
The Relationship between Consumers' Characteristics and the Expectations towards a Brand's Value

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Abstract:

Purpose: The subject of this article is the identification and evaluation of communicated values and values actually declared by consumers' gender and age.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article presents a research approach based on a literature query and empirical research. Beginning by presenting the essence of both material and non-material values in marketing, the focus is on the values pyramid communicated by brands. The empirical research was conducted by the method of a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire on a representative sample of 1000 respondents. The principal research was preceded by a pilot survey. The research results were statistically processed using the Chi-square test of independence, the Mann–Whitney U test, the Kruskal–Wallis test, post-hoc Dunn test with Benjamini-Hochberg correction.

Findings: The research analysis indicates differences in the assessment of declared and expected values towards cosmetic product brands between women and men, in particular concerning functional and life-changing values. The assessment of the declared and expected values also changes depending on age. Substantially different assessment is shown by the group of the youngest respondents. A particular difference is noticeable concerning the aesthetic value, the brand prestige and the heritage, tradition, as well as brand history.

Practical Implications: To develop the brand management capability, organizations may benefit from cultivating processes that seek to meet the latent customer needs through explorative and proactive information seeking, and at the same time, pursuing processes that focus on capturing the existing customer and competitor trends in the market.

Originality/Value: This study borrows from the existing research on market orientation, branding and brand management to argue that organizations are required to verify the actual expected values towards brands. Enterprises should also verify the consistency of the values declared by brands with those actually expected by consumers.

Keywords: Brand value, consumer age, consumer gender, promotion.

JEL codes: M3, M30, M31, M37.

Paper Type: Research article

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1. Introduction

The challenges faced by modern enterprises are very diverse. The dynamic changes in market, economic, demographic, social, technological, and environmental processes occurring in societies and organisations are combined with an increasing consumers' demand to find their professed and expected values in the communications offered by brands (Gligor and Bozkurt, 2021; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2021). Iyer *et al.* (2021) investigate the effect of perceived brand interactivity on customer purchases along with the mediating effect of perceived brand fairness. The research results indicate that perceived brand interactivity directly and indirectly (via perceived brand fairness) impact customer purchases.

Research on expectations towards values communicated by brands was designed at the specific model value level. The article is an analysis example of the consumers' attractiveness and perceived value in the market for cosmetic products from the age and gender perspective. The ability to create a marketing message adequate to consumer expectations is important in an increasingly competitive environment and the struggle for the customer. Building a brand and creating a marketing message based on properly selected values can help create a competitive advantage.

The research aim is an attempt to verify the consistency and existence of a relationship between the values declared and communicated by brands offering cosmetic products. The following research questions were formulated for the study:

- Do consumers pay attention to the values present in marketing communications?
- Do consumers perceive the values present in marketing communications as relevant?
- Do the perceived values of cosmetic brands depend on age?
- Do the perceived values of cosmetic brands depend on gender?

The analysed values were distinguished based on the thirty value items described in research by Almquist *et al.* (2016b). These elements can be classified into one of four categories, functional, emotional, life-changing, or socially impactful. According to the research results available in the literature on the subject, values should be analysed at the industry level (Almquist *et al.*, 2018). In the article, the authors first concentrate on a literature review concerning two main areas, marketing values and brand values. Then, the description of the research subject, research period, and sampling procedure have been given. Afterwards, the data have been analyzed, and the results are explained and discussed. Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that the consumers' age and gender are a change factor towards the value expectations communicated by brands. Finally, the implications and limitations of this study have been provided.

The research was based on the cosmetics market products. This market is characterised by a significant product differentiation according to assortment and customer groups. It is also a market for fast-selling items characterised by very diverse purchase motives and factors determining the consumer's attitude towards the product/brand.

2. Values in Marketing (Material and Non-Material)

Many definitions and concepts related to value exist. The multiplicity of definitions is a result of the fact that in many areas value has a different meaning and concerns a different conceptual scope. One of the definitions of values existing in psychology is Schwartz's approach, which assumes that values are concepts or beliefs about desirable goals that describe specific states of affairs or behaviour (Primc *et al.*, 2021). For the human, values are ordered by importance. By this definition, a value is something valuable, approved, and expected, to which people should or would strive. Values do not refer to separate situations but concern human behaviour as an entirety. Values create behaviour and judgement in particular situations and are hierarchical in nature.

According to their definition, values are positively oriented (Bailetti *et al.*, 2020). As per Rokeach, values refer to the desired behaviour or ultimate goal of existence. Rokeach assumes that specified goals or behaviours are better than the alternatives. Each value is a separate belief that influences a person's judgements and behaviour (Johnston, 1995). The amount of value a person will have depends on their number of goals and desired behaviours (Rokeach and Ballrokeach, 1989). Values perform functions that regulate behaviour and orient the cognitive system. They create and define personality, form the criteria for assessing morality, and are also the criteria for behaviour and attitudes towards other people and situations (Bailetti and Tanev, 2020).

Values can also be defined as principles, qualities, and characteristics that are genuinely valuable and desirable. These values are associated with quality, meaning, and desire, leading to a marketing definition of value and further to the statement that it can be a key factor in intrinsic consumer motivation (Kim *et al.*, 2020; Voorn *et al.*, 2021). Values influence the sense of importance, recognition, and significant meaning. Beliefs are cognitive structures that connect values to other experience aspects. In marketing, the concept of consumer value, which refers to a package of benefits obtained by the consumer together with a product or service (Popli and Ladkani, 2020). The value thus defined includes four types of advantages (Ardley *et al.*, 2020):

- advantages related to the characteristics and qualities of the offered product,
- advantages related to its service,
- advantages of additional facilities,

- advantages derived from prestige and trust in the manufacturer.

Values create standards adopted by individuals to judge things and situations. Therefore, values can also influence consumers' judgments about products (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Among other things, values influence attitudes, attributes, consequences, or consumption values, which in turn influence product choice (Hai *et al.*, 2019). Human values indirectly influence product choice when consumers evaluate the utilitarian meaning represented by the product's visible function (Gueli *et al.*, 2019). Consumers also evaluate economic relevance (related to convenience, efficiency) as well as utilitarian relevance focusing on the product and its physical properties (perceived in objective and tangible product characteristics) (Cho *et al.*, 2020).

3. Values Communicated by Brands

Classification is key to organising and establishing a hierarchy (Kainth and Verma 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2011). This process allows groups to be identified based on common object characteristics, considering also their significance (Almquist and Wyner, 2001). Classification from the perspective of the values communicated by brands concerns product characteristics and marketing communication (Almquist and Wyner, 2001). The article uses the value model of Almquist *et al.* (2016b) presenting thirty values that can be divided into four categories, functional, emotional, life-changing, and having a social impact. Each category corresponds to a type of consumer need. The more elements the product offer provides to the consumer, the greater their satisfaction and loyalty will be. The functional value category refers to the quality attributes of a brand, product, or service. The functional elements are defined as the minimum that should be guaranteed to the consumer from a practical and useful value perspective (Almquist *et al.*, 2016a) as shown in Table 1.

The authors of the model classified as functional values, time-saving, simplification, making money, risk reduction, organizing, integrating, connecting, reducing effort, hassle, and cost, quality, variety, sensory, and information (Almquist *et al.*, 2016b). Emotional values refer to the impact of a product or service on the consumer's well-being. The elements of emotional value have an impact on the customer-company contact. Through these values, relationships can be created with the customer, and provide the customer with a feeling of comfort in the purchase. These values fulfil the emotional consumer needs. Emotional values in Almquist *et al.* models include anxiety reduction, reward, nostalgia, aesthetics, brand prestige, health/wellbeing, therapeutic value, entertainment, attractiveness, providing access.

The life-changing value elements concern how a brand, product, or service affects and changes a consumer's life. The above values have a strong influence on customer behaviour, build loyalty and attachment. This category of values includes

hope, personal self-actualization, motivation, heirloom, and a sense of belonging. At the top of the pyramid are presented the elements allowing a brand to deliver value that affects its customer and society's lives. The social impact value elements are concerned with how the brand helps the customer to make a difference in other people's lives. It concerns values that change the world. Transcendence or self-transcendence, understood as helping other people or society more generally, is such a value. This element expresses a person's need to participate in something that goes beyond himself, his interests.

Table 1. *The Elements of Value Pyramid*

<i>Value category</i>	<i>Product and marketing values</i>		
<i>Functional</i>	quality	integrates	reduces costs
	saves time	connects	variety
	makes money	reduces effort	sensory appeal
	simplifies	avoids hassles	informs
		reduces risk	organizes
<i>Emotional</i>	reduces anxiety	attractiveness	nostalgia
	wellness	provides access	design/aesthetics
	therapeutic value	rewards me	badge value
		fun/entertainment	
<i>Life changing</i>	provides hopes	motivation	affiliation/belonging
	self-actualization	heirloom	
<i>Social impact</i>	self-transcendence		

Source: Almquist, E., Senior, J. and Bloch N., *The 30 Elements of Consumer Value: A Hierarchy*, *Harvard Business Review*, 9/2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/09/the-elements-of-value>.

The model was created based on quantitative and qualitative customer research to investigate consumers' initial preferences in order to determine their purchase motives. The model derives its conceptual roots from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Abbas, 2020). Maslow argued that human actions derive from an innate urge to satisfy needs ranging from the very basic, such as safety, warmth, food, rest, to the complex, i.e. self-esteem, altruism. The values-based element approach broadens its shape by focusing on people as consumers - describing their behaviour concerning products and services. At the top of the pyramid are the most important values. To deliver these higher-level elements, the company must provide at least some of the functional elements required by the product category.

However, there are many combinations of elements in successful products and services. The importance of the items varies by industry, culture and demographics. Across all industries surveyed, perceived quality has a greater impact on customer perceptions than any other element. Products and services must reach a certain minimum level and no other elements can compensate for a significant deficiency in these values. After quality, the hierarchy of elements depends on the industry. Companies can improve the elements that constitute their core value, which will help them distinguish themselves compared to their

competitors and better meet their customers' needs. Companies can also sensibly add elements to broaden their value proposition.

4. Materials and Methods

The questionnaire used in the survey was designed by the authors based on their previous empirical research (Rzemieniak and Iannuli, 2015; Rzemieniak and Wawer, 2021) and the literature review mentioned above. The article by Almquist, Senior, and Bloch (2016a) constituted an important point of reference, as it described the results of the study on pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour in the gender context (Almquist *et al.*, 2016a; Felonneau and Becker 2008).

The 5-point Likert scale was applied for the questionnaire, used for measuring attitudes in social sciences (Croasmun and Ostrom, 2011). Answers were given on five-point scales. Before the analysis of the results the variables were ranked from 1 (strongly disagree or strongly irrelevant) to 5 (strongly agree or strongly relevant). In the pilot study carried out in the group of 32 students of various majors, i.e., management, marketing and communications and logistics; the accuracy of the formulated questions and the applied scale was verified. In order to assess the questions' reliability, a reliability analysis was conducted and the Alpha-Cronbach coefficient was calculated. For the pilot survey, the coefficient was 0.81. For the question on values actually declared by brands, it was 0.90, while for the question on values expected from brands it was 0.87. The indicators' value confirms the questions' high reliability.

Table 2. *Sample structure*

Group	No.	Group	No.	Group	No.	Group	No.
Gender		Education		Age [years]		Place of residence (number of inhabitants)	
Women	501 (50.1%)	Primary education	28 (2.8%)	18-24	127 (12.7%)	Village	216 (21.6%)
Men	499 (49.9%)	Basic vocational education	95 (9.5%)	25-34	241 (24.1%)	City ≤ 20.000	99 (9.9%)
		Secondary education	467 (46.7%)	35-44	258 (25.8%)	City of 20.000 – 50.000	150 (15%)
		Higher education	410 (41%)	45-54	168 (16.8%)	City of 50.000 – 100.000	151 (15.1%)
				55-64	135 (13.5%)	City of 100.000 – 250.000	158 (15.8%)
			≥ 65	71 (7.1%)	City ≥ 250.000	226 (22.6%)	

Source: *Own creation.*

The research tool developed and verified in this way was finally sent to respondents using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique via the BIOSTAT Agency. Biostat Sp. z o.o. is a commercial research unit with the status of Research and Development Centre in the register kept by the Minister of Entrepreneurship and Technology with many years of business and scientific experience supported by education in statistics, mathematics, IT, and social sciences. The survey was carried out on a representative population of Internet users via the research portal www.badanie-opinii.pl. The research sample of 1000 respondents provided by BIOSTAT is representative (Table 2).

5. Results and Conclusions

The research evaluation was based on the identification of values communicated by brands and values expected from brands by cosmetic product consumers. Consumers, focusing on the brand of their choice, assessed the actual values provided by producers and the desired values using a five-point Likert scale. The analysis of the collected data began with the assessment of the relationship between the answers given by the respondents in terms of gender and age. The Chi-square test of independence (with Yates' correction in the case of classes with a cardinality <10) was used for this purpose. In all issues, the null hypothesis of no relationship between groups was set against the alternative hypothesis that the variables are related. Based on the results of the Chi-square test, the null hypothesis was rejected in the cases discussed below, which is confirmed by the statistics provided together with the significance level. For the questions detailed, the alternative hypothesis should be accepted meaning that a relationship exists. In terms of most of the values declared by brands, the answers given by men differ significantly from those given by women.

In particular, this applies to brand values from the functional group i.e. product quality ($\chi^2=20.47$, $p=0.0004$), physical characteristics of the product ($\chi^2=17.58$, $p=0.0015$) and reliable and credible brand information ($\chi^2=10.42$, $p=0.0339$). Furthermore, the answers given by men differ significantly from those given by women in the category of emotional values i.e. the sense of security declared by the brand ($\chi^2=12.08$, $p=0.0168$). The significant relationship between men's and women's responses also relates to the same values categories but expected by respondents towards the brand.

Therefore, these are respectively functional values i.e. brand quality ($\chi^2=18.20$, $p=0.0011$), physical characteristics of the product ($\chi^2=10.47$, $p=0.0332$) and reliable and credible brand information ($\chi^2=36.01$, $p<<0.0001$). Additionally, a significant relationship in the perception of functional expectancy values towards the brand, such as purchase risk reduction ($\chi^2=12.33$, $p=0.0151$) and making the consumer's life easier with reduction of effort, problems and obstacles ($\chi^2=11.64$, $p=0.0203$), was shown. Statistical analysis also revealed a significant relationship between respondents' assessment of their declared and expected brand

values concerning age. In the category of values declared by brands, it includes the sense of security ($X^2=39.17$, $p=0.0064$). Considering the chosen cosmetics brand, respondents in different age groups declared differently their expectations towards the brand value. A significant relationship with age was observed for functional values i.e. cash benefits and saving money with the product ($X^2=39.93$, $p=0.00512$), emotional values i.e. brand prestige ($X^2=40.52$, $p=0.0043$). A significant relationship with age was also found for the expected value at the top of the product-marketing value pyramid, which is the social impact value of helping other people or society ($X^2=38.07$, $p=0.008682$).

Table 3. Significant results of the Mann-Whitney U test along with mean responses for men and women

Question	Mean F	Mean M	Z	p
Product quality	4,36	4,16	4,44	0,0001
Physical characteristics of the product	4,13	3,94	3,42	0,0006
Information, i.e. responsible provision of reliable and reliable information to consumers	3,95	3,81	2,10	0,0354
Save time, facilitate the use or use of the product	3,85	3,68	2,75	0,0059
Product quality	4,57	4,35	3,72	0,0002
Physical characteristics of the product	3,74	3,57	2,79	0,0052
Information, i.e., responsible provision of reliable and reliable information to consumers	4,17	3,82	5,63	0,0001
Cash benefits, saving money with the product	3,68	3,54	2,22	0,0266
Purchasing risk reduction	3,58	3,43	2,37	0,0177
Save time, facilitate the use or use of the product	3,67	3,52	2,61	0,0092
Making life easier for the consumer, reducing the consumer's effort, reducing obstacles and problems	3,62	3,43	2,72	0,0064
Optimism and motivation to achieve goals, self-fulfillment	3,40	3,23	2,52	0,0117

Source: Own creation.

The significant differences in the responses to the survey questions between the female and male groups were analysed using the Mann-Whitney U test. For the questions in Table 3, the null hypothesis of no difference between groups was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that the differences were significant. Regarding the functional values both expected and received by the respondents, women pay more attention to the product quality and its physical characteristics.

The functional value of informing consumers about all aspects related to the product is also more important for women. Particularly noteworthy is the higher women's score concerning saving time and facilitating the product's use or application. Women, as fundamentally involved in various household activities, rank this value highly. The results obtained confirm research conducted in the retail trade industry (Bojanowska and Kulisz, 2020). Selected functional values for surveyed customers were predictors of their brand loyalty (Cunningham and De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2021).

Table 4. Significant results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for the variable age (respectively- Mean₁ – mean for 18-24 years; Mean₂ – 25 – 34 years, Mean₃ – 35 – 44 years, Mean₄ – 45 – 54 years, Mean₅ – 55 – 64 years; Mean₆ - mean for ≥ 65 years)

	Mean ₁	Mean ₂	Mean ₃	Mean ₄	Mean ₅	Mean ₆	K-W	p
Esthetics	4,39	4,11	4,15	4,17	4,19	4,32	16,02	0,0068
Sense of security	3,47	3,68	3,78	3,85	3,93	3,79	16,04	0,0058
Heritage, tradition, history that influences the present day	3,06	3,36	3,43	3,49	3,47	3,37	12,11	0,0333
Brand prestige	2,98	3,37	3,45	3,55	3,56	3,58	29,58	<< 0,0001
Heritage, tradition, history that influences the present day	2,76	3,15	3,22	3,17	3,17	3,25	17,24	0,0041

Source: Own creation.

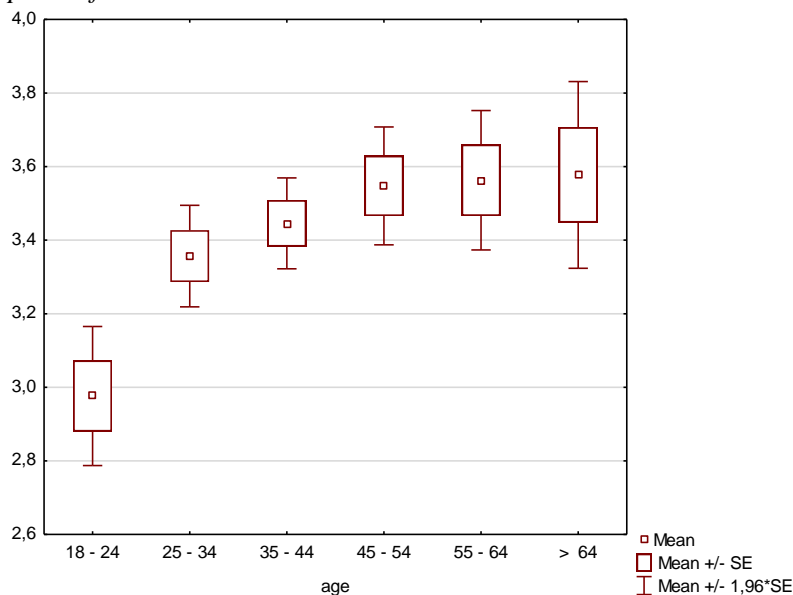
The difference in the mean significance of the values expected by respondents concerning cosmetic products brands should be emphasized. Among these were important values from the group of functional values considered in the cosmetics purchase decision process, such as cash benefits and saving money, purchasing risk reduction and making life easier for the consumer. Women value and expect life-changing values higher, i.e. optimism, self-realisation and the pursuit of goals.

This result confirms women's assumptions and expectations of cosmetic products to provide, among other things, a better appearance, the elimination of imperfections, improved self-esteem and well-being. Researchers of the proactive approach to purchasing identified in their research similar gender determinants for purchasing professionals (Van Poucke *et al.*, 2019). The research results also correspond with the customer attitude analyses towards the purchase of original luxury and counterfeit products (Kassim *et al.*, 2021). Product environmental studies also confirm the gender diversity of proactive purchasing approaches (Skowron and Sak-Skowron, 2021).

The significant differences with respect to age divided into 6 age groups were tested using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, which is equivalent to the one-way analysis of variance. The significant results of the Kruskal-Wallis test mean that within the surveyed value there is at least one age group, which the mean rank of the responses differ significantly from the others. This age group is presented in Table 4. Differences were noticed concerning the communicated emotional value of aesthetics. This result can be interpreted as a particular appreciation of cosmetic brands' external attributes, such as packaging, but also visual aspects in communication activities. Respondents in particular age groups differ in their assessment of tradition and history as a value that influences the brand. These differences concern both the communication perception of this value and the evaluation of its significance. Among the values that consumers expect from

cosmetic brands, differences in evaluation are noticeable concerning brand prestige.

Figure 1. Means and standard errors for each age group in assessing prestige as a value expected from a brand



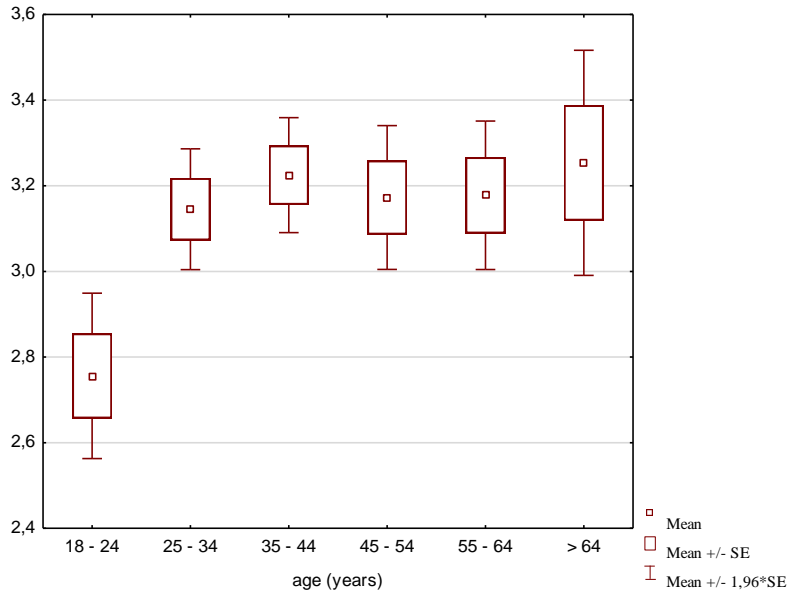
Source: Own creation.

In order to indicate which age groups differ significantly from the others, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test were augmented by conducting the post-hoc Dunn test with Benjamini-Hochberg correction. In particular, it was noted that for the declared emotional value "brand aesthetics", the mean rank in the 18-24 years group is significantly higher than the mean rank in the 25-34 years group and the mean rank in the 18-24 years group is significantly higher than the mean rank in the 35-44 years group. Furthermore, when considering the chosen cosmetic brand, consumers differ in their assessment of the declared value of feeling safe, where the mean rank in the 18-24 age group is significantly lower than the mean rank in the 45-54 age group, and the mean rank in the 18-24 age group is also significantly lower than the mean rank in the 55-64 age group. Brand heritage, tradition and history are also perceived differently by respondents in the 18-24 age group, where the mean rank is significantly lower than the mean rank in the 45-54 age group. These results suggest a different attitude of young consumers towards cosmetic brands, including value assessment. However, this suggests a different value hierarchy both expected and perceived in promotional messages by these consumers.

Although research on brand aesthetics has mainly been conducted in the context of luxury products (Kusumasondjaja 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2016; Seifert *et al.*, 2019) or in

the context of luxury product packaging design (Brunner *et al.*, 2016), it is worth emphasizing that the mean rank for the declared emotional value "brand aesthetics" is highest for the 18-24 age group. An interesting approach to brand aesthetics was presented by Hazlett in a book based on his own PhD from Universite 'Paris-Dauphine (Hazlett, 2014). However, analyses were not conducted in terms of the consumer age, which seems to be an original contribution to brand value research.

Figure 2. Averages and standard errors for each age group in assessing heritage, tradition and history influencing the present as a value expected from a brand



Source: Own creation.

Significant differences between all age groups were noticed concerning the value expected from cosmetics brands, i.e., brand prestige. Performing Dunn's post-hoc test allowed us to conclude that in brand prestige assessment as a value expected from cosmetic brands, the youngest age group of consumers aged 18-24 differs significantly in the assessment of this value from all other age groups (Figure 1). The average rating of the brand prestige importance for this group is the lowest and significantly lower than all other age groups. This result can be interpreted as a lack of created preferences for the brand status and a schematic association of prestige with a high product price, which for this age group can be a purchase barrier.

A high brand prestige rating is expected by the consumer at a constant level regardless of age for luxury products (Lo and Yeung, 2020). The same applies to the value of aesthetics (Lee *et al.*, 2015). The results obtained concerning the values declared by cosmetic brands for the 6 age groups allow for differentiation of profiled marketing messages.

After performing Dunn's post-hoc test, it was shown that in the evaluation of heritage, tradition and history influencing the present as a value expected from cosmetic brands, the group of respondents aged 18-24 years old also differed from the others (Figure 2). The youngest age group differs significantly in its assessment of this value. The mean rank in this group is the lowest, which would indicate that this value is perceived as of low significance, to which respondents do not attach as much importance. This may be related to the innovative attitude of this consumer group, which is more likely to reach for new products, as well as not being attached to brands in search of diversity.

Many researchers have analysed consumer age as a variable of shopping patterns or as a variable of social media activity (Khaksar *et al.*, 2017; Matarazzo *et al.*, 2018; Melancon and Dalakas, 2018). Brand value research is often carried out in terms of gender. The consumer age variable does not dominate the model value analyses communicated by brands. The obtained research results allow the formulation of practical implications for cosmetic product brands in terms of the fundamental values expected by consumers in terms of both age and gender. The findings of this study should be read in light of its limitations. It seems that interesting results could also be obtained by performing similar research abroad, as well as in relation to other industries.

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