Consumer action: Learning about lip balms

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Abstract

Many people wear lip balm to moisturize their lips. In this research-informed action project I investigated some of the hidden issues associated with lip balms by examining some of the living and non-living components that are involved during the life cycle of lip balm. Each stage in the life cycle of a product (from extraction to disposal) has some negative impacts on the wellbeing of individuals, societies and environments (“Story of Stuff,” 2007). In addition, I conducted a study involving 40 teenage girls to learn more about their frequency of

use of lip balms, the features of lip balms that appeals to girls the most, and what brands the girls preferred. My study reveals that 50% of the girls surveyed use lip balm on a daily basis. Fragrance appears to be the most preferred feature when selecting a lip balm. There are no specific colours or brands that stand out as most popular. Corporations use fragrance, colour and fancy packaging to attract consumers and, at times, distract them from some of the negative impacts of their product. I suggest alternatives to lip balms and tips to stay lip balm-free.

Introduction

As the holy grail of comforting dry lips, lip balm is one of the most frequently used consumer products in the world. Lip balm, like most products, goes through the stages of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal (“Story of stuff,” 2007). Although people and other living things are impacted in all stages of the product’s life cycle, the major issue in the life cycle of lip balm is hidden behind the creative and bold brand imaging that is used to sell the product at an accelerating rate. The images associated with lip balms can include girls applying the product for advertisements. Most of the time the girls have styled hair and small figures, which are components that are not relevant in presenting the product’s effectiveness. These images affect teenage girls even if the girls are not immediately aware of it. The media greatly influences consumers’ decisions and presents the girls with the ideal look that society “accepts”. Adolescents girls are likely to perceive and believe that “fitting in” is a contending priority in everyday life.

Lip balms can vary tremendously depending on colour, scent and texture. Often, various chemicals are used to obtain these characteristics. The addition of sun protection factor (SPF), one of the seemingly positive benefits of certain lip balms, also results in exposing sensitive skin to octinoxate. Studies have shown that octinoxate causes a disturbance in the endocrine system (“Octinoxate,” n.d.). Various fragrances, which encourage a more frequent use of lip balms, are almost always made from petroleum and contain toluene, a chemical linked to nervous system damage and illnesses like cancer (“No perfume means healthier air,” n.d.). In addition, colours used to tint lips are derived primarily from coal tar in a process that releases harmful chemicals and fumes into the environment. The chemically produced colour may suggest links to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and surprisingly, different types of cancer (Rachel Hennessey, 2012).

Carbon emissions from production plants along with emissions from other facilities in the extracting and

Nasteha Abdullahi takes on a 5-day challenge to go lip-balm free. She also proposed an alternative to the commercial product, which is developed from more natural and locally available ingredients. She encourages her peers to try the alternative lip balms that are better for the well-being of individuals, societies and environments.

distributing stages contribute to global warming and climate change. With innumerable lip balm purchases being made constantly around the world, it is critical to understand lip balms’ possible negative impacts on individual, social and ecological wellbeing.

YouToube: The Issues With Lip Balm Action Video. Developed Nasteha Abdullahi.

The Lip Balm Study

Questions arise regarding the different features used in a lip balm to mask some of the negative effects and ultimately gain lifelong customers. The purpose of this study was to learn how often girls use lip balm, and what

scent, colour and brand they prefer the most. Surveys were handed out to forty girls at Erindale Secondary School. Males were not asked to participate as they use lip balm considerably less than females.

Summary of Results

The data shows that 50% of the girls wear lip balm daily and 35% wear it on most days of the week (see Figure 1). Out of the forty girls that were surveyed, only two answered that they never wore lip balm.

In addition, 65% of the girls picked out lip balms according to scent, and surprisingly, none of the girls said that they selected the product based on the advertising that was done for the product (see Figure 2).

In addition, more girls like a pink lip balm than any other choice, although a range of colours were selected by the girls surveyed (see Figure 3). Some noticeable choices

of colour include red-tinted lip balms and nude lip balms.

Almost all girls prefer having scents in their lip balms, and the most popular choice was anything fruity– the choice of minty scents was only two votes behind anything fruity choice (see Figure 4).

Finally, most girls use lip balms from the brands Maybelline™ and EOS™ (see Figure 5). The amounts of votes for other brands were similar to each other, except for the brands Vaseline™ and Burt's Bees™, which only had one vote each.

Discussion

Along with the quantitative answers, interpretations can be made from the qualitative answers that were gathered. Concerning the frequency of lip balm use, the results may have sparked one way or the other because lip balm can be very addictive to wear and wearing it most days will most likely lead to an addiction; thus, creating the barrier between inconsistent users and avid users. Moreover, applying lip products may be accustomed to a teenage girl's cosmetic routine to complete and finish off looks. It can also act as a protective measure against weather for any male or female consumer.

Marketers use fruity and fresh scents to attract consumers to keep buying more unique lip balms, and consumers tend to buy more than they should own. They incorporate scents and even tastes that relate to fruits since

consumers often consider them in purchases, which allows for partial intakes of lip balm over time. Brands, such as Maybelline and EOS, attract customers the most because they use eye-catching shapes and bright colours for their packaging. The amount of votes for the brands Vaseline and Burt's Bees, which give the message of either being natural or soothing, are very small in comparison.

A major issue of conflict stretches along the chemical intake of consumers. According to the website SteadyHealth, lip balms have the ability to cover up early signs of life-altering lip cancer by hiding the dry characteristics of actinic keratosis which can develop into skin cancer (Robert Rister, 2010). It is crucial for teens and adults to inform themselves on the dangers of the unknown when it comes to personal health.

Figure 1: How Often Girls Wear Lip Balm in a Week?

Figure 2: What Features Appeal to a Girl in a Lip Balm the Most?

Projects such as this one promote the wellbeing of individuals, societies, and environments – where some aspects may seem more directly affected than others, but their ulterior connections prove otherwise – by divulging the greater consequences of simple actions in the life of the average person. It is encouraged to be active in comprehending the way the world works and getting

involved to improve the mistakes of past generations for a brighter future. Starting with the teen audience is just an idea to grow a society of curious thinkers and innovative doers who are the soon-to-be leaders of the world. [This paragraph might be too general. Concluding remarks – what are your hopes? What action are you recommending? Also needs one more secondary research reference]

Figure 3: Lip balms scents that girls prefer

Figure 4: Lip balm brands that girls prefer

Taking Action

It is certain that there is a lack of knowledge on healthier and safer alternatives to lip balm. The research gathered involving the issues concerning lip balms was translated into an informational video with an added personal

challenge of going lip balm-free for a five-day school week. It was titled “The Issues with Lip Balm and the Ditch the Chapstick” (see Introduction). The purpose of this video was to encourage teenagers to reduce use of lip balms.

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