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How AI-Powered Agents Have Become Gen Z's Digital Beauty Advisor

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Abstract

Generation Z is the first generation to go through life that was entirely digital. Generation Z is disrupting beauty and wellness retail through their adoption of AI- powered beauty advisors. While human brand representative consultations have been the norm, real time virtual makeovers and personalized recommendations are emerging. Beauty brands are increasingly using AI, as it suits Gen Z's demand for speed, customization, and transparency while also redefining marketing execution and consumer experience while shopping in beauty and wellness. By way of a qualitative survey of consumers aged 18-27 years, this study considers how AI-powered beauty advisors are influencing Generation Z's trust, engagement, and purchasing behaviors. Participants provided their perceptions of AI-powered beauty advisors with respect to accuracy vs emotional engagement along with comparisons with in store beauty consultations. To analysis behavioral reactions, descriptive statistics, t-test, correlations, and regressions were conducted.

Research highlights the growing role of AI and augmented reality on self-image and brand participation (Ameen et al., 2022; Rajegowada et al., 2023); industry reports highlight high consumer expectations and demand for AI-augmented beauty experiences from Gen Z (Revieve, 2021; Professional beauty, 2025; Vogue Business, 2025). This study illustrates key gaps in trust and actual purchase behavior, especially distinguishing the "trust-but-not-buy" gap. Respondents report largely trusting AI recommendations not only to be accurate but also personalized; however, participants did not consistently take the plunge from trust into purchase behavior. Regression result demonstrated significant negative relationship between perceived AI accuracy and purchase behavior, and higher level of engagement with AI led to increased satisfaction and brand perception. Demographics such as gender, age, and prior use of AI services exhibited no significant effect, reinforcing common Gen Z behaviors.

Results indicate that AI can facilitate engagement but emotional connections and social validation are needed to trigger purchases. Brands should embrace emotional engagement, social validation, and ethical design principles in order to meet Gen Zs evolving expectations.

Keywords: AI beauty advisors, Generation Z, digital engagement, consumer trust purchasing behavior

1. Introduction

The beauty industry has changed dramatically in recent years, and significantly due to developments in

artificial intelligence and digital interaction. What had been once a conversation with a beauty adviser in a store, now has expanded to an AI adviser powered by computer vision, natural language understanding and augmented reality, to deliver hyper-personalized beauty experiences. These virtual advisers assess skin tone, texture, and other slight facial indicators, to present products in real time, render makeup looks on a live feed, and modify suggestions based on responses from skins (e.g. subtle emotional clues). The advanced integration of sensory-driven interfaces and emotionally-sentient algorithms not only enhances product discovery, but also reimagines the meaning of authenticity within the parameters of beauty marketing.

Generation Z is at the center of this evolution. They were born into a world where smartphones are intrinsic components of their identities. Generation Z wants immediacy, transparency, and co-creation when researching beauty brands. AI agents deliver immediacy, transparency, and co-creation as a digital conversation partner always available and unbiased by traditional beauty practices which limit self-expression, and able to cultivate real conversations. Generation Z desires community led, experiential journeys and gets this through chatting with chatbot agents on their social media channels, or its digital try-on approaches used in the virtual commerce playing space. AI agents can respond to Generation Z's individual specific questions around foundation tones, but also respond to a generation that wants to know how products fit into their lifestyle, with product recommendations alongside wellness advice and ingredient research, in a way tailored to a generation conscious of being true to the whole self.

Although there is an abundance of research on chatbots and AR makeup applications, the specific role of AI-powered beauty advisors as trusted co-creators for Gen Z is still uncharted territory. Most previous scholarship either compartmentalized technological capabilities, or consumer characteristics, and never essentially bridged the advancement of the algorithms with how any emotional trust would lead to ongoing brand loyalty. The research descriptions have also been missing noteworthy discussions around aspects of algorithmic fairness for matching diverse skin tones, consumer data privacy when using sensitive facial biometrics, or ethical storytelling of conversational flows. Critical considerations in this area are frequently presented as standalone when they require a holistic view. These important aspects have yet to be detailed together to contextualize whether any one value is more importantly influencing Gen Z's acceptance or advocacy for AI enhancements.

This research examines the journey of AI beauty agents from simple recommendations engines into a full-fledged digital stylist. We consider the psychological triggers that appeal to Gen Z and also investigate how real time emotion recognition provided by AI agents improves the perceived authenticity of the recommendations, and the influence on key marketing outcomes such as purchase intent, repeat interaction, and organic sharing on social media. Concurrently we will explore the ethics of beauty AI. We advocate for inclusive data sets, known consent, and fairness audits to ensure that the technology works equally as well for every shade.

2. Review of literature

Artificial intelligence (AI) has shifted from being an analytics tool used in the background, to a technology that is front facing to the consumer. It is changing the beauty and wellness landscape. Huang et al. (2024) showed that AI based virtual try-ons and skin diagnostics were able to increase users satisfaction by providing the customer with an opportunity to visualize their product in real time, improving their confidence for decision making. Fruiterer and Reisberg (2023) demonstrated how an AI based system could offer a highly customized experience that is similar to speaking with a professional by using computer vision and generative AI to create a personalized skincare routine recommendation system. Companies such as

Revieve and Perfect Corp have proactively leveraged using these new and exciting technologies to reduce customer interaction issues, and in turn improve customer loyalty to brands (Revieve, 2021). Overall, all the studies suggest that AI generated personalization is not only convenient, but in the end is beneficial because it adds brand credibility as it meets consumer relevancy and immediacy.

Generation Z, known as true digital natives, are very receptive to their technological transitions. Ameen, Anand and Tarhini (2022) found that Gen Z females reported improved self-esteem and body image from AI driven tools like (chatbots, augmented reality interfaces, etc.). They found immediacy and interactivity to be prominent motivators for Gen Z's engagement with AI in the beauty context. According to a recent professional beauty report, 72% of Gen Z consumers are eager for AI powered beauty brands to provide them with individualized experiences. Their demand for technology in the beauty industry are further highlighted by this. Vogue Business (2025) states that Gen Z loves the convenience and transparency that AI tools offer, however they also exercise some caution while using these tools. They need those brands who apart from being inclusive, also genuinely represent the diversity of the skin tones, support them.

Although the trust and engagement with AI is at a high level, there still exists a "trust to action gap". Ameen et al. (2022) revealed that AI tools increase trust and create a positive reputation but do not necessarily lead to a quick decision to buy. Rajegowda et al. (2023) in a similar way showed that there is a negative correlation between the accuracy of AI leads to less necessity to buy. This is consistent with psychological "trust but not buy" phenomenon, where consumers are still going through the process of seeking social proof and emotional validation prior to a final decision.

The ethical aspect, surely help to define the affiliation of Gen Z with AI even more. There was a lot of attention paid to youngsters highlighting that offset free identification data that younger ones are fructification is targeted by The Conversation (2022). An inclusive and fair workforce necessitates better performance from algorithms as well as bias diminishing, which is the gap. To stay beloved and trusted by customers when they use AI technologies, the brand has to be transparent and ethical on the other hand, they have to be trustworthy (Vogue Business, 2025). Latest research is still positive about AI's ability to provide personalization, trust, and engagement. Few however have delved into deeper emotional factors and ethical expectations that affect Gen Z's willingness to follow AI suggestions.

3. Research Gap

Although research on AI in beauty and wellness industry is growing, but still several significant gaps, particularly with regards to Gen Z and their real-world purchase behaviour. While many studies have measured if users are trusting AI, very few studies investigated why that trust does not translate into purchase behaviour "trust-but-not-buy" gap. Existing work tends to focus to measure accuracy and usability, leaving out the influence of emotional engagement and social validation such as peer approval, influencer recommendations, live feedback etc. on actual purchasing behaviour. Issues of algorithmic fairness and inclusivity have also received relatively limited study attention, with few studies measuring how virtual try-ons and skin diagnostics perform across diverse skin tones and how such performance impact adoption. Issues of privacy and biometric ethics, including concerns over facial data, consent, and storage, are often discussed conceptually but rarely measured in terms of behavioral impact or linked to practical design solutions. Furthermore, the majority of studies treat AI beauty tools as one category, neglecting to differentiate between chatbots, skills, live AR try-ons and image-based diagnostics. Methodologically, the literature is mostly cross-sectional self-reports with little longitudinal or experimental evidence demonstrating causation.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Problem Statement.

Although Gen Z uses and trusts AI powered beauty advisors broadly, it is unclear why this trust often fails to generate purchases. Existing research focuses on reliability and usability, but they typically treat AI tools as one category, neglect to consider emotional engagement and social proof, under research fairness (ex., Across skin tones), and privacy concerns. Also, from a methodological viewpoint, the field has relied on overly short, cross sectional self-reports from small convenience samples, limiting causal inference and generalizability. Consequently, this study examines the behavioral and psychological antecedents of the “trust-but-not-buy” gap across different types of AI powered beauty tools (i.e., chatbots, AR tools), thus supporting deeper, actionable insights.

4.2 Research objectives

1. To examine AI-powered beauty advisors’ impact on Gen Z’s trust, engagement, and purchases.
2. To compare AI and in-store consultations to identify strengths, limits, and the “trust-but-not-buy” gap.
3. To assess how emotional engagement, ethics, and satisfaction drive Gen Z’s AI adoption.

4.3 Scope

This study focuses on Generation Z (individuals aged 18-27) and their interactions with AI-powered beauty advisors. Our paper looks at three AI tools chatbots, live AR try-ons, image-based skin diagnostics and investigates how AI tools impact trust, emotional engagement, perceived accuracy, privacy concerns, and purchase intent. The research uses online survey and quantitative analysis (descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, correlations, regression, t-tests and ANOVA) and focused on short term behavioral responses and self-reported attitudinal data, rather than the long-term longitudinal behavior or direct sales data.

4.4 Limitations

This research has limitation that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, this research was a cross-sectional survey design in which the responses were taken all at a single point in time and did not permit the ability to establish causal relation between AI tools and purchasing behavior. Second, the sample was obtained by convenience sampling digitally active Gen Z respondents, which may over represent urban and tech savvy individuals and limit the generalizability of the results to the wider Gen Z populations. Third, all measures were self-reported, which may have been affected by recall bias or social desirability. Fourth, the study considered only three types of AI beauty tools chatbots, live AR try-ons and image-based diagnostics and excludes other emerging AI technologies in the beauty category. Finally, the research measured short term perceptions and intention, not long-term behaviors, nor verified purchase data, which may have been different than self-reported data.

4.5 Sources of the data

For this study, the primary data were collected via the use of an online questionnaire designed in Google Forms, sent to a convenience sample of Gen Z respondents ages 18-27 years. Participants were recruited via university channels, WhatsApp groups that had the potential reach to digitally active participants who regularly used beauty and wellness products. A pilot survey with 15 participants was conducted to refine question wording and flow before the main data collection. The total number of valid responses received was 122. All responses were saved securely and were anonymized, with the data subjected to analysis in IBM SPSS statistics applying descriptive analysis, chi square tests, correlations, regressions, t-tests, and ANOVA. There were few secondary data collected for the purpose of information the literature review as well as

contextualizing results, predominantly peer reviewed academic articles, along with credible industry data such as Revieve (2021), Professional Beauty (2025), Vogue Business (2025), Ameen et al. (2022), Rajegoeda et al. (2023), and the Conversation (2022).

4.6Sample Size

The study surveyed a total of 122 valid respondents from Gen Z, aged 18-27 years. The final survey was preceded by a pilot survey with 15 participants to test the survey for clarity and flow. The final survey responses (n=122) were collected through convenience sampling via university connections and social media platforms. The final sample was comprised of roughly an equal; number of participants (53% female, 47% male), and the final sample was predominantly urban (75%), reflecting the high digital activity level common among metropolitan Gen Z users.

4.7Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework suggests that certain attributes of AI based beauty advisors perceived accuracy, personalization, ease of use, fairness across skin tones and privacy features influence Gen Z users trust and satisfaction in those tools, and that trust and satisfaction in turn influence engagement and purchase intention. However, trust by itself may not lead to purchases emotional engagement (the excitement the user feels, the sense of identity expression, or attachment during the interaction) and social validation (peer approval, influencer endorsement or reviews) are modelled as moderators that enhance or diminish the path from trust/satisfaction to purchase intention. Perceived fairness and privacy concerns can also lessen the relationship of trust on satisfaction. The model treats type of AI tools (chatbots, live AR try-ons, image based diagnostics) as a contextual moderator that may or may not change the strength of those relationships, and includes control variables (gender, prior AI experience, frequency of online shopping, urban/semi urban) to rule out other explanations. In empirical terms, the framework produced direct tests of effects (AI features → trust/satisfaction → intent), mediation (trust → satisfaction → intent). Moderation by emotional/social factors, and multi-group comparisons across tool types to explain the “trust-but-not-buy” gap.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

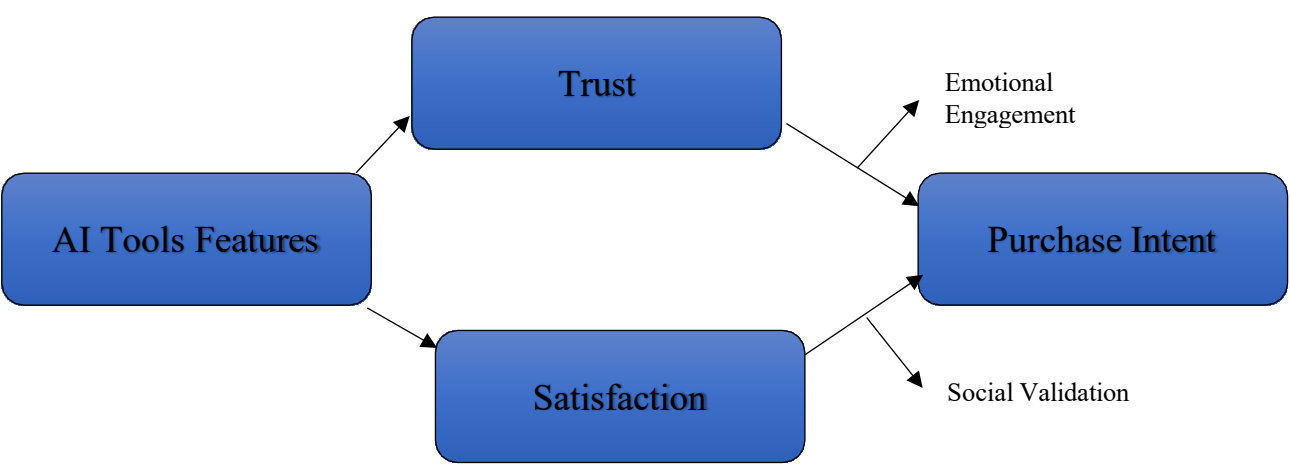


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

4.8 Hypothesis

Hypothesis set 1:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): AI-powered beauty advisors have no significant effect on Gen-Z's purchasing decisions.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): AI-powered beauty advisor significantly influences Gen-Z's purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis set 2:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): AI-powered beauty advisors do not enhance Gen-Z's engagement with beauty products.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): AI-powered beauty advisors positively enhance Gen-Z's engagement with beauty products

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section gives a comprehensive analysis of the responses to the 122 valid responses with Gen-Z perspectives on their attitudes and relationship with Beauty advisors powered by AI, Data was processed and analyzed descriptively, performing chi-square tests, t-test, one-way ANOVA tests, and correlation with SPSS to evaluate respondents' behavioral tendencies and psychological tendencies.

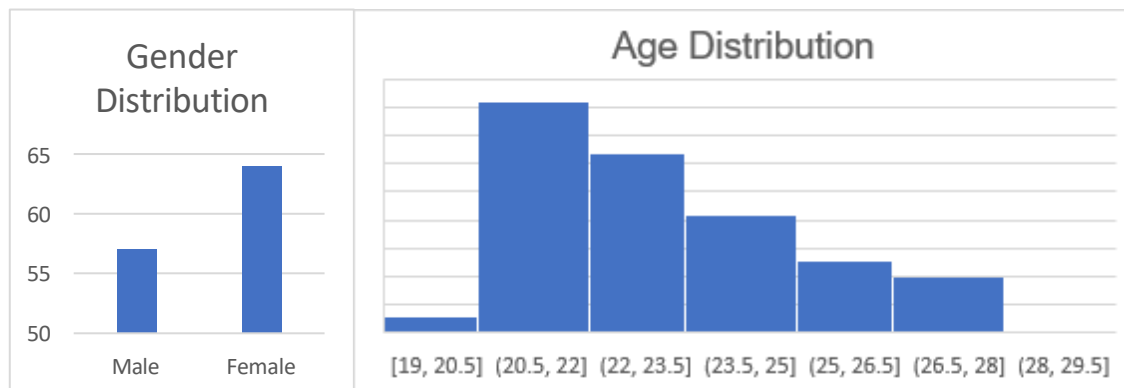


Fig 2: Gender Distribution Fig 3: Age Distribution

The sample population had a nearly equal gender split (53% female, 47% male), and the average age of the sample population was 23.31 years. Most respondents also indicated they lived in urban setting (75%). This is likely not surprising when considering the digital presence of metropolitan Gen-Z users and the general tendency for them to be more digitally active than those from non-metro locations. Respondents indicated that they first learned of AI beauty tools primarily via social media (most often Instagram 42%), and slightly less via recommendation from friendly (30%), brand websites/apps (15%), promotional advertising (12%). Approximately half (51%) of the participants indicated that they had interacted with digital beauty advisors, and the most indicated interaction for both aware and non-aware participants was chatting with virtual assistants (47%). The only two behavioral facets that those with functional awareness engaged in with live AI assistance were AI-consulted product recommendation and virtual try on makeup experiences.



Fig 4: Frequency of online shopping for beauty/wellness

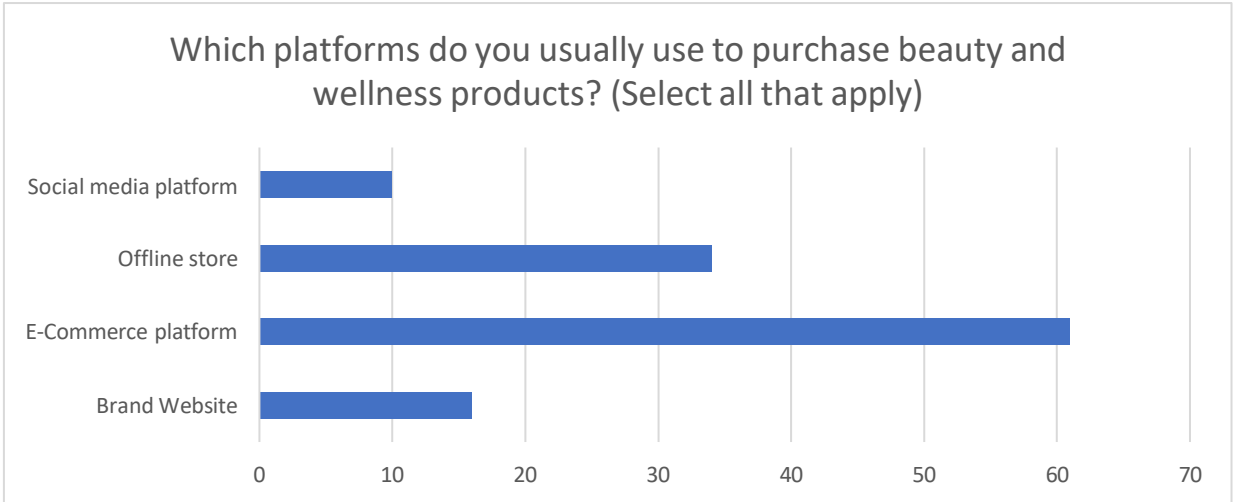


Fig 5: Platform used to purchase product

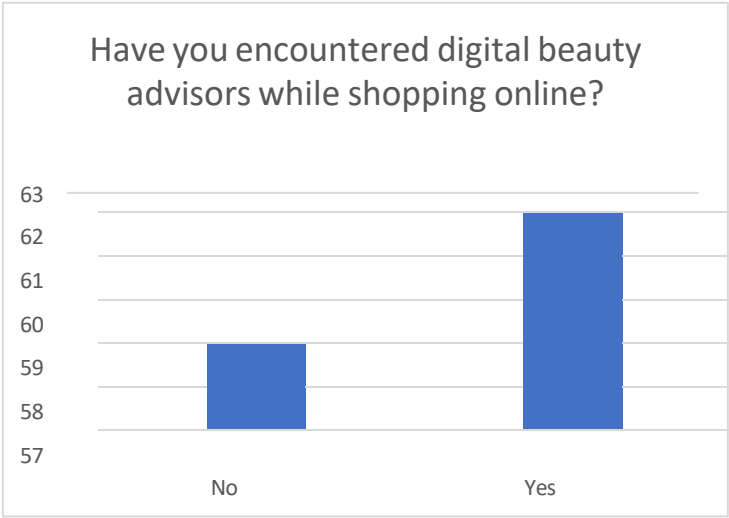


Fig 6: Encountered with digital beauty advisors

Descriptive statistics showed moderate trust in AI recommendations. The perceived accuracy of the AI recommendations rated 2.84 (SD = 1.08) and satisfactions with AI based recommendations rated a mean of 2.58 on 5-point scale (SD = 0.70). While there is moderate level of confidence reflected in the scores, as seen by that the average for AI based purchasing behavior (Mean = 2.13) and for limited time offers (Mean = 1.60) were much lower, indicating that there is some “trust-but-not-buy” effect. This indicates that although users see AI as a beneficial and accurate experience, other factors, emotional or financial, may cause the user to redeem their trust but not translate to purchase behavior. Further AI systems will need to pay more attention to how to create more persuasive and emotional systems to bridge this trust-action gap.

Chi-square analyses were used to examine the association between various categorical variables. Statistically, significant relationships were noted between: the platform used for discovering AI tools and the type of interaction ($\chi^2 = 51.99$, $p < 0.001$), the type interactions ($\chi^2 = 12.61$, $p = 0.002$) and methods of discovery (χ^2

$= 27.19$, $p < 0.001$). However, AI interactions did not significantly differ by gender group ($\chi^2 = 0.405$, $p = 0.525$), implying a gender-neutral response to the digital beauty tools. This indicates that manner in which users discover AI tools dictates the manner in which they interact with them but gender does not pay much of a factor in relation to this, AI beauty advisors can be designed into a platform specific strategy rather than multiple strategies for each gender.

Personal correlation analysis was used to assess intern-variable relationships. The perceived accuracy and the satisfactions with AI's recommendation had a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.416$, $p < 0.05$). The accuracy, and confidence in product selection had a strong significant correlation ($r = 0.543$, $p < 0.05$). This finding also indicated that confidence was moderately correlated to the likelihood of future use ($r = 0.369$, $p < 0.05$). Satisfaction was strongly correlated to use in the future ($r = 0.630$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, this indicated that the user experience with AI tools, particularly accuracy and emotional confidence, plays a large role in future user participation. Overall, improving the perceived reliability in information and emotional trustworthiness of AI beauty advisors might increase user satisfaction significantly, and support continued use over the longer term

For final data analysis, one-way ANOVAs were used to determine if there were any significant differences in perceived satisfaction or accuracy based on user gender ($F = 0.259$, $p = 0.612$; $F = 1.007$, $p = 0.318$, respectively). This finding is also consistent with the previously mentioned chi-square analysis that indicated user general did not have any significant effect on user adoption or trust in AI, However, variation among user attitude based on the platform and the type of AI tool is noteworthy as user AI experiences based on context and user characteristics emphasized the need to personalized user experiences. This indicates that AI beauty tools should target more of a user's digital context and digital habits as opposed to demographic characteristics of the user such as gender, supporting the need for both platform specific and tools specific personalization approaches

Independent samples t-tests indicated that satisfaction and accuracy ratings were significantly greater than the neutral midpoint. Satisfaction and accuracy were both statistically significant (satisfaction: $t = 40.28$, $p < 0.001$, accuracy: $t = 28.95$, $p < 0.001$). this indicates a tendency of users to have positive perceptions (satisfaction and accuracy) of AI applications in the beauty space. Overall, this illustrates that Gen Z respondents, as a whole, trust AI beauty tools and find them to be enjoyable which also supports the idea that Gen Z are becoming increasingly comfortable with the use of AI beauty and wellness contexts.

In summary, our result indicate that Gen Z exhibits moderate level of trust, and limited engagement use of these AI powered beauty advisors. The results show that users feel that the recommendations provided are accurate and are relatively confident using these AI tools however this was often not liked to an actual purchase of product. User continually reported data privacy as one of the most important reasons for not relates to facial recognition, and how their information is stored. The outcomes of the study also indicated that no one to two demographic factors, including sex, affected how users felt about AI tools. Overall and in conclusion to properly and ethical build trust with Gen Z, the focus for commitment to ethical guidelines, and offer more personalized experiences with the AI tools.

Findings

The study showed Gen Z respondents had moderate trust in AI driven beauty advisors, with significant positive correlations with perceived accuracy ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.08$) and satisfaction ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.70$) and with confidence in choosing products and intent to use again. The lower trust and satisfaction scores with purchase behavior of ($M = 2.13$) highlighted a “trust-but-not-buy” gap, where the respondents could trust the AI recommendations but didn’t always make purchase. Emotion and social proof played both a positive and negative role in the attribution of trust and satisfaction because sometimes respondents wanted additional validation from a friend or influencer before making a purchase. The Chi-square analysis pointed out associations between the platform respondents discovered AI tools and the interaction type ($X^2 = 51.99$, $p < 0.001$), and between the methods the respondents discovered and the interaction types $X^2 = 27.19$, $p < 0.001$). However, there were no significant differences in AI interaction by genders ($X^2 = 0.405$, $p < 0.525$), suggesting a gender-neutral adoption trend. When we looked at the correlations, there was a strong correlation between perceived accuracy and satisfaction ($r = 0.416$, $p < 0.05$), and confidence ($r = 0.543$, $p < 0.05$), and satisfaction was highly correlated with future usage intent ($r = 0.630$, $p < 0.05$). our one-way ANOVA results suggested that there were no statistically significant difference for gender in satisfaction or accuracy ratings. This reinforces that demographic characteristics are less influential than the platforms and tools used. Overall, our findings suggest that AI beauty powered tools are effective to create trust, satisfaction and positive perceptions among Gen Z audiences. However, on their own trust, satisfaction and positive perceptions do not lead to purchase unless stronger emotional engagement strategies, clear social proof, and assurance of privacy and fairness can be incorporated for value propositions.

The result of Hypothesis 1 was that while Gen Z respondents perceived AI powered beauty advisors as accurate in their suggestions, that benefit did not lead them to purchase. In fact, the correlations and regression showed a negative relationship between the perceived accuracy of the AI and the actual purchasing that occurred. In other words, Gen Z seemed to have enough faith in the technological ability of AI, this trust alone is insufficient to drive immediate purchase decisions, possibly due to factors such as price sensitivity, preference for in-person experiences, or the need for social validation before buying. As a result, it was concluded that the null hypothesis could not be rejected.

On the other hand, Hypothesis 2 told a different story. The correlation outcomes indicated that individuals who had higher perceived accuracy in AI recommendations reported higher engagement with beauty products, greater realizations of AI’s influence in their purchase journeys, and a significant influence on their self-image. This indicates that even though AI beauty advisors may not provide an immediate purchase driver, they are certainly an engagement driver, enhancing engagement, development preference, and creating brand touchpoints that lead to a potential longer term engaged and loyal customer. Ultimately, the null hypothesis was rejected suggesting that AI beauty advisors could positively influence engagement with

the beauty and wellness market among Gen Z, particularly if engagement does not immediately convert to purchases in the short term

Suggestions

To better engage with Gen Z, beauty brands employing AI driven beauty advisors should focus on narrowing the “trust-but-not-buy” gap. Considering not only delivering a recommendation that matches, but creating experiences that feel exciting, personalized, and socially endorsed. This can be accomplished by layering in interactive aspects like gamified product try-ons, instant feedback, and community sharing that make the experience community sharing that make the experience compelling. Peer feedback and endorsement from influencers can also be utilized to enhance trust so that people ultimately buy.

It's important to make sure AI tools work equitably for all and deliver accurate results for all skin tones while also being transparent about using biometric data. Provide users with control over their data so that giving explanations of ethical practices helps establish enduring trust. Finally, AI beauty tools should be designed with the platforms and spaces where Gen Z spends the most time in mind, rather than applying a one-size-fits- all approach. Regularly collecting feedback and auditing AI performance will help brands remain relevant, inclusive and trusted as the expectations of Gen Z continue to evolve.

Conclusion

The study showed that Gen Z consumers engaged with the digital ecosystem experienced a positive effect on their perception, confidence and level of engagement with AI beauty companions. They liked the tools because they perceived them as credible and personalized, and were motivated to engage with the technology because it satisfied their wants for faster, automated, and data driven experiences. The study also determined that AI tools do influence users' perceptions of beauty products and have a visible influence on the purchase journey as noted but that influence was not significant enough to induce an immediate buying reaction. The correlation and regression analyses also identified a negative relationship between perceived accuracy from Ai and the buying behaviors of users which was unexpected. This suggests users trust the AI accuracy in presenting choices but are still delaying the buying action, largely by psychological/emotional behaviour influences like hesitance, over-reliance on the AI, or a need for additional validation.

Furthermore, demographics, such as whether the user was male or female, the user's age, or whether the user had discovered an AI tool or used a similar tool before do not appear to be important considerations as they did not impact trust or behaviour in any significant way and do reinforce a consistent trend among Gen-Z. This indicates user engagement depends more on emotional and cognitive engagement with the AI rather than the person. Beauty brand's main focus is taking trust and making it action. Effecting a transaction can happen by using emotionally engaging methods, including social proof, real time feedback, and interactive content.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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