Animal Testing in the Cosmetic Industry

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**Introduction**

Animal testing is the process of conducting clinical trials of products on animals before conducting these trials on humans. This is done to determine the safety and effectiveness of a product before it is approved for human use. “Rabbits, mice, rats, and other animals are often used to test medicine, cosmetics, drugs and food”(Murnaghan). The use of animals to test products has dated back to the Ancient Greeks, and the idea of using animals for testing has been heavily debated for years. Some believe that animal testing is a necessary practice, while others believe that it is wrong to cause this type of suffering to animals. The topic of animal testing also brings up the question if the act of using animals in experiments is morally right or wrong. With animal testing, there is a chance that it may cause the animals pain, distress, and long-term harm, and because of this, there are many arguments on whether or not animal testing should be permitted when inspecting the safety of cosmetic products.

*The Truth About Animal Experimentation*, an article written by members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) explains that animals like mice, rabbits, primates, dogs and cats are held in cages suffering from frustration and loneliness as they wait for their next painful procedure to test a product. Even if animals do not experience physical pain during experimentation, they still suffer from stress due to their captive living situation. This stress and longing to be free leads the animals to “develop neurotic types of behavior such as incessantly spinning in circles, rocking back and forth, pulling out their own fur, and even biting themselves” (Newkirk). It is estimated that almost “100 million animals suffer and die in the US” from cosmetic, medical, drug and food testing (Newkirk). However, it is impossible to get an exact estimate because animals like mice, birds, and cold-blooded animals are not covered under the protection of the Animal Welfare Act that aims to ensure animals undergoing testing are being treated with care. Additionally, animal rights activists argue the alternatives to animal testing which include using human cells and the creation of artificial skin (Liebsch 843).

On the other hand, *The Truth Behind Animal Testing* argues that animals that undergo animal testing are not treated as poorly as many animal rights activists may claim. As the understanding of animal testing began to grow, strict regulations have been put into place to make sure that all animals are being treated with care. For example, The National Institute of Health (NIH) regularly checks animal testing facilities to make sure the animals are in good hands. As a result of a survey, only “6% of animals used for animal experimentation experience pain”(Sun 83). Moreover, under the Animal Welfare Act, groups like the Use Committee and Animal Care developed to ensure that the animals are only tested if all other trial methods have failed. These groups also provide animals with medical care and make sure their living conditions are suitable. Sun also argues that many Animal Rights activists make it seem that animals who undergo testing are always treated poorly, but this mistreatment is very unlikely.

The research questions I intend to answer are ‘do cosmetic products suffer from negative publicity if they conduct trials on animals’ and ‘is it morally acceptable and ethical to experiment on animals to create new cosmetics. Despite all of the controversies of animal testing, many popular cosmetic brands continue to test their products on animals and are still widely used. With the rise of animal rights activists and groups, cosmetic companies that test their products on animals face negative publicity due to increased consumer awareness, but this does not mean that their sales are adversely impacted. Furthermore, despite all the arguments for and against the use of animal testing, whether the act is moral and ethical solely depends on an individual's philosophical beliefs.

**Methods**

Since my research questions are determining if animal testing leads to negative publicity and if it is morally acceptable and ethical to test on animals, I have conducted a survey that will reveal how a person feels about animal testing and whether they think it should be used when testing cosmetic products. I used a survey over the other options for primary research because it was the most efficient method to get a broad range of answers and opinions to guide me to answer my research questions. I created the survey using Google forms and shared it through email as well as on my social media accounts. Since the survey was posted on social media accounts including Facebook, I was able to get a range of answers from men and women ages 16 to 56 and up. To prevent survey fatigue, I limited my survey to only ten questions. I also gave the option for survey takers to explain their answers as well as an other option for most questions so that they can share their most exact opinion in detail. The survey consisted of the following questions.

1. Before answering further questions, how much do you know about animal testing?
   1. None, Very Little, Moderate Amount, A lot
2. Do you see animal testing as abuse towards animals?
   1. Yes, No, Maybe, Other
3. In your opinion, is it okay to test cosmetic items on animals?
   1. Yes, No, Maybe, Other
   2. Please explain your answer (Optional)
4. Do you believe it would be ethical for people to test products instead of animals?
   1. Yes, No, Maybe, Other
   2. Please explain your answer (Optional)
5. What is your opinion on the following statement? “Animals are not as important as humans. If they can be used to make human life better they should be.”
   1. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree, I am not sure
   2. Please explain your answer (Optional)
6. What is your opinion on the following statement? “Animals do not live according to the same moral rules as humans so there is no reason why we should give them any moral rights”.
   1. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree, I am not sure
   2. Please explain your answer (Optional)
7. Would you use cosmetic products that have been tested on animals?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. It would depend on the product
   4. Other
8. Which of these products have you used?
   1. Maybelline, L’oreal, Listerine, Vaseline, EOS, St. Ives
9. Were you aware that all of these companies test on animals?
   1. Yes , No, Some but not all
10. Will you continue to use these products knowing that they have been tested on animals?
    1. Yes, it doesn’t bother me
    2. Yes, it does bother me
    3. No, I will not use these products
    4. I will try to avoid these products but not completely
    5. Other
11. Check the boxes that apply to you (gender/age)
    1. Male, Female, Prefer not to say, Under 16, 16-25, 26-35, 36-45. 46-55, over 56

**Results**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Survey Questions** | **Option 1** | **Option 2** | **Option 3** | **Option 4** | **Option 5** |
| Before answering further questions, how much do you know about animal testing? | **None**  28.4% | **Very Little**  49.3% | **Moderate Amount**  19.4% | **A Lot**  3% |  |
| In your opinion, is it okay to test cosmetic items on animals (Makeup, Shampoo, etc.) | **Yes**  13.6%  “Closest things to humans” | **No**  66.7%  “I feel that there are other methods for testing out cosmetic products. Animals should not have to be the fall out plan for that” | **Maybe**  18.2%  “Cosmetics need to be tested just in case it can have a negative reaction to people. But the tests they do hurts animals and can kill them” | **Other**  “Shampoos and other cleaning things yes, make up, no” |  |
| What is your opinion on the following statement? “Animals are not as important as humans. If they can be used to make human life better they should be.” | **Strongly Disagree**  37.3%  “That is ridiculous just because something seems less important for someone doesn’t mean it should automatically be used for human benefit” | **Disagree**  26.9%  “All of God’s creation are important” | **Neutral**  22.4%  “I don’t think people are “better” than animals. But I do think we have different purpose. God gave man dominion over animals. And as in all things man has dominion over there are a select few who will abuse that power” | **Agree**  9%  “Humans are more important than animals but we should not be cruel to them” | **Strongly Agree**  1.5%  “God put man over animals” |
| What is your opinion on the following statement? “Animals do not live according to the same moral rules as humans so there is no reason why we should give them any moral rights”. | **Strongly Disagree**  42.4%  “Just as people have a purpose so do animals and they should be allowed to fulfill it without being mistreated” | **Disagree**  36.4%  “Even though they do not generally follow our moral codes they are still alive and conscious. It would be unethical to hurt them when unnecessary” | **Neutral**  13.6%  “We don’t know for certain, but we can assume animals don’t live by the same moral rules as humans, but that doesn't automatically mean we shouldn’t give them moral rights. They are living beings just like we are” | **Agree**  3%  “In the animal kingdom animals don’t necessarily have morals such as not killing someone” | **Strongly Agree**  1.5% |
| Would you use cosmetic products that have been tested on animals? | **Yes**  19.4% | **No**  29.9% | **It would depend on the product**  38.8% | **Other**  “I would not, but a lot of the products that work best for me do happen to be animal tested” | **Other**  “I probably have since I don’t check labels to determine in animals were use” |
| Which of these products have you used? | **Maybelline**  43.1% | **L’oreal**  47.7% | **Listerine**  81.5% | **Vaseline**  96.9% | **EOS**  35.4% |
| Were you aware that all of these companies test on animals? | **Yes**  4.5% | **No**  76.1% | **Some but not all**  19.4% |  |  |
| Will you continue to use these products knowing that they have been tested on animals? | **Yes, it doesn't bother me**  17.9% | **Yes, but it does bother me**  28.4% | **No, I will not use these products**  11.9% | **I will try to avoid these products but not completely**  35.8% | **Other**  “I will look for alternatives now that I know” |
| Check the boxes that apply to you | **Male**  17.9% | **Female**  82.1% | **16-25**  41.8% |  |  |

**Table 1:** Raw data from survey and select direct quotes from each question out of 66 responses

**Discussion**

**Negative publicity for Cosmetic Companies from Animal Testing**

Based on the results of the survey, as well as the secondary research conducted, it seems that cosmetic companies do in fact face negative publicity if they test their products on animals, but this does not necessarily mean that consumers will stop using these products altogether. In the late 1980s, animal testing became more and more controversial as public awareness of the issue increased. The 1989 newspaper article, *Cosmetic Companies Quietly Ending Animal Tests* points out how many cosmetic companies began to stop testing their products on animals during this time due to an increase in animal rights activists and organizations. In 1988, many companies like Avon, Revlon, and Faberge stopped supporting animal testing to ensure their products were safe. Following in their footsteps, other cosmetic companies began to promise an end to animal testing after facing significant backlash due to their consumers becoming consciously aware of what takes place in animal testing facilities. Animal Rights organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) were very vocal on their beliefs and influenced activists and consumers to target and boycott cosmetic companies that openly tested on animals. “After coming out that their products were now cruelty-free, Avon, Revlon, and Faberge ranked first, second and fourth for the United States cosmetic companies with 1988 sales of $2.1 billion, $1.79 billion and $1.2 billion, respectively” (McGill A1). Though these cruelty-free companies ranked first, second and fourth for sales, there is no record that companies that continued to test on animals faced any significant decrease in sales.

In 2019 many popular companies like Maybelline, Listerine and Vaseline continue to test their products on animals but are still widely used by consumers (PETA). Initially, I had assumed that with an increase of technology and the ability for information to spread globally that many of the survey participants would know a significant amount about animal testing. However, out of the 66 participants, 77.7% knew little to none about animal testing, while only 3% knew a lot about the information. With such a small number of participants knowing a lot about animal testing, I doubted that there would be many strong opinions when it came to cosmetic animal testing. However, when participants were asked if they thought it was okay to test cosmetics on animals, 66.7% answered no, while only 13.6% answered yes. On the other hand, when participants were asked if they would use cosmetic products that were tested on animals, 19.4% answered yes, 29.9% answered no, and 38.8% answered it would depend on the product. I didn’t include an explain answer to this question, so I am not sure what factors would encourage or prevent a consumer from using an animal tested product. However, with the other response of “I would not, but a lot of the products that work best for me do happen to be animal tested,” I am assuming these factors include access, cost, and effectiveness. As a result of these responses, it appears that many understand the controversy behind cosmetic animal testing and feel that it is wrong, but would not sacrifice their favorite products even if they are from animal tested companies.

In further questions, I wanted to see how participants would feel once finding out that some popular brands they may use have products that are tested on animals. As mentioned above, brands like Maybelline, Vaseline, and Listerine continue to test their products on animals and are sold in almost all drug stores across the country. In the survey question that asked which of these products have been used, it was found that 41.3% of participants have used Maybelline, 81.5% have used Listerine, and 96.9% have used Vaseline. At first glance, these percentages seemed high considering that over half of the participants believe that it is wrong to test cosmetic products on animals, but in the following question, I found that 76.1% of participants were not aware that any of these companies test their products on animals. However, now knowing that these companies do test products on animals only 11.9% of participants answered that they would avoid using these products altogether. Additionally, 46.3% participants responded that they will continue to use these products while 35.8% answered that they will try to avoid these products but not entirely with many explaining their answer by saying they will now look for alternatives.

Based on the primary research, as well as a look into 1989 cosmetic sales, it seems that cosmetic companies do face negative publicity for testing their products on animals. As mentioned in the 1989 newspaper, companies were targeted and boycotted for testing products on animals as soon as awareness increased. Furthermore, though the results of this survey cannot be generalized to a population because the sample size was so small, based on the responses, over half of the participants had negative feelings associated with the idea of testing cosmetics on animals for human benefit. However, although this negative publicity is present, there is not much of a correlation between whether companies undergo animal testing and their projected sales. Yes, in 1989 Avon and Revlon were leading drugstore makeup brands and also cruelty-free, but today L’oreal and Maybelline hold the first and third spot for best drugstore makeup brands although they have animal tested products (Shunatona). Overall, I would conclude that animal testing in cosmetics is often frowned-upon by consumers, but if an animal tested product works best for an individual, they are more likely than not going to continue using the product.

**Moral Considerations of Animal Testing**

*Non-Human Animal Crash Course Philosophy* outlines moral considerations when it comes to animal testing and experimentation. Two animals that are often used for animal testing are rabbits and chickens. While in these testing facilities, these animals are restrained and get cosmetic products poured into their eyes to check for any adverse side effects which can lead to them becoming blind and then eventually euthanized. It is no doubt that humans would never consider treating another human being this way, but often never think twice when it comes to treating animals this way. When asked why animal testing is okay many think it is solely because we can do so and because humans have always dominated non-human animals by keeping them as pets or by making them do work. Some philosophers like Peter Singer argue that just because we have always done something, it doesn’t mean that the action is right or moral and if it is not okay to do something to a human it is not okay to do it to an animal. However, other philosophers like Carl Cohen argue that animal testing is justifiable because humans are using it to supply their needs and to survive. By testing cosmetics on animals, humans are avoiding any unnecessary suffering which justifies this action (Green). Overall, even well-educated philosophers have differing opinions on whether animal testing is moral or not which reveals that there is no right or wrong answer to this question and it comes down to an individual's moral beliefs and their ability to justify their opinions.

After learning that there is no right or wrong answer to the question asking if animal testing is morally and ethically right, I wanted to see how survey participants would justify their opinions on the following two statements regarding the morals of animal testing. The first statement was “Animals are not as important as humans. If they can be used to make human life better, they should be”. As a result of this, 37.3% of the participants strongly disagreed, 26.9% disagreed, 22.4% were neutral, 9% agreed, and 1.5% strongly agreed with the statement. The second statement was “Animals do not live according to the same moral rules as humans so there is no reason why we should give them any moral rights,” and to this 42.4% of participants strongly disagreed, 36.4% disagreed, 13.6% were neutral, 3% agreed, and 1.5% strongly disagreed. To both statements, the majority of participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed, but I was still able to see responses from each answer choice.

Out of the two statements, I found the justifications to the first statement the most interesting. Though the opinions if animals are not as important as humans were not unanimous, participants from every answer choice used religion to justify their views. From a participant who disagreed with the statement, they also said that “All of God’s creation is important.” A participant who strongly agreed with the statement further claimed that “God put man over animals.” Lastly, a participant that had a neutral opinion stated that “God gave man dominion over animals. And as in all things man has dominion over, there are a select few who will abuse that power”. I do not have enough knowledge to form an opinion to argue or agree with any of these justifications, but I found it interesting how three people of the same religion could have different views on the same statement, but all use religion to back their belief. This further reveals that there is no right or wrong answer to whether a person thinks animal testing is morally and ethically correct or not and it all comes to whether an individual can justify why they believe what they believe on this subject. Whether an individual agrees with Peter Singer or Carl Cohen, as long as their opinion is backed with justification, their belief is valid.

**Conclusion**

**Limitations**

By using a survey to assist in answering the research questions, I was able to see how a very small sample of people feels about animal testing in cosmetics. However, some improvements could have been made to the survey to achieve a more in-depth and a broader range of answers. Firstly, many of the survey questions had yes, no or maybe answer choices, but I would give the participants the option to explain their answer. Since this part of the survey was optional, not every participant gave feedback on why they chose the answers that they did. An improvement would be to make the ‘please explain answer’ option mandatory so that I could have better explained in words why the results of the survey were what they were.

Another limitation of the research conducted was the platform that the survey was shared. Since I shared the survey on my social media accounts, the participants were a wide range of ages, but the majority fell in the 16-25 age range. Also, 82.1% of participants were female while the remaining 17.9% were male. Males in females sometimes have differing views on certain subject matter, and this could've played a role in the responses received In addition to that, I only received 66 responses which is small sample size in relation to the US population. Though I did receive useful information from the survey, I believe if it looked at one age range, had an equal amount of male and female participants, and reached a broader audience, I would be able to look at the results from a greater scale.

**Additional Research**

When conducting primary and secondary research, I only looked into the companies that tested their cosmetics on animals and the negative publicity that they received. However, I think it would have also been helpful to look into cruelty-free cosmetic companies to see if they are receiving any praise or positive publicity. As a result of my survey, I learned that a majority of participants were still going to use the products that I had informed are still being tested on animals because these products were what worked best for them. By looking into cruelty-free companies, I could've furthered understood what was or wasn’t being done by these companies to make consumers want to switch to cruelty-free products.

**Call to Action**

Overall, as a result of my primary and secondary research, I have found that many individuals have negative emotions towards the use of animal testing in the cosmetic industry, but there is a disconnect in the extent of consumer awareness on the subject. Yes, more than half of participants believe that animal testing is wrong, but more than 75% were unaware that some name-brand companies are continuing to test their products on animals today. I think this research is important because it hopefully opened the eyes of survey participants and will lead them to be more conscious of the cosmetic products they are using. In conclusion, I believe that this research uncovered emotions towards animal testing that aren’t publicly known because a lack of a full understanding of the issue. Furthermore, by building on this research, there is an increased chance that consumers will transition to cruelty-free products and more cosmetic companies will incorporate alternatives to animal testing.

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