

Exploratory study in Attitude, Behavior, and Motivation to Cosmetic Dentistry Between Generation X and Z

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Introduction

Beauty is arguably one of the largest segments in the fashion industry (Samper et al., 2017). With the rising popularity of social media over the past 25 years, there has been a vast emergence of beauty influencers in addition to celebrities in social media (Maryville Online, 2021). Within the realm of social media and the beauty industry, there has been a rising interest in cosmetic dentistry due to the influences and celebrities being more transparent about their beauty enhancement procedures (Ansari, 2020). The term “cosmetic dentistry” itself was introduced in the mid-1980s (American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, 2023). Because the combination of social media and cosmetic dentistry is relatively new, there is a lack of research connecting these two ideas together.

The purpose of this study is to compare the effects of social media on the perceptions of cosmetic dentistry between Generation X and Generation Z. Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, was not immediately immersed in technology, unlike Generation Z. Generation Z is defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, meaning that they grew up in an age where they were constantly connected to the Internet and exposed to many forms of social media at a much younger age (Dimock, 2022). Although research on generational health behaviors is vast and expansive (Seematter-Bagnoud et al., 2020), little research compares Generation X and Z regarding their attitudes, behavior, and motivations toward cosmetic dentistry or oral health in general. To address this gap in the literature, two theoretical perspectives are employed to guide this study: 1) The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and 2) Motivation Theory (MT). TRA posits that an individual’s intentions are determined by their behavioral attitudes and subjective norms. (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). MT is essential to understand both generations’ extrinsic and intrinsic motivations (S, B. & Chandra, 2023) regarding their oral health, which implies that consumers make decisions to fulfill their needs (Ganesh et al., 2020).

Knowing the motivations behind generational health choices is vital for oral health education because people no longer attend the dentist just for regular treatment but also for cosmetic procedures as well (Constantinescu-Dobra & Maier, 2017; Ansari et al., 2020). Even though Generation Z processes information more rapidly than the generations before them, they are not particularly brand loyal and do not like to be controlled (Williams et al., 2011), which made dental practices today have a more challenging job in attracting and satisfying the needs of this rising generation of patients (Constantinescu-Dobra & Maier, 2017). Therefore, this study proposed the following research questions, RQ1: What are the differences in the attitudes, behaviors, and motivations between Generation Z and Generation X regarding cosmetic dentistry and oral health? RQ2: How does social media play a part in those differences?

Method

A Qualitative method study was used with an interview approach with open-ended questions (Kallio et al., 2016). With IRB approval, 16 interviews were conducted over the span of 2-weeks, from

the last week of February to early March 2023. The interviews consist of 11 females and 5 males between the ages of 18 and 58. These participants were mainly from the Midwest region, with the exception of two from the Southeast region. The interviews took between 15-20 minutes to complete. The interview consisted of 6 screening questions leading to the 23 main questions regarding the motivation and attitude of dental consumers in cosmetic dentistry, oral health, and the influence of social media. The interviews were conducted through Zoom (16), and the data were coded and analyzed using deductive (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) and inductive (to generate themes) coding schemes using MAXQDA software.

Findings and Discussion

For RQ1, the findings in Table 1 show that Gen Z has a higher OA (60%), AT (55.12%), IM (53.89%), and EM (53.60%) compared to Gen X's OA (40%), AT (44.88%), IM (46.11%), and EM (46.40%). In general, the findings for RQ1 are consistent with the characteristics of Generation Z and Generation X. However, for RQ2, our research found that while Gen Z is known to spend more time on social media and the internet (Dimock, 2022). Unlike Generation X, they were more influenced by their strong opinions, intrinsic motivation, and previous knowledge of the subject of cosmetic dentistry and oral health. In terms of extrinsic motivation, Generation X had slightly larger participation and overall ability to be influenced compared to Generation Z. These results are inconsistent with Pew Center's views of Generation Z. Generation Z was found to be much more opinionated about oral and cosmetic procedures compared to Generation X. Yet, cosmetic dentistry was associated with negative attitudes for both generations, while personal oral health yielded positive attitudes. This may be because the existing education on oral health is more standard, but there are varying preconceptions about cosmetic dentistry. Personal interests overall pointed more towards social participation rather than social influence.

The study highlights the differences between generations X and Z's perceptions and social media's influence on cosmetic dentistry and oral health. Although this study shows that social media influences Generation X and Z differently, the results show future opportunities for beauty influencers and dental practitioners to better inform their followers and patients regarding cosmetic dentistry and oral health. The study also shows that there is much room for improvement in information on cosmetic dentistry that can be done through social media.

Table 1 Code Percentage and Examples between Gen Z and Gen X

	Gen Z	Gen X	Example
Overall Attitude (OA)	60.00%	40.00%	
Towards Cosmetic Dentistry	44.44%	45.00%	"Veneers is like extremely scary, and I think that's a permanent damage to your teeth."
Towards Oral Health	55.56%	55.00%	"I brush my teeth so my breath smells good and so I don't get cavities."
Attitude (AT)	55.12%	44.88%	
Neutral	15.71%	26.32%	"You're good if it makes you feel good, I guess."
Negative	38.57%	36.84%	"I don't think I would use it. I don't think it's necessary, either"
Positive	45.71%	36.84%	"I think it's a good thing I use white strips."
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	53.89%	46.11%	
Personal Value	50.96%	53.93%	"It's very important to me [that my teeth do not become decayed]."
Personal Interest	49.04%	46.07%	"We changed dentists, because the one that we really liked switched offices."
Extrinsic Motivation (EM)	53.60%	46.40%	
Self-presentation	28.57%	21.36%	"I want my teeth to look better."
Social Influence	31.09%	38.83%	"I'd say like moderately influenced, like I've seen a lot of TikTok's and stuff of people being like, 'Oh, like this is a good mouthwash.'"
Social Participation	40.34%	39.81%	"I do follow other dentists [on social media]."
TOTAL	55.35%	44.65%	

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