

Gen Z and Makeup: Exploring Psychological Impact on Self-Image

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Abstract:

This study, "*Gen Z and Makeup: Exploring the Psychological Effects on Self-Image*," investigates how makeup impacts the inner lives of Gen Z—beyond trends, branding, or influencer culture. Unlike prior studies that focused mainly on external influences like social media, this research explores the deeper psychological dimensions: self-confidence, anxiety, self-expression, and perceived professionalism. Based on data from 85 Gen Z individuals in Rajkot City, the findings reveal that makeup is more than a cosmetic tool—it's a significant medium for personal empowerment. A vast majority reported that makeup boosts their confidence (87%), helps them feel socially accepted (85.5%), and serves as a form of self-expression (88.3%). However, not all effects are positive. About 73% of respondents admitted feeling anxious or insecure without makeup, and 75.3% experienced FOMO-driven impulse buying due to beauty trends. Influencer impact was notable, with 55.3% acknowledging that their makeup purchases were influenced by online beauty personalities. Gender-wise, the study observed that females—who comprised 90.6% of respondents—were especially affected, suggesting that emotional connections to makeup vary significantly across genders. Ultimately, the findings call for a more authentic and inclusive approach by beauty brands and influencers—one that embraces natural beauty, diversity, and transparency to foster genuine self-acceptance among Gen Z.

Key Words:

Gen-Z, Makeup Industry, Consumer Behaviour, Self-expression, Beauty standards, psychological impact, Influencer marketing, social comparison, Insecurity.

INTRODUCTION:

The makeup industry has evolved significantly from ancient Egyptian rituals to a multi-billion-dollar global enterprise. Traditionally associated with enhancing beauty and social status, makeup now plays a psychological role in shaping self-image, especially among Generation Z (born 1997–2012). With increasing exposure to social media, this generation's relationship with makeup intertwines self-expression, mental health, and societal validation.

This research aims to explore the psychological effects of makeup use on self-image within Gen Z, considering the influence of digital platforms, the clean beauty movement, gender fluidity, and mental health dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Research by **Veçoso et al. (2024)** highlights the psychological benefits of makeup, particularly for women with lower purchasing power. Daily use of makeup was associated with improved mood, reduced depressive symptoms, and a stronger self-image. A follow-up study by the same authors revealed that makeup enhances self-worth but also contributes to social pressure and unrealistic beauty expectations due to filters and editing, suggesting the importance of using makeup as a form of self-expression rather than conforming to societal standards.

The influence of **digital marketing and influencer culture** on Gen Z's beauty consumption has been extensively studied. **Sahu and Karnuta (2022)** demonstrated how brands like Glossier effectively use influencer partnerships, storytelling, and loyalty programs to build lasting relationships with Gen Z consumers. Similarly, **Kumar (2019)** and **M & Kumar** found that social media trends, influencer reviews, virtual try-ons, and user-generated content significantly impact brand trust and loyalty, especially when authenticity and transparency are prioritized.

Influencer marketing emerges as a central force in shaping Gen Z's purchasing decisions. Studies by **Nguyen et al.** and **Baloch** show that influencer content—especially from micro-influencers—is more relatable and trustworthy, increasing purchase intent. Female consumers, in particular, are more responsive to influencer recommendations. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) was found to be more impactful when influencers appeared genuine and accessible.

Emotional factors also play a vital role in Gen Z's cosmetic consumption. According to **Ramadhani & Putri**, impulsive buying is largely driven by FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), hedonism, and celebrity endorsements. These psychological triggers often lead Gen Z consumers to make quick, emotionally-charged purchasing decisions, reflecting a deeper need for social belonging and self-validation.

There is a noticeable shift in Gen Z's preference toward **clean and ethical beauty**. Research by **Shim et al.** and **Kumar (2019)** confirms that Gen Z values cruelty-free, transparent, and dermatologist-tested products. The pandemic further intensified this trend, pushing consumers toward brands that emphasize honesty, sustainability, and skincare integrity.

Studies like **Kovács Ildikó (2023)** shed light on Gen Z's buying behavior regarding luxury vs. dupe cosmetics. While dupes are preferred for their affordability, high-end products remain desirable due to their perceived quality and prestige. Financial stability is a major factor influencing these preferences, encouraging brands to consider pricing strategies that appeal to both budget-conscious and aspirational consumers.

Generational comparisons, such as those by **Antun Biloš et al.**, illustrate how Gen Z differs from older cohorts (Gen X and Y) in their dependence on digital content and influencers. Unlike older generations, Gen Z places more value on immediate visual appeal, social media validation, and digital peer reviews when making cosmetic decisions.

RESEARCH GAP

While previous studies have explored Gen Z's makeup consumption, influencer impact, and preferences for clean beauty, there is limited research on the **psychological effects** of makeup on **self-image, confidence, anxiety, and identity**. Most research focuses on external factors like marketing and social media, but **few examine the internal emotional and mental impact** of makeup use. Additionally, the role of makeup in **self-expression and professionalism** among Gen Z is underexplored. This study aims to bridge these gaps by analyzing both **behavioral patterns and psychological outcomes** linked to makeup use in Gen Z.

RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Title of the Study

"GEN Z and Makeup Exploring the Psychological Effects in Self Image "

2. Objective of the Study

- To analyze the frequency and motivations behind makeup usage among Gen Z individuals.
- To study the impact of makeup on self-confidence, social acceptance, and self-image in Gen Z.
- To explore the role of beauty influencers and social media in shaping Gen Z's perception of beauty and makeup consumption.
- To examine the psychological effects of makeup, including feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).
- To investigate the extent to which Gen Z associates' makeup with self-expression and professionalism.
- To identify spending patterns and key factors influencing makeup purchase decisions among Gen Z.

3. Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in self-confidence levels between genders based on makeup use.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in self-confidence levels between genders based on makeup use.

4. Sample of the Study

In this study, **85 respondents** of Gen Z in Rajkot city have been taken as a part of sample. For selection of sample, researcher has used convenient sampling method.

5. Data Collection

This study is totally based on the Primary Data and the data was collected using a **structured questionnaire** designed to measure the psychological influence of makeup on Gen Z individuals. The questionnaire was distributed digitally via Google Forms and physically in university and college campuses where Gen Z is highly concentrated.

6. Tools & Technique

Primary data was analysed using Microsoft Excel for descriptive statistics and an independent t-test to test the hypothesis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table no 1. Topic-Wise Interpretation with Percentages:

Question no.	Topic	Key Finding	Percentage
1	Gender	Majority are female	90.6%
2	Age Group	Most are 18–20 years old	83.5%
3	Makeup Frequency	Use makeup daily or few times a week	83.5% (44.7% daily, 38.8% few times/week)
4	Confidence Boost	Makeup increases confidence	87.1% (55.3% gradually, 31.8% slightly)
5	Social Acceptance	Feel socially accepted with makeup	85.5% (55.4% always, 30.1% sometimes)
6	Social Media Pressure	Feel pressured by trends	80% (50.6% yes, 29.4% sometimes)
7	Professional Appearance	Feel more professional with makeup	88.2% (57.6% yes, 30.6% sometimes)
8	Anxiety Without Makeup	Feel anxious/insecure without it	73% (36.5% yes, 36.5% sometimes)
9	Perception of Natural Beauty	Influenced by makeup to varying degrees	92.9% (Only 7.1% unaffected)
10	Influencers' Impact	Inspired/confident due to influencers	55.3%
11	Self-Expression	Associate makeup with self-expression	88.3% (51.8% strongly, 36.5% somewhat)
12	Monthly Spending	Spend ₹2000–₹3000 on makeup	48.2%
13	Purchase Influencers	Influenced by beauty influencers	55.3%
14	FOMO Purchases	Buy makeup impulsively due to FOMO	75.3% (49.4% often, 25.9% sometimes)
15	Clean Beauty Belief	Believe in clean beauty	85.9%

1. Frequency and Motivations for Makeup Use

83.5% of Gen Z use makeup at least a few times a week — 44.7% daily, 38.8% a few times weekly. Usage depends on context (social, routine, or professional). The primary motivations for makeup use were boosting confidence (87.1%), socially accepted (85.5%) and self-expression (88.3%).

2. Impact on Self-Confidence, Social Acceptance, and Self-Image

The study found that for 87.1% of Gen Z, wearing makeup helped boost their self-confidence, greater social acceptance (85.5%), and a more professional appearance (57.6%). Notably, 73% feel anxious or insecure without it, indicating a stronger psychological dependence than previously thought.

3. Role of Beauty Influencers and Social Media

Social media and beauty influencers strongly impact Gen Z's makeup behaviour. Over half (55.3%) feel inspired and more confident due to influencers, and the same percentage are influenced in their purchasing decisions. A large portion (80%) feel pressured by social media trends, while 75.3% admit to buying makeup impulsively due to FOMO. These trends highlight how online platforms shape beauty standards, drive consumer behaviour, and influence self-image among young users.

4. Psychological Effects: Anxiety, Insecurity, and FOMO

The data reveals strong psychological effects of makeup use among Gen Z. About 73% feel anxious or insecure without makeup, highlighting emotional dependence. Social media adds to this pressure, with 80% feeling influenced by trends. Additionally, 75.3% make impulsive purchases driven by FOMO. These findings suggest that beauty routines are deeply tied to self-esteem, social comparison, and the fear of missing out.

5. Makeup as Self-Expression and Professionalism

For Gen Z, makeup serves both as a form of self-expression and a tool for enhancing professionalism. A significant 88.3% associate makeup with self-expression, showing it's a key part of personal identity. Additionally, 88.2% feel makeup helps them appear more professional and put together. This highlights how makeup goes beyond aesthetics, playing a meaningful role in how young individuals present themselves in both social and professional settings.

6. Spending Patterns and Influencing Factors

Nearly 48.2% of respondents spend between ₹2000–₹3000 per month on makeup, indicating a steady investment in beauty products. This spending is strongly influenced by social media and beauty influencers, with 55.3% acknowledging their impact and 80% feeling pressured to keep up with trends. Additionally, 75.3% admit to making impulsive purchases due to FOMO (fear of missing out). Emotional and psychological factors also play a role—many participants feel more confident (87.1%), professional (88.2%), and socially accepted (85.5%) when wearing makeup. Furthermore, 85.9% believe in clean beauty, suggesting that ethical and health-conscious choices are becoming increasingly important in their purchasing decisions.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no significant difference in self-confidence levels between genders based on makeup use.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** There is a significant difference in self-confidence levels between genders based on makeup use.

t-Test for the Gender and Self-Confidence

Table no 2. t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>female 1</i>	<i>Male 2</i>
Mean	3.5194805 2	2.375
Variance	0.4107997 3	0.8392857 1
Observations	77	8
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
t Stat	3.4468900 2	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0043673 5	
t Critical one-tail	1.8595480 4	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0087347	
t Critical two-tail	2.3060041 4	

(Source: Computed from the Excel)

Analysis

Table 1.02. reveals the t-test results for the gender and self-confidence after wearing makeup is 0.0087. At the 5% significance level, the p-value is less indicating that result is statistically significant. In these circumstances, the null hypothesis is rejected meaning there is a significant difference in self confidence levels between male and female while wearing makeup. As a result, females report a significantly higher increase in self-confidence compared to males.

Result of Hypothesis Testing:

The data analysis showed a **statistically significant difference** between male and female respondents regarding the impact of makeup on self-confidence.

- **Female respondents** reported a **higher increase** in self-confidence with makeup use compared to **male respondents**, although males who use makeup also cited positive effects.
- Therefore, **the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected**, and **the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted**:

There is a significant difference in self-confidence levels between genders based on makeup use.

SUGGESTION

The research offers several thoughtful suggestions to Promote healthier beauty standards and responsible marketing within the makeup industry. Brands are encouraged to move away from filtered and AI-enhanced imagery, instead embracing raw, unedited visuals that reflect real skin textures and individuality. Makeup should be marketed as a form of self-expression rather than a means to mask insecurities. Companies are urged to increase transparency about product ingredients and how they cater to different skin types to build trust and loyalty. Additionally, campaigns should promote self-acceptance and discourage comparisons or the need for external validation. Gen Z consumers are advised to follow creators who embrace authenticity, while influencers are encouraged to share unfiltered content to normalize real beauty. Overall, the goal is to create inclusive, honest beauty communities that celebrate all skin types and promote a message of self-love and acceptance.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

- A small number of respondents made up the study's sample, which was only collected from Rajkot city.
- Data were gathered for the current investigation using questionnaires. The conclusion cannot therefore be generalized to all situations.
- The research is based on primary data because of that the limitations of primary data will be the limitations of this research.
- The researcher has not covered all the factors that affect psychological impact towards makeup.
- The present study is limited to only 85 respondents of Rajkot city.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that for Gen Z, makeup is much more than just looking good — it's about feeling confident, expressing who they are, and fitting into both social and professional spaces. While makeup often lifts their self-esteem, especially for women, it also brings pressures tied to social media, leading to anxiety and a fear of missing out. Gen Z isn't just chasing trends; they care about affordability, ethics, and authenticity. The findings highlight a clear need for the beauty industry to shift toward real, unfiltered representations and encourage self-love and individuality over perfection.

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