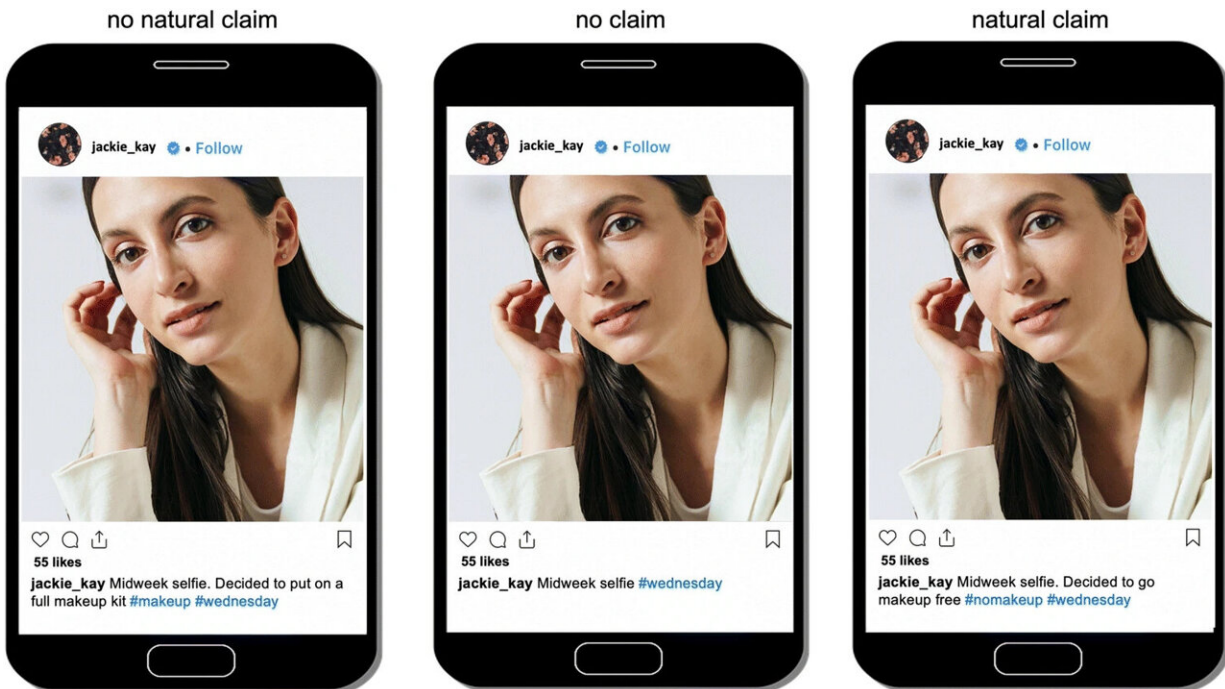


#Nomakeup trend fails to discourage use of cosmetics

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Individuals shown the photo of the woman with the caption #nomakeup rated her as more attractive than study participants who saw the photo tagged #makeup. Credit: UGA

It costs time and money to look natural these days.

"No-makeup" makeup sounds like an oxymoron. But ask anyone in the beauty industry, which is valued at \$445 billion, and they'll tell you a

good chunk of those photos tagged #nomakeup online actually require multiple cosmetics to look so "natural."

Although popular social media trends encourage [women](#) to embrace their natural beauty and post makeup-free selfies, new research from the University of Georgia suggests that the natural beauty [movement](#) isn't liberating women from cosmetics. In fact, cosmetic sales have actually increased alongside the rise of the no-makeup movement.

The rise of #nomakeup

Published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, the study examined the relationship between the rise of the #nomakeup movement on Twitter from 2009 to 2016 and cosmetic sales across the United States. The researchers found that the movement was associated with an overall increase, rather than decrease, in sales across a majority of cosmetic product categories.

"The movement claims to be about empowering women," said Rosanna Smith, lead author of the study and an assistant professor in the Terry College of Business. "But our research showed that the no-makeup movement actually exacerbated a key tension that women often have to manage: They're pressured to look attractive or maintain a set of beauty standards. But they're also punished or ridiculed for putting effort into maintaining those standards by wearing makeup."

The researchers wondered whether the no-makeup movement may have encouraged consumers to present their appearance as natural, when their appearance actually involved "artificial" enhancements like makeup.

So they analyzed 784 selfies tagged with #nomakeup on Instagram and sorted them into two groups: "real natural beauty selfies" that seemed to actually be makeup-free and "constructed natural beauty" selfies where

the person in the photograph appeared to be wearing makeup.

"We wanted to see which look is rewarded more by others: real natural beauty that is truly makeup-free or an appearance has been enhanced with makeup in a way that appears natural," said Smith.

The researchers used a machine learning model to compare the number of likes and perceived attractiveness of 3,155 additional photos. The artfully crafted "natural" look won out.

"The results suggest that people may be motivated to say they're not wearing makeup when they actually are," Smith said. "By doing that, they gain the benefit of having an attractive appearance without the punishment that may come with others knowing you put in effort to get it."

Finally, the researchers conducted a set of experiments to test more directly how others assess the attractiveness of an individual in relation to the amount of effort needed to look that way.

In one study, the same selfie of a woman was shown to 633 participants with different captions: one with the claim of no makeup, one without any mention of makeup and one that said the woman was wearing makeup. Participants who were shown the post with the no-makeup caption rated the woman as more attractive than the same woman in the other two posts.

"These results are consistent with prior work that has shown that being aware that a woman is wearing [makeup](#) can lead the woman to be judged less positively," Smith said. "This reinforces the bind women are in: You need to look good but not like you tried. Given this, it's not surprising that some women feel pressure to hide their effort."

Inequality in beauty

The beauty industry emphasis on natural yet beautiful, glamorous yet low effort looks won't be letting up any time soon, with companies like Glossier and RMS Beauty based on the natural but better concept.

"I don't know how much natural beauty movements actually help women," Smith said. "If we say we have to be who we 'naturally are,' we often indirectly shame women who may use tools to manage certain esthetics concerns such as cystic acne.

"Only a lucky few can wake up looking naturally beautiful—at least by society's standards. If we elevate natural beauty and implicitly shame [beauty](#) work, will we simply just end up reinforcing inequality?"

More information: Rosanna Smith et al, The cost of looking natural: Why the no-makeup movement may fail to discourage cosmetic use, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s11747-021-00801-2](#)

Provided by University of Georgia

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