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Cosmetics Industry Performance in the European Union: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract. *This paper investigates the performance of the beauty industry within the European Union (EU), utilizing a visual-comparative approach based on key graphical data reflecting market size, growth, segmentation, digitalization, and promotional trends. With the beauty sector representing a critical area of consumer spending and innovation, particularly in the post-pandemic recovery phase, this study seeks to analyze intra-EU disparities and emerging strategic patterns. Through examination of seven carefully curated graphs, the analysis spans diverse dimensions such as market size, product category distribution, consumer behavior, e-commerce integration, and advertising expenditure. This multi-layered exploration reveals that while mature markets such as France and Germany continue to lead in overall market volume and innovation, emerging markets like Poland demonstrate robust growth dynamics and digital adoption. The study integrates these visual findings with extensive secondary research to uncover how different national strategies and consumer cultures contribute to the sector's structure and resilience. The conclusions offer targeted recommendations for industry stakeholders and policymakers focused on competitive positioning, regulatory adaptation, and digital transformation across the EU beauty landscape.*

Keywords: beauty industry, European Union, market segmentation, e-commerce, advertising strategies, consumer behavior, post-pandemic recovery.

Introduction

The beauty industry, encompassing personal care products, skincare, cosmetics, and fragrances, holds a prominent role within the European Union's socio-economic fabric. It is both an economic powerhouse and a cultural symbol, intimately tied to national identities, social rituals, and evolving definitions of self-care and well-being. From Parisian perfumeries to Milanese salons, the sector is steeped in tradition, yet remains at the forefront of innovation, responding swiftly to shifts in technology, consumer behavior, and global economic conditions.

Over the past decade, the beauty industry has undergone a profound transformation. The confluence of digitalization, environmental consciousness, and demographic shifts has prompted companies to rethink everything from product development to marketing and distribution. The rise of social media and influencer-driven branding has revolutionized how consumers interact with beauty products, making online engagement as crucial as physical shelf presence. These developments have democratized the industry, allowing new entrants to challenge legacy brands, and enabling consumers to make more informed and values-driven purchasing decisions.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic represented an inflection point for the industry, acting as both a disruptor and accelerator. With physical retail closures, reduced mobility, and shifting health priorities, the industry initially contracted. Yet, it quickly pivoted. Brands ramped up e-

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commerce capabilities, introduced touchless retail experiences, and shifted their product mix toward self-care and skincare as work-from-home routines changed beauty norms. Now, in the post-pandemic recovery period, the industry faces a new landscape—one where adaptability, sustainability, and customer intimacy are more critical than ever.

Within the EU, this landscape is further complicated by regulatory diversity, uneven economic recovery, and cultural differences in beauty standards. Countries like France and Germany, which house large multinational brands and sophisticated distribution networks, have shown greater resilience. Meanwhile, markets such as Spain and Poland face different trajectories, shaped by local consumer dynamics, digital readiness, and policy environments. These differences make the EU a compelling case for comparative sectoral analysis.

This paper builds its analysis on empirical evidence derived from a series of seven thematic graphs. These include indicators of market size and growth, per capita spending, product category evolution, national segmentation profiles, digital market share, and advertising strategies. By juxtaposing quantitative and visual data, we aim to identify key patterns and implications for market development.

The study's structure is designed to guide readers through an integrated analysis. Following this introduction, the literature review offers a synthesis of existing research and industry insights. The methodology section outlines the sources and interpretation strategies applied to the visual data. The results section then provides a detailed analysis of each graph, identifying inter-market contrasts and trends. Conclusions and recommendations offer forward-looking perspectives, emphasizing actionable insights for stakeholders navigating the evolving EU beauty landscape.

Ultimately, this study positions the beauty industry not only as a site of economic activity but also as a lens through which broader societal changes—such as digitization, sustainability, and identity politics—can be examined. In doing so, it underscores the value of comparative and visually grounded approaches in understanding complex consumer markets across a diverse economic union.

Literature review

Scholarly and industry analyses have highlighted the role of consumer behavior, market digitalization, sustainability trends, and global branding in influencing the beauty industry's trajectory. According to Jones (2010), the evolution of global beauty brands has often mirrored societal shifts, with recent years showing increased emphasis on diversity and authenticity. Statista (2023) presents data indicating continued expansion in both premium and mass-market segments across Europe, especially in skincare. Euromonitor (2022) identifies online retail and influencer marketing as pivotal trends reshaping the customer journey. Deloitte (2021) further observes the growing alignment between beauty products and health-conscious lifestyles, while McKinsey & Company (2021) documents the industry's volatility and resilience during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Donnelly and Scaff (2020) emphasize the strategic pivot toward digital-first sales channels and omnichannel retail experiences as key for future growth. Research by Mintel (2022) shows that skincare continues to outperform other categories due to its health-related attributes, while Bain & Company (2021) outline how luxury beauty is undergoing structural shifts influenced by Gen Z.

The European Commission (2023) identifies sustainability regulations such as the Green Deal as emerging policy drivers. NielsenIQ (2023) discusses consumer transparency expectations and traceability demands as accelerating clean beauty trends. Shiseido (2021) and L'Oréal (2022) corporate reports underline innovation and R&D as strategic priorities in navigating post-COVID uncertainty. WGSN (2023) explores future-forward trends including AI-driven personalization and neurocosmetics. Harvard Business Review (2019) discusses how storytelling and identity are central to millennial and Gen Z brand engagement. Busu (2018) adds that data monetization strategies are reshaping how brands engage with consumers across digital platforms. EY (2021) finds that supply chain resilience is now a leading concern for CPG firms in the wake of global disruption. Finally, the OECD (2022) highlights gendered consumption and the sociocultural embeddedness of beauty routines as important variables often overlooked in quantitative studies.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach with a primary emphasis on visual-comparative analysis supported by secondary research. The core of the methodology is the interpretation of seven graphs sourced from industry reports, publicly available EU statistics, and institutional research platforms such as Cosmetics Europe and Statista. These visual representations reflect the following analytical dimensions: total market size by country in 2023, annual growth rates from 2022 to 2023, per capita beauty consumption, market changes by product category, share of beauty market by segment, penetration of e-commerce in beauty retail, and advertising spending by product type. Each graph offers insight into structural and behavioral trends within the beauty market of the EU.

The graphs were selected to ensure a balance between macroeconomic indicators (e.g., market size and growth), consumer-level behavior (e.g., per capita spending, product preference), and firm-level strategic responses (e.g., advertising investment, digital sales channels). This tri-dimensional lens allows for an integrated reading of the market, capturing both demand-side and supply-side dynamics. The visual data is supplemented with a thorough literature review that contextualizes findings within broader academic and industry discussions.

To ensure consistency, data from all graphs were normalized to the 2023 fiscal year unless otherwise specified. The methodology also considers the limitations of visual interpretation—acknowledging that such graphs represent condensed realities and that some insights may require further empirical validation through longitudinal or qualitative research. Nonetheless, visual analysis proves particularly valuable for comparative frameworks where differences in scale, proportion, and variation across countries or categories can be immediately observed and assessed.

Interpretation was conducted using a thematic coding strategy, mapping the insights from each graph to broader themes including market maturity, consumer trends, digital adaptation, and policy alignment. These codes informed the structure of the results section, where each graph is analyzed individually before synthesizing overarching conclusions. This analytical design supports the development of targeted recommendations for policymakers, business leaders, and academic researchers seeking to understand the European beauty industry's current dynamics and future directions.

Results

The results section synthesizes insights from seven key visual data representations that collectively chart the evolution and differentiation of the EU beauty market. Figure 1 presents the total market size by country for 2023, offering a snapshot of national dominance and structural disparities. Figure 2 explores year-over-year growth rates to reveal market momentum and emerging trends. Figure 3 focuses on per capita consumer spending, linking national affluence to beauty expenditure intensity. Figure 4 shifts to a cross-EU analysis of product category growth between 2022 and 2023, offering a sectoral perspective. Figure 5 dissects market composition by product type across countries, showing how consumer preferences vary. Figure 6 highlights the rise of e-commerce, mapping digital transformation trajectories, while Figure 7 addresses strategic advertising allocations, revealing where companies are placing promotional emphasis. Together, these figures not only depict quantitative shifts but also narrate deeper transformations in consumption, branding, and economic organization within the European beauty industry.

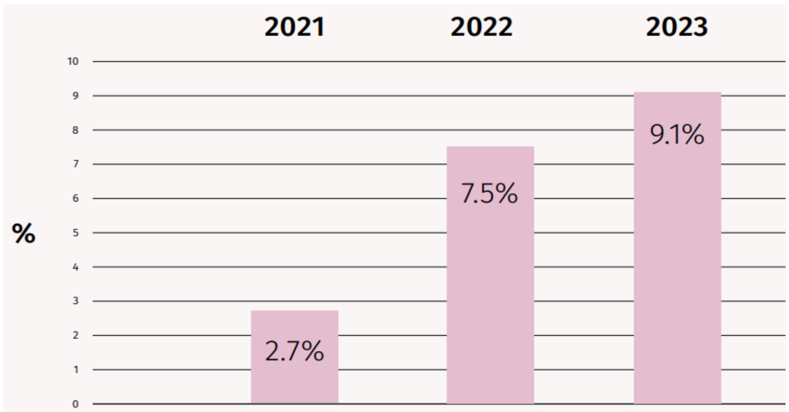

Figure 1. The European cosmetics market annual growth, between 2021-2023

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023.

As we can see in Figure 1, which illustrates the total market size in billions of euros for the year 2023, France emerges as the leading national market with revenues surpassing €13.5 billion, followed closely by Germany. Italy and Spain form a middle tier, while Poland appears as a developing market with relatively smaller volumes. The disparity in total size reflects broader economic scales and varying levels of maturity in national beauty markets. France's market leadership reflects historical branding dominance, consumer sophistication, and well-developed export infrastructure, while Germany's proximity to central European logistics networks supports scale efficiencies and retail density.

In terms of market dynamics, Figure 2 presents the year-on-year growth rates for the same countries from 2022 to 2023.

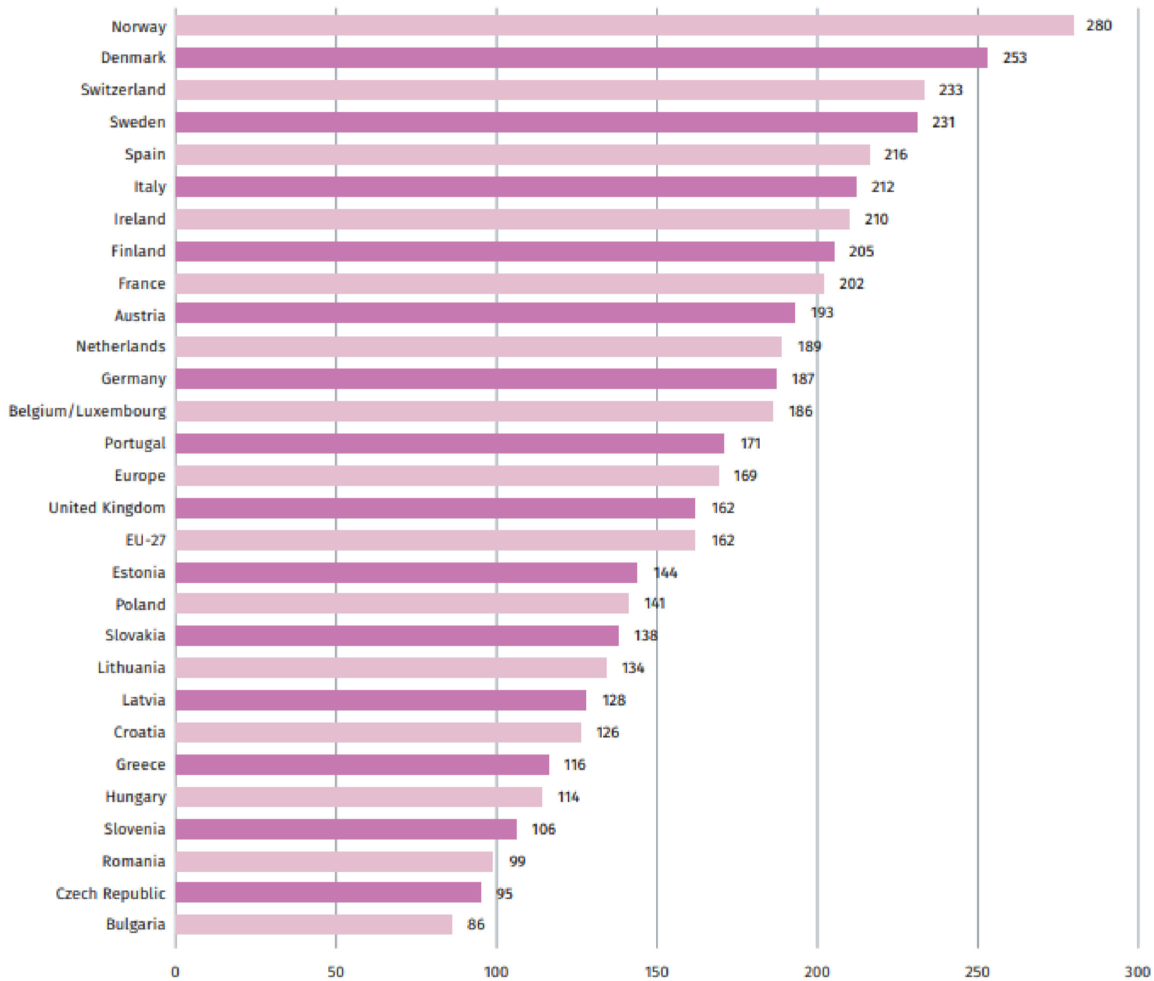

Figure 2. The European cosmetics per capita consumption by country

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023.

This Figure reveals a striking contrast. Poland, despite its smaller market size, demonstrates the highest growth rate, suggesting it is in an expansionary phase with significant market potential. Meanwhile, mature markets like France and Germany show lower but more stable growth, consistent with saturation effects and robust consumer loyalty. Italy maintains moderate growth, whereas Spain reflects slower performance, likely influenced by persistent inflationary pressures and post-pandemic labor market disruptions.

Figure 3 shifts the focus to individual consumption levels, showcasing per capita spending on beauty products.

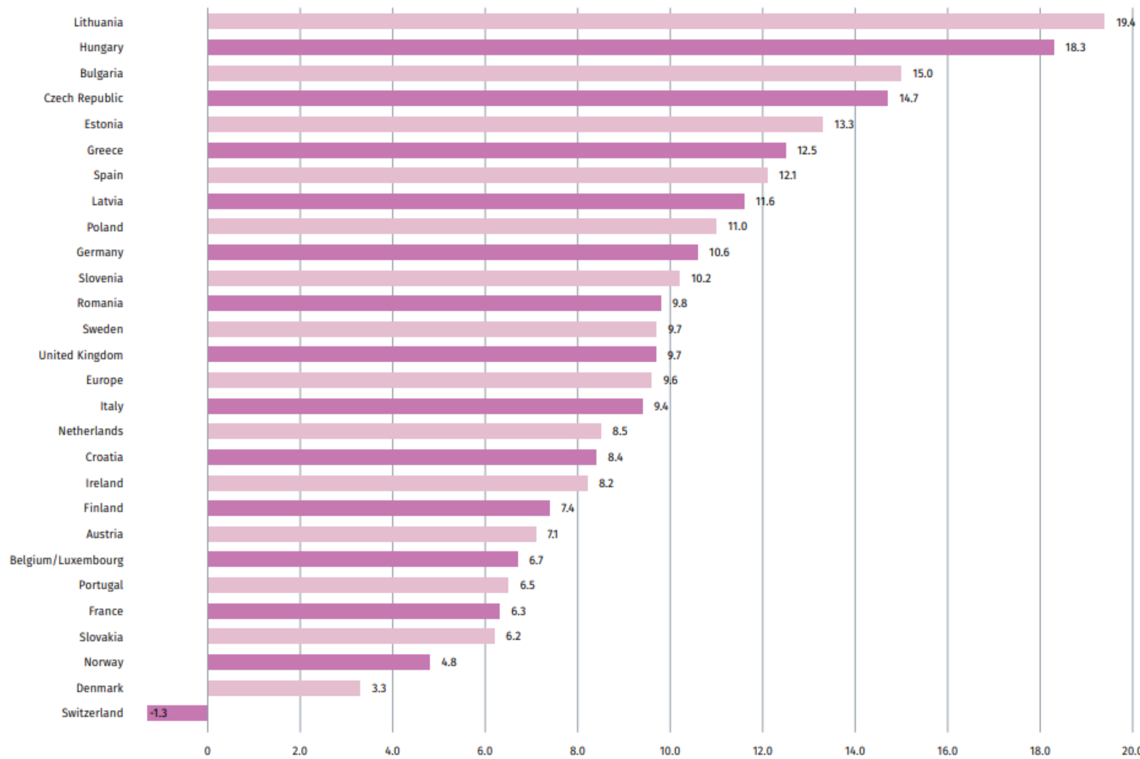

Figure 3. The European cosmetics market: market changes 2022/2023 (%)

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023

Here, France again leads, emphasizing not only the market's size but also the cultural importance of personal care in French society. Italy and Germany follow, while Poland and Spain lag, the former due to lower income levels and the latter likely impacted by delayed recovery from the pandemic and broader economic pressures. High per capita spending reflects not just affluence but deeper behavioral integration of beauty into daily routines, underlining aesthetic expectations and wellness connotations particularly prevalent in Mediterranean countries.

A more nuanced view emerges in Figure 4, which dissects market segmentation into skincare, cosmetics, haircare, and other personal care categories. Skincare dominates across all countries, confirming its position as the cornerstone of modern beauty routines.

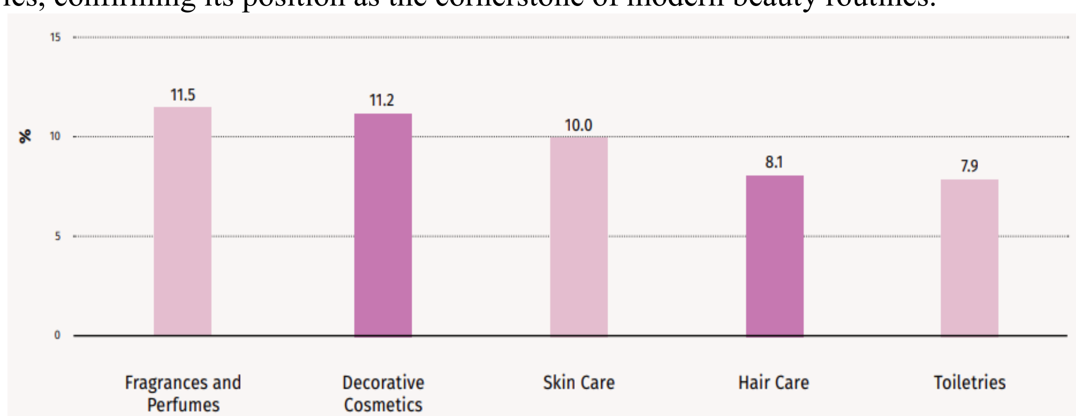

Figure 4. The European cosmetics market: market changes by product category

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023.

Figure 4 illustrates the changes in market value by product category between 2022 and 2023, offering a cross-sectional view of how different segments of the beauty industry have evolved in terms of growth. Unlike the earlier Figures, this one does not compare countries but instead focuses on product categories such as skincare, haircare, color cosmetics, and personal hygiene across the EU as a whole. The most significant growth is observed in skincare, which continues to benefit from wellness-driven consumer preferences and the proliferation of hybrid health-beauty products. Haircare also shows modest positive change, with innovations in scalp health and natural treatments contributing to renewed interest. In contrast, the color cosmetics segment registers a slower recovery, reflecting lingering behavioral changes from the pandemic period, during which reduced social interaction curtailed demand. Personal hygiene products maintain a stable trajectory, consolidating the gains made during COVID-related spikes. This product-level analysis underscores how structural shifts in consumer priorities are reshaping the composition and strategic focus of the EU beauty market.

Figure 5 provides a breakdown of the beauty market by product category as a percentage of total market share in each country.

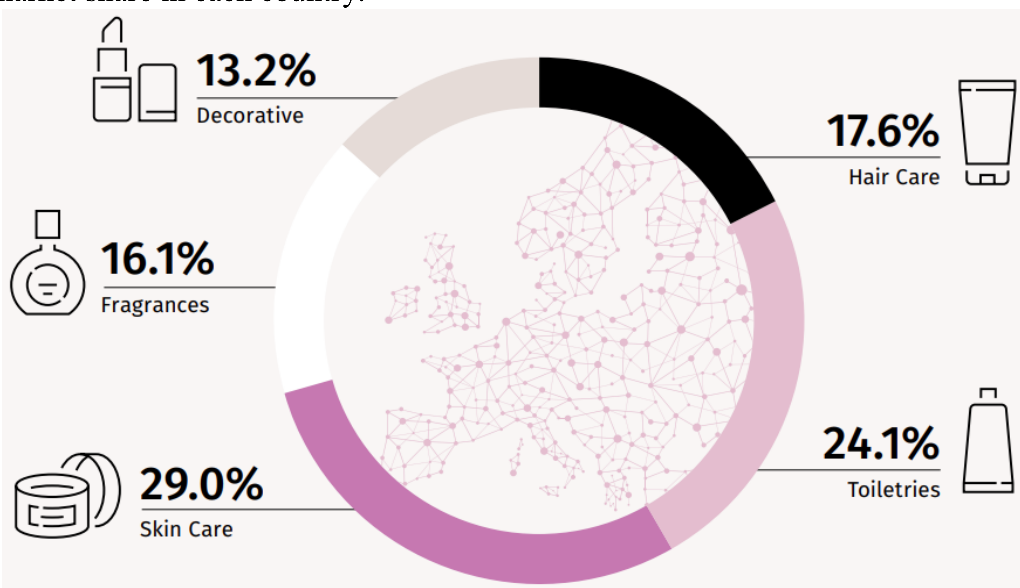

Figure 5. The European cosmetics market: market changes by product category (%)

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023

This visualization reveals how national preferences differ significantly across skincare, haircare, color cosmetics, and other personal care products. Skincare consistently holds the largest share, particularly in Germany, where clinical and dermocosmetic products are widely embraced. France also maintains a strong skincare base but stands out for its substantial investment in fragrances, echoing its global leadership in luxury perfumes. Italy displays a balanced distribution with a noticeable emphasis on haircare, consistent with the country's renowned salon culture. Spain's market is more heavily weighted toward color cosmetics, reflecting stylistic preferences and youthful consumer bases. Poland shows a more even distribution, with higher relative spending on essential personal care items, indicative of a market in transition from necessity-driven to aspirational consumption.

Figure 6 illustrates the market penetration of e-commerce in the EU beauty industry, expressed as the percentage of total beauty sales made online.

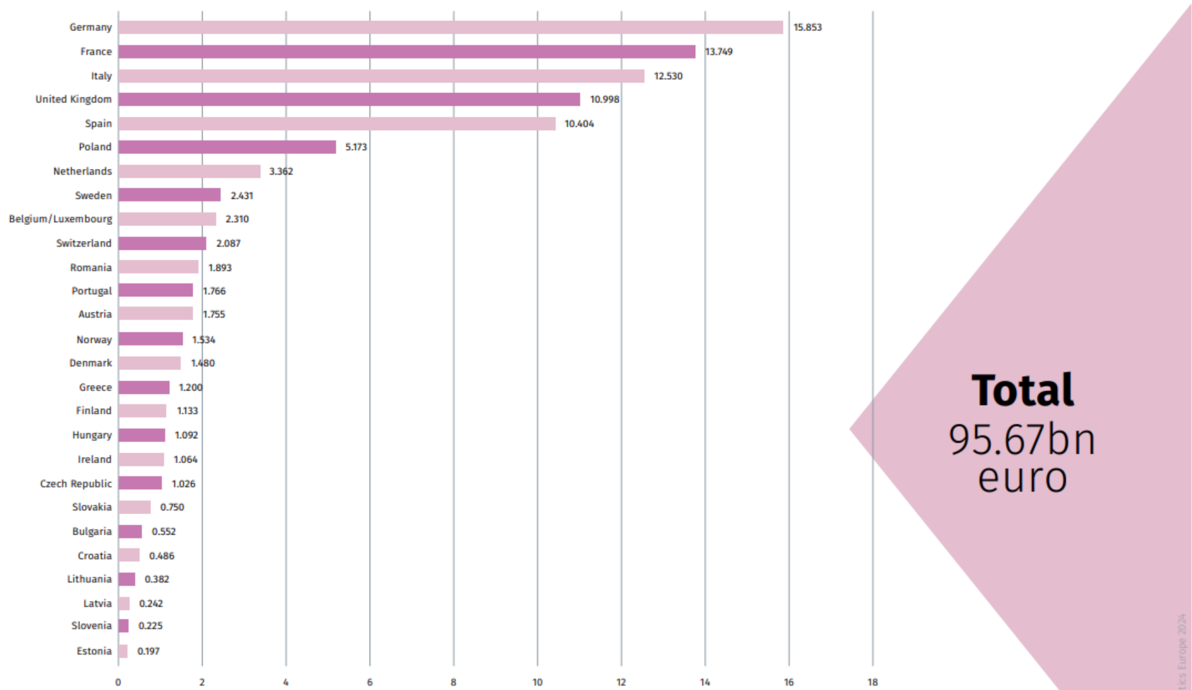

Figure 6. Market volume by country in 2023

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023.

This Figure reveals a marked increase in online beauty sales, indicating a structural shift in consumer purchasing behavior accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. France and Germany lead in online penetration, driven by strong logistics networks, consumer trust in digital platforms, and the presence of well-established e-retailers. Italy and Spain follow with moderate online integration, though both countries show upward trends as traditional retailers expand their digital capabilities. Poland, while still trailing behind in absolute figures, demonstrates rapid adoption growth, suggesting significant potential for future expansion. This data underscores the critical importance of omnichannel strategies and digital investments across all EU markets. The increasing consumer comfort with online beauty purchases is reshaping retail dynamics, favoring brands that provide seamless, personalized, and content-rich digital experiences.

Figure 7 provides insights into advertising expenditure by product category across the EU beauty market.

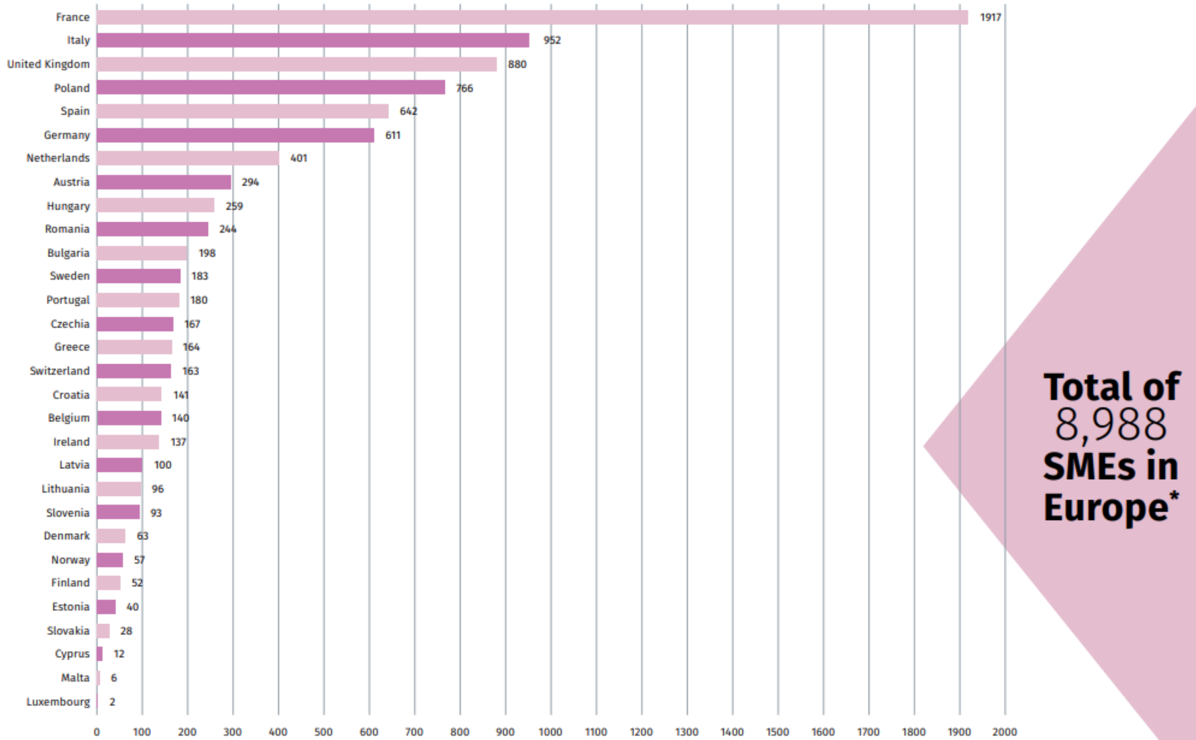

Figure 7. Number of SME per country in 2023

Source: Cosmetics Europe. Market Performance 2023.

The data shows that skincare commands the largest share of advertising budgets, reflecting both consumer demand and competitive intensity in this segment. Cosmetics follow closely, particularly driven by influencer marketing and visual platforms that suit the promotional nature of color products. Haircare and personal hygiene receive relatively smaller shares, though haircare has seen increased spending linked to new trends in scalp care and natural treatments. Fragrance advertising remains concentrated in premium and luxury segments, typically through high-profile campaigns and celebrity endorsements. This allocation of advertising resources indicates the strategic priorities of beauty companies, emphasizing brand visibility in high-margin segments and responding to digital engagement metrics that guide media spend. It also highlights the evolving role of marketing in driving product differentiation and consumer loyalty in a saturated marketplace.

Conclusions and recommendations

The comparative analysis of beauty markets across the EU reveals both convergence and divergence. France and Germany dominate in terms of market size and consumer investment, benefiting from long-standing infrastructures, strong domestic brands, and cultural alignment with beauty values. Italy's performance is bolstered by its recovery strength and resilient per capita spending, while Spain's challenges highlight the need for targeted recovery efforts. Poland represents a promising growth frontier, underpinned by rising incomes and a youthful consumer base.

Policy recommendations should be tailored to these dynamics. Mature markets should leverage digitalization to deepen customer engagement and experiment with personalized, data-driven product offerings. In Poland, stakeholders should focus on brand development and skincare innovation to sustain momentum. Spain would benefit from structural support measures such as tax incentives for beauty SMEs and campaigns to revitalize consumer demand. Across all countries, aligning with EU sustainability goals by promoting eco-friendly packaging and ingredient transparency is essential.

Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach and integrate qualitative data, such as consumer interviews and brand case studies, to enhance contextual understanding. As the beauty industry continues to intersect with health, technology, and identity politics, interdisciplinary studies will become increasingly valuable for academics, policymakers, and practitioners alike.

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