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Social Media's Impact on Female Generation Alpha's Beauty Standards and Consumer Habits

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SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON FEMALE GENERATION ALPHA'S BEAUTY
STANDARDS AND CONSUMER HABITS

by

Matisen O'Brien

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Social Media and Digital Content Strategy

at

Lindenwood University

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Lindenwood University
School of Arts, Media, and Communications

SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON FEMALE GENERATION ALPHA'S BEAUTY
STANDARDS AND CONSUMER HABITS
by

Author of Thesis Matisen O'Brien

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Social Media and Digital Content Strategy Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Title of Thesis: SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON FEMALE GENERATION ALPHA'S
BEAUTY STANDARDS AND CONSUMER HABITS

Matisen O'Brien, Master of Arts/Social Media and Digital Content, 2025

Thesis Directed by: Andrew Smith, Social Media and Digital Content Strategy Program Chair

This study examines how social media shapes beauty standards and consumer behaviors among female Generation Alpha (ages 7–13). As the first generation fully immersed in digital culture, these young girls face early exposure to influencer marketing, algorithmic promotion, and adult beauty practices, which influence their skincare routines and product preferences. The research highlights the decline of child-centered physical spaces, intensifying their engagement with digital platforms. Using a mixed-methods approach focused on a subgroup of female gymnasts, the study combines quantitative surveys and qualitative analysis to reveal how social media affects identity formation, consumer choices, and related mental health concerns. Results indicate early adoption of adult beauty ideals mediated by peers and Millennial parents, underscoring the need for targeted educational and industry strategies. This project contributes foundational empirical data to a relatively unexplored area, guiding future research and intervention development within digital youth marketing and beauty culture.

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Introduction

Social media's pervasive presence is fundamentally reshaping female Generation Alpha's beauty standards and consumer habits, amplifying pressures to adopt adult beauty practices—including skincare routines and product preferences—while simultaneously driving early and aspirational consumption patterns through influencer culture, algorithmic marketing, and the erosion of child-centered physical spaces.

Generation Alpha, as the first fully digital generation, experiences unprecedented levels of digital immersion that shape their beauty standards and consumer behaviors from an early age. Despite being a relatively new focus for scholarship, heightened exposure to social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube positions these platforms as primary arenas for peer influence, aspirational content, and influencer marketing. Unlike previous generations, Generation Alpha's consumption and identity formation are deeply intertwined with curated digital content and community-driven beauty practices. Additionally, parental behaviors—particularly those of Millennial parents—play a significant role in mediating and, at times, amplifying these digital influences. Emerging patterns of skincare obsession and early adoption of prestige beauty products traditionally marketed to adults highlight the unique consumer trends within this cohort. Alongside these shifts, mental health concerns, including increased self-objectification, anxiety, and susceptibility to unrealistic beauty ideals, have been documented, underscoring the need for age-appropriate research and interventions. Compounding these dynamics is the decline of child-centered physical social spaces, which channels younger users further into digitally mediated environments where these beauty and consumer pressures intensify.

This Master of Arts project aims to provide foundational baseline evidence demonstrating that social media has already caused significant shifts in beauty perceptions and consumer habits among girls aged 7–13. The significance of this project lies in establishing empirical proof of these transformations rather than forecasting future impacts, thereby supporting subsequent, more comprehensive longitudinal and mechanistic studies. By generating a rigorous consumer profile of Generation Alpha within a high-access sample of female gymnasts, this study aims to produce actionable insights valuable to marketers, educators, parents, and researchers invested in youth wellbeing and industry adaptation.

The objectives of this project include establishing this baseline understanding, exploring the pathways through which social media shapes young girls' beauty-related consumer behaviors, and providing a methodological model for studying this generation's unique digital context. The project's originality derives from its focused empirical approach, exclusive access to a relevant subpopulation, and integration of academic and industry perspectives to produce robust, actionable findings. Ultimately, this research paves the way for future scholarly inquiry and practical efforts aimed at mitigating potential harms while harnessing opportunities within Generation Alpha's evolving beauty and consumer landscape.

Literature Review

Kids Getting Older Younger (KGOY)

The phenomenon of "Kids Getting Older Younger" (KGOY) has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, particularly with the rise of social media and digital technology. The term Kids Getting Older Younger (KGOY), originating as a marketing concept in the early 2000s, refers to the trend of children adopting adult behaviors and preferences at younger ages, which marketers use to target children with products previously aimed at older consumers

(Bishop). This trend is characterized by children adopting behaviors, interests, and attitudes typically associated with older age groups at a younger age than previous generations. The concept of KGOY is evident in the context of social media usage among French adolescents, where around 71% of children aged 12 years are already active on social media platforms (Rachidi and Yangzom 2). This early exposure to digital spaces allows children to connect with peers and observe older individuals, potentially accelerating their maturation process. The desire to be accepted by peers who use social networks further drives this phenomenon, as younger children strive to emulate the behaviors and interests of their older counterparts (Rachidi and Yangzom 2). As a result, children increasingly engage with content and experiences that were once considered more appropriate for older age groups, blurring the traditional boundaries between childhood and adolescence. The pervasive nature of social media exposes children to adult content and trends, further contributing to this blurring of age boundaries. Firinci Orman argues that this phenomenon reflects a broader societal shift toward "adultization," where childhood is increasingly shaped by adult norms and expectations, eroding distinctions between childhood and adulthood (Orman). Social media accelerates this process by immersing children in environments saturated with adult themes, including consumerism, beauty standards, and behaviors traditionally associated with maturity.

The Death of Child-Centered Spaces

One potential reason for children getting older, younger could be the lack of suitable alternatives designed specifically for younger users. Child-centered spaces, defined here as spaces designed and created specifically for children, such as parks, playgrounds, community centers, and even retail environments like children's clothing stores (e.g., The Children's Place), are developmentally appropriate environments that cater to children's unique needs and interests.

This digital phenomenon mirrors a physical trend in urban environments, where children's spaces have become increasingly scarce. A recent study by Cui et al. examines how rapid urbanization has led to a decrease in green spaces, parks, community centers, and playgrounds that are crucial for children's development and socialization. However, there is hope on the horizon, as city planners are beginning to incorporate children's needs into their urban designs. The concept of child-friendly cities is gaining traction, with planners considering the unique requirements of younger residents in their construction and development plans (Cui et al.). This shift in urban planning philosophy could potentially create more physical spaces for children, reducing their reliance on adult-oriented digital platforms for socialization and entertainment.

Recent research and media reports document a growing trend of child-free or adult-only spaces, reflecting a societal shift that excludes children from areas once welcoming to them. For example, many restaurants and cafés have implemented “no kids” policies to attract an adult clientele seeking quieter environments (Masilun). Research shows that traditionally youth-focused recreational spaces like arcades have been rebranded and remodeled to cater primarily to adult consumers. This shift is part of broader cultural and urban development trends, with fewer spaces dedicated specifically to children’s socialization and play.

Recently, the phenomenon of “kidulting”—where adults engage in activities traditionally for children—has grown significantly. Adults find joy in buying toys, attending movies about toys, and engaging with nostalgia-driven entertainment, transforming previously child-centered leisure domains into adult-focused markets. This shift toward adult consumption of childhood culture blurs the boundaries between child and adult spaces, accelerating the adultification of leisure venues and restricting truly age-appropriate social environments for children (Holman).

The decline of shopping malls, once a popular hangout spot for children and teenagers, has contributed to the loss of physical spaces for youth socialization. According to a study by Montgomery, the closure of retail stores has had a profound impact on children's social experiences. Malls previously served as safe, supervised environments where young people could gather, shop, and interact with peers (Bauer). However, the rise of e-commerce and changing consumer habits have led to the closure of many malls, eliminating these important social spaces for youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated this trend, forcing many physical stores to close and pushing retail activities online. As research indicates, "the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered changes in consumer behavior, which has been reflected in the increased use of online shopping as a result of the limitations imposed by social distancing" (Grimmer). This shift has not only reduced opportunities for in-person socialization but also directed children towards digital devices for shopping and entertainment. The closure of children's clothing stores, such as The Children's Place, which announced the permanent closure of 300 stores across the country in 2020, has further limited options for age-appropriate shopping experiences (Kindelan). This loss of physical retail spaces specifically catering to children and tweens has significant implications for their social development and sense of independence. The disappearance of tween-focused clothing stores like Limited Too and Justice has further exacerbated this issue. Brozyna details the history and appeal of Limited Too, highlighting its significance as a cherished tween store. Limited Too, which rebranded as Justice in 2009, was known for its colorful and age-appropriate clothing for young girls (Puhak). Armstrong further discusses the closure of Justice stores, marking it as "the end of an era for tween retailers." The closure of Justice stores in 2020 marked the end of an era for many tweens and their parents. As one parent noted in Bernstein's article,

"Justice wasn't just a clothing store; it was a rite of passage." These stores provided a safe and exciting space for tweens to explore their developing sense of style and identity, away from more adult-oriented fashion retailers.

The loss of these age-appropriate retail spaces has left a void in the lives of many children and tweens. As Bernstein observes, "Tweens are losing stores that were made for their age group and were deemed as age-appropriate spaces." This shift not only impacts their shopping experiences but also removes important opportunities for social interaction, self-expression, and the development of consumer skills in a supervised environment. As child-centered physical spaces disappear, children have increasingly turned to digital environments, which are predominantly adult-oriented. Compounding this digital migration, the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated young people's movement online. Lockdowns and social restrictions intensified reliance on internet connectivity—not only for education and social interaction but also by reshaping consumption patterns within these virtual spaces—deepening the digital immersion of younger generations.

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Digital Behavior and Cosmetic Consumption

Not only did the pandemic shut down shopping malls, but it also led to significant increases in internet usage among children and young people due to school closures, remote learning, and restricted outdoor activities. According to a study of university students in Bangladesh, over 50% of respondents reported spending more than four hours per day online during the pandemic, marking a substantial rise compared to pre-pandemic usage patterns (Aziz et al.). This trend likely reflects global shifts, where digital devices have become essential tools not only for education but also for leisure, communication, and skill development. Importantly, even after lockdown restrictions eased, elevated internet use persisted, highlighting a lasting

transformation in digital behaviors that embeds connectivity deeply into youths' daily routines (Aziz et al.).

Cosmetic consumption was also powerfully influenced by these new digital realities. During the pandemic, interest in skincare products rose markedly, driven by concerns such as "maskne"—a term for acne and other skin rashes caused by wearing face masks (Spigariolo et al.)—and a growing emphasis on self-care at home, as reflected in the rise of the clean beauty trend among younger consumers (Shim et al.). In contrast, demand for many makeup products declined, aside from eye makeup, which remained significant, as masks obscured much of the face. Consumer awareness shifted towards skincare and wellness, with increased searches and purchases focused on hygiene-related cosmetic products and mental health-aware beauty routines (Choi et al.). These pandemic-era shifts reveal dual motivations for cosmetics: managing appearance under new conditions and promoting psychological well-being during stressful times.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed and reflected profound changes in digital engagement and consumer priorities, deepening the intersection of online life, beauty standards, and purchasing behaviors. This environment sets a critical stage for examining the role of social media in shaping digital access and perceptions of beauty among young adults.

Social Media Use and Digital Access Among Young Adults

The pervasive nature of social media in contemporary society necessitates a closer examination of its impact on younger generations. Among young adults in the United States, social media usage is remarkably high, with 97.5% reporting regular use of at least one social media site in 2016 (Villanti et al.). This widespread adoption of social media underscores its central role in the daily lives of young adults, shaping their communication patterns, social

interactions, and access to information. The association between social media use and psychological well-being has been systematically reviewed and meta-analyzed by Przybylski et al., highlighting both positive and negative impacts on mental health. This research highlights the significance of understanding how social media influences the daily lives of young people. This is significant because recent data from the Pew Research Center confirms that social media remains a central part of teens' lives, continuing to shape their communication patterns and social interactions in 2022 (Pew Research Center, “Teens 2022”).

Moreover, mobile devices have emerged as the primary channel through which young adults access social media platforms (Villanti et al.). This reliance on mobile technology highlights the importance of understanding the implications of constant connectivity and the potential blurring of boundaries between online and offline experiences. As social media becomes increasingly intertwined with mobile usage, young adults are perpetually exposed to digital content, creating both opportunities and challenges for their development and well-being.

While the prevalence of social media use among teenagers is well-documented, it's essential to note that specific platform preferences have evolved. In 2015, Facebook was the dominant platform among teens (Pew Research Center, “Teens 2015”). However, by 2022, platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat had gained prominence, reflecting the ever-evolving digital landscape (Pew Research Center, “Teens 2022”). This study examines the impact of social media on Generation Alpha across various platforms, with a particular emphasis on Instagram and TikTok, as these platforms hold the most significant popularity and potential influence. As platforms increasingly mimic one another's features—such as all adopting TikTok-style short-form video feeds—the social media landscape becomes more homogenous, making it harder for young users to escape highly optimized, attention-grabbing content (Singer).

Despite the high prevalence of social media use among young adults, disparities persist in access to digital technologies and internet connectivity. These differences are often stratified along racial/ethnic lines, educational attainment, and subjective financial status (Villanti et al.). These findings suggest that while social media has become a ubiquitous presence in the lives of many young adults, equitable access to the digital resources necessary for full participation remains a challenge. While digital disparities should be taken into consideration, this research focuses on the general presence and influence of social media on the lives of female members of Generation Alpha. The study examines the generation as a whole, while acknowledging that digital access can vary due to financial, geographical, and racial/ethnic factors. At the same time, it shines a spotlight on gender roles, specifically exploring how these dynamics uniquely impact female members of Generation Alpha in the context of beauty standards and consumer behavior.

Social Media's Effects on Identity Formation and Peer Pressure

Problematic social media use among adolescents has been strongly associated with increased mental health challenges. Research highlights that individuals with lower self-esteem and higher social anxiety are particularly vulnerable to developing problematic patterns of social media use. These individuals often turn to social media as a coping mechanism, which can exacerbate their mental health issues through cycles of negative reinforcement and dependency (Avci et al.). Additionally, certain cognitive processes, such as rumination—defined here as repetitive thinking about negative experiences and feelings—and distraction play a mediating role in the relationship between social media use and mental well-being. Adolescents who engage in excessive rumination about social media interactions or use it as a distraction from real-life problems are more likely to experience declines in mental health, including heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms (Pérez-Torres).

The role of cyberbullying further compounds these challenges. Victimization through cyberbullying has been linked to significant mental health problems among adolescents, including depression and anxiety. Research indicates that rumination and low self-esteem act as critical factors that amplify the psychological impact of cyberbullying. Adolescents who dwell on negative online interactions or have fragile self-esteem are more likely to internalize the harmful effects of cyberbullying, leading to long-term emotional distress (Avci et al.). This underscores the importance of addressing both the behavioral patterns associated with problematic social media use and the broader cultural dynamics that enable cyberbullying.

In light of these challenges, it is crucial to consider how social media environments negatively shape identity formation through peer pressure, especially concerning materialistic values, influencer marketing, and luxury consumption (Lee and Lee). Children in Generation Alpha are developing deeper parasocial relationships with social media and are highly susceptible to peer pressure due to their immersion in digital environments, particularly through video-centric apps like TikTok and YouTube (Bach; Raudsepp and Kais). The rise of platforms like TikTok, with their emphasis on short, immersive videos, plays a key role in fostering deeper engagement and intensifying these peer pressures (Alonzo). These video-centric apps utilize powerful, emotionally resonant content formats that make their impact especially potent among young audiences (Bai).

Studies show that children's interactions and emotional attachments to online personalities are facilitated by algorithmic content delivery and a lack of child-centered spaces in physical environments, which leads them to seek belonging and identity through digital means (Lee and Lee). This process is compounded by peer-driven validation and a "fear of missing out," fueling cycles of comparison and consumption (Lee and Lee). As Gil et al. found, "the need

to be accepted and liked by their peers is a strong motivator for teens to desire and acquire luxury product," which is further amplified by social media influencers. According to Tu and Lee, the "fear of missing out" (FOMO) drives buying intentions for products endorsed by social media influencers. This creates a cycle of consumerism and pressure to maintain social standing through possessions, which can negatively affect mental health and hinder the development of an authentic identity. The constant display of curated lifestyles can create a sense of inadequacy and a reliance on external validation, exacerbating the struggle for self-discovery among adolescents. This homogenization of platform design, where major sites converge on similar algorithmic, video-heavy interfaces, further entrenches these pressures by surrounding girls with nearly identical streams of aspirational content regardless of which app they use (Singer).

Within youth consumer culture, branded products often transcend their functional purpose to become potent status symbols that mediate social belonging and peer acceptance. The term "Lululemon girls" refers to young, fashion-conscious consumers who wear Lululemon athletic apparel not only for its functional qualities but as a symbol of social status and lifestyle, embodying wellness, health, and exclusivity within their peer groups (Urban Dictionary). Like the "Lululemon girls," young consumers engage with beauty and skincare products to assert identity and status within their peer groups, with brands cultivating a strong identity valued by young shoppers. However, as noted in Forbes, Lululemon itself claims it doesn't need a specific teen strategy, suggesting its appeal is more organic and lifestyle-based, not explicitly manufactured for younger demographics (Ruhland). This approach parallels how youth-targeted beauty brands use collectability and exclusivity to engage young consumers and reinforce social positioning, even when not directly marketing to them.

Such consumer behavior is deeply driven by social media and peer influence, creating environments where possessing specific branded items indicates social capital. This dynamic intensifies peer pressure, encouraging ongoing consumption to maintain status and group membership. Beauty brands leverage this by designing products that offer both functionality and playful collectible appeal, which are coveted in youthful social hierarchies.

Female Magnification

Female users appear to be more susceptible to the effects of social media exposure, compared to their male counterparts. Female magnification refers to the heightened sensitivity and vulnerability of female users to the effects of social media exposure compared to their male counterparts. Although "female magnification" is not an established academic term, it is used here to describe the phenomenon whereby girls experience intensified negative mental health impacts from media and social media exposure compared to boys. This concept builds upon existing research into gendered media effects, such as heightened appearance-based pressure, objectification, and anxiety among adolescent girls (Lee and Kwon). The term captures the disproportionately magnified scrutiny and vulnerability faced by girls within digital environments saturated by unrealistic beauty ideals and pervasive objectification (Choukas-Bradley et al.). This phenomenon suggests that girls and young women are more likely to internalize online content, particularly regarding beauty standards, body image, and self-worth. The heightened sensitivity of female users to social media content has led to more pronounced effects on their self-image and psychological health, particularly during adolescence. The effects on self-esteem are particularly concerning, with research showing that "internet usage, particularly on image-based 'social media' platforms, is associated with increased body-image and eating anxiety" (Lee and Kwon). This issue is further emphasized by the finding that

exposure to idealized body types and "thinspiration" imagery puts girls at a higher risk of experiencing body dissatisfaction (Lee and Kwon). The pursuit of perfection has become a dominant theme, as adolescent girls experience pressure from peers who seek to emulate unrealistic beauty standards portrayed online. The culture of comparison fostered by these platforms has shifted the focus from genuine self-expression to a competition for the best self-presentation, with teens investing more time and energy into curating their appearance, rather than developing their passions. This trend is supported by research indicating that "the frequency of viewing sexualized images on Instagram was found longitudinally to predict self-objectification among adolescents, with girls reporting subsequent body image concerns" (Taha et al.). Holland and Tiggemann provide further evidence from longitudinal and experimental studies on the effects of social media use on body image satisfaction, supporting the claims of increased body image issues with social media use. These findings collectively highlight the profound impact of female magnification on social media, emphasizing the need for interventions to promote healthier digital engagement among teenage girls. As Lee and Kwon note, "strong feminist beliefs—measured as agreement with attitudes that would further gender equality—acts as a strong protective factor against this sense of constant body surveillance," suggesting potential avenues for addressing these issues.

Female magnification, the exaggerated focus on women's physical appearance and sexuality, has been a pervasive issue in media long before the advent of social media, as evidenced by Jean Kilborne's influential "Killing Us Softly" video series, which has documented the negative portrayals of women in advertising since the late 1970s (Lacap et al.). Kilbourne's work underscores the pervasive nature of these harmful media representations and their far-reaching consequences on women's self-perception and societal attitudes toward women. She

argues that the ubiquitous and often subtle nature of these images makes them particularly dangerous, as they shape cultural norms and individual behaviors in ways that are often unconscious (Kilbourne). The video emphasizes that these portrayals not only affect women's self-esteem and body image but also contribute to a culture that devalues women's contributions beyond their appearance, potentially leading to broader societal issues, such as violence against women and gender inequality (Kilbourne).

Adding to these concerns, research suggests that social media algorithms can intensify these pressures by targeting potential candidates with ads based on users' interests and behaviors (Mironica et al.). "The persuasive nature of these ads, combined with their frequent appearance in users' feeds, can create a strong incentive to consider cosmetic surgery," further normalizing and even encouraging such procedures among young girls who are already vulnerable to the effects of female magnification (Mironica et al.).

Intergenerational Transmission of Beauty Standards

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have significantly impacted body image and self-esteem among young users, contributing to a culture of comparison and the relentless pursuit of perfection (Alsatti et al.). This culture fosters an environment where users, especially young women and girls in Generation Alpha, constantly evaluate themselves against often-unattainable standards presented online. Understanding this broader social media effect sets the stage for exploring more specific mechanisms by which social media influences identity, consumer behavior, and mental health in young female adolescents (Lee and Lee; Choukas-Bradley et al.).

The influence of social media extends beyond mere comparison, actively driving consumers to seek cosmetic procedures. According to a study by Alsatti et al., one in three participants reported that Snapchat motivated them to get facial cosmetic procedures (Alsatti et al.). Moreover, approximately 50% of surgeons noted that their consultations were affected by social media, indicating a direct link between online trends and real-world decisions regarding cosmetic enhancements (Alsatti et al.). These trends disproportionately affect a specific demographic: women between 25 and 34 with higher educational levels and incomes. The higher the income, the more likely they are to pursue such procedures, revealing a complex interplay of social pressure, access to information, and financial resources. Although these findings pertain to an older cohort, they provide valuable insight into possible future behaviors of Generation Alpha girls, who are currently exposed to and influenced by similar social media beauty ideals from an early age.

The toxic beauty standards of the 1990s, characterized by extreme diet culture and fear of fat, have had a lasting impact on Millennials who grew up during that era. As adolescents, Millennials were exposed to unrealistic body ideals and restrictive eating habits, which have led to intergenerational transmission of these harmful standards. According to a *New York Times* article, these beauty ideals can be passed down from mother to daughter, perpetuating a cycle of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors (Odell).

Building upon historical beauty pressures, it is crucial to examine how Millennial parents—who experienced and internalized toxic beauty standards—contribute to shaping Generation Alpha girls' perceptions of self-image. Research indicates significant correlations between mothers' and daughters' body dissatisfaction, highlighting how parental modeling and communication convey anxieties about appearance (Kim and Song). Parent attitudes intersect

with pervasive social media influences, exposing Generation Alpha to intensified beauty ideals from a young age, which magnifies risks to their mental health and well-being.

This intergenerational transmission of beauty standards impacts how adolescents internalize ideals and negotiate identity through daily practices. Central to many young girls' routines is skincare, a ritual serving both as a form of self-care and as an expression of identity and empowerment. Emerging studies reveal the significance of sensory and cultural aspects of skincare, demonstrating how product experiences intertwine with emotional well-being and social meanings in the context of mediated beauty culture (Youn). Cross-cultural analysis further reveals significant variations in adolescent skin health literacy, with Western contexts emphasizing product-driven routines while Asian contexts prioritize dermatological knowledge and preventive care, influencing early skincare adoption patterns (Youn).

Skincare, Self-Confidence, and Emotional Experiences in Adolescents

Skincare consumption is profoundly influenced by generational identity, with Generation Z and Generation X exhibiting distinct preferences, values, and purchasing behaviors. Paula Havoj's comparative analysis reveals that Generation Z prioritizes sustainability, transparency of ingredients, peer recommendations, and influencers on social media platforms. This cohort's digital nativity makes online engagement and social proof critical in purchasing decisions. Their emphasis on eco-friendly products and brand ethics reflects broader societal shifts toward conscious consumption. In contrast, Generation X consumers demonstrate stronger brand loyalty, rely heavily on recommendations from dermatologists and experts, and often prefer traditional in-store shopping experiences. They tend to evaluate products based on efficacy and reliability, rather than social trends, reflecting their greater trust in established authority and familiarity (Havoj).

Supporting this generational contrast, Sutinah and Putri provide an in-depth exploration of urban adolescent girls' consumptive behavior concerning skincare products. Their study describes how adolescents negotiate social identities and peer influences in their beauty routines, demonstrating how consumption becomes a form of self-expression and social belonging. Adolescents actively engage with market trends, navigating digital marketing and peer pressure, which shapes their motivations and product choices. This illuminates the emotional and cultural dimensions behind skincare consumption, revealing patterns of aspirational identity formation intertwined with consumer practices (Sutinah and Putri).

Together, these studies offer a comprehensive perspective on the interplay between generational identity and consumer psychology in skincare. They underscore how motivations extend beyond the functional benefits of products to encompass social validation, emotional well-being, and cultural belonging. This understanding is crucial for recognizing the diverse ways generations approach beauty standards and how marketing strategies can effectively target these nuanced consumer segments.

This transmission of beauty ideals across generations not only influences outward appearance but also deeply shapes young people's internalized perceptions of self-worth and standards of care. As these norms are continually reinforced, adolescents negotiate their identities through daily practices that extend beyond mere aesthetics.

Central to these practices is skincare, which functions as both a physical ritual and a psychological tool fostering self-confidence and emotional well-being. Emerging research reveals how the textures, cultural meanings, and sensory experiences of skincare products intertwine with adolescents' self-perception, offering a rich lens through which to examine the interplay of beauty standards, emotional health, and digital influence.

Generation Alpha: Consumer and Spending Habits

Generation Alpha, born after 2010, exemplifies the accelerating trend of KGOY. This cohort, the first to experience only the digital age, is exhibiting behaviors and consumer habits typically associated with older age groups at much younger ages. Their engagement with beauty and cosmetic products reflects a complex interplay of societal influences and technological advancements. As the first fully digital generation, Generation Alpha's relationship with technology is fundamentally different from previous generations, making them uniquely susceptible to new forms of advertising and social influence (Lee and Kwon).

The female magnification and female gaze, concepts explored in Jean Kilborne's influential "Killing Us Softly" video series, highlight the negative portrayal of women in media. These portrayals, combined with the toxic beauty standards of the 1990s, have shaped Millennials' mindset, who are now parents to Generation Alpha. Consequently, we are witnessing an intergenerational transfer of beauty ideals and concerns, manifesting in Generation Alpha's surprising obsession with beauty products at a very young age.

Generation Alpha children, particularly girls, are flooding popular beauty stores like Ulta and Sephora. Despite their youth, these children seem infatuated with anti-aging products, which can have harmful effects at their age. This trend is concerning given the recent push for realistic beauty standards. Generation Alpha appears drawn to even more aggressive and youth-focused beauty ideals than previous generations, despite efforts to promote body positivity and natural beauty. As the first fully digital generation, they have grown up immersed in a world where technology is seamlessly integrated into every aspect of their lives, including their understanding of beauty (Lee and Kwon). This early engagement with beauty and cosmetic products is further

influenced by social media, which plays a significant role in shaping their consumer habits (Lee and Kwon).


Their technological savvy and spending power amplify the Alpha Generation's engagement with beauty products. As children of Millennials, who are generous in their spending on this generation, this financial dynamic, combined with early exposure to digital technologies, has established Generation Alpha as a formidable consumer group at a remarkably young age (Lee and Kwon). Generation Alpha is characterized by significant spending power, both directly and through their influence on family purchases (Barnard). They are known to be influential on family spending decisions, affecting everything from technology to travel (Barnard). Over-consumption and the desire for the newest products are significant characteristics of Generation Alpha, which are attributed to heavy exposure to online advertising and social media trends.

As adults, many Millennials have become acutely aware of their own body dysmorphia and the negative impacts of diet culture on their mental and physical well-being. This awareness has sparked a movement towards body positivity and acceptance, with many Millennials actively working to challenge and redefine beauty standards for themselves and future generations. Social media platforms have become a space for celebrating diverse body types and encouraging self-love, as Millennials strive to create a more inclusive and accepting environment for their children (Sole-Smith).

Social media is the primary driving force behind Generation Alpha's unique consumer habits, especially in the beauty industry. Studies have shown that marketing through significant social media influencers substantially impacts this generation (Lee and Kwon). This sensitivity to influencer marketing, coupled with their immersion in digital platforms from birth, has created

a generation highly susceptible to beauty trends and product recommendations circulating online. Generation Alpha consumers are growing and are influenced by the customization and personalization of products, and they appreciate it (Barnard).

Generation Alpha wields significant consumer power, with parents facilitating purchases of high-cost skincare and beauty products that fashion young consumers' identities. Retail data indicate that many purchases are parent-driven, with social media and marketing campaigns fueling multistep skincare routines involving products not originally intended for children (Holmstrom). These products are often priced at a premium, reflecting their positioning as desirable prestige items. For example, skincare items popular with Generation Alpha consumers range from affordable cleansers to luxury anti-aging serums and peel products, some costing upwards of \$100 per item. The *Los Angeles Times* highlights cases where young consumers' avid interest in skincare has led parents to buy costly products for their children, a dynamic that significantly fuels the growth of the skincare industry targeted at this demographic.

The high prices and brand prestige associated with products from companies like Drunk Elephant, Sephora, and other premium beauty retailers underscore the economic clout of this young consumer base. Such spending patterns not only demonstrate the financial influence of Generation Alpha (and their parents) but also raise concerns about the commercialization of childhood and the ethical considerations of marketing expensive, adult-tier products to children. The facilitation by parents plays a crucial role, as children often lack independent spending power but benefit from parental buy-in that shapes early consumer preferences and habits. This relationship between parent and child in the consumer sphere cannot be examined without addressing the way parents are enabling their children's spending habits. 

The Role of Social Media and Influencers in Beauty Trends

The early engagement with beauty and cosmetic products, coupled with the influence of social media, has led to some concerning trends among Generation Alpha. As previously mentioned, marketing through social media influencers has a substantial impact on this generation (Lee and Kwon). This translates to increased spending power directed toward beauty products and greater exposure to often unrealistic and sometimes harmful beauty trends (Barnard). One particularly alarming trend is the growing obsession with anti-aging products despite their young age. This premature engagement can have detrimental effects on their developing skin and further distort their perceptions of beauty and aging.

Adolescent girls' skincare consumption is significantly driven by social media, influencers, and peer pressure (Bai). This influence often leads to overconsumption, fueled by media-driven beauty standards that create a constant desire for the newest and most popular products (Bai). For many teen girls, skincare has been re-categorized as a "need," rather than a "want," indicating a fundamental shift in how they perceive these products (Bai). Their purchase decisions are heavily influenced by their social circles and the pervasive nature of digital advertising, making them highly susceptible to trends and marketing tactics (Bai).

The combined effects of social media, influencer marketing, and peer pressure contribute to a pervasive sense of anxiety and inadequacy among young individuals. As social media becomes increasingly integrated into their daily lives, many young people experience problematic social media usage and Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), which has been proven to cause mental health issues (Fang et al.). This constant exposure to curated online personas and unrealistic beauty standards fosters a sense of competition and self-doubt, driving them to seek validation through external means, such as purchasing and using more beauty products. This cycle of insecurity and consumption can have serious consequences for the mental and emotional

well-being of young individuals. The pressure to conform to ever-evolving beauty standards can lead to body image issues, low self-esteem, and even disordered eating behaviors. The constant pursuit of perfection, driven by the fear of missing out on the latest trends, can create a state of chronic stress and anxiety, further exacerbating these mental health concerns (Fang et al.).

To address these challenges, it is crucial to promote critical media literacy and encourage healthier patterns of social media engagement. Young individuals need to develop the skills to evaluate the content they consume online critically, recognize the manipulative tactics used by advertisers and marketers, and cultivate a stronger sense of self-worth that is not dependent on external validation. Parents, educators, and policymakers all have a role to play in fostering a more positive and empowering digital environment for future generations.

TikTok's Rise and Beauty Marketing Tactics

The emergence of TikTok as a dominant social media platform can be traced back to the early popularity of Vine, which introduced the concept of short-form video content. Vine's influence laid the groundwork for platforms like TikTok, which have since capitalized on the appeal of brief, engaging videos that cater to users' limited attention spans (Villanti et al.). TikTok's design, centered on an endless feed of short, highly engaging videos, creates an immersive environment where trends, sounds, and visual aesthetics circulate rapidly among young users. Recent research on Generation Alpha's device use shows that children already spend substantial weekly time on screens, and that high levels of digital engagement are associated with concerns about reduced attention span and other developmental outcomes (Mohsen et al.). In this context, TikTok's fast-paced, bite-sized content does not simply appeal to Gen Alpha girls; it aligns with and may reinforce emerging tendencies toward shorter, more fragmented attention when consuming digital media (Mohsen et al.). As beauty tutorials, product

hauls, and “get ready with me” videos are compressed into brief, highly stimulating clips, this format encourages quick, repetitive exposure to aspirational beauty messages rather than slower, more reflective engagement with the products and routines being showcased (Mohsen et al.). TikTok has transformed how beauty brands market their products, leveraging the platform's unique format to capture the attention of younger audiences.

Central to TikTok's success is its algorithm-driven content delivery system, particularly the "For You" page, which curates personalized video feeds based on user interests and behaviors (Bach). This tailored approach not only increases user engagement but also fosters platform loyalty, as users are more likely to return for content that resonates with their preferences. The appeal of short-form videos is particularly strong among younger audiences, who favor quick, digestible content that aligns with their fast-paced lifestyles (Bach). Video-centric platforms such as TikTok leverage short-form content that is highly engaging and interactive, making it easier for children to form strong attachments to influencers and participate in trends. The ability to directly interact with and observe influencers' routines, challenges, and beauty advice through immersive video formats intensifies these parasocial bonds (Lee and Lee). Moreover, the prevalence of cross-posting—where TikTok content is rapidly adapted or shared on platforms like YouTube Shorts—extends the reach of trends and influencer routines, amplifying their influence on young audiences (Lee and Lee). This shift towards short-form video consumption has created a fertile ground for beauty marketing, allowing brands to showcase products in innovative and entertaining ways.

Moreover, TikTok has facilitated the growth of niche communities that foster social connections and identity formation among users. Communities such as “JazzTok” and various beauty-focused groups enable users to share experiences, tips, and trends, further enhancing their

engagement with the platform (Bach). These communities not only provide a sense of belonging but also amplify the reach of beauty brands that tap into these social networks for marketing purposes.

Successful beauty marketing tactics on TikTok often involve leveraging influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and viral trends. Beauty brands collaborate with influencers who have established credibility and a loyal following to promote their products authentically. This strategy is particularly effective in reaching younger audiences who value peer recommendations over traditional advertising methods. Additionally, user-generated content allows consumers to showcase their experiences with products, creating a sense of community and encouraging others to participate in trends (Bach). When children see beauty challenges and product reviews everywhere they browse, their exposure to consumer trends multiplies, and the pressure to participate and remain relevant within both peer groups and broader online communities increases. This cycle of validation, imitation, and comparison is now embedded in daily digital routines, creating new norms for socialization, purchasing, and identity development among children (Lee and Lee). The rapid dissemination of viral challenges and beauty hacks further propels brand visibility and consumer interest.

As TikTok continues to rise in popularity, its role in shaping beauty marketing strategies cannot be overstated. The combination of algorithm-driven content delivery, community building, and influencer collaborations positions TikTok as a powerful tool for beauty brands aiming to connect with Generation Alpha and beyond. The platform's unique characteristics enable brands to engage consumers in meaningful ways while navigating the complexities of modern beauty standards.

Targeted Marketing Techniques in Cosmetic, Makeup, and Skincare Brands

Cosmetic, makeup, and skincare brands utilize diverse marketing tactics to engage consumers, especially Generation Z. Moura de Carvalho's research describes how traditional skincare marketing has long centered on anti-aging campaigns that vividly portray skin aging and imperfections—not just as natural processes but as urgent problems requiring correction. These campaigns commonly use digitally retouched imagery and idealized standards of youth and beauty, setting often unattainable benchmarks for consumers.

Anti-aging skincare advertising frequently utilizes the fear appeal by portraying natural aging as a condition needing urgent correction. These products promise skin rejuvenation and youth preservation, symbolizing success, beauty, and social acceptance. The campaigns commonly feature digitally enhanced and idealized images of youthful skin, setting high and often unattainable beauty standards that heighten consumer anxiety regarding aging (de Carvalho). Women, particularly, encounter messaging that equates physical youth with self-worth and desirability, prompting regular use of anti-aging skincare regimens as a form of self-care and societal conformity.

Anti-aging products are predominantly delivered in the form of skincare formulations, such as serums, moisturizers, sunscreens, and creams, designed to target and prevent visible signs of aging. Moura de Carvalho emphasizes how these products' marketing hinges on promising preservation of youthful skin and reversal of aging symptoms—wrinkles, fine lines, dullness—thereby embedding a preventive care culture even in younger consumers. This preventive anti-aging trend aligns with Generation Z's preference for gentle, consistent skincare routines centered on maintaining skin health, rather than drastic corrective treatments (de Carvalho). Products favored by this demographic include those with peptides, retinaldehyde, antioxidants, and broad-spectrum SPF that promote hydration and collagen protection.

Friedman highlights the ethical quandaries this creates, as anti-aging skincare marketing frequently targets younger audiences with messaging that may inadvertently instill fear or unrealistic standards about natural aging processes. The promotion of anti-aging as a necessary daily routine can compel youth to engage in early and sometimes unnecessary cosmetic regimens, reinforcing anxiety about aging at a stage when visible signs are minimal or non-existent. This not only risks psychological harm but also can lead to misuse of potent ingredients not suited for young skin types (Friedman).

Such marketing tactics underscore the need for a critical examination of how the skincare industry's narratives affect younger generations, making the ethical framing and transparency of such campaigns critically important. This sets a foundation for examining Generation Alpha's emerging consumer behaviors and spending habits in the following section.

TikTok's and Social Media's Future

The potential ban of TikTok in the United States, initially driven by national security concerns and allegations of privacy violations (Keim et al.), could significantly impact Generation Alpha. As this generation increasingly relies on platforms like TikTok for entertainment, social interaction, and exposure to trends, the removal of such a platform could force them to seek alternatives (Keim et al.). This shift could lead to the adoption of other video-sharing apps like Byte, Dubsmash, and Triller, raising questions about the security and privacy of these alternatives and the data they collect from young users (Keim et al.). The forensic analysis of these apps becomes crucial to understanding their potential risks and ensuring the safety of Generation Alpha's digital experiences.

The landscape of social media is constantly evolving, and platforms like TikTok are subject to potential shifts in direction or even complete changes in ownership (Rohlinger et al.). This volatility can significantly impact younger generations who heavily rely on these platforms for entertainment and social connection.

While the future of any specific platform remains uncertain, the core drivers of social media engagement—content format, algorithm transparency, analytics tools, and monetization opportunities—will likely continue to shape user preferences (Scott). As one viral video creator, Zach King, noted, even if TikTok were to be banned, users would simply migrate to the "next big thing" (Scott). This suggests resilience among content creators and consumers, who are adaptable and responsive to changing platform dynamics.

The Future of Beauty in the Digital Age

As we move further into the era of the metaverse and non-face-to-face interactions, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the beauty industry is adapting to cater to this tech-savvy generation. Virtual try-ons, AI-powered skincare recommendations, and immersive online shopping experiences are becoming increasingly important to capture Generation Alpha consumers' attention and loyalty. This shift towards digital and personalized experiences in the metaverse world of beauty is likely to shape the cosmetics industry's future for years to come (Lee and Kwon). However, this digital transformation brings new challenges, particularly in the realm of beauty standards and self-perception. The emergence of AI influencers and models has introduced a new dimension to the already complex landscape of beauty ideals. These digital entities, with their flawless appearances and lack of real human features, are perpetuating unattainable beauty standards that can significantly impact young adults' self-image and expectations (Gavin and Bellefeuille). The perception that AI models have "the perfect body"

further exacerbates the pressure on real individuals to conform to impossible ideals, potentially leading to increased body dissatisfaction and mental health issues among Generation Alpha and future generations.

Gaps in Research

While scholarship has increasingly focused on Generation Alpha's engagement with beauty and social media, several key gaps remain. First, although Generation Alpha girls are drawn to skincare products—including anti-aging items traditionally marketed to adults—the specific motivations behind this trend remain unclear (McDougall and Katz). Most research documents early skincare use prevalence but lacks a deeper exploration of why skincare, instead of other beauty categories, appeals so strongly. Similarly, psychological and social reasons for the popularity of anti-aging products among pre-teens remain underexplored, leaving questions about influences like marketing, peer pressure, and developmental anxieties (Choi).

Another gap concerns the decline of child-centered spaces. While some studies and media reports document the disappearance of dedicated venues, limited research examines why this decline is happening or the rise of “kidult” spaces where adults reclaim children's traditional environments (Armstrong). More research is needed to understand economic, cultural, and urban planning drivers and their effects on child development and socialization.

Furthermore, studies predominantly focus on white, middle-class populations; little is known about racial and cultural differences affecting Generation Alpha girls' beauty standards and consumer behavior. This creates a need to research racial, ethical, financial, and geographical differences within this age group, especially as this study primarily looks at a similar racial and cultural demographic.

Finally, the full effects of social media on Generation Alpha remain poorly understood because they are too young for longitudinal study. Interpretations often extrapolate from older cohorts, like Generation Z, which may not fully reflect Generation Alpha's unique developmental context (Barnard). Longitudinal and age-appropriate research is critical to capture the psychological and social impacts of their digital upbringing.

Addressing these gaps will require studies exploring (1) the cultural and psychological motivations behind skincare and anti-aging use, (2) social and economic dynamics behind child-centered space loss and “kidult” trends, (3) racial and cultural diversity in beauty and consumer patterns, and (4) longitudinal effects of social media specific to Generation Alpha. Such research is essential for a nuanced and inclusive understanding of how emerging beauty ideals and media exposure shape this generation’s development.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate Social Media's Impact on Female Generation Alpha's Beauty Standards and Consumer Habits. The research design incorporated a survey instrument and a comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed and media articles.

Survey Design and Administration

The survey consisted of 25 questions designed to capture multiple dimensions relevant to Generation Alpha’s beauty standards and consumer behaviors. The questions were organized into thematic categories:

- **Social Media Use:** Frequency, platform preferences, types of content engaged (e.g., influencers, ads).

- Consumerism: Purchasing habits, influences on buying decisions, brand awareness.
- Makeup Use: Types of makeup products used, reasons for use, frequency of usage.
- Skincare Use: Types of skincare products, attitudes towards skincare routines, motivations behind product choices.
- Perceptions and Attitudes: Self-image, social appearance anxiety, and attitudes toward beauty standards.

This structure allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, supporting a mixed-methods analysis that addresses not only behavioral patterns but also underlying motivations.

The full survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

Participant Selection and Data Collection

The study participants were American female gymnasts aged 7-13 years, representing Generation Alpha, whom the researcher coached. Parental consent was obtained through signed documents after a thorough explanation of the research study. The participants surveyed consisted of 35 female gymnasts drawn from a single gymnastics facility. These girls represented multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, though the sample was not extensively diverse, given the relatively small number of respondents. Nonetheless, certain limitations related to the study's design, including sample homogeneity and geographic specificity, require consideration. These factors may influence the generalizability of results to wider populations. Completed surveys were numerically marked to keep track while allowing participants to remain anonymous.

Printed surveys were distributed to the participants, who completed them individually and anonymously. To maintain objectivity and prevent researcher influence, participants were

instructed to direct any questions about the survey to other coaches. Most questions within the survey included options such as "I don't know" or "None" to accommodate potential confusion or inapplicability. Participants were given unlimited time to complete the survey.

Data Analysis

Upon completion, the surveys were numbered, and the data were input into an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet facilitated the creation of charts and graphs for the visual representation of the quantitative data. The quantitative analysis focused on identifying patterns and trends in social media usage, consumer behavior, and self-perception among the participants.

The qualitative component of the research involved analyzing responses to open-ended questions, which provided subjective insights into the participants' interests and experiences. These responses were compared to identify common themes and draw subjective conclusions.

Data Entry and Coding

After data collection, all responses were entered into Microsoft Excel to facilitate organization and initial error checking. Each participant's data was recorded as a single row, with variables such as age, social media usage, and self-esteem score organized into columns. Categorical variables (e.g., social media platforms) were numerically coded (e.g., 1 = TikTok, 2 = YouTube) to ensure compatibility with statistical analysis software, while continuous variables were entered as numeric values. Variable names were formatted without spaces to meet the requirements of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Importing and Preparing Data for SPSS

The coded Excel file was then imported into SPSS. During import, variable properties-including type, label, and value labels for categorical data-were reviewed and adjusted in SPSS's Variable View to ensure accurate data interpretation. This step allowed for the assignment of descriptive labels to coded values, enhancing the clarity of subsequent analyses.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS was selected as the quantitative analysis tool for this study due to several methodological and practical considerations. First, researchers in social sciences widely recognize SPSS as a powerful, flexible, and user-friendly software for statistical analysis, especially when handling large datasets and multiple variables arising from survey designs (Rahman and Muktadir). Its intuitive interface eases the process for researchers without extensive technical or programming backgrounds and facilitates diverse statistical tests crucial for descriptive and inferential analysis (Rahman and Muktadir). The adoption of SPSS enables efficient management, coding, and visualization of data, including producing tables and graphical outputs necessary for communicating complex quantitative results (Rahman and Muktadir). Compared to alternative platforms, SPSS supports robust modeling, cluster analysis, and regression procedures vital for marketing and consumer research (Rahman and Muktadir).

Integrating SPSS within a mixed-methods design reinforces methodological rigor, as mixed methods research benefits from quantitative tools that enable accurate measurement and statistical validation alongside qualitative insights (Ahmed et al.). Mixing qualitative and quantitative techniques enriches understanding, allows for triangulation, and provides complementary perspectives for nuanced exploration of beauty standards and consumer behaviors (Ahmed et al.). The use of SPSS facilitates the explanatory and confirmatory phases of

research, ensuring that quantitative patterns identified through surveys are systematically tested and contextualized with qualitative findings (Ahmed et al.).

The compatibility of quantitative statistical analysis in SPSS with qualitative approaches—such as thematic coding from interviews—addresses concerns over paradigmatic incompatibility in mixed-methods research. Contemporary scholarship argues that practical alignment, rather than rigid philosophical distinctions, should guide methodological choices in digital marketing inquiries (Liu). Employing SPSS in tandem with qualitative analysis fits the pragmatic orientation of mixed-methods studies, supporting both breadth and depth of inquiry into Generation Alpha’s digital consumer habits (Liu).

Literature Review

In addition to the primary data collected through the survey, a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed articles and research data was conducted. This literature review served two purposes:

1. To provide a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of social media on Generation Alpha females' beauty standards and consumer habits.
2. To compare and contextualize the survey results with existing scholarly research.

The literature review focused on recent studies examining social media usage among young females, its effects on body image and self-esteem, and its influence on consumer behavior. Particular attention was paid to studies that employed similar methodologies or focused on comparable age groups.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The mixed-methods approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the research question. Quantitative data from the survey and relevant literature provided measurable insights

into trends and patterns, while qualitative data offered a deeper understanding of individual experiences and perceptions. This integration of methods enabled a more nuanced interpretation of the complex relationship between social media, beauty standards, and consumer habits among Generation Alpha females.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines as approved by Lindenwood University's IRB. Parental consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. All girls were explicitly informed that they could choose whether or not to participate, ensuring their autonomy and assent in the research process. The survey was administered in 2024. During survey administration, participants completed the survey anonymously and independently. If they experienced any confusion or had questions, they were encouraged and welcomed to ask for clarification; however, these inquiries were directed solely to other coaches present at the gymnastics facility. The researcher intentionally refrained from observing or influencing any participant responses, thereby maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of the data collection.

Due to my role as their coach, I recognize that an inherent power imbalance exists, which may have influenced some participants' willingness or comfort in participating. To minimize any potential pressure or influence, I ensured that all questions were handled by other coaching staff and that girls understood participation was fully voluntary and confidential. This approach aimed to preserve ethical standards and protect the authenticity of the girls' responses.

Limitations

It is important to note that the sample size of 35 participants, while providing valuable insights, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Given the young age of the participants (7 to 13 years), some girls may have experienced difficulty comprehending certain survey questions or misunderstood item meanings. Despite provisions to keep questions simple and allowing extra time for completion, developmental differences in reading and cognitive skills could have influenced their responses. This introduces some potential measurement error and warrants caution when interpreting findings, as misunderstandings and confusion might impact the reliability of self-reported data from this age group.

All participants shared a common passion for gymnastics, which may influence their views and behaviors related to the study topic. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, no individual responses could be linked to specific racial or ethnic identities, limiting detailed demographic analysis. Since all participants attend the same gymnastics facility, they likely come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Gymnastics, as a sport, often requires a significant financial investment for coaching, equipment, uniforms, competition fees, and travel. This economic barrier suggests the sample may be skewed toward families with comparable income levels and access to resources, limiting socioeconomic diversity within the group. Consequently, this shared socioeconomic status could influence participants' attitudes, experiences, and behaviors related to the study's focus, further narrowing the generalizability of findings to broader populations with varied economic circumstances. The focus on female gymnasts may introduce some bias in the results, as this group may have specific characteristics or experiences that differ from the broader Generation Alpha female population.

Results

Social Media Usage and Device Ownership

Participants were asked which social media applications they used most frequently. Of the 35 respondents, 6 indicated they either were not allowed on social media or did not use social media apps. Despite this, all but one of these participants listed a favorite platform, with several selecting multiple apps such as YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat. In particular, two respondents marked "I'm not allowed on social media," yet also listed this as a favorite app. YouTube emerged as the most frequently reported favorite platform, followed by TikTok and Snapchat.

For this age group, the findings imply that their everyday digital routines are dominated by video-centric apps rather than text-based or static-image platforms (Mohsen et al.). Recent research on Generation Alpha's device use shows that children already spend substantial weekly time on screens, and that high levels of digital engagement are associated with concerns about reduced attention span and other developmental outcomes (Mohsen et al.). In this context, the fast-paced, bite-sized content that defines YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat does not simply appeal to Gen Alpha girls; it aligns with and may reinforce emerging tendencies toward shorter, more fragmented attention when consuming digital media (Mohsen et al.). As beauty tutorials, product hauls, and "get ready with me" videos are compressed into brief, highly stimulating clips across these platforms, this format encourages quick, repetitive exposure to aspirational beauty messages rather than slower, more reflective engagement with the products and routines being showcased (Mohsen et al.).

Participants were asked to choose their favorite activity from options including watching a movie, watching TV, watching YouTube videos, watching TikToks, playing with toys, or running around and playing with friends or family. Results revealed almost equal preference for

screen-based entertainment and physical play: watching TikToks received 11 votes, while running around and playing with friends or family received 10 votes. Watching a movie was chosen by 7 respondents, watching YouTube by 5, and watching TV by 2. This suggests that, despite the popularity of social media-driven activities, active play remains highly favored among the participants.

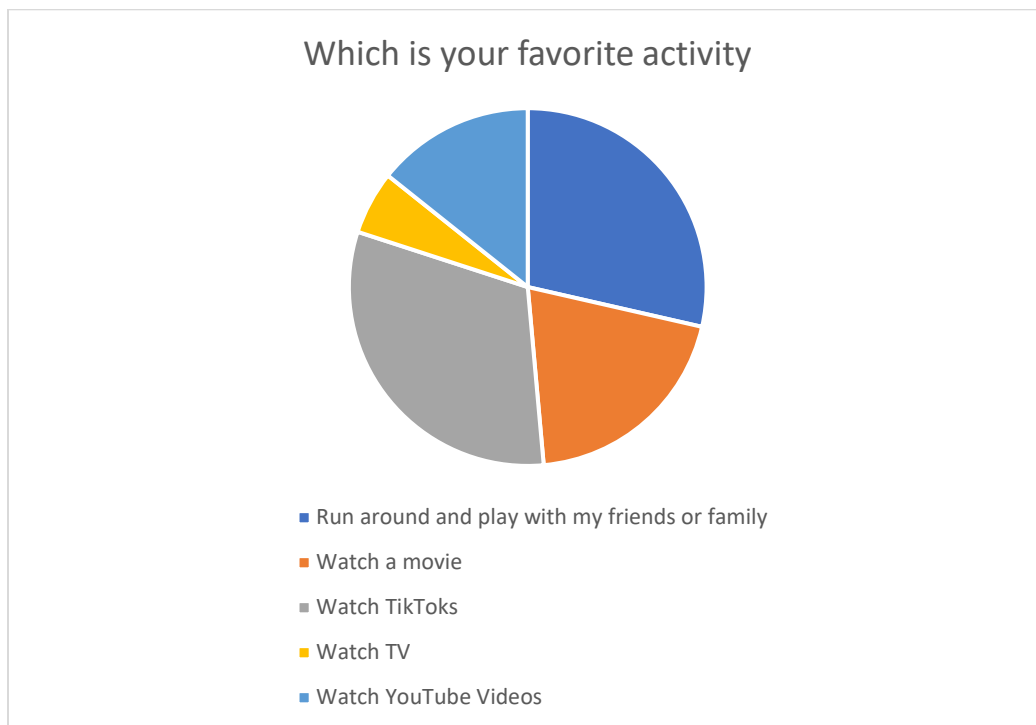


Figure 1. Distribution of Favorite Activities Among Survey Participants

Figure 1 shows the visual breakdown of these responses, highlighting the near tie between watching TikToks and running around and playing, with watching TikToks receiving one more vote. This duality reflects a generational recalibration emerging after the pandemic, during which children experienced heightened digital exposure alongside enforced reductions in physical interactions. Post-pandemic data from the global GWI survey indicate that 43% of Gen Alpha kids see friends in person on weekends, surpassing the 39% who engage online with

friends (Hussain). This shift towards offline play is evidenced by a 16% increase in requests for physical toys and board games, indicating parents' influence on balancing digital and offline activities (Walsh). The findings highlight an ongoing dynamic between screen use and active play, which parents and educators must navigate to support healthier development (Ferris et al.).

All children reported owning at least one device with internet connectivity. Only two participants listed a computer as their sole device, confirming high digital immersion. This widespread device ownership among respondents further supports the varying social media usage patterns observed. Even among those with reported restrictions, most still accessed favorite platforms, underscoring the limits of parental controls and suggesting independent navigation of digital spaces (Rachidi and Yangzom).

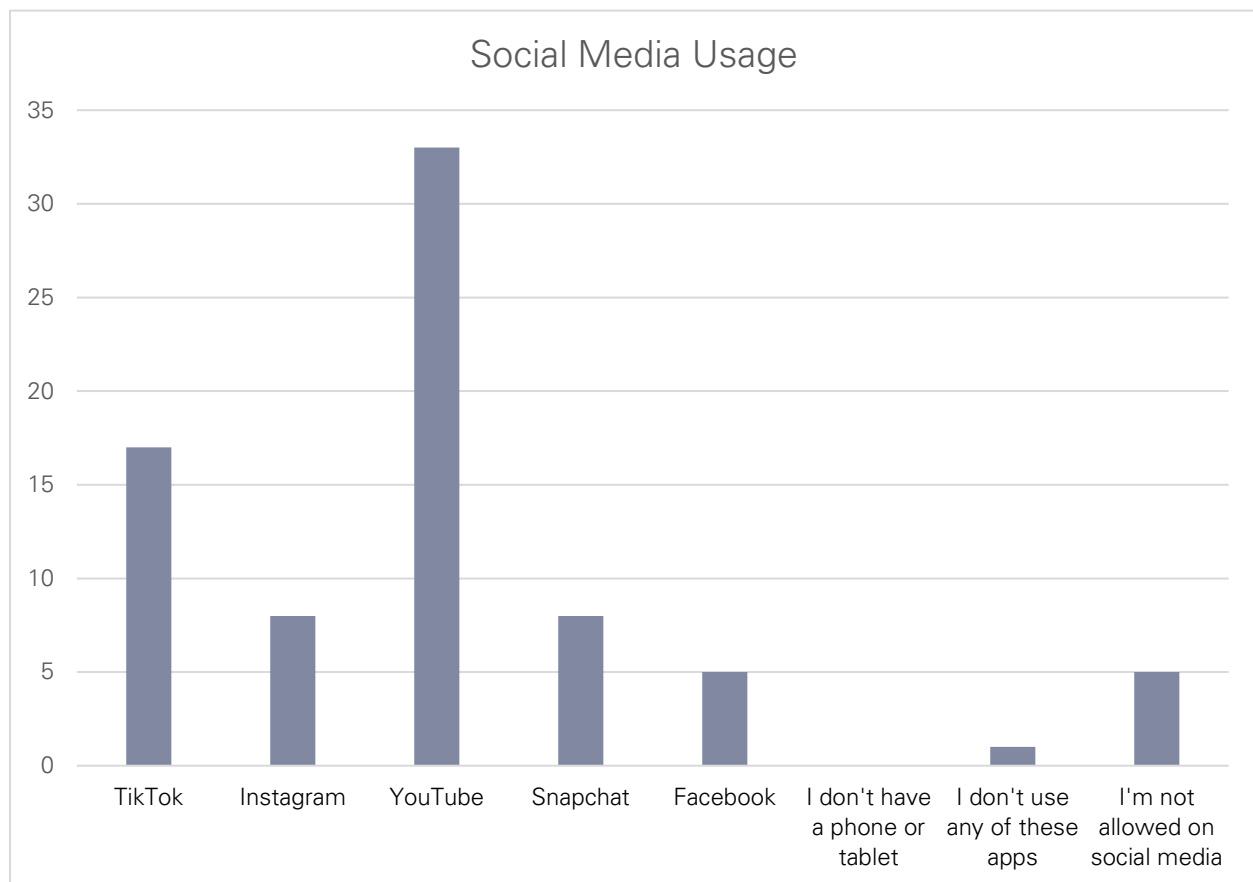


Figure 2 Self-Reported Social Media Usage Among Survey Participants

Figure 2 shows that YouTube emerged as the most commonly used app among participants, indicating that long-form and short-form video content remains central to their digital lives. This prominence of YouTube in participants' self-reported usage aligns with parent-facing guidance that often frames YouTube as a more manageable or "safer" environment than TikTok, in part because of tools like YouTube Kids, restricted modes, and customizable content filters that allow adults to exert greater control over what children see (TruPlay Games). These perceived safety features may help explain why families are more comfortable allowing frequent YouTube use, even as concerns persist about algorithm-driven recommendations and exposure to age-inappropriate content.

Owning internet-enabled devices is consistent with 2025 trends showing 86% of eight-year-olds have smartphone/tablet access, and 75% of US Gen Alpha children own a phone by age 13 (Walsh). This proliferation supports high engagement but introduces ambivalence, as only 12% of tweens enjoy social media "a lot" and many report it would be easy to give up social media (Bayron). This reflects a generation both connected and selective with their digital participation—an attitude parents and policymakers should consider in shaping digital literacy efforts (Walsh; Annie E. Casey Foundation).

Additional analysis of app preference correlations was conducted using SPSS Pearson correlations. Results reveal several statistically significant associations among commonly used social media platforms. Notably, Instagram and Snapchat usage showed a moderate positive correlation that was significant at the 0.05 level ($r = 0.352$, $p = 0.038$). Likewise, Snapchat usage was significantly correlated with both Facebook ($r = 0.361$, $p = 0.033$) and TikTok ($r = 0.424$, $p = 0.011$) at the 0.05 level. The strongest correlation observed was between Facebook and Instagram, which reached a high level of significance at the 0.01 level ($r = 0.556$, $p < 0.001$).

These findings suggest that participants who are active on one social media platform are more likely to be active on others, with the closest relationships observed between Facebook-Instagram and the Snapchat pairing with TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. This interconnected platform usage aligns with reports emphasizing Meta's platforms creating a seamless ecosystem that reinforces continuous engagement (Pew Research Center, “Teens 2022”). The decline of child-centered physical spaces further funnels Generation Alpha towards amplified social media consumption, intensifying exposure to beauty and consumption pressures (Walsh; Bayron). The detailed correlation coefficients and significance values are shown in Table 1.

		Correlations					
		Age	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube	Snapchat	Facebook
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.205	.082	-.075	.166	-.088
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.236	.639	.668	.340	.617
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Instagram	Pearson Correlation	.205	1	.288	.134	.352*	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.236		.094	.443	.038	<.001
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
TikTok	Pearson Correlation	.082	.288	1	.239	.424*	.257
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.639	.094		.166	.011	.137
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
YouTube	Pearson Correlation	-.075	.134	.239	1	.134	.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.668	.443	.166		.443	.566
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Snapchat	Pearson Correlation	.166	.352*	.424*	.134	1	.361*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.340	.038	.011	.443		.033
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Facebook	Pearson Correlation	-.088	.556**	.257	.101	.361*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.617	<.001	.137	.566	.033	
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1. Pearson Correlations Between Social Media App Usage

These results align with larger findings showing Meta platforms (Instagram, Facebook) encourage cross-platform engagement (Pew Research Center, “Teens 2022”). Gen Alpha’s ecosystem is rarely confined to one application, and the decline of child-centric physical spaces may nudge youth towards deepening digital habits, sometimes breeding resignation or ambivalence toward device use (Walsh; Bayron; Kim and Song).

Further analysis investigated the relationship between social media's presence in participants’ bedtime routines and its ranking among favorite activities. A moderate negative correlation was found ($r=-0.371, p=0.028$), indicating that participants who incorporate social media into their bedtime routine are less likely to list it as one of their favorite activities.

Variable Pair	<i>rr</i>	<i>pp</i>
Bedtime Social Media Routine & Favorite Activity	-0.371	0.028

Table 2. Correlation Between Social Media Bedtime Routine and Favorite Activity

This habitual or obligatory social media use, especially at bedtime, may diminish enjoyment, echoing broader data that only a minority of Gen Alpha tweens truly enjoy social media and many find it easy to abstain (Walsh). The use of devices to self-soothe or for emotional regulation as a bedtime strategy reflects broader trends of habit-driven rather than pleasure-driven engagement (Avci et al.; Bayron; Prez-Torres). The decline of accessible, child-centric physical spaces compounds this reliance on devices, shaping digital routines that may be unsatisfying over time (Annie E. Casey Foundation).

Influencer and Peer Pressure

Descriptive frequency analysis revealed strong engagement with influencers and evidence of influencer-driven and peer-driven consumer behavior among participants. More than half of respondents (52%) reported that they follow influencers on social media. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

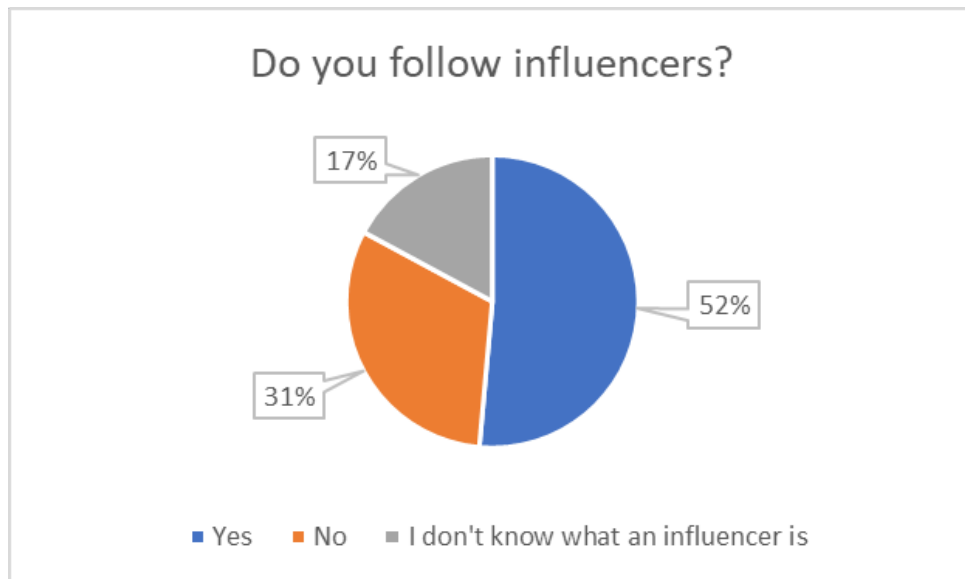


Figure 3. Proportion of Respondents Who Follow Influencers

Additionally, 69% of participants indicated that they have purchased something because they saw an influencer have it or use it. This persuasive power of influencer marketing is presented in Figure 3.

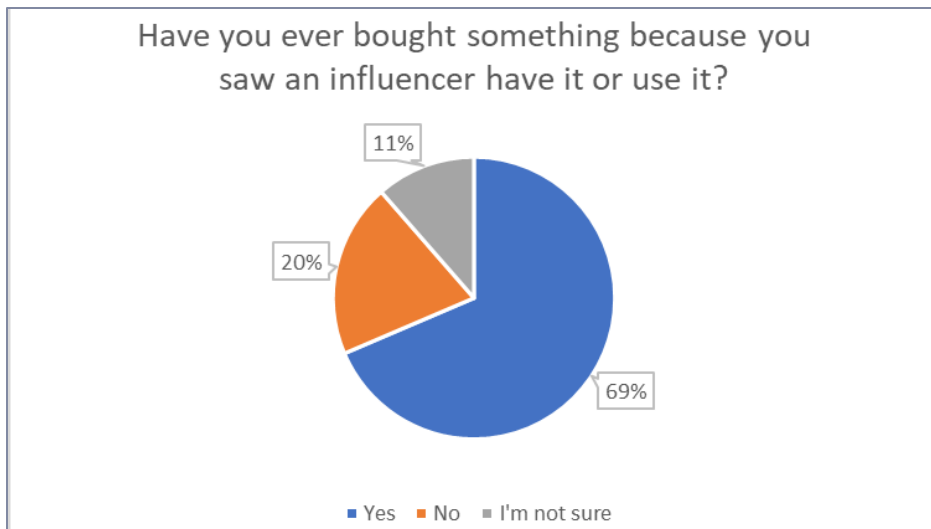


Figure 4. Proportion of Respondents Who Bought Because of Influencers

Influencers are deeply integrated into the digital and social fabric of Gen Alpha lives, routinely shaping not only attitudes and preferences but actual purchasing decisions (Tu and Lee; Gil et al.). This group’s impressionability during identity formation is vulnerable to dual pressures—online role models and peer trends—that amplify materialistic values and psychological risks (Lee and Lee; Choukas-Bradley et al.; Holland and Tiggemann).

Inferential analysis using SPSS Pearson correlations examined the relationship between having purchased influencer-promoted products and wanting a Stanley cup “because everyone else has it.” Results revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive correlation ($r=0.364, p=0.031$), summarized in Table 1.

Variable Pair	<i>rr</i>	<i>pp</i>
Buy Influencer Products & Want Stanley Cup	0.364	0.031

Table 3. Correlation Between Buying Influencer Products and Wanting a Stanley Cup Because of Peer Trends

This synergy shows influencer and peer pressure jointly drive consumer decisions, intensifying social conformity and materialism among young girls (Lee and Lee; Choukas-Bradley et al.). This dual pressure may push girls to adopt highly visible influencer-driven trends to secure group belonging, even when those trends lack deeper personal meaning, thereby heightening the risks of surface-level identity construction and comparison-based anxiety (Lee and Lee). Recognizing these forces is critical for promoting agency, resilience, and healthier engagement (Ferris et al.).

Social media influencers also inadvertently push adult-targeted skincare products to young audiences, with tweens aspiring to become influencers themselves. Many viewers may not recognize marketing intent, leading to unintentional advertising exposure and cycles of mirroring among peer groups (Lajnef).

Consumerism and Beauty Products

Building on the connection between influencer engagement and beauty product consumption, analysis was conducted to determine whether participants who identified makeup brands as one or both of their two favorite brands were more likely to purchase products promoted by influencers. As Table 1 shows, there was a marginally significant positive correlation ($r=0.329, p=0.058$) between listing a makeup brand among one's top two favorite brands and reporting that influencer marketing drove their product purchases.

Correlations

		BrandMakeup	BuyInfluencer
BrandMakeup	Pearson Correlation	1	.329
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.058
	N	34	34
BuyInfluencer	Pearson Correlation	.329	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.058	
	N	34	35

Table 4. Correlation Between Listing a Makeup Brand as a Top Two Favorite Brand and Buying Influencer-Promoted Products

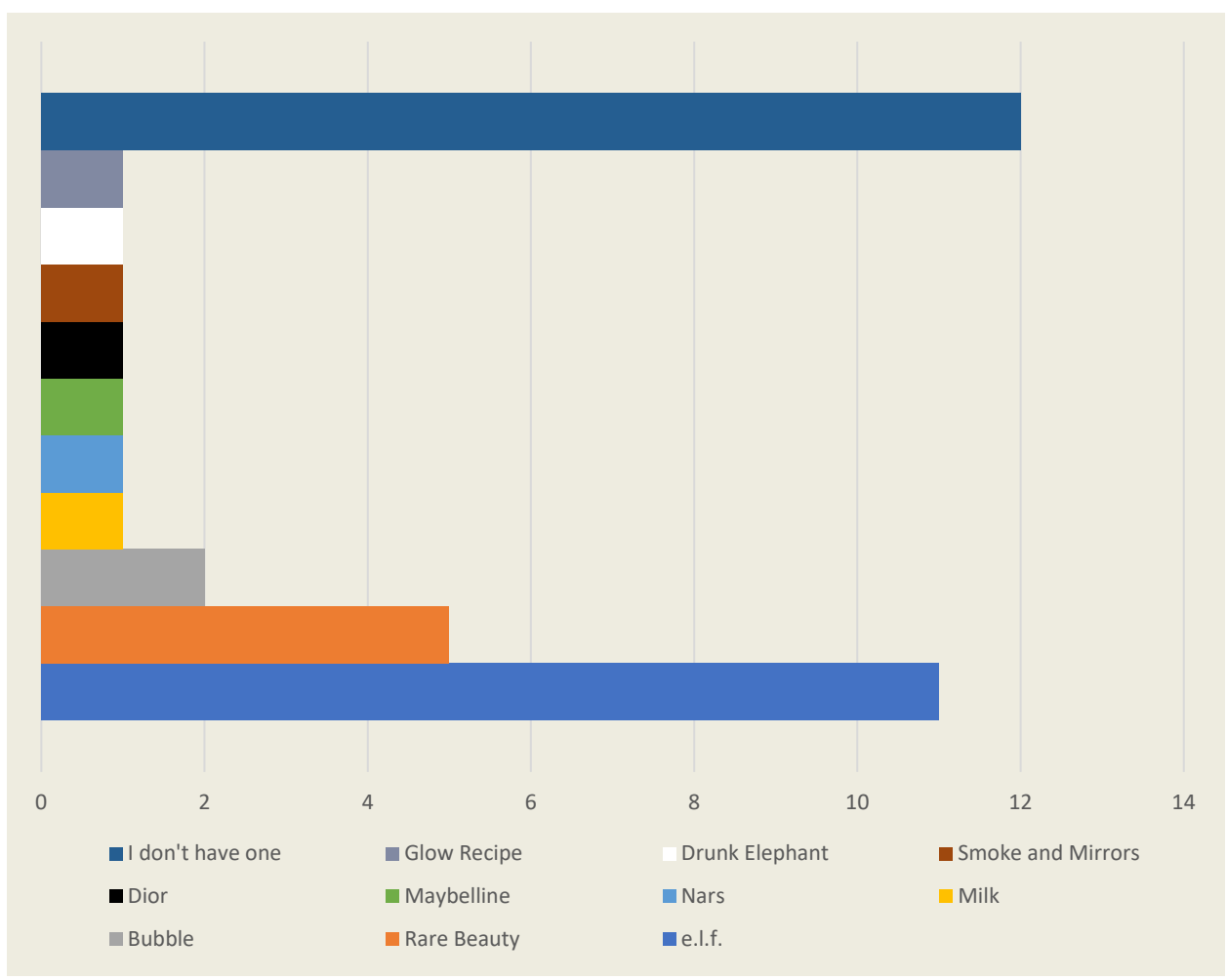
The marginally significant positive correlation between listing a makeup brand as a favorite and purchasing influencer-promoted products demonstrates that Gen Alpha's beauty preferences are shaped by influencer culture. Unlike previous cosmetic eras dominated by celebrity endorsements, this generation prefers influencers who feel authentic and relatable, such as 18-year-old Katie Fang, whose honest lifestyle and beauty content resonates deeply with tweens. This preference underscores Gen Alpha's valuation of genuine connection over celebrity, reinforcing influencer culture's role in shaping youth beauty standards and practices (Mazzone). The combined impact of influencer and peer pressure amplifies their impressionability and vulnerability, encouraging conformity and materialistic values at an early age. As a result, Gen

Alpha is more likely to wear or desire makeup products promoted by influencers, reflecting a shift toward aspirational, relatable role models rather than distant celebrities.

Descriptive frequency analysis revealed that e.l.f. was the most frequently listed favorite makeup brand among respondents, followed by Rare Beauty (see Figure 1).

Figure 5. Favorite Makeup Brands Listed by Participants

e.l.f. Cosmetics emerged as the most frequently listed favorite makeup brand among survey participants, reflecting its strong appeal to Generation Alpha. This popularity is rooted in several key factors: affordability, vegan and cruelty-free formulations, and innovative digital campaigns that leverage platforms like TikTok to engage younger audiences (Havoj; Bernstein).



The brand's accessible price point makes it a preferred choice for parents who are price-sensitive and cautious about their children's cosmetic purchases, while its inclusive marketing and empowerment narratives resonate with Gen Alpha's values (Bernstein; Mazzone).

Mazzone highlights that e.l.f.'s popularity among this age group is further amplified by its gamified and interactive marketing strategies, such as collaborations with influencers and the extension of its presence into digital environments like Roblox. These approaches not only deepen engagement but also foster a sense of empowerment and innovation, aligning with Gen Alpha's desire for brands that feel authentic and relatable. The brand's ability to combine affordability with trend-responsive campaigns positions e.l.f. as a leader in capturing the attention and loyalty of young consumers, making it a standout in the competitive beauty landscape for tweens and pre-teens (Mazzone).

This section underscores how e.l.f.'s blend of accessibility, ethical branding, and digital innovation has made it the most popular beauty brand among your survey participants, reflecting broader trends in Gen Alpha's consumer preferences and the influence of influencer-driven marketing (Mazzone; Bernstein; Havoj).

Further SPSS analysis found that participants who reported using skincare and makeup products were significantly more likely to say they have a skincare routine ($r=0.418, p=0.012$), as shown in Table 2.

		Correlations			
		SKinFavWhen Home	FriendsFaveW henHome	SocialMediaFa veWhenHome	BedRoutineSo cial
SKinFavWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	1	-.165	.352*	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.345	.038	.433
	N	35	35	35	35
FriendsFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	-.165	1	.302	.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.345		.077	.791
	N	35	35	35	35
SocialMediaFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	.352*	.302	1	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.077		.433
	N	35	35	35	35
BedRoutineSocial	Pearson Correlation	.137	.046	.137	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.433	.791	.433	
	N	35	35	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Correlation Between Skincare/Makeup Use and Skincare Routine

Participants who reported using skincare and makeup products were significantly more likely to say they have a skincare routine, indicating that skincare practices have become ritualized behaviors rather than casual use (Sutinah and Putri). This ritualization is reinforced by the popularity of social media trends, such as multi-step skincare routines and "get ready with me" videos, which were initially adopted by older demographics but have now become influential among younger Generation Alpha users (Holland and Tiggemann). These videos, often shared on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, not only demonstrate product use but also foster a sense of community and social connection, making skincare a shared and interactive experience (Mazzone).

Mazzone notes that for Gen Alpha, skincare routines often serve as soothing habits, providing a sense of control and relaxation amid rising anxiety and depression in this demographic. The act of following a routine—whether it's a simple cleanse or a multi-step process—can offer a structured, calming activity that helps young users manage stress and create

a sense of normalcy. This is especially significant in a digital age where many children are exposed to high levels of screen time and social pressures, making skincare a form of self-care that is both practical and emotionally grounding (Mazzone).

The ritualistic nature of these routines is further amplified by the aspirational portrayal of influencer lifestyles, with many tweens aspiring to emulate the beauty routines they see online. The "get ready with me" format, in particular, allows young viewers to participate vicariously in the influencer's experience, making the routine feel both personal and communal. This dynamic not only deepens engagement with skincare products but also reinforces the importance of these rituals in shaping identity and social belonging among Gen Alpha (Mazzone).

In summary, the ritual and soothing aspects of skincare routines, combined with the influence of "get ready with me" content, highlight how Gen Alpha's engagement with skincare is both a personal and social practice, shaped by digital trends and the desire for connection and self-care (Mazzone; Sutinah and Putri; Holland and Tiggemann).

Analysis of purchasing behavior for skincare and shopping at specialty retailers showed a marginally significant correlation between buying skincare and purchasing from Sephora and/or Ulta Beauty ($r=0.283, p=0.099$), depicted in Table 3.

Correlations

		BuySkinMakeup	SepUltSkinMakeup
		p	eup
BuySkinMakeup	Pearson Correlation	1	.283
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.099
	N	35	35
SepUltSkinMakeup	Pearson Correlation	.283	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.099	
	N	35	35

Table 6. Correlation Between Buying Skincare and Purchasing from Sephora/Ulta Beauty

Skincare occupies a luxury status, with specialty shopping reflecting aspirational tastes fueled by targeted marketing and peer networks (Choi et al.; Lee and Kwon). Sephora increasingly acts as a social venue akin to Starbucks for Millennials—a response to declining child-centered public spaces (Mazzone). Much like Starbucks, which became a social hub for previous generations, Sephora now serves as a destination where Gen Alpha can gather, socialize, and engage with beauty culture in a relaxed, welcoming environment. The store’s interactive displays, product sampling stations, and frequent influencer events create a sense of community and excitement, making it more than just a place to shop. For many tweens and teens, visiting Sephora is a social activity, a way to connect with friends, try new products, and experience the latest beauty trends firsthand. This shift underscores how specialty beauty retailers are not only shaping Gen Alpha’s purchasing habits but also redefining their social spaces, blending retail with leisure and self-expression (Mazzone).

Final descriptive analysis confirmed that skincare was the top purchase preference category among respondents, outpacing makeup, clothes, food, hair products, toys, and games. Additional SPSS analysis showed a significant positive correlation between listing skincare as a favorite activity when home and listing social media as a favorite activity when home ($r=0.352, p=0.038$), as detailed in Table 4.

Tabletable

		Correlations			
		SKinFavWhen Home	FriendsFaveW henHome	SocialMediaFa veWhenHome	BedRoutineSo cial
SKinFavWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	1	-.165	.352 [*]	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.345	.038	.433
	N	35	35	35	35
FriendsFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	-.165	1	.302	.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.345		.077	.791
	N	35	35	35	35
SocialMediaFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	.352 [*]	.302	1	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.077		.433
	N	35	35	35	35
BedRoutineSocial	Pearson Correlation	.137	.046	.137	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.433	.791	.433	
	N	35	35	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7. Correlation Between Skincare as Favorite Activity at Home and Social Media as Favorite Activity at Home

Final descriptive analysis confirmed that skincare was the top purchase preference category among respondents, outpacing makeup, clothes, food, hair products, toys, and games. This finding highlights the growing importance of skincare in Gen Alpha's consumer habits, reflecting a shift toward self-care and wellness at an early age. Additional SPSS analysis showed a significant positive correlation between listing skincare as a favorite activity when at home and listing social media as a favorite activity when at home, as detailed in Table 4. This connection suggests that skincare routines are not only a personal practice but also a social one, often shaped and reinforced by digital engagement.

Social media content directly influences the growing skincare obsession, often popularizing prestige brands originally marketed to adults—such as Drunk Elephant, Skinfix, Glow Recipe, and Youth To The People—with children seeking these products for relaxation or

self-care (Sutinah and Putri; Ferris et al.). Many brands have had to clarify age-appropriateness in response to viral trends, demonstrating the reach and unintended consequences of influencer-driven marketing (Sole-Smith). The blend of empowerment and risk highlights the urgent need for more critical education, parental guidance, and ethical marketing to protect vulnerable young consumers (Ferris et al.; ULA Health).

Mazzone notes that for Gen Alpha, skincare has become a central part of daily life, blending self-care with social connection. The popularity of skincare routines is amplified by social media, where “get ready with me” videos and influencer content make skincare a shared experience. Many young users turn to platforms like TikTok and YouTube to learn about products, share their own routines, and participate in beauty communities. This dynamic fosters a sense of belonging and normalizes skincare as both a relaxing ritual and a social activity, further reinforcing its appeal among Gen Alpha (Mazzone).

In summary, the prominence of skincare as a top purchase preference, combined with its strong link to social media use, demonstrates how Gen Alpha’s engagement with beauty is both personal and communal, shaped by digital trends and the desire for connection and self-care. However, the influence of social media also brings challenges, as the popularity of adult-targeted skincare brands among children underscores the need for greater awareness and ethical responsibility in marketing and education (Mazzone; Sutinah and Putri; Ferris et al.; Sole-Smith; ULA Health).

Conclusion

Achieving the Study's Objectives

This project set out to systematically examine how social media and digital culture have redefined beauty standards and consumption for Generation Alpha girls. The objectives—to document specific patterns of digital immersion, trend adoption, influencer and peer effects, and the rise of new beauty rituals—were fully met. Both the quantitative analyses and the rich qualitative responses demonstrate that social media-driven trends are not peripheral experiences but foundational to Gen Alpha's sense of self, social connection, and consumer choice.

Trend Dynamics and Generational Adaptation

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Generation Alpha's digital experience is not just the speed with which they encounter trends, but the remarkable creativity and agency with which they remake them as their own. Many trends that define Gen Alpha culture actually start outside the age group—spreading from adult creators, older teens, or unrelated pop-culture phenomena—before being transformed into something wholly “Gen Alpha.” The viral "6 7" trend is a prime example. Originally, "6 7" emerged from a song (*Doot Doot (6 7)*) by rapper Skrilla, with no intended meaning for children or tweens. The phrase spread first among older users and sports fans, picking up humor through NBA star LaMelo Ball's 6'7" height—another connection unintended for Gen Alpha but made visible on TikTok and through celebrity culture (Caruso).

However, once Gen Alpha audiences discovered the meme on TikTok, they adopted and rapidly repurposed it. For these younger users, “6 7” quickly morphed into schoolyard slang, online inside jokes, social “passwords,” and even a humorous stand-in for test scores or

achievement levels. What began as a viral adult or teen meme became a badge of group identity and emotional expression for Gen Alpha—a code that united friends, bridged online and offline interactions, and marked those “in the know.” As with many digital phenomena, the original meaning was almost irrelevant; it was the act of owning, remixing, and circulating the trend that mattered most. This process embodies the playful, performative, and collaborative nature of Gen Alpha’s culture, in which trends are continually reinterpreted and moved across contexts (Caruso).

Labubus, collectible characters with an eccentric and slightly eerie design, offer a parallel illustration. Created and marketed for adult collectors, Labubus entered Gen Alpha’s world largely through digital exposure via social media, YouTube unboxings, and especially through older siblings’ and parents’ feeds. Despite its origins and aesthetic quirks, Gen Alpha made Labubus a symbol of the nonconformist, countercultural, and imperfect—precisely the opposite of the sanitized and polished icons favored by previous generations (Kayata). Again, it is the very process of reinterpretation—taking something not “meant for them” and redefining it as a marker of their unique identity—that signals Gen Alpha’s adaptive agency.

This generational versioning of trends is also visible in content like *KPop Demon Hunters*, an animated Netflix film originally designed to capture teen and young adult fandom. Through music, visual storytelling, and fantasy-world narratives, the film achieved blockbuster status among younger viewers. Gen Alpha’s embrace of the film’s fandom, artistic remixing (e.g., fan art, TikTok dance covers), and thematic preference for authenticity over spectacle transformed a mainstream youth media trend into something with unique meaning for their own peer group (Hatchett).

Together, these cases illustrate that social media trends do not simply “trickle down” to Gen Alpha; rather, young people actively appropriate and recast them. What starts as pop or adult culture is rewritten and distributed in group chats, playgrounds, and digital spaces, resulting in trends—with meanings, rituals, and symbols—distinctively reimagined for Gen Alpha’s realities.

How It Relates to Beauty

This same mechanism of trend adaptation and creative reinterpretation is evident in the way Gen Alpha approaches beauty and skincare. Just as they reroute memes and collectibles, these tweens have redefined beauty rituals—taking elements designed for adults or influencers (fancy skincare routines, “Get Ready With Me” videos, luxury product hauls) and making them fitting to their own lives. Rather than simply imitating, Generation Alpha manipulates beauty routines for group bonding, identity expression, and accessible play: collecting prestige products like Summer Fridays lip balms and Drunk Elephant moisturizers as both social capital and functional self-care (Mazzone). Sephora trips become new sites of socialization, replacing previous generations’ toy stores or mall hangouts, while peer-shared, relatable influencers like Katie Fang become the icons of choice over unreachable celebrities.

Looking ahead, the future of beauty for Generation Alpha will likely involve ongoing debates over what “age-appropriate” skincare should look like and who should design it. Rising concerns about preteen girls applying potentially harsh or unnecessary active ingredients have led some to argue that the solution is to create gentle, child-safe product lines specifically for younger users. However, the recent backlash against actress Shay Mitchell’s kids’ skincare brand Rini illustrates how even well-intentioned attempts to offer safer formulas can be met with intense public scrutiny, with critics questioning whether any skincare line targeted at children further normalizes beauty consumption and appearance-focused routines at earlier ages

(Murray). This controversy underscores that industry responses must grapple not only with ingredient safety but also with the broader ethical questions of marketing, desirability, and the messages these products send about what young girls should value, suggesting that “fixing” the problem will require more than simply swapping adult products for kid-branded alternatives.

Generation Alpha’s beauty culture thus operates as a living trend—permeable, social, creative, and continuously open to reinvention. Even as controversies like Rini expose the risks of commercializing children’s skincare, they also highlight how rapidly norms can be challenged, debated, and reshaped in real time across platforms. Within this fluid environment, by tracing both viral memes and beauty rituals, this research demonstrates that Gen Alpha is not a passive audience for trends but an active cohort of inventors, continually redefining what it means to belong, to play, and to be “in” on the next big thing.

Contribution to the Field

This research offers a foundational baseline for understanding both the risks and creative possibilities of Gen Alpha’s digital consumer culture. Its originality lies in revealing how trends in beauty and consumption are being adapted to new meanings and contexts by youth themselves, not simply imposed upon them. The documentation of cross-platform engagement, peer and influencer synergy, and the normalization of adult-targeted products among preteens moves the field beyond broad theorizing to fine-grained, evidence-based insight.

Strengths, Limitations, and Context

A methodological strength was the deliberate pairing of quantitative rigor with qualitative voice, providing a multi-dimensional view of trends, identity, and beauty. The focused sample—female gymnasts—offered a lens on aspirational subcultures, yet future research ought to extend

across more diverse populations, including non-athletes, boys, and different regions or socioeconomic backgrounds. Reliance on self-reported data introduces some bias, and the cross-sectional design means more work must be done to unpack how these digital and beauty trends evolve over time.

This research is strongly aligned with prior studies of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, confirming materialistic, anxious, and high-engagement digital patterns, but extends existing literature by showing the creativity and flexibility with which these trends are made their own. Where much past scholarship positions children as passive consumers, these findings argue for a view of Gen Alpha as cultural “remixers,” whose agency shapes the very landscape they inhabit.

Implications and Future Directions

Should these patterns hold in broader samples, the implications for families, educators, the beauty industry, and policymakers are profound. Gen Alpha is leveraging digital tools and social spaces to create peer-driven communities and flexible rituals—but also faces rising pressures around beauty standards, material success, and conformity. If these behaviors go unchecked, the risks of anxiety, exclusion, and unhealthy habits increase. However, intentional support—ethically-minded influencer marketing, transparent brand communication, thoughtful regulation, and digital/media literacy education—can harness Gen Alpha’s creativity toward healthier outcomes.

Future research should expand demographic reach, track these trends over time, and explore intervention models that preserve agency while minimizing risk. The evidence here makes clear that beauty, in the hands of Generation Alpha, is as much about participation in play

and trend-making as about the products themselves—a perspective that will be vital as this cohort ages and sets new standards both for themselves and the markets that serve them.

Summary of Findings

In sum, Generation Alpha girls are not mere followers—they are trendsetters and trend transformers. Whether inventing new meanings for viral memes, appropriating adult beauty brands, or reshaping “self-care” into a community, their influence is felt across digital platforms and in offline consumer spaces. This study establishes an empirical and conceptual foundation for future scholarship, intervention, and industry strategy, underscoring the need to see these youth as both vulnerable and vigorously creative participants in the ever-evolving world of social media and beauty culture.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

This appendix contains the full list of survey questions administered to female Generation Alpha participants, organized by topic.

Section 1: Social Media Use

1. How old are you?
2. Which of the following social media apps do you use? (Check all that apply):
 - TikTok
 - Instagram
 - YouTube
 - Snapchat
 - Facebook
 - I don't have a phone or tablet
 - I don't use any of these apps
 - I'm not allowed on social media
3. Which app is your favorite? (Choose one)
4. Do you follow influencers on social media (like TikTok or Instagram)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I don't know what an influencer is

5. Who is your favorite person or idol to follow on social media? If you don't have social media, please write who your favorite person is:
6. Have you ever bought something because you saw an influencer have it or use it?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I'm not sure

Section 2: Consumer Habits

7. What is your favorite thing to buy?
 - Clothes
 - Makeup
 - Skincare
 - Food
 - Hair stuff
 - Toys
 - Games
8. Do you buy skincare products or makeup?
 - Yes
 - No
9. Where do you like to buy things from?

- Stores (like Target or Walmart)
- Online (like Amazon)
- Social media (like TikTok Shop or Instagram Market)

10. Do you have a skincare routine?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know what a skincare routine is

11. What kinds of items have you bought from stores like Sephora or Ulta? (Check all that apply)

- Makeup
- Hair products
- Skincare
- Anti-aging products
- I have never bought anything from Sephora or Ulta
- I've never heard of Sephora or Ulta
- I bought something not listed above at Sephora or Ulta

12. What is your favorite makeup brand? If you don't have one, please write "I don't have one"

13. Name two of your favorite brands (Examples: Disney, Target, Stanley, Alix Earle, Starbucks)

Section 3: Beauty and Media Perception

14. If everyone at school uses a certain brand like a Stanley cup, would you want one?

15. If you have a Stanley cup, why did you buy it?

- All my friends had one
- I saw an influencer use it
- I saw it in the store and wanted it
- Got it as a gift
- Someone in my family had one
- Don't have one
- Another reason

16. If you buy something, how do you pay for it?

17. What is your favorite store to buy things from?

Section 4: Media Consumption and Other Interests

18. What devices do you watch or use the most? (Choose one)

- TV or Television
- Phone
- Computer

- iPad or Tablet
- I don't like any of them

19. What is your favorite thing to do when you are home? (Choose one)

- Watch a movie
- Watch a TV or television show
- Watch YouTube videos
- Watch TikToks
- Play with toys
- Run around and play with family or friends

Section 5: Financial and Family Influence

20. How do you usually get money to buy things?

- Money earned from chores
- Money gifted for birthdays
- Parents buy it for me
- Sometimes parents buy it
- Parents usually say no
- None of these

Section 6: Sleep and Bedtime Routine

21. Which of the following are in your bedtime routine? (Check all that apply)

- Watch TV or television
- Scroll on Instagram
- Watch TikTok videos
- Listen to music
- Read a book
- Read on phone or tablet
- Watch videos on YouTube
- Play games on phone or tablet
- I don't do any of these, I just go to bed
- Something else (please specify)

22. Which devices are in your bedroom? (Check all that apply)

- Phone
- Tablet
- Computer
- Apple Watch
- TV or television

Section 7: Spending Limits and Gifts

23. If you want something, how much would it have to cost for your parents to say no to buying it for you?
24. What is the most expensive thing your parents have gotten you? If you don't know, please write "I don't know."
-

Appendix B: Data Coding and Analysis Procedures

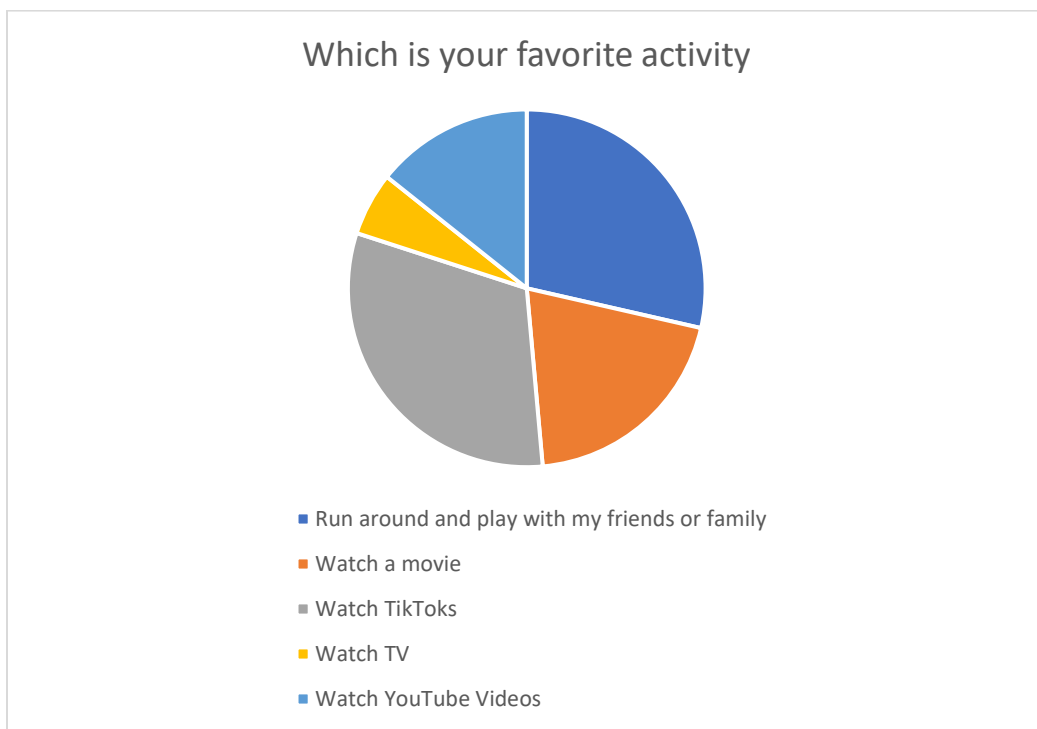
- Data collected from printed surveys were numerically coded for input into Excel and subsequently SPSS.
 - Categorical responses (e.g., gender) were assigned numeric codes (1 = Female, 2 = Male).
 - Variable properties (type, label, and value labels) were defined clearly to facilitate accurate statistical processing.
 - The data analysis employed Pearson correlations and frequency tables to explore relationships between social media engagement, beauty habits, and consumer behaviors.
-

Appendix C: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Appendix C presents supplementary descriptive statistics and correlation analyses that expand on the primary results reported in Chapter 4. These figures and tables provide additional detail on

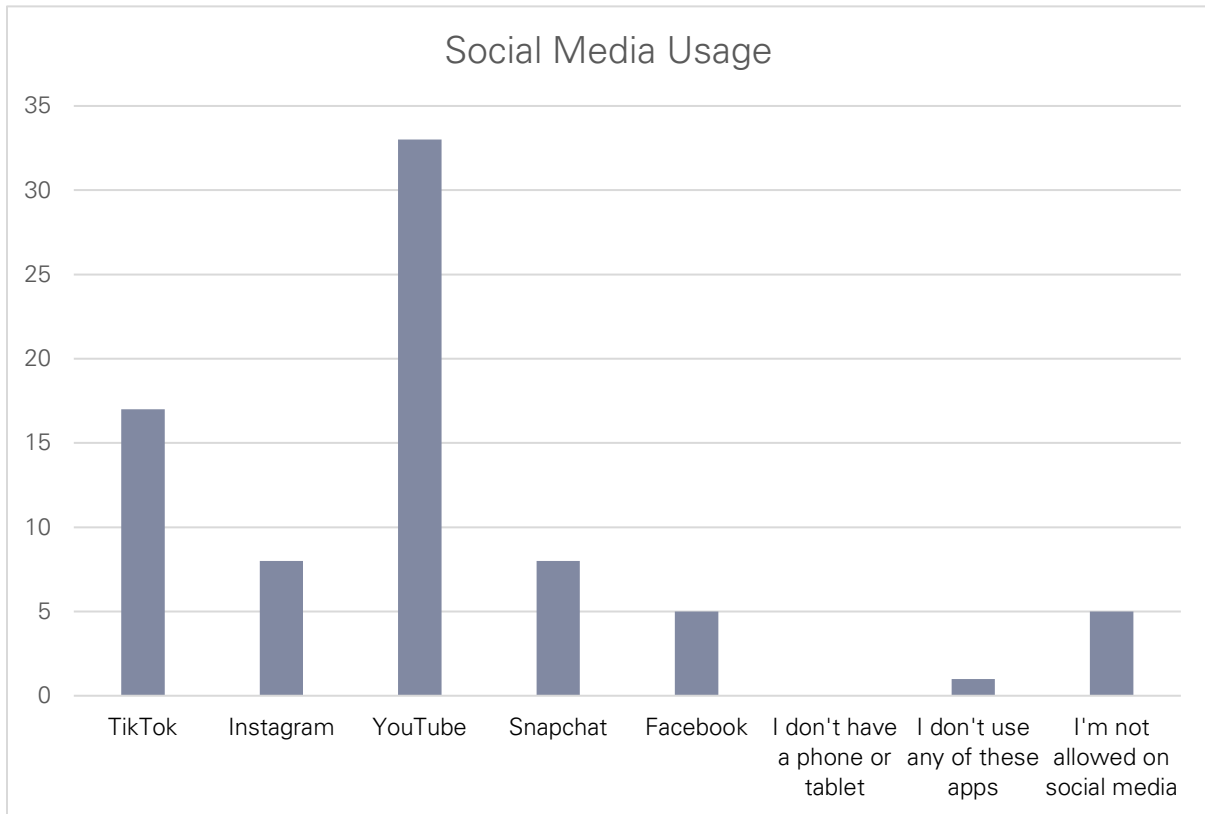
participants' activities, platform use, influencer exposure, and clustered skincare and beauty behaviors.

Figure C1. Distribution of favorite activities among survey participants, illustrating how often respondents selected options such as active play, social media, and skincare or beauty routines as preferred at-home activities.



Note: N = 35. This figure shows near-equal preference for TikTok viewing and physical play.

Figure C2. Self-reported social media usage among participants, showing the proportion who use platforms including YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook.



Note: Visualizes widespread device ownership and varying app usage patterns.

Figure C3. Proportion of respondents who report following influencers on social media, indicating the extent of direct influencer exposure in the sample.

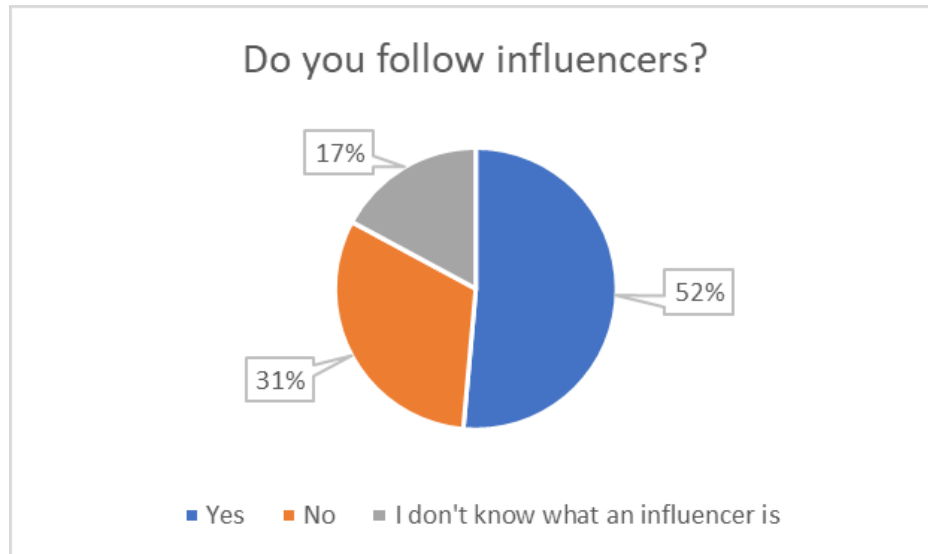


Figure C4. Proportion of respondents who report purchasing a product because they saw an influencer use or promote it, highlighting the prevalence of influencer-driven consumption.

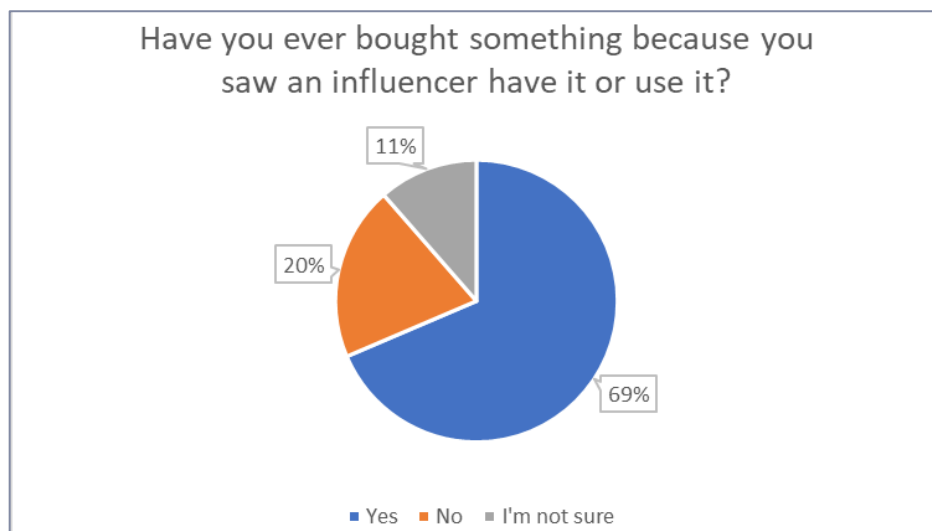


Figure C5. Favorite makeup brands listed by participants, summarizing brand awareness and preference patterns within the sample.

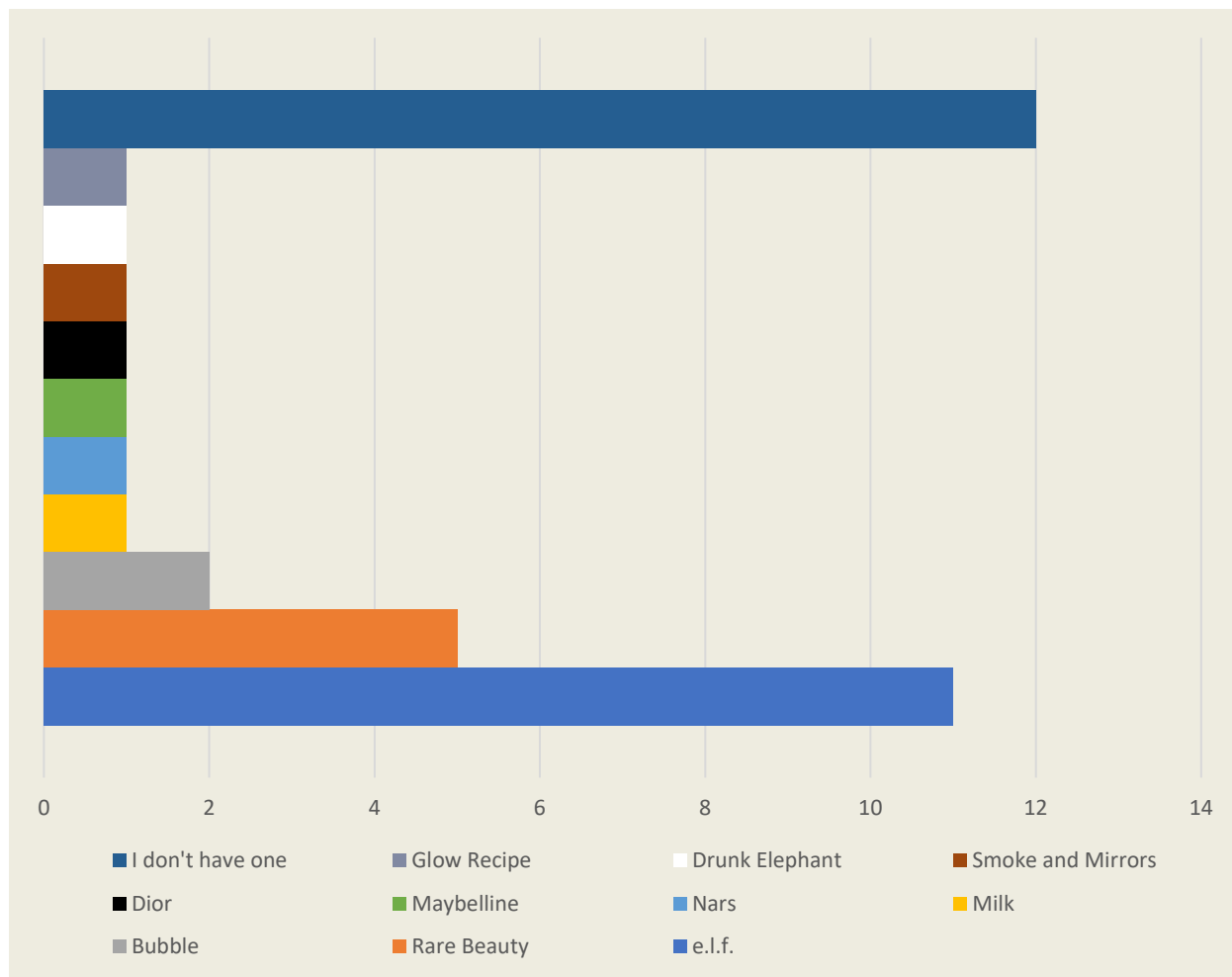


Table C1. Pearson correlations between reported usage of major social media apps (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook), demonstrating patterns of cross-platform engagement and co-use.

		Correlations					
		Age	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube	Snapchat	Facebook
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.205	.082	-.075	.166	-.088
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.236	.639	.668	.340	.617
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Instagram	Pearson Correlation	.205	1	.288	.134	.352*	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.236		.094	.443	.038	<.001
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
TikTok	Pearson Correlation	.082	.288	1	.239	.424*	.257
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.639	.094		.166	.011	.137
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
YouTube	Pearson Correlation	-.075	.134	.239	1	.134	.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.668	.443	.166		.443	.566
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Snapchat	Pearson Correlation	.166	.352*	.424*	.134	1	.361*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.340	.038	.011	.443		.033
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Facebook	Pearson Correlation	-.088	.556**	.257	.101	.361*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.617	<.001	.137	.566	.033	
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: N = 35. *p < .05, **p < .01. Strongest correlation: Facebook-Instagram (r = 0.556, p < 0.001).

Table C2. Correlation between including social media in one's bedtime routine and listing social media as a favorite activity, suggesting distinctions between habitual and leisure-driven engagement.

Variable Pair	<i>rr</i>	<i>pp</i>
Bedtime Social Media Routine & Favorite Activity	-0.371	0.028

Note: N = 35. $r = -0.371$, $p = 0.028^*$. Negative correlation indicates bedtime use feels habitual, not enjoyable.

Table C3. Correlation between buying influencer-promoted products and wanting a Stanley Cup because of peer or trend influence, indicating how influencer exposure intersects with trend-driven consumption.

Variable Pair	<i>rr</i>	<i>pp</i>
Buy Influencer Products & Want Stanley Cup	0.364	0.031

Note: N = 35. $r = 0.364$, $p = 0.031$.

Table C4. Correlation between listing a makeup brand as a top-two favorite brand and buying influencer-promoted products, reflecting links between brand identification and influencer-driven purchasing.

		Correlations	
		BrandMakeup	BuyInfluencer
BrandMakeup	Pearson Correlation	1	.329
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.058
	N	34	34
BuyInfluencer	Pearson Correlation	.329	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.058	
	N	34	35

Note: N = 35. $r = 0.329$, $p = 0.058$ (marginally significant).

Table C5. Correlation between skincare/makeup use and having a skincare routine, underscoring how product use and routine-building cluster together.

		Correlations			
		SKinFavWhenHome	FriendsFaveWhenHome	SocialMediaFaveWhenHome	BedRoutineSocial
SKinFavWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	1	-.165	.352*	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.345	.038	.433
	N	35	35	35	35
FriendsFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	-.165	1	.302	.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.345		.077	.791
	N	35	35	35	35
SocialMediaFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	.352*	.302	1	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.077		.433
	N	35	35	35	35
BedRoutineSocial	Pearson Correlation	.137	.046	.137	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.433	.791	.433	
	N	35	35	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: N = 35. [Insert r and p values from your data]

Table C6. Correlation between buying skincare products and purchasing from Sephora or Ulta Beauty, highlighting the role of prestige beauty retailers in participants' consumption.

		BuySkinMakeup	SepUltSkinMakeup
BuySkinMakeup	Pearson Correlation	1	.283
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.099
	N	35	35
SepUltSkinMakeup	Pearson Correlation	.283	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.099	
	N	35	35

Note: N = 35. [Insert r and p values from your data]

Table C7. Correlation between listing skincare as a favorite at-home activity and listing social media as a favorite at-home activity, suggesting interconnected engagement between beauty routines and digital media use.

		SKinFavWhenHome	FriendsFaveWhenHome	SocialMediaFaveWhenHome	BedRoutineSocial
SKinFavWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	1	-.165	.352*	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.345	.038	.433
	N	35	35	35	35
FriendsFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	-.165	1	.302	.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.345		.077	.791
	N	35	35	35	35
SocialMediaFaveWhenHome	Pearson Correlation	.352*	.302	1	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.077		.433
	N	35	35	35	35
BedRoutineSocial	Pearson Correlation	.137	.046	.137	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.433	.791	.433	
	N	35	35	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: N = 35. r = 0.352, p = 0.038

Appendix D: Ethical Considerations and Permissions

- This study received IRB approval from Lindenwood University.
 - Parental consent was obtained for all participants.
 - Ethical safeguards ensured participant anonymity and voluntary participation.
 - Participants were informed of their right to decline or withdraw without penalty.
-

Appendix E: Additional Qualitative Data

- Selected anonymized quotations from open-ended survey responses that illustrate participant attitudes toward beauty and social media.
- Summaries highlighting recurring themes such as peer pressure, influencer impact, and self-esteem issues.