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Marketing approaches between Millennials and Gen-Zs in the fashion and beauty industries

Abstract

This Honors College Undergraduate Senior Thesis analyzes the marketing practices with respect to Gen-Zs and Millennials' behavior in regard to the beauty and fashion industries. In order to do so, a survey among Gen-Z and Millennial adults from diverse backgrounds was conducted to gather important data. The survey consists of twenty-three questions, some focusing on the participant demographics and cultural backgrounds and the rest focusing on behaviors they have had with various forms of paid advertising through social- media practices. Additionally, this thesis includes insights regarding some of the literature review topics and includes results that enforce some of the analysis.

Some of the remarkable results from the research conducted resulted in average Gen-Z and Millennial respondents feeling neutral about the influence of fashion and beauty paid advertisements. Overall, Gen-Z respondents showed to have more influence and pressure in regard to how they look from the exposure to trendy fashion or beauty brands' advertisements.

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MARKETING APPROACHES BETWEEN MILLENNIALS AND GEN-ZS IN THE FASHION AND BEAUTY INDUSTRIES

By

Mariana Gutierrez Chora

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Dedication

This senior thesis is dedicated to

The professors who have made a positive impact on my time at Eastern Michigan University. Special thanks to the College of Business faculty, especially to Dr. Kenneth Lord for overseeing and guiding me through the process of writing this thesis, and to Dr. Megan Moore for being an amazing support through the Honors College.

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And, of course, to my family. To my parents, Claudia and Alfredo, who have believed in me since the beginning, for supporting me through the difficult times, for giving me unconditional love, and for taking the risk of moving to a new country with nothing but hopes for a better life for all of us. Lastly, my sister, Geraldine, for giving me the energy and joy I need in my everyday

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Esta tesis está dedicada a

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Abstract

This Honors College Undergraduate Senior Thesis analyzes the marketing practices with respect to Gen-Zs and Millennials' behavior in regard to the beauty and fashion industries. In order to do so, a survey among Gen-Z and Millennial adults from diverse backgrounds was conducted to gather important data. The survey consists of twenty-three questions, some focusing on the participant demographics and cultural backgrounds and the rest focusing on behaviors they have had with various forms of paid advertising through social- media practices. Additionally, this thesis includes insights regarding some of the literature review topics and includes results that enforce some of the analysis.

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Introduction

This thesis highlights the beginning stages of marketing approaches between Millennials and Gen-Zs in the fashion and beauty industry. An examination of shifting marketing tactics over the years reveals a difference in how much companies and brands have cared to get the right audience while creating a positive impact on their lives. These changes made by the brands have been done more during recent years, especially when the brand targets segments from the Millennial and Gen-Z generations. Even though these two generational segments are somewhat similar since the members are close in age, there are still substantive differences.

As the digital marketing industry has grown, the beauty and fashion industries have experienced drastic pressure to meet their marketing objectives while maintaining not only strong brand awareness but also brand loyalty. Some of the current challenges that these companies are facing are navigating the industry and their target markets. There are many factors that are considered when a brand or company approaches the market as well as when it develops marketing campaigns. Some of these factors that marketing experts have to focus on are trends, the current market, and social environments for them to develop these strategies that will attract their intended market segments. If in any instance a brand fails to meet any of these requirements, there can be significant repercussions and consequences to its marketing team and the brand itself. However, these consequences and repercussions can be different when we look at the approaches that each generation such as Gen-Zs or Millennials make.

After developing this project, the hope is to gain a better understanding of the marketing tactics some companies have approached with some external factors that potentially affect the beauty and fashion industry, especially for those brands targeting younger generations.

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Background

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to give a better understanding of a likely consumer audience and professionals who are involved in the marketing practices of the fashion and beauty industry. Different perspectives are what make other people learn from what is valuable to others and if this project is successful, something similar will emerge from its data and conclusions. Additionally, professional recommendations consistent with the findings of this study will be offered. These recommendations are intended to offer fresh management perspectives in certain situations confronted in marketing to Millennial and Gen-Z consumers.

Definition of Keywords

Before the deep analysis which will take place throughout the project, it is necessary to have a brief overview of some of the constant keywords that will be utilized throughout the project. Those key terms are Gen-Zs, Millennials, differences and similarities between Gen-Zs and Millennials, marketing strategy, advertising, and digital marketing.

The technical definition of Gen-Zs is individuals born from 1997 to 2012. These individuals are known as the "chaotic generation", they are typically very observant, digital natives, diversified, wellness advocates, and progressive individuals (Payne, 2022). As of July 1st, 2021, Gen-Zs accounted for more than 20.67% of the population in the United States of America (Duffin, 2022). Like many other generations, there are many advantages and disadvantages of Gen-Zs and this is something that has been reflected not only when comparing other generations but also in observing how marketing teams approach this demographic segment. Gen-Zs as a generalization seems to be more aware than their predecessors of what the consequences are for certain actions or behaviors and with this involved actions taken by companies and organizations. Gen-Zs are known for investigating and getting to the true meaning and intentions of actions taken. Additionally, one of the most important indicators of Gen-Zs is the facility and ability to be technologically gifted; unlike other generations, Gen-Zs have been able to demonstrate the "work smarter not harder" techniques across their professional, technical, and personal environments. Other core representations of Gen-Zs, related to such issues as social media usage, cancel culture, and sense of humor, will be considered in subsequent sections.

Close in age but not quite the same are Millennials. This generation consists of individuals born between the years 1981 and 1996. They are known as the "me generation" and Millennials are typically upbeat and receptive, tech-savvy, and known for mixing business with pleasure. As of July 1st, 2021, Millennials constituted more than 21.75% of the population in the United States of America (Duffin, 2022). One of the factors that represent Millennials in comparison to older generations is that Millennials are known as the most educated generation, not only in the United States but also in the Western Hemisphere. Additionally, Millennials are well known for their sense of community and, unlike other generations, they focus more on large societal rather than individual needs (Payne, 2022). Accordingly, Millennials have shaped how civics are oriented and they seek to exert power through their progressive stance with political engagement, human rights, environmental consciousness, and more. These factors and others explained throughout this thesis are important considerations that marketing teams consider when they build marketing campaigns targeting Millennials.

Just like there are similarities in age between Gen-Zs and Millennials, there are also many differences and all of these factors should be taken into consideration from a marketer's perspective. One of the most important similar factors is that both generations hold purchase power and will likely enjoy a disposable-income advantage, especially compared to older generations. This is due to the fact that these younger generations are much more likely to seek higher education, including undergraduate degrees and even graduate degrees. At the same time, since they are part of the younger generations, they are less likely to seek families quite yet. Additionally, the social norms have changed dramatically from generation to generation. For example, having a family does not necessarily seem like a responsibility and obligation for Gen Zs and Millennials, and those who choose not to are likely to have enhanced disposable income since they are saving the expenses from becoming parents. These are all aspects that marketers take into consideration when targeting these younger generations as they are more willing to spend more money on products or services that companies might offer to them.

One factor that varies between these two generations is that Gen-Zs typically like independent work or a "do it myself" attitude. In contrast, Millennials prefer to work in groups and circles of individuals. Often marketers use this information when starting to think of new innovative products for the market. These can be very beneficial when it comes to features of the products they offer when truly knowing their target audience. Another key difference that might affect a lot of the marketing channels relates to how these generations prefer to shop even though both generations have experienced technological advancements since an early age, Gen-Zs are twice as likely to shop on mobile devices than Millennials (Vuleta & Gajić, n.d.). Thus, marketers might not want to offer some of their products and services fully through an app or a mobile device if some of their audiences would rather purchase through a brick-and-mortar location.

The broad definition of a marketing strategy can be seen as an organization's integrated pattern of decisions that specify its crucial choices concerning products, markets, marketing

activities and marketing resources in the creation, communication and/or delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchanges with the organization and thereby enables the organization to achieve specific objectives (Varadarajan, 2009, 119). In more simple terms, a marketing strategy is the thought process and actions put into the development of a product or service when they enter the market. Marketers take into consideration: communication, advertising, creative pieces, media strategy, pricing, and distribution, among other marketing approaches.

The technical definition of advertising is "paid messages from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade an audience" (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019, 3). However, for an easy understanding, the word "persuasion" needs to be associated with the word "advertising" at all times. When thinking about those behavioral and physiological factors of why we behave the way that we do. As consumers, is it related to the promotions offered? Is it due to the commercials with the new influencers who are promoting a brand? Or is it the free perfume samples that you get from Sephora? All these factors are part of the promotional mix and, for the purposes of this study, are considered "advertising."

The easiest way to describe digital marketing is the promotion of a business, product, service, or brand online (McGruer, 2019, xiii). This entails any marketing which has to do with the internet and digital channels, such as apps, mobile phones, display advertisements, social media and more. Digital marketing can still be new for some since it is a field that is constantly growing and there is no exact mathematical formula to succeed. It changes as consumers, technology, and marketers change; the digital marketing strategies in 2010 when Facebook was becoming more popular were not the same as those in 2022. A business cannot be successful without a strong digital marketing campaign and strategy. Nowadays people rely on social

media, smartphones, and websites where advertisements have followed us through every new innovation.

Summary of the Survey

Before moving forward with the literature review, it is important to give an overview of the research to gather primary data. A short survey was created to see the behaviors and interactions between Gen-Z and Millennial survey takers to compare their thoughts about some of the marketing strategies and business actions that were taken by companies in the fashion and beauty industry. Before creating the survey, the researchers had to complete human subject training through the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects (IRB) Center. The research study got exempted after being reviewed by the University Human Subjects Review Committee, where the reference number provided was IRB#UHSRC-FY22-23-56. The survey contained a variety of multiple-choice questions starting off with some demographic information such as birth year, gender, race/ethnicity, and level of education. All these questions were crafted to be as inclusive as possible and the option of "Prefer not to answer" has also been added in case the survey takers were not comfortable with the questions. However, this information was important for the empirical research section; it allowed hypothesis testing and additional findings in regard to some of the marketing questions involving the fashion and beauty industries.

The sharing method of this survey is known as snowball sampling, where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. This survey started off with a close group of friends from the author and expanded the social circle after being shared for the first time. Some of these initial people were asked to share the survey link with the rest of their friends and close cohort. Additionally, there was a LinkedIn publication to encourage Gen-Zs and Millennials to participate in the survey while supporting student research as well as business and marketing research, which can lead to valuable information. The survey started accepting responses on October 14, 2022, and the last response was accepted on November 7, 2022, which means the survey kept getting responses for a total amount of 25 days. During the last couple of days, the survey responses were monitored closely due to the importance of getting an equal amount of responses from Gen-Zs and Millennials, this monitoring allowed the prevention of the average of the responses which would have caused less accuracy on the data collected. The results ended up being 150 responses in total, 75 responses from the Gen-Z group and 75 responses from the Millennial group. In total, the survey consisted of three different parts: demographics, trend consumption through social media, and additional consumer questions.

The way the survey was organized included the first section asking all respondents demographic questions and their birth year. The second and third sections were split between Millennials (born from 1981 to 1996) and Gen-Zs (born from 1997-2004), these two generational cohorts were asked the same questions and had the same multiple-choice options. This method allowed the researcher to have more control and organization over the data collected. After retrieving the data, time was allocated for reviewing it and analyzing data with different market research software tools such as SPSS and Microsoft Excel, which allowed for further filtering data and statistical analysis. The results from this research will be further explained in the empirical research section after the literature review.

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review intends to discover the existing academic works and business articles encompassing the main topics of this thesis. This will allow the research section to focus on specific subtopics in relation to marketing strategies applied to Gen-Zs and Millennials in the beauty and fashion industries. In order to do so, this literature review will be separated into several subheadings, each related to one of the aspects of the main topic.

The different aspects of the topic with which this literature review will engage are plus-size fashion companies and their marketing strategies, marketing practices in relation to diversity within the fashion and beauty industry, the impact of aesthetics and trends and the involvement with social media, and sustainability in the beauty and fashion industry.

Plus-Size Fashion Companies and their Marketing Strategies

As an adult, it is unlikely to have lived one's entire life without having some type of exposure to advertising and marketing through daily activities. In this society, consumers are exposed to advertisements every single day. Having this exposure has led not only individuals, but our society as a whole, to have standards about certain products or subcategories of goods.

Since consumers are so exposed to these advertisements, they are often biased toward what these advertisements make them believe. The fashion and beauty industries are not an exception. Since historical times, the societal construct has influenced mostly women in how to dress, act, behave, and look. Most people are familiar with the tall, skinny, tan, big lips, nice bottoms, and breasts stereotype that represents a beauty standard. We are conditioned to draw social comparisons, which is a basic human tendency, and marketers have taken advantage of that by idealizing images of happy, attractive people who just happen to use their products (Solomon, 2019, 182). The real question is whether or not marketers are right to utilize these not-very-realistic beauty standards to advertise their products.

The beauty and fashion industry has led women to want to change something about their appearance, even from an early age: "The American ideal of beauty has become so pervasive that 50% of three- to six-year-old girls worry about their weight" (Roeder, 2015). This problem ties in with the consumer-socialization concept, where children are not only conditioned and trained by their authority figures, but now they also have marketing and advertising exposure which will shape their minds toward how they are expected to look. This fact itself tells us how much advertisements and marketing efforts can affect women about their physical appearance and these girls seek to look like those unrealistic model body types and images.

There has recently been more exposure to "body positivity" ideas, and brands have begun adapting toward women of all sizes, shapes, and skin colors. However, most women still struggle with talking about their body image, as it can be uncomfortable, create anxiety, and lead to poor self-esteem; which refers to the positivity of a person's self-concept" (Solomon, 2019, 182). Fashion brands' advertisements that specifically target plus-size women can be difficult for some, as they can remind them of insecurities that stem from not meeting traditional beauty standards. A brand should strive to avoid harming the integrity and self-esteem of its consumers at all costs because when looking at this problem from a quantitative perspective, there are brands that favor profit over integrity (Oakes, 2019). Those actions can lead a brand or company to get backlash and negative comments from consumers. Therefore it is important to understand the drivers of consumers' self-image.

Not being inclusive to all types of bodies and customers can lead to a brand receiving negative opinions from consumers, as some might not have the ability to purchase fittable

clothing items from that store, making them take their purchase options to only plus-size retailers. A great example of this has been Victoria's Secret and how there has been a lack of plus-size options, as well as diversity and inclusivity. For example, research by various Oxford University professionals studied the temporal trends of Victoria's Secret models from 1995 to 2018, evaluating one of the established parameters of female body attractiveness which consisted of waist-to-hip ratio (WHR). Their research detected potentially changing weight ideal of beauty that is moving farther away from the characteristics of the average American woman; however, a constant idealized WHR remains intact. They concluded that "As the demand for body contouring and aesthetic surgery increases, body measurements may be a useful tool for aesthetic planning" (Maymone et al., 2019, NP76). Even though things are progressively changing when making women feel comfortable with their own bodies, there is still a sense that idealized body measurements correlate with Victoria's Secret models. These models are essentially used for the brand's marketing media, which ends up being consumed by those who most likely do not have the same body measurement as Victoria's Secret models. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this section of the literature review, marketing campaigns and branding have changed tremendously since a decade ago, as up to October of 2022 Victoria's Secret website contains all kinds of models, including some who seem not to fit the previously mentioned beauty standard. Additionally, their shopping website includes sizes from XS to XXL. This shift of their brand shows that they are willing to shape their business model and marketing strategies to what new generations of consumers are starting to value more.

Most of these brand changes are due to the overall idea of inclusiveness and body positivity that has been made by younger generations such as Gen-Zs and Millennials. These generations have grown up with easy access to social media, where the word can spread more easily. The body-positivity movement started with social media influencers wanting to share confidence and love for one's self and to start avoiding those beauty stereotypes that have been placed for decades. Additionally, "In the digital age, social media has undoubtedly carried the rhetoric of these beauty ideals by allowing for more images and messages to be shared to a larger audience than capable in previous decades" (Chiat, 2020). Because these younger generations have been exposed to social media the longest, they are more likely to get impacted by being more inclusive with different body types, their representation, and their accessibility to some fashion retailers.

Diversity Representation in the Fashion and Beauty Industries

It is important to recognize that many fashion and beauty companies have become more vocal about their shift to greater inclusivity and diversity within the past decade. However, the shift can also come off as pure brand management and even advertising rather than actually wanting to change the vision of their brand. In a way, the initial involvement of more diverse people from a brand that might have been known for not being diverse throughout its business history can be perceived as tokenism or novelty. Instead of wanting to take a step forward for the "new normal", they might treat it more as having a diversity checklist for their brand and throw in a person of color, an older person, and a person in a wheelchair to make things even. Diversity and inclusion do not necessarily work like that: "We're only going to have a diverse fashion industry when we stop talking about it, when we just have a diversity and we don't need to keep drawing attention to this issue" (Entwistle et al., 2019, 310). In order to create more diversity across fashion and beauty companies, there needs to be less emphasis on getting those couple people of color (POC) just because of societal expectations and more on their worth, skills, and personalities.

Social media has had a huge impact on diversity across fashion and beauty. Many consumers see their favorite bloggers who might be of the same race or ethnicity and feel like they are able to connect, be influenced, and see themselves reflected by the content creator. Fashion and beauty brands are equally attracted to social media platforms since social media is coming from the bottom up whereas the fashion industry has been traditionally from the top down (Entwistle et al., 2019, 315). Social media is crucial for beauty and fashion companies to hear immediate feedback from their customers. Unlike magazine articles and fashion shows, social media is instant and anyone can express their options on diversity and inclusion about certain campaigns or new products. Consequently, it is in the power and best interest of the brand to either just listen and monitor comments or to actually consider their customer's feedback while taking actionable steps.

For many beauty companies, it might be difficult to shift their focus to a more diverse market since they have long been catering mostly to non-POC. However, these new perspectives may arise most seamlessly and effectively when an organization has a diverse board of leaders, whose understanding, life experiences, and values can help shape new products that are meant to serve POC. It is a fact that people are going to be attracted to others who look like them; therefore, it is hard to cater to and target a diverse audience when there might not be a diverse team. The change starts internally, "with increasing diversity both in front and behind the camera. We need diversity on the boards of companies to reflect the wider diversity within the general population. It's only when we see companies diversify across the board that we'll see real and sustainable diversity in our media representations" (Entwistle et al., 2019, 322). These changes can be made by recognizing the problems that the beauty and fashion industries have

faced in the past, trying to drive away from those, and seeking a more progressive way of success.

Some companies recognized this lack of inclusiveness and diversity and have leveraged that awareness to make actionable changes. *Vogue* magazine has been an example of progressiveness in diversity. *Vogue* has been a highly influential fashion and lifestyle magazine, in the United States of America and around the globe. *Vogue* makes fashion statements and they influence major fashion trends every time there is a new issue released. They have a major impact on the fashion industry, brands, promotion, and advertising for some luxury fashion retailers. Additionally, they have significant participation in Fashion Week, where major promotional content is considered and planned.

Even though *Vogue* started being more inclusive and diverse in the early 2000s, it seemed like there might have been more work to do. After some concern had been raised about the racial differences in *Vogue* issues of other countries such as China and Italy, a journal article mentioned the following: "In the USA, The Black Issue/Vogue Black resonated with concerns about race and representation. It coincided with a surge of interest in the politics of race after the election of Barack Obama. Praise for Vogue Black was sometimes accompanied by snarky remarks at American Vogue. While American Vogue had images of women of colour in every 2012 issue (including cover images of Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez and Serena Williams), our analysis shows that racial diversity is never explicitly addressed" (Kuipers et al., 2014, 2164). Even though being diverse is not a political concern, racial justice and diversity movements and awareness have changed exponentially from the early 2000s to the current 2022. Now, through the online *Vogue* magazine and articles, we can see an increase in more inclusive and diverse content. From a "Beauty weak spot: Inclusive luxury colour cosmetics" article to "We must include trans men

and non-binary people when we talk about periods—here's why", the magazine now covers such issues not only in their fashion sections but in their wellness and business sections as well. *Vogue* is a brand that is actively trying to educate its readers and customers about diversity, equity, and inclusion, and instead of treating models of other ethnicities or backgrounds as "tokens", they are able to make a homogenous diverse magazine.

Aesthetics, Trends, and Microtrends in the Fashion and Beauty Industry

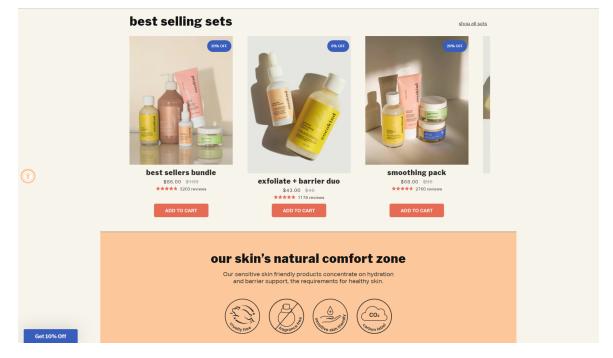
With the spark of social media, it is easier for consumers and the public to be exposed to aesthetics, which are essentially lifestyle practices, the way of doing things or simply the combination of items that are arranged in a visually pleasing manner. More broadly, however, "the term 'aesthetic' has come to be used to designate, among other things, a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value" (Shelley, 2009, 1). Today social media users can make an aesthetic out of anything; we see aesthetics in messaging around "a day in the life of", travel, nightlife, school, cities, seasons, and of particular relevance, fashion, and beauty. Millennial and Gen-Z social media users are at a point in life where they may be getting joy from anything they do as long as it provides a rush and adrenaline of the aesthetics, potentially as long as it is aesthetically pleasing to their eyes. Despite this, aesthetics not only are an effective way to impact, influence, and educate individuals but they have also been shown to be effective in positively building a beauty brand and products: "the use of aesthetics on social networks allows the brand identity to be built in two ways: showing virtually what constitutes its physical identity and symbolizing the intangible elements that constitute its identity. Both of these ways have potential positive long-term effects on customer relations: improving and deepening the customer experience" (Aehanchiague, 2021, 5). In a way, aesthetics are a form of expression that beauty brands can leverage and connect with their customers in a more meaningful way.

Apart from the impacts of aesthetics, with all the exposure and impact of social media in the past decades, there seems to be an impact on people's attention spans: "National Centre for Biotechnology Information claimed that the average human attention span has dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2013" (Valentine, n.d.). Attention spans have likely changed from 2013 to 2022 and they will potentially continue to change throughout the years. The main point here is that people seem to be more willing to pay attention to something that draws their eyes and the answer here is aesthetics.

One of the ways that aesthetics influence the beauty industry and positively impacts consumers has been by educating individuals about skincare products. Furthermore, many cosmetology and dermatology professionals seem to be leveraging their personal brand while educating their viewers with the right products for their skincare. The skincare aesthetic has made the action of self-care more of an aesthetic rather than a simple hygiene procedure, and more and better skincare brands have risen from these social media trends. For example, the company Cocokind was founded in 2015 by Priscilla Tsai, who had personally struggled with her own skincare routine before. The way Cocokind is branded shows a very calming, minimalistic, and nurturing feel for users who visit their site (www.cocokind.com). Their website is built from neutral colors, carousel displays, product short clips, and very aesthetically pleasing product image compounds (see Figure 1).

Additionally, the way that Cocokind educates its customers about skincare is by offering a free skin quiz that asks customers about their skin type, their ideal skin texture, and other personal questions in regard to their skin and skincare habits. After submission, Cocokind offers a personalized skincare routine with its products while also offering a 10% coupon to first-time customers. Other than having promotional content to incentivize customers to make a purchase, they are also using their aesthetically pleasing products to educate their customers on a well-planned skincare routine. Providing this additional value allows customers to have greater trust in their brand due to selling products not just because of the aesthetic but also tailoring them specifically to a customer's personal needs and wants.





Cocokind Website Screen Capture (Retrieved on November 2022)

The impact on trends affects many people's consuming behavior. For instance, once a new fashion trend becomes viral, people will tend to follow the virality for them to reach a trendy status. With trends constantly coming in and out of style, it becomes hard to afford all the latest trendy statement pieces. This problem leads us to micro trends, which in other words are "cheap, stylish fashion items that are designed to last until the end of the current season" (Guler, 2022). Within the past couple of years, fashion pieces such as slip-on sandals, cloud puffy

jackets, parachute pants, crocs, bucket hats, and swirly designs have come in and out of the trendy radar. As of 2022, these trends will typically spark through social media, followed by virality, which ends up with fast fashion manufacturers facing mounting pressure to keep production aligned with emerging fads.

A discussion of the marketing approaches of one of the biggest fast fashion company retailers in the world, Zara, concludes the review of trends. Zara is well known for its "high-end location, minimal advertising budget, and sophisticated supply chain" (Li, 2021, 305). Zara has been in the industry since 1975 and it has expanded globally since first established. In order to understand the marketing approaches, we first have to understand that Millennials and Gen-Z segments have a major influence within the fashion industry. One of the major business strategies of Zara is that their designs gather information about the latest fashion trends from being involved in major fashion cities such as Paris, Milan, and New York City. Then Zara's designers replicate similar pieces and alter them to fit a younger audience, and they typically produce small quantities in order to keep production costs low and to make themselves look like a rare and unique brand. Additionally, Zara typically has a physical store in high-traffic, privileged locations. Zara makes its stores unique by "creating impressive and intriguing store windows and well-designed lighting and background" (Li, 2021, 307). One of the major marketing strategies that Zara does through their online site is making Gen-Z and Millennials feel like they are purchasing higher-end luxury products when in reality it is simply another fast fashion retailer. Their website and social media have a layout that is not only pleasing to see but gives the feel of the best quality of products while looking classy and professional, which leads to a positive appeal to their clothing items. Overall, Zara has had a strong brand presence and impressive marketing strategies throughout the years. Apart from the fashion trends and designs, Zara has been able to produce and sell, having a retailer that launches more than 1000 new styles each month (Li, 2021, 307); this might not be the best outcome for the environment and landfills. This current problem will take us to the last part of this literature review, sustainable fashion.

Sustainability in the Fashion and Beauty Industry

The negative impact some of the fashion and beauty companies have on the environment also warrants consideration. Overconsumption has increasingly become an issue all consumers should be aware of, especially when realizing the damage that it causes to the environment. Often marketing and promotional strategies incentivize consumers to overconsume products that they might not need. It might even seem like wants are taking over our substantial needs as humans. When it comes to making purchases, there are uncontrolled emotions, impulses, habits, compulsions, and decision biases that manage the customer journey every day (Del Prete, 2022, 19). However, the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to be a positive impact on sustainability for some consumers to reconsider their consumption habits. "Statistics demonstrate that, in the purchasing process, these 'mindful customers' now search for a sustainable, self-sufficient way of living in harmony with nature" (Del Prete, 2022, 19). This shows that some consumers are willing to take a step back and be more analytical before any of their purchases. This allows consumers to be more sustainably friendly with their products.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many Gen-Zs and Millennials experienced a mind shift in terms of their fashion and beauty products, sustainable sourcing, production process, ethics, social responsibility, and whether or not they are sustainable for the environment. Many fashion and beauty brands have taken this into consideration, allowing them to create new campaigns and products that meet these sustainability goals to meet their consumers' wants. For instance, Levi's has been able to adapt to these new consumer trends in terms of sustainability; for example, "Levis' current sustainability goals are to accomplish zero discharge of hazardous chemicals by 2020 and to produce more than 80% of its product volume in Worker Wellbeing factories by 2025" (Castello & Reddy, 2020, 1). Additionally, Levi's website focuses on the current climate-change crisis, allowing the brand to engage in more eco-friendly practices such as using ethically sourced cotton, recyclable denim, and innovations to reduce water usage. Lastly, Levi's has recently introduced a program that enables consumers to purchase Levi's jeans second-hand at a reduced price. Levi's statement mentions "If everybody bought one used item this year, instead of buying new, it would save 449 million pounds of waste" ("Levi's Second Hand", n.d.). Using second-hand clothing has become more popular and accepted in recent years and mindful consumers tend to use this resource and support non-profits rather than purchasing all fashion items new.

Even though there has been more visibility and transparency around the repercussions of non-sustainable and unethical practices when producing fashion and beauty items, there are many consumers who still prefer to purchase from companies that have done nothing about their sustainability practices. Furthermore, there are fashion companies that claim to be eco-friendly, when in reality they are often greenwashing, which refers to "a harmful and deceitful way of advertising that a company is more sustainable than it actually is" (Robinson, 2022). Many consumers fall for some of these false advertisements and packaging. Two of the companies that have claimed to be sustainable when in reality they are not are fast-fashion retailers Zara and H&M.

As mentioned before, Zara produces small amounts of designs, and these pieces are not meant for extensive use due to the low quality of production. "In addition to a small percentage of them that can be recycled, an overwhelming proportion of the garments is inclined to end up in the landfill and be incinerated, which can emit massive carbon dioxide into the air and thus result in global warming" (Li, 2021, 308). However, Zara has been greenwashing their customers through their Join Life Collection which is supposedly more environmentally friendly and uses better materials, even though most of their garments are not part of this collection. For some consumers, this collection might look like a token in order for Zara to avoid backlash for its unsustainable practices.

Like Zara, H&M has a similar situation where they launched a new clothing line titled "Conscious" in 2019. H&M currently claims "In 2020, we reached our goal of sourcing all our cotton from more sustainable sources" (H&M Group, n.d.). However, through their sustainability and conscious website landing pages, there are no legal definitions of sustainability or eco-friendly, which means that H&M's executive team could be making their own definitions of these terms, which can lead to misleading information and statements. These marketing practices have been criticized not only by consumers but also by higher authority groups "H&M was then criticized by the Norwegian Customer Authority for 'misleading' marketing of their Conscious Collection because the information given regarding sustainability was not sufficient, especially given that the Conscious Collection is advertised as a collection with environmental benefits" (Robinson, 2022). Without a doubt, some of these brands have heard concerns from customers; however, many of them still need radical changes in the production and ethical practices of their fashion products.

Though some fashion brands are still struggling to keep up with these new sustainable practices, many are providing more transparency in terms of their conscious sourcing, as well as other sustainable practices. There are high hopes from younger generations such as Gen-Zs and

Millennials to have brands that care about the environment and are taking actionable steps for a better future in the fashion and beauty industry.

The following section reports empirical research which allows us to understand more about behavioral similarities and differences between Gen-Zs and Millennials regarding the topics of the literature review, along with information and data that might yield new findings and insights surrounding sponsored or advertised content in social media.

Empirical Research

Hypothesis

A principal focus of this research is the examination of major differences between Gen-Zs and Millennials related to their decision processes for and consumption of fashion and beauty products. While there is a generalized idea that these two generational cohorts are somewhat similar given their proximity in age, a research question motivating the survey was whether there were relevant differences between the two generations in terms of sponsored content in social media. The hypothesis is that since Gen-Zs typically spend more time on social media than Millennials, they are more likely to be influenced by paid advertisements or sponsored content communicated through social media.

Though not specifically hypothesized, the survey also seeks information on potential generational differences in other of the topics addressed in the literature review (e.g., diversity, sustainability).

Data Collection

As explained in the summary of the experiment, in total there were 150 respondents split evenly between Millennials and Gen-Zs. The survey consisted of 23 questions. To keep organization through this empirical research section, the data will be analyzed in four sections: demographics, social media, sustainability, and diversity.

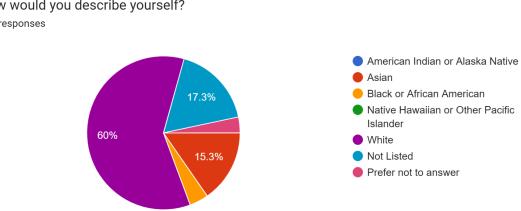
Demographics

The demographic questions were focused on understanding some of the backgrounds these respondents have, questions regarding their birth date, ethnicity, race, gender, and educational status were asked. When it comes to the birth year, besides having 24% of the respondents born in 2000 or 1999, there was substantial variation across all of the birth years.

In response to the question "To which gender identity do you most identify?" question (options included male, female, transgender female, transgender male, gender variant/non-conforming, non-binary, and prefer not to answer), 68% of the respondents identified as females and 32% as males (no responses in the other categories). There were no significant differences in gender representation across the two generational cohorts (X2 = 3.84, p > .10).

When it came to the ethnicity and race questions, there was no significant difference between Millennials and Gen-Zs in race/ethnicity (X2 = 5.62, p > .10). However, 57.3% of Millennials self-identified as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, with a lower percentage (24.0) among Gen-Zs (X2 = 17.27, p < .001). To have a visual perspective of these respondents, the next graph shows the percentages of the respondents. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2



How would you describe yourself? 150 responses

Gen-Zs and Millennials Race/Ethnicity Responses Pie Chart

Lastly, for the last demographic question in regards to their education level, the results show that Millennial respondents had a higher mean educational level than Gen-Z respondents (5.35 and 3.96, respectively, where 4 = associate degree and 5 = bachelor's degree; t = 7.15, p < .001)). This might be due to some Gen-Z students still currently attending a university. Overall,

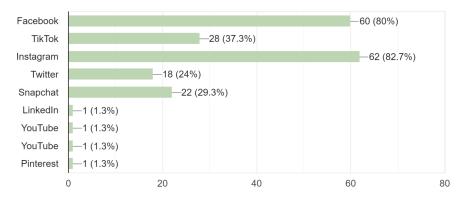
50% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, while 37.4% of the respondents have a degree higher than a bachelor's degree.

Social Media

Regarding the social media aspect of the survey, there were some important differences between the social media platform usage between Millennials and Gen-Zs. The first bar chart graph represents the Millennial respondents, while the second bar chart represents the Gen-Z respondents. (See Figure 3 and Figure 4)

Figure 3

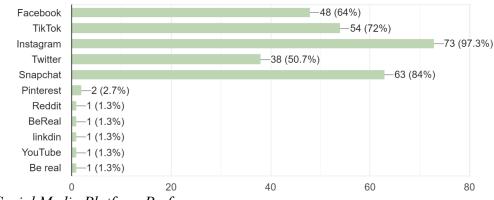
What social media platforms do you use for personal purposes? (Select all that apply) 75 responses



Millennials' Social Media Platforms Preferences

Figure 4

What social media platforms do you use for personal purposes? (Select all that apply) 75 responses



Gen-Zs' Social Media Platform Preferences

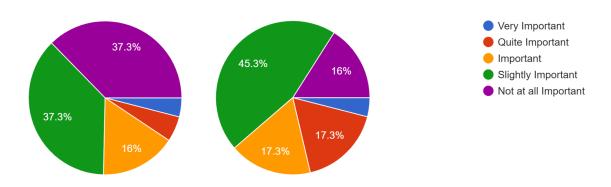
Platform usage differed significantly between the two generational cohorts, with Facebook significantly higher for Millennials than for Gen-Zs (80.0% and 64.0%, respectively; X2 = 4.76, p < .05), while the opposite pattern prevailed for Tiktok (37.3 % of Millennials, 72.0% of Gen-Zs; X2 = 18.18, p < .001), Instagram (82.7% versus 97.3%; X2 = 8.96, p < .005), Twitter (24.0% versus 50.7%, X2 = 11.40, p < .001), and Snapchat (29.3% versus 84.0%; X2 =45.64, p < .001). As expected, some of the social media platform results show that most of the Millennials have adapted and used some of the social media platforms that have been established for longer time such as Facebook and Instagram. Gen-Zs, on the other hand, show that they adapt and use social media platforms that have been established more recently; some of these platforms are TikTok, Snapchat, and even the newest platform, BeReal.

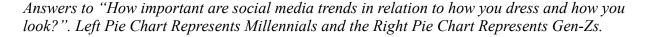
When it comes to the amount of time spent on social media per day by all of these respondents, this was a question that resulted in Gen-Z respondents spending more time daily on social media than Millennials (means of 4.11 and 3.56, respectively; t = 2.75, p < .01). The results include 73.4% of Millennials using social media, from 30 minutes to 3 hours daily, whereas Gen-Z respondents include 70.7% of social media usage between 2 hours to more than 4 hours. A possible explanation might be that Gen-Z respondents have fewer responsibilities on average, possibly still in school or as recent graduates, and therefore, more time to spend on social media.

Moving beyond time spent on social media, other questions gauged the impact of that activity on respondents' behavior as consumers. When asked "How often do you follow social media trends?", Gen-Z respondents reported greater frequency than Millennials (2.97 and 2.55, respectively, on a five-point scale where 1 = never and 5 = always; t = 2.61, p < .05). For this instance, 50.7% of the Millennials respondents answered they "Never or Rarely" follow social

media trends, whereas only 30.7% of Gen-Z respondents answered the same options. When asked about their perception of the importance of social-media trends, 37.3% of the Millennials saw them as "Not at all Important" in relation to how they dress and how they look, whereas another 37.3% responded "Slightly Important." However, when looking at the Gen-Z responses, there is a shift where 38.6% of the respondents answered that social media trends were "Important, Quite Important, and Very Important" in how they dressed and looked. Overall the perceived importance of social-media trends was somewhat higher for Gen-Zs than for Millennials respondents (means of 1.49 and 1.01, respectively, with 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important; t = 2.71, p < .01) (See Figure 5).

Figure 5





When referring back to the literature review, people consume more when trends become viral even though often the trend status and virality will not last long. Such influences and marketing efforts may drive people to purchase products that they do not need, but because others on social media are making them trendy and in style. These results represent a stronger impact of social media trends on Gen-Z respondents and this might be due to having more

exposure to social media from an early age, which could lead to Gen-Zs considering social media trends as a way of how they should dress and look.

Furthermore, there is a relation between the pressure to follow beauty standards and trends with social media. When asked "How likely do you feel pressured to follow beauty standards and trends?", the mean was higher for Gen-Zs than Millennials (3.05 and 2.35, respectively; t = 4.26, p < .001). Only 6.7% of Millennials felt pressured to follow beauty standards from trends, whereas 36% of Gen-Z respondents answered likely and very likely to feel those pressures. Tying this back to the earlier discussion of plus-size fashion companies and their marketing strategies, the younger a generation is, the more they are exposed to and potentially feel pressured by advertisements in the media that often portray bodies that for many are unattainable and which can sometimes be edited to look more attractive or pleasing.

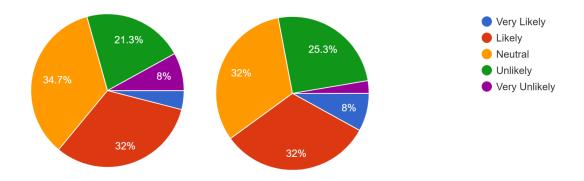
Similarly, within these social pressures, the question "How often do you feel pressured when missing out or when you are not up-to-date with current trends?" yielded higher means for Gen-Zs than for Millennials (2.61 and 2.00, respectively; t = 4.11, p < .001). Thus, it appears more likely for Gen-Z consumers to feel more pressure than Millennials to fit in and follow some of these trends. This generation might be less likely to miss out on these trends because they are exposed to social media; however, they might get more social pressures from them.

Other questions addressed the role of sponsored content or paid advertising on purchase behavior. The question "How often do you purchase a fashion item after seeing sponsored content such as 'Get Ready With Me' videos, fashion hauls, or try on videos?" resulted in more frequency for Gen-Zs than for Millennials (means of 2.32 and 1.97, respectively; t = 2.11, p < .05). Only 6.7% of Millennials answered that they would often purchase fashion items after seeing interactive content, whereas 16% of Gen-Zs answered to the same option. When asked,

"How often do you purchase a beauty/self-care product after seeing sponsored content such as tutorials and reviews about it?", there was no significant difference in means between the two generational groups (t = 1.04, p > .10); however, results were directionally consistent with other findings, with 9.3% of Millennials responding that they would often purchase beauty or self-care products from the sponsored media mentioned above, compared to 16% of Gen-Z respondents.

One of the major research questions was in regard to the significance of sponsored content and how it could affect the trust and value of a brand. At the end of the day, consumers will oftentimes rather trust word-of-mouth recommendations than sponsored or paid advertisements. The question "How likely is it for sponsored visual content (tutorials, video reviews, etc.) to make you trust a brand/product?" was asked through the survey and the results were that trust derived from sponsored visual content was somewhat higher for Gen-Zs than for Millennials (3.38 and 3.04, respectively; t = 2.05, p < .05). From the results gathered, only 5.3% of Millennials responded that they would "Very Likely" trust the brand from sponsored content, whereas 8% of Gen-Zs responded the same option. Even though some of the users who get sponsored content on their social media might gain or lose trust in the brand, that does not necessarily mean that they will consider the products for future purchases. The question "How likely does sponsored content provide a valuable way of considering a future purchase?" was asked and the difference in means between the generational cohorts was not significant (t = 0.90, p > .10). Most respondents felt neutral about the value sponsored content provides for future purchases (mean of 3.1 on a five-point scale) (See Figure 6).





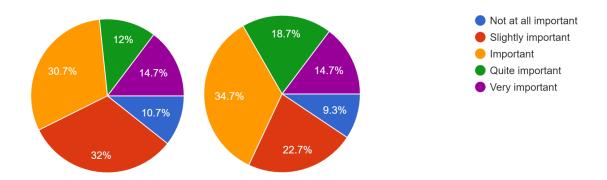
Answers to "How likely does sponsored content provide a valuable way of considering a future purchase?". Left Pie Chart Represents Millennials and the Right Pie Chart Represents Gen-Zs.

With significant differences favoring Gen-Zs over Millennials on questions ranging from hours spent on social media to its perceived importance, pressure, and trust, to trends, to sponsored content, there is abundant evidence to support the hypothesis of greater social-media influence on Gen-Zs (relative to Millennials) fashion and beauty decision processes and outcomes. The discussion will now turn to the other research issues identified earlier.

Sustainability

Moving beyond sponsored content, there were some questions asked to participants in regard to their thoughts between consumption and sustainability. The first question that was asked was "How important is it for your beauty/fashion/self-care products to be environmentally sustainable?" To this question, there were no significant differences between the two generational cohorts (t = 0.91, p > .10) The charts below represent the distribution of percentages from both generational cohorts (see Figure 7).

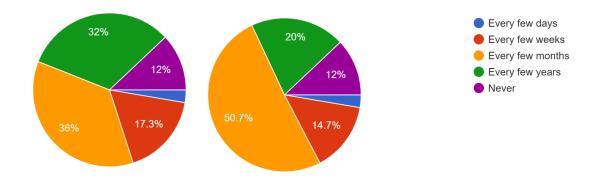




Answers to "How important is it for your beauty/fashion/self-care products to be environmentally sustainable?". Left Pie Chart Represents Millennials and the Right Pie Chart Represents Gen-Zs.

As shown above, there is not much difference between some of the responses from both generations. It is noteworthy, however, that most Millennials and Gen-Zs seem to be conscious of some of the repercussions of the fashion, self-care, and beauty products they are using in their day-to-day lives and these two generations seem to be aware of some environmental harms in regards to some of their consuming habits. A question that asked "How often do you buy new "trendy" fashion statement pieces to add to your wardrobe?" yielded no significant differences between the two generational groups (t = 0.59, p > .10), but revealed some inclination in that direction in both (overall mean 3.29 on a five-point scale where 3 corresponds to "every few months" and 4 to "every few weeks"). The charts below show the frequency for purchases of "trendy" fashion pieces for both generational cohorts (see Figure 8).





Answers to "How often do you buy new "trendy" fashion statement pieces to add to your wardrobe?". Left Pie Chart Represents Millennials and the Right Pie Chart Represents Gen-Zs.

As noted in the literature review, microtrends tend to be something recent in the fashion industry and the data above shows the information on how often people add to their wardrobe. It appears that the majority of Gen-Zs and Millennials will get trendy additions at least every few months. However, a clothing piece will typically last more than a few months due to the durability of its fabrics and materials; hence these consumers are just adding more to their wardrobe without needing it sometimes. It might not necessarily be a bad thing because most consumers are influenced by media or social media to want to fit within trends and new styles; in this instance, people typically take a few months to decide to purchase some of these trendy items. When looking at this from a sustainable perspective, it is not necessary to keep consuming and purchasing items that consumers might not necessarily need. In the instance of them needing their new purchase, there are ways to dispose of some of the items they initially had.

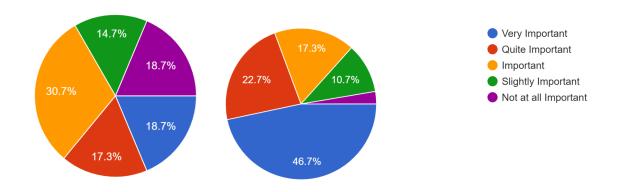
This leads to the next couple of questions which are "How often do you replace fashion/beauty/self-care products that you currently have and get fashion/beauty/self-care products from new trends instead?"(five-point scale ranging from never to always) and "When you replace fashion/beauty/self-care items, how do you dispose of them?" (response options: Donate them, Give them to a friend/family member, Throw them out, Other). From the survey results, 26.7% of the respondents (from both Gen-Zs and Millennials groups; the mean difference was not significant, t = 1.11, p > .10) said that they never replace products and get new products. However, when do decide to dispose of them or replace their products, Millennials were more likely than Gen-Zs to throw them away (44.0% versus 30.7%, respectively) and to donate them (24.0% and 14.7%, respectively), while Gen-Zs were more likely than Millennials to give them to family members or friends (33.3% and 16.0%, respectively; X2 = 11.43, p < .05). Even though there are different practices between Millennials and Gen-Zs when it comes to disposing of initial products, as expressed in the first question under the sustainability section, it seems like more people are aware of their overconsumption behavior and many more people are taking actionable actions to help with sustainability such as shopping second hand, donating, or reusing the products that they already might have.

Given these results, it seems likely that consumers in these two generational cohorts are likely to perceive the importance of ethical sustainability practices from the companies they patronize. Some of these companies are taking actionable steps to provide more sustainable procedures, especially when it comes to disposing of some products. Stores such as Levis, Patagonia, and REI have programs that encourage the purchase of secondhand items, where some of their customers can return some of their branded clothes back to the retailers for them to resell and sometimes there is even compensation from both ends. Even though these are new methods of disposing of clothes that are not wanted or used anymore, as seen in the data collected, the majority of the respondents of both generations consider sustainable practices as something important.

Diversity

Diverse representation and equitable social practices were addressed in the literature review, with some examples provided of some fashion and beauty brands and what they are doing to be more inclusive with their business practices. Responses to the question "How important to you is diversity representation in social-media content?" revealed that the perceived importance of diversity representation was higher for Gen-Z respondents than for Millennials (4.00 versus 3.03, respectively; t - 4.74, p < .001) (See Figure 9).

Figure 9



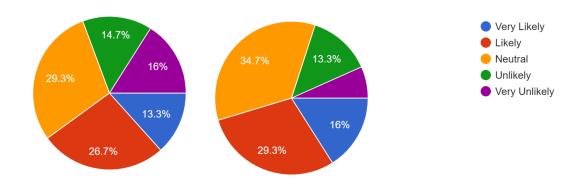
Answers to "How important to you is diversity representation in social-media content?". Left Pie Chart Represents Millennials and the Right Pie Chart Represents Gen-Zs.

From the charts above, we see that 86.7% of Gen-Zs think that diversity representation in social media is important, whereas only 66.7% of Millennials think the same way. Though the results are stronger for Gen-Zs, clearly both groups recognize the importance of diverse representation in the media and advertisements. It is an efficient marketing strategy for fashion and beauty brands to be able to connect better with their customers if there is a representation of people from all races and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, when it comes to Gen-Zs' point of view, "They're the most likely generation to boycott a product, company, country or state because of a political, social or environmental stance" (Carnegie, 2022 para. 9). Another factor to

consider is that younger generations tend to be more aware of social justice issues; therefore this can explain the Gen-Z responses in terms of diversity representation.

Lastly, when it comes to the likelihood of choosing a product based on diversity representation, there was no difference between the two groups and their product choices (t = 1.36, p > .10) (See Figure 10).

Figure 10



Answers to "How likely is it for diversity representation to impact your choice of making a beauty/fashion/self-care product purchase?". Left Pie Chart Represents Millennials and the Right Pie Chart Represents Gen-Zs.

Even though these graphs and their percentages seem to be very similar, Millennials have a 16% of diversity representation being a very unlikely reason when making a product choice, whereas Gen-Zs only had 6.7% for the same response. One of the possible reasons for these results is due to Gen-Zs being more aware of diversity in their environment; it is something that has been talked about more often, which leads Gen-Zs to have more knowledge and exposure to these diverse representation thoughts, which end up being applied to their consuming behavior.

Managerial Recommendations

Based on the empirical research results, there are some recommendations and suggestions that can be emphasized for beauty and fashion brands in terms of their marketing strategies while approaching Gen-Zs and Millennials.

The first recommendation is related to sponsored content. Millennials feel neutral about sponsored content and if there is one way that they feel more inclined to purchase a product it is through tutorial videos and reviews, a tactic for which the results are similar to Gen-Z respondents. Having more visuals for users to look at will allow the brand to have better exposure to the product, its benefits, and the value it provides to the consumer. Additionally, encouraging online reviews will allow a specific product or item to have higher usage popularity and this might also be a way to learn what are some of the features people like and don't like; which can lead to an opportunity for the betterment of a certain product. One way brands can get sponsored online reviews is by reaching out to the potential persona of their ideal customer, sharing some of the benefits their product provides, and having an agreement for them to leave a review of its products in exchange for a partnership and free products.

Another recommendation is for brands to create marketing campaigns that encourage more user-generated content. From the data collected, Gen-Zs are more likely to feel pressured from missing out or when not being up to date with current trends; therefore, this can be leveraged to create campaigns that encourage consumers to provide user-generated content about a certain product or brand. This method can be something that can turn viral with the help of advertising efforts, organic content, the face of influencers, and by creating unique hashtags. Additionally, some of these user-generated content incentivizing marketing campaigns can be tied with important and current events that are currently going on, for example, sustainability issues and activism opportunities. As shown in the data, both Millennial and Gen-Z cohorts find sustainability as an important factor for their fashion and beauty products. Having a good outcome and vision associated with a brand will enhance consumers' brand/product perceptions, which will incentivize them to make a purchase that can lead to user-generated content.

Subsequently, it seems like consumers are moving away from fast fashion as well as brands that have had practices that contradict their company mission or vision statements. A question asking "When thinking about beauty/fashion/self-care products, do you prefer to get quantity or quality?" led a majority of both Millennials and Gen-Zs to answer that they preferred quality primarily (over quantity or equal emphasis on quality and quantity), results being 64% for Millennials and 57.3% for Gen-Zs a difference that was not significant (t = 0.83, p > .01) but that showed a quality preference in both groups. For this instance, it is common sense that something with higher quality is going to typically cost more money; however, this is where advertising and marketing efforts become valuable for a brand and its image. If companies are able to show value through their products while showcasing the quality of their products, there will be consumers who will believe in the brand and will want to invest more money for higher-quality products.

Lastly, something that is crucial for a brand's success is for it to have transparency and good intentions for the brand's mission. It is evident that a brand bases success on profits, market share, and other quantitative measurements. Though it is important to keep track of these key performance indicators, staying true to their mission and caring about the value they bring to their customers can be more important for younger consumers. Having a good balance in keeping the business running while caring about the impact they provide to consumers and the market would be an essential factor in succeeding with these younger generations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has yielded a number of potentially valuable findings. One relates to the impact of sponsored content in social media and how survey respondents, on average, feel neutral about being influenced by these beauty and fashion advertisements. However, the data suggest that exposure to advertisements of trendy products leads to a higher influence on how consumers will typically want to appear. Even though Gen-Zs are more likely to be influenced by these advertisements, and Millennials responded with having less influence, we know that what people answer is not always the same as what they feel or they do. This can be somewhat of a hiccup when collecting information about people's opinions and turning them into solid results.

Future research could productively focus on elucidating some of the generational similarities and differences observed in this study. For instance, while responses from the 1981-born Millennial responses and the 2004-born Gen-Zs could be quite different, the same change can happen within the same generational cohort. For example, among 1997-born Gen-Zs and 2004-born Gen-Zs, it would be interesting to see further research within the same generational group to see how answers might fluctuate. Additionally, another important factor was that due to the research collection circumstances, only adults (18 years old or older) were able to participate in the survey. It would be interesting to see how young teenagers think about the same research topic and how their answers would be different than the data presented here.

This research paper provided insights and information which has not previously been researched. This can be beneficial for marketers in the fashion and beauty industry when it comes to targeting Gen-Zs and Millennials, providing an enhanced understanding of their market segments to increase marketing efficiency and to delivering greater satisfaction to consumers in these vital generational cohorts.

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