

A Study on Consumers' Perceptions and Emotional and Behavioral Attitudes Concerning the Usefulness of Information on All Cosmetic Ingredients Used

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In an effort to protect consumers' rights and interests, the South Korean government has been enforcing, since 2008, a policy that requires all manufacturers of cosmetic products to list all the ingredients used to make their products. Whereas, prior to the enactment of the current policy, manufacturers of cosmetic products were required to list only the main ingredients, the current policy mandates that they list all the ingredients so as to protect consumers' rights and interests and to promote their freedom of choice. The policy is also intended to help consumers identify causes of possible side effects that could be caused by cosmetic products. It is doubtful, however, whether consumers are taking full advantage of the changed policy. No matter how well-intended the policy is, it would be of little value if the actual end-users are not aware of its full benefits. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct additional research to help increase the actual usefulness and value of the policy for mandatory listing of all cosmetic ingredients used. This study seeks to address the issue, by investigating the perceptions and the emotional, behavioral attitudes of consumers concerning the usefulness of the policy.

The main questions for this study are as follows. (1) What are the factors that affect consumers' perceptions and emotional, behavioral attitudes toward the information listing all the ingredients used in cosmetic products? (2) What are the causal relationships among the perceptions and emotional, behavioral attitudes of consumers concerning the information on all the ingredients used in cosmetic products?

This study involved distribution and collection of questionnaires answered by women across South Korea in their twenties or older who are consumers of cosmetic products. The consumer survey was conducted over a period from March 24, 2011, through April 2, 2011. The questionnaire was distributed to 300 members on the panel of an online research institute named M Brain.

The questionnaire contained questions about: the demographic and statistical factors of respondents (gender and age); respondents' skin-specific characteristics (skin types and previous experiences of side effects from cosmetic products); respondents' patterns in purchasing cosmetic products (the sources of information they rely on for purchasing and their involvement with cosmetic products); respondents' cognitive attitudes toward the policy for mandatory listing of all ingredients of cosmetic products; the usefulness of the policy; their emotional attitudes toward the policy and the information it provides; and their behavioral attitude toward the policy and the information it provides.

The findings of this study are described below.

First, a regression analysis was run to identify the factors that affect consumers' perceptions of the usefulness of information provided by the policy for mandatory listing of all cosmetic ingredients used as well as their emotional and behavioral attitudes toward it. The significant factors that affect consumers' perceptions include: skin type 1 ($\beta=.265$); knowledge of the functions of cosmetic ingredients ($\beta=.231$); and consumers' involvement with given cosmetic products ($\beta=.194$). Their explicatory power was 17%. The significant factors that affect consumers' emotional attitudes are the usefulness of the information on all cosmetic ingredients used ($\beta=.797$) and consumers' age ($\beta=.093$). Their explicatory power was 64.7%. The significant factors that affect consumers' behavioral attitudes are consumers' emotional attitudes ($\beta=.524$), the usefulness of the information ($\beta=.328$), and consumers' previous experiences of side effects ($\beta=-.074$). Their explicatory power was 68.7%.

Second, a path analysis was conducted to identify possible causal relationships among consumers' cognitive attitudes, perceptions, emotional attitudes, and behavioral attitudes regarding the information on all the cosmetic ingredients used. The factor that had the strongest effect on consumers' behavioral attitudes was their perception of the usefulness of the information. Consumers' behavioral attitudes toward information on all cosmetic ingredients used also had direct effects on their emotional attitudes ($\beta=.795$), the usefulness of such information ($\beta=.752$), and, of their cognitive attitudes, their awareness of the functions of the ingredients ($\beta=.153$). Of consumers' cognitive attitudes, their knowledge of the functions of ingredients had indirect effects on their behavioral attitudes ($\beta=.331$) by the intermediation of their perceptions and emotional attitudes. The usefulness of the information provided also affected consumers' behavioral attitudes ($\beta=.626$) by the intermediation of their emotional attitudes.

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The findings of this study reveal that, the more consumers are aware of the usefulness of the policy for mandatory listing of all cosmetic ingredients used and the more positive their attitudes are toward such policy and the information it provides, the more favorable their behavioral attitudes are. In order to improve consumers' perception about such information, education on the functions and kinds of cosmetic ingredients should be provided on a continual basis. The policy could also mandate that the manufacturers and distributors of cosmetic products also include written descriptions of the functions and effects of all the ingredients used as part of their products.

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