

BEYOND BEAUTIFUL



HOW TECHNOLOGY IS DRASTICALLY ALTERING APPEARANCE STANDARDS, THE RISKS TO TEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND HOW BRANDS CAN BUILD SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

BEYOND BEAUTIFUL



Like most things in life, it feels like people's aspirations around beauty and overall appearance used to be simple. For girls it was going to a local make-up counter for the latest eyeliner shade, and for boys it meant doing a few push ups or using some deodorant. Fast forward to 2022.

The explosion of social media as a new surround sound – most powerfully for the impressionable 16-22 demographic, has transformed not just what beauty 'is' but what it does, what it means, what it looks like, how you get it, where you get it and what you do with it. The images of what young people think they need to look like is beyond all possibility because it is not real. It's beyond beautiful. It's technology.

Ronald F. Blawko: Popularly known as Blawko, is a self-proclaimed low-life who identifies as a robot man. He has 141k followers on Instagram and describes himself as a 'young robot sex symbol' due to his streetwear style and tattoos. Blawko has featured in a number of online interviews, has his own YouTube channel and has even done DJ set's on radio.

Not surprisingly, this is driving a boom in the beauty industry. Worth \$480B in 2020, it's predicted to swell to \$716B in the next 3 years.¹ That's great for the industry, but a dilemma lies within. Many of the drivers of this growth are proving detrimental to young audience's mental health. The prevailing 'look', both for women and men, is increasingly becoming uniform, genuinely unattainable, and worrying overall.

For young women it's flawlessness, perfection and homogeneity. Often described in the industry as 'Insta-Face' (think cat eyes, high cheek bones, poreless skin and big lips), with a slim but voluptuous (in places) figure. And young people are exposed to this look by brands, influencers and entertainment on an almost constant basis on social media, advertising and TV.

For young men the look is almost impossibly athletic and muscley – the classic action man or Greek god figure; on steroids; literally. The fastest growing cosmetic surgery for men aged 18-24 is 'pec implants'.² More than 1 million Brits admit to taking steroids, easily accessible online or in certain gyms, in their quest for the Beyond Beautiful bod.

If Gen Z's don't naturally have the look and want it, they are overwhelmingly prepared to fake it with cosmetics, filters and if/when they can afford it, cosmetic procedures.



Beauty is now perfection. It's not enough to just be good-looking anymore, you have to be unreal. Look at Gigi or Bella Hadid; they are literal models, with a practically perfect gene pool, and they have had so much work done. They've gone from being pretty, to practically looking like aliens, they're so beautiful. It's beyond beautiful.

Skylar (16)³



In partnership with Chloe Combi, author and opinion leader helping marketers and governments understand youth, we conducted a global research study to hear their views, aspirations and experiences first hand.

Over half the girls in our research said they wanted to be "flawless and perfect".⁴ You could say it's always been this way, but what that means today is so much more extreme.

'I've never seen a mental health crisis this bad in young people. Governments, schools and professionals are in full red-alarm, panic stations mode, with the majority of teenagers.

and young adults in the UK, USA and Europe experiencing mental health issues varying from the mild to the critical. And looks and body image are cited by every young person I speak to and discuss with other professionals as a major factor in this mental health crisis. The fault lies with no one thing – but there is one undeniable fact; we must do something to make young people start feeling better about themselves".⁵

We know conversations around unattainable beauty standards are not new. However, with growing awareness of mental health and wellbeing, we've started to take the conflation of the rising standards of beauty and the declining state of mental health and ask serious questions about how much one impacts the other.

In the UK in 2020, a Parliament commissioned survey of children and adults showed the extent to which our beauty and body image impacts our mental health and wellbeing. The study showed that people, especially young people, feel overwhelmingly negative about their bodies and they still feel unrepresented in media and advertising.⁶

Thankfully, the corporate and media worlds are starting to shine a light on the need for businesses to find a way to grow commercially without harm to people and planet. Just last week at the Cannes Lions International Festival

of Creativity, the independent, not for profit Institute for Real Growth brought together 100+ CMOs for three days to focus on achieving a new kind of growth; humanised growth. Humanised growth is recognising the need of all stakeholders in a business including the customers and communities they serve. In beauty, no other brand has led in this area better than Dove, from the pioneering "Campaign for Real Beauty" launch almost two decades ago to the most recent "Toxic Influence" film that highlights what young girls are exposed to online and what is being normalised to achieve this Beyond Beautiful standard.



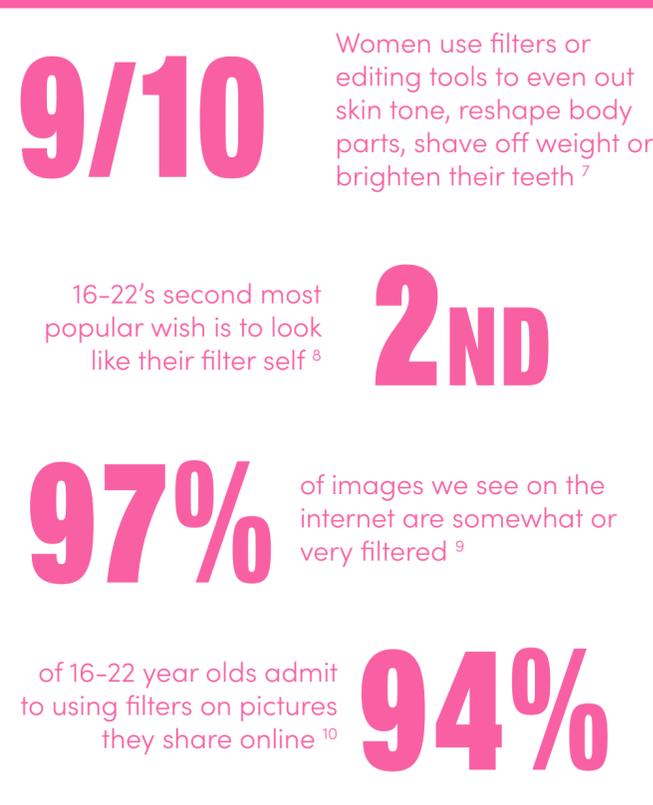
The 'Insta-Face' - cat eyes, high cheek bones, poreless skin and big lips.

Model: @ysathisjulienne

THE DILEMMA: HOW CAN THE BEAUTY AND WELLNESS INDUSTRY ACHIEVE HUMANISED GROWTH WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

There is no question. Technology is driving an unprecedented and extreme inflation of beauty standards.

The data is clear:



So it's no surprise that people have begun to aspire to look like they are filtered in real life. It's all they see in their digitized social lives. This is the point at which connection to the real, to the human fades away and the tunnel vision sets in.

Importantly, the issue is not just limited to femme beauty but affects boys and young men too. There is a general societal misconception of what it takes to reach the 'Greek God' body fuelled by fitness influencers and celebrities that hide the truth about their use of substances. This is so common it has a name – being a 'fake natty' – and there are entire Youtube channels with millions of subscribers dedicated to calling it out. This type of brand behaviour is proven to lead young males either down the path of muscle dysmorphia when their attempts to attain the 'Greek God' bod inevitably fail – which 1 in 10 male gym goers may have¹¹ – or simply to reach for the steroids.

The latest evolution of the tech influence is AI. This is creating a next level aesthetic that Gen Z already seem to be drawn to. There is now a desire to look like a "walking filter", or worse; a digital avatar. One of the most expressed

desires is for cosmetics and procedures that replicate these unreal looks. Cosmetic doctors are most commonly asked to make patients to either look like a celebrity, or a filter.¹²

“ I definitely think the computer-generated thing has impacted men's beauty standards. It's like the good-looking guys all come from a 'programme' and even if they're a different colour or age, there's a similarity: symmetrical face, stubble, penetrating eyes, square jaw, full lips.

Harry (20)¹³



To see this trend in action, look no further than the recent success of virtual influencers. These are fictional computer generated 'people' who have the realistic characteristics, features and personalities of humans. These 'influencers' are sponsored by companies such as Chanel, and have kissed Bella Hadid and graced the covers of Esquire. This year, the most popular virtual

Influencer Lil Miquela signed with CAA and is projected to earn over \$10M. Whilst tempting for marketers, they bring all their own complications with promoting unrealistic (literally) beauty, and transparency (as they are imitating real humans, but not in a way that is immediately clear that they aren't real – particularly if you are casually strolling!)

The beauty industry has and always will fulfil the human need for aspiration, fantasy and escape. It's fun and it can drive people to be better healthier selves. But when the new normal is so impossible there is a risk that post pandemic and being driven into a more digital world, young people will struggle to feel good enough in reality to enjoy reality, relationships and personal success outside the screen.



Lil Miquela: The world's most popular Virtual Influencer, or according to her Instagram, a '19 year-old Robot living in LA. Miquela has over 3m followers on both TikTok and Instagrams and songs with over 50m plays on Spotify. She's also collaborated with brands like Calvin Klein and Prada and was listed as one of the 'Top 24 most Influential People on the Internet' by TIME magazine.

1 IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS: USE TECH WITH CAUTION

We've been here before.

Once again parts of the advertising industry, and the government are mobilising against influencers and companies who neglect transparency. Ogilvy UK will no longer work with influencers who distort or retouch their bodies or faces for brand campaigns.¹⁴ And an MP in the UK government has proposed the Digitally Altered Body Image Bill to the UK parliament. If passed the bill would require influencers to add a logo to show their body has been digitally altered.¹⁵ This type of bill has already been passed in Norway, with the law coming into place in July 2022.

Our advice to beauty brands committed to better mental health and the wellbeing of their young customer base is to approach the use of virtual influencers with real caution. If planning to work with one, think about the Beyond Beautiful implications – there is no reason that a virtual influencer can't be 'real' about their blemishes too.

So whilst potentially financially rewarding in the short-term, a laissez-faire attitude to transparency will likely damage all brands in the long-term, particularly with generations who are really starting to understand just how much beauty, mental health and overall wellness are interconnected.



Margot, Shudu & Zhi for Balmain
(AI IModels/Influencers)

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS: BREAK THE MOULD

The aim should be to create more inclusivity and diverse representation when it comes to faces, bodies and creating new looks for audiences to buy into.

Brands should be open-minded to non-traditional beauty trends and leave more room for non-cis beauty role models and even to eschew beauty all together by focusing on health of body, skin, hair and mind.

Big brands, like Fenty Beauty with their 40-shade Pro Filter range and Vaseline's See My Skin campaign have already provided benchmarks for creating authentic trust and encouraging diverse beauty. It's time other brands followed suit.

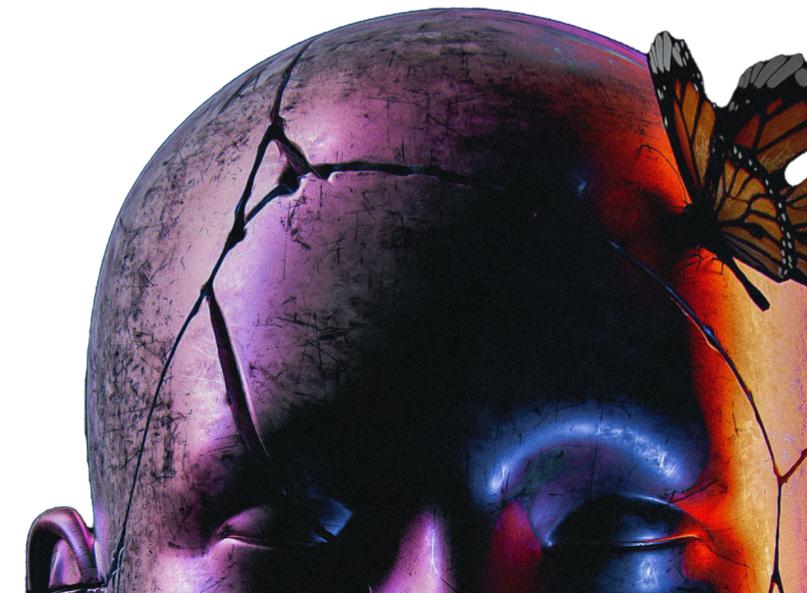
It is time to bring back the fun and pleasure of creating a look and move away from the seriousness, misery, and low-self-esteem.

“ Oh my god yes!! Products that make me look gorgeous, but don't use Love Island type influencers, don't use filters, gives a genuine sense of what it'll do for you, shows beautiful, diverse, real people wearing it, and makes me feel good when I wear it out, would be lit. I want it. ”

Rochelle (19)¹⁶

“ I'd love more products for men that are more honest and real. I can't even go on Insta at the moment, because my mental health is so shredded. It's so triggering. I'd love to see a campaign with guys who looked more like me, in the real world and some sense of normality. ”

Danyal (19)¹⁷



3 IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS: PUT TRUE CUSTOMER CARE FIRST

There are ways for every brand to keep doing what they do best and produce the gorgeous and ground-breaking products young audiences love, whilst also making them feel great about themselves and helping them look after their mental health.

A recent You Gov study has shown that young people want it too. 65% of Gen Z will pay 48% more on average for products from a purpose-driven brand.¹⁸ And what could be more purpose driven than helping to tackle one of the biggest public health crises of the '20's?

It's time for brands to be brave and creative about how to play their part.

What if brands started calling out this global addiction for what it is?

What if brands started saying to the young customers 'you are good enough'?

BRING PEOPLE BACK TO REALITY

Have both real and filtered images in every campaign to acquaint people with what real is and remind people what people look like.

ENCOURAGE BRAVERY

A non-filter line running with a #losethefilter campaign, where everyone dares to bare. Don't believe this could work? Barbie – the original Beyond Beautiful gal, was given a 'real' makeover and sales boosted by 16%. People need to feel they can be what they can see!¹⁹

HARNESS NOSTALGIA

In a search for comfort, Gen Z's desire for nostalgic products is booming, from is HUGE from Stranger Things to the return of blue eyeshadow. Playing on this trend, is there a way your brand could encourage your Gen Z audience take a leaf from their Mum's tea-dress and just rock their look for themselves and not social media?

Brands play a key role in people's lives, and always will. However, we're championing for all brands to create a sustainable beauty landscape, where a humanised nature is adopted.

To discuss our report in more detail, our recommendations and the role you have to play, please get in touch with grow@mcsaatchi.com.

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Sources

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