

FEBRUARY 2024



Adobe stock image

# Beauty Insights Report

Refinery29 x SCAD: Next in Beauty

# SCADask

# Table of Contents

## 1 Introduction

## 2 Research Overview

## 3 Our Planet

- Visible Sustainability
- Affordable Sustainability

## 4 Our People

- Genderless Marketing
- Gender Identities and Inclusivity
- Holistic Inclusivity
- Social Media Recommendations



REFINERY29 x SCAD

# NEXT IN BEAUTY

---

## Introduction

Refinery29 and SCAD have partnered for Next in Beauty, a two-day event designed to engage, inspire, and propel the industry forward with SCAD talent at the helm. To enliven and stimulate dialogue, SCADask facilitated the execution of the insights highlighted within this summary. A survey on beauty and in-depth field research yields an overarching truth: Beauty is Global. With increased awareness of human impact on the planet, the industry is responding to consumer desire for sustainable practices and ingredients. In addition, brands have expanded and adapted to include a spectrum of peoples and cultures – genderless products, inclusive package design, South Korean skin care regimes, Middle Eastern and African fragrance rituals like burning bakhoor, and more. Gen Z and Gen Alpha, in particular, have emerged to drive change and usher beauty into a brighter future for our planet and its people.

According to the results of the pre-event survey, sustainability, affordability, and effectiveness remain top priorities for consumers. While interested in genderless offerings and global beauty rituals, consumers still face societal pressures and desire personalization, transparency, and value.

Brands must embrace affordable, natural products with sustainable packaging and clear messaging; expand genderless selections and diverse representation without stereotypes; curate personalized, transparently-sourced wellness experiences inspired by global rituals; and leverage authentic social media influencers to organically connect with consumers and emphasize genuine user reviews. Ultimately, brands must foster inclusive communities, communicate shared values, and balance consumer desires for self-expression and validation with accessibility and efficacy.

SCADask

# Research Overview

63 survey respondents

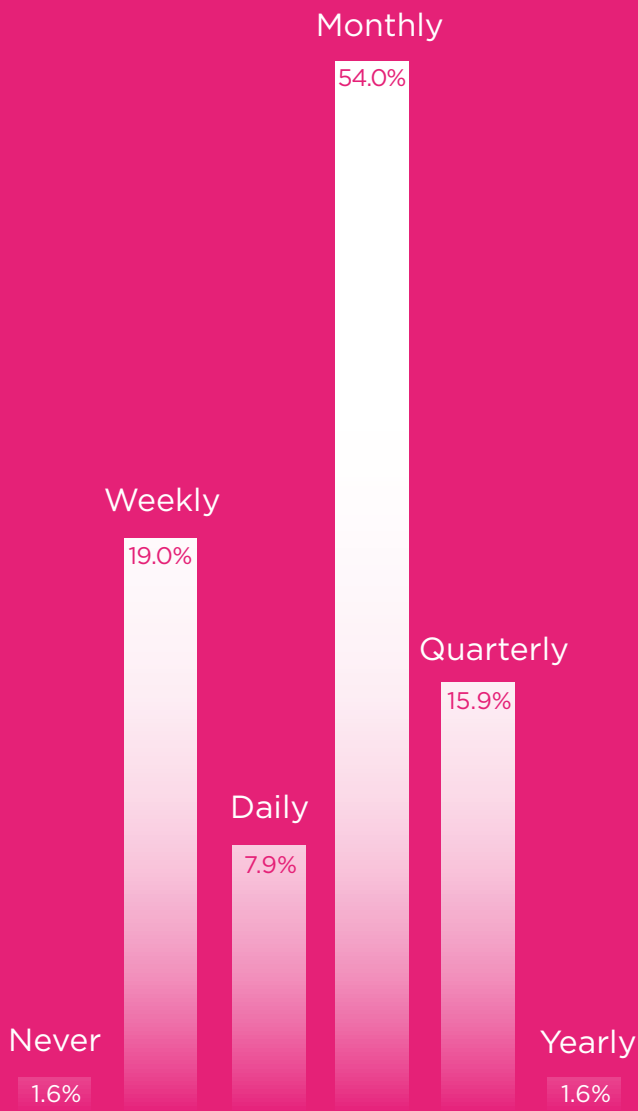
10 interviews

Student observations and insights from:

- Business of beauty and fragrance undergraduate degree program
- Luxury and brand management graduate degree program

According to the results of the pre-event survey, consumers prioritize the following when evaluating beauty products and practices:

- Sustainability is becoming more important, but affordability and effectiveness are still the top priorities for consumers. They want brands to visibly showcase sustainability efforts.
- Consumers are interested in genderless beauty products and inclusive marketing, but societal pressures still hinder full self-expression.
- Consumers are drawn to global beauty rituals, but want more personalization, sustainability, and transparency.
- Social media influences beauty purchases, but authenticity is key. User reviews and recommendations from friends and family hold more weight.



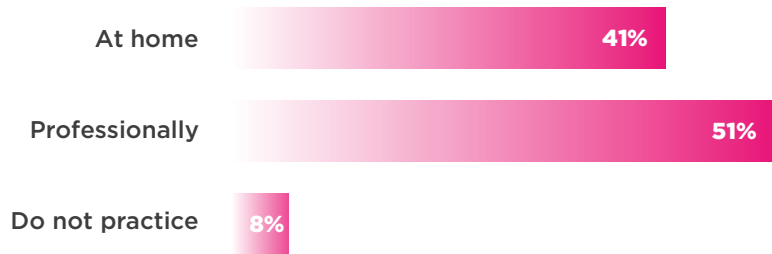
---

**How often do you purchase beauty products?**

# Research Overview

## Where do you go for your beauty routines?

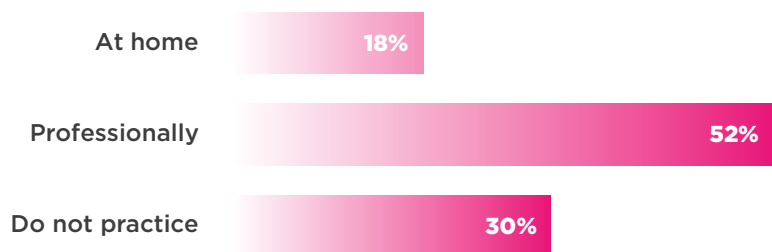
### Nail care



### Hair cut



### Hair color



### Hair styling



Students spend an average of \$52 on beauty products monthly.

## Research Overview

---

In three words, describe your ideal luxury beauty product.

**High-quality**  
**Healthy** Effective  
Innovatively packaged  
Feel beautiful **Sustainable**

What do you believe is the next big beauty industry trend?

- | Boosting sustainability, natural ingredients, refillable containers, global sustainable practices, balance between sustainability and price.
- | Intermingling beauty, health, and wellness.
- | Adopting global practices like South Korean beauty services, Asian-led trends, and fragrance rituals.
- | Making more beauty available to more people. Products that reflect the spectrum of humanity: kids, genderless, accessible packaging for the disabled, inclusive for all skin shades and types.
- | Returning to makeup maximalism: graphic contour, messy, color, darker shades, glam.

# Our Planet

---

- 1 Visible Sustainability
- 2 Affordable Sustainability



# Our Planet

## Visible Sustainability

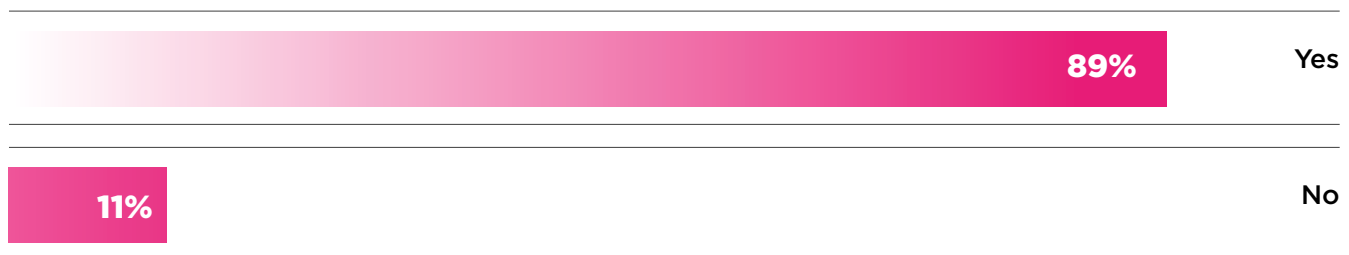
Although sustainability is not a main priority, shoppers like to see more influencers and brands showcase innovative, eco-friendly solutions.

Although sustainability is not as important as factors like quality and price point, consumers make choices with environmental consciousness in mind as the beauty industry increasingly features sustainable packaging and clean, natural ingredients. They've developed trust in influencers like Lauren Ireland, co-founder of beloved brand Summer Fridays — a brand with a user-friendly recycling program and clean ingredients. Beauty brands should continue to innovate solutions like refill stations for products like eco-friendly hemp butter. These efforts reflect a commitment to environmental impact and accessible, Earth-friendly options while providing financial benefits to consumers.

### Do you pay attention to a brand's sustainability platform?



### Do you pay attention to whether or not they exercise what they promote?



*"I pay attention to a brand's sustainability platform because it is solely important for them to be communicating that they are sustainable because that is the **new norm**. Sometimes I feel it is shocking if a brand isn't doing anything."*

— Student



# Our Planet

## Affordable Sustainability

Consumers want skincare effectiveness at an affordable price, and for brands to achieve that with natural, sustainable ingredients.

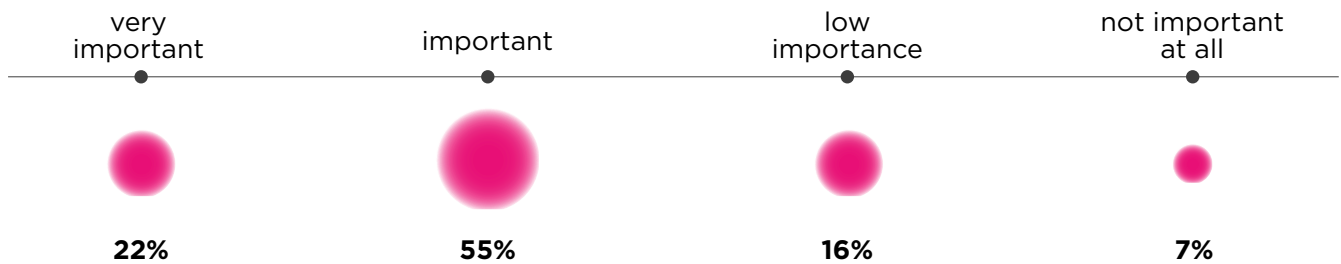
Sustainability is sometimes confused with natural ingredients, some of which can be harmful to the environment. Consumers enjoy learning from influencers who explain those differences and discuss cost-effective alternatives.

Consumers focus on both sustainability and effectiveness, which are cultivated by skincare influencers and a growing awareness of environmental impact, like the shift from makeup wipes to cleansing balm. Within the beauty landscape there's a nuanced approach to sustainability: while skincare may lean toward natural ingredients, makeup priorities can vary. The beauty industry should continue to cater to diverse preferences, recognizing that consumers lean towards natural products in skincare but may consider lab-grown alternatives in exchange for reduced manufacturing footprints. These alternatives must be within budget for consumers to seriously consider them as viable options.

Relevant Brands listed in 10% + of responses:

- Haircare: OLAPLEX
- Skincare: The Ordinary, CeraVe, La Roche-Posay
- Fragrance: Jo Malone London
- Makeup: Rare Beauty, e.l.f. Cosmetics, Fenty Beauty, NARS Cosmetics

## How important is it to you that beauty products include natural ingredients?



*“Brand reputation is probably the most important to me because I want to trust that it can do its job and that the quality is there. Cruelty-free products are almost an expectation for me. I would like to care more about sustainability, but first and foremost I am buying a product for a specific result. If two products have the same outcome, but one is more sustainable, then I will go for that one.”*

— Student

# Our People

---

- 1 Genderless Marketing
- 2 Gender Identities and Inclusivity
- 3 Holistic Inclusivity
- 4 Social Media Recommendations

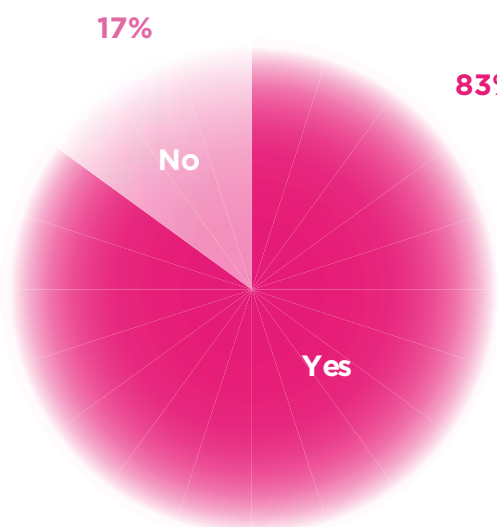


# Our People

## Genderless Marketing

Genderless products are more popular than ever, but societal pressures may hinder consumers' self-expression. Gen Z and Gen Alpha respondents expect diversity efforts to continue to evolve within the beauty industry and beyond to feel more liberated.

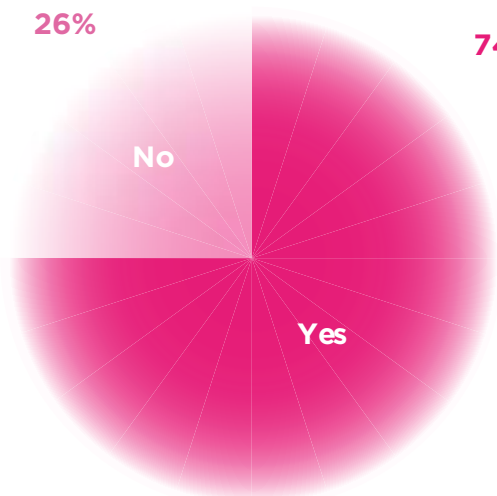
As genderless beauty products soar in popularity, consumers find themselves drawn to the evolving allure and diversity. Amidst conflicting messages and societal pressures, they express a frustration that hinders authentic self-expression and feeling acceptance. Consumers wish for an ideal beauty experience where inclusivity thrives, individual expression is celebrated, and brands prioritize efficacy over gender norms, contributing to a more liberating and progressive society.



**83%** Is it important to you that brands show diversity and inclusivity in their advertising, marketing, and products?

*"I want to see a brand be more inclusive to all customers, since not everyone is the perfect target market."*

— Student



**74%** Do brands' diversity and inclusivity marketing efforts influence your purchasing decisions?

*"I see the genderless beauty industry only growing from here. **People want versatility and inclusivity.** Much of it is not going to be recognizable to people you see on the street, allowing for it to become more **mainstream.**"*

— Student

# Our People

## Gender Identities and Inclusivity

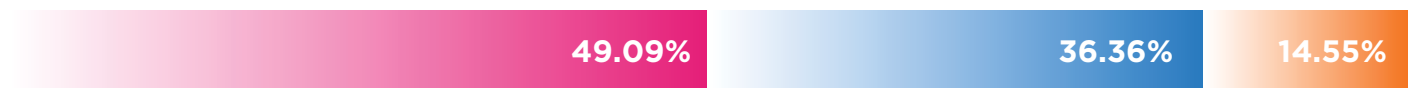
Consumers embrace in bold trends like maximalist makeup, particularly among younger generations who embrace diverse representation. They want these kinds of trends to gain momentum.

Beauty industry trends like the rise of maximalist makeup denote a shift toward inclusivity, particularly with younger generations who embrace diverse gender identities. Consumers wish for continued progress, extending inclusivity efforts beyond foundation shades, inspired by brands like Fenty Beauty that lead the way.

## When shopping for beauty products, how important are the following factors to you?

### Availability at your preferred retailers

Very important Moderately Slightly Not



### Ingredients



### Price



### Quality/performance



### Recommendations from friends/family



# Our People

## Gender Identities and Inclusivity

When shopping for beauty products, how important are the following factors to you?

### Brand ambassadors

Very important Moderately Slightly Not



### Brand reputation



### Cruelty-free labeling



### Diversity and inclusion in marketing



### Non-gendered beauty



### Social media



### Sustainability



# Our People

---

## Holistic Inclusivity

Consumers are drawn to the beauty industry attention toward South Korean and Indian rituals, but would like to see increased personalization, sustainable practices, and transparency in wellness services for an informed experience.

As consumers have put an emphasis on sustainability and spiritual wellness practices, brands have adopted beauty rituals from South Korea and India. Looking ahead, consumers anticipate more inclusive and bold beauty trends, celebrity-driven innovations, and increased sustainability measures, including refillable packaging in luxury brands. The beauty industry must continue evolving, with consumers seeking transparency, personalization, and a deeper understanding of ingredients for a holistic beauty experience.

Brands should prioritize diverse representation to foster understanding and evolution, especially for non-binary and LGBTQ communities. Consumers will hold brands accountable for empty ethical promises by not purchasing their products.

The beauty industry should use language and aesthetics that resonate with cultures beyond English-speaking markets. As a result, all consumers can feel included, no matter where they're from or who they are.

Brands prioritize inclusivity across diverse media forms like TV, social media, and radio, featuring individuals from various backgrounds and life stories. But there's a realization that representation in marketing is crucial to prevent alienation, particularly for non-binary and LGBTQ communities, reflecting society's diversity and contributing to its evolution. Moreover, it is important for the beauty industry to not only acknowledge linguistic diversity but also tailor its language to resonate with various cultures, recognizing the significance beyond English-speaking markets.

## Is it important to you for brands to show diversity and inclusivity in their advertising, marketing, and products?

*"The beauty industry has been taking a very good turn for the better when it comes to inclusivity. There are certain brands — for example, **Rare Beauty** by Selena Gomez — **whose packaging is very inclusive for people with disabilities**. Their blush has a little dot on the top of the packaging made for people with motor skill issues to open the packaging more comfortably. **It goes way beyond shades and colors**. Packaging has seen a very big evolution."*

— Student

# Our People

---

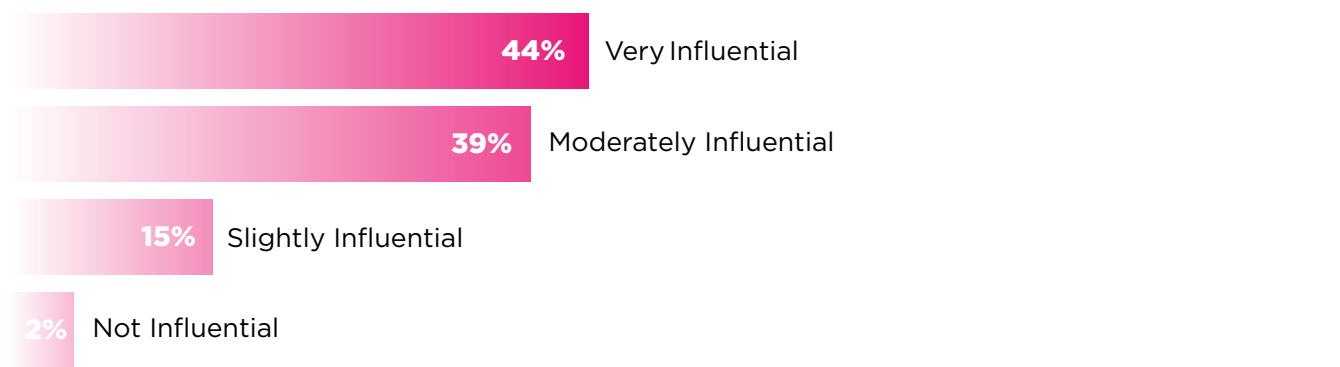
## Social Media Recommendations

Although consumers use social media to research products and brands, this medium requires more effort from brands to convince them about the quality of the products. User reviews and recommendations from friends and family are crucial for making decisions.

Social media marketing must remain savvy and aware of consumer intelligence. Influencers have the ability to promote and sell products through sponsored content. However, research shows many consumers are skeptical of recommendations that influencers are paid to make. As a result, these wary consumers place greater trust in unpaid user reviews or recommendations from influencers perceived as authentic fans of the products rather than paid sponsors.

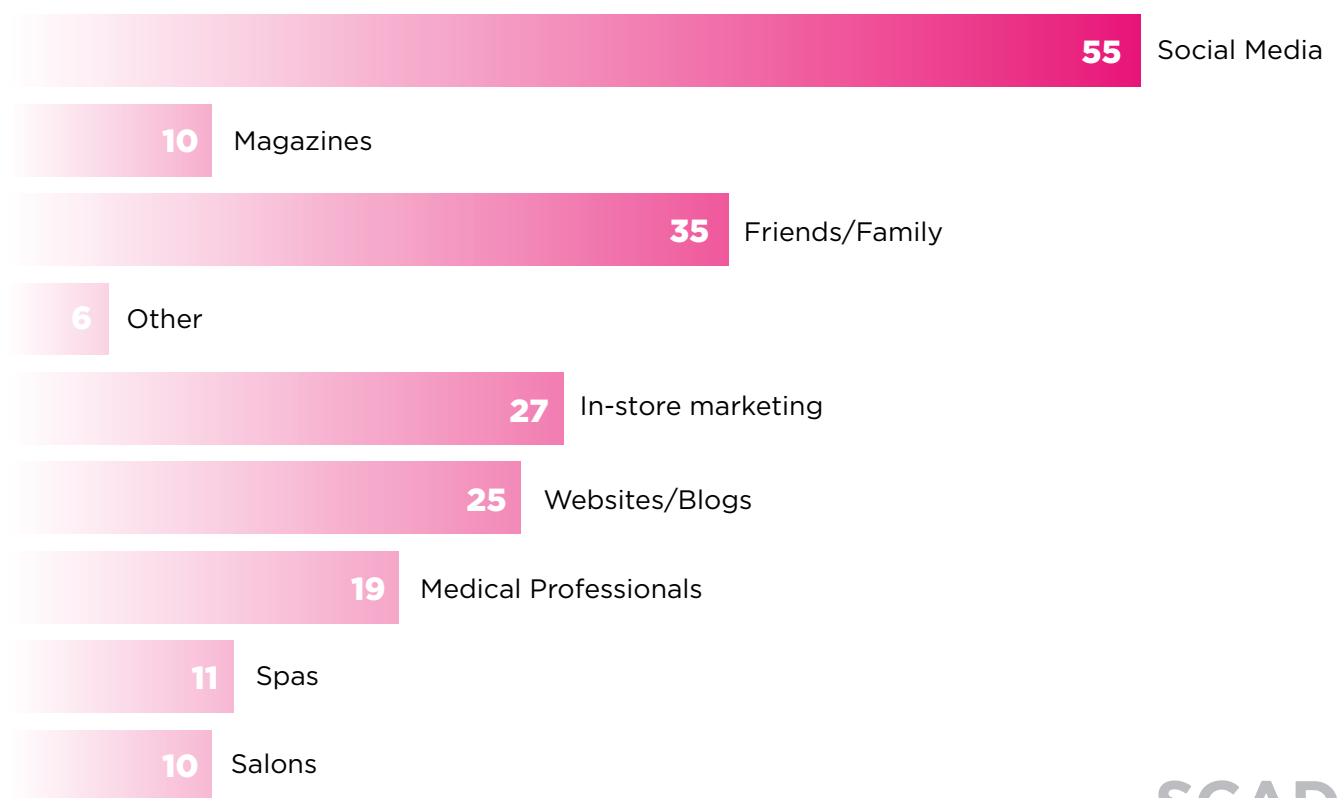
## How influential are user reviews in your beauty product purchasing decisions?

---



## How do you learn about beauty practices and products?

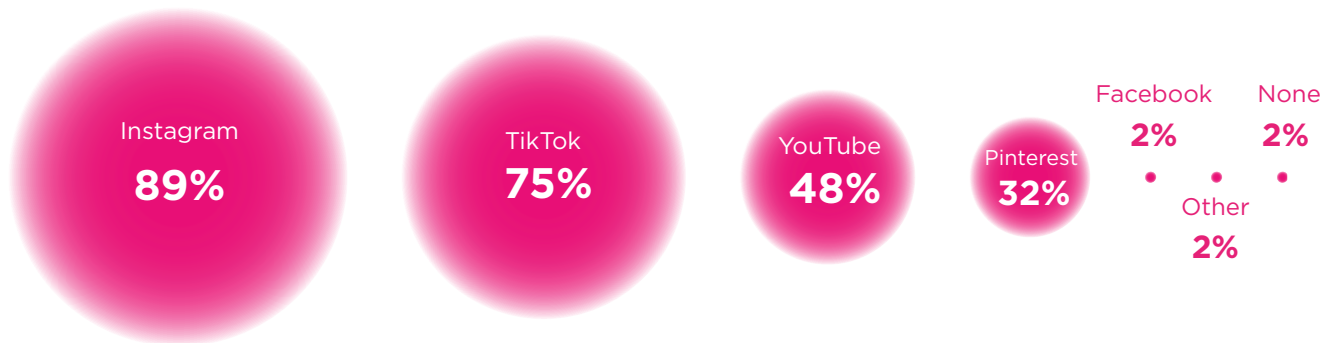
---



# Our People

## Social Media Recommendations

Which social media platforms do you use to engage with beauty-related content?



*“**Social media** has a huge influence within the beauty community. While most of my beauty purchases are **influenced by recommendations from people** online, there are a few things I look into when buying beauty products. For instance, brand reputation has a huge impact because I wouldn't support a brand that has malpractice or is controversial because of personal beliefs. Ultimately, **the driver for me to purchase new beauty products is all within marketing** and then influencer reviews.”*

— Student

## Acknowledgements

Contributors include Subin Cho, designer; Erin Compton, researcher Daniel Guth, designer and researcher; Chandhana Lingampally, researcher; Paula Mogollón Mejía, SCADask principal design researcher; Anushka Nigam, designer; Michael Shreve, associate vice president for academic services; Sarah Snook, senior writer and researcher; and Sunanda Vasudevan, designer.

SCADask, the applied research unit of the Savannah College of Art and Design, is a beacon of innovative research at the confluence of commerce, creativity, and culture. This report is a testament to SCADask's ongoing commitment to generating timely, actionable research that empowers leaders and decision-makers.

SCADask welcomes partnerships that propel consumer insights and innovation within business, technology, sustainability, culture, and entertainment. Please reach out to us at [research@scad.edu](mailto:research@scad.edu) to engage with us or to discuss potential research endeavors.