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Ulta Beauty Launches New NielsenIQ Study on Gen Alpha and AI-Powered Beauty Discovery

- **New Ulta Beauty-commissioned “Smart Beauty” study conducted by NielsenIQ shows Gen Alpha is hybrid by default:** 78% discover beauty online and 77% rely on real-world validation, with most still preferring to shop beauty in-store (73% fragrance; 70% makeup; 66% skincare/hair/nails).
- **According to the study, AI and personalization are accelerating discovery without replacing stores or trusted guidance:** 73% use personalization tools, AI users visit stores to browse/try at higher rates than non-users (57% vs. 36%), and parents remain the top “most helpful” influence (41%) – with 98% playing an active role and 33% prioritizing safe, welcoming retail environments.

BOLINGBROOK, III.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- [Ulta Beauty, Inc.](#) (NASDAQ: ULTA) today unveiled findings from a new Ulta Beauty-commissioned study conducted by [NielsenIQ](#), “**Smart Beauty: AI, Personalization & the Gen Alpha Consumer**,” exploring how Gen Alpha consumers are navigating beauty and wellness in an increasingly AI-driven world. The study underscores Ulta Beauty’s commitment to understanding and evolving alongside the next generation, as well as building beauty and wellness experiences that are personalized, empowering, responsible and rooted in trust.

Smart Beauty Study: Gen Alpha Values Both AI & In-Person Experiences

The Smart Beauty study reveals a generation embracing technology while still valuing in-person experiences and trusted guidance – challenging assumptions about what it means to be digital and AI natives.

“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 valuing the importance of physical stores and real-world experiences,” said Kelly Mahoney, chief marketing officer at Ulta Beauty. “What’s especially powerful is that technology is fueling more exploration and engagement with the category, making discovery faster, more relevant and more inspiring for Gen Alpha consumers.”

Among the findings:

- **Gen Alpha Blends Digital Discovery With Real-World Validation:** While 78% of Gen Alpha consumers discover beauty products through at least one online source, nearly as many (77%) then seek real-world validation, including visiting stores to try products in person (37%), asking family or friends how to use products (37%) and

discussing products with peers (36%).

- **“In Real Life” (IRL) Shopping Wins on Instant Gratification:** Despite being digital natives, the majority of Gen Alpha consumers still prefer shopping for beauty products in-store, including 73% of fragrance users, 70% of makeup users, 66% of skincare users, 66% of hair care users and 66% of nail care users. The top reasons: being able to take products home immediately (43-51% across categories) and discovering or exploring new products in person (33-49% across categories).
- **AI Is Reinforcing the In-Store Beauty Experience:** Gen Alpha consumers who use AI tools are significantly more likely to visit stores to browse and try products in person than non-AI users (57% vs. 36%), revealing that technology is amplifying discovery rather than replacing physical retail.
- **Personalization Is Becoming Part of Everyday Beauty Discovery:** Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Gen Alpha beauty consumers already use personalization tools while shopping for beauty products, turning to tailored product recommendations (35%), AI-powered search results (31%) and interest-based content suggestions (29%). The top reasons for using these 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 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%). Compared to pre-teen boys, they are also more likely to be aware of (84% vs. 72%) and use (79% vs. 65%) personalization tools, underscoring their comfort with customized beauty experiences.
- **AI Beauty Users Feel More Confident in Their Product Choices:** Compared to non-users, Gen Alpha consumers who use AI shopping assistants are significantly more likely to say personalization makes beauty feel more relevant (44% vs. 24%), more fun and engaging (42% vs. 27%) and more efficient by helping save time while shopping and exploring products (42% vs. 29%). They are also more likely to trust recommendations when they understand why products are being suggested (38% vs. 23%).
- **Parents Want More Guidance & Transparency in Beauty:** Gen Alpha parents remain highly involved in beauty purchasing decisions, with 98% saying they play an active role in what beauty and personal care products are purchased. They are also the single most helpful beauty influence for Gen Alpha (41%), outranking social media (34%) and friends (29%). For retailers, trust starts with safety and guidance: one-third of parents and guardians (33%) say the most important way to build trust is by creating safe, welcoming environments for Gen Alpha, including age-appropriate assortments, clear ingredient labeling and knowledgeable in-store associate guidance.

“What stands out in these findings is the clear convergence of digital and physical behaviors,” said **Jacqueline Flam**, managing director, beauty & health at NIQ. “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. For brands and retailers, this means creating connected journeys that link digital influence with real-world engagement.”

As Gen Alpha continues to influence the future of consumer culture, Ulta Beauty believes the opportunity for the beauty and wellness industry is not simply to innovate faster, but to innovate more responsibly – combining AI-powered innovation and personalization with safety, inclusivity, education and human connection. From AI partnerships with Adobe and

Google to its collaboration with NIQ to deepen understanding of beauty shoppers and market trends, Ulta Beauty is investing in thoughtful innovation grounded in insight. The company is also expanding education-first experiences – from in-store associate training to birthday programs for younger guests and their families – to advance the beauty and wellness experience for guests of all ages and life stages.

For more information and insights from the “Smart Beauty: AI, Personalization & the Gen Alpha Consumer” study, visit <https://www.ulta.com/smartbeauty>.

About the “Smart Beauty” Study

This research was conducted from April through May 2026 by NIQ on behalf of Ulta Beauty. The study explored 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. The survey is based on a nationally representative sample of 522 Gen Alpha consumers across the United States, along with 500 Gen Alpha parents and guardians.

About Ulta Beauty

Ulta Beauty (NASDAQ: ULTA) is the largest specialty beauty retailer in the U.S. and a leading destination for cosmetics, fragrance, skin care, hair care, wellness and salon services. Since opening its first store in 1990, Ulta Beauty has grown to more than 1,500 stores across the U.S. and redefined beauty retail by bringing together All Things Beauty. All in One Place®. With an expansive product assortment, professional salon services and its beloved Ulta Beauty Rewards loyalty program, the company delivers seamless, personalized experiences across stores, Ulta.com and the Ulta Beauty App – where the possibilities are truly beautiful. Ulta Beauty is also expanding its presence internationally through its subsidiary, Space NK, a luxury beauty retailer operating in the U.K. and Ireland, its joint venture in Mexico and its franchise in the Middle East. For more information, visit www.ulta.com.

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 cloud-based 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.

For more information, please visit www.niq.com.

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