

MORE TO COSMETICS PURCHASES THEN MEETS THE EYE



Cosmetics are not a one size fits all market – on the contrary, females of different ethnic groups are very specific with regards to what they are putting on their faces. Cosmetics companies have realised the need to better understand how females within different age and ethnic groups differ in their involvement with cosmetics, as this influences decisions when selecting and purchasing cosmetics products.

A recent study on female cosmetics buying behaviour was conducted by Beate Stiehler, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to better understand this need as well as to investigate differences between cosmetics consumers with regard to the sources of information consulted on cosmetics purchases, cosmetics spending, the criteria used to evaluate cosmetics products and preferred outlets to purchase cosmetics from. The study was conducted in Gauteng amongst a sample of 430 Black African and Caucasian females.

The results of the study identify six different segments of cosmetics consumers, each with their own distinctive characteristics. The segments were compiled according to their type of involvement with cosmetics as a product category. Five of the six segments were dominated by a specific ethnic group, suggesting that a definite difference in cosmetics buying behaviours exists between ethnic groups. The largest proportion of Black African females showed a high level of interest in cosmetics, indicating that they develop pleasure from using it and also attach a high symbolic meaning (image) to the specific brand of cosmetics they use. This group also displayed a very high level of confidence in their ability to choose cosmetics, whilst the largest proportion of Caucasian females displayed enthusiasm and interest in choosing cosmetics. Results show that Caucasian females derive pleasure from using cosmetics, but fear the possibility of making a mistake during purchase.

The majority of both ethnic groups indicated that word-of-mouth is their most important source of cosmetics information. Department stores are their most preferred outlet to purchase cosmetics and compatibility of the product with skin type was rated as the most important criterion used to select cosmetics.

The findings of this study are a clear indication that cosmetics marketers cannot afford to ignore the difference between ethnic groups in the cosmetics market. Marketers may also achieve better sales figures if they look at females' cosmetics needs from an involvement perspective, and then alter their segmentation approach accordingly. The decision-making process in Black African females' minds is clearly more than only knowing if they can afford a specific cosmetics brand or not.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2011 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Beate Stiehler, under the supervision of [Theuns Kotzé](#).