

## Lights, Camera, Zoom: The Impact of Video Conferencing on Cosmetic Purchase and Use Christy Crutsinger & Kaylyn Edgar, University of North Texas

*Background.* In the wake of lock downs, reduced store hours, strict COVID safety regulations and Chapter 11 bankruptcy filings, the retail industry is in a state of upheaval. Many experts predict that traditional brick and mortar will never look the same, and that it will be years for the retail industry to rebound (Vader et al., 2020). Some segments of the industry are predicted to fare much better. According to a report by Kline & Company (2020), the beauty market is fairly recession proof because there is consistent consumer demand and a good mix of essential categories to provide some level of stability. Experts predict a fast rebound for the cosmetic industry especially given the special attention people are paying to their facial appearance for video conference meetings.

In April of 2020, Zoom had more than 300 million daily meeting participants, up from just 10 million in the previous quarter (Evans, 2020). In this new post-COVID reality, we find ourselves socially distanced in our homes and conducting virtual encounters where our professional image is projected on a computer monitor. As cameras turn on for the next Zoom meeting, we quickly freshen our makeup, adjust the lighting, and do one last visual check before going live. Alternatively, some of us simply hide behind a black screen.

*Conceptual Framework.* Because of the dramatic increase in the use of video conferencing applications in classrooms, work settings, and personal connections, we hypothesize that cosmetics present a viable and readily available means to manage one's impression (Dayan et al., 2015; Workman & Johnson, 1991). The constant mirrored reflection that video conferencing presents establishes the basis for our rationale. According to Kaiser (1997), appearance management encompasses "all that we do to and for our bodies visually" (p. 5) to create our look. As a universal construct, we all engage in appearance management on a daily basis and in varying levels. Thus, we situate our descriptive study within this framework.

*Purpose.* This exploratory study aims to describe the phenomenon of Zoom and its' impact on appearance management, specific to cosmetics. We limit our definition of cosmetics to "color only" which includes foundations, eye shadows, eyeliners, mascara, powders, lipsticks, and concealers. Specifically, we address the following research questions: a) How important is appearance in a Zoom meeting? b) How do consumers use cosmetics prior and during Zoom meetings? and c) What are the cosmetic purchasing behaviors in a post-COVID environment?

*Methods.* The purposive sample was drawn from two undergraduate courses (n= 184) housed within a textiles and apparel program. Subjects received an email invitation to participate in the online survey through the university email system. Email reminders were sent after two weeks. One hundred twenty-five students completed the survey, achieving a 67.9% response rate. The survey contained 17 questions, developed by the researchers, measuring video conference participation; appearance management behaviors; cosmetic use; cosmetic purchasing patterns; and demographic information. Participants were predominantly female (87.2%), held either part or full-time positions (67.9%), and identified as an ethnic minority (57.9%). A majority of respondents used Zoom for school (56.8%), followed by work (17.8%) and

entertainment (10%). Most respondents (56.7%) participated in fewer than five Zoom meetings per week.

*Results.* Respondents indicated that appearance was extremely important or somewhat important during a Zoom meeting for work (75.8%), social gatherings (70.1%), and class (67.5%). The majority (57.5%) indicated that they do not turn on their camera or attend to their appearance even if the camera is on during a Zoom meeting. When asked how often they applied cosmetics prior to a Zoom meeting, only 15.2% indicated that they always applied cosmetics. Cosmetic use among respondents revealed significant declines throughout the COVID pandemic, with 23% using cosmetics everyday pre-COVID compared to only 7.8% of respondents using cosmetics everyday post-COVID.

The use of color cosmetics varied across categories with a majority of participants using mascara (75%), concealer (64.4%) and powder (50%). Lipstick (49%), eyeshadow (46%), and eyeliner (41.5%) were used less frequently. In both pre- and post-COVID situations, respondents purchased most of their cosmetics at specialty stores (e.g., Ulta, Sephora) and mass merchandisers (e.g., Target, WalMart). Online cosmetic purchases increased only slightly from the pre-COVID (8.5%) to post-COVID (13.4%) timeframe. Over half of the respondents (51.2%) were comfortable purchasing cosmetics in a traditional retail store. Specific purchasing challenges highlighted by respondents included color matching and product testing of cosmetics.

*Implications.* Surprisingly, the results provide no clear evidence that college-age students are using Zoom as a vehicle for self-expression or impression management. With a decline in cosmetic use and a general lack of engagement in the Zoom environment, cosmetic brands must be nimble and pivot to capture lost market share. Many companies have already shifted their model to other rescue and basic products that provide bottom-line stability such as hand sanitizers, lotions, and deodorants (Kline & Company, 2020).

Further research should consider the long-term effects of the quarantine on overall appearance management behaviors. The social, psychological, and economic impacts resulting from the pandemic may explain consumer behaviors specific to cosmetic purchase and use. Likewise, further study is needed to examine differences according to ethnicity and race. It should be noted that ethnic minority females were overrepresented in our sample. The narrative on make-up shaming among women, particularly black women, is prevalent and may explain some of the findings from our exploratory study. Our small sample size limits our ability for comparative analysis.

While many companies are returning to business as usual, some predict that video conferencing may become a common business practice because of its' flexibility, ease of scheduling, and overall cost savings. Textile and apparel educators must prepare students for this workplace reality, emphasizing the importance of professional Zoom behavior (e.g., appropriate dress, cameras on). Finally, if mask mandates stay in effect for any length of time, the cosmetic industry may be further impacted, particularly in specific categories. Whether they develop lipsticks that prevent the spread of germs or enhance virtual product testing, cosmetic companies must be one step ahead of the unpredictable, post-COVID consumer.

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