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# Is Men's Skincare an Emerging Social Norm? Evidence from Norm-Elicitation Vignettes

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**Abstract**

Our study examines whether men's use of skin-care cosmetics constitutes a social norm in Bicchieri's (2006, 2016) sense, via empirical and normative expectations and sanctions. Because norms constrain feasible action sets, norm diagnostics precede modelling of downstream determinants (Ajzen 1991). A bilingual Qualtrics survey (March 2025) produced an international sample with a substantial Hungarian component ($n = 217$), using third-person vignettes and 4-point likelihood scales to reduce self-presentation bias. Empirical and normative expectations cluster near the norm-consistent benchmark ($\approx 3/4$) and correlate moderately to significantly, consistent with an emerging norm. Sanctioning could not be assessed credibly because sanction items show low internal reliability ($\alpha < .40$), precluding classification as an enforceable norm. Acceptability is higher when framed as health maintenance; limited communication may hinder consolidation, and reference-group effects vary by context. The findings characterise men's skin-care use as a nascent norm and motivate incentive-compatible follow-ups on sanctioning and conditional compliance mechanisms.

**JEL Classification:** D91; I22; M31; Z13

**Keywords**

cosmetics consumption — social norms — male consumers

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## Introduction

The present research focuses on the formulation of norms regarding the use of skin care cosmetics among men. The research was conducted within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991)[1], using Bicchieri's conceptual (Bicchieri 2006) and methodological (Bicchieri 2016) framework for norm research.

Previous research on men's cosmetics has focused on identifying factors that influence attitudes toward cosmetic products but has paid little attention to their use. Skincare and cosmetic product use is traditionally considered a female activity, but is gradually becoming more common among men as well. Male skincare habits have undergone significant changes, influenced by the relaxation of social expectations and the growing supply and marketing activities (Souiden and Diagne 2009). Concepts of masculinity and male identity have become more widely defined and accepted, leading men to purchase more cosmetic products, suggesting a growing attraction to cosmetics and self-representation in general (Ho, Chiu, Mansumitrchai, and Quarles 2019). The examination of social norms related to men is underrepresented in scientific discourse, especially regarding subjective norms that influence behavioural intention through existing norms and the intention to comply with them.

Norms are, in most cases, higher-level decision-making factors, as they fundamentally determine the range of considerable actions (Bicchieri 2006). Due to their collective nature, norms are difficult to operationalise, but they can be examined along several dimensions: their origin, existence, function, content characteristics, or impact. Research focusing on their content often concentrates on normative expectations, primarily exploring the extent to which individuals expect their environment to approve or disapprove of certain behaviours. While quantitative research can focus on factors and mechanisms that influence sanctioning (Horne 2009), qualitative research documents norm communication, interpretation, negotiation, and sanctioning in specific contexts (Plemons 2017, Schilt 2010). Others, such as Jasso and Opp (1997), measure individual attitudes and aggregate responses to assess norms collectively (Horne and Mollborn 2020), or use typical behaviour as an indicator, as in.

The goal of the present research is to better understand how deeply rooted changes are in the cosmetics market and how they can shape the wider acceptance of men's skincare as a social norm. Furthermore, it provides new insights into

[1] The Theory of Planned Behavior is a theoretical framework often used in marketing that provides a suitable basis for exploring consumer behaviour (Armitage and Conner 2001) and is therefore also applied in the field of cosmetics consumption (Hsu, Chang, and Yansritakul 2017).

the intertwining of men's skincare habits with social norms, while contributing to a better understanding of male identity formation, and reveals the decisive nature of individual social groups and influencing factors. The examination of the social normality of men's use of cosmetics is not only significant from the perspective of social psychology, but also has important policy and business relevance. The cosmetics market is developing dynamically worldwide, influenced by factors such as changing consumer demands, technological innovations, and growing demand for sustainability and natural ingredients (Yoon, Kang, and Song 2020). From an economic perspective, the research results can help identify new market niches and contribute to the authentic, attractive positioning of brands among a consumer group that is increasingly open to cosmetic products but still has specific expectations and norms.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we present the main literature, with particular emphasis on the Theory of Planned Behavior and the typification, formation, and measurement of norms. In Section 3, we provide the survey design and the sampling method. In Section 4, we present our main results. In Section 5, we conclude.

## Literature Review

### Theory of Planned Behavior and Cosmetics-Related Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behavior (henceforth, TPB) is widely used to explain consumer behaviour (Ajzen 1991) and is prominent in cosmetics consumption research (Ghazali, Soon, Mutum, and Nguyen 2017). Although it has been criticised as overly parsimonious and heavily reliant on self-report measures, empirical work supports its explanatory utility (Armitage and Conner 2001). Methodological responses include strategies for assessing self-report reliability (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff 2003) and belief decomposition to specify context-relevant subcomponents (Taylor and Todd 1995). TPB is often considered particularly suitable for novel, non-routine behaviours (Ajzen 1991, Aarts, Verplanken, and Van Knippenberg 1998), which aligns with men's adoption of cosmetics in many contexts.

Within TPB, intention precedes behaviour and is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Attitude is an evaluative orientation with direction and strength that affects cognition, affect, and behaviour (Petty and Cacioppo 1996). Attitudes are shaped by multiple factors (Howe and Krosnick 2017), including social influence (Sherif 1935). Perceived behavioural control reflects the perceived effort and capacity required to act. Attitude is a consistent predictor of cosmetics-related behaviour, yet subjective norms may be especially influential among less informed individuals (Wicker 1969), indicating that conformity to normative expectations can precede behavioural change (Kalkstein, Hook, Hard, and Walton 2023). This emphasis on social pressure provides a clear bridge to norms research, which specifies how expectations become behaviourally consequential.

### Norms, Expectations, and Sanctioning

Subjective norms reflect perceived social pressure to act, while broader social norms define permissible conduct within groups (Shaffer 1983). Descriptive norms concern what others do, whereas prescriptive norms concern what ought to be done (Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno 1991); relatedly, norms may be characterised as correct (prescriptive) or improper (proscriptive) (Bendor and Swistak 2001). Norms as collections of self-imposed laws are much more efficient in framing decisions of individuals since their belonging to the group creates an inner motive for obeying the commonly accepted rules as opposed to the norms invented outside of the group(Tyran and Feld 2006). Compliance is maintained through incentives (e.g., affiliation) and sanctions (e.g., ostracism) (Young 2015), and a behavioural rule lacks normative force without sanctions for violation (Homans 1950). Sanctioning stabilises behavioural regularities (Bendor and Swistak 2001) but may also reproduce inequities and harmful practices (Horne and Mollborn 2020). Accordingly, understanding men's skincare requires attention not only to approval but also to the perceived costs of deviation.

Norms emerge through interpersonal interaction and institutional processes; expectations, shared information, and communal knowledge shape norm systems (Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018). Norm creation may be institutional (Opp 1982), welfare-enhancing through sanctioning and externality management (Akerlof 1976, Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018), deliberately instituted by group agreement (Opp 1982), or formalised to limit detrimental interpersonal influence (Thibaut 1959, Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018). Norms are distinct from beliefs and behavioural regularities: they include anticipated social responses such as praise, disapproval, and punishment (Jackson 1966), and expectations can motivate others to sanction (Santee and Jackson 1977). The self-induced need to conform to the group norms is heavily rooted in the individual beliefs that the group constantly monitors and disapproves deviant behaviour. The fear from the imminent sanctions resulting from the non-conformist behavior motivate individuals to follow the norm even via altering their actions and baring monetary sacrifices (Krupka and Weber 2013). Norms can also be self-fulfilling when expectations elicit behaviours that reinforce them (Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018). Similarly, ambiguous group activities especially in case of changing social norms can only be inferred by individuals with a certain degree of error and interpret group feedback, ultimately evolving the normative expectations through experience gained by trial and error (Briscese, Grignani, Lacetera, Macis, and Tonin 2024). Over time, repetition may culminate in internalisation, and the social validation of practices (Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018), and norms may be defined as behavioural guidelines backed by the likelihood of sanctions (Rutherford 1996).

Norms and cultural practices co-evolve: norms shape beliefs and behaviour (Shteynberg, Gelfand, and Kim 2009), while group identification reinforces compliance and implicit learning (Frese 2015). Social institutions transmit norms

across generations, yet generational change can shift entrenched norms (Hawkins, Goodman, and Goldstone 2019). Moreover, individuals may revise beliefs and values when entering new statuses, groups, or organisations and encountering new information (Saltman, Figueras, and Sakellarides 1998, Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018). In market scenarios values and norms are also reconsidered when individuals presented with seemingly disadvantageous circumstances comparably to other in a social group, solely based on how communication is formulated, but once again altering acceptability of the norm (Lathouwers, Kogler, and Zeelenberg 2024). These dynamics are especially relevant in markets undergoing rapid change, where emerging practices may be morally endorsed before they become widely observed.

Bicchieri's (2016) diagnostic approach argues that behavioural observation is insufficient; researchers must assess both empirical and normative expectations. A pattern constitutes a norm (or is supported by one) when individuals' normative expectations converge on what should be done, and when conformity depends on conditional preferences shaped by those expectations. Experimental manipulations can activate or suppress expectations to test conditional preferences and heterogeneity in sensitivity to putative norms; however, since social desirability may bias self-reports, hypothetical questioning can reduce self-presentational pressures. A social norm exists when enough individuals comply (empirical expectations), and a substantial proportion believe compliance is required or are willing to sanction violations (normative expectations). Establishing a norm, therefore, requires evidence of both types of expectations. This framework informs both the measurement strategy and the interpretation of findings in the present study.

## Values, Masculinity, and Men's Cosmetics Use

Values are flexible, situation-transcending goals that guide individuals and societies and differ by their motivational aims (Schwartz 1994). Therefore, values shape ideas and conventions underlying moral obligations (Steg 2016), and social and cultural values operate beyond individual life histories (Scott 1959), just as moral and competence values that are commonly distinguished (Rokeach 1973, Schwartz 1994). Norms have also been theorised as embodying societal ideals and sustaining social order (Parsons 1951), with institutionalised values shaping normative roles and sanctioning (Parsons and Shils 2017, Blake and Davis 2013, Santee and Jackson 1977). Values may influence personal norms through identity-related pathways, including openness to skincare self-identities (Steg 2016), and are shaped early through socialisation and relatively resistant to informational change, while still guiding responses to novel practices (Stern, Kalof, Dietz, and Guagnano 1995). This helps explain why men's skincare may become morally endorsed in principle even when practice remains uneven.

Masculinity is frequently conceptualised as a normative system. Thompson and Pleck (1986) distinguish descriptive perceptions of men from sociocultural prescriptions for men's behaviour, which they term the "male role". "Masculinity ideology" refers to societal norms governing men and masculinity (Thompson, Pleck, and Ferrera 1992), and masculinity can be framed as a socially constructed gender ideal associated with male roles (Thompson and Pleck 1995). Masculinity varies across time, institutions, and individuals (Thompson and Bennett 2015), and is internalised through beliefs about gender relations (Pleck 1995). Perceived male characteristics include activity and performance orientation, interpersonal dominance, and confidence (Cicone and Ruble 1978). Brannon (1976) identifies four male role norms: rejection of femininity, pursuit of status, emphasis on independence and self-confidence, and aggressive/assertive conduct. These prescriptions illuminate why men's cosmetic use may be interpreted as either compatible with, or threatening to, masculine identity.

Men's cosmetic use is shaped by these normative constraints and by shifting market and cultural signals. Stigma may inhibit use because cosmetics are positioned as incompatible with masculinity (Souiden and Diagne 2009). Gender systems reward conformity, implying that men's cosmetic practices must remain intelligible within prevailing expectations (Butler 2011). Assimilation into social and cultural norms may require alignment with dominant masculinity ideals (Beynon 2001). Metrosexuality has been described as a cluster of traits among men who prioritise appearance and invest in self-care products, including cosmetics. Traditional masculinity may deter skincare engagement as feminised, and tensions between conventional ideals and male emancipation may inhibit purchases perceived to diminish masculinity. Although some links between vanity and masculinity are changing (Chiu, Wang, Ho, Zhang, and Zhao 2019), cultural associations between masculinity and cosmetics persist (Lagardère 2017), and masculinity may continue to deter purchasing (Duarte, Silva, and Carvalho 2025). The normative landscape is therefore not uniform: acceptance may depend on how skincare is framed, who endorses it, and which reference groups define legitimacy.

Recent evidence highlights the role of norms and social influence in purchase intention. Duarte et al. (2025) identify determinants including self-image, health considerations, masculinity-related beliefs, skincare attitudes, and social media influence, while Chiu et al. (2019) report that young men's facial-care purchases are shaped by social recognition, societal expectations, and word-of-mouth recommendations. Norm influence is also conditioned by identity and group processes: conformity increases when individuals perceive that most of their reference network engages in the behaviour and that they should do likewise (Bicchieri 2023). Group membership shapes beliefs and behaviours (Cooper, Kelly, and Weaver 2001), ingroup norms are often more influential than outgroup norms (Louis, Davies, Smith, and Terry 2007), and norms are most potent when social identity is central to self-definition (Smith and Louis 2009). Because norms are

linked to social standing (Coleman 1990), violations can elicit shame and anxiety (Rutherford 1996). The normative component of TPB may therefore be stronger when behaviour is perceived as normative within a salient self-concept group (Terry and Hogg 1996). Perceived societal expectations may outweigh personal convictions (Warner and DeFleur 1969), while internalised norms may generate intrinsic penalties that strengthen the link between normative belief and behaviour (Parsons 1951).

## Data Collection and Sampling

This exploratory study employed quantitative data collection and analysis using a survey administered in March 2025 via Qualtrics. Respondents could complete the survey in Hungarian or English. Given the sensitivity of the topic, social norms (Bicchieri 2006) and men's use of cosmetics (Souiden and Diagne 2009), a self-administered, anonymous design was selected to encourage candid responses, even though quantitative approaches may remain vulnerable to measurement error.

The questionnaire comprised three sections. First, demographic variables were recorded. Second, a block of norm-related items was developed based on Bicchieri's (2006) framework and the most relevant prior literature. Items were assessed on a four-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely; 4 = very likely) with reference to an "imaginary person", an approach recommended for sensitive questions (Bicchieri 2006). The items measured empirical, normative, and sanction-related expectations. To reduce respondent fatigue, only two-thirds of participants evaluated each of the 50 statements. Third, respondents reported their cosmetic consumption habits, including prior experience, information-seeking behaviour, and future purchase intentions.

A convenience sampling strategy was adopted.[2] The sample was skewed towards young adults in higher education (typically 19–29, with overrepresentation of 19–25), resulting in an imbalance in educational attainment. Gender was approximately balanced (i.e., 40% male, 60% female), and the language versions were evenly represented (i.e., 58% Hungarian, 42% English). Most respondents resided in Hungary, though nearly one-third did not spend a substantial part of their childhood there, permitting exploratory consideration of cultural variation. Following data cleaning, 217 valid cases remained from 303 submissions after excluding 63 partial completions and 23 falsified responses.

## Results

### Descriptive Patterns in Empirical Expectations

The questionnaire included 50 norm-related items rated on a four-point likelihood scale (1 = very unlikely; 4 = very likely). Descriptive analyses examined item means and standard deviations. Following Bicchieri's (2017) norm-level logic, strong norm endorsement would be reflected in high values for positively framed statements; however, with one exception, item means did not exceed M = 3. Consensus items (low dispersion) included Q39, Q34, and Q47, while several items displayed marked disagreement (e.g., Q6, Q4, Q9, Q34). Q47 had the highest mean ($M = 3.06; SD = 0.673$), indicating that skincare use is considered most likely when framed as health prevention. By contrast, Q4 ("male coworkers share skincare routines at workplace wellness programmes") produced the lowest mean ($M = 2.45; SD = 0.878$), suggesting that workplace communication remains limited and that perceived peer influence differs substantially across respondents.

Most items fell between $2.6 \leq M \leq 3.0$, indicating moderate openness alongside persistent uncertainty. Items relating to open or covert discussion of skincare (Q30, Q31) were weaker, which is consistent with the continued sensitivity of the topic. Similarly, Q9 and Q37 combined positive connotations with low means and high dispersion, suggesting polarised views about whether supportive, practical social approaches would increase uptake. Taken together, respondents tended to evaluate the social aspects of men's skincare positively, yet the magnitude of dispersion (typically $SD = 0.77$–$1.04$) indicates limited agreement, especially regarding the influence of family, small communities, and the psychological functions attributed to self-care.

### Normative Expectations and Value Framing

Normative expectation items displayed stronger endorsement than empirical items. Of 19 statements, 10 statements (Q7, Q8, Q17, Q21, Q23, Q27, Q32, Q44, Q49, Q50) had mean values of $M \geq 3$. These items framed skincare in value-consistent terms, self-esteem, care, status, and health, and their low standard deviations indicate broad agreement. Items above the overall mean but below $M = 3$ (e.g., Q19, Q20, Q23, Q33) suggest that respondents generally expect social acceptance and grooming norms to matter, while still expressing uncertainty. The dispersion for Q19 ("many fathers teach their sons basic skincare") was high ($SD = 0.981$), implying heterogeneous beliefs about family socialisation.

Items linked to advertising, campaigns, and media representations of men's skincare (Q5, Q26, Q36) clustered around $M \approx 2.7$. This may indicate that such cues are not yet sufficiently salient to serve as clear normative signals, consistent with the relative novelty of campaigns linking men's skincare to health benefits (Chiu, Wang, Ho, Zhang, and Zhao 2019). Finally, Q24, construing skincare as unnecessary, appeared to reflect social stratification: responses suggested that occupational background and personal experience may shape whether skincare is viewed as acceptable or superfluous, indicating a potential avenue for further research on education, income, and occupational culture.

[2] While convenience samples enable rapid access to respondents, they constrain representativeness and therefore limit generalisability. The literature remains divided: some authors reject convenience sampling (Peterson and Merunka 2014), whereas others argue it can support meaningful inference under certain conditions (Ellis, Savchenko, and Messer 2023).

### Men's Skincare as a Social Norm

To assess whether men's cosmetic use functions as a norm, correlations were examined in line with Bicchieri's (2006) framework using Pearson's coefficient, and a simple linear regression model was used to estimate intended product use; analytical assumptions were met (Simon, Berezvai, Kemény, Kun, and Pusztai 2024). Empirical and normative expectations were positively correlated across the full sample and within subgroups, consistent with a norm-like association, although only one of the three equally created subgroups based on question permutations approached a strong relationship ($\beta \approx 0.7$). Bicchieri (2006) further specifies that a norm is present only when both empirical and normative expectations reach $M \geq 3$; this threshold was met only for the same one subgroup, and only for normative expectations.

Across the sample, mean levels of both expectation types exceeded $M = 2.5$, which is notable given the contested nature of men's use of cosmetics. A meaningful pattern also emerged in dispersion: normative expectations showed very low variability, whereas empirical expectations showed greater variability. This configuration suggests that supportive judgements about what "ought" to be acceptable may be relatively internalised, even when observational certainty that "most men do" engage in skincare remains limited.

The regression model explained a modest share of variance in intended cosmetic use ($R^2 = 0.16$). Empirical expectations were significant ($p = 0.039; \beta = 0.442$), whereas normative expectations were not ($p = 0.210; \beta = 0.319$). A one-unit increase in empirical expectations predicted a 0.442-unit increase in product use. In practical terms, this indicates that perceived prevalence is a more immediate predictor of intention than perceived obligation, and that norm consolidation may depend on increased visibility and experience.

### Additional Predictors of Expectations

To explore covariates of empirical and normative expectations, the authors used exploratory ANOVA tests and paired expectation measures, along with demographic and behavioural factors, including gender, childhood location, educational attainment, employment status, product experience, and information-search behaviour; the prerequisites for the tests were satisfied.

**Table 1.** Summary of ANOVA Analysis Results

| | Significance ($p$) | | Relationship | | Degree of Relationship ($\eta^2$) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Empirical Expectations | Normative Expectations | Empirical Expectations | Normative Expectations | Empirical Expectations | Normative Expectations |
| Gender | .650 | .889 | NONE | NONE | - | - |
| Place of Childhood | .174 | $< .001$ | NONE | **YES** | - | 0.048 |
| School Education | .035 | .076 | **YES** | NONE | 0.055 | - |
| Employment | .183 | .112 | NONE | NONE | - | - |
| Previous experience with the product category | .007 | .005 | **YES** | **YES** | 0.049 | 0.053 |
| Product-related information gathering | .199 | .161 | NONE | NONE | - | - |

Based on the test results, expectations were unrelated to gender, although gender identity may warrant closer scrutiny in future research. A significant difference in normative expectations emerged for childhood location: respondents who grew up in Hungary reported different norms from those who did not, underscoring the role of early socialisation in shaping beliefs about what others expect. Empirical expectations were comparatively homogeneous, suggesting that current observation may partly override childhood imprints.

Expectations differed by educational attainment, consistent with schooling as a secondary socialisation environment and a mechanism that shapes dispositions over time; however, given the sample imbalance, this association should be interpreted cautiously. Finally, prior product experience was consistently associated with higher expectations, suggesting that active use may shape perceptions of both acceptability and prevalence, consistent with extended versions of TPB in which prior behaviour moderates intention and its antecedents.

## Conclusions

The present study focused on whether men's use of cosmetics for skincare can be considered a social norm. Two conditions derived from Bicchieri's framework (2006, 2016) were nearly met: empirical and normative expectations approached $M = 3$, and their correlation was moderate and significant. However, sanctioning (or rewarding) was not adequately captured, limiting the strength of the norm diagnosis. The results, therefore, support the interpretation that men's skincare is an emerg-

ing, partially internalised norm that is not yet sufficiently widespread to yield strong empirical certainty.

The descriptive evidence indicates that men's cosmetics use is most acceptable when framed in health and health-conscious terms, whereas low visibility and limited communication around skincare appear to weaken normalisation. Social influence is heterogeneous: family and close relationships strengthen normative expectations for some respondents but not for others. Overall, men's skincare appears to be undergoing normative consolidation, with important elements still contested and unevenly distributed across contexts. If men's skincare is becoming increasingly normative, marketing strategy should respond accordingly. Normalisation may reshape the product category life cycle by expanding demand and accelerating an S-curve transition. Whether such a shift is firm-driven or organic, both incumbents and entrants should be prepared for changes in category boundaries and consumer expectations. The results point to the value of strengthening empirical expectations (through visibility cues and credible prevalence signals) alongside reinforcing normative expectations (through legitimacy and desirability cues). Communication may be especially effective when it emphasises benefits and rewards associated with skincare rather than penalties for non-compliance. More broadly, positioning skincare as part of health maintenance, akin to oral and general hygiene, may support adoption through social education.

There are several implications for public policy as well, particularly where health promotion, consumer protection, and equality objectives intersect. First, the results suggest that health-framed skincare is perceived as more legitimate than appearance-framed use, indicating an opportunity to integrate basic skincare into wider public health messaging. Public communication can position skincare as part of everyday preventive healthcare, thereby reinforcing perceived legitimacy without requiring individuals to directly challenge entrenched gender expectations. This approach is consistent with the findings that empirical expectations are more strongly associated with intended use than normative expectations, implying that visibility and normalisation mechanisms may be especially influential.

Second, the apparent role of socialisation and reference contexts implies that early-life and institutional environments may be relevant levers. If childhood environment shapes normative expectations, as the results suggest, then locally delivered education-focused campaigns through schools, community health services, and youth programmes may be more effective than uniform national campaigns. Such campaigns could emphasise skin health literacy (e.g., sun protection, irritation prevention, and basic hygiene routines) while remaining sensitive to cultural variation and differing norms around masculinity.

Third, the findings underscore the importance of communication settings and interpersonal discussion. The low endorsement of workplace discussion indicates that adult contexts may still discourage open conversation about men's skincare. Policy actors, including occupational health bodies and public employers, could support inclusive workplace wellbeing programmes that address skin health in gender-neutral terms and avoid reinforcing stigma. Where appropriate, workplace health promotion guidance can include training on avoiding gendered framing that inadvertently discourages participation. Fourth, consumer protection considerations remain salient in a rapidly expanding market. As new segments are targeted, regulators should ensure that marketing claims, particularly those linked to health outcomes, are accurate and evidence-based. Clear standards for ingredient transparency, allergy information, and sustainability claims would support informed decision-making and reduce the risk that normalisation is driven by misleading or exclusionary messaging. This aligns with broader market trends towards sustainability and natural ingredients (Yoon et al., 2020), which may be incorporated into policy efforts to address greenwashing and substantiate claims.

Finally, there are potential equity implications. The pattern suggesting social stratification in perceptions of skincare indicates that acceptance and access may vary across occupational or socio-economic groups. Public health initiatives should therefore avoid assuming a uniform baseline of knowledge or resources and instead focus on providing information and affordable options, particularly when skin health is related to occupational exposure (e.g., outdoor work, chemical irritants). More generally, policy can support norm change by reducing stigma and expanding legitimate participation across groups, rather than framing men's skincare as a niche lifestyle choice.

The main limitation concerns sampling. The convenience sample was skewed towards urban, higher-education respondents, which may inflate openness towards cosmetics relative to the general population. Item complexity may also have contributed to response error, particularly for sanction-related expectations. In addition, cultural specificity may have shaped item interpretation; future research could refine wording by drawing on cultural studies of family, religion, and work contexts. The product definition was also broad, and references to "skincare" may have elicited different product associations (e.g., face wash versus hand cream), generating heterogeneous interpretations.

Future studies should replicate the design using stratified sampling to test demographic variation in norm perception. Refining items and developing a standardised norm-identification scale would strengthen measurement and comparability across settings. Mixed-method approaches, cultural mapping, qualitative interviews, and content analysis could clarify meaning and salience. Finally, following Bicchieri's sequence, future research should directly measure sanctioning and reward mechanisms after identifying the most influential determinants of norm adherence (Bicchieri 2006).

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# Appendix

## Appendix A - English Questionnaire

D1 - Year of birth

D2 - Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say

D3 - Country of residence

D4 - Permanent residence

- A major city or the capital
- A small town
- A village
- None of the above/cannot be classified
- Prefer not to say

D5 - Country of childhood

D6 - Highest level of education

- Did not complete primary school
- Completed primary school (8 years)
- Vocational school/trade training
- Secondary school diploma (high school or technical school)
- College degree (BA/BSc or equivalent)
- Master's degree (MA/MSc or equivalent)
- Doctoral degree (PhD or equivalent)
- Prefer not to say

D7 - Current employment status

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Student
- Not employed
- Prefer not to say

Section of the hypothetical questions The following section presents hypothetical situations followed by related questions. This is the most important part of the survey, so please read each scenario carefully and answer thoughtfully. Your responses should reflect how the person in the situation would behave, based on your own beliefs and perceptions.

Imagine a MAN similar to you in age and background who just moved to a new community. How likely is it that this man would try a skincare cosmetic product if in this community...

(1) - Extremely unlikely

(2) - Unlikely

(3) - Likely

(4) - Extremely likely

QA1 - A block Statements

- ...many men in peer groups are observed using skincare products such as face wash or moisturizer.

- ...some men who use skincare are occasionally ridiculed or described as less masculine.
- ...skincare use among men is not frequently discussed, and few people mention it in public.
- ...male colleagues sometimes share skincare routines during workplace wellness discussions. ...male influencers commonly post skincare routines, and these posts receive general support.
- ...male family members, such as fathers or brothers, talk openly about using skincare products.
- ...skincare is often recommended by professionals as a part of general hygiene and health practices.
- ...there is general support for self-care practices, regardless of gender.
- ...male students regularly talk about and use skincare products.
- ...in some religious settings, men are advised to limit grooming to basic hygiene.
- ...local dermatologists frequently recommend skincare for men as part of health routines.

QA2 - Statements

- ...both men and women are expected to maintain a well-groomed look.
- ...older male role models, such as teachers or mentors, are seen using skincare and speaking about it openly.
- ...many fathers introduce their sons to basic skincare as part of growing up.
- ...the local culture emphasizes respect for personal care habits among all genders.
- ...premium skincare products are associated with professionalism and self-respect.
- ...traditional masculine behaviors are less emphasized, and men feel comfortable engaging in self-care.
- ...in some professions, polished appearance and skincare use are viewed positively.
- ...in certain working-class settings, grooming beyond hygiene is viewed as non-essential for men.
- ...when a man shared his skincare habits in a group chat, he received negative feedback.
- ...local advertising includes both men and women in skincare product promotions.
- ...skincare is more commonly used by men in higher income brackets and viewed as a status-related product.

QA3 - Statements

- ...younger men tend to use skincare more often than older men.,
- ...men are more likely to use skincare as part of preparation for religious or cultural events., ...health campaigns regularly include skincare guidance for men.,
- ...at local gyms, men occasionally exchange skincare tips during informal conversations.
- ...some romantic partners view male skincare use as unattractive or unnecessary.
- ...while not commonly discussed, many men admit to trying or considering skincare.
- ...skincare is sometimes used as a way to practice relaxation or mindfulness.
- ...friend groups may positively comment when someone adopts skincare routines.,
- Romantic partners often talk about their skincare routines and expect their partners to participate as well. It's common for them to compare habits or products.
- Some communities value rugged appearances, and extensive grooming is uncommon.
- ...teenage boys are often introduced to skincare alongside other hygiene products like deodorant.

QB1 - B block Statements

- ...many men in peer groups are observed using skincare products such as face wash or moisturizer.
- It is considered typical for men to take care of their appearance, and skincare is viewed as a routine part of grooming.
- ...skincare use among men is not frequently discussed, and few people mention it in public.
- Romantic partners often support or encourage skincare as part of self-care routines.
- ...male influencers commonly post skincare routines, and these posts receive general support.
- ...male influencers commonly post skincare routines, and these posts receive general support.
- ...few men use skincare, and it is sometimes perceived as unnecessary or not aligned with masculine norms.
- ...skincare is often recommended by professionals as a part of general hygiene and health practices.,
- ...it is common to see men on university campuses using skincare products as part of daily habits.,
- ...male students regularly talk about and use skincare products.,

- ...some families teach that men should avoid focusing on grooming or appearance.,
- ...local dermatologists frequently recommend skincare for men as part of health routines.

QB2 - Statements

- ...some male influencers receive negative comments when posting skincare-related content.
- ...older male role models, such as teachers or mentors, are seen using skincare and speaking about it openly.
- ...skincare products marketed toward men are limited, and packaging often targets women.
- ...the local culture emphasizes respect for personal care habits among all genders.,
- ...some men use skincare privately but do not discuss it openly.
- ...traditional masculine behaviors are less emphasized, and men feel comfortable engaging in self-care.
- ...skincare is commonly practiced in private, but not discussed in public spaces.
- ...in certain working-class settings, grooming beyond hygiene is viewed as non-essential for men.
- ...using skincare is seen by some as a sign of discipline and personal pride.
- ...local advertising includes both men and women in skincare product promotions.,
- ...respected community members openly share their own skincare routines.

QB3 - Statements

- ...younger men tend to use skincare more often than older men.
- ...health campaigns regularly include skincare guidance for men.
- ...people live in a smaller town, and in this town skincare among men is seen as unnecessary or impractical.
- ...skincare items for men are less available, and packaging may not be gender-inclusive.
- ...some romantic partners view male skincare use as unattractive or unnecessary.,
- ...during colder seasons, it is typical for men to use skincare to prevent dryness.
- ...skincare is sometimes used as a way to practice relaxation or mindfulness.
- ...some media programs mock men who use skincare, portraying them in stereotypical ways. ...romantic partners often talk about their skincare routines and expect their partners to participate as well. It's common for them to compare habits or products.
- ...after local health issues, skincare use among men increased following expert recommendations.
- ...teenage boys are often introduced to skincare alongside other hygiene products like deodorant.
- ...well-groomed skin is associated with pride and care in cultural ceremonies.

QC1 - C block Statements

- ...it is considered typical for men to take care of their appearance, and skincare is viewed as a routine part of grooming.,
- ...some men who use skincare are occasionally ridiculed or described as less masculine.
- ...romantic partners often support or encourage skincare as part of self-care routines.
- ...male colleagues sometimes share skincare routines during workplace wellness discussions.
- ...few men use skincare, and it is sometimes perceived as unnecessary or not aligned with masculine norms.
- ...it is common to see men on university campuses using skincare products as part of daily habits.
- ...male family members, such as fathers or brothers, talk openly about using skincare products.
- ...there is general support for self-care practices, regardless of gender.
- ...some families teach that men should avoid focusing on grooming or appearance.
- ...some male influencers receive negative comments when posting skincare-related content.
- ...in some religious settings, men are advised to limit grooming to basic hygiene.

QC2 - Statements

- ...both men and women are expected to maintain a well-groomed look.
- ...skincare products marketed toward men are limited, and packaging often targets women.
- ...many fathers introduce their sons to basic skincare as part of growing up.
- ...some men use skincare privately but do not discuss it openly.,
- ...skincare is commonly practiced in private, but not discussed in public spaces.,

- ...premium skincare products are associated with professionalism and self-respect.
- ...using skincare is seen by some as a sign of discipline and personal pride.
- ...when a man shared his skincare habits in a group chat, he received negative feedback.
- ...respected community members openly share their own skincare routines.
- ...skincare is more commonly used by men in higher income brackets and viewed as a status-related product.

QC3 - Statements

- ...people live in a smaller town, and in this town skincare among men is seen as unnecessary or impractical.
- ...men are more likely to use skincare as part of preparation for religious or cultural events.
- ...skincare items for men are less available, and packaging may not be gender-inclusive.
- ...at local gyms, men occasionally exchange skincare tips during informal conversations.
- ...during colder seasons, it is typical for men to use skincare to prevent dryness.
- ...while not commonly discussed, many men admit to trying or considering skincare.,
- ...some media programs mock men who use skincare, portraying them in stereotypical ways.
- ...friend groups may positively comment when someone adopts skincare routines.
- ...after local health issues, skincare use among men increased following expert recommendations.
- ...people value rugged appearances, and extensive grooming is uncommon.
- ...well-groomed skin is associated with pride and care in cultural ceremonies.

Questions about previous experience with cosmetic product use (QU)

QU1 - Have you ever used skincare cosmetic products (e.g., face wash, moisturizer)?

- Yes, regularly
- Yes, occasionally
- I've tried them once or twice
- No, never

QU2 - Where do you most often get information about skincare?

- Friends or peers
- Social media / influencers
- Partner or family
- Dermatologist or health professional
- Product packaging / advertising
- I don't seek skincare information

QU3 - How likely are you to try a skincare cosmetic product in the next 30 days?

- Extremely unlikely
- Unlikely
- Likely
- Extremely likely