

# ***Research on the Optimization Path of Eco-leadership Based on the Beauty Industry***

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**Abstract:** People's aesthetics and tastes have changed with the progress of time and culture. People are constantly influenced by new things, technologies, and ideas, and the pursuit of beauty has increased. However, the beauty industry is currently facing natural resource and ethical dilemmas. Eco-leadership, focusing on environmental and social sustainability, can solve the current dilemmas and help maximize corporate benefits. This paper contributes to the application of eco-leadership in the beauty industry. The case study approach is used to analyze the application of eco-leadership in some leading beauty companies: the body shop, L'Occitane, Natura & Co, and KIKO. These companies are highly recognizable brands in the beauty industry, have a considerable market share, and their products lead to consumer buying behaviour. It is concluded that the beauty industry requires brand leaders to invest in environmental sustainability and social contribution. The strategies related to eco-leadership are suggested to mainly focus on animal testing, recyclability and availability of packaging, energy, and water management, and research into eco-technology.

**Keywords:** eco-leadership, beauty industry, environment, social, sustainability

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Research Background**

The implementation of leadership is a process that responds to social influence and maximizes the efforts of others to achieve the ultimate common goal of the organization [1]. It is the ability to motivate people towards a common goal. It influences not blindly, and it is goal oriented. The leader does not exist independently and must be born out of the group [2]. Moreover, leadership is independent of personality traits and titles, which means that leadership is diverse [3].

Due to advances in technology and business, the nature of leadership is changing to adapt to a more complex environment. As a result, leadership is now being emphasized as a collective process to motivate and inspire teams to achieve common goals [4]. Western mentions the controlling, therapeutic, messianic, and ecological as the main types of leadership cultures in the west over the past century [5].

In order to continually adapt to the ever-changing demands of the environment, eco-leadership is now being used to more comprehensively address the new environmental challenges facing businesses, including but not limited to environmental crises, ethical crises, sustainability issues, and more [5]. Eco-leadership emphasizes sustainable business models, ethical business ethics, and the

integration of ecosystems into leadership styles and organizational decision-making. Eco-leadership also focuses on environmental friendliness and strives to find ways to harmonize business and the environment. In addition, eco-leadership focuses on dependency and connectivity to maximize stakeholder benefits.

Eco-leadership is the new age approach in leadership, focusing on sustainability and protecting the environment. Eco-leadership integrates a leadership focus and decision-making orientation into sustainability and environmental thinking, making corporate ethics and social responsibility a key consideration in business practices. It seeks to minimize any negative impact on society and the environment while maximizing the benefits to the business. In today's society, leadership is about "collaboration and putting people first" [6]. Eco-leadership can help companies build stronger ties with society. As eco-leadership emphasizes a broad distribution of leadership, it also helps companies to promote motivation and creativity [7]. It can also help companies implement business strategies considering the environmental impact, helping them grow sustainably and gain a good reputation. It also considers the interests of different stakeholders and the potential benefits to the business, helping to maximize the benefits to the business.

The beauty industry is potentially harmful to natural resources and has ethically controversial. Studies have shown that UV filters, also known as sunscreens, cause irreversible damage to marine life, that surfactants cause potential environmental problems, and that plastic packaging for cosmetics forms plastic deposits due to their inability to degrade [8]. In addition, with the exposure to animal testing in the beauty industry, more and more people are boycotting animal testing products [9]. Ethical issues in the beauty industry are also emerging in the public eye.

As people's income increases and beauty products become a symbol of a confident lifestyle, cosmetics sales are growing exponentially. Sustainability and ethics in the beauty industry are becoming primary concerns [8]. A focus on environmental protection and corporate sustainability characterizes eco-leadership. If eco-leadership could be introduced in the beauty industry, it would strengthen the company's focus on ecological issues. By considering environmental protection when producing products, companies can raise their ethical and environmental standards and help them improve their brand image. This also would allow the company to gain more social support and thus generate benefits.

## 1.2. Literature Review

Western first introduced eco-leadership in 2008 [5]. In this article, the author gives the motivation behind the emergence of eco-leadership, its specific definition, and the importance of implementing eco-leadership in business. The context for the emergence of eco-leadership was the lack of government funding, the need to address local community issues, and the need for companies to take on social responsibility, thus leading to a change in leadership. He mentioned that eco-leadership requires attention to the reciprocity of the environment, the distribution of power, and the strengthening of links with the outside world to create the right culture and conditions. He advises on how to develop eco-leadership and what characteristics eco-leadership should have. He also suggests responding to social and environmental challenges ethically and creatively. However, this paper's limitation is that the issue of resource constraints in companies and the associated challenges to organizational culture can be a barrier to successful eco-leadership.

Pal proposed that the beauty industry has seen exponential growth in sales due to the increase in demand for beauty products due to the rise in people's standard of living [8]. He discusses the potential adverse effects of the industry as a whole on human health by examining the environmental hazards of different beauty ingredients and the ecological impact of plastic packaging for cosmetics. He, therefore, calls for stricter regulation of the beauty industry and the need for manufacturers to take responsibility for human health and the environment. For example, instead of using plastic packaging

for cosmetics, innovative biodegradable materials should be developed to protect the environment. This paper gives recommendations for the sustainability of beauty products. However, it does not examine how the beauty industry leaders should impose eco-leadership to transform themselves into environmentally friendly companies.

Gould analyzed the impact of ethical perceptions on consumers' purchasing decisions [10]. The study showed that most consumers do not consider ethical issues when purchasing cosmetics unless specifically guided. He also mentions that many cosmetic companies position their companies on ethical-friendly criteria, even though consumers do not consider the ethical aspects of the company when making a purchase. This study inspires these companies that for a company's strategy on ethics to be successful, such companies need to communicate knowledge about ethics to consumers in a detailed and systematic way. This article advises on ethical strategies for beauty companies. However, it does not point out the potential dangers if companies face an ethical crisis and do not give specific steps for companies to implement ethical strategies.

### **1.3. Research Gap**

Most scholars have studied the importance of eco-leadership for business and the ethical and environmental issues facing the beauty industry. However, no research has been conducted on the current application of eco-leadership in the beauty industry. There is a research gap in this area.

### **1.4. Structure of the Article**

Firstly, this paper introduces eco-leadership's high business and social value for the beauty industry. In the second step, the paper examines the literature review, tracing the origins of eco-leadership and its importance to modern society. The beauty industry emphasizes the importance of environmental protection, ethics, and sustainable development. This paper then illustrates the research gap that scholars have not addressed, thus, applying eco-leadership in the beauty industry to fill this gap. Thirdly, the research methodology adopted in this paper is presented. This paper selects the Case study research method and then analyses which representative companies have been selected for the Case study research and gives the reasons for selecting these companies. Fourthly, the paper analyses the specific case study of each company and discusses a summary of the findings. Fifth, the paper presents the pressing issues that need to be addressed by eco-leadership in the beauty industry and how eco-leadership can be used for corporate governance to achieve sustainable development and finally points out the limitations and directions for further research in this paper.

## **2. Research Method**

This paper has chosen the case study approach to analyze the application of several beauty companies in terms of eco-leadership.

The case study is a research method that is used in a wide variety of disciplines [11]. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the events, and problems. It issues the Case faces to understand the underlying issues, standard features, and their impact on the industry to which the Case is supposed to respond [12]. The benefit of a case study is its relevance; it allows for a situation-specific analysis based on particular cases, exploring specific details in detail and focusing on analyzing the impact of underlying factors. However, this characteristic also leads to the limitations of case studies. Case studies lack generalisability [13].

This article selected the body shop, L' Occitane, Natura & Co, and KIKO as case studies. These companies are highly recognizable brands in the beauty industry, have a considerable market share, and their products lead to consumer buying behaviour. This helped to study only their contribution to eco-leadership and exclude other factors from interfering with the case study.

### 3. Result

Eco-leadership focus on the environment and society. This paper studies several representative companies in the beauty industry that focus on eco from the leadership level. The leadership's attitude towards eco and the company's overall strategy reflects the leadership. The paper also highlights the focus of eco leadership in the beauty industry on the environment and society.

Anita Roddick established The Body Shop, a renowned British beauty brand, in 1976, with over 3,000 shops in over 60 countries and territories. It is civilized for its ethical, environmentally concerned and socially responsible approach [14]. As a result, this has made the brand stand out in the industry and attract a large number of consumers. The Body Shop's products include skincare, bath and make-up, covering all areas of the face, body, hair, and beauty tools [15].

#### 3.1. Environment Sustainability

##### 3.1.1. Stop Animal Testing

Animal testing of cosmetics is an important area of concern for the protection of animal health and respect for animals while encouraging the use of more ethical, sustainable, and reliable methods of scientific experimentation. Numerous scientific studies have shown that animals have a degree of consciousness and emotion and can perceive pain, illness, and suffering [16]. Over 500,000 animals are tested on cosmetic animals worldwide each year [17]. Animal testing involves ethical issues, and brands need to consider the rights and dignity of animals. In addition, the availability of animal testing is controversial. Animals are fundamentally different from humans, and there are no conclusive results regarding whether animal testing is fully adaptable to humans [18]. Consumers are frustrated and uncomfortable with animal testing. More and more women are willing to buy products not tested on animals. New data from Perfect365 shows that 36% of women prefer cosmetic brands with zero cruelty [19-20].

As per the statement of Jessie Macneil-Brown, who serves as the Senior Manager of Corporate Responsibility at The Body Shop, "I was shocked to hear that cosmetics are still being tested on animals. The company surveyed 6,000 customers worldwide last year, and the results showed that they were most concerned about animal testing." The Body Shop founder Anita Roddy, herself a prominent animal rights activist, has laid the groundwork for the brand's focus on animal protection and the environment as a leader in large-scale beauty products, and she vehemently disagrees with the proposed EU directive, which would mandate all cosmetics companies to conduct animal trials. The leader's values will determine the brand's strategy and future.

Leadership is used to facilitate teams to achieve common goals. Under leadership, The Body Shop, together with Cruelty-Free International, an international organization committed to ending animal testing, has joined forces.,[21-22] partnered with 8.3 million people who rallied at the UN headquarters in New York City to sign a petition against animal testing on cosmetics. In 2018, they petitioned the UN to ban animal testing. With the successful submission of the petition, many countries have made changes accordingly. The Australian government stopped using data obtained from animal testing. Canada legislated a zero-cruelty cosmetics bill. A fresh federal legislation named the Humane Cosmetics Act has been proposed in the House of Representatives and the Senate in the United States to end animal experimentation for cosmetic purposes throughout the nation.

##### 3.1.2. Energy Conservation

Executives at The Body Shop encourage offline shops to save energy [23]. Executives have developed an energy conservation guide distributed throughout the organization to encourage behavioural change that will help reduce energy intensity and promote recyclability and reusability of packaging.

In addition, according to Edie Newsroom [24], The Body Shop will commit to reducing its emissions to zero by 2030. However, progress is slow. More achievable KPIs and improved monitoring measures may be needed.

The Body Shop has had an empty bottle recycling programme since 1993. Today, The Body Shop has a dedicated recycling facility to ensure that each item is fully traceable and not landfilled or incinerated. The programme is designed to help customers properly recycle or reuse their old beauty packaging. Consumers bring their empty bottles to the Beauty Shop's offline shops. The offline shops contact MYGroup, a specialist recycling company, to process, sort, recycle, or reuse them as raw materials for new products. MYGroup transforms the collected material into reusable plastic for benches, tables, and planters. The Body Shop repeats this process every time so the packaging never ends up in a landfill or incinerated.

Although the management of The Body Shop is very committed to environmental protection and social contribution, progress has been slow [23]. The difficulties and slow progress of the environmental protection strategy can be attributed to conflicting interests, difficulties in international coordination, technical difficulties, and lack of awareness [25]. Many environmental issues involve conflicts between stakeholders, such as economic development and environmental protection, and the director of The Body Shop mentioned that environmental protection is a global issue that requires international cooperation and coordination and involves political, economic and cultural differences between different countries, making it more difficult [23]. In addition, although their body shop has outlets in over sixty countries, many people are unaware of environmental protection and do not act on it. Therefore, the lack of education on environmental awareness is also a challenge.

Natura & Co, which consists of the Natura, The Body Shop, and Aesop brands, became the world's largest pure plant-based beauty company in 2021. The company's CEO, Roberto Marques, says the brands will commit to the 1.5C science-based emissions reduction target and use eco leadership to drive the group's brands towards more specific environmental goals. Marques emphasizes that "companies need to take responsibility and commit to a better, more sustainable and inclusive society." Natura & Co is also committed to protecting 3 million hectares of Amazon rainforest by 2030 and is already working with NGOs and suppliers to protect 1.8 million hectares. In addition, the company has pledged to ensure zero deforestation in its South American supply chain by 2025.

On the other hand, as an international French personal care and household products retailer founded in 1976 [26], L'OCCITANE focuses on natural regeneration and sustainability and is committed to preserving biodiversity. L'OCCITANE has improved its product formulations to promote a sustainable supply of raw materials and reduce production's impact on water and land. Their 80% rinse formula is readily biodegradable [27-29].

## **3.2. Social Sustainability**

### **3.2.1. Gender Equality**

As a beauty brand leader, the feminist movement should be supported. Justice and equality are closely linked to women's rights. Therefore, any form of gender discrimination, violence, or harassment should be strictly prohibited. Women are an important part of every society. Suppose their talents and abilities are not fully recognized and utilized. In that case, they will not be able to escape their dependence on men, and the development of society as a whole will be limited. As women are the main consumers in the beauty industry, better insight and understanding of female consumers will lead to more business opportunities and profits. Eco leadership focusing on and supporting women's rights will not only improve the company's social image and create an image of corporate social responsibility but will also win wide acclaim and recognition from society and the public, bringing great benefits to the company.

Kiko's eco leadership is reflected in its high regard for social responsibility. As a company, they consider it their responsibility to create a work environment that respects every employee, regardless of gender, colour, race, social background, language, religion, personal or political views, tradition, disability, age or sexual orientation [30].

Since founding the company 45 years ago, Body Shop founder Anita Roddick has been committed to creating a more just and beautiful world and believes that "kindness results in it drawing people closer to you" [31-34]. The brand is true to its founder's philosophy and beliefs. As a feminist brand, Body Shop believes that empowering women is at the heart of everything the team does. Their products are designed to help women express their self-love, boost their self-esteem, and promote female leadership. Harmeet Singh, Vice President of E-Commerce Marketing at The Body Shop India Marketing, focuses on women's rights. He oversees The Body Shop India's collaboration with Plan International, a worldwide charitable organization to combat gender inequality. In her interview, she said: "In my 20 years in business, I have witnessed a lot of gender inequality - women are often at a disadvantage in terms of success, even though they are equally capable and talented. I want young girls across the globe to believe in themselves and be supported by their families and communities to achieve their dreams. I am calling for gender equality so that men and women can be treated equally in a better world."

Natura & Co, the leader of The Body Shop's parent company leading the company's strategic direction, is also taking action in response to the feminist movement and employee well-being. They are committed to promoting the circular economy and protecting human rights. The company's 'Commitment for Life' programme includes six measures to achieve full supply chain traceability by 2025 and to ensure suppliers comply with UN human rights guidelines by 2023. The company also supports improved wage, health, and education provisions for direct employees and is committed to ensuring that women account for 50% of leadership positions within three years.

#### 4. Discussion

As people's standard of living increases, the demand for beauty products increases. The beauty industry is currently facing environmental and social challenges. The beauty industry is polluting and damaging the environment with chemical waste and using non-renewable resources generated during production. Some brands are still experimenting on animals, which has sparked discontent and condemnation from consumers and animal protection groups. Some accuse the beauty industry of using exaggerations and falsehoods in their marketing and sales pitches, misleading and deceiving consumers while having a quantitative impact on women's body image and self-esteem. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the materials, energy, and environmental standards brands use in their production processes and the social responsibility commitments made by brands. It demands brands be socially active and transparently demonstrate their production processes and values to consumers. Eco-leadership focuses on social and environmental sustainability and can address the current dilemma faced by the beauty industry.

The beauty industry needs brand leaders to focus on investing in environmental sustainability and social contribution if eco-leadership is to be applied. When developing strategies related to environmental sustainability, there is a need to focus on animal testing, recyclability and availability of packaging, energy, and water management, and research into environmental technology. Avoiding animal testing can help build a positive brand image by avoiding harming animals and getting caught up in ethical and legal risks. Leaders need to focus on this communication aspect and develop strategies to help boost turnover. With the advancement of modern technology, techniques, and methods that can replace animal testing have been developed. This eliminates animal testing controversy while improving the results' accuracy, reliability, and validity. At the same time, this is used to promote technological innovation and drive the beauty industry toward continued

development and progress. Recycling packaging is also an intelligent strategy. Recycling packaging campaigns can help raise the profile of corporate social responsibility. By participating in packaging recycling, companies can demonstrate their social responsibility and help build a good social image and reputation, thereby increasing their brand competitiveness and market share. Secondly, it improves the sustainability of products. Packaging recycling can provide companies with raw materials to make their production circuits more closed and recyclable and reduce their environmental impact, improving their products' sustainability. Finally, recycling packaging can reduce production costs. Participating in packaging recycling can save companies resources and costs. Recycling used packaging reduces the cost of purchasing raw materials for the packaging of a company's products and reduces them at the same time.

Thus, despite the slow progress of the body shop's environmental initiatives, they have been promoting sustainability. In their future strategy, the body shop can establish cooperation mechanisms to promote stakeholder collaboration and achieve a win-win situation. They are doing just that, and it is going well so far. They and the body shop have partnered with Scan2Recycle and MYGroup to launch a beauty product packaging recycling programme. The body shop can also enhance coordination and cooperation at an international level to establish a common environmental mechanism. Seek cooperation with local governments to promote sustainability. In addition, they should perform to promote and apply green technologies to reduce environmental pollution and waste. Finally, they should increase their investment in environmental protection publicity, strengthen environmental education and raise public awareness and action on environmental protection.

At the same time, as a part of society, enterprises are responsible for contributing and giving back to society. The stable development of enterprises in society cannot be achieved without the support and stability of society. A win-win situation in terms of benefits can be achieved by participating in public welfare affairs to build mutual trust between enterprises and society. The beauty brand's contribution to society emphasizes concern for the well-being of its employees, creating an equal, safe, and inclusive work environment and culture, and resisting unequal labour contracts. Active involvement in the public good, supporting the development of society's educational, cultural, and environmental sectors. Improve employee satisfaction and motivation. Leaders must mobilize and organize all employees to participate actively in the public good. This will help the company to develop a positive social image and enhance trust and goodwill towards the company. A range of socially beneficial strategies leaders develop can influence consumer perceptions of their brand, strengthen the company's competitiveness in the marketplace and build brand reputation. By engaging and investing in socially beneficial matters, companies can expand into new markets and increase new customers and sales opportunities. The stable development of a company in society cannot be achieved without the support and stability of society. By participating in public welfare affairs, a company can build mutual trust with society and achieve win-win benefits.

## 5. Conclusion

In order to constantly adapt to the changing needs of the environment, eco-leadership has emerged as a more comprehensive response to the new environmental challenges faced by companies, including but not limited to environmental crises, ethical crises, and sustainability issues. Eco-leadership emphasizes the environment and society, integrating leadership perspectives and values into organizational decision-making. It helps organizations develop sustainable business models and seeks ways to harmonize business and the environment. In addition, leaders need to mobilize all employees to become actively involved in socially beneficial matters. Beauty brands' social contribution emphasizes concern for employees' well-being, creating an equal, safe, and inclusive work environment and culture, and resisting unequal labour contracts. Eco-leadership should lead the

company actively participate in social causes, supports the development of educational, cultural, and environmental areas, and improves employee satisfaction and motivation.

Eco-leadership is vital to companies because it means that their leadership is aware of the long-term impacts of environmental protection and sustainability on their business operations and is taking positive action to address them. As consumer and investor demand for sustainable business models increases, companies with solid eco-leadership are more likely to attract large numbers of consumers and investors, thereby increasing their competitiveness. Eco-leadership can help companies build stronger ties with society. Eco-leadership helps companies to anticipate and reduce environmental risks such as climate change and natural disasters, thereby minimizing environmental damage and business disruption. This helps companies to expand their business, improve efficiency and reduce operational costs. For example, using sustainable materials and resources can reduce procurement costs. In addition, eco-leadership emphasizes an inclusive, equitable, and diverse work environment. Therefore, it can also provide more employee and stakeholder engagement opportunities, thus increasing their sense of involvement and loyalty and enabling the business to respond better to future changes and challenges.

The limitations of this article are the use of secondary sources and the limited time available. Secondary sources refer to information such as literature, data, graphs, and charts created or collated by others rather than original data or literature. It leads to information that may be distorted or inaccurate. Information transmission is subject to error or distortion at every step of the process, and secondary sources have the potential for distortion or error in transmitting the information. In addition, the time available for the articles was limited, so there was no way to conduct fieldwork. The information is sourced from news, brand websites, and reports and may therefore be biased by the company's position and personal bias. These issues may lead to unobjective evaluations and a tendency to bias, leading to skewed research findings.

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