

Cosmetics and Society

The cosmetic industry spans back to the ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman worlds, starting approximately 5000 years ago. From the ancient world in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, cosmetics took on various forms and worth in society. The related social and scientific ideas regarding cosmetics and their role in society then evolved through western Europe and the Americas. This includes opinions on the proper use of cosmetics along with the chemical ingredients involved in the production of these products. This slow evolution continued until the early 20th century when photography and the film industry encouraged the creation of cosmetic corporations. Large-scale production and the economics of scale made perfume and make-up available to people of every socioeconomic class.

The ancient world first introduced primitive cosmetics for upper-class members of society. These primitive cosmetics, mainly perfume-like fragrances, were often made of dangerous materials such as mercury and white lead. In ancient times, many believed that appearance indicated your level of spirituality. In Egypt, combinations of copper and lead ore led to eye make-up for royal females, wishing to keep the attention of the gods. To add more color, a mixture of burnt almonds, oxidized copper, lead, ash, and ochre was used also around the eyes and cheeks to add different colors to the face. These types of cosmetics continued in the lives of wealthy Greeks and Romans of later years. The Romans, however, preferred the use of animal products in their cosmetics to enhance their aphrodisiac appeal. In Roman times, some cosmetics became accessible for more people, although still reserved for those of the higher classes.

In the Middle Eastern countries, Persians and Arabs frowned upon cosmetics. In early Islamic culture, a sense of pride was taken in purity and cleanliness, away from disguising the real body. Despite this disdain for cosmetics, physicians in the Middle East viewed cosmetics as a form of medicine; they were able to make the earliest forms of modern day lipstick and deodorant from oily substances called “adhan”. Other make-ups from this era include kohl, a form of eye-liner thought to protect the wearer from disease and evil spirits. In recent years, kohl has been banned in the U.S. because x-ray diffraction and SEM showed that kohl contains galena, antimony ore, soot, amorphous carbon, zincite, and aragonite, among other harmful chemicals. Laboratory research has shown kohl causes increased dangerous levels of lead in the blood stream.

In Asia, cosmetics were very valuable, and thus expensive enough to limit its use to royalty. It was common practice to make the female face and back very white using rice powder. Other forms of make-up were used to accent the eyes and lips, made of organic items such as safflower petals and ohaguro, a Japanese black ink. The fashion for white faces was prevalent in Japanese and Chinese cultures, but kept as a privilege for rich women. The pale face defined your place in society, since peasants working in the fields had tanned and rugged skin. The make-up of the time helped create a social division of classes, where the pale skin indicated those who did not need to work.

In Western Europe and the Americas, make-up and cosmetics has developed to become the large industry it is today. Starting with powder made of hydroxide, carbonate, and zinc oxide (after lead poisoning from lead oxide was discovered) cosmetic companies were created in the late 19th and early 20th century. Make-up was first severely frowned upon by Queen Victoria in the 19th century before it grew in popularity.

Victoria declared that makeup should only be used by actors. Because of the growth of the film and photography industry, these actors started to spread make-up as a popular fashion statement. Following Queen Victoria's death in 1901, companies such as L'Oreal, Max Factor, and Avon all prospered in the early 20th century, bringing cosmetics out from under the counter and available in the open market. As a result, women became more confident and following the First World War, the flapper look came into fashion, using eye-liner, lipstick, nail polish, and artificial suntan.

The industry grew rapidly throughout the 1920s. Initially women's magazines would not allow cosmetic ads, but by the '30s, the cosmetic ads were the largest source of revenue. From 1927 to 1930, the industry grew from \$300,000 to \$3.2 million a year. The global cosmetic industry has recorded a compound growth rate of 5 percent in the last decade, showing that the cosmetic industry continues to grow. New developments in cosmetic science include the use of safe organic compounds to replace synthetic chemicals that may be harmful to the user and to the environment. For instance, nail polish has a concentration of 10% phthalates, used as synthetic plasticizers. They are used in smaller concentrations in hair spray, perfume, and shampoos. A major goal of the National Toxicology Program is to reduce the usage of these products since recent studies are emerging with evidence that these chemicals are carcinogens. Therefore the push for organic cosmetics has been a top priority for the major cosmetic companies.

This push for organic products has started with the lotions and creams for skin moisturizing. From previous synthetic ingredients such as isopropyl palmitate, glycerides, and synthetic emollients, research has completed to introduce organic oils, organic sugar-cane ethanol, and fruit extracts to replace their synthetic counterparts. As a

result, the organic product industry has grown tremendously in the past decade. The current U.S. growth rate alone is almost 20% annually, showing similar growth to east and southeast Asia, with Europe atop at 22% annual growth. In 2002, the average organic product sales for these three different regions was \$9.2 billion dollars and the growth rate has been constantly increasing since then.

From growth on the chemical market to growth in the advertisement market, cosmetics have had a large impact on the modern global economy. Additionally, the social impact of cosmetics is beyond bridging the gap between the rich and the poor; but has taken a new form as make-up has become a standard in female society not only in the west, but globally. The advent of mass produced and accessible magazines, television shows, movies, and the associated advertisements has evolved cosmetics from chemicals once reserved for the rich and the royal, to a largely available standard of society.

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