

INNOVATIONS IN COSMECEUTICALS: ADVANCES IN ACTIVE INGREDIENTS AND SKIN DELIVERY TECHNOLOGIES

Mansi Sharma, Hemant Singh, Dinesh Kumar Jindal, Vipin Kumar Singhal
Jaipur School of Pharmacy Maharaj Vinayak Global University Jaipur Rajasthan

***Corresponding author:** Mansisharma7301@gamil.com

Abstract- Cosmeceuticals represent a rapidly evolving interface between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, combining aesthetic enhancement with biologically active ingredients that improve skin health. Recent innovations have focused on advanced active ingredients such as peptides, antioxidants, botanical extracts, stem-cell derivatives, and bioengineered molecules, alongside novel delivery systems designed to overcome the skin barrier. Nanotechnology-based carriers including liposomes, nanoemulsions, solid lipid nanoparticles, and polymeric nanocarriers have significantly improved ingredient stability, penetration, and controlled release. These technologies enhance efficacy while reducing adverse effects. Emerging approaches such as stimuli-responsive nanocarriers, microneedle delivery, microbiome-friendly formulations, and personalized biotech skincare are reshaping the cosmeceutical landscape. Despite these

advancements, safety evaluation, regulatory harmonization, and long-term clinical validation remain essential. This review highlights recent progress in cosmeceutical actives and innovative delivery technologies, emphasizing their therapeutic potential and future prospects in dermatology and cosmetic science.

Keywords: Nanotechnology, Active ingredients, Skin delivery systems, Nanocarriers, Anti-aging, Peptides, Antioxidants, Cosmetic biotechnology

I. INTRODUCTION

Cosmeceuticals represent a rapidly expanding category of skincare and personal care products that bridge the gap between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. Unlike conventional cosmetics, which primarily aim to enhance appearance through cleansing, beautifying, or masking, cosmeceuticals contain biologically active ingredients that exert measurable therapeutic

effects on the skin. These products are formulated to improve skin health, prevent premature aging, protect against environmental damage, and manage specific dermatological concerns such as hyperpigmentation, acne, dryness, and photoaging. The increasing consumer awareness of skin health, combined with advances in dermatological research, has significantly contributed to the global growth of the cosmeceutical industry.

In recent years, the demand for effective anti-aging solutions has become one of the primary drivers of cosmeceutical innovation. Skin aging is influenced by intrinsic factors such as genetics and hormonal changes, as well as extrinsic factors including ultraviolet radiation, pollution, stress, and lifestyle habits. These factors lead to oxidative stress, collagen degradation, reduced elasticity, and formation of wrinkles. Consequently, cosmeceutical research has increasingly focused on active ingredients capable of stimulating collagen synthesis, neutralizing free radicals, improving hydration, and enhancing the skin barrier function. Ingredients such as peptides, antioxidants, botanical extracts, retinoids, and vitamins are commonly incorporated to address these concerns.

Photoprotection is another major area of cosmeceutical development. Continuous exposure to ultraviolet radiation accelerates photoaging, causes pigmentation disorders, and increases the risk of skin damage. Modern cosmeceuticals incorporate broad-spectrum UV filters along with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agents to protect skin cells from oxidative stress and environmental pollutants. Similarly, pigmentation control has gained attention due to increased awareness of uneven skin tone, melasma, and age spots. Active compounds targeting melanin synthesis and distribution are increasingly used to promote brighter and more even skin complexion.

Advances in biotechnology have significantly transformed the cosmeceutical sector. Biotechnological processes enable the production of highly purified and sustainable cosmetic actives, including bioengineered peptides, plant stem-cell extracts, enzymes, and fermentation-derived compounds. These ingredients often demonstrate improved stability, enhanced efficacy, and reduced environmental impact compared with traditional synthetic or naturally extracted ingredients. Biotechnology also supports the development of innovative skincare concepts such as microbiome-friendly

formulations that help maintain the natural balance of skin microorganisms, which is essential for maintaining skin health and immunity.

Nanotechnology has emerged as another key technological advancement in cosmeceuticals. The skin's outermost layer, the stratum corneum, acts as a significant barrier that limits the penetration of active ingredients. Nanotechnology-based delivery systems such as liposomes, nanoemulsions, solid lipid nanoparticles, and polymeric nanocarriers help overcome this barrier by enhancing solubility, stability, and targeted delivery of cosmetic actives. These carriers protect sensitive ingredients from degradation, enable controlled release, and improve skin penetration, ultimately enhancing product efficacy while minimizing irritation or adverse effects.

Formulation science has also evolved considerably, allowing the development of sophisticated delivery vehicles and multifunctional products. Modern cosmeceutical formulations aim to provide not only therapeutic benefits but also desirable sensory characteristics such as pleasant texture, fragrance, and ease of application. Advances in emulsification techniques, encapsulation technologies, and

stabilization strategies have improved product performance and shelf life. Additionally, physical enhancement methods such as microneedle patches, iontophoresis, and micro-infusion systems are being explored to facilitate deeper penetration of active ingredients into the skin.

The integration of dermatology and pharmaceutical sciences into cosmetic product development has strengthened the scientific credibility of cosmeceuticals. Clinical evaluation, in vitro testing, and safety assessments are increasingly employed to substantiate product claims. This scientific approach helps ensure efficacy, minimize adverse reactions, and improve consumer trust. Nevertheless, regulatory frameworks for cosmeceuticals vary widely across countries, often placing them between cosmetic and pharmaceutical regulations. This lack of uniform regulatory classification remains a challenge for manufacturers and researchers.

Another emerging trend in cosmeceuticals is personalized skincare. Advances in genetic analysis, skin microbiome research, and artificial intelligence have enabled the development of customized formulations tailored to individual skin characteristics,

lifestyle, and environmental exposure. Personalized cosmeceuticals promise improved efficacy by addressing specific skin needs rather than relying on generalized formulations.

Sustainability and environmental responsibility are also shaping the future of cosmeceuticals. Consumers increasingly prefer products derived from natural, biodegradable, and ethically sourced ingredients. Green chemistry principles, eco-friendly packaging, and cruelty-free testing practices are becoming important considerations in product development. Biotechnology-based production methods further support sustainability by reducing reliance on scarce natural resources.

Despite these advancements, several challenges persist in the cosmeceutical field. Ensuring long-term safety of novel delivery systems, particularly nanomaterials, remains a key concern. Stability issues, manufacturing scalability, regulatory approval, and the need for robust clinical evidence also require continued attention. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure the safe and effective use of cosmeceuticals.

Overall, cosmeceuticals have evolved into a dynamic interdisciplinary field combining

cosmetic science, dermatology, biotechnology, and pharmaceutical technology. Innovations in active ingredients and advanced delivery systems continue to enhance product efficacy, safety, and consumer acceptance. As research progresses, cosmeceuticals are expected to play an increasingly important role in preventive skincare, dermatological therapy support, and personalized beauty solutions.

II. 2ADVANCES IN ACTIVE INGREDIENTS

The effectiveness of modern cosmeceuticals largely depends on the development of innovative active ingredients capable of providing measurable biological benefits to the skin. Advances in dermatological research, biotechnology, and natural product chemistry have enabled the discovery of novel compounds with improved efficacy, safety, and stability. Active ingredients in cosmeceuticals are no longer limited to simple moisturizers or protective agents; instead, they now include sophisticated biomolecules designed to target specific skin concerns such as aging, pigmentation disorders, oxidative stress, inflammation, and barrier dysfunction. Among the most significant developments are peptides and growth factors, antioxidants and

phytochemicals, stem-cell-derived and biotech-based actives, and microbiome-friendly ingredients. These advances are

transforming skincare from purely cosmetic enhancement toward scientifically driven skin health management.

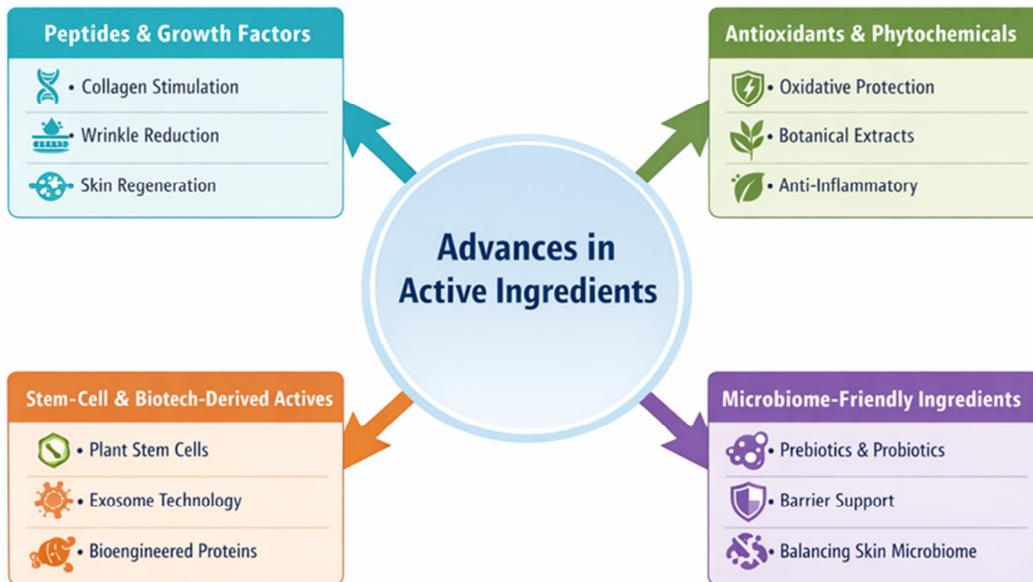


Figure.1. Advances in Active Ingredients

2.1 Peptides and Growth Factors

Peptides have emerged as one of the most promising classes of active ingredients in cosmeceutical formulations, particularly in anti-aging skincare. Peptides are short chains of amino acids that can function as signaling molecules in the skin, regulating cellular activities such as collagen production, wound healing, and extracellular matrix remodeling. Certain peptides stimulate fibroblast activity, leading to increased synthesis of collagen, elastin, and

glycosaminoglycans, which are essential for maintaining skin firmness, elasticity, and hydration. As collagen levels decline with age, peptide-based formulations help reduce wrinkles, improve skin texture, and enhance overall skin resilience.

Different categories of peptides are used in skincare, including signal peptides, carrier peptides, neurotransmitter-inhibiting peptides, and enzyme-inhibiting peptides. Signal peptides promote collagen synthesis and tissue repair, while carrier peptides

deliver trace elements such as copper that support enzymatic processes involved in skin regeneration. Neurotransmitter-inhibiting peptides are commonly used to reduce expression lines by modulating muscle contraction, offering a non-invasive alternative to cosmetic procedures. These multifunctional properties have made peptides central to advanced anti-aging formulations.

Growth factors represent another important group of bioactive molecules increasingly incorporated into cosmeceuticals. These proteins regulate cell growth, differentiation, and repair processes. Biotechnology has enabled the production of recombinant growth factors that enhance skin regeneration, accelerate wound healing, and improve dermal thickness. Growth factor-based ingredients can stimulate keratinocyte and fibroblast proliferation, improve collagen organization, and promote skin rejuvenation. Although promising, careful formulation and safety evaluation are required due to their potent biological activity.

2.2 Antioxidants and Phytochemicals

Oxidative stress is a major contributor to skin aging, inflammation, pigmentation disorders, and environmental skin damage.

Reactive oxygen species generated by ultraviolet radiation, pollution, and metabolic processes can damage cellular lipids, proteins, and DNA. Antioxidants play a crucial role in neutralizing these free radicals and protecting skin cells from oxidative injury. Consequently, antioxidants have become essential components of modern cosmeceuticals.

Vitamins such as vitamin C and vitamin E are widely used for their antioxidant, photoprotective, and collagen-stimulating properties. Vitamin C also contributes to skin brightening by inhibiting melanin synthesis, while vitamin E helps stabilize cellular membranes and enhance hydration. Polyphenols, flavonoids, and carotenoids derived from plant sources further strengthen antioxidant defense mechanisms. These compounds exhibit anti-inflammatory, photoprotective, and anti-aging effects, making them valuable ingredients in skincare formulations.

Botanical extracts remain highly popular due to their natural origin and multifunctional benefits. Many plant-derived compounds possess antimicrobial, soothing, and anti-inflammatory properties, which support skin barrier function and reduce irritation. Additionally, consumers often

perceive natural ingredients as safer and more environmentally friendly, further driving their incorporation into cosmeceutical products. Advances in extraction techniques, standardization, and quality control have improved the consistency and effectiveness of botanical actives.

2.3 Stem-Cell and Biotech-Derived Ingredients

Biotechnology has opened new avenues for the development of innovative cosmeceutical actives, particularly stem-cell-derived and bioengineered ingredients. Plant stem-cell extracts are increasingly used in skincare due to their potential regenerative properties. These extracts are believed to contain bioactive metabolites that promote skin cell vitality, enhance antioxidant defense, and protect against environmental stressors. Unlike human stem cells, plant stem-cell ingredients are generally considered safe and ethically acceptable for cosmetic use.

Exosome-based actives represent another emerging area of interest. Exosomes are small extracellular vesicles involved in cellular communication and tissue repair. In skincare applications, exosome-derived ingredients may support skin regeneration,

improve elasticity, and enhance hydration. Although still under investigation, these actives show promise for advanced anti-aging formulations.

Bioengineered proteins and fermentation-derived compounds are also gaining attention. Biotechnology allows controlled production of high-purity ingredients with consistent quality and minimal environmental impact. Such approaches reduce reliance on natural harvesting, promote sustainability, and enhance ingredient stability. Examples include recombinant collagen, elastin-like peptides, and enzyme-based actives that support skin renewal and repair. These developments highlight the growing integration of biotechnology into cosmetic science.

2.4 Microbiome-Friendly Ingredients

Recent research has highlighted the importance of the skin microbiome—the community of microorganisms residing on the skin surface—in maintaining skin health. A balanced microbiome supports barrier function, immune defense, and protection against pathogenic microbes. Disruption of this balance has been associated with conditions such as acne, eczema, sensitivity, and premature aging. Consequently, microbiome-friendly ingredients have

become a significant focus in modern cosmeceutical development.

Prebiotics are compounds that promote the growth of beneficial microorganisms on the skin, helping maintain microbial balance. Probiotics, which include beneficial live microorganisms or their lysates, are incorporated into some formulations to support skin immunity and barrier function. Postbiotics, consisting of metabolic byproducts of beneficial bacteria, also contribute to skin health by enhancing hydration, reducing inflammation, and strengthening the skin barrier.

Microbiome-focused skincare aims to preserve the natural ecological balance of the skin while addressing specific dermatological concerns. These formulations often avoid harsh surfactants, excessive preservatives, and ingredients that may disrupt microbial diversity. As understanding of the skin microbiome expands, personalized microbiome-based skincare approaches are likely to become more prevalent.

III. INNOVATIONS IN SKIN DELIVERY TECHNOLOGIES

The effectiveness of cosmeceutical products depends not only on the selection of active

ingredients but also on their ability to penetrate the skin barrier and reach target sites in adequate concentrations. The outermost layer of the skin, the stratum corneum, acts as a protective barrier that restricts the entry of many active compounds, particularly those with large molecular size or poor solubility. Therefore, advanced skin delivery technologies have become a central focus in modern cosmeceutical research. Innovations in nanotechnology, smart delivery systems, vesicular carriers, and physical enhancement techniques have significantly improved ingredient stability, penetration, and therapeutic efficacy. These developments allow more precise delivery of active ingredients while minimizing irritation, degradation, and systemic absorption.

3.1 Nanocarrier-Based Delivery Systems

Nanotechnology has revolutionized cosmeceutical formulation by enabling the development of nanoscale carriers that enhance the stability, solubility, and penetration of active ingredients. Nanocarriers typically range from 1 to 1000 nanometers in size and possess unique physicochemical properties that facilitate interaction with the skin surface and deeper layers. Their small size allows improved

permeation through the stratum corneum, while their encapsulation capability protects sensitive ingredients from oxidation, hydrolysis, and photodegradation.

Among the most widely used nanocarriers are liposomes and niosomes. Liposomes are phospholipid vesicles capable of encapsulating both hydrophilic and lipophilic substances. Their structural similarity to biological membranes allows efficient fusion with skin lipids, enhancing dermal penetration and improving ingredient bioavailability. Niosomes, which are formed from nonionic surfactants, offer similar advantages but often demonstrate greater stability and cost-effectiveness. These vesicular systems are commonly used for delivering vitamins, antioxidants, peptides, and moisturizing agents in skincare formulations.

Solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs) and nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs) represent another important category of nanocarriers. These lipid-based systems provide controlled release, improved stability, and enhanced occlusive properties

that help maintain skin hydration. SLNs consist of solid lipid matrices, while NLCs combine solid and liquid lipids to improve drug-loading capacity and reduce crystallization issues. These carriers are widely used in sunscreens, anti-aging creams, and moisturizing products due to their ability to enhance skin hydration and protect active ingredients from degradation.

Polymeric nanoparticles and nanoemulsions are also extensively explored in cosmeceutical delivery. Polymeric nanoparticles can be engineered to provide sustained release, targeted delivery, and improved stability of active compounds. Nanoemulsions, characterized by extremely small droplet size, enhance solubility of poorly water-soluble ingredients and improve skin absorption. Additionally, they provide a pleasant sensory feel, making them highly desirable in cosmetic formulations. Overall, nanocarriers play a crucial role in enhancing product performance by improving penetration, protecting actives from degradation, and enabling sustained release within the skin.

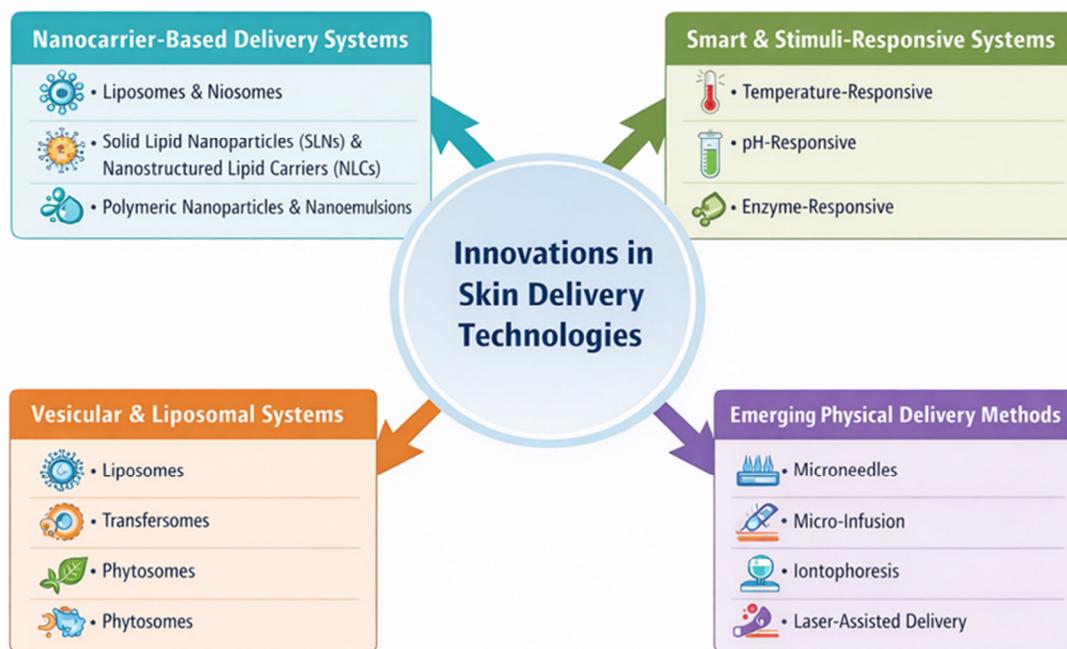


Figure.2. Innovations in Skin Delivery Technologies

3.2 Smart and Stimuli-Responsive Systems

Recent advances in formulation science have led to the development of smart or stimuli-responsive delivery systems capable of releasing active ingredients in response to specific environmental or physiological triggers. These systems provide controlled and targeted delivery, thereby improving therapeutic efficacy and minimizing potential side effects.

Temperature-responsive systems release active ingredients when exposed to changes in skin temperature, which can occur due to

inflammation, environmental factors, or metabolic activity. Similarly, pH-responsive carriers are designed to release actives in response to variations in skin pH, which may occur in diseased or damaged skin. Enzyme-responsive systems utilize naturally occurring enzymes in the skin to trigger release of encapsulated ingredients. These innovative approaches ensure that active compounds are delivered precisely where and when they are needed.

Smart delivery systems also enhance ingredient stability and reduce degradation during storage and application. By protecting sensitive actives until they reach

the target site, these systems improve overall formulation efficacy. Such technologies are increasingly being incorporated into advanced anti-aging, acne treatment, and skin repair products, representing a significant step toward precision skincare.

3.3 Vesicular and Liposomal Systems

Vesicular delivery systems, particularly liposomal formulations, have gained substantial importance in cosmeceutical applications due to their biocompatibility and effectiveness in enhancing skin penetration. Liposomes consist of phospholipid bilayers that can encapsulate active ingredients and facilitate their transport across the skin barrier. Their structural similarity to cellular membranes allows them to merge with skin lipids, improving ingredient absorption and retention within the epidermis and dermis.

These systems are especially beneficial for delivering sensitive ingredients such as vitamins, antioxidants, and botanical extracts. Encapsulation within liposomes protects these compounds from environmental degradation while ensuring sustained release over time. This results in improved hydration, enhanced skin repair, and reduction of fine lines and wrinkles.

Other vesicular carriers such as transfersomes, ethosomes, and phytosomes have also been developed to enhance transdermal delivery. Transfersomes are highly deformable vesicles that penetrate deeper skin layers, while ethosomes contain high alcohol content that enhances permeation. Phytosomes improve the bioavailability of plant-derived actives by forming complexes with phospholipids. These innovations demonstrate the versatility of vesicular delivery systems in modern cosmeceutical formulations.

3.4 Emerging Physical Delivery Methods

In addition to chemical and nanotechnological approaches, several physical methods have been developed to enhance transdermal delivery of cosmeceutical ingredients. These techniques temporarily disrupt the skin barrier or use external energy sources to facilitate deeper penetration of active compounds without causing significant tissue damage.

Microneedle technology involves the use of tiny, minimally invasive needles that create microchannels in the skin, allowing enhanced penetration of active ingredients. This method is particularly useful for delivering anti-aging agents, peptides, and hydrating compounds. Micro-infusion

systems also use controlled delivery mechanisms to introduce active ingredients directly into superficial skin layers.

Iontophoresis utilizes a mild electrical current to drive charged molecules across the skin barrier, enhancing penetration and bioavailability. Laser-assisted delivery employs controlled laser energy to create microthermal zones in the skin, facilitating deeper absorption of topical formulations. These methods provide improved efficacy while minimizing discomfort and recovery time compared with invasive dermatological procedures.

IV. CHALLENGES AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Despite significant advancements in cosmeceutical science, several challenges must be addressed to ensure the safe, effective, and sustainable development of these products. One of the primary concerns relates to the limited long-term safety data on nanomaterials used in advanced skincare formulations. Although nanocarriers improve ingredient stability, penetration, and efficacy, their small size may allow deeper skin penetration and possible systemic exposure. Long-term toxicological studies are therefore essential to evaluate their safety and potential biological effects.

Regulatory differences across countries also pose challenges for manufacturers and researchers. Cosmeceuticals are often classified differently worldwide, sometimes falling between cosmetic and pharmaceutical regulations. This lack of uniform regulatory standards complicates product approval, labeling requirements, and international marketing, highlighting the need for harmonized regulatory frameworks.

Another important consideration is the potential toxicity and systemic absorption of highly active ingredients, particularly when advanced delivery technologies enhance skin penetration. Ensuring that actives remain within safe concentration limits and do not cause irritation, sensitization, or systemic side effects is critical for consumer safety. Rigorous clinical testing and safety assessments are therefore essential.

Additionally, stability and scalability issues in manufacturing remain significant challenges. Many advanced formulations, especially those involving nanotechnology or biotechnology-derived ingredients, require specialized production techniques, strict quality control, and optimized storage conditions. Maintaining product stability, consistency, and cost-effectiveness at an industrial scale is crucial for successful

commercialization. Addressing these challenges through continued research, regulatory collaboration, and technological refinement will support the safe and sustainable growth of the cosmeceutical industry.

V. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The future of cosmeceuticals is expected to be shaped by advances in biotechnology, digital technologies, and personalized medicine approaches. One of the most promising trends is personalized skincare based on genetic profiling, skin microbiome analysis, and individual lifestyle factors. Such tailored formulations can address specific skin concerns more effectively than generalized products, leading to improved efficacy, reduced adverse reactions, and enhanced consumer satisfaction.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is also playing an increasingly important role in cosmeceutical research and development. AI-assisted formulation design can accelerate ingredient selection, optimize product stability, predict skin compatibility, and analyze consumer preferences. This technological integration helps reduce development time, improve precision in formulation, and support innovation in cosmetic science.

Sustainability is another key focus area for future cosmeceutical development. Biotechnology-derived ingredients produced through fermentation, cell culture, or recombinant techniques offer environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional extraction methods. These approaches reduce environmental impact, ensure consistent quality, and support ethical sourcing practices.

Furthermore, regenerative dermatology and advanced smart delivery systems are expected to transform skincare. Technologies such as bioengineered growth factors, stem-cell-inspired actives, and stimuli-responsive carriers may enhance skin repair, rejuvenation, and targeted treatment. Collectively, these innovations will likely drive the next generation of safe, effective, and sustainable cosmeceutical products.

VI. CONCLUSION

Innovations in cosmeceuticals have significantly progressed through the development of advanced active ingredients and novel skin delivery technologies. Peptides, antioxidants, botanical extracts, and biotechnology-derived compounds have enhanced the therapeutic potential of modern skincare products by improving skin

health, protection, and rejuvenation. Nanotechnology-based carriers such as liposomes, nanoemulsions, and lipid nanoparticles have improved ingredient stability, skin penetration, and controlled release, thereby increasing product efficacy while reducing irritation. Biotechnology has also facilitated the sustainable production of high-purity cosmetic actives with consistent quality, supporting both efficacy and environmental responsibility. Personalized skincare approaches based on genetic, lifestyle, and microbiome factors are transforming consumer expectations, while artificial intelligence and advanced formulation techniques are accelerating innovation in product development. Emerging regenerative dermatology concepts further show promise for enhanced skin repair and rejuvenation. Despite these advancements, safety assessment remains a critical priority, particularly regarding long-term evaluation of nanomaterials and highly active compounds. Regulatory harmonization across countries is necessary to ensure product quality, safety, and transparency, while manufacturing scalability and formulation stability continue to require research attention. Interdisciplinary collaboration among dermatologists, pharmacists, and cosmetic

scientists will be essential for continued progress. Overall, ongoing scientific research and technological innovation will contribute to the development of safer, more effective, sustainable, and innovative cosmeceutical solutions for future skincare needs.

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