

Stigma, Trends, and Skincare Preferences among Male Consumers

Wifka Rahma Syauki¹, Diyah Ayu Amalia Avina²

^{1,2} Communication Department, FISIP, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the stigma, inclinations, and skincare preferences of young consumers, with a particular focus on male, Millennials and Generation Z. Over recent years, the use of skincare products among women has witnessed a significant increase, driven by evolving perceptions and trends surrounding aging and wrinkles. Adopting a qualitative methodology, this research utilizes interviews to explore the factors motivating participants to use skincare products, their product choices, and their approaches to navigating social stigma associated with skincare use. Findings reveal that while stigma persists—particularly toward skincare products containing minerals—an increasing number of women view skincare as an essential element of self-care and personal improvement. Furthermore, technology and social media emerge as pivotal forces in shaping consumer preferences for specific products and services. The study also highlights emerging insights into male consumers' responses to shifting social stigmas, offering valuable implications for marketing strategies and product innovation within the cosmetics industry.

KEYWORDS:
male skincare,
social stigma,
masculinity,
trends,
consumer
preferences

INTRODUCTION

Skincare products are well-established among female consumers, meanwhile the male skincare products are a relatively new business, with little research conducted in this burgeoning sector. Products for men's skin care are an untapped market. Not much has been focused on this emerging market. The sight of men employing what is predominantly subscribed to women raises interesting possibilities changing gendered agendas (Byrne & Milestone, 2023). Particularly in the case of men belonging to the millennial and generation Z group, the increasing trend of using skin care products indicates a new shift in societal norms as well as consumption patterns. Skincare has been regarded as an activity associated with women for the most part, but changing definitions of what masculinity means makes everybody recognize skincare as a basic requirement rather than a luxury. Presently, men and women are concerned about one's attractive looks. Emphasis on body aesthetics, particularly the face, is a new culture that has redefined the traditional concept of males being masculine to embracing metro sexuality. Many people seek treatment to enhance their physical appearance and while this is achieved, numerous costs are required. Such concerns regarding physical appearance will keep increasing consumption levels in men (Putranto, Suyanto, & Ariadi, 2022). This

research investigates the mechanisms driving this transition and the remaining societal and psychological hurdles. Furthermore, it emphasizes the significance of technology, social media, influencers, and celebrities in normalizing men's skincare habits.

There are changes in consumer characteristics over time. It is true that marketing theorists have long studied the consumer behaviour, but certain added features of consumers are still being unearthed. The process of deciding on your purchases as a consumer is also one of the hardest and most elaborate undertakings. Some customers take a very high-order abstraction to look through information and decide, whereas others do so use lower-order criteria. Grooming product categories include shaving, body care and skin care. In the 1990s, the crowd pleasers were the shaving goods among aggressive male grooming products, whereas skincare was by far the least favoured inclination amongst consumers. Instead, that is changing, as more and more men seem to slowly take up the use of skin care products (Angus & Westbrook, 2019).

The recent surge in the consumption of grooming products is attributed to an increasing number of men recognizing the importance of maintaining their appearance. By 2026, skincare is projected to become one of the fastest-growing segments within the male grooming industry, driven by evolving attitudes toward grooming and its perceived significance. This shift reflects a broader awareness among men that physical attractiveness plays a critical role in achieving personal and professional success. The body and its physical appearance have become central to individual visual identity (Shilling, 2007). Moreover, men are becoming increasingly aware that healthy skin is fundamental to cultivating a polished appearance (Irawan & Widjaja, 2011). A well-maintained appearance is often associated with enhanced opportunities, including career advancement and improved social interactions. This growing awareness has contributed to a significant increase in the use of skincare products, as men strive to achieve a desirable self-image.

The evolution of skincare usage among men is further accelerated by rapid advancements in technology and the pervasive influence of social media. These platforms have made skincare knowledge, product accessibility, and advice more readily available, enabling men to better understand and implement effective skincare routines. Social media influencers on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have played a pivotal role in destigmatizing the use of men's skincare products. Through their content, influencers engage audiences by sharing skincare methods, promotional campaigns, and life hacks, effectively normalizing skincare practices among men. Consumers are not only influenced by the content shared but also by the social networks formed through these platforms, which stimulate increased consumption and foster a collective acceptance of male skincare routines (Gavrielatou & Raita, 2021). These interactions also serve to challenge stigmas, debunk misconceptions, and promote inclusivity in self-care, further advancing the integration of skincare into men's lifestyles.

While male grooming is becoming the norm for many, there persists a sociocultural undertone that links the use of men's skincare to femininity and diluted masculinity. This form of stigma is mostly derived from conventional concepts where the male person is a rough and dirty being who does not take care of himself. This is likely

rooted in the fear that most men hold; that incorporating skincare routine is feminine and may subject them to an interview or mockery. Research has revealed male consumers' orientation and choice of skincare products is also a contributory factor in this stigma, whereby they tend to go for products labeled 'men' or with male imagery instead (Forbes, 2022).

To keep up with the changing tastes and needs of male buyers, the beauty sector is increasingly adopting more progressive approaches to the marketing of cosmetic goods. Manufacturers are now extending the use of their skin care products to all genders and the importance of caring for oneself, for one's health. Besides, some companies use males and colloquially, their star athletes in some endorsements. This strategy alters the concept of masculinity and suggests skin care routines for men (Kestenbaum, 2022). In marketing such ideas aimed at inclusiveness, brands not only increase their market position but also broaden their conception of how self-care can be undertaken by a person. This move helps to address the imbalance brought about by the stereotypes of gender roles and gets more people interested in skin care and overall health.

The trend of young men embracing the use of skincare products is symptomatic of more lax perceptions of masculinity and self-care in society. While advancements in technology and social media have contributed significantly to the emission of such behaviors, there are still challenges due to the presence of social stigma. In social situations and the context of skincare, it is crucial to appreciate how, yet another gender makes accomplishment decisions and why. The focus for new studies that could follow should be on these interactions and look for measures for these norms in relation to male grooming.

Based on these studies, the primary concern of this research is the rising need for women's use of skin care products and the evolving perception around wrinkles, which are primarily obtained in Millennial and Gen Z generations, considering the stigma, tendencies and skin care preferences towards these generations. The objective is to analyze what drives users and helps" them choose products; and what clientele in cosmetic industry is annoyed with, e.g., attempts to micronize the social stigma surrounding cosmetic usage in the wallet which has few undesirable consequences, most importantly the social aspects of cosmetics issues and marketing.

METHOD

This study adopts a constructivist research paradigm, which posits that reality is shaped by individuals' beliefs, interactions, cultural contexts, and historical backgrounds (Creswell, 2015). Within this framework, researchers are able to interpret consumer behavior through the lens of participants' lived experiences. The primary objective of this investigation is to conduct an in-depth analysis of male Millennials' and Generation Z's skincare purchasing preferences and decision-making processes, with a particular focus on the influence of self-image and perceptions of masculinity on skincare practices within these demographic groups.

The study aims to uncover the patterns and preferences driving skincare usage among male Millennials and Generation Z, exploring the intersection of self-image, grooming habits, and evolving conceptions of masculinity. Primary data is collected through in-depth interviews with carefully selected informants, enabling a nuanced understanding of their skincare preferences, self-perceptions, and views on masculinity. This qualitative data is further enriched by secondary sources, including a comprehensive review of existing literature, e-books, online resources, academic journals, and other relevant references.

Informants are chosen using purposive sampling, a technique that involves selecting individuals based on specific characteristics deemed essential for achieving the study's objectives. This targeted approach ensures that participants provide insights that are directly relevant to understanding the evolving dynamics of male skincare consumption, self-perception, and masculinity in contemporary society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings related to skincare preferences show that physical appearance is central to someone identifying their identity, especially at the visual level. Research data were obtained from questionnaires and research questions distributed to informants who were included in the category, this was done to get a general picture of how millennial and gen z men describe their preferences and needs for skincare products. Providing structured research questions is also to see how informants respond to further interviews.

The informants obtained from the survey were collected as many as 67 people. At the age level, there are two large groups of informants who use skincare, namely Millennials (33%) and Gen Z (31%). The results of this survey, the researcher tried to dig deeper by conducting interviews, but it was quite surprising because most male skincare users objected to further in-depth interviews. This provides an illustration that although the use of skincare is quite open, there is still a sensitive side to male skincare users. The researcher successfully conducted interviews with 5 informants; Aris and Lutfi from Millennial demographic, Ari Agung, and Yori as a representative from Gen Z.

Shifting Cultural Norms and Male Skincare Adoption

The increasing use of skincare products among young men, particularly from Millennial and Gen Z generations, signifies a cultural shift in the perception of masculinity and grooming habits. Traditionally, skincare was viewed as a female-dominated activity, with societal norms linking masculinity to ruggedness and a lack of concern for personal grooming. However, this perception has been changing, with evolving definitions of masculinity that now encompass self-care, personal grooming, and attention to appearance. The term "metrosexual," which emerged in the early 2000s, epitomizes this shift, describing men who invest in their appearance and personal grooming without compromising their masculinity (Byrne & Milestone, 2023).

Interviews with the informants reveal that younger men are increasingly embracing skincare as an essential part of their routines. For instance, Ari mentioned, "I started using skincare when I was in middle school because my mom and sister used it. It just felt natural to start taking care of my skin." This early adoption indicates that younger generations are growing up in an environment where skincare is not bound by traditional gender roles but is instead viewed as a normal aspect of self-care.

Conversely, Luthfi and Aris, representing the Millennial demographic, began using skincare products later in life, motivated primarily by specific skin concerns such as acne and dullness. Luthfi shared, "I didn't start using skincare until I noticed my skin getting worse—acne, oily patches. My wife suggested I try some products, and that's when I got into it." This reflects a key difference between generations: while Millennials may have approached skincare reactively, Gen Z views it as a proactive measure, ingrained in their routine from a young age.

The Role of Social Media and Technology

Technology and social media have played a crucial role in normalizing skincare for men. The widespread use of platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has made skincare information, product reviews, and recommendations more accessible. Influencers and celebrities who share their skincare routines and endorse products help to demystify the process and make skincare appear not only acceptable but also sophisticated and essential (Gavrielatou & Raita, 2021).

The impact of social media was evident in the interviews, with all informants acknowledging its influence on their skincare choices. Fajar, for instance, explained, "I follow a few influencers on Instagram who talk a lot about skincare. They make it easy to understand what products to use and why." This reliance on digital platforms reflects a broader trend in which social media shapes consumer behavior, especially among younger audiences.

For Luthfi and Aris, while they also recognized the influence of technology, they emphasized the need to be selective about the information they consumed. Aris noted, "There's so much advice out there, you have to be careful about who you trust. I prefer to stick with recommendations from sources I know are credible." This cautious approach highlights the importance of trust and credibility in the digital age, where the sheer volume of information can be overwhelming.

Social media not only provides a platform for education and product discovery but also fosters a sense of community among users. Men who may have previously felt isolated in their skincare journeys can now connect with others who share similar interests and concerns. This sense of belonging helps mitigate the stigma associated with male skincare, as men see their peers and role models openly discussing and practicing skincare.

Overcoming Social Stigma

Despite the growing acceptance of skincare among men, social stigma remains a barrier. Many men still face judgment or ridicule for engaging in activities traditionally viewed as

feminine, such as skincare. This stigma is rooted in outdated gender stereotypes that equate masculinity with a lack of concern for appearance and self-care. Both Ari and Fajar, despite being more open about their skincare routines, were conscious of potential judgment. Ari mentioned, "When I was younger, some friends would tease me for using skincare, saying it was only for girls. But now, it's becoming more common, so it doesn't bother me as much."

Luthfi and Aris also encountered stigma, especially from older generations or in environments that upheld traditional masculine ideals. However, they noted that this stigma has decreased over time as more men embrace skincare. Luthfi reflected, "At first, it felt awkward to talk about skincare with my male friends, but now it's more accepted. I think people are starting to see the benefits beyond just looks." This reduction in stigma suggests that societal norms are slowly shifting, with the boundaries of masculinity becoming more flexible.

Marketing communication strategies play a vital role in addressing and overcoming this stigma. Brands that emphasize the gender-neutral benefits of skincare and promote self-care as essential for overall well-being are helping to reshape public perceptions. Campaigns that feature male celebrities or athletes who embody traditional masculinity while endorsing skincare products are particularly effective in challenging stereotypes (Kestenbaum, 2022). These figures serve as relatable role models, making it easier for men to adopt skincare routines without feeling like they are compromising their masculinity.

In addition to using prominent figures, brands are also crafting narratives that highlight the practical benefits of skincare, such as maintaining healthy skin, preventing aging, and enhancing professional and social success. By framing skincare as a tool for achieving broader personal goals, these campaigns can resonate more deeply with male consumers who might otherwise be resistant to the idea of skincare.

Consumer Preferences and Marketing Strategies

The insights gathered from the interviews provide valuable information for marketing communication strategies aimed at male skincare consumers. The data indicate that men are becoming more discerning in their skincare choices, with preferences shaped by factors such as product effectiveness, brand reputation, and peer recommendations.

For younger consumers like Ari and Fajar, social media and online reviews are paramount. They are more likely to experiment with different products and follow trends driven by influencers and peers. This suggests that marketing strategies targeting Gen Z should focus heavily on digital channels, leveraging influencer partnerships and user-generated content to build credibility and trust.

Millennials like Luthfi and Aris, while still influenced by online content, tend to be more cautious and brand-loyal. Aris emphasized, "Once I find a product that works for me, I stick with it. I'm not as interested in trying the latest trends." Marketing strategies targeting this demographic should emphasize product quality, scientific backing, and testimonials from satisfied customers. Engaging with this audience through a combination of digital and traditional media will likely yield the best results, as they

appreciate both the convenience of online shopping and the reassurance provided by in-store experiences. Brands must also consider the importance of inclusivity in their messaging. As men from different backgrounds and with varying skincare needs enter the market, it is essential to create campaigns that speak to a diverse audience. This includes featuring models of different ages, ethnicities, and skin types in advertisements to ensure that all potential customers feel represented and valued (Forbes, 2022).

The concept of "masculine branding" remains pivotal in addressing barriers to the adoption of skincare products among men. Products explicitly marketed as "for men," featuring packaging and branding that emphasize attributes such as strength, simplicity, and functionality, can help reduce the stigma traditionally associated with skincare. However, as societal norms evolve, opportunities arise for brands to move beyond conventional masculine branding and introduce more inclusive or gender-neutral product lines, reflecting broader cultural shifts.

The findings of this study underscore several promising avenues for future research. One key area is the long-term impact of social media on male grooming habits. As digital platforms and algorithms continue to evolve, examining how these changes influence male consumer behavior will be essential. Insights from such research can help brands refine their strategies to align with emerging trends. Another valuable avenue for exploration is the cross-cultural variation in male skincare adoption. While this study focuses on a specific demographic, understanding how different cultural contexts shape perceptions of masculinity and grooming practices could provide actionable insights for global brands seeking to expand their market presence.

Further research is also warranted to investigate the psychological factors driving men's skincare choices. Exploring underlying motivations—such as self-esteem, social acceptance, or health-related concerns—can offer brands a deeper understanding of consumer behavior, enabling them to design more targeted and impactful marketing campaigns.

The growing emphasis on male grooming and skincare reflects significant societal shifts, evolving notions of masculinity, and the increasing acceptance of gender-neutral products. According to Precedence Research (n.d.), the global men's skincare market is projected to reach \$61 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6%. This growth highlights a broader cultural transition, with men increasingly integrating personal care into their overall well-being. Younger consumers, in particular, are adopting a wider range of skincare and cosmetic products, challenging traditional associations of grooming with a loss of masculinity (Bizrate Insights, 2024). These trends illustrate the transformative potential of the male grooming industry, paving the way for innovative strategies and products that cater to a more diverse and inclusive consumer base.

Social media and influencers have played an essential role in normalizing skincare routines for men, especially among Millennials and Gen Z. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow influencers and celebrities to share their skincare journeys, product endorsements, and helpful tips, making skincare more socially acceptable and even fashionable. A recent study shows a 68% increase in male skincare usage, with Gen Z men

being more open-minded and less stigmatized about using skincare products. This normalization has extended to younger generations, including Gen Alpha, with teenage boys engaging with skincare categories early on. This suggests a sustained increase in skincare usage among male demographics as younger generations continue to view it as part of their daily routines (Cosmetics Design, 2024).

In addition to social media, innovations in skincare have contributed to the growing acceptance of grooming routines among men. Increased awareness of the link between skincare and self-grooming for health, alongside the rise of gender-neutral and inclusive cosmetics, has expanded the market. Men are increasingly adopting routines focusing on health benefits rather than aesthetic goals. The rise of gender-neutral products has played a significant role, as men no longer feel pressured to choose products traditionally marketed to women (Assembled Skincare, 2024). The men's skincare market has seen pioneers developing effective, accessible products free from traditional gendered branding, encouraging more men to embrace skincare without fear of stigma.

Generational differences in beauty and grooming reflect broader societal changes in masculinity and beauty perceptions. Older generations often associate beauty with classic Hollywood glamour and natural elegance. In contrast, younger generations—particularly Millennials and Gen Z—are breaking away from traditional ideals. Younger men are more likely to engage with skincare routines that focus on health, self-care, and grooming as part of a broader lifestyle trend. This shift indicates that male skincare is not just tied to aesthetics but also to pursuing health and well-being (Associates in Plastic Surgery, n.d.).

Data from interviews responses show that Gen Z consumers like Ari adopt skincare early, influenced by family and social surroundings, treating it as a natural part of self-care. Millennials like Aris, meanwhile, adopt skincare reactively, driven by concerns such as acne or aging. This generational divide is echoed in responses from Yori and Agung, indicating that younger generations, especially Gen Z, are normalizing skincare for men. Both social media and influencers are powerful forces, shaping grooming habits and reducing stigma, with younger men like Ari and Yori relying on social media to guide their choices. Stigma around male skincare is diminishing, especially among younger generations. While Ari faced teasing in his teenage years, he noted that this stigma faded as skincare became more accepted. Similarly, Lutfi and Yori commented that younger generations no longer view skincare as a threat to masculinity.

As male grooming becomes increasingly associated with health and self-care, brands are adjusting their marketing strategies. Aris and Yori highlighted that practical, effective products with straightforward branding are appealing to men, supporting the paper's argument that brands should focus on inclusivity and functionality. Male grooming and skincare habits are evolving due to shifting societal norms, the influence of social media, and innovations in product development. As men embrace skincare as a form of self-care, brands have an opportunity to meet their needs through gender-neutral, affordable, and effective products that align with modern masculinity. This growing acceptance is evident across generations, with younger men leading the charge in adopting skincare as a normalized aspect of daily life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, male consumers, particularly millennials and Generation Z, are increasingly embracing skincare—a trend that underscores the evolving societal norms and perceptions of masculinity. Male grooming has become significantly more prevalent, driven by the influence of social networks, the availability of gender-neutral products, and the growing emphasis on health and wellness. The men's skincare market is poised for sustained growth as consumers seek effective, affordable, and user-friendly products to meet market demands.

Future research in this domain could benefit from exploring several critical areas. First, it is essential to investigate the role of social media algorithms in shaping male consumers' skincare decisions, particularly examining how platforms like TikTok and Instagram function as influential tools. Second, a cross-cultural analysis could uncover variations in male grooming practices influenced by cultural norms and societal codes across different regions. Third, in light of increasing concerns about sustainability, research on male skincare preferences should consider the impact of ethical consumption on product choice. Finally, an intriguing area of study would be the psychological and social outcomes of adhering to skincare routines, particularly their effects on self-image, confidence, self-esteem, and perceptions of professionalism.

Exploring these areas could provide valuable insights into the evolving male skincare market, fostering a deeper understanding of consumer behavior and informing the development of targeted strategies to position men as a pivotal demographic in brand innovation.

REFERENCES

- Angus, A., & Westbrook, G. (2019). Top 10 global consumer trends. *Euromonitor International: London, UK*.
- Assembled Skincare. (2024). Men's skincare innovations in 2024: Pioneers shaping the industry. Assembled Skincare. Retrieved September 30, 2024, from <https://www.assembledskincare.com/blogs/news/men-skincare-innovations-in-2024-pioneers-shaping-the-industry>
- Associates in Plastic Surgery. (n.d.). Generational perceptions of beauty: Timeless takes and evolving aesthetics. Associates in Plastic Surgery. Retrieved September 30, 2024, from <https://www.associatesinplasticsurgery.com/articles/generational-perceptions-of-beauty-timeless-takes-and-evolving-aesthetics>
- Bizrate Insights. (2024, January 24). Male shoppers are learning the value of cosmetics and skincare. Bizrate Insights. Retrieved September 30, 2024, from <https://bizrateinsights.com/2024/01/24/male-shoppers-are-learning-the-value-of-cosmetics-and-skincare>
- Byrne, A., & Milestone, K. (2023). 'He wouldn't be seen using it...' Men's use of male grooming products as a form of invisible consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 23, 146-167.

- Byrne, M., & Milestone, K. (2023). Changing gendered trends in grooming. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 25(3), 112-130.
- Cosmetics Design. (2024, September 4). 68% increase in male skin care usage: What's driving the surge? *CosmeticsDesign.com*. Retrieved September 30, 2024, from <https://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/Article/2024/09/04/68-increase-in-male-skin-care-usage-what-s-driving-the-surge>
- Forbes, E. (2022). Navigating the masculine landscape: How male consumers approach skincare products. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 32(1), 51-68.
- Gavrielatou, S., & Raita, E. (2021). Social media influencers and their impact on consumer behavior: The case of male skincare. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.
- Irawan, V., & Widjaja, A. W. (2011). Pengembangan model perilaku konsumen pria dalam membeli produk perawatan kulit (skin care) di Indonesia. *Ultima Management: Jurnal Ilmu Manajemen*, 3(1), 16-30.
- Kestenbaum, J. (2022). The new face of masculinity: Men's skincare in the digital age. *Journal of Business Research*, 137, 324-340.
- Precedence Research. (n.d.). Men's skin care products market size to hit USD 61 billion by 2033. *Precedence Research*. Retrieved September 30, 2024, from <https://www.precedenceresearch.com/men-skin-care-products-market>
- Putranto, T. D., Suyanto, B., & Ariadi, S. (2022). Digital marketing communication of skincare products to develop men's consumptive behaviour. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 6(1), 199-212.
- Shilling, C. (2007). Sociology and the body: Classical traditions and new agendas. *The sociological review*, 55(1_suppl), 1-18.