	0.000	0.000
Price sensitivity (PS)	0.723**	0.565**	0.655**	0.565**	1	0.725**
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	—	0.000
Purchase intention (PI)	0.760**	0.640**	0.720**	0.640**	0.725**	1
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	—

Note: ** means that correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

The following structural equations indicate the structure of the full model:

$$P = \beta_1 A + \beta_2 SN + \beta_3 PBC + \beta_4 COO + \beta_5 A \times COO + \beta_6 SN \times COO + \beta_7 PBC \times COO + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

$$P = \beta_1 A + \beta_2 SN + \beta_3 PBC + \beta_4 PS + \beta_5 A \times PS + \beta_6 SN \times PS + \beta_7 PBC \times PS + \varepsilon, \quad (2)$$

where P: Purchase intention; A: Attitude; SN: Subjective norm; PBC: Perceived behavioral control; COO: Country of origin; PS: Price sensitivity.

Attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were predictors of purchase intention. Moreover, COO and price sensitivity moderated the relationships between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control and purchase intention. Thus, COO was included in Equation (1), and price sensitivity was included in Equation (2). In these two equations, the significance of the coefficients of $\beta 1$, $\beta 2$, $\beta 3$, and $\beta 4$ represents the direct effects of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, COO, and price sensitivity on purchase intention. The significance of the coefficients of $\beta 4$, $\beta 5$, and $\beta 6$ represents the moderating effects of COO and price sensitivity on the relationships between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control and purchase intention.

Process Macro was used as a statistical moderation analysis in SPSS to estimate the path coefficients using multiple regression for the continuous outcome (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). It can provide insight into the direct and indirect effects of independent variables on the dependent variable through moderators. In this study, this method analyzes the direct effect of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on customers' intention to purchase green skincare products through the moderation of COO and price sensitivity.

For the moderation analysis results, simple moderation was examined using "Model 1" in Process (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). Table 5 shows the results. COO and price sensitivity were entered into the Process Macro as moderators. The details required in the Process Macro is 5000 basis-corrected bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test

Hypotheses 4 and 5. Specifically, we determined if customers' intention to purchase green skincare products is a function of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control and whether COO and price sensitivity moderate the above relationships.

The moderation effect of COO on the relationships between attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control and purchase intention was significantly negative (SE = 0.0370, $p < 0.1$; SE = 0.0378, $p < 0.01$; SE = 0.0423, $p < 0.01$), as shown in Table 5. Thus, the relationships between attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control and purchase intention were stronger when COO was low. The direct effect of COO on purchase intention was significant (SE = 0.0594, $p < 0.01$). This result proved that the COO was a moderator of this TPB model.

By contrast, the moderation effect of price sensitivity on the relationships between subjective norm and perceived behavioral control and purchase intention was significantly positive (SE = 0.0375, $p < 0.1$; SE = 0.0356, $p < 0.01$; SE = 0.0373, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the relationships between subjective norm and perceived behavioral control and purchase intention were stronger when COO was low. The direct effect of price sensitivity on purchase intention was significant (SE = 0.0665, $p < 0.01$). This result proved that the COO was the moderator of this TPB model. However, the interaction between attitude and purchase intention moderated by price sensitivity was not significant. The interaction between antecedents of price sensitivity accounted for an insignificant amount of variance in purchase intention, indicating that price sensitivity did not strengthen the direct effect of attitude on purchase intention of eco-friendly skincare products.

Table 5 Moderated Regression Result

		Interaction between IV x Mov					
Variables	**Overall model**	**Coefficient**	**SE**	***T***	***p***	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Country of origin (COO)							
Attitude (AT)	$R^2 = 0.65$; $F = 73.65$, $p < 0.01$	−0.0672	0.0370	−1.8165	0.0718	−0.1405	0.0061
Subjective norms (SN)	$R^2 = 0.58$; $F = 54.80$, $p < 0.01$	−0.1264	0.0378	−3.3475	0.0011	−0.2012	−0.0516
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	$R^2 = 0.61$; $F = 60.72$, $p < 0.01$	−0.1177	0.0423	−2.7801	0.0063	−0.2015	−0.0338
Purchase intention (PI)		0.2783	0.0594	4.6826	0.0000	0.1606	0.3960
Price sensibility (PS)							
Attitude (AT)	$R^2 = 0.65$; $F = 71.11$, $p < 0.01$	−0.0391	0.0375	−1.0439	0.2987	−0.1133	0.0351
Subjective norms (SN)	$R^2 = 0.65$; $F = 72.52$, $p < 0.01$	−0.1410	0.0356	−3.9599	0.0001	−0.2115	−0.0705
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	$R^2 = 0.64$; $F = 69.20$, $p < 0.01$	−0.0629	0.0373	−1.6847	0.0947	−0.1368	0.0110
Purchase intention (PI)		0.3070	0.0665	4.6182	0.0000	0.1753	0.4386

This study was guided by previous research, strengthening the reliability of the result that the TPB model work under the moderation of COO and price sensitivity. Thus, these moderators are valid to measure the influencing factors of customer purchase intention. However, future works should improve them (Table 6). Table 4 shows that all variables have significantly positive relationships, supporting Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. The moderation analysis results also show three things: First, the effect of attitude on purchase intention is significant, and this relationship is strong when COO is low, supporting Hypothesis 4(a). Second, the effect of subjective norm on purchase intention is significant, and this relationship is strong when COO and price sensitivity are low,

supporting Hypotheses 4(b) and 5(b). Third, the effect of perceived behavior control on purchase intention is significant, and this relationship is strong when COO and price sensitivity are low, supporting Hypotheses 4(c) and 5(c). However, Table 5 also shows that the moderating effect of price sensitivity on the relationship between attitude and purchase intention is insignificant, rejecting Hypothesis 5(a).

Table 6 Hypothesis Expected Result

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Consumers' attitude positively affects their purchase intention.	Significant
H2: Consumers' subjective norms positively affect their purchase intention.	Significant
H3: Consumers' perceived behavioral control positively affects purchase intention.	Significant
H4(a): The positive relationship between consumers' attitude and purchase intention is more pronounced with lower than higher COO.	Significant
H4(b): The positive relationship between consumers' subjective norms and purchase intention is more pronounced with lower than higher COO.	Significant
H4(c): The positive relationship between consumers' perceived behavioral control and purchase intention is more pronounced with lower than higher COO.	Significant
H5(a): The positive relationship between consumers' attitude and purchase intention is more pronounced with lower than higher price sensitivity.	Insignificant
H5(b): The positive relationship between consumers' subjective norms and purchase intention is more pronounced with lower than higher price sensitivity.	Significant
H5(c): The positive relationship between consumers' perceived behavioral control and purchase intention is more pronounced with lower than higher price sensitivity.	Significant

Surprisingly, the relationship between attitude and purchase intention moderated by price sensitivity is not significant. To figure out the reason for this situation, we conducted an in-depth interview with ten respondents to ask their views about price, attitude, and intention to purchase green skincare products. Most of their answers pointed that before deciding to buy a green skincare product, they first determine whether the price of green skincare products is higher than that of normal cosmetic products. Thus, health and safety, instead of price, are the main factors affecting their purchase.

This finding is like that of previous research. Hsu et al. (2017) stated that COO and price sensitivity positively moderate purchase intention and its antecedences. Ling (2013) also stated that customers' willingness to pay moderates the relationship between attitude and purchase intention. He also found a significant direct relationship between environmental attitude and purchase intention. The results of the current study support the above statement.

This study still has some limitations. Specifically, some extraneous variables might have affected the accuracy of the data. The given collection time was short, which might have pushed respondents to finish the questionnaire too fast without understanding the question extremely well. Moreover, less understanding of the green skincare products might have affected the data. Although the questionnaire included the introduction and picture of the green skincare products and brands, respondents' stereotypes on chemical cosmetics might have still controlled their ideas.

This study can help companies and industry practitioners understand customers' intention to purchase eco-friendly cosmetics. First, we consider COO and price sensitivity as moderators heuristically, which could facilitate the understanding of the relationship between customer purchase intention and its antecedences. Our findings prove the direct effect of consumers' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on their intention to purchase green skincare products. These relationships can be strengthened or weakened by the moderating effects of COO and price sensitivity. Roth & Romeo (1992) stated that building a strong and healthy relationship with favorable partners would improve the reputation of the brands, which in turn benefit purchase intention by its antecedences.

Companies can provide clear and honest service when presenting product information to decrease consumer price sensitivity (Lee et al., 2020). For example, they can use special materials to make their products different from non-green cosmetics. This innovation may increase customer satisfaction. Low et al. (2013) showed that satisfaction has a negative relation to price sensitivity. Thus, Chinese companies need to pay attention to the recommendations of Internet celebrities. Currently, these personalities have a huge influence on China.

This study contributes to the literature by addressing the gap in previous research on green skincare products in Mainland China. The respondents comprise Chinese university students who will become the main customers in the next few years. This study provides novel findings and inspires skincare companies to increase customer purchase intention by changing their strategy on the basis of its influencing factors.

CONCLUSION

This study examines what factors affect customers' intention to purchase green skincare products in China by applying the TPB model. Our findings provide some managerial recommendations to existing companies. We find that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control significantly affect purchase intention. Moreover, COO and price sensitivity moderate the relationships between purchase intention and its antecedences. In particular, consumers' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior affect their purchase intention in case of weaker COO and price sensitivity. This finding suggests that individuals who have low price sensitivity and a high subjective norm or high perceived behavioral control are likely to purchase green skincare products. Our study determines some factors that affect customer purchase intention, addressing the first research objective. Our findings provide some great managerial recommendations to green skincare companies in China, addressing the second research objective. Attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control significantly and positively influence consumers' intention to purchase green skincare products. Thus, companies need to provide quality and functional products and improve their brand image through various social media sites to build a great reputation. They can also hire some people to advise the advantage of eco-friendly skincare products and discuss the detrimental effects of chemical skincare products on the environment to evoke their customers' positive attitude toward eco-friendly skincare products. This strategy can facilitate an understanding of eco-friendly skincare products and may help the future choices of consumers. In turn, consumers will prioritize green skincare products than their commercial counterparts. Additionally, a reasonable price and promotion or coupon activity can increase customer purchase intention. This study has some limitations. First, we use products available in the market as examples in this research. Thus, we only focus on trusted goods. Future studies can investigate other green products to expand our results to various types of green skincare products. Second, the respondents in this study comprise Chinese university students. Future works can consider all potential customers as their respondents. Third, we determine the relationships between consumers' intention

to purchase green skincare products and its antecedences and the moderating effects of COO and price sensitivity in these relationships. Future research can extend this finding to other green products or the whole green industry, instead of focusing only on the cosmetic industry.

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