

Examining Customer's Perception of Purchasing Accessible/Adaptive Beauty Products

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Introduction

According to World Health Organization (2023), roughly 16% of the world's population lives with some form of disability. There has been an increased focus on people with disabilities (PWDs) due to the increased need for accessible and inclusive products (Chitrakorn, 2021). Inclusive design, designs that consider all human diversity as it relates to ability, culture, gender, age, and other forms of human difference (Inclusive Design Research Center, n.d.), has experienced an increase in popularity in the apparel industry (Kabel et al., 2016); however, the beauty industry has been slow to adjust. Although the beauty industry has made progress in being more inclusive, many beauty products still need to be made more accessible for PWDs (Mintel, 2022). Beauty brands and retailers such as L'Oréal, Estée Lauder Companies, and Unilever have taken the initiative to make their websites more accessible for PWDs. However, accessible/adaptive beauty product offerings for PWDs. It is lacking and needs to be addressed to ensure inclusivity for all.

Literature Review

This study utilized Expectation Theory and Objectification Theory as the theoretical foundation. Expectancy theory can be defined as the process in which an individual chooses one behavior over another. The theory explains that an individual will choose a certain behavior over another if they believe there is a benefit in choosing the behavior (ET) (Vroom, 1964). A study by Zeng & Mourali (2021) explains that an individual will engage in behavior based on their estimates of how well the expected result will be. In this study, we focused on PWD customers and assessed their perception of accessible/adaptive beauty products through perceived social risk (product focus), performance risk, product risk, and purchase intention.

Objectification Theory (OT) (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) states that self-objectification is how individuals treat themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated. Considering the increasing demand for accessible/adaptive products, this study assessed the relationship between broad beauty concepts and body appreciation from the perspective of OT. Previous studies have examined broad beauty concepts and body appreciation separately and their relationship to social norms and discovered that the broad beauty concept did not affect social norms due to the subjective nature of the broad beauty concept (Kopot & Reed, 2022). Understanding that PWD customers may have their own perception of beauty and body, therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

- H1: Body appreciation has a positive effect on perceived social risk.
- H2: Beauty concept has a positive effect on perceived social risk.
- H3: Perceived social risk has a positive effect on perceived performance risk.
- H4: Perceived social risk has a positive effect on perceived product risk.
- H5: Perceived performance risk has a positive effect on purchase intention.
- H6: Perceived product risk has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Methods

Scale items were developed to measure each construct in the theoretical framework. The measurement items were adapted from previous research, researcher knowledge, and literature review using a 5-point Likert scale. Some items were reworded to adjust to the focus of the study and improve readability. Amazon MTurk was used to administer a questionnaire for data collection. At the beginning of the survey, a selection of beauty retailers who sell adaptive/accessible beauty products. (i.e., Sephora, Ulta, Target, Walmart, Macy's, Nordstrom, Kohl's, Glossier, and L'Oreal) were presented for the respondents to choose from to ensure that the respondents have shopped in one or more of the stores listed in the past 12 months. If the participant answered yes, they were required to input the brand or store where they had purchased. A total of 176 participants were used for the data analysis (males 44% and females 59%; median age = 28-32). Next, participants were asked to answer questions adopted from the literature (Forsythe, S. et al., 2006; Grewal, D., et al., 1994; Kang, J., & Kim, S. H., 2016; Ma, 2017). To test the hypotheses, this study employed structural equation modeling using Mplus version 8.

Results

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = .954, TLI = .946, RMSEA = .045, SRMR = .048, $\chi^2 = 319.77$, $df = 237$, $p < .001$) and SEM analysis (CFI = .928, TLI = .919, RMSEA = .056, SRMR = .077, $\chi^2 = 344.88$, $df = 223$, $p < .001$) demonstrated partial hypothesis confirmation. The results from the modeling suggest that $t(n = 172)$, body appreciation (H1: $\beta = .142$, $p < .001$) had no significant positive effect on perceived social risk, and product risk, had no significant positive on purchase intention (H4: $\beta = .089$, $p < .001$). Hence H1 and H6 was not supported. Further, beauty concept (H2: $\beta = .565$, $p < .001$) did have a positive effect on product confidence, perceived social risk had a positive effect on perceived performance risk (H3: $\beta = .449$, $p < .001$), perceived social risk had a positive effect on (H4: $\beta = .874$, $p < .001$), and Perceived performance risk had a positive effect on purchase intention (H5: $\beta = .749$, $p < .001$) (H5: $\beta = .749$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and Implications

The findings reveal that body appreciation had no significant positive effect on perceived social risk. This finding suggests that regardless of how beauty PWD customers see their disability, their perception is not influenced. (i.e., whether or not the product will look good on them (Kang and Kim, 2013). However, the findings suggest that for PWD customers, their broad beauty concept can influence their perception. Interestingly, this finding is not consistent with previous findings from Kopot & Reed (2022). Within the framework of OT, the rise of the positive body appreciation movement may have created a mindset that customers accept their body as it is. However, the individual (PWD beauty customers) is still affected by the general beauty concept in society. Hence, for beauty brands and retailers that have placed more focus on accessible websites, the research suggests that focusing more on inclusive beauty messages in marketing and promotion will help reach the PWD community and the larger consumer community in general.

The finding of this study also revealed that customers of accessible/adaptive beauty products are concerned about the performance of the product, which will affect their purchase intention. Although the study suggests that product risk does not affect purchase intention, we suggest that beauty brands and retailers should focus on developing the product to ensure that it will perform as intended. As with the premises of ET, customers will buy the product if they believe that there is a benefit in using the product.

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