

Perceptions of Colourism in Instagram Beauty Content and Brand Image among Gen Z

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Abstract

Instagram being a platform that's widespread amongst Gen Z provides relevant context to study how visual content related to beauty practices is perceived and interpreted amongst young users. This study explores Gen Z's perception of colourism in Instagram beauty content and examines how these perceptions relate to brand image. Colourism remains a deeply rooted social issue in India, and digital media platforms such as Instagram play an important role in shaping contemporary beauty norms and practices regarding representation. The study adopts a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google forms. The survey assessed perceptions of skin tone representation in beauty posts, reels, and influencer content, along with attitudes towards brand trust, authenticity, inclusivity, and purchase consideration. Respondents also self-identified their skin tone using the TIRTIR shade chart to allow for descriptive comparison across different skin tone categories. The data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods. The findings suggest that respondents commonly perceive lighter skin tones to be more prominently represented in Instagram beauty content, while darker skin tones appear less frequently. Participants reported varied responses regarding the influence of such content on self-perception. Inclusive representation was generally associated with more favourable evaluations of brand image, whereas fairness-oriented messaging was viewed less positively by some respondents. Differences in perception were observed across skin tone groups, indicating that skin tone may influence how colourist representation is interpreted.

Keywords

Instagram, Gen Z, Colourism, Beauty Content, Visual Representation.