



Can Cosmetic be helpful against Corona?

By Matteo Zanotti Russo

Change.

This is the word that best describes the period we are experiencing, intense, unexpected and dramatic. Economic plans, certainties and habits have been distorted and partially canceled, the objectives changed, the forecasts canceled. We are witnessing major maneuvers to save entire continental economies, pharaonic investments to contain social problems and to find therapies that can save hundreds of thousands of people, waiting for the “holy grail”, the vaccine that (in the hopes of all) will awaken the whole world from this nightmare. We in the cosmetics sector have naturally experienced great uncertainties related to our individual lives (not least the fear of disease and its extreme consequences) and the prospects of our field. But not only that: it is legitimate to ask ourselves what role our sector has assumed in such a dramatic moment and if prospects and dynamics will change in the future.

It should be remembered that the major changes, reviewed and accepted the dramatic aspects, still bring some positive aspects: they force us to reflect, help us to see things from new angles and once the emergency is overcome, they can bring opportunities, if well managed. The loss of certainty can give new perspectives.

In this scenario, the cosmetics world was obviously overwhelmed by the *tsunami* of the pandemic: the entire sector was hit, both by the total closures imposed in many countries, by the drop in consumption and sales. The world was not prepared and neither was the cosmetic sector, but the epochal turning point gives us the opportunity to rethink the role of cosmetics. To “what is the cosmetic product really”, to what role it played during the pandemic. How will the cosmetic product be relocated to the new world that awaits us, with new dynamics, new priorities and new perspectives?

Practical importance of cosmetics and their active role against coronavirus: are hand sanitizing gels cosmetics or biocides?

The importance of hand hygiene and the effectiveness of hydroalcoholic gels in neutralizing the virus when it is not possible to wash hands with soap and water emerged from the first dramatic stages of spread of the virus. Faced with a very limited number of companies capable of producing highly sought-after disinfectants (hydroalcoholic gels), the markets have undergone

an impressive big wave of requests, and I would like to underline the very important role played (still today) by cosmetic companies in the ability to create volumes of hydroalcoholic gels whose importance has been (and still is today) essential to contain the spread of the virus. As an expert (naturally working from home) I personally supported dozens of cosmetic companies that were making hydroalcoholic gels desperately requested by collapsing hospitals in record time: cosmetic companies played an essential role in my opinion not adequately known and recognized.

Having overcome the most critical phase of the emergency, a different regulatory problem has slowly emerged, which still sees different positions between the various EU member countries: is the hydroalcoholic gel lawfully a cosmetic (due to its cleansing action)? Or was it an exception dictated by the emergency situation?

The question is still under discussion, but it concerns (it is right to underline it) aspects inherent to the different definitions of cosmetic and biocide: I will not go into the merits of this complex topic here.

Subsequently, after the first acute phase (in Europe), this regulatory issue will need to be clarified and better regulated (several options and proposals are currently on the table of DG Sanco of the EU).

Hygiene and skin care

If the question is complex with regard to the classification of the “cosmetic” hydroalcoholic gel, it is good to remember that the WHO guidelines agree on the fundamental importance of cleaning hands with soap and water, whenever possible. So we are again faced with a fundamental role assumed by cosmetic products, and in this case without any regulatory ambiguity.

Even in this very important area, the role of cosmetic products has been underestimated, perhaps due to the fact that, unlike hydroalcoholic gels, soaps have always been readily available. This does not mean that skin cleansing products have had (and still have) a fundamental role in containing the spread of the virus, and this may already be sufficient to define the importance and role of the cosmetic product in the fight against coronavirus. But in my opinion the importance of the cosmetic product goes beyond the (albeit vital) role of containing the virus.

Cosmetics and “gestures”. Cosmetics and “attitudes”.

The cosmetic product arises from personal and social needs (and does not create them, as some detractors claim). In this context, it is interesting to reflect on the role that the cosmetic product assumes in the context of the great change that is involving humanity, to understand and predict the role of the cosmetic product in the phase of change we are experiencing.

Let us reflect: how has the Corona affected our daily life, our behavior? What are the new perspectives?

We have to think about what we do. What we touch, how we move, spaces, distances, the surrounding environment. The pan-



dem has forced us to radically change the way we relate to the outside world, which must be more careful and controlled. The pandemic has taught us, is teaching us, to become more aware and respectful towards ourselves and towards others. It makes us more alert and reflective. It has taken away (and threatens to do so again) the freedom to move. But at the same time it has given back an important value to gestures and situations to which we gave no weight or value. How many times have we entered a bar completely automatically, out of habit? How many times have we gone to a restaurant, or have we simply left the house for a walk? And how many times have we not done it, despite being free to do it, simply because we didn't go, or, worse, because we didn't think about it?

The most dramatic aspect (naturally excluding the disease itself) was precisely this: deprivation. The most important change: gestures, the relationship with the outside world.

And the cosmetic product? What remains of the previous value of the cosmetic, of the role it had “before”, in reality? And what role can it play now? And what role and what importance could it have in the future? Perhaps the value of the cosmetic product hasn't actually changed. Perhaps the pandemic can give us the opportunity to better understand what the cosmetic product is, what role it had even before, which we may have underestimated because our scales of values were completely different from today. And we can also understand the importance it has assumed in the dramatic moment of the pandemic. In a free world (the one before), the use of cosmetics was often associated with unconscious gestures, to which we often did not give importance: shaving, putting on make-up or washing our hair were part of a predictable everyday life, sometimes just a annoying daily duty. But what is the cosmetic product really? What has it always been?

The words “self-care” and “beauty” were enough to describe the cosmetic product of the “before” world. During the pandemic we were divided by invisible walls, and soon after (and to a large extent even now), the meter distance, the walk or dinner at the restaurant became conquests that we savor with pleasure, when we can afford them. In this “new world” it is easier to understand the concept of barrier and border. By focusing on the new borders we have and on regaining the possibility of socializing, it is much clearer that the cosmetic product is located at the border.



Cosmetics have always been on the border between us, our way of being, and the outside world, which perceives us: they have always communicated a “state”, a way of being, sensations, to ourselves and to others. Softness, appearance, fragrance, color. Age.

New attitudes and new needs

If the world around us changes suddenly, then the need to communicate intensifies, and cosmetics can increase its social importance. But that's not all: one of the functions of the cosmetic product, recognized by most international regulations, is the ability to keep the skin in good condition. And healthy skin represents an intact barrier: an effective defense.

The new habits change our relationship with the skin, which at the same time can become a vehicle of contention (by contact) and in turn is exposed to much greater insults than in the “world of before”: washing hands 10 times a day and smearing them with ethanol is not what dermatologists recommend. Compulsive hand cleansing itself is new in the world dermatological scenario ...

Not to mention the facial skin covered by the mask (another essential device!), Which everyone uses today (or should do it!) And which in many cases (especially healthcare workers or those who work in contact with the public) forces for a long time the skin in an anomalous microclimate of humidity and high temperature, in the presence of an equally anomalous content of carbon dioxide.

From a dermatological point of view we are witnessing a gigantic clinical study: billions of people whose skin is sheathed with gloves, delipidized by compulsive washing or kept for many hours a day in a tropical climate with very important masks. What consequences will we have in the medium term from a dermatological point of view? And what psychological and sociological impacts will this result?

Without forgetting that damaged and compromised skin can lose part of its ability to protect the entire body ...

All this belongs to the sphere of cosmetics and represents the challenge of cosmetics manufacturers in the world that awaits us.

Conclusions

Being an expert in the cosmetic sector, I have no doubts: cosmetic products have made an important contribution to containing the damage deriving from the corona virus, from many points of view. Furthermore, the new needs related to protection and new lifestyles will give rise to new products and new cosmetic categories that will be able to give greater protection, and will be able to adapt to the changing needs of interaction between people, both from the hygienic point of view and from the point of view of view, no less important, of the need to relate to others, in a world in which great changes induce new individual and social dynamics.

The role of the cosmetic product is multiple and fundamental. It was so in the acute phase and it will also be in the subsequent struggle on the various fronts of hygiene, protection and social and psychological impact: an underestimated ally in the fight against the coronavirus. ■



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