

Why We Need To Implement Underconsumption Core in the Beauty Industry

With perishable cosmetics and plastic packaging polluting our earth, reducing our product usage and practicing mindful habits can help the environment, as well as our mental health.

In the fashion industry, coverage of ethical consumption and sustainability has drastically increased over the past years. Eradicating harmful practices is consistently shown as a top priority.

However, this is not as apparent in the beauty industry. Owning a large amount of cosmetics is seen as impressive. Consumers are hardly shamed for their massive Sephora splurges, yet clothing hauls are often criticized. Pre-teens and children as young as nine are curating comprehensive skincare collections, adding to the demand to produce more and more. The beauty industry appears to thrive on a hype driven fast paced culture, often telling consumers “Don’t walk, RUN” to purchase a product.

On the contrary, ‘underconsumption core’ – a trend created by TikTok users – wants consumers to cut back on how much they buy. Underconsumption is a well-established and beneficial method that should be adopted if you struggle to shop in moderation. Although it’s shown as a trend, it offers timeless advice, educating how we can make use of what we already have. If you already own a facial cleanser that works, then no need to buy five others. Own a 32-colour eyeshadow palette? No need for another. The gist of it is clear. Whilst the platform did not invent minimalism and mindful shopping habits, the easy to remember term makes it simple for us to remember when it comes to how we interact with beauty products.

If consumers continue to overspend on things they do not need, and engage in unnecessary product wastage, it will cause severe implications for our environment. Additionally, splurging on an alarming amount of cosmetics may seem harmless, but it can cause serious financial and psychological harm.

Online content, predominately on social media, has become dominated with videos perpetuating this obsession. Beauty enthusiasts show off curated bathroom shelves stocked with cosmetics – categorised by colour and kind. Content creators and makeup artists display desks teeming of makeup products, naturally due to their line of work. The problem? The frequent exposure of this has made owning too many cosmetics become normalised.

It’s easy to lose sight that it is not typical to own drawers of highlighters like American YouTuber Tati Westbrook, who admitted to owning 130 highlighters to her 8 million subscribers. Social media is often the culprit for self-esteem and identity issues. The fear of missing out or seeming like the outlier in the beauty industry can make consumers feel pressured to buy certain goods.

For an average consumer this would be hard to acquire and maintain. Trying to keep up with trends by overspending can lead to long term harm. A link between financial status and mental health has been well established, with organisations such as the ‘Money and Mental

Health Policy Institute' being founded in order to combat these issues. Debt can cause consumers to be depressed or anxious, and also have [poor eating habits](#) as they cut costs on food to help.

Whilst the beauty industry has noticed it's need to celebrate diversity and inclusion to mitigate harm on consumers self-esteem, it has clear gaps in helping to prevent the financial impacts it may have on people.

Not only is it financially unfeasible but purchasing products only to discard a few months later is impracticable. Plastered on every cosmetic item is the dotted writing etched across the rim showing the expiry date. As they are perishable goods, cosmetics cannot be kept forever.

Whilst advocates for sustainable fashion can encourage consumers to keep and cherish their garments forever, the same cannot be said for cosmetics. Unfortunately, the disposal of beauty products is part of its life cycle, and a greater rate of this can be harmful for the environment.

By following the underconsumption way, consumers can buy more honestly to their taste and requirements. They can use products that complement them and embrace their own interests, rather than copying others, thus save a lot of money. This relieves pressure, making it a more enjoyable experience.

While we have widely accepted plastic waste's negative effects on the environment, it still requires desperate attention. In 2019, the amount of plastic waste in the EU alone was already at 53 million tons, with it being predicted to surpass 100 million by [2060](#). We have all seen measures implemented to reduce plastic waste in the UK: the small fee now charged in all supermarkets for once-complimentary plastic grocery bags, to the legal ban of micro-beads in our exfoliant facial cleansers.

The main culprit of plastic waste is plastic packaging. Despite the clear attempts to make products safer for the environment, a lack of transparency prevents it from being genuine. Many brands use greenwashing tactics for their products, meaning that claims made in sustainability campaigns are actually inaccurate, but written to appear as ethical. This includes instances such as providing incorrect recycling information on products, preventing the product to be environmentally friendly and recycled properly. 67.75% of manufactures in the industry are [responsible](#) for this.

Studies also show that consumers are easily misled with products advertised as biodegradable, despite it only being able to be decomposed under industrial conditions. As biodegradable plastics cannot be recycled at home, they will require further traveling or arrangements to enable it to be done industrially. For busy consumers unaware of these requirements, this is unlikely.

Rather than being a victim of greenwashing, a more socially responsible way of shopping is to carry out light research before buying. As underconsumption core advocates for little to no spending, if you must make a purchase then it should be ethical and beneficial. Seeking a

shopping expert, whose job is dedicated to researching, testing and reviewing products, so you don't have to, is a great way to honour the underconsumption core rule.

"We put each product through its paces, highlighting the best and worst features so consumers have all the information before spending with the intention of preventing items from ending up in landfills." Says Ellie, head of the shopping desk of the Evening Standard.

Ellie explains how her team consciously ensures readers make considered purchases. "In my role, it is important to always be on the pulse of trends and with the likes of TikTok, these move at breakneck speed, so it can be challenging to navigate and decide which will have endurance. During major shopping events like Amazon Prime Day and Black Friday, it does often feel like fuelling overconsumption, so we like to stress that our readers make Wishlist beforehand so that they are only buying what they need rather than because it is discounted".

With the sheer volume of brands not living up to their 'environmentally friendly' claims, wastage is more harmful than we initially thought. Being more mindful of what you buy and how much you buy can help.

Despite the misinformation, brands have still stepped forward with helpful initiatives and sustainable practices. For example, brands have introduced refillable packages for consumers. Others such as Lush have completely removed packaging, with innovative creations like shampoo bars and toner tabs.

However, there are still drawbacks. Reusing cosmetic packages may lead to hygiene concerns, recycling may be difficult with residual formulation in discarded products, or manufactured cosmetics being made up of 90% unrecyclable materials.

If consumers reduce their consumption of beauty products, demand and production will slow down. As rates of re-use and recycling are not balanced with the rates of production, it will take longer for these initiatives to make substantial environmental improvements. Underconsumption core shows itself to be one of the best ways to alleviate the pressure put on brands to mitigate environmental issues. Instead of using PR to pressurise customers to making a payment, brands could focus more on advertising re-using solutions, educating consumers how to get the most out of their products.

Incorporating underconsumption core is simple and can be made exciting. Challenges like 'project pan' encourages fully using makeup—pencils to the nub, eyeshadows to the pan, and foundation bottles emptied—promoting commitment to products and reducing waste. This cultivates a non-disposable approach, similar to sustainable clothing, but it doesn't endorse expired makeup. Beauty YouTuber Elle Chu warns that owning excess products, like 20 lip glosses, highlights overconsumption. Minimalist beauty brands like Merit and Typology offer practical sets for a full face of makeup, while simplified skincare routines can be of equal benefit to 15 step routines. Shopping for personal skin needs rather than trends ensures better results and supports individual skincare goals.

Whilst the trend is criticised as a frivolous way to describe normal consumption, it holds great values and solutions for how the beauty industry encourages spending. By adopting this mindset, consumers can relieve themselves from the demanding pressures to purchase excessive cosmetics. Not only will it provide financial and psychological benefits, but it will also help brands implement their initiatives better for the environment.