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Article

Consumer Awareness of Green Cosmetics in Emerging Markets: A Comparative Study of South Africa and Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The introduction of green cosmetics has undoubtedly captured researchers' interest following the global surge in environmental awareness and sustainable consumption. However, consumers do not consistently opt for green products, causing businesses to approach green marketing from an opportunistic standpoint. This study explores consumer awareness of green cosmetics in South Africa and Zimbabwe, two emerging markets with contrasting economies. Using an exploratory qualitative design, data were collected through purposive sampling using in-depth interviews with six participants from South Africa and six from Zimbabwe. The findings reveal that participants in both countries prefer to receive information from reference groups and social media rather than from business advertisements. In Zimbabwe, lack of awareness and product availability hinder adoption, while South African consumers are guided by packaging cues and sustainability claims. In addition, limited production and product unavailability affect the purchasing of green cosmetics, as indicated by the participants in both countries. This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on green consumerism in African markets by offering comparative qualitative insights from two contrasting economies and offers implications for marketers and policymakers promoting sustainable consumption.

Keywords: green marketing; green cosmetics; consumer awareness; qualitative research

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

Green marketing first gained popularity in the latter stages of the 1980s and early 1990s in response to growing concerns about environmental degradation (Santosh, 2024). A surge in the preference for green products has been evident, with businesses and consumers playing significant roles in the supply-demand equation to separate demand and financial success from environmental degradation and promote a more sustainable economy (Szaban and Stefańska, 2023). Amoako et al. (2022) and Mukonza and Swarts (2020) acknowledge that environmental friendliness in green marketing is driven by both moral concerns and market pressures, helping businesses adopt a long-term perspective and maintain stability in profits. The green sector has grown at a significant rate over the past few years, and consumer perceptions of green cosmetics and green buying behaviour have remained under-researched (Lundberg, 2024).

Evidence shows that green consumerism has successfully penetrated the African markets (Matindike and Mago, 2023). Traoré et al. (2023) state that green consumption is rapidly expanding in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the substantial adoption of green products in developed countries, combined with the green awakening in developing countries, has significantly contributed to the global green industry. The shift towards sustainable development in developing nations necessitates a significant focus on green buying behaviour to gain a competitive edge and keep pace

with developed countries (Traoré et al., 2023). However, Al-Swidi and Saleh (2021) point out that while research on green behaviour has been predominantly conducted in developed countries, there is a pressing need for comprehensive studies on green purchasing practices in developing countries.

African countries lack standardised ideas and legal frameworks that guide green initiatives, making the concept of going green ambiguous in both literature and practice (Matindike and Mago, 2023). Therefore, the introduction of the green cosmetic product category has undeniably piqued researchers' interest due to the rapid increase in sales of green cosmetics. In South Africa, the city of Johannesburg with its sizable ethnic diversity, is a crucial place for consumer behaviour research, because Johannesburg's large, multicultural population is a key factor that reflects a wide range of consumer preferences and buying habits (Magidimisha-Chipungu, 2024). In Zimbabwe, Harare, despite having a more uniform population than Johannesburg, is a significant microcosm of Zimbabwe's enormous social transformations particularly concerning income disparities, migration from urban to rural areas, and cultural impacts (Poshai et al., 2024). Therefore, contrasting Johannesburg and Harare, two cities with similar geography but vastly different socioeconomic realities, offers a unique opportunity for researchers. The comparison offers a unique opportunity for researchers to contrast Zimbabwe's primary economic city with a well-known South African economic hub, sparking new insights and understandings. Therefore, this study aims to identify motivational factors and barriers influencing awareness and adoption of green cosmetics in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

In the 21st century, female consumers are increasingly taking part in economic activities compared to previous years and have displayed a more significant concern for the environment (Dragolea et al., 2023). However, the literature related to female consumers of green cosmetics has yet to be researched in South Africa and Zimbabwe, even though these consumers have the most significant purchasing power in this sphere. Women's purchasing decisions for cosmetics are impacted by a variety of factors, such as personal values, social standards, cultural views, and financial limitations. The present study sets out to develop a more profound understanding of how these aspects influence women's decisions about purchasing green cosmetics and thus can assist businesses to understand how to reach and engage female consumers in these two contexts. The main objective of the study is to examine consumer awareness of green cosmetics in South Africa and Zimbabwe; identify motivational factors and barriers; and provide recommendations for marketers and policymakers. These objectives are essential in addressing the gap in the body of knowledge regarding female consumers of green cosmetics, and contribute to the existing literature in this area which may serve as a foundation for future research and academic debate.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Green Cosmetic Industry in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Marketing developments are not just passing business fads; instead, they often result from more significant societal, cultural, or economic changes that have an impact on consumer behaviour (Golchha and Nagariya, 2025). Recent studies have indicated that businesses must boost the economy by providing products and services that have little negative impact on the ecosystem to succeed in the green industry (Nga and Tam, 2024). However, the green cosmetic industry in Zimbabwe has faced significant challenges, with many businesses failing within the initial five years due to a lack of insight into the competitive landscape, particularly the green consumer. The unstable economic situation in Zimbabwe has caused small businesses to focus on short-term financial goals to safeguard investment against inflation (Marimira and Gumel, 2025). Zimbabwe's economy significantly impacts businesses' ability to conduct sales, since Zimbabwe is performing poorly on global rankings (Mutambara, 2025). In this context, the sale or promotion of green products is considered difficult because green cosmetics are generally sold at a premium price (Szaban et al., 2025). In contrast, many businesses in South Africa have fully introduced green marketing by embracing the concept of going green (Maziriri, 2020). As a result, businesses have become responsible and knowledgeable about

environmental issues, and consumers in South Africa are becoming more interested in natural and organic skincare products. South Africa's middle class is seeking high-quality, reasonably priced products that suit a variety of skin types and ethnicities (Lanto, 2021). However, Al-Swidi and Saleh (2021) note that concerns have been raised about the concept of "green marketing" and its limited impact on the shift to sustainability in developing countries.

2.2. Product Information

Ikhsan et al. (2024) suggest that during the information phase, consumers assess and examine their immediate environment to fulfil their desire to learn adequate information about the products or services to make informed decisions. Research has shown consumers have a greater regard and appreciation for personal sources than for commercial ones (Kansal, 2021). Most green consumers remain sceptical of the information businesses provide in green marketing regarding the functions or benefits of green cosmetics, as there is a lack of in-depth information on ingredients that would help consumers ascertain whether green cosmetics are environmentally friendly (Sadiq et al., 2021). As a result, when consumers' requirements are not met by the information stored in their memory, they tend to favour substitute products or frequently consult friends, partners, and family for advice based on their knowledge and experience (Wijekoon and Sabri, 2021). Baltaçı et al. (2025) indicate that marketers must invest in promotional efforts to accentuate technical details and product features since providing this information will entice consumers to choose green cosmetics due to their health benefits and environmental concerns.

2.3. Environmental Concern

Alghamdi and Agag (2024) state that environmental awareness is a motivating factor for purchasing green products. Liao et al. (2020) demonstrates that consumers' urgent demand for environmentally friendly products is compelling businesses to make environmental concerns a priority in their manufacturing processes. Ng et al. (2024) indicate that if marketers fail to understand why consumers are concerned about the environment, it will hinder the marketer's ability to transform consumers' environmental concerns into rigorous environmental protection and sustainable growth. To increase environmental concerns, governments use green advertising strategies for public service announcements about environmental issues. Similarly, businesses are adopting these green advertising strategies to motivate consumers to purchase environmentally friendly products (Alamsyah et al., 2020). Consumers who invest time in discovering green products become aware of the potential benefits of green products; they are more likely to trust them, which in turn raises environmental awareness and increases purchase intention (Dhir et al., 2021).

2.4. Greenwashing

Businesses are increasingly recognising the importance of creating a green image to showcase their ecological awareness and social responsibility, especially amid fierce competition and public scrutiny (Tarabieh, 2021). However, research highlights numerous obstacles in disclosing unaudited green performance data, including the lack of a global regulating authority, a variety of firm-level behavioural difficulties, and insufficient explicit regulations to ensure the veracity of reported environmental data (Yu et al., 2020). As a result, most businesses cannot implement green marketing strategies, since there are gaps in sustainability changes, and businesses tend to approach green marketing from an opportunistic standpoint (Rawat and Pande, 2024). Adopting the greenwashing technique may boost the market's reputation and consumer readiness to buy in the short term, but it does not appear to provide any long-term advantage in terms of improved operations and finances (Isac et al., 2025). The deceptive nature of greenwashing has come under scrutiny, particularly from consumer advocacy and environmental groups, who hold businesses accountable for their misleading marketing and false environmental claims that distort the public's perception of sustainability (Bhagat, 2024). The reviewed literature suggests that awareness, information sources,

and environmental concern interact to shape consumers' perceptions of green cosmetics. These insights inform the thematic framework guiding the present study.

3. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach and followed an exploratory research design. Inductive reasoning was adopted to not only contribute to the field of green cosmetics but also address a pressing need for green marketing research in both South African and Zimbabwe, because it allows for the development of theories from collected data and open new lines of inquiry for future research (Janiszewski et al., 2016).

The study used purposive sampling to select suitable research participants, and data were collected by conducting twelve in-depth interviews with female participants over the age of 18 who had purchased green cosmetics in the last six months in South Africa (Johannesburg) or Zimbabwe (Harare). Data saturation was achieved in this study through the iterative conduct of participant interviews and data analysis. The first two interviews from each country yielded valuable information, which was coded and examined to identify recurring themes. Few new notions or ideas were introduced during the subsequent interviews; instead, the same themes started to reappear. New interviews were grouped under pre-existing topics throughout the coding phase, which revealed this repetition in the data collection. It was evident by the sixth interview in each country that the study questions had been thoroughly addressed and that no noteworthy new material had emerged. Findings from different participants were consistent, suggesting that the data adequately represented the viewpoints and experiences pertinent to the research.

Over the past 20 years, South Africa's economy has made some social and economic progress (Enaifoghe and Asuelime, 2018). In contrast, Zimbabwe has recently experienced severe economic difficulties, such as hyperinflation and currency instability (Mambiravana et al., 2022). Therefore, a comparative analysis of consumer behaviour in these two nations is crucial for understanding how shifting economic situations impact consumer preferences, brand loyalty, and purchase decisions.

The participants were invited to participate in the study through a comprehensive approach, utilising various social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram) associated with green cosmetic businesses. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation. Interviews lasted 15 to 20 minutes via Microsoft Teams or Zoom between May to July 2024. Transcribed interviews were coded using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2022), involving familiarisation, initial coding, theme development and interpretation.

To ensure trustworthiness and rigour of the findings, triangulation, and field notes and peer debriefing were used. To uphold moral principles and safeguard participants' rights, participant permission, confidentiality, and data security were prioritised in the study. Participants received information letters outlining the voluntary nature of participation, and the rights of the participants. After prospective participants approached the researcher, the participants were asked to sign a permission form attesting to their understanding of the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any point without consequences. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee of the university, ensuring that it adheres to the universally accepted ethical principles for research involving human subjects.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed three main themes that influence green awareness in the green cosmetics sector in South Africa and Zimbabwe, namely: motivation for consumers to purchase green cosmetics, awareness of green cosmetics, and barriers and challenges when considering or purchasing green cosmetics. The results will highlight how the themes contribute to increasing awareness by giving a thorough explanation of the factors that South African and Zimbabwean consumers consider when choosing to purchase green cosmetics.

4.1. Theme 1: Motivation for Consumers to Purchase Green Cosmetics

4.1.1. Reference Groups

The beauty industry's trends, driven by the growing consciousness of sustainability and wellness, have significantly impacted the South African and Zimbabwean consumer, prompting reference groups to promote green cosmetics. Participants in both countries cited that they were not motivated to try green cosmetics based on advertisements by businesses, but rather by the influence exerted by friends, social media, doctors and teachers. Given that these reference groups have nothing to gain from giving positive reviews on green cosmetics, the purchase advice is given more importance than the communication from the businesses.

Participant 1 in South Africa said that *"...also look at TikTok reviews about certain products. Um, you just type in the name of the product you want, and then it gives you all the information that you need to say?"* On the other hand, Participant 1 in Zimbabwe said, *".... if my family and friends have little knowledge about the new green cosmetics that I want to try, I would rather go on social media to look at the reviews..."*

Recent studies support this assertion, indicating that consumers situate themselves in the context of their reference groups to provide recommendations for developing their perspectives, beliefs, knowledge, and/or behaviours (Xie, 2024). In addition, Kansal (2021) adds that the reference group acts as an ideal basis for consultation, as consumers believe information provided by family or friends is more credible, as they do not have a financial incentive to recommend a business's products or services. The result highlights a consumer culture where green cosmetics are viewed as a movement supported by reliable peers and professionals, rather than merely a business-driven fad. Therefore, it is recommended that bloggers and influencers in the beauty business should declare their brand ties and give accurate information about the green cosmetics that the influencers recommend; this may entail developing policies or a certification program. This is crucial for protecting against potential conflicts of interest and ensuring the legitimacy and authenticity of these endorsements. Such measures would significantly enhance consumer confidence in the information disseminated by these reference groups.

4.1.2. Environmental Impact

The study highlighted that participants in both South Africa and Zimbabwe recognised environmental impact as a motivation for purchasing green cosmetics. As more consumers became ecologically aware, they were driven by their ethical considerations and how their purchases impacted the environment. Most of the participants highlighted that the reason for purchasing green cosmetics is that the products are environmentally friendly and promote animal welfare.

Participant 4 in South Africa said that, *"...purchasing green cosmetics is also a way of supporting sustainable practices... a positive way to just contribute to a greener planet."* While Participant 4 from Zimbabwe said, *"And also, I realised that when they make the product, there is no animal testing..."*

This finding corresponds to a study conducted by Dhir et al. (2021) and Shah et al. (2021), individuals who are concerned about environmental issues and are knowledgeable about how to solve issues to act sustainably will help businesses achieve sound environmental performance. Guerreiro and Pacheco (2021) highlight that if consumers believe that environmental concerns are merely a means to generate profits and do not align with the company's fundamental values, identity, or operations, there is no guarantee that consumers will consistently opt for green products. However, a separate analysis by Chanda et al. (2024) found that the likelihood of green purchases is inversely correlated with environmental concerns and environmental knowledge. Consumers are constantly looking for ways to promote sustainable consumption by purchasing environmentally friendly cosmetics that also consider animal welfare. Therefore, it is recommended that to increase sales of green cosmetics marketing teams should build on basic data of how the cosmetics are environmentally friendly and consider animal welfare to tell a more compelling and product story through product descriptions, lifestyle photography and the like to complement product attributes

and capture consumers' attention, helping the consumers to visualise what life looks like using green cosmetics. On the other hand, the government should implement eco-labelling and certification programmes that pinpoint products that are cruelty-free and environmentally friendly, thereby enabling consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions. These certifications, backed by stringent ethical and environmental guidelines, can ensure that products meet specific sustainability requirements, such as low environmental impact, ethical sourcing, and cruelty-free testing.

4.2. Theme 2: Awareness of Green Cosmetics

4.2.1. Online Presence

The results from the study highlighted the importance of maintaining a robust online presence to reach and influence consumers effectively. South Africans and Zimbabweans shared a great deal of similarities in the tools that the consumers used to learn about green cosmetics, making social media and other digital platforms essential in promoting awareness of green cosmetics.

One distinctive difference that was noted in South African consumers was the reliance on documentaries to primarily educate the participants on the detrimental effects of traditional cosmetics on their health and the environment.

Participant 1 from South Africa said that “...I watched a certain documentary that talked about the, um these hair relaxers, the, the creamy crackers, some would call, it where inside that relaxer they put a chemical called sodium hydroxide, which is not environmentally friendly because it can degrade even harsh materials and things like that....”

A great reliance on the internet was evident in Zimbabwe, where the internet empowered consumers to make well-informed decisions as it allowed consumers to research different green cosmetics manufacturers, read in-depth reviews, and compare prices and ingredients.

Participant 6 in Zimbabwe highlighted that, “I searched on Google for greener options of green cosmetics”.

These findings are supported by Pop et al. (2020), who highlighted that the internet is used as a consumer communication source whereby consumers who use social media learn about products; this contributes significantly to the development of consumers' attitudes. In addition, referrals from other consumers, social media, online platforms, and advertising in the mass media, consumers get to learn more about products or services and find comparable alternatives, causing consumers to demand products of higher quality and lower environmental impact progressively (Varadarajan et al., 2022). South Africa and Zimbabwe are recommended to implement targeted policy interventions that leverage social media and documentaries, which have already been successful in increasing awareness of green cosmetics, to draw attention to the risks of non-sustainable consumption, encouraging viewers to adopt more environmentally friendly consumption. In addition, businesses should develop marketing strategies such as hosting live videos, Q&A sessions, and giveaways to help a business foster a personal connection with the audience, which can ultimately lead to increased sales.

4.2.2. Product Packaging

Lupindo et al. (2024) and Owusu-Sekyere et al. (2019) state that in South Africa, the green cosmetic industry is slowly gaining prominence due to the wide variety of green cosmetic products available, and the extensive advertisement of green cosmetics products. In addition, the South African cosmetics and personal care industry is competitive, with a sizable presence of regional and international businesses in the market, where demand is primarily driven by increasing adaption toward skincare routines and consumer awareness of brand know-how (Amra, 2022). While only a small percentage of people in Zimbabwe, for example, are aware of the detrimental effects that the manufacturing and distribution of cosmetic products have on both the environment and human health (Nyoni-Kachambwa, 2021).

As a result, the study shows that South African and Zimbabwean consumers differ significantly in their approaches to learning about green cosmetics and in their evaluations of products. Most of the participants in South Africa specifically considered product packaging as a tool to increase awareness of green cosmetics amongst participants by considering the product label. While evaluating the cosmetic alternatives in the market by comparing the ingredients, the participants in South Africa identified different cues on the label that specify if the cosmetic is vegan or recyclable or anti-animal testing; this participant opted to purchase these as it made the participant feel like they are contributing to a greater good of preserving the environment and protecting animals.

Participant 5 in South Africa, who said, *"If there's that little tick on it that does say vegan or recyclable or anti-animal testing, then that is how I first became aware of products that actually do advocate for those types of initiatives."*

This finding is supported by Luo et al. (2020) consumers rely on external cues, such as green advertising, to influence their internal reasoning before deciding whether to purchase goods or services in an environment with an unequal distribution of information. However, Isac et al. (2025) note that many businesses have adopted an opportunistic approach of the absence of regulatory authority to provide ambiguous green labels to consumers – this is due to less knowledge about the production process. Therefore, it is recommended that establishing a national green certification programme that standardises labels across the market could be a significant regulatory intervention. This would bolster consumer trust by ensuring that green products with claims such as 'vegan', 'recyclable', or 'cruelty-free' are appropriately validated by an impartial third-party organisation. Additionally, it is recommended to have policies that include campaigns to educate consumers about the ethical and environmental benefits of choosing products with green labels, as this would help them become more aware of how their purchasing decisions impact the environment and animal welfare.

4.3. Theme 3: Barriers and Challenges

4.3.1. Availability

The majority of the participants repeatedly emphasised that product availability is the main factor impeding decisions to buy eco-friendly cosmetics. A variety of linked factors, including limited production, a limited choice of green cosmetics, product unavailability, and the sale of green cosmetics in certain retailers, all affect product availability as indicated by the participants.

Participant 3 in South Africa noted that, *"...It was difficult to find them because they were at very selected stores at that time.... whenever I do buy them, I'll have to buy in bulk, but they can be quite pricey as well."* Participant 1 in Zimbabwe said that, *"...And also, you might find a small business selling the products, and the next time that you want to go and purchase them or to buy those products, um, the business will not be operating..."*

This finding is further supported by Weissmann and Hock (2022) note that the availability of green products influences both the desire to purchase and the actual purchase of those products, whereas a shortage of green products is negatively correlated with both desire and actual purchase. In addition, Adrita (2020) also indicated that consumers tend to choose products that are readily available and are reluctant to spend time searching for green products; therefore, the presence of eco-labelled products in a store influences their intention to purchase – this is because green purchases cannot occur without access to green products. Therefore, it is recommended that the government implement legislation to encourage local manufacturers of green cosmetics through grants or subsidies for businesses that prioritise green and sustainable product lines. This proactive role not only makes green cosmetics more accessible, but also reduces dependency on imports, encourages domestic businesses to manufacture green cosmetics, and significantly mitigates the adverse environmental effects of transportation, instilling confidence in the public about the government's commitment to sustainability.

4.3.2. Awareness

A major obstacle to having difficulties in determining the legitimacy of green cosmetics due to a lack of information and inadequate advertising was identified by Zimbabwean participants, despite interest in purchasing green cosmetics. On the other hand, another participant mentioned that to learn about green cosmetics, they had to educate themselves by reading about brands that prioritise sustainability and transparency, looking for certifications, and reading reviews.

Participant 2 in Zimbabwe noted that, *“the challenges that I faced is that I do not have the knowledge to actually verify if the cosmetics are really green, so sometimes I can purchase the product thinking it is green...”*

This finding aligns with the results presented by Luo et al. (2020), indicating that consumers often lack accurate information on the environmental characteristics of products or services due to the complex data, jargon, and unclear messages presented in green advertising, which also frequently overestimate the benefits of such products or services. A study conducted by Sadiq et al. (2021) stipulates that most green consumers remain sceptical of the information that businesses provide in green marketing regarding the functions or benefits of green cosmetics, because there is a lack of in-depth information on ingredients that would help consumers to ascertain whether green cosmetics are indeed environmentally friendly. Many consumers in Zimbabwe expressed a desire to explore sustainable cosmetics by seeking information on businesses that prioritise sustainability. While this self-education is advantageous, it can also be quite burdensome for consumers. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers ease this by promoting the establishment of independent platforms or services that compile and verify sustainability information for cosmetics. These platforms can function as a one-stop shop for research, offering reviews, certification details, and brand transparency rankings.

4.4. Summary of Findings

See Table 1 for a cross-country comparison of findings.

Table 1. Cross-country comparison of findings.

Summary of Findings		
Theme 1: Motivation for consumers to purchase green cosmetics		
	(‘Similarities’, True)	(‘Differences’, True)
Reference Group	Both countries noted that reference groups played a pivotal role in motivating consumers to purchase green cosmetics, as they had nothing to gain from giving positive reviews.	International beauty trends and online communities influence South African consumers, whereas in Zimbabwe, traditional community networks exert greater influence.
Environmental Impact	Consumers in Zimbabwe and South Africa are unified in their desire to shun cosmetics that use animals in testing, reflecting a growing ecological consciousness and a premium placed on animal welfare.	Not applicable
Theme 2: Awareness of green cosmetics		
Online Presence	South Africans and Zimbabweans relied on online communities and social media influencers to share their experiences with green	A great reliance on the internet was evident in Zimbabwe, where product availability and access to physical retail establishments selling green

	cosmetics, which has contributed to the credibility and awareness of the products.	cosmetics is limited. South African consumers showed reliance on documentaries, which made the problem of traditional cosmetics seem urgent and personal, providing an eye-opening experience that increased awareness. South African consumers were more knowledgeable about green cosmetics, enabling the consumer to pinpoint the essential indicators that constitute a product to be green, such as the usage of sustainable packaging, the existence of eco-friendly or organic certifications, and the lack of dangerous chemicals, as compared to Zimbabwe.
Product Packaging	Not applicable	
Theme 3: Barriers and Challenges		
Availability	Product availability stemming from the limited manufacturing and sales, which were also mentioned by the participants as significant causes of the shortage of these products, was one of the prevalent obstacles that were evident amongst South African and Zimbabwean consumers.	A differentiating factor amongst participants in South Africa is the limited range of selection of green cosmetics, posing a significant obstacle for consumers to find green cosmetics that met their needs, tastes, or budget. The Zimbabwean market is mainly concentrated on product unavailability due to production and distribution limitations, making the purchasing process tedious and the incorporation of green cosmetics into the daily lives of consumers difficult. Zimbabwean consumers alluded to the difficulties faced in determining the legitimacy of green cosmetics as a result of a lack of information and inadequate advertising.
Awareness	Not Applicable	However, a more advanced knowledge infrastructure surrounding green cosmetics benefits South African consumers, enabling consumers to make more informed purchases.

5. Conclusions

The present study sets out the key factors that increase the awareness of green cosmetics in South Africa and Zimbabwe to develop a more profound understanding of how these aspects influence women's decisions about purchasing green cosmetics. Evidence showed that reference groups are essential in shaping consumer behaviour toward green cosmetics in South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the market remains niche and underdeveloped. In Zimbabwe, limited availability makes the social networks crucial for guiding purchasing decisions and spreading awareness that formal advertising fails to provide. The growing ecological awareness in both countries reflects a broader cultural shift, yet the strength of this movement depends heavily on access to information. The persistent lack of accessibility and weak advertising in Zimbabwe demonstrate that without stronger awareness campaigns and improved product availability, the green cosmetics movement cannot progress. In contrast, South Africa's more informed consumers show that education and transparency are powerful tools in promoting sustainable purchasing behaviour. Since Africa is still in the early stages of the green awakening, businesses on the continent need to adopt differentiation strategies to penetrate the green industry and secure a competitive edge.

Marketers should ensure that environmental benefits are clearly communicated rather than implied. Instead, they should be visible and communicated ostentatiously. Such relevant marketing communication efforts should valorise consumers' confidence to choose new, innovative, green cosmetics. The present study may offer insightful information about how women in these two nations choose their green cosmetics, which may be helpful for businesses and decision-makers looking to enter new markets or create sustainability plans suited to the local conditions. This could add to the body of knowledge on consumer behaviour in developing countries and help us to understand how sustainability and green consumerism are viewed and used in these areas. The growth of the green cosmetic industry in South Africa and Zimbabwe can profit from this research.

A key limitation of this study is the small sample size of 12 participants, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study focused only on female consumers, and thus future studies could use mixed methods to include male consumers and measure quantitative relationships between awareness and purchasing behaviour. Moreover, gender and economic status could act as moderators, since consumers from diverse backgrounds may exhibit varying reactions, providing valuable insights for policymakers, managers, and practitioners regarding green behaviour from different perspectives. Furthermore, the research did not consider the role of government influence on the purchasing of green cosmetics, making it essential to investigate the moderating effects of governmental influence on attitudes and purchasing patterns related to green products and cosmetics.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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