**The Clean Beauty Movement:**

**Perspectives of Generation Z in Vietnam and the United States**

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# ABSTRACT

This study investigates the evolving landscape of clean beauty among Generation Z consumers in the United States and Vietnam, exploring how cultural values, social consciousness, and consumer preferences shape their clean beauty preferences. Through interviews and surveys, we identify clean beauty and green beauty as paramount considerations for Gen Z, and identify significant cultural differences in their interpretations. American respondents view clean beauty as an individualistic trend aligned with broader wellness movements, influenced by global trends. In contrast, Vietnamese respondents perceive clean beauty as an extension of traditional practices that emphasize natural ingredients, reflecting a deep-rooted cultural ethos. Survey data highlights that while both groups prioritize cleanliness and safety, Vietnamese Gen Z demonstrate a stronger connection between clean beauty, cultural identity, and sustainability. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural heritage in shaping consumer behavior and underscore Gen Z’s proactive engagement in demanding transparency and ethical practices from beauty brands. This research not only enriches the discourse on the global clean beauty movement but also suggests avenues for future studies that could further investigate the dynamics of beauty consumption across different cultural contexts and generational cohorts.

# KEYWORDS

clean beauty; green beauty; Generation Z; Vietnam; environment

**INTRODUCTION**

“Yes, Gen Z, we are going to continue to raise the bar when it comes to the beauty industry. We are going to make it do better and do right by us.” Dominica1, a 25-year-old small business owner in Phoenix, has been buying clean beauty skin care for years to manage her “difficult skin,” and has high expectations for the industry. Halfway across the world, Mai, a 22‐year‐old marketing assistant from Ho Chi Minh City, spoke with a warm confidence about clean beauty in Vietnam. “Gen Z isn’t afraid to call out companies that aren’t doing enough, and I think that pressure will keep driving the industry towards more responsible, clean beauty practices.”

Just like her American counterpart, Mai’s experience of clean beauty demonstrates a proactive engagement with an industry rapidly adjusting to the preferences and demands of Generation Z (Gen Z), the individuals born between 1995 and the early 2010s. This cohort, characterized globally by its reliance and mastery of digital communications, embrace of cultural diversity, and heightened social consciousness, has emerged as a formidable force in shaping consumer trends and navigating emerging technologies (Katz et al., 2021). Gen Z is maturing and gaining significant economic power, and their unique perspectives and values are reshaping traditional marketing paradigms, a process they themselves seek to steer.

The realm of clean beauty, as both a conceptual framework and a marketing strategy, offers an opportunity for Gen Zers to influence the ethical behaviors of the beauty industry. Traditionally dominated by established brands, this sector is transforming in response to the demands of this new generation. Globally, Gen Z's approach to beauty is markedly different from previous generations, as they prioritize authenticity, safety, and sustainability over brand loyalty or pricing in their purchasing decisions (Le, Duc Tran, and Hoang, 2022; Tirocchi, 2023). They seek brands that align with their values and cater to their diverse preferences, making clean beauty an ideal area for exploration.

While the global Gen Z generation shares a general interest in sustainability, specific cultural trends within beauty can vary significantly. Additionally, clean beauty, a movement emphasizing the avoidance of potentially toxic beauty ingredients in favor of natural, organic, and minimally processed ingredients, has gained significant traction since the COVID-19 pandemic, but in notably different ways depending on the cultural context (Lee and Kwon, 2022; Ma and Kwon, 2021).

Research on ethical consumption has gained prominence as businesses and academics recognize the impact of ethics on consumer choices (García‐Ortega et al., 2023; Godefroit‐Winkel and Peñaloza, 2023; Kim and Lee, 2023; Newholm and Shaw, 2007; Starr, 2009). Coupled with heightened awareness of personal health and environmental issues, responsible consumption has become a focal point across cultures. Young people, particularly Gen Z, demonstrate strong environmental consciousness and clean ingredient awareness in beauty products. However, academic exploration of responsible consumption among this generation, particularly within the beauty sector, is still developing.

Additionally, there is a serious lack of understanding of Gen Z consumer habits outside of the US, with industrial and academic research emphasizing American Gen Z conceptions of clean beauty as standard across all international societies. This project seeks to help fill a research gap around Southeast Asian youth, particularly Vietnamese Gen Z. This study aims to undertake a comparative analysis of Gen Z’s beauty consumption patterns by examining youth in two deliberately contrasting cultural contexts: the United States and Vietnam. Through a combination of in-depth interviews and survey-based research, the study seeks to illuminate the distinct socio-cultural influences shaping consumer behavior within these divergent markets, offering insights into how global trends in beauty are interpreted and adapted across varying cultural landscapes.

**CLEAN BEAUTY AS AN ETHICAL NORM**

The clean beauty trend has emerged alongside growing global awareness of sanitation, cleanliness, and environmental issues, all of which has gained significant momentum since the COVID-19 pandemic (Lee and Kwon, 2022; Ma and Kwon, 2021). Consumers, increasingly focused on their personal well-being, have grown the market for safe and non-toxic products, generally expecting (sometimes erroneously) clean beauty products to contain only safe ingredients and organic or natural components (Amberg and Fogarassy, 2019; Rubin and Brod, 2019). The expanding demand for safe and non-toxic products has broadened the scope of the concept of clean beauty to encompass a wide variety of natural/non-synthetic, organic, cruelty-free, and eco-friendly products (Park and Lee, 2022). However, the lack of a government-defined standard for clean beauty has led to diverse interpretations by different companies, consumers, and even regulators (Mora and Ross, 2021; Rubin and Brod, 2019).

The terms ‘clean beauty’ and ‘green beauty’ are often used interchangeably, but they represent distinct approaches to ethical skincare, beauty, and cosmetics consumption. Clean beauty, as an economic and ethical framework, is rooted in the use of clean, non-toxic, natural, and/or high-quality ingredients that emphasize health and safety (Talavera and Sasse, 2019). Clean beauty appeals to consumers who are increasingly inclined to pay a premium for products aligned with ethical principles, signaling a broader shift towards values-driven consumption (Davies and Gutsche, 2016; Leary et al., 2019).

In contrast, green beauty extends its focus to the broader environmental impact of the cosmetic industry, from sourcing of materials to testing and packaging (Chin et al., 2018). Green beauty language emphasizes sustainable sourcing and eco-conscious packaging, further embedding itself in the ethical consumption narrative (Grappe et al., 2022; Gyan Prakash et al., 2024; Lee, 2021; North et al., 2021). Responding to growing consumer demand for products that are both sustainable and ethically produced, the green beauty sector has expanded rapidly (Kim and Choi, 2005). However, the industry's rise is not without complications, as concerns over greenwashing, the deceptive promotion of purported environmental benefits, persist (Lavuri et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen, 2024).

The convergence of clean and green beauty finds its foundation in a shared ethos of ethical consumption. These two models are different in focus, but both concepts align with growing consumer concerns about the potential risks of synthetic and chemical ingredients and the need for sustainable practices and products (Shim et al, 2024). For many consumers, clean and green beauty are intertwined dimensions of a larger ethical paradigm, each contributing to the collective aspiration for a more responsible and sustainable cosmetics industry.

Despite the compelling appeal of clean beauty, its global adoption is hindered by significant cultural and structural challenges. The absence of standardized definitions and regulatory frameworks for clean beauty often results in confusion and skepticism among consumers (Witek and Kuźniar, 2021). This lack of clarity complicates the differentiation between genuine clean beauty products and those that merely tout claims of being natural or organic, creating an environment in which greenwashing techniques may proliferate (Duran et al., 2014; Urbański and Haque, 2020). The global beauty industry’s long standing history of unethical practices, including certain types of animal testing and environmental degradation, has deeply undermined consumer trust over time (Hennigs et al., 2015). Despite this erosion of confidence, demand for ethically produced and sustainable cosmetics continues to rise, driven particularly by environmentally conscious consumers who remain resolute in their pursuit of products that reflect their values.

This persistent commitment to ethical consumption reflects a broader shift in market expectations, as consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability and transparency over brand loyalty or traditional product attributes. This ongoing tension between aspiration and skepticism underscores the complexity of navigating the ethical landscape of the beauty industry.

The concept of cleanliness and purity has long held a prominent place in beauty practices across various cultures. Historically, these ideals were often linked to notions of health, morality, and social status (Dijk and Taylor, 2011; Hoy, 1996; Zimmerman, 2008). Symbolically, in many societies, clean skin was considered a sign of good hygiene and personal care, while impurities were associated with disease, sin, or social stigma (Lee et al., 2015). The pursuit of purity and cleanliness in beauty rituals often reflected cultural beliefs about the body, the soul, and the relationship between the individual and the divine (Quack, 2013; Ramsbrock, 2015). Culturally different ideas of clean beauty have also coalesced over time, as Geoffrey Jones argues that, “when the first wave of modern globalization struck in the nineteenth century, a homogenization of global beauty ideals began—one which has, to some extent, continued until the present day” (2011, p. 885). These ideals now shape contemporary beauty standards, influencing the preferences and values of consumers worldwide. Cultural concepts of purity, cleanliness, and naturalness are often integrated into clean beauty marketing campaigns, to position their products within the existing popular imaginations (Fortunati et al., 2020).

**GEN Z CONSUMERS AS A CULTURAL FORCE**

Gen Z is marked by an ingrained familiarity with digital technologies and a heightened social consciousness shaped by their global interactions. Growing up in a digitally mediated environment, they possess a sophisticated understanding of platforms like social media, which are central to their communication and cultural engagement (Katz et al., 2021). Unlike Millennials, who adapted to the rise of the internet, Gen Z is fully immersed in a digital world, significantly influencing their values, social interactions, and cultural production, especially in beauty, identity, and personal expression.

As the first cohort to mature in a fully digitized society, Generation Z occupies a unique position in contemporary culture (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Their fluency in digital ecosystems enables them to act as cultural arbiters, shaping and amplifying trends across various industries. This generation's affinity for technology has made them early adopters of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, and key agents in promoting movements such as clean beauty and climate justice.

Central to the ethos of Gen Z is a heightened sense of social and ethical responsibility. Compared to preceding generations, they are markedly more engaged with global challenges, particularly in relation to environmental sustainability, social equity, and justice. This consciousness informs not only their political and social advocacy but also their broader cultural and interpersonal engagements, as they place a premium on authenticity, transparency, and ethical alignment. Their demand for congruence between values and actions reflects a deeper cultural shift toward meaningful, values-driven relationships and collective responsibility in the face of global crises.

Moreover, Gen Z's social consciousness has influenced their purchasing decisions in the beauty industry. They are more likely to support brands that are ethical, sustainable, clean, and socially responsible (Kim and Seock, 2009; Shim et al., 2024). This has led to a rise in conscious consumerism and a growing demand for clean beauty products that are made ethically and have a positive impact on the planet. In many cases, Gen Z consumers have an ingrained mistrust of companies and fear of greenwashing (Nguyen, 2019; Pitaloka, 2023) expecting government regulation (Kabaja, 2023) or social media pressures to ensure beauty companies are transparent. While the specific preferences and values of Gen Z may vary across different countries and societies, their overall emphasis on social responsibility and ethical consumption has played a significant role in driving the growth of the clean beauty market.

While academic research on Gen Z and clean beauty has grown in recent years, there is a tendency to focus primarily on a few notable countries, such as America, China (Li and Nuangjamnong, 2022), and South Korea (Kim and Lee, 2023; Shim et al., 2024). These represent the largest markets for clean beauty (Amed et al., 2023), but also cannot provide as much insight into emerging markets and trends in the Global South. As the authors of a 2023 McKinsey & Company study note, “other countries and regions, including the Middle East and India, are ready to step into the [clean beauty] limelight, offering distinct potential for specific categories and price tiers. The likely upshot is that many brands will align their geographic strategies to this new world order, which will require a variety of localized playbooks” (Amed et al., 2023). This study, in part, explores the contents of Vietnam’s Gen Z ‘playbook.’

Research on clean beauty in the Global South is spotty, though there has been impactful research regionally on Indonesia (Andika et al, 2023; Syahrul and Mayangsari, 2023; Widiantari and Rachmawati, 2023), Malaysia (Al Mumun et al., 2018; Ghazali et al, 2017), and India (Putri et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2019). While cross-cultural studies of Gen Z behavior have originated from within the clean beauty industry (Amed et al., 2023; Francis and Hoefel, 2018; Lynam, 2023), academic examinations often concentrate on single developing countries (Pitaloka, 2023) or regional analyses (Kaliyadan, 2021) rather than comparing diverse perspectives. While this approach is valuable for understanding the specific context of a given nationality of Gen Z, it may obscure the diversity and complexity of global Gen Z experiences.

In light of this reality, this study aims to compare the experiences and perspectives of Gen Z in the United States and the case study of Vietnam, with a particular focus on their attitudes towards and consumption of clean beauty products. By examining these two distinct contexts, we seek to challenge the overemphasis on Gen Z data from large clean beauty markets, instead focusing on the ways Vietnamese cultural values are shaping the nascent Vietnamese clean beauty industry and market.

Vietnam, a rapidly developing communalist nation with a changing cultural landscape, provides a valuable case study for comparison to larger clean beauty markets. Gen Z in Vietnam values authenticity and cultural integration while seeking safety and sustainability in beauty products (Le, Duc Tran, and Hoang, 2022; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2020). They are influenced by digital platforms, new movements in education, and a broadening economic situation, but also maintain traditional values.

In particular, Vietnam’s stark contrast to the United States – which is characterized by a capitalist economy, individualism, a strong clean beauty industry, and robust governmental regulation – allows us to explore a wider range of cultural factors that shape global Gen Z's perspectives on beauty and sustainability. While the preferences and behaviors of American Gen Zers are often used as a stand-in for the discussion of an entire generation, this study emphasizes the importance of considering diverse cultural, economic, and social contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z experiences worldwide.

Our methodology paired quantitative and qualitative research methods, with data gathered over several months in 2024. Qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with Gen Z aged men and women in both countries, allowing for a deeper exploration of their experiences and perspectives through open-ended questioning. Quantitative data was collected through online surveys administered to representative samples of American and Vietnamese Gen Z. Two hundred surveys per country were gathered to collect demographic information, attitudes towards beauty, and consumption habits. This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights.

**CLEAN AND GREEN AS INTER-RELATED PRIORITIES**

Throughout all of our interviews and our surveys, clean beauty and green beauty emerged as paramount considerations for Gen Z consumers in both the United States and Vietnam when selecting beauty products. However, the specific interpretations of these terms varied across cultures.

American consumers perceived both clean beauty and green beauty as broader societal trends, aligning with larger movements towards safe consumption and sustainability. Olivia, 27, from Raleigh, explained that, “in America, there's a lot of hype around health and wellness, and people are often willing to pay a premium for products that are marketed as 'clean'... I think the [American] consumer will continue to insist on transparency and honesty when it comes to products: beauty, food, medicines, yeah. We will want to know what ingredients we’re putting in us, how the products came to be, how they were made, who made them, etc.” These concepts were not solely confined to the beauty industry but were seen as part of a broader cultural shift.

Furthermore, Americans conceptualized clean beauty as a concept shaped by both industry practices and consumer demands in relation to larger pressures like the pandemic and existing government policies (which will be further discussed below). Prioritizing clean beauty was often viewed as an individualistic choice, reflecting personal values and preferences. Interestingly, many American consumers also expressed that clean beauty was a foreign concept, originating from South Korea. For example, Dominica, a 25-year-old entrepreneur in Phoenix suggested that, “I feel like there has been a noticeable increase in natural and sustainable products in the past few years, maybe since the pandemic? But perhaps it is due to the influence of other cultures, like South Korea, in the modern beauty world.”

In contrast, Vietnamese respondents perceived clean beauty as an extension of existing cultural norms that emphasized simplicity, cleanliness, and natural ingredients. As Thuy, a 21 year old fashion student in Hue, articulated what she saw as the primary differences between clean beauty in Vietnam and other national contexts:

I think in Vietnam, clean beauty is still a relatively new concept, especially compared to Western countries. People here have always valued natural beauty, but the idea of clean beauty as a movement— where consumers demand transparency, sustainability, and ethical practices—is just starting to take off. In other cultures, especially in the US or Europe, clean beauty seems more established, and there’s a stronger focus on environmental activism tied to beauty consumption. Here, clean beauty is still seen as a bit niche, but I think it will grow as more people become aware of the benefits for both health and the environment.

Survey data further reinforced these findings, and is shown in Table 1. When asked to prioritize various cultural and social factors influencing their beauty product purchases, Vietnamese Gen Z respondents overwhelmingly valued safety, health, cleanliness, and sustainability, with over 90% rating these factors as "Very Important" or "Important" on our four-point Likert scale. While social media and family/friend recommendations were less prioritized, they were still considered "Important" by 55% of the Vietnamese respondents. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of Vietnamese respondents expressed a strong desire for beauty products that aligned with Vietnamese cultural values.

American Gen Z consumers also considered safety, health, and cleanliness as key factors, with 75% prioritizing them highly, as shown in Table 2. However, sustainability was valued by a smaller percentage of American respondents, and just over 10% considered it "Not Important." Social media and family/friend recommendations were less influential for American consumers, and the need for products to align with American cultural values or be manufactured domestically was even less significant. The most striking finding was the overwhelming emphasis on price and value among American Gen Z, with almost 58% of Americans signaling that price was "Very Important."

Correlational analyses revealed stronger associations between cleanliness and sustainability, as well as between cleanliness and cultural connections, among Vietnamese respondents compared to their American counterparts. These findings, found in Table 3, suggest that Vietnamese consumers may view these as a connected matrix of cultural understandings: cleanliness and sustainability are themselves seen as extensions of Vietnamese culture. In contrast, American Gen Zers see cleanliness, sustainability, and cultural identity as separate factors when considering beauty and purchasing preferences.

These findings highlight that Gen Z in both countries prioritize cleanliness and sustainability, but with distinct perspectives. Vietnamese Gen Z perceive these values as integral to their cultural experience, while American Gen Z describe them as individual pursuits for personal health and environmental improvement. Recognizing and exploring these contrasting viewpoints is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways Gen Z approaches clean beauty globally.

**NORMALIZING ‘NATURAL’ AS MODERN**

*“Growing up in Vietnam, I was surrounded by natural beauty remedies from a young age. My mom and grandmother always believed in using simple, natural ingredients like rice water, green tea, and aloe vera for skincare. They never really trusted products from big brands because they believed in the power of natural remedies. So, when I first started exploring clean beauty, it felt familiar to me. The concept of using natural, non‐ toxic ingredients is something that’s already deeply rooted in our culture. I think that’s why clean beauty resonates so much with me—it’s like the modern, refined version of the natural beauty practices I grew up with.” –* Mai, 22, Ho Chi Minh City

Our findings highlight the significant cultural influences on Gen Z's understanding and appreciation of clean beauty, as existing ideas of natural beauty merge with modern market ideas. During interviews, American respondents often connected their perceptions of clean beauty to the broader cultural emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene within American society, especially in the post-COVID era. But there was no reference to distinctly American ideals about beauty or cleanliness, or mention of unique qualifiers of American clean beauty. For example, Ethan, 23 from Los Angeles, felt that “there might be some cultural or societal things that play a role in this, but my personal decision to go down the road of clean beauty, for the most part, has more to do with my personal concerns about health and the environment.” Interestingly, many American respondents also acknowledged the influence of other cultures, such as South Korea, in shaping the global discourse on clean beauty.

American Gen Z subjects instead viewed the clean beauty industry in the United States as tapping into existing ideas of youthfulness, even expressing concerns about the potential for excessive obsession with cleanliness among younger Americans. “I do think that the clean beauty movement, by promoting certain types of looks, has the potential of enabling a kinda unhealthy preoccupation with certain looks and uses,” argued Olivia, a 27 year-old working professional in Raleigh, North Carolina. She continued, “I believe that the future of clean beauty is one to be hopeful about, yet the consumerism surrounding everything ‘clean’ and all the big claims of certain products and brands make me kinda worried for the next generation.”

In contrast, Vietnamese Gen Z informants rooted their understanding of clean beauty in traditional Vietnamese values and practices. As Thuy, a 21 year old fashion student in Hue explained, “clean beauty products often combine our traditional ingredients with scientific research, which makes me trust them even more.” Throughout interviews, Vietnamese Gen Z were able to identify specific ingredients that connected modern clean beauty products to their country's long-standing cultural heritage; rice water was the most commonly referenced, inherently tied to rice’s deep importance in Vietnam’s economic and cultural contexts. This suggests a strong cultural resonance between traditional beauty practices and contemporary clean beauty trends in Vietnam, aligning with other ethnographic studies of clean beauty in Vietnam (Nguyen-Viet, and Nguyen, 2024).

Furthermore, our survey data (refer back to Table 3) revealed a stronger correlation between caring about cleanliness and wanting beauty products to connect to local culture among Vietnamese survey takers than their American counterparts. This indicates that Vietnamese Gen Z are more likely to prioritize products that align with their cultural identity and heritage, while American respondents may be more focused on the broader health and environmental benefits associated with clean beauty.

**INFLUENCE AND EXPECTATION**

Throughout our interviews, one somewhat unexpected aspect of this research made itself present: both American and Vietnamese Gen Z were enthusiastic, even audacious, in their confidence that Gen Z was a major force pushing companies to become more transparent, more sustainable, and more clean. As Ethan, 23 from Los Angeles, proclaimed with notable pride in his voice, “don’t forget that we’re the values-driven generation, committed to sustainability and ethical sourcing, and we do our research, read our reviews and shop with our principles in mind.” Vietnamese counterparts expressed similar sentiments. Both American and Vietnamese respondents emphasized Gen Z's role in driving the clean beauty movement, underscoring their active engagement and critical thinking. This was a proactive mindset, a negotiation of ethics and supply and demand.

A prominent theme that emerged from our interviews and surveys was the importance of doing one's own research. Gen Zers in both countries expressed a strong desire to take control of their beauty routines by independently investigating ingredients, brands, and product claims. For example, one Vietnamese subject explained her process, “I usually check the product’s ingredients list, look for reviews from other users, and visit the brand’s website to see if their sustainability claims hold up. If a brand says it’s eco‐ friendly, I want to know how they’re backing that up.” This approach not only allowed her to ensure the safety and effectiveness of clean beauty products but also held companies accountable for their claims.

American Gen Z informants often attributed the rise of clean beauty in the United States directly to the actions of their generation, especially in regards to researching product composition and demanding clean ingredients and ethical sourcing. Emily, a 19-year-old college student in St. Louis, explained, “we can Google it, [beauty companies] better answer the questions because we can research the products. We want to know what’s going on. We want to know what’s in the products that we’re putting on our faces and skin… The beauty industry is changing because we’re choosy.” American Gen Z informants described a mix of grassroots activism, social media savvy, and consumer empowerment that led to increased demand for cleaner products. While price was a significant factor for American consumers, they were willing to invest in clean beauty products, especially when they could find them on sale, intentionally putting pressure on the market to address their needs.

In contrast, Vietnamese Gen Z informants recognized that clean beauty was more deeply rooted in their cultural traditions, but they also acknowledged that it was a relatively new movement for young people and those with disposable income. For example, Mai, 21 from Ho Chi Minh City, argued that, “[clean beauty] is still something that mostly appeals to younger people, especially those who are more educated about skincare and environmental issues… Right now, I think it’s still seen as something for people who are really into beauty, but I believe it will go mainstream as more affordable options become available.” Despite its luxury status, Vietnamese Gen Zers in both our interviews and surveys expressed a willingness to pay for clean beauty products, recognizing their value and potential benefits.

Globally, Gen Z is a supremely digitally-oriented demographic, and they are fully aware of the power their social media use has on the clean beauty industry. Duy, a 24‐year‐old marketing intern in Hanoi, explained that “social media makes it easier to spread information, and companies are starting to realize that they have to cater to these demands if they want to stay relevant.” American Gen Zers enthusiastically agree: Dominica, a 25-year-old entrepreneur in Phoenix, proclaimed that, “we are always on our phones, which means that we can scream on social media about the crap that’s out there and cheer on the brands that are embracing clean beauty and calling out those who aren’t.”

These expressions of expectation also manifested themselves within the survey data. Our survey offered Gen Z respondents a way to show how “intense” their feelings were about cleanliness, purity, sustainability, and brand responsibility through various questions. Users could choose on a scale of 0-100 how important these social issues were to them, and the data can be found below in Table 4. In the case of all options presented to survey-takers, Vietnamese respondents cared more about the safety, sustainability, ethics, and inclusivity of the beauty products and brands. In all cases, American responses to the respective question showed a significantly higher standard deviation than their Vietnamese equivalent, meaning Vietnamese respondents were more aligned in their social views than their American counterparts.

The largest difference in weight between American and Vietnamese Gen Z respondents occurred around the issue of sustainability: 61.23 for Americans and 81.76 for Vietnamese respondents. This result aligns with the comparison of American “Not Important” and Vietnamese Gen Z “Very Important” beauty purchasing priorities, respectively shown on Table 2 and 1 earlier.

**GOVERNMENT REGULATION, INFLUENCERS, AND TRUST**

Both American and Vietnamese Gen Z respondents emphasized the importance of government regulation in ensuring the safety and effectiveness of clean beauty products. However, their perspectives on existing regulation differed. American informants expressed confidence in the existing regulatory framework and expressed that regulation was having a positive impact on the clean beauty industry. Vietnamese Gen Z, on the other hand, felt that government regulation was still lacking in their country but expressed hope that Gen Z's activism would inspire future reforms. Quan, 21, from Ho Chi Minh City, explained, “right now, there isn’t much oversight on what gets labeled as clean or natural. If there were stricter rules about ingredient transparency or environmental impact, I think more people would feel confident choosing clean beauty products.”

Despite their shared commitment to clean beauty, American and Vietnamese Gen Z respondents expressed concerns about the trustworthiness of the beauty industry. Vietnamese Gen Z informants expressed doubts about the quality and authenticity of clean beauty products. For example, Mai, 21 from Ho Chi Minh City, warned that, “right now, there’s a lot of confusion about what ‘clean’ really means because the term isn’t regulated. Some brands take advantage of that by using misleading labels.”

In contrast, American Gen Z respondents were more skeptical of influencers who might be exaggerating or being paid for positive reviews. “I never believe what a social media influencer is telling me at face value,” Olivia, 27, from Raleigh, assured us during interviews. “You really always need to do your own research and read reviews of the products from different sources, and also finding out if the brand received a certificate or is acknowledged by certain certifying organizations.” Olivia’s concerns, echoed by many of the American interview subjects, highlight the challenges and opportunities for the beauty industry to build trust and credibility among this influential generation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This study presents groundbreaking insights into the complex factors that drive beauty product purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers in both the United States and Vietnam. By exploring the dynamic interplay between cultural values, social consciousness, and consumer preferences, our research significantly advances the discourse on the global clean beauty movement, particularly highlighting how the social and cultural priorities of this generation are reshaping industry behaviors and strategies.

Our findings reveal that Vietnam serves as a fascinating case study, illustrating in new ways how traditional cultural practices converge with modern market dynamics. For Vietnamese Gen Z, the concept of clean beauty is intricately linked to longstanding practices that emphasize natural ingredients like rice water and green tea, deeply embedded in the nation’s heritage. This perspective reframes sustainability, cleanliness, and health as interconnected values, reflecting a broader cultural ethos. Although the clean beauty movement in Vietnam is still emerging compared to its Western counterparts, it is rapidly gaining traction as an increasing number of young consumers with disposable income recognize the profound benefits of ethical consumption. This engagement marks a transformative shift towards sustainable practices that honor traditional values of simplicity, health, and environmental stewardship.

In contrast, American Gen Z approaches clean beauty from an individualistic and trend-centric viewpoint, to a greater extreme than the literature seemed to suggest. Insights from our interviews and surveys indicate that American respondents align clean and green beauty with broader societal movements focused on wellness and environmental activism, though these concepts lack the same deep cultural roots. Heavily influenced by global beauty trends, particularly those from South Korea, American Gen Zers often see clean beauty as a personal choice grounded in health and ethical considerations. While sustainability is a prominent concern, it is frequently viewed as separate from their cultural identity, reflecting a critical skepticism towards influencers and a strong emphasis on independent research and brand transparency.

These contrasting perspectives illuminate the intricate ways in which Generation Z navigates the clean beauty landscape, with cultural heritage and modern market forces playing crucial roles. Whether steeped in tradition, as seen in Vietnam, or propelled by individual choice, as illustrated in the United States, clean beauty emerges as a vital priority for this generation, shaped by distinct cultural contexts.

Looking forward, our research opens the door for future studies that could expand the questionnaire, increase sample sizes, and include additional Asian countries for comparative analysis, thus enriching the current literature. While we examined diverse aspects of beauty consumption – sustainability, safety, cleanliness, ethics, inclusivity, and national identity – subsequent research could delve deeper into specific cultural values by developing more sophisticated models and scales. Utilizing advanced theoretical frameworks could yield fresh insights into particular aspects of Gen Z consumer behavior. Furthermore, comparing our findings with those from other generational cohorts in both countries could reveal significant generational differences and the evolving dynamics of beauty product consumption.

Moreover, insights into the Vietnamese experience—especially regarding the evolution of cultural notions of natural beauty amid a burgeoning beauty movement—will be crucial for understanding the preferences and priorities of Vietnamese Gen Z, transcending the boundaries of the clean beauty sector. By unpacking the cultural nuances and shared values that underpin Gen Z's preferences, researchers, marketers, and policymakers can craft more targeted and effective strategies to engage this influential demographic.

**ENDNOTES**

1. All names in this article have been changed to maintain anonymity.

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| **TABLE 1: Vietnamese Responses to Question, “How important are the following factors when you purchase beauty products?”** | | | | |
|  | **Very Important** | **Important** | **Somewhat Important** | **Not Important** |
| Cleanliness, safety, and health | 147 | 33 | 16 | 4 |
| Sustainability/environmental impact | 109 | 70 | 19 | 2 |
| Price and value for money | 67 | 92 | 35 | 6 |
| Social media recommendations | 36 | 109 | 35 | 20 |
| Family and friend recommendations | 31 | 110 | 36 | 23 |
| Connections to Vietnamese culture | 57 | 75 | 51 | 17 |
| Made in Vietnam | 22 | 45 | 68 | 65 |

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| **TABLE 2: American Responses to Question, “How important are the following factors when you purchase beauty products?”** | | | | |
|  | **Very Important** | **Important** | **Somewhat Important** | **Not Important** |
| Cleanliness, safety, and health | 101 | 49 | 46 | 4 |
| Sustainability/environmental impact | 55 | 50 | 74 | 21 |
| Price and value for money | 115 | 66 | 11 | 8 |
| Social media recommendations | 25 | 62 | 90 | 23 |
| Family and friend recommendations | 24 | 74 | 83 | 19 |
| Connections to American culture | 32 | 37 | 56 | 75 |
| Made in the United States | 31 | 37 | 70 | 62 |

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| **TABLE 3: Pearson’s Correlations to “Cleanliness” Responses to Question, “How important are the following factors when you purchase beauty products?”** | | |
|  | **Vietnam** | **United States** |
| Sustainability/environmental impact | 0.495 | 0.365 |
| Price and value for money | 0.368 | 0.193 |
| Social media recommendations | 0.048 | 0.064 |
| Family and friend recommendations | 0.272 | 0.240 |
| Connections to National culture | 0.211 | 0.101 |
| Made in Home Country | 0.058 | 0.099 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **TABLE 4: Comparison of American and Vietnamese Gen Z Weighted Importance of Beauty Company Responsibility** | | | |
|  | | **MEAN** | **SD** |
| How important is it to you that beauty products are clean, safe, and free from harmful chemicals? | | | |
|  | America  Vietnam | 70.36  89.27 | 26.83  16.20 |
| How important is it to you that the beauty products you purchase are environmentally friendly? | | | |
|  | America  Vietnam | 61.23  81.76 | 25.83  18.79 |
| How important is it to you that beauty brands are socially responsible and ethical? | | | |
|  | America  Vietnam | 64.10  82.94 | 25.40  20.84 |
| How important is it to you that beauty brands are inclusive and represent a diverse range of people? | | | |
|  | America  Vietnam | 62.37  77.85 | 29.04  20.82 |