



# The Relationship Between Social Appearance Anxiety and Perceived Values of Skin Care Products Among Highly Stable Income Women

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**Abstract.** The importance individuals attach to their appearance is attracting attention in different countries. We studied if highly stable income female groups with different facial anxiety levels have different value demands for skin care products. As expected, our research showed that highly stable income women with higher social appearance anxiety tend to care more about the symbolic value of the product, than the functional and emotional value of the product. Our research suggests that companies may want to emphasize more of the symbolic value of their skin care products, in addition to their promotion of the functional value of the product. We discuss the theoretical and practical indications of our findings.

**Keywords:** Appearance anxiety · Symbolic value · Functional value · Skin products · Women

## 1 Introduction

The importance individuals attach to their appearance is attracting attention in different countries [1]. Women try different ways to leave a more favorable impression on others and to look attractive, muscular or beautiful [2]. These findings may partially explain why the vast majority of people who pursue cosmetic procedures and use skin care product [3]. To date, research in this area has focused primarily on the female population [4]. With the emergence of different kinds of skin care products, the appearance anxiety of female groups that have stable income and social status is affected [1]. Thus, affecting the consumption behavior of female groups that have stable income and social status. For skin care products, as well as the resulting consumption behaviors of skin care products. Appearance anxiety describes an apprehension about aspects of one's physical appearance and how others evaluate them.

Generally, product value is divided into three definitions about functional value, emotional value, and symbolic value [5]. Functional value means that it is the cornerstone of the brand and mainly reflects the functional benefits of the product or the property of the house, such as quality, efficacy, performance, service and other emotional is means that it mainly expresses the emotional connotation of the brand, such as love, care, friendship and warmth. The value of emotional experience means that it mainly

interprets the values contained in the brand, aesthetic taste, identity, status, which can be understood as the personality of the brand; through the use of such brand products, people often through the pursue of brand products experience the pursuit of life, publicity of their own personality, looking for spiritual sustenance.

According to existing studies, women who buy anti-aging products pay more attention to their anti-wrinkle effects [6]. We expect women that have stable income and social status with high facial anxiety would have similar preferences. Arguably, they feel their own imperfections and aging [1], and their purpose is to make themselves more perfect, while the function of skin care products is the most important for women that have stable income and social status with high facial anxiety [7]. Based on these, our first hypothesis is that women that have stable income and social status with higher facial anxiety are more concerned with the functional value of skin care products (H1).

In general, women with stable incomes have a relatively high level of education [8]; Or they have more opportunities to receive more cultural social life experience. Therefore, in addition to care if they have wrinkles on their face, they may also pay more attention to the idea whether they are independent women [9]. Therefore, the symbolic value of the product may also attract attention from these women. Indeed, there is evidence that women also pay attention to the background and brand culture of skin care products [10]. Based on these, our second hypothesis is that highly educated women may also be more concerned with the symbolic value of products (H2).

In summary, this research tests two hypotheses. Our hypothesis one is that higher-educated women with higher facial anxiety pay more attention to the functional value of skin care products, and our hypothesis two is that higher-educated women with higher facial anxiety also pay more attention to the symbolic value of skin care products.

## 2 Methods

A survey was conducted by the author to examine the opinions of female with high stable income about different values of skin products based on their level of social appearance anxiety. The questionnaire included four parts one by one: (1) demographics, (2) measurement of social appearance anxiety, (3) different values of skin products, and (4) consume behaviour of skin products. Detailed items for all measures in parts (2)–(4) are included in Sect. 2.2. Data was collected from 13 to 24 March 2022.

### 2.1 Sampling

Data collection was conducted via convenience sampling with snowball methods. The online questionnaire was distributed the social media software WeChat.

The total questionnaire collected was 85. Among the questionnaire collected the male participants were 11. This result in 74 female valid respondents. The mean age of the participants was 38 ( $SD = 6.879$ ).

### 2.2 Measures

Social appearance anxiety was measured with five statements. We asked the respondents, to what extent the following five statements are in line with their personal situations, by

indicating on a 7-point scale from 1 totally not in line to 7 totally in line with personal situations ( $\alpha = .902$ ).

1. I feel uncomfortable when people don't think highly of my looks.
2. When I'm in front of people who look better than ME, I usually feel uneasy and apprehensive.
3. I'm always worried that people will think I'm ugly and look down on me when I'm interacting with others.
4. Afraid to go out without makeup because they are worried about their looks and make up for it.
5. Because of the appearance problem, I often fantasize about how good it would be if I became good-looking.

Next, we measured the three types of values of products.

The functional value was measured with two statements. We asked the respondents, to what extent they agree with the following two statements, by indicating on a 7-point scale from 1 totally disagree to 7 totally agree ( $\alpha = .854$ ).

1. The most important thing about skin care products is their functions, such as preventing and reducing wrinkles.
2. The most important thing for skin care products is their quality, such as reducing the loss of collagen and sagging face.

The symbolic value was measured with two statements. We asked the respondents, to what extent they agree with the following two statements, by indicating on a 7-point scale from 1 totally disagree to 7 totally agree ( $\alpha = .832$ ).

1. The most important thing about skin care products is the values they represent. For example, every woman is a unique individual.
2. The most important thing about skin care products is the lifestyle they represent, such as caring for yourself and enjoying life.

The emotional value was measured with one statement. We asked the respondents, to what extent they agree with the following statement, by indicating on a 7-point scale from 1 totally disagree to 7 totally agree.

1. The most important thing for skin care products is to bring consumers real feelings, for example, to take care of their skin just like mothers take care of their children.

### **3 Results: Relationships Between Social Appearance Anxiety and Three Values of the Product**

We tested hypothesis by relationships between social appearance anxiety and three values of the product.

**Table 1.** Pearson's *r* between social appearance anxiety and three values of the product

–	Functional value	Symbolic value	Emotional value
Social appearance anxiety	.318** (p = .006)	.363** (p = .001)	.294* (p = .011)

Note. \*\*p < .001, \*p < .05

As expected, the participants who had higher social appearance anxiety tend to also care more about the functional value of the product. In addition, the participants who had higher social appearance anxiety tend to also care more about the symbolic value of the product. Moreover, the participants who had higher social appearance anxiety tend to also care more about the emotional value of the product. Interestingly, the participants who had higher social appearance anxiety tend to also care more about the symbolic value of the product than its functional value and emotional value (Table 1).

## 4 Conclusion and Discussion

We studied if highly stable income female groups with different facial anxiety levels have different value demands for skin care products. We extended the previous research by (1) focusing on women group that have stable income and social status; (2) testing the relationship between the level of social appearance anxiety and different values of skin products via cross-disciplinary research design.

Our research findings show that the participants who had higher social appearance anxiety tended to also care more about the symbolic value of the skin care products and the emotional value of the product, as well as the functional value of the product [11]. Interestingly, the participants who had higher social appearance anxiety tended to also care more about the symbolic value of the product than its functional value and emotional value. In other words, women who focus more on the product's values and central ideas than the quality of the product.

Our findings have important theoretical implications. First, the findings are in line with the literature which shows that women with higher social appearance anxiety care about the functional value of the products. Second, we extended the literature by further showing that those people also care about the symbolic value of the products, and maybe care about the symbolic value more than the functional value of the product [12].

Our findings also have important practical implication:

- (1) For the business: If its customer group is highly knowledgeable women, our research findings can help the business to better understand the needs of customers. Specifically, the business can introduce the symbolic value of products to customers and meet their needs more effectively.
- (2) For women: Our findings may help them find that they are not alone in focusing on product functionality or face anxiety [13].
- (3) Significance to society: Voices on the Internet may change their attitudes due to the publication of the paper. For example, everyone on the Internet says that high-knowledge women are completely free of appearance anxiety, but in fact, high-knowledge women also have appearance anxiety.

## Limitation + future research

- (1) One of the reasons the sample's appearance rating is generally not very high is that the media has exaggerated the appearance anxiety, while in real life most women's appearance anxiety may not be that high.
- (2) In the future, other sales channels can be explored to correctly convey the symbolic value of products in the publicity and the relationship between product sales volume. When introducing products to highly educated women, businesses can overemphasize symbolic value [14].
- (3) Chanel's latest slogan of the year is about if there is one thing that must be done is to love yourself first, perfume is not to please others, but to please yourself more. Chanel's popularity and sales doubled this year because of a slogan. This is because Chanel knows that high-income women pay attention to functional value and symbolic value, which makes many high-income women consume [15].
- (4) At present, there are many products that have disappeared [16]. Even if the products are very functional, the merchants may lose the consumer group of high-knowledge female group because they do not do symbolic propaganda work at all, and thus disappear.

In conclusion, we studied if highly stable income female groups with different facial anxiety levels have different value demands for skin care products, as well as the resulting consumption behaviors of skin care products. Our research showed that highly stable income women with higher social appearance anxiety tend to care more about the symbolic value of the product, than the functional and emotional value of the product. Our research suggests that companies may want to emphasize more of the symbolic value of their skin care products, in addition to their promotion of the functional value of the product [16] (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Demographics of respondents

–		China
Gender	Male	11
	Female	74
Mean age (SD)		(SD = 38.47)
Education	Primary school	1
	Junior school	6
	High school	25
	University	32
	I do not want to say	0
	Master	1
	Doctor	1
	Else	8
Income per month/Yuan	Less than 30000	57
	30000–60000	10
	60000–90000	4
	90000–120000	1
	More than 120000	2
	I do not want to say	0
Total		74

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