

THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY UNMASKED:

The Buzzwords That Leave Consumers Lost

2025 Consumer Trends in Online Shopping



Introduction

Today, we live in a world of instant makeovers and on-demand glam, and shopping online for beauty products — whether it's makeup, skincare, or hair care — should be as smooth as your favorite serum. But all too often, it's a frustrating game of guesswork. Why is it nearly impossible to track down the exact nail polish shade your friend wore to brunch? Or find a face lotion formulation that doesn't sound like it's the result of a high school chemistry project? Despite advances in both digital marketing and eCommerce, discovering and searching for beauty products remains more complicated than ever. In beauty, as in life, it all comes down to the right words.

A recent survey of 2,081 U.S. consumers — each shopping online at least once a month for beauty, clothing, shoes, accessories, and/or home goods products — reveals fresh insights into what today's buyers want, what drives their decisions, and how brands can stay relevant (and irresistible) in an increasingly competitive market.

The Hunt for New Beauty

The global cosmetics and beauty industry is projected to generate **\$646.20 billion** in revenue in 2025 and continue to grow. Over the past decade, the way consumers find new products and engage with trends has undergone a true makeover. This is what beauty industry leaders should know:

- ▮ **Product discovery channels differ by generation.** When online for the purpose of exploring new products and brands, a variety of channels are in play. Across all generations, respondents said they prefer to start the discovery process using Amazon, but from there, channel preferences vary:
 - Gen Zers prefer using social media for discovery (56%).
 - Millennials prefer to browse big box retail sites like Walmart, Target, etc. (46%).
 - Gen Xers (41%) prefer using search engines, like Google, to discover new products.

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| **Social media is where consumers discover.** Social media **outranked** multibrand retailers' digital channels in driving beauty product discovery, with the most pronounced impact among Gen Z shoppers. In fact, **50% of Gen Zers** say they are most likely to learn about new cosmetic and beauty products from social media personalities, particularly on TikTok.

- Of those surveyed by Lily AI, TikTok (54%) was the social media channel of choice for Gen Z for new product discovery, with Instagram following at 29%.
- Millennials preferred Instagram (39%) over TikTok (32%).
- Gen X's preferences were fairly even across TikTok (32%), Instagram (31%), and Facebook (28%).

Searching for Perfection

When searching for beauty items, finding exactly what you want online can feel like trying to match a foundation shade under harsh fluorescent lighting — frustrating and far from flawless. Imagine hunting for the ultimate bold red lipstick — one that's creamy and long-lasting — only to be served lackluster options that miss the mark. It's not that the product doesn't exist; it's that it can't be found.

| **Consumers aren't finding what they want in a single search, and getting a relevant result is important to them.** 84% of those surveyed said it can take up to six searches to find what they want; a mere 16% said it only takes one or two searches to locate an item they want.



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- Most people (80%) have given up on an online search because they couldn't find what they were looking for.
- More than half of surveyed consumers (57%) said they use a retailer's search bar when shopping online for beauty, clothing, shoes, accessories, and/or home goods products and expressed the importance of the results being relevant and aligned with what they want.

| **Brand loyalty only goes so far.** 85% of shoppers said that if they can't find the exact product they want — whether it's their go-to foundation, signature lipstick, or a luxe cashmere sweater — they'll move on and buy from another brand or retailer instead.

- Only 41% of consumers are loyal to specific beauty brands or products.
- Over half of consumers (52%) are more likely to try a new beauty product now than pre-COVID, up from 40% in 2021.
- 45% of Gen Zers report trying new beauty brands and products every two to three months.

Decoding Beauty Buzzwords

Navigating beauty product descriptions shouldn't feel like translating a secret language, but for many shoppers, it does. According to Accenture, 67% of consumers struggle to make sense of product details. This could leave some to decipher whether a "radiance-boosting elixir" is just a fancy way of saying "moisturizer." Or is the "elixir" a whole new product to be added to one's beauty routine, and if so, does it go under or over the moisturizer? When searching for beauty, clothing, shoes, accessories, and/



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or home goods products, consumers favor simple, plain language — yet the beauty industry loves its poetic (and sometimes perplexing) flair.

- | **Retailers' descriptions are challenging for consumers.** 66% of shoppers say unclear or overly creative product descriptions make it difficult to find the right items. For example, searching for a simple “hydrating face moisturizer” might lead to products labeled as “dew-drop elixir” or “radiance revival cream,” leaving shoppers unsure if the item is what they really want.
 - More Gen Zers (69%) and Millennials (69%) feel that retailers' descriptions make it harder for them to find what they're looking for compared to Gen Xers (64%), yet all three generations generally agree it's simply too hard.
- | **Consumers interpret and search for colors differently.** Unclear words or terms describing a product's color or shade can be a hindrance to consumers. For example, “Midnight Mantra” may sound like an enticing nail polish color, but an unclear description of the shade can leave shoppers second-guessing what they're adding to their cart.
 - Nearly half of survey respondents (49%) said the color “midnight” represents black, while almost 30% said it's blue. Other responses included grey, blue/green, or all of the above.
 - Millennials (51%) were more likely to say the color “midnight” represents black compared to Gen Zers (44%).
 - When searching for a ‘blue’ product, 17% of consumers would just search ‘blue,’ 31% of consumers would add detail around their search, adding light or dark blue, and 30% said they would search using common shades of blue, such as sky or navy.



of shoppers believe retailers use product language and descriptions that make it challenging for them to find what they want.

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30% OF CONSUMERS

said the color “midnight” represents blue.



In-Store Charm Meets E-Commerce Convenience

For beauty shoppers, there's still something special about seeing and testing products in person — but as eCommerce continues to surge, brands and retailers can't afford to overlook the growing demand for the convenience of a truly personalized and relevant online experience. According to [McKinsey](#), beauty eCommerce nearly quadrupled between 2015 and 2022, and today, [41%](#) of beauty and personal care sales occur online. Additionally, Millennials ([42%](#)) make up the largest share of consumers globally who mostly shop for beauty products online.

As consumers continue to prefer convenience, variety, and accessibility of products, having a robust digital marketing and eCommerce strategy is no longer optional — it's essential for brands and retailers looking to stay competitive in the evolving beauty market.

| **Online shopping is the go-to for most purchases, but with beauty, it's a different story.** When asked to choose, the majority of surveyed consumers (66%) prefer shopping online versus in-store for beauty, clothing, shoes, accessories, and/or home goods products. However, [72%](#) report in-store shopping as their preferred method when shopping for beauty products specifically, and [97%](#) of shoppers purchase at least some beauty products each month in-store.

- Nearly 90% of Lily AI survey respondents said they'd found a product online but then gone to a physical store to buy it because they had unanswered questions about details such as quality, color, or ingredients/materials, among other things. Of those that purchased in-store:
 - » 52% said they wanted to see or try the product.
 - » 48% said they wanted to assess quality.



of consumers said they'd found a product online, but then gone to a physical store to buy it because they had unanswered questions.



Glow Play Cushiony Blush by MAC is a bouncy, buildable blush that provides glowy color in a lightweight formula with skin-conditioning ingredients.

- » 29% said the online product information wasn't detailed enough.
- » 20% said the online product description used confusing or overly complicated terms.

I Shoppers want and need product content to help them with purchase decisions.

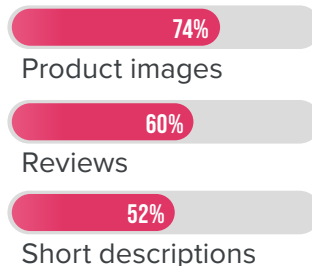
Product images (74%), reviews (60%), and short descriptions (52%) are the most commonly used types of content to inform purchases when searching for beauty, clothing, shoes, accessories, and/or home goods products.

- **92%** of consumers say that reviews are a factor they consider when accessing a new beauty product they've never purchased before.
- **96%** of consumers look for photos and videos from other consumers when shopping for beauty items online.

AI Meets Beauty: A Smarter Way To Shop

The beauty industry thrives on personalization, and yet, shopping for the perfect shade, formula, or finish online can still feel like a guessing game. As consumer expectations evolve, brands and retailers must keep up — not just with trends, but with technology. Shoppers know exactly what they want, from a lightweight, dewy foundation to a frizz-fighting hair serum, and they expect beauty retailers to understand and respond just as precisely.

Shoppers want and need product content to help them with purchase decisions. They commonly use:



Today, 40% of consumers have experimented with AI-powered search tools to streamline their online shopping, and an impressive 75% would pay more for beauty and skincare products if they had personalized online shopping experiences. As a result, retailers and brands must reevaluate how they describe their products online.

The solution: product content optimization.

Driven by the latest advancements in artificial intelligence (Generative AI, LLMs, Agentic AI, etc.), Product Content Optimization will define the next generation of online shopping, enabling retailers bridge the consumer communication gap in product language and product details.

With AI-powered Product Content Optimization integrated across a retailer's advertising and e-commerce tech stack, beauty brands and retailers can boost product discoverability across traditional channels like Google, TikTok, Meta (e.g. Facebook, Instagram), eCommerce sites and marketplaces, as well as generative-AI powered search engines.

Retailers must meet customers where they are, and recognize the online shopping experience is evolving, especially in the beauty space. Beauty retailers that can provide the ultimate beauty concierge service – guiding shoppers to their perfect match with precision, speed, and a touch of glam – will be the ones that win.



of consumers have experimented with AI-powered search tools for online shopping.



5 Tips To Bridge The Gap Between “Merchant/Marketer” and “Consumer” Speak

1 START WITH THE CONSUMER

Retailers need to be where the consumer is, and having product content that aligns with consumer search queries is at the heart of this. Lily AI's Product Content Optimization (PCO) platform employs natural language synchronization, real-time search intelligence, and continuous feedback loops to analyze consumer searches and dynamically enrich product data with consumer-centric language that is customized and optimized for the unique specs of a given platform.

2 GET GOING WITH GOOGLE

If you can't be found, you can't be sold! In the generative AI era, Google (70.5%) still remains the top destination for search ad spending. With Lily AI, brands and retailers can optimize their product content to better incorporate attributes, synonyms, trends, phrases, titles, and long-and short descriptions, enabling them to not only improve their Google Quality Score and Ad Rank, but also drive increased awareness, conversion and sales without additional ad spend.

3 ORGANIZE YOUR DATA

AI outputs are only as powerful as the quality of the data powering the models. If retailers' product data isn't complete, accurate, consumer-friendly, and consistent, they won't get the most out of their Google efforts and media investments. These data considerations are critical to ensuring a fair and personalized digital media and e-commerce experience for all consumers. Lily AI's Product Content Optimization provides brands and retailers a diverse and well-distributed dataset across all product categories and features, and conducts regular audits to refine taxonomy and label processes to align with both industry standards and consumer expectations.

4 FIX THE MARKETING FRAGMENTATION

Roles and responsibilities differ across the marketing and eCommerce functions, and while overlaps and dependencies exist across SEO, paid media, and site optimization, they're rarely aligned. Team members often do not even know about how their work outputs directly impact the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of another team's efforts. This creates a fragmented and incomplete approach to optimizing product content. Investing in Product Content Optimization allows retailers and brands to truly connect the dots between the efforts of digital marketing and digital commerce teams, ensuring product details and descriptions are fully and dynamically optimized on both the front and back-end.

5 HARNESS THE POWER OF AI

Retailers and brands should adopt AI early, experimenting with the technology to stay competitive and relevant. New AI capabilities are presented every day, and while some may feel like hype, others are already having real impact. When product data foundations are accurate, consistent, rich and relevant, AI-powered Product Content Optimization (PCO) can play a valuable role in autonomously and proactively analyzing information and situations, making high-quality decisions, and acting independently for next steps.

Methodology

A consumer survey was fielded via SurveyMonkey with the goal of better understanding current consumer sentiment and preferences towards the search and discovery process of online shopping. The survey garnered 2,081 responses, with the criteria of respondents making at least 12 or more online purchases of beauty, clothing, shoes, accessories, and/or home goods products in 2024.

Respondents answered 31 logic-driven questions, and responses were collected on January 22, 2025. The survey audience was comprised of the following demographic groups:

- **Ages: 18-65**
- **Male: 34%**
- **Female: 66%**
- **Respondents were distributed across the United States**

Respondents self-identified into the following generational groups based on the above age range:

- **Gen Z (1997 and after) — 447 respondents (21%)**
- **Millennial (1981 - 1996) — 755 respondents (36%)**
- **Gen X (1965 - 1980) — 678 respondents (33%)**
- **Baby Boomers (1964 and before) — 201 respondents (10%)**



