

Gen Z Appearance and Its Impact on Young People: A Comparative Study

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Abstract—The present study examined selected consumer and self-perception outcomes associated with Gen Z appearance-related culture among young people. The study focused on consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image. A quantitative, cross-sectional comparative survey design was used. The final analyzed sample comprised 76 participants divided into three age groups: 15–20 years ($n = 24$), 21–25 years ($n = 37$), and 26–30 years ($n = 15$). Participants completed structured five-point Likert-type measures assessing appearance-related consumer and self-perception domains. Descriptive statistics, Shapiro–Wilk tests, Welch's one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs), and Tukey post hoc comparisons were used. Mean scores were 18.20 ($SD = 4.25$) for consumer brand awareness, 18.40 ($SD = 4.99$) for materialism, and 14.30 ($SD = 4.62$) for perceived image. No statistically significant age-group differences were observed for consumer brand awareness, $F(2, 38.6) = 0.620$, $p = .543$; materialism, $F(2, 32.4) = 0.570$, $p = .571$; or perceived image, $F(2, 32.6) = 0.445$, $p = .645$. Post hoc comparisons were also nonsignificant. The findings indicate that, within this sample, the measured appearance-related outcomes did not differ significantly across age groups. The results have implications for media literacy, mindful consumption, and interventions addressing appearance-related pressures. Given the purposive sampling strategy, modest sample size, and cross-sectional design, the findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Index Terms—Gen Z, appearance, consumer brand awareness, materialism, perceived image, young people, social media

I. INTRODUCTION

Appearance has become an increasingly salient component of identity, communication, and social

positioning in contemporary digital culture. For Generation Z, visual social media, influencer culture, fast-changing fashion trends, and digitally mediated peer interaction have created an environment in which clothing, grooming, body image, and aesthetic presentation can function as markers of identity and belonging. The dissertation frames appearance as more than physical presentation and emphasizes its links with self-expression, social evaluation, consumption, and self-perception.

Young adulthood and late adolescence are periods characterized by identity exploration, self-definition, and sensitivity to social evaluation. In the present study, appearance is considered within this developmental and social context. Digital platforms can repeatedly expose individuals to curated representations of beauty, fashion, and lifestyle, potentially increasing opportunities for social comparison and external evaluation. At the same time, appearance can provide a means of creativity, individuality, and social expression.

An important dimension of the study is consumer psychology. Appearance-related consumption includes clothing, beauty products, branded items, and other products that may be used to communicate identity or social status. The dissertation conceptualizes consumer psychology behavior through brand awareness and related appearance-driven purchasing tendencies. Materialism is also considered because the symbolic value attached to possessions may influence how individuals connect consumption with self-presentation and social recognition.

The perceived image represents the internal psychological dimension of appearance. Clothing and

fashion choices may be interpreted as expressions of identity, while comparison with models, influencers, and peers may influence how individuals evaluate their appearance. The study therefore treats perceived image as relevant to self-concept, identity expression, and social perception.

Social cognitive processes are relevant because individuals learn from and respond to social environments. Through observation, comparison, feedback, and perceived social expectations, appearance norms can be maintained or challenged. The present study brings together consumer-related and self-perception variables to examine whether these outcomes differ across age groups within the selected sample.

II. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The study is informed by a social-cognitive perspective in which behavior and self-perception are understood in relation to observation and interaction with the social environment. Digital platforms can operate as environments in which appearance-related standards are repeatedly observed, evaluated, and reproduced. The dissertation also draws on the idea that fashion and appearance can function as forms of identity expression and social distinction. Bourdieu's (1984) account of cultural capital provides a relevant conceptual lens because fashion choices can communicate social positioning and symbolic preferences.

Consumer behavior perspectives suggest that purchases can carry meanings beyond functional utility. Solomon (2018) conceptualizes consumer behavior as involving processes through which individuals select, purchase, use, and evaluate products in relation to broader psychological and social meanings. In the context of Gen Z appearance, branded fashion and trend-oriented products may therefore become part of identity construction and social signaling.

The conceptual framework links appearance-related influence with three measured outcome domains: consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image. The dissertation also discusses social comparison, peer perception, and self-evaluation. However, the reported statistical analysis directly tests the three variables for which numerical results are

available. Accordingly, this paper does not claim statistical tests of separate social-comparison or peer-perception constructs.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research reviewed in the dissertation suggests that Gen Z consumption is shaped by identity, social media, trends, sustainability concerns, brand authenticity, and influencer culture. Francis and Hoefel (2018) reported that Gen Z consumers have distinctive expectations concerning identity, authenticity, and social responsibility. Priporas et al. (2017) examined Generation Z consumers' expectations in smart retailing and highlighted the importance of technology-mediated interactions.

Research on influencers also indicates that online personalities can affect consumer responses. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that perceived credibility of Instagram-based online celebrities was associated with purchase-related responses among young female users. The dissertation uses this literature to support the broader proposition that appearance-oriented digital environments can shape consumer awareness and fashion-related decisions.

Fashion and sustainability research identifies a recurring gap between attitudes and behavior. Joy et al. (2012) discussed tensions between fashion consumption and sustainability, while Niinimäki (2010) examined eco-clothing, consumer identity, and ideology. Szymkowiak et al. (2021) considered emotional factors in sustainable consumption among Generation Z. Together, this literature indicates that consumer decisions can involve psychological, emotional, and identity-related considerations.

Identity is another major theme. The dissertation emphasizes that clothing and appearance can be used to express individuality and communicate social belonging. Solomon (2018) conceptualizes consumption as connected to identity construction and communication, while Bourdieu (1984) provides a broader account of taste and distinction. These perspectives support examining appearance-related consumption alongside perceived image.

Despite this literature, the dissertation identifies gaps involving limited integration of consumer behavior, self-identity, and social-cognitive processes; reliance on self-report and cross-sectional methods; limited cross-cultural and longitudinal evidence; and

insufficient attention to rapidly evolving digital appearance culture. The present study addresses a portion of this gap by comparing measured outcomes across age groups.

IV. RESEARCH GAP

The literature reviewed in the dissertation indicates that appearance, consumer behavior, identity, and social comparison have often been examined separately. There is comparatively less work integrating these dimensions in a single framework among young people exposed to contemporary digital appearance culture. The dissertation also identifies a need for comparative research examining whether appearance-related outcomes vary across demographic groups. The present study responds to this gap by comparing consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image across age groups.

V. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the influence of Gen Z appearance-related trends on consumer psychology behavior among young people.
- To analyze appearance-related differences in perceived self-identity, operationalized in the present analysis through perceived image.
- To investigate appearance-related social and cognitive outcomes through the measured materialism variable and related questionnaire content.
- To compare consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image across age groups.
- To examine the interrelationship of appearance-related consumption and self-perception as conceptualized by the study.

VI. HYPOTHESES

- H1: There will be a significant difference in consumer psychology behavior across groups.
- H2: Gen Z appearance will significantly influence perceived self-identity among young people.
- H3: There will be a significant impact of appearance on social cognitive outcomes.
- H4: There will be significant differences between age groups on consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image.

The corresponding null hypotheses stated that no statistically significant differences or effects would be observed. Because the reported analysis compared age groups rather than directly testing causal influence of appearance exposure, the statistical conclusions in this paper are limited to age-group differences.

VII. METHOD

Research Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative survey design. Data were collected at one point in time and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The dissertation specifies one-way ANOVA and post hoc comparisons to examine group differences.

Participants and Sampling

The final analyzed sample comprised 76 participants. Participants were grouped by age as 15–20 years ($n = 24$), 21–25 years ($n = 37$), and 26–30 years ($n = 15$). Purposive sampling was described as the principal sampling approach, with participants selected because they were relevant to the topic of appearance-related content and consumer behavior. The dissertation also refers to an intended sample of approximately 100–150 participants, but the reported results are based on 76 complete cases; therefore, $N = 76$ is used throughout this paper.

A methodological inconsistency is present in the source: the methodology describes young adults aged 18–30 years, whereas the final sample includes a 15–20 age category and the consent form permits participation from 15–30 years. Accordingly, this paper uses the neutral term young people when describing the total sample rather than imposing an age definition not consistently supported by the source.

Measures

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The dissertation describes three principal measurement domains.

- Consumer Brand Awareness/Consumer Psychology Scale: Six items assessing preference for well-known brands, confidence associated with branded fashion, perceived quality and status

of brands, satisfaction with fashion purchases, following fashion trends through social media and influencers, and the role of fashion in self-presentation.

- Self and Identity Perception Scale: Six items assessing whether clothing reflects identity, confidence when following fashion trends, dissatisfaction arising from comparison with models or influencers, body-related feelings, individuality, and clarity of personal style.
- Social and Cognitive Outcomes Scale: Five items assessing social comparison, concern about others' judgments, influence of trends on purchasing decisions, perceived social acceptance, and pressure to dress in particular ways.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and consent was obtained before participation. Questionnaires were administered online or offline depending on accessibility. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality and anonymity were stated to be maintained, and data were intended for academic purposes. The questionnaire was described as requiring approximately 5–10 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using jamovi (Version 2.6). Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess normality. Welch's one-way ANOVA was used to compare the three age groups. Tukey post hoc comparisons were reported for pairwise group differences.

VIII. RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	Skewness
Consumer Brand Awareness	76	18.20	4.25	0.417
Materialism	76	18.40	4.99	0.178
Perceived Image	76	14.30	4.62	−0.0795

All three variables had complete data for the 76 participants. Consumer brand awareness had a mean of 18.20 (SD = 4.25), materialism had a mean of 18.40 (SD = 4.99), and perceived image had a mean of 14.30 (SD = 4.62). The reported skewness values were small, indicating no pronounced asymmetry.

Normality

Shapiro–Wilk tests were nonsignificant for consumer brand awareness, $W = 0.981$, $p = .303$; materialism, $W = 0.981$, $p = .328$; and perceived image, $W = 0.987$, $p = .609$. Thus, the reported results did not indicate significant departures from normality.

Table 2 Welch's One-Way ANOVA Comparing Age Groups

Variable	F	df1	df2	p
Consumer Brand Awareness	0.620	2	38.6	.543
Materialism	0.570	2	32.4	.571
Perceived Image	0.445	2	32.6	.645

Age-Group Comparisons

Welch's one-way ANOVA indicated no statistically significant age-group differences in any of the three study variables. For consumer brand awareness, $F(2,$

$38.6) = 0.620$, $p = .543$. For materialism, $F(2, 32.4) = 0.570$, $p = .571$. For perceived image, $F(2, 32.6) = 0.445$, $p = .645$. Therefore, the null hypotheses concerning age-group differences were not rejected.

Descriptively, consumer brand awareness increased from $M = 17.50$ in the 15–20 group to $M = 18.20$ in the 21–25 group and $M = 19.00$ in the 26–30 group. Materialism was highest in the 21–25 group ($M = 18.90$), compared with the 15–20 group ($M = 18.40$) and 26–30 group ($M = 17.10$). Perceived image was $M = 13.50, 14.60,$ and 14.70 across the three age groups, respectively. These descriptive differences were small and were not statistically significant.

Post Hoc Comparisons

Tukey post hoc comparisons did not identify significant pairwise differences. For consumer brand awareness, the reported pairwise p values ranged from .557 to .821. For materialism, p values ranged from .489 to .918. For perceived image, p values ranged from .607 to .999. These results were consistent with the omnibus ANOVA findings.

IX. DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether selected appearance-related consumer and self-perception outcomes differed across age groups. The results showed moderate levels of consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image, but no statistically significant differences among the three age groups. The findings therefore do not support the hypotheses predicting significant age-group differences.

The absence of significant age-group differences may reflect the shared digital and consumer environment experienced by participants across the selected age range. The dissertation proposes that social media and appearance-oriented content create similar exposure to trends, brands, influencers, and social expectations. If exposure is relatively homogeneous, small chronological differences may not be sufficient to produce detectable differences in the measured outcomes.

Consumer brand awareness showed a small descriptive increase with age, but the difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that the older participants in the sample had somewhat higher mean brand-awareness scores, but the evidence is insufficient to conclude that age is associated with this difference. Similarly, materialism was descriptively highest among participants aged 21–25, yet the omnibus test indicated that this variation was not statistically significant.

Perceived images also showed a small increase across age groups. However, the nonsignificant result indicates that the present data do not establish age-group differences in perceived image. This finding cautions against assuming that appearance-related concerns necessarily become stronger or weaker with age within the studied range.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of the operationalization used in the analysis. The dissertation conceptualizes Gen Z appearance broadly, including fashion trends, social media exposure, identity expression, and social comparison. However, the inferential results directly test age-group differences in three scale scores. Therefore, the results support the conclusion that the measured outcomes did not differ significantly by age group; they do not establish that Gen Z appearance causes consumer behavior, materialism, or perceived image.

Overall, the findings suggest a pervasive rather than strongly age-differentiated appearance-related environment within this sample. This interpretation is compatible with the literature reviewed in the dissertation, which emphasizes digital platforms, fashion trends, brands, influencers, and identity processes in contemporary youth culture. At the same time, the cross-sectional design and purposive sample limit broader conclusions.

X. IMPLICATIONS

The findings have several practical implications. Educational institutions may benefit from media-literacy initiatives that help young people critically evaluate appearance-related content, influencer marketing, and idealized representations. Psychological and counseling interventions can address self-esteem, identity clarity, social comparison, and appearance-related pressure without assuming that such concerns are restricted to a particular age group. Consumer education may encourage mindful purchasing and awareness of the distinction between personal needs and appearance-driven consumption. The results also support a broad preventive approach because appearance-related influences may be shared across age groups in digitally connected populations.

XI. LIMITATIONS

- The final analyzed sample was relatively small (N = 76), which limits statistical power and generalizability.
- Purposive sampling may have introduced selection bias and reduced representativeness of the wider population.
- The study was cross-sectional; therefore, causal relationships cannot be established.
- The source dissertation contains inconsistent age eligibility information: the methodology refers to 18–30 years, whereas the final sample and consent form include participants aged 15–30 years.
- The dissertation does not report sufficient psychometric evidence, such as reliability coefficients or validation statistics, for the study sample.
- Several hypotheses are phrased as influence or impact hypotheses, whereas the reported inferential analysis tests age-group differences. Conclusions should therefore be limited to the analyses actually conducted.
- The study was conducted in a specific sociocultural context, which may limit generalizability to other populations.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Recruit larger and more diverse samples using probability or stratified sampling where feasible.
- Examine social media exposure, influencer engagement, self-esteem, body image, peer influence, and social comparison as separate variables.
- Use validated standardized instruments and report reliability and validity evidence for all scales.
- Use longitudinal designs to examine changes in appearance-related attitudes and consumer behavior over time.
- Use mixed-method designs to combine statistical patterns with participants' lived experiences of fashion, identity, and social evaluation.
- Conduct cross-cultural research to determine how cultural norms and socioeconomic conditions shape appearance-related consumption and self-perception.

- Separate late-adolescent and adult samples where developmental differences are theoretically important.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The present study provides a quantitative examination of selected appearance-related outcomes among 76 young participants. Consumer brand awareness, materialism, and perceived image were all present at moderate levels, but none differed significantly across the three age groups. The findings therefore do not support the proposed age-group differences. Instead, they suggest that the measured appearance-related outcomes may be relatively similar across the sampled age range. The study contributes to understanding contemporary appearance culture by bringing consumer and self-perception variables into a single comparative framework, while also highlighting the need for larger, longitudinal, psychometrically stronger, and more diverse investigations.

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