



Smart Beauty:
*AI, Personalization and
the Gen Alpha Consumer*



NIQ

Executive Summary

Beauty discovery is entering a new era, defined not by channels, but by convergence.

For Gen Alpha, inspiration can begin on a screen, become personalized through AI and end with a product tested in-store.

This generation does not see a hard line between digital discovery and physical retail. They expect both to work together.

Technology is not replacing the store. It is making real-world beauty experiences more valuable.

Gen Alpha uses digital channels to explore, compare and learn. But they still rely on stores, parents, peers and physical experiences to validate choices and build confidence.

For beauty and wellness brands, the future is not digital versus physical. It is intelligent, personalized, transparent and human.

“Our Smart Beauty research shows that **Gen Alpha is embracing AI and personalization** in ways that are fundamentally changing how beauty and wellness is discovered and shopped – while still relying on stores and real-world experiences to navigate the category.”



Kelly Mahoney,
Chief Marketing Officer at Ulta Beauty

Gen Alpha is Hybrid by Default

Gen Alpha discovers beauty online, but they validate it in the real world. Online channels help them find new products, learn what's trending and explore beauty through content. Physical experiences help them decide what feels right, what works and what they can trust.

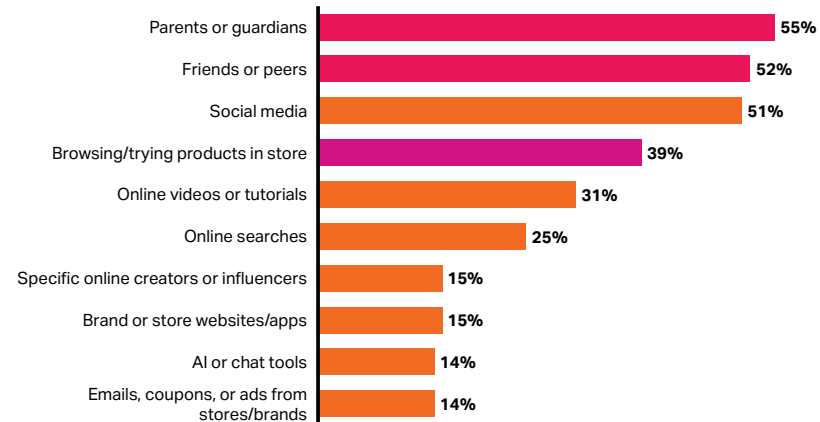
The data shows how closely these behaviors now sit together. Despite growing up digitally, Gen Alpha still prefers shopping for many beauty categories in-store. The reasons are simple: immediacy and exploration. Beauty is sensory. Color, scent, texture, packaging and product fit are easier to understand in person.

Digital discovery creates the spark. The store gives Gen Alpha a place to try, compare, ask and decide. It's a confidence-building environment, especially for younger consumers still learning how to navigate beauty. For beauty and wellness brands, the opportunity is to connect these moments into one seamless discovery journey.

Digital Discovery Meets Real-World Validation

While 78% of Gen Alpha consumers discover beauty products through at least one online source, 77% also rely on real-world validation, including store visits, family and friend guidance and peer conversations.

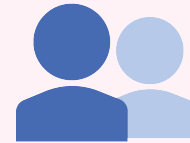
Top Sources Used to Learn About Beauty/Personal Care Products



Methods of Discovery



78%
Online



77%
People/Events



44%
In-store



In-Store Still Wins on Confidence and Immediacy

The majority of Gen Alpha consumers prefer shopping for beauty products in-store, including 73% of fragrance users and 70% of makeup users, 66% of skincare users, 66% of hair care users and 66% of nail care users. Top reasons include being able to take products home immediately and discovering or exploring new products in person.

AI and Personalization Reinforce the Beauty Journey

Gen Alpha consumers who use AI tools are more likely than non-users to visit stores to browse and try products in person. And personalization is also becoming mainstream. The reasons are practical and emotional. Gen Alpha uses personalization to discover new products, try something new and learn how to use products.

AI beauty users are also more likely to say personalization makes beauty feel more relevant, more fun and more efficient. AI is creating more curiosity, not less physical engagement.



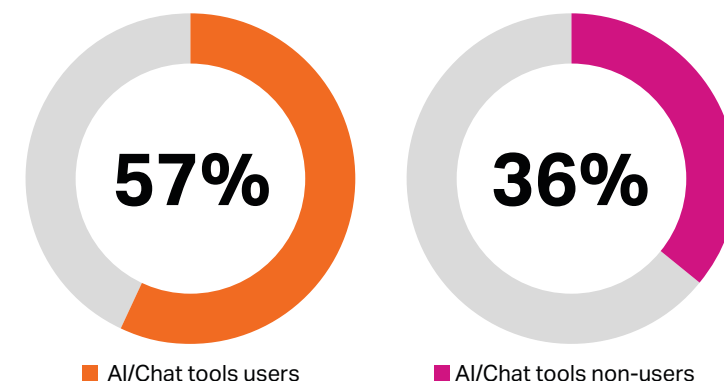
73%
use personalization tools

Nearly three-quarters of Gen Alpha beauty consumers already use personalization tools while shopping for beauty products, such as tailored product recommendations (35%), AI-powered search results (31%) and interest-based content suggestions (29%).



Methods of Learning About Beauty/Personal Care Products

Browsing/ trying products in store



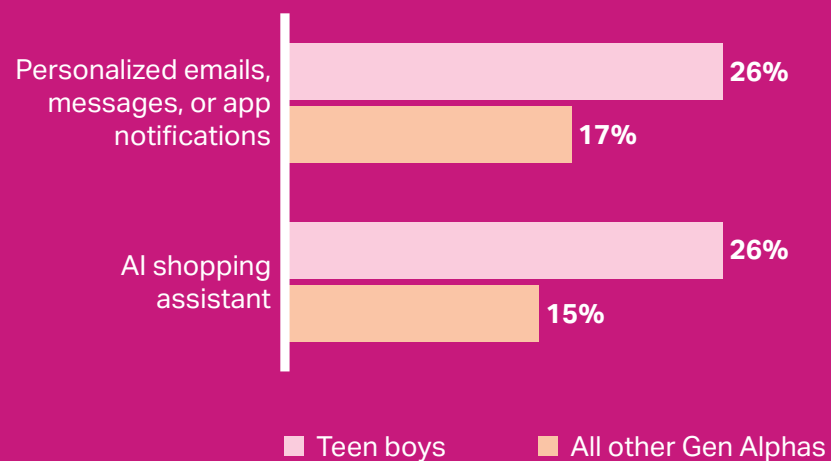
The top reasons for using AI tools include discovering new products (53%), trying something new (45% overall; 54% among teen girls) and learning how to use products (42% overall; 49% among nail care users).

Teen Boys Are Emerging as Early AI Beauty Adopters

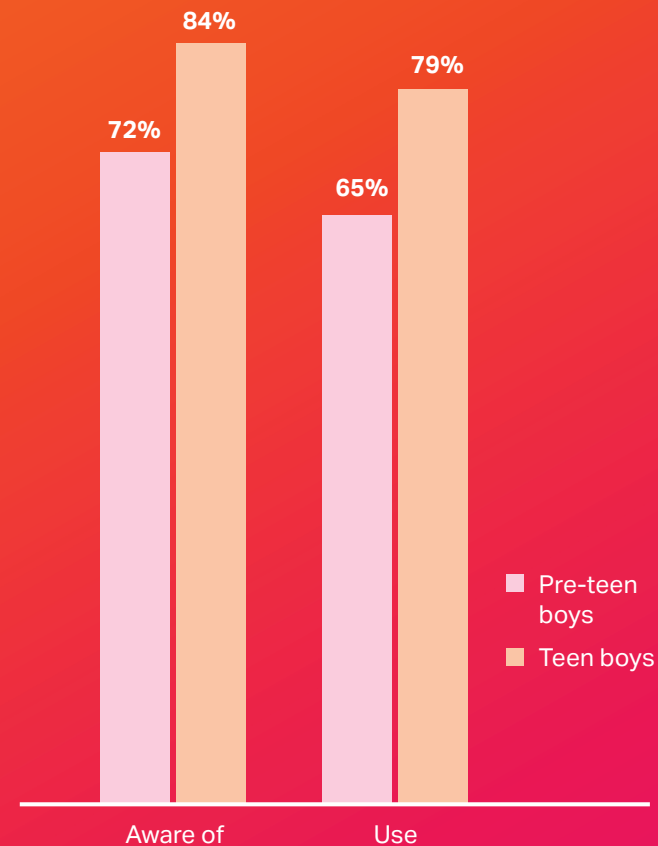
Teen boys are an important signal of what may come next. They are leading Gen Alpha's adoption of AI shopping assistants, suggesting AI may create new entry points into beauty for consumers who have historically been less engaged in the category.



Personalization Tools Usage



Overall Awareness & Usage of Personalization Tools



Teen boys are leading Gen Alpha's adoption of AI-powered beauty tools, with 26% using AI shopping assistants – nearly double the rate of other Gen Alpha groups (~15%).

Parents Want Guidance, Transparency and Trust

As AI and personalization reshape discovery, parents remain central to Gen Alpha beauty decisions.

Nearly all Gen Alpha parents and guardians say they play an active role in what beauty and personal care products are purchased (98%). They are also the single most helpful beauty influence for Gen Alpha (41%), outranking social media (34%) and friends (29%).

This creates a critical balance for the beauty industry. Gen Alpha wants discovery to feel fast, personalized and engaging. Parents want safety, transparency and reassurance.

For retailers, trust starts with the environment. Parents want safe, welcoming spaces for teens, supported by age-appropriate assortments, clear ingredient labeling and knowledgeable in-store guidance.

This is where the human role of retail becomes essential. AI can recommend. Personalization can guide. But trust is built through clarity, responsibility and reassurance.

“**Clear ingredient labelling and age-appropriate product guides would make me feel more comfortable**

- Gen Alpha parent

“**Have an age-appropriate section that we can explore together. This allows them to stay within certain parameters.**

- Gen Alpha parent



The Future of Beauty is Intelligent and Human

Gen Alpha is not simply growing up with AI. They are growing up through it.

Their expectations are being shaped by instant intelligence, personalized recommendations, immersive content and seamless movement between digital and physical experiences.

For beauty and wellness brands and retailers, the opportunity is to connect AI, personalization, stores, parents and peers into one discovery ecosystem. AI can accelerate discovery. Personalization can make it more relevant. Stores can make it tangible. Parents and trusted guidance can make it feel safe.

The winners will be those that balance innovation with trust, intelligence with transparency and digital discovery with real-world reassurance.

In the next era of beauty, the most powerful experiences will not be purely digital or purely physical. They will be connected, personalized and deeply human.



What stands out in these findings is the clear convergence of digital and physical behaviors. **Gen Alpha is highly fluent in AI and personalization, but they are using these tools to enhance discovery and build confidence, not to replace in-store experiences.**



Jacqueline Flam
Managing Director
Beauty & Health at NIQ



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Methodology & Research Design

- Custom quantitative study conducted among Gen Alphas and their parents/guardians to explore how Gen Alpha consumers are engaging with beauty and wellness in an increasingly digital and AI-driven world, including their shopping behaviors, attitudes toward personalization and technology and expectations for brands and retailers.
- 10-minute online survey, fielded April 27, 2026 - May 8, 2026
- US Market
- N=500 Parents/Guardians of Gen Alpha
- N=522 Gen Alpha (60% female, 40% male), recruited through parent with informed consent

About NIQ

NielsenIQ (NYSE: NIQ) is a leading consumer intelligence company, delivering the most complete and trusted understanding of consumer buying behavior and revealing new pathways to growth. By combining an unmatched global data footprint and granular consumer and retail measurement with decades of AI modeling expertise, NIQ builds decision systems that help companies turn complex data into confident action.

With operations in more than 90 countries, NIQ covers approximately 82% of the world's population and more than \$7.4 trillion in global consumer spend. Through cloudbased platforms, advanced analytics and AI-driven insights, NIQ delivers The Full View™—helping brands and retailers understand what consumers buy, why they buy it and what to do next.

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