

# PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP IN THE DERMATO-COSMETICS INDUSTRY AMONG PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD

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## INTRODUCTION

The dermato-cosmetic industry is an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of cosmetology, clinical dermatology and pharmaceutical research [1]. It brings together products designed for both aesthetic care and the improvement of minor skin conditions, through scientifically validated active ingredients such as hyaluronic acid, ceramides or retinoids, and rigorous in vitro, in vivo and ex vivo testing protocols (cosmeceuticals) [1,2]. This solid scientific foundation has favored the emergence of iconic brands (developed in collaboration with dermatologists) which occupy a distinct position on the border between cosmetic and medical products, thus enjoying high credibility among both consumers and healthcare professionals [3].

Although legally classified as cosmetics according to EC Regulation no. 1223/2009, dermato-cosmetics occupy a distinct intermediate status (superior to conventional cosmetics, but without having the legal quality of a drug) which gives them both flexibility in marketing strategies and the obligation of rigorous standards of testing and scientific validation [4]. At organizational level, companies in the sector adopt an operating model close to the pharmaceutical one, investing in research and development departments, partnerships with dermatologists, and emerg-

**INTRODUCTION:** The dermato-cosmetic industry is at the intersection of dermatology, cosmetology and pharmaceutical research, being characterized by rapid innovation, increased competition and strict regulations. In this context, organizational leadership influences the strategic performance, adaptability and sustainability of companies. The study aimed to analyze the perception of the influence of leadership in the management of dermato-cosmetic products in Romania.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** A quantitative-descriptive study was conducted, with exploratory elements, by applying a structured online questionnaire, between March and May 2025. The batch included 72 responses from companies active in the field of cosmeceuticals in Romania. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation methods. Results: The predominant perceived leadership style was laissez-faire (29.2%), followed by transformational (27.8%) and participative (22.2%) leadership. The average leadership effectiveness score was 2.94/5, indicating a moderate to low level of organizational satisfaction. The main business strategies identified were competitive pricing (31%) and product portfolio innovation (24%). Less than half of the respondents reported constant adaptation to market feedback, and internal communication and digital marketing support were predominantly evaluated negatively. No significant correlation was identified between professional experience and the perception of leadership effectiveness ( $r=-0.038$ ;  $p>0.05$ ).

**CONCLUSIONS:** The results highlight the need to strengthen active, transformational leadership oriented towards communication, innovation and strategic adaptability in the Romanian dermato-cosmetic industry.

**Key words:** leadership, dermatology, dermato-cosmetics, pharmaceutical industry, organizational satisfaction.

ing technologies such as biotechnology, neurocosmetics, epigenetics, and bioferments, in order to obtain innovative, effective and well-tolerated formulas [5].

In the last decade, Romania has registered a sustained increase in imports of dermato-cosmetic products, the market being dominated by international brands present through pharmacy networks, dermatological clinics, and e-commerce channels. At the same time, relevant local initiatives have emerged in the natural and artisanal cosmetics segment, developed by independent pharmacies and start-ups oriented towards sustainability and local brand identity [6]. One of the main challenges of the dermato-cosmetics industry is compliance with the European regulatory framework, established by Regulation EC no. 1223/2009, which imposes rigorous standards regarding product safety, labeling, composition, and traceability [4].

The contemporary consumer shows a growing demand for personalized products, adapted to the skin type, genetic profile, and individual microbiome, a demand to which the industry responds by integrating facial analysis algorithms, artificial intelligence and DNA testing into the recommendation process [7–9].

The rise of contract manufacturing and digital expansion enabled many new players to enter the market, leading to market over saturation, where meaningful differentiation is becoming increasingly difficult [10]. Shorter product life cycles, driven by social trends and the accelerated pace of launches on digital platforms transform innovation from a competitive advantage into a fundamental condition for organizational survival [11,12].

Sustainability has become a strategic priority for the dermatological-cosmetics industry, with companies adopting specific actions such as packaging design, eliminating ingredients with high ecological impact and implementing sustainability audits along the production chain [13–15]. At the same time, climate change directly influences consumer behavior, increased UV exposure, urban pollution and seasonal instability are all generating increased demand for products containing antioxidants, anti-pollution filters, and products labeled with a protection factor [16,17].

Over-promises and discrepancies between marketing communications and actual results have generated increased skepticism among consumers, who are now demanding public scientific validation and compliance with rigorous ethical standards [18].

Dermato-cosmetic marketing is a complex strategic approach that combines evidence-based communication with medical education and digital personalization, simultaneously responding to the needs of healthcare professionals, end consumers, and the distribution chain. Traditional channels — dermatology congresses, pharmaceutical training, and specialist publications — coexist with advanced digital strategies, such as influencer marketing, artificial intelligence for personalized recommendations, and user-generated content, thus strengthening the credibility and visibility of brands [19–21]. The European regulatory framework, established by Regulation 655/2013, imposes clear restrictions on efficacy claims and prohibits any suggestion of a medicinal effect that is not clinically documented, which obliges marketing departments to collaborate closely with legal and medical teams [4].

In a sector characterized by high volatility, strict regulations and increasing competitive pressures, leadership is a key factor in organizational performance, going beyond the traditional administration to become a driver of innovation, strategic cohesion, and social responsibility [22,23].

Transformational leadership proves to be particularly relevant where innovation constitutes an essential vector of competitive differentiation. Studies demonstrate that organizations promoting R&D team autonomy and a culture of continuous learning generate products with a significantly higher rate of success and market retention [24]. In parallel, organizational agility — understood as the ability to quickly reconfigure strategic priorities, to reduce the cycle from concept to launch and to integrate market feedback in real time — becomes an essential condition for survival [25].

The ethical dimension of leadership takes on particular importance in an industry directly connected to consumer health, with responsible leaders assuming transparency regarding the origin of ingredients, combating greenwashing, and respecting the principles of inclusion in clinical testing [18,26]. At the same time, developing human capital—through values-based recruitment, continuous training, and building a participatory organizational culture—represents a strategic responsibility of the leader, as coherence between research, marketing, regulatory, and sales teams is the foundation for the sustainable success of any dermato-cosmetic brand [27–30].

### Purpose and objectives

This research aims to analyze the perception of the influence of leadership on the development and implementation of successful strategies in the management of dermato-cosmetic products in Romania, by analyzing the responses of industry representatives in relation to five specific objectives: identifying the predominant leadership styles, evaluating how they contribute to managing current market challenges, analyzing the relationship between leadership and the performance of marketing and sales strategies, and determining the importance of ethical and sustainable leadership in decision-making processes.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study design

The study is a quantitative-descriptive research, with exploratory elements, being carried out by applying a structured questionnaire addressed to people with commercial responsibility functions within companies operating in the cosmeceutical field in Romania.

### Research period

Data collection was carried out between March and May 2025.

### Data collection

The tool used for data collection was an online questionnaire [23], built in the Google Forms platform, designed based on the research objectives. The online format was preferred to allow accessibility, rapid distribution and automatic centralization of responses. The form consisted of 23 closed and semi-open questions, grouped into the following sections:

- Socio-professional data (function, experience, type of company);
- Perception of current leadership in the organization;
- Commercial strategies used;
- Impact of leadership on motivation, innovation and performance;
- The importance of sustainability and ethical values in managerial decisions.

Participants were selected based on the criterion of relevant experience in the field, being contacted via email or professional networks (business platforms, industry associations, LinkedIn).

### Research method

The research was based on the questionnaire method as a quantitative survey instrument. It was applied anonymously, to ensure the objectivity and honesty of the responses and to protect the professional identity of the respondents.

### The sample

Responses were recorded from 72 different people, including: regional/zonal managers, medical or sales

representatives, brand or marketing coordinators and other relevant functions (regulatory affairs, training, R&D). The sample cannot be considered statistically representative of the entire industry, but it provides a solid basis for analyzing the prevailing perceptions and trends in the sector.

**Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using the form, exported to a Google Sheets document and subsequently downloaded and processed in the Microsoft Excel application. Descriptive statistical analyses were used for the following:

- frequency and percentage distribution;
- mean scores on items using Likert scales;
- correlations between certain variables;
- comparative analyses between certain categories of respondents.

**RESULTS**

**Demographic analysis of the group**

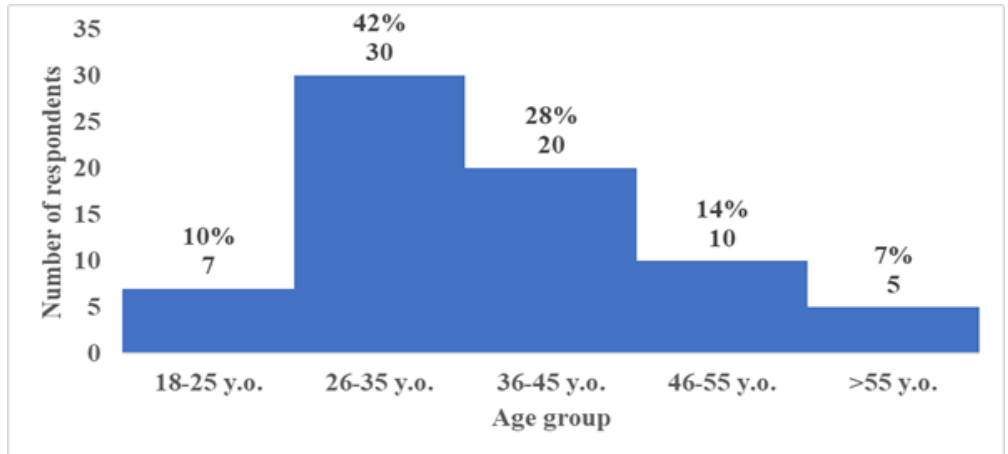
The distribution of respondents by gender was as follows: 47 (65.28%) women and 25 (34.72%) men. We analyzed the distribution of respondents by age groups: 18-25 years, 26-25 years, 36-45 years, 46-55 years and over 55 years. The majority of respondents (42%) were in the 26-35 age group (Figure 1).

The distribution of respondents according to their position in the company was presented in Table 1 and is as follows: 32% were medical/sales representatives. 31% were brand managers, 18% were regional managers and the remaining 19% reported holding another position.

25 of the respondents reported working in multinationals, 24 in start-ups and 23 in companies with Romanian capital. As can be seen from this point of view, the distribution was approximately uniform. The experience of the respondents was analyzed in terms of length of work in this field. Thus, the majority of 29% reported working in the industry for more than 7 years, while 21% have been working for less than a year (Figure 2).

86% of them (62) operate in Romania and the other 14% (10) operate for the international market. Of those operat-

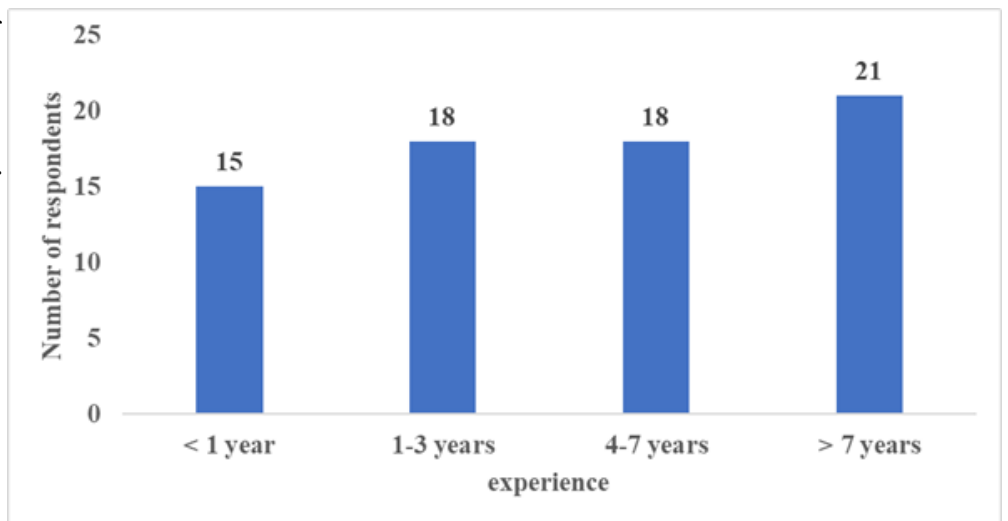
**Figure 1 Distribution of respondents by age group**



**Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their position in the companies where they work**

	sales representatives	brand managers	regional managers	other positions
Number of respondents	23	22	13	14

**Figure 2. Distribution of respondents according to experience in the field expressed as years of experience in this field**



ing in Romania: 35% operate nationally, 29% only in Bucharest, 23% only in the Center/North-West region and 13% in the South/South-East region.

**Analysis of the perception of leadership style**

The respondents' perception of the leadership styles in the teams they are part of is as follows (Figure 3): most (29.2%) consider that the leadership they are dealing with is laissez-faire and 27.8% consider that their leaders exercise transformational leadership. 22.2% consider that the leadership in their teams is participative and 20.8% consider that their leaders are autocratic.

Respondents rated leadership effectiveness on a Likert-type scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) as shown in the graph below (Figure 4). The

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents' perceptions about the type of leadership in the teams they are part of

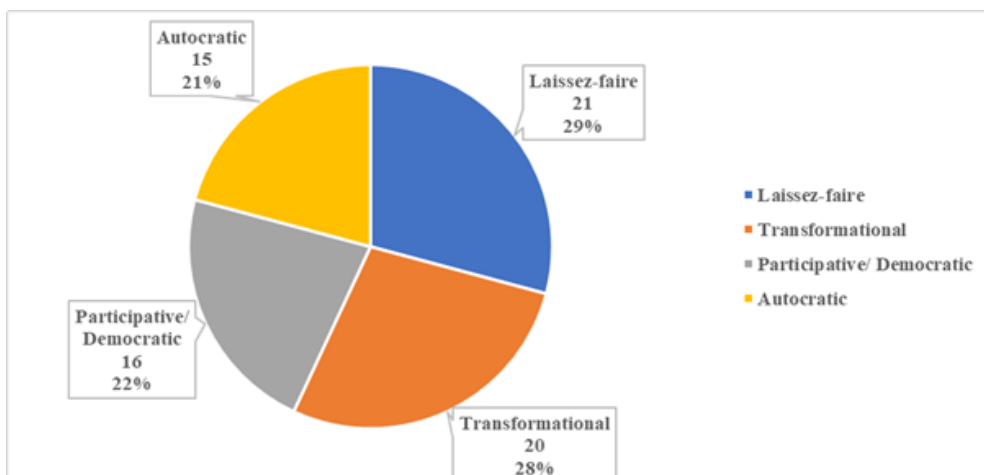


Figure 4. Respondents' score on perceived leadership effectiveness

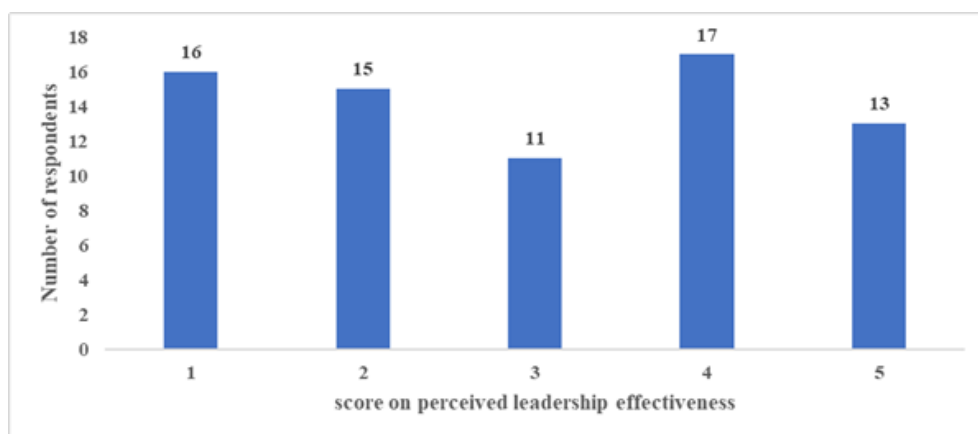
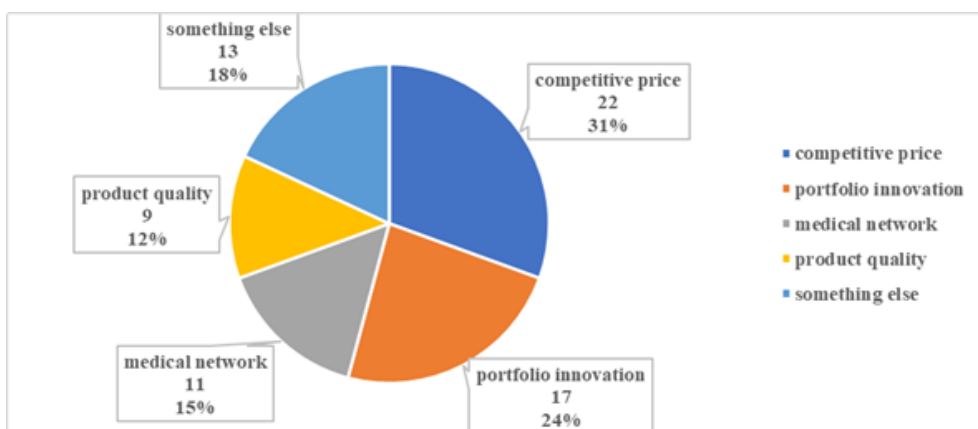


Figure 5. Commercial strategies addressed in the teams of which the respondents are part



overall mean score is 2.94, which is below the threshold of 3, considered “good” or “acceptable”. In particular, the association of this perception with the predominance of the laissez-faire style may indicate the need for more active involvement from leaders, as well as a more clearly defined vision and strategic direction.

Results on commercial strategies, communication and ethics in the organization

The most frequently mentioned differentiation strategies were (Figure 5): competitive price – 31% of respondents, product portfolio innovation – 24% of respondents, medical promotion network – 15% of respondents, perceived product quality – 12% of respondents and other promotion strategies (e.g. sustainability statements, digital communication) – 18% of respondents. The results suggest that price continues to play a dominant role in commercial strategy, especially in competition with international brands or generic products. A significant part of respondents also identified innovation and the professional relationship with dermatologists as essential pillars for differentiation – which is in line with global industry trends

When asked to what extent their organization adapts commercial strategies based on market feedback (Figure 6), 30.6% of respondents said that this always happens, 13.9% – frequently, 31.9% – sometimes and 23.6% believe that this never happens, results that suggest a fragmentation of the organizational culture regarding responsiveness to change. Less than half perceive the organization as having a good capacity for adaptation, and, naturally, more than half report a low, inconsistent or absent level of strategic response, which can reduce the agility of the decision-making process and the ability to adjust products or campaigns in relation to consumer requirements.

When asked about internal communication: excellent, 29.2% consider it excellent, 20.8% – acceptable, and at the opposite pole, 26.4% consider team communication weak and non-existent – 23.6%, data that indicate a lack of coherence in vertical communication

and in the integration of team feedback into the decision-making process. Over half of the respondents perceive communication as deficient or non-existent.

Figure 7 highlights the respondents' perception of leadership involvement in supporting digital marketing strategies. Approximately 25–30% of respondents indicate



Figure 6. Respondents' perception of the extent to which their organization adapts to market feedback

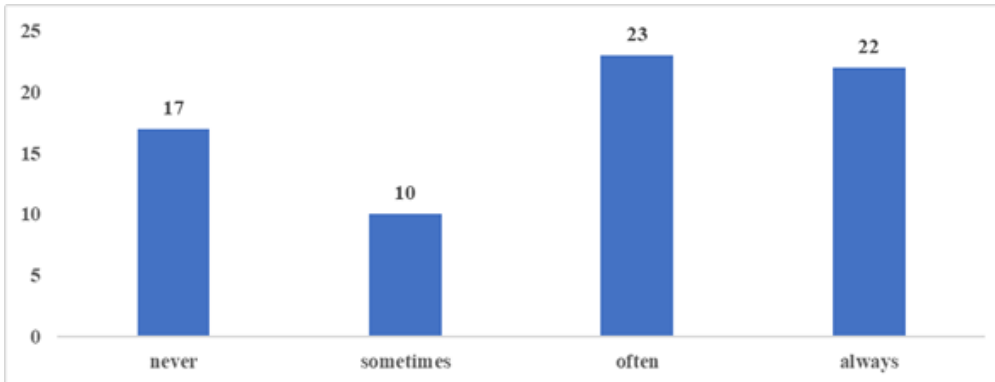
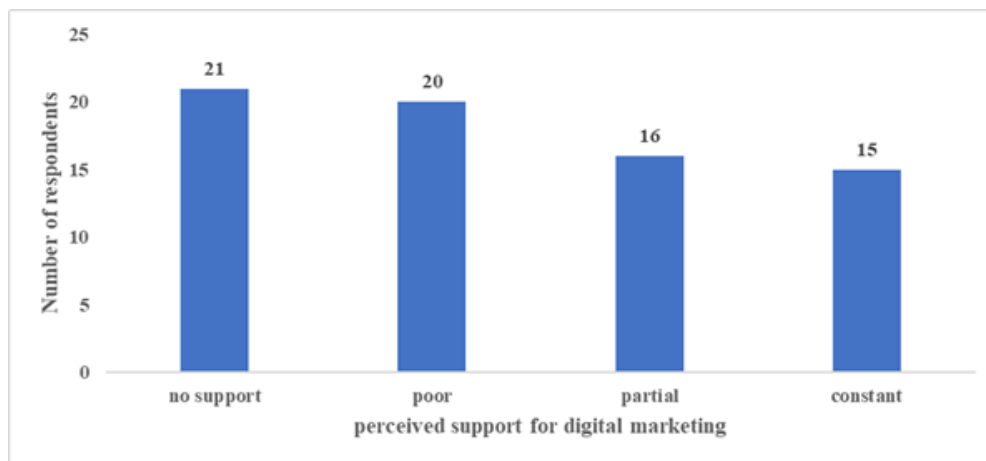


Figure 7. Respondents' perception of the support they receive from leaders in digital marketing efforts



the existence of constant support for digital initiatives, which suggests that the digitalization process is still in a stage of strategic consolidation. At the same time, most respondents perceive partial, reduced or non-existent support, the "Weak" category reflecting a minimal level of involvement in the development of digital initiatives within some organizations. This result highlights the fact that, despite the acceleration of digital transformation in the dermato-cosmetic sector, leadership does not yet uniformly prioritize the digital component, which may affect the visibility and competitiveness of brands.

On the last question regarding the ethical dimension of leadership: over half of the respondents consider ethics to be "very important" (25%) or "important" (27.8%) in the decision-making process. However, approximately 15.3% of respondents rate ethics as not very important and 31.9% consider it irrelevant to their work – results that could reflect the lack of explicit policies or real practices that support sustainability, inclusion or transparency. Correlation between professional experience and perception of leadership effectiveness We analyzed the relationship between professional experience (expressed in years of activity in the field) and the score given on leadership effectiveness, using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The calculated correlation coefficient was  $r = -0.038$ , which indicates a very weak and negative, but statistically insignificant

( $p > 0.05$ ) correlation between the two variables. This suggests that the level of experience of the respondents does not influence the perception of leadership effectiveness. Both newer employees and those with over 7 years of experience evaluated leadership independently of their seniority in the industry.

## DISCUSSIONS

Our study obtained, after applying the questionnaire to a group of 72 professionals from the cosmeceutical industry in Romania, a complex but heterogeneous picture of how leadership and its effectiveness are perceived in the management process in this industry. Laissez-faire leadership is the most frequently encountered style in the companies in the group (29.2%), followed by transformational (27.8%) and participative (22.2%). Although of these, transformational and participative styles have been associated in the literature with organizational performance, innovation and increased motivation [10,24], the predominance of the laissez-faire style in our group indicates a lack of clear direction and active involvement of leaders in decision-

making processes, which may negatively affect organizational culture. Looking at perceived leadership effectiveness, the average of 2.94/5 suggests a moderate to low level of satisfaction, which is consistent with other studies in the literature [31,32] showing that employees' perception of leadership in these industries is often influenced by rigid hierarchies, lack of communication and pressure to perform. Study participants reported that market differentiation strategies include competitive pricing (30.6%) and portfolio innovation (23.6%). In the context of a market that tends to be saturated, brands need to differentiate themselves [33]. Differentiation is often achieved either through superior perceived value (innovation) or through strategic price positioning, the two main axes of competitive advantage identified by Porter (1985) [34] and empirically confirmed in the context of consumer brands by Davcik and Sharma (2015) [35]. These strategies have also been reported in other studies [2,6]. Of the responses collected, only one third of the companies demonstrate fast and consistent reactions to market feedback, indicating a deficit in the capacity for strategic adaptation. Adapting strategies and portfolios within a certain time window is critical in an industry where product life cycles are short and consumer demands are rapidly evolving [25]. Only a minority of respondents (approximately 25%) perceive leadership support for digital marketing as

constant. In the literature, digitalization is perceived as a major growth vector in the cosmeceutical industry [7,36], an aspect in contrast to the results of our study. Positively, ethics and sustainability are perceived as important values for leaders' decisions by over 60% of respondents. This perception is aligned with other studies indicating that younger generations of consumers prefer brands that promote ethical values, transparency and social responsibility [27–29]. The coefficient  $r = -0.038$ , indicating the absence of a statistically significant correlation between seniority in the profession and the perception of leadership in their organization. This result suggests that perceptions of leadership style and quality are relatively homogeneously distributed across the entire group. Similar results have been observed in other studies applied to professionals in the field, where the perception of leadership was not significantly influenced by the seniority of employees, but rather by the quality of the leader–subordinate relationship [23,24,30].

## CONCLUSIONS

The research results highlight a dermato-cosmetic industry in continuous expansion, but in which competitive pressures are not accompanied by a proportionate managerial response. The predominant leadership style identified is the laissez-faire one, characterized by a reduced involvement in strategic and operational decisions, while the transformational and participative styles, although present, do not have a sufficient weight to generate sustained organizational efficiency. This reality is reflected in the moderate average score of the perception of managerial efficiency (2.94), indicating the absence of a clear leadership direction. The companies analyzed are mainly oriented towards strategies based on competitive prices and product innovation, confirming the market's sensitivity to value

and functional differentiation. However, less than half of the respondents claim that their organizations demonstrate real strategic adaptability to market signals, and the support given to digital marketing remains insufficient compared to the importance of this channel. Internal communication is deficient in almost half of the companies. Although ethics and sustainable values are recognized as relevant in the managerial decision-making process, their applicability is not universal.

## FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Further research could aim to extend the approach internationally, by applying a similar instrument in multinational companies in the European space, in order to validate the results and identify cultural differences in the exercise of leadership. At the same time, the integration of qualitative methods — such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups — would allow a deeper understanding of leadership dynamics and hierarchical relationships. A complementary direction is the evaluation of organizational performance correlated with leadership style, through measurable indicators such as customer satisfaction, employee retention or innovation rate.

## LIMITATIONS

Like any applied study, this research presents a series of limitations that must be taken into account: the statistically unrepresentative group (only 72 respondents, mostly from Romania), the research instrument (online questionnaire – does not allow for verification of the consistency of the responses or in-depth evaluation of the attitudes and motivations of the participants) and possible subjective responses (influenced by direct relationships with the team).

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