

Universidad del Rosario



**The FOMO Effect: How Limited Edition Beauty Products Influence Gen Z's
Perception of Brand Exclusivity**

Trabajo de Grado

Natalia Medina Ramírez

Paris, Francia

2025

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Glosario

Edición limitada (Limited Edition):

Estrategia de marketing basada en lanzar productos en cantidades o periodos de tiempo restringidos. Crea sensación de escasez y exclusividad, incrementando el deseo del consumidor y la percepción de valor del producto.

Exclusividad de marca (Brand Exclusivity):

Percepción de que una marca o producto es único, prestigioso o difícil de obtener. Puede construirse a través de estrategias como la escasez, el diseño, la comunicación estética y la afiliación social.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):

Acrónimo en inglés que significa “miedo a perderse algo”. Describe la ansiedad o preocupación que sienten las personas al creer que otros están disfrutando de experiencias, productos o oportunidades de las que ellas no participan. En marketing, se utiliza para generar urgencia de compra y aumentar la participación del consumidor.

Generación Z (Gen Z):

Grupo demográfico nacido aproximadamente entre 1997 y 2010. Se caracteriza por su alto dominio de la tecnología, pensamiento crítico, búsqueda de autenticidad y consumo basado en valores sociales, culturales y medioambientales.

Hype (Cultura del Hype):

Fenómeno cultural en el que la expectativa colectiva, generada por redes sociales e influencers, amplifica el interés y la emoción alrededor de un lanzamiento o producto, creando ciclos de entusiasmo y escasez percibida.

Marketing de escasez (Scarcity Marketing):

Técnica que consiste en resaltar la disponibilidad limitada de un producto o servicio para impulsar la demanda y motivar decisiones de compra rápidas. Se apoya en principios psicológicos como la urgencia y el FOMO.

Marketing de influencers (Influencer Marketing):

Estrategia que utiliza figuras públicas o creadores de contenido en redes sociales para promocionar productos o servicios. Su influencia y credibilidad contribuyen a generar confianza y deseo de compra entre los consumidores.

Validación social (Social Validation):

Tendencia de las personas a guiar su comportamiento según lo que aprueban o hacen los demás. En el contexto digital, se manifiesta a través de likes, comentarios, reseñas y recomendaciones que influyen en la percepción de exclusividad y valor de una marca.

Resumen

El miedo a perderse algo (Fear of Missing Out, FOMO) encabezó la lista de factores que influyeron en las compras impulsivas y urgentes de los consumidores en mi investigación, mientras que las redes sociales desempeñaron un papel fundamental al reforzar la idea de exclusividad dentro de los llamados hype cycles. Los resultados muestran que la exclusividad ya no se percibe únicamente como un concepto de marketing, sino como una idea construida psicológica y simbólicamente por la sociedad. La industria de la belleza está empleando estrategias basadas en la escasez de manera intensiva, con el propósito de elevar el prestigio de las marcas y atraer a nuevos consumidores. Un ejemplo de estas estrategias son las ediciones limitadas, que no solo generan reacciones impulsivas inmediatas, sino que también atraen a grandes audiencias, aumentando significativamente las ventas a corto plazo.

En general, mi investigación subraya las desventajas de depender únicamente de la exclusividad como método. Si bien las ediciones limitadas pueden generar mucha atención en un corto periodo de tiempo, su capacidad para fomentar la lealtad hacia la marca depende en gran medida de otros factores. Algunos participantes del estudio señalaron que, después de adquirir un producto exclusivo, sintieron una conexión más fuerte con la marca; sin embargo, para la mayoría, este efecto fue efímero. La verdadera lealtad solo es posible mediante una práctica

constante de storytelling, construcción genuina de comunidad y alineación con los valores de la Generación Z, como la transparencia y la sostenibilidad.

Este estudio constituye un ejemplo de cómo puede ampliarse la literatura existente al redefinir la exclusividad como un fenómeno psicológico y cultural dentro del marketing de escasez. Para quienes están a cargo de la toma de decisiones en las marcas, el mensaje es claro: si desean mantener el interés del consumidor más allá del entusiasmo momentáneo, deben encontrar un equilibrio entre escasez y autenticidad, generar un impacto visual y narrar la historia de la exclusividad de una manera que sea coherente con los valores de la Generación Z, con el fin de construir una lealtad duradera hacia la marca.

Palabras clave

Miedo a Perderse Algo (FOMO); Marketing de Escasez; Generación Z; Exclusividad de Marca; Marketing de Influencers; Validación Social; Industria de la Belleza; Comportamiento del Consumidor.

Abstract

The fear of missing out (FOMO) topped the list of factors that influenced the buyers' urgent impulse purchasing in my research, while social networks were instrumental in supporting the idea of exclusivity within the hype cycles. The results show that exclusivity is no longer perceived as merely a marketing concept but a psychologically and symbolically-created idea by society. Beauty industry is employing scarcity-driven strategies to the extreme for the purpose of elevating the brands' prestige and luring new consumers. One example of these strategies is limited-edition releases that not only generate the most immediate impulse reactions but also attract large audiences, and therefore short-term sales, grow tremendously.

In general, my research underlines the disadvantages of depending on exclusivity alone as a method. Limited editions, while they can almost always generate a lot of attention for a short period of time, their capacity to develop the brand's people's loyalty is very much dependent on other aspects. A few participants in the study pointed out that after acquiring something exclusively, they felt a stronger connection to the brand, but, for the majority, the effect was very short-lived. True loyalty to the brand is only possible through the continuing practice of storytelling, real community-building, and being in line with Gen Z principles such as transparency and sustainability.

This study is one of such examples of how the existing literature can be expanded by redefining exclusivity as a psychological and cultural phenomenon within scarcity marketing. For the people who are responsible for the decision making of the brand, one thing is very crystal

clear: if they want to get rid of the short-lived frenzy and still keep the consumers coming, then they have to strike a balance between scarcity and authenticity, make a visual impression, and tell the story of exclusivity in a way that would be compatible with the values of the Gen Z consumers, so as to establish a lasting brand loyalty.

Key Words

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO); Scarcity Marketing; Generation Z; Brand Exclusivity; Influencer Marketing; Social Validation; Beauty Industry; Consumer Behavior.

Figures

Table 1

Short- and Long-Term Effects of Consumer Drivers

Dimension	Short-Term Effect	Long-Term Effect (Conditional)
FOMO	Urgency, impulsive buying	Risk of fatigue and consumer disillusionment
Social Validation	Peer approval, influencer-driven hype	Loyalty possible if reinforced by community ties
Packaging & Aesthetics	Perceived luxury, collectability	Enduring attachment if linked to symbolic identity
Storytelling	Emotional resonance, lifestyle association	Loyalty if aligned with consumer values and identity

Note. This table is an own elaboration based on the study data.

Table 2

Main Drivers Mentioned and Their Role in Exclusivity Perception

Driver	% Participants Mentioning	Role in Exclusivity Perception
Packaging	80%	Strongest driver; linked to collectability and prestige
FOMO	60%	Trigger of urgency and impulsive behavior
Social Validation	55%	Amplifier of desirability via social proof
Storytelling	40%	Enhancer of emotional and cultural connection

Note. This table is an own elaboration based on the study data.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background & Context

The beauty industry pulses with constant change, where innovation and consumer trends shift rapidly. Brands now wrestle to capture the attention of savvy, digitally connected consumers. Limited edition product launches have emerged as a powerful strategy. By intentionally restricting availability to a specific time or quantity, companies create deliberate scarcity. This approach drives not just sales but elevates brand perception, giving consumers exciting reasons to engage and anticipate new releases.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2010, particularly resonates with this strategy. They're the first generation immersed in digital platforms since childhood, making them highly visual and trend-aware. Unlike previous generations, they prioritize authenticity and self-expression. For these young consumers, beauty products transcend mere cosmetics. They become powerful tools for social connection, cultural expression, and personal storytelling. Exclusivity isn't just a marketing tactic, it's a cultural mechanism that helps Gen Z explore and define their identities within youth communities.

The fear of missing out (FOMO) drives people's attraction to limited editions. FOMO stems from the worry that others might access exclusive offers while you cannot (Przybylski et al., 2013). In beauty markets, this triggers quick, impulsive actions during new product launches.

Social media amplifies this effect through countdowns, influencer endorsements, and "sold out" alerts. These elements create a sense of urgency and boost the symbolic value of scarcity (Roberts & David, 2019). Viral behaviors like unboxing videos and peer recommendations transform exclusivity into an aspirational Gen Z culture. Yet, this approach might not just spark joy and excitement, but also provoke anxiety and stress, raising questions about whether scarcity marketing truly builds brand loyalty or exploits psychological vulnerabilities.

Beyond scarcity and FOMO, a product's attractiveness significantly impacts its perceived exclusivity. Consumers often associate unique design, elegant packaging, and creative presentation with luxury and desirability (Bloch, 1995; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Even basic visuals can become collectible through seasonal themes that elevate products beyond ordinary consumer goods (Sundar et al., 2020; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015). Gen Z's social media-driven consumption turns aesthetics into a means of enjoyment, identity expression, and cultural capital. What was once a private consumption activity now unfolds on digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where exclusivity has become the new social currency.

Several brands have mastered the art of creating product excitement. With limited drops like the Cinnamon Roll Lip Treatment and seasonal blush shades, Rhode Beauty sparks consumer interest through strategic releases and engaging pop-up experiences (Pereira, 2025). Similarly, Fenty Beauty leverages seasonal collections that blend scarcity, visual appeal, and celebrity connections to maintain brand relevance (Fetto, 2020; Mandave, n.d.). Rare Beauty and Laneige also employ seasonal packaging and unique flavors to forge emotional connections and encourage repeat purchases. These examples showcase how strategic scarcity and aesthetic design can amplify brand exclusivity and consumer engagement.

Despite these marketing successes, academic research still reveals significant knowledge gaps. Existing studies primarily focus on short-term behavioral outcomes like impulse buying and sales volume increases (Yang, Zhang, & Fang, 2021). Researchers have largely overlooked the deeper psychological dimensions of exclusivity, such as identity formation, community building, and long-term brand loyalty. This study aims to explore whether exclusivity genuinely nurtures sustainable consumer-brand relationships or merely provides fleeting satisfaction. Moreover, the ethical implications of intentionally manufacturing scarcity remain largely unexamined, particularly in the beauty sector and among Gen Z consumers who increasingly prioritize sustainability and authenticity (McNeill & Venter, 2019).

For beauty brands, understanding consumer motivators is crucial in a crowded market. When crafted skillfully, 'exclusivity' can become a brand's key advantage by connecting with customers beyond their basic needs. It taps into emotional and cultural dimensions that resonate deeply. Yet, a critical question remains: do these loyalty strategies truly build lasting brand connections or merely reflect temporary market trends and consumer fatigue? This research seeks to explore the psychological foundations of exclusivity among Gen Z consumers. By doing so, it offers valuable insights that can help brands navigate an increasingly competitive and value-driven industry landscape.

1.2 Problem Statement

Limited-edition marketing, although widely implemented and seemingly effective, still reveals its profound impact on Generation Z much later and partially. The focus of the existing research has been primarily on transaction-related aspects, e.g., the rise of sales, impulsive buying, and the intention to buy (Yang, Zhang, & Fang, 2021), whereas the psychological and social mechanisms which affect how young consumers perceive brand exclusivity have been mostly neglected. The phenomenon of FOMO, the need for social validation through influencers, and the attractiveness of the product are just a few of the aspects which, instead of working separately, are also deeply intertwined to influence the consumer's emotional and rational attitudes towards limited editions (Przybylski et al., 2013; Roberts & David, 2019)

Firstly, it is not known whether these launches, which are full of enthusiasm and urgency, really lead to customer loyalty over time and deepening of brand relations or if they simply excite a short-term hype and a transient consumer's engagement. According to a study done by Oliver (1999) on consumer loyalty, impulsive buying habit is rarely leading to the development of long-term relations with the brand unless identity-building strategies and emotional connection are continually implemented. This issue is of great importance for beauty brands namely: whereas exclusivity is very appealing to the consumer for a short time and thus can yield immediate profits, it is still up to a brand to prove its potential in cultivating real and sustainable consumer bonds to keep it as a strategy. Filling in such a gap becomes even more significant given the peculiar consumer profile of Gen Z. Being born and brought up digitally, they are mainly attracted by the trinity of the concepts of authenticity, self-expression, and community (Williams & Page, 2020). Although limited edition marketing is aligned with these tenets, without a deeper insight into its psychological impacts, brands will not only lose exclusivity as one of the transient and pressurized ways of dealing with customers but, more

importantly, they will cease to be loyal to them. As such, the study could be expressed through these aspects: in spite of the fact that limited edition campaigns are effective in generating a feeling of urgency and increasing sales, it is still uncertain how their fundamental psychological drivers FOMO, social validation, and aesthetics influence Gen Z's wider understanding of exclusivity and whether these tactics can be a brand's equity source. This question is a great deal of importance not only for the sake of academic research but also for the beauty industry as it seeks marketing strategies that could achieve a short-term impact while maintaining consumer trust and advocacy in the long run.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research has significance both in terms of its academic value and its practical value. Academically, it provides a valuable insight into marketing and consumer literature by redirecting the analysis from immediate results like purchase intention to a more extensive examination of perception, identity, and emotional connection in terms of brand exclusivity. Limited-edition beauty products come to be an increasingly important phenomenon where scarcity, aesthetics, and validation shape the consumer's new experience. This study, incorporating psychological constructs such as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social validation, unravels a more complex understanding of how Generation Z interacts with exclusivity not only as a transactional phenomenon but also as a cultural and symbolic practice

(Przybylski et al., 2013; Roberts & David, 2019; Belk, 1988). By doing so, the study provides an important link with existing academic research that is often centered on behavioral outcomes, leaving aside the identity-related and thus more enduring aspects of brand interaction, which constitute the focus of the present work.

Managerially, the insights uncovered by this study can inform decision-making in beauty brands that want to adapt their marketing strategies and stay ahead of the changing expectations of Gen Z. The generation, being digital natives, seeks out the values of authenticity, inclusivity, and self-expression in their consumption habits (Williams & Page, 2020). Managers have the ability to improve product development, event timing, and brand communication to become more compatible with this basket of consumers by learning the impact of limited-edition launches, influencer endorsements, and beautiful packaging on the exclusivity perception. The brands may use these insights not only to evaluate whether they should commit resources to limited-edition campaigns that could lead to loyalty and advocacy in the long run, or if they are merely a source of temporary hype and consumer fatigue. Thereby, the research can be seen as enabling more efficient choices on how to utilize marketing budgets as it differentiates between strategies that are capable of creating sustainable growth and those that only result in a short-term buzz (Oliver, 1999).

In the end, this research can deepen the knowledge of the academic community and the practitioners about how exclusivity is treated by the beauty industry. Understanding what psychological drivers interact to shape Gen Z's perception of brand exclusivity, these findings provide a basis for companies to create emotional bonds with consumers, which is one of the most important factors of brand equity in markets that are becoming more competitive and dynamic (Kapferer, 2004). Those brands which manage to couple the exclusivity with

authenticity and cultural resonance will be empowered to keep consumer loyalty, gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace that is crowded with other brands, and achieve a long-term survival in the era of digital revolution.

1.4 Research Question

How do limited-edition beauty products influence Generation Z's perception of brand exclusivity, and to what extent do psychological factors such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social validation, and product aesthetics contribute to this perception?

1.5 Research Objectives

- The main focus of this research is to study how the limited-edition beauty products influence Generation Z's view of brand exclusivity, especially considering the factors of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social validation, and product aesthetics.

- For this purpose, the research work has these secondary objectives:
- Explore the way FOMO affects the feeling of urgency, impulsivity, and the emotional aspect of exclusivity for Gen Z consumers.
- Discover the significance of social validation through friends, influencers, and social media that is the most important factors for the perception of brand exclusivity.
- Measure the degree to which beauty and packaging contribute to the attractiveness and symbolic value of the limited editions.
- Check out the combinations of exclusivity-driven strategies with the creation of sustainable brand loyalty or the generation of mainly short-term consumer excitement.
- Deliver beauty brand managers the advice on how to properly develop exclusivity strategies that balance with the long-term consumer trust and emotional connection as well as with the short-term hype.

1.6 Structure of the Study

This thesis is organized in and five chapters that each further develop the research argument. Chapter 1 opens the study by sketching the background and the environment, specifying the research problem, and introducing the research question and objectives. Chapter 2 surveys the literature with a focus on the issues which are most relevant to the research such as

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), scarcity marketing, Generation Z consumer behavior, brand exclusivity, and the influence of social validation. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the research in detail, specifies the data collection method, the sampling strategy, and the instruments of analysis. Chapter 4 displays the findings of the research and compares them with the existing theoretical frameworks and previous research. Eventually, Chapter 5 ends the dissertation by recapping the most important findings, presenting their managerial implications, dealing with the limitations of the study, and suggesting the directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

The beauty industry, in the past, has heavily banked on methods that only a privileged few could access or that were available in very small quantities to increase not only the recognition of the brand but also the user interaction. By restricting access to their offerings through limited editions or seasonal releases, urgency is created and at the same time the products become more symbolic because they are rare and prestigious (Lynn, 1991). This means that consumers are not only motivated to purchase but also feel a sense of distinction as they become the owners of items that are limited and culturally desirable.

In such a scenario, limited-edition beauty products have turned out to be the main instruments used by brands to gain the attention of customers who are already overwhelmed with the number of companies offering the same thing. Apart from being indicators of identity and social status, these items play a crucial part in the lives of young consumers, as they use them as means to display their personality (Belk, 1988). The charisma of the exclusivity is further strengthened by the very same psychological and social mechanisms that surpass price or quality of the product, thus consumer emotions, community belonging, and symbolic capital.

Consequently, this chapter elaborates on the very same mechanisms by underpinning three generators of the concept of exclusivity in Generation Z: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social validation, and product aesthetics. These aspects carve out the niche for Gen Z a.k.a. digital natives who are not only well-equipped with technology but are also big on truth, as well as thematic engagement and cultural-productivity (Williams & Page, 2020). This literature review, by identifying how these factors are mutually dependent on each other, sets the stage for substantiating whether exclusivity as a marketing tool in beauty only sparks brief consumer delight or fosters longer brand prestige and loyalty.

2.1 The Role of FOMO in Consumer Behavior

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a phenomenon that is related to the anxiety that is caused by the idea that other people are living more satisfying lives or accessing products that are only for a few and that you are not (Przybylski et al., 2013). Anticipated loss generates a feeling of urgency and exclusivity that FOMO puts together is a strong motivation for consumers in engaging with limited-edition products. For example, in the beauty industry, scarcity signals like “limited stock” announcements or the use of countdown timers cause consumers to act quickly and these consumer behaviors are often impulsive (Yang, Zhang, & Fang, 2021).

The FOMO among Generation Z is significantly exaggerated by the fact that they are always surrounded by digital and social media world. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok offer real-time product launches, influencer promotions, and peer-generated content, which altogether leads to the feeling that exclusivity does not last for a long time (Roberts & David, 2019). Social pressure is the other consequence besides transactional urgency because consumers worry about not being able to access the trends that have cultural and symbolic capital inside their peer groups that is why they fear exclusion.

The best example of this is perfumes. Products like Maison Margiela’s Replica discovery sets launched for a limited time only and Jean Paul Gaultier’s seasonal “Le Male” editions that are marketed as collectible and time-bound, lead consumers to purchases they create strong urgency to purchase them before they are gone. Social media unboxings and reviews turn these products into the beauty items as well as marks of taste and identity. In this way, fragrances illustrate how FOMO can be seen as product scarcity and social signaling that causes the consumers to feel exclusivity and therefore become less powerful in breaking exclusivity perceptions.

One of the most important things is that FOMO is still a little bit different than scarcity marketing of old times, as it deals with social and emotional aspects rather than just the product itself. According to research, social validation turns out to be a strong factor in the arousal of these anxieties: peer reviews, unboxing videos, and influencer endorsements make product acquisition a socially significant act (Listiawati et al., 2024). In other words, FOMO not only drives more sales but also becomes the important factor that allows brand community members to feel more unity with the exclusive circle.

Briefly, FOMO is a complex psychological persona that keeps consumers' feeling of brand exclusivity and at the same time makes them more susceptible to impulsive buying and emotional stress. This is a very important insight for marketers as it represents the FOMO's strengths and weaknesses: it can be very effective to draw the spotlight and sales, yet, if used too much, it can lead to consumer exhaustion and decrease the brand's trust in the long run.

2.2 Social Validation and Scarcity in Beauty Marketing

Social validation is the main aspect upon which Generation Z evaluates brand exclusivity, as this group is very much concerned about what others think and the feeling of being a part of a certain community. Gen Z is curious about the products and learns about them

from TikTok and Instagram besides other social media platforms. The platforms are also places where kids get recommendations and come across viral campaigns that dictate what is both new and desirable. Limited-edition companies go hand-in-hand with this phenomenon by depicting goods not only as uncommon but also as symbols of participation in pop culture, thus triggering the feeling of being valuable members of the community. Such a process is the promotion of what may be called "hype culture" where the limitation to the number of products is highlighted by shared joy and community recognition (Talib & Saat, 2017; Liang, Xu, & Huang, 2024).

The principle of Cialdini (2007) regarding social proof is the proper explanation for this occurrence: the behavior of other people is usually what individuals refer to when deciding how to act, especially in cases of doubt. Thus social media plays a big role in beauty marketing through which peer influence is delivered in the form of endorsements by digital creators who are the ones to turn branding exclusivity into a socially validated experience. Influencers hold a lot of power, particularly micro-influencers who have a smaller but more interactive audience that is more trustful and relatable, hence the authenticity is perceived to be higher and emotional connections to brands become stronger (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

The influence of social proof is very visible in the case of perfumes. For instance, unboxings or peer-to-peer sharing of Maison Margiela's Replica Discovery Sets and Dior's Christmas-only "J'adore" bottles are some of the ways how limited-edition launches attract women's attention. Fragrance lovers, for example, may showcase the fetching design of a rare bottle or the release of a seasonal collection on a website such as TikTok, consequently, the bottles are no longer just beautiful but also become a symbol of fashion, refinement, and being a part of a specific trend. The phenomenon of hashtags such as #PerfumeTok going viral is an indicator of how social

validation can fuel exclusivity perceptions making perfumes extremely desirable not only for the reason they are collectible items but also because they are an integral part of Gen Z's digital identity practices.

Social media algorithms speed up these dynamics even more by promoting content related to beauty trends and product drops. For example, TikTok makes it very easy for unboxings, reviews, and aesthetic showcases to be shared quickly, thus creating “hype cycles” where likes, shares, and comments serve as signals of exclusivity and cultural relevance (Shahifol & Mudzmir, 2024). A feedback loop then gets created: the more a product is seen online, the more it becomes exclusive and desirable regardless of its functional qualities.

One of the case examples that show how powerful the combination of social validation and scarcity marketing is Fenty Beauty. The brand's limited-edition collections, which are often released in partnership with influencers, become sold out in no time and thus, the company gets a consumer base that is always eager for the next drop (Fetto, 2020; Mandave, n.d.) Glossier in a similar way takes advantage of scarcity by having limited releases that are then promoted by user-generated content creating stronger feelings of exclusivity and brand loyalty among the community (Bruner, 2016). Rhode Beauty, a company founded by Hailey Bieber, is now the clearest example of the combination of exclusivity and social validation. They launched limited-edition blushes and the “Lemontini” lip balm, promoted through influencer partnerships and an exclusive trip for digital creators in Mallorca during the summer of 2025. Together with the symbolic positioning of lemon yellow as the “color of the summer,” these moves really transformed the release into a statement of lifestyle rather than just a product launch (Katos, 2025)

Among other things, these limited releases not only sold out at lightning speed but also spread via virtual waitlists, unboxings and peer reviews that were shared online (Chitrakorn, 2023).

Perfumes and skincare partnerships have been going down the same path, which tells that exclusivity, when scarcity is merged with socially acknowledged rituals like reviews, influencer “hauls,” or collection displays, is progressively becoming a cultural phenomenon.

In general, the research indicates that the use of limited-edition beauty marketing brings the most powerful impact when scarcity is combined with social validation. Nevertheless, this aspect also poses a problem: while the hype culture is encouraging rapid engagement, it still has the potential to wear out consumers if brands merely use the short-term buzz for their benefit without committing to authentic community-building and long-term brand identity.

2.3 The Role of Aesthetics, Packaging, and Storytelling

Moreover, research indicates that scarcity marketing works wonders especially if combined with beauty and social confirmation. (Sundar et al., 2020; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015) revealed that buyers are ready to go to even more great lengths to get their hands on beautiful items because they look forward to the pride of ownership and the quick happiness that they get through the beauty of the item. This means, in a nutshell, that the visual aspect, if combined with scarcity signals, becomes one of the most potent ways to attract consumer desire, especially that

of Generation Z, which is the most reactive to the aspects of uniqueness and visual distinctiveness.

Why aesthetics and exclusivity go together so well is not only about physical features but also about how the brand conveys closeness and cultural identity (Berger & Heath, 2007). For instance, Gen Z says that authenticity and community membership signs are packaging and visual storytelling (Campos Figueiredo, 2023). The media also helps a lot with this, showing how packaging design and visual narratives turn limited editions into cultural objects that have the ability to go beyond their function (Oswald, 2015).

One of the fundamental product design theories that underpin the symbolic aspect of product is aesthetics. Bloch (1995) maintained that product aesthetics influence not only the functional appeals but also the symbolic meaning that consumers assign to products, thereby creating an emotional bond and increasing consumer loyalty to the brand. In the same way, Orth and Malkewitz (2008) came to the conclusion that the haptic and optical signal such as fabric quality, spelling, and construction design lead to the consumer's feeling of regality and thus, a higher referred rate of willingness to pay. Gen Z, whose consumer habits are heavily affected by the digital world, sees these design elements not only as a personal but also as a social capital, thus allowing them to showcase on various platforms when performing their identity.

Perfumes show a common idea. Some special ones have collectable bottles. Such as Jean Paul Gaultier's 'Le Male' Christmas bottles and Montblanc's fancy flasks. Many people show these bottles in collections and on social media. They admire both how the bottles look and their scent. The bottle design shows personal style and membership in a desired group.

Design psychology theories also suggest that people should be engaged both through their senses and emotions. This trend in “unboxing” can be an example where the packaging is no longer protective but is a very important part of the consumer’s journey. In case of Gen Z unboxings, these are shared mostly on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, which have the role of spreading the message faster and being a part of the social validation process where aesthetic design becomes more visible (Bhattacharya & Dhingra, 2023).

The way a story is told can help some products be part of what Gen Z believes in. They like honest, distinct, and welcoming things. In Escalas (2004), storytelling makes people feel more connected with brands as they see items as part of who they are. The palette by Pat McGrath inspired by *Bridgerton* and other popular culture elements, shows how an item can become part of the culture. Rare Beauty uses stories about social issues and inclusivity in its design and marketing. This shows how stories can make people feel that they belong when they otherwise feel left out.

Most notably, in their 2012 paper, Joy et al. stated that the emotional effect of branding and narrative leads to unforgettable experiences, which are vital to attracting and holding the interest of younger consumers who are very trend-sensitive. Therefore, beauty and narrative, when merged with rarity, help to raise products beyond mere usage to become symbols of one's personality, thus inducing not only instant attraction but also loyalty over time.

2.4 Short-Term Hype vs. Long-Term Brand Loyalty

Limited-edition strategies often create short-term excitement, but their long-term branding impact remains unclear. Research reveals that consumers attracted to exclusivity primarily value a product's uniqueness over sustained brand connection (Hwang & Lee, 2023). While scarcity can drive quick sales, its ability to build loyalty is fragile and risks becoming just another marketing trick.

Industry experts warn about potential "drop fatigue" from overusing scarcity tactics. The real challenge lies in transforming urgency into lasting relationships through personalization, storytelling, and emotional connection (Chang, 2025). Exclusivity works best when blended with compelling aesthetics and narrative. Studies show distinctive products create symbolic sense of belonging, and increases loyalty when scarcity merges with personalized experiences and engaging stories (Sundar et al., 2020; Hwang and Lee, 2023).

Loyalty research by Oliver (1999) and Dick and Basu (1994) suggests that genuine brand commitment emerges only when value and identity align. Limited editions might spark impulse purchases, but they become true loyalty drivers only through authentic, value-driven experiences.

Real-world examples illustrate this principle. Fenty Beauty's seasonal sets sell out quickly but rely on strong brand identity to maintain customer loyalty (Fetto, 2020; Mandave, n.d.). Rhode Beauty demonstrates how cultural narratives can extend initial hype into meaningful

engagement, as seen in their Krispy Kreme "Strawberry Glaze" lip treatment collaboration (Fraser, 2023; Lorincz, 2025). The perfume industry perfectly captures this dynamic: while Gaultier's and Chanel's collectibles generate excitement, Dior's J'adore and niche brands like Byredo successfully merge scarcity with rich storytelling to build deeper connections.

Ultimately, loyalty programs and customer relationship management tools leverage personalization, community efforts, and unique rewards to transform fleeting enthusiasm into lasting customer commitment. By making exclusivity feel genuinely valuable rather than manipulative, brands create meaningful connections that resonate with their audience (Goldenberg, 2008).

2.5 Community and Cult Brands: Building Lasting Emotional Connections

Some beauty brands are capable of maintaining continuity beyond one-day consumer frenzy and still receive the adoration of communities that perceive them as cult brands. Fournier and Lee (2009) recognize cult brands as brands of rare products and also by the cultural identity, values, and emotional belonging that they offer to the consumers. These brands keep the idea of a tribe alive, where customers feel that they are communicating through a collective experience rather than through simple transactional relationships (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).

In most cases, cult beauty brands present similarities that are directly tied to the exclusiveness they announce. They do not significantly use advertising, but rely on the communities' passion that promotes them in a more natural way. They use controlled drops or distribution that is selective to reemphasize their rareness and at the same time they create an appealing and authentic philosophy which is not only a result of packaging and communication style but also product formulation that they share with their brand identity and customers. Storytelling along with cultural resonance become the primary desire drivers when these elements are enacted together, practically relying on social media and word-of-mouth as the main marketing avenues. Rather than having a variety of products, cult brands select a few items that are most representative of their values as a hand-picked collection.

In any respect, Rhode Beauty is a cult brand with all the resources at its disposal such as selective distribution, limited-edition product drops, and experiential marketing, that, besides permitting a common lifestyle and value system, quickly moves beyond the tangible product. The brand could be linked to Hailey Bieber, Rhode, who is all for “glazed donut skin,” which is a term coined for ultra radiant and healthy complexion. The Krispy Kreme partnership and the seasonal lip treatments such as Passion Fruit Jelly and Cinnamon Roll are some of the latest collaborations and products that make the brand’s cozy yet exclusive space even more visible and accessible to an ever-growing number of people, mostly via the viral social media experience (Fraser, 2023; Lorincz, 2025). This tactic elevates the feeling of community and keeps the brand exclusivity, thus allowing a lot of emotional attachment and repeated interactions.

Other cult beauty brands are Glossier, Saie, and Summer Fridays. Even before its products came out, Glossier created a loyal community thanks to the blog Into the Gloss and is

also widely known for its millennial pink appearance and "skin first, makeup second" philosophy. Saie builds a brand that is different and limited by using a mix of its clean beauty positioning, simple packaging, and storytelling with nature-derived ingredients. The Instagram-friendly identity of Summer Fridays which is the result of the founders Marianna Hewitt and Lauren Ireland with the neutral look of the brand and popular products such as the Jet Lag Mask and limited-release lip balms have made them so well-known.

The perfume universe can give more examples of cult brand dynamics. Le Labo and Byredo, are among the niche fragrance houses, that have gone on to become cult brands by integrating the elements of scarcity, craftsmanship, and highly distinctive storytelling. Artisanal production and therefore exclusivity are the primary accent of Le Labo along with city-exclusive perfumes that are only available in a small number of locations, whereas Byredo has built its following by embracing minimalism and sharing stories inspired by art and culture. In both brands, exclusivity does not necessarily imply that there is only a limited number of products but also the creation of cultural capital and being a part of the community of the connoisseurs. Among the similarities here, is the main indicator that cult branding is not limited to one specific product category within the beauty sector.

There are, however, beauty brands that are very successful and not in the cult category. Take, for instance, Rare Beauty as a case in point; even though it has been widely promoted as inclusive and honest in its messaging, the company seems to be following a mainstream model, which is characterized by wide distribution, a great plethora of products, and high investment in traditional marketing. Similarly, the likes of Fenty Beauty, Charlotte Tilbury, and M·A·C

are the brands that through large-scale distribution and mass-market strategies greatly target audience, which is the opposite of the exclusivity that these brands are trying to maintain. Despite having pulled off spectacular feats, these brands have become more identifiable because of their easy availability and wide cultural influence rather than their community-building nature, which is more tight-knit.

One of the main points about the differences between cult and mainstream brands is in understanding these distinctions when looking at the strategies that brands have set for Generation Z. Not only by means of limited availability but also by delivering to a consumer the feeling of identity and being part of a community are cult brands turning the consumers into brand advocates. The loyalty of younger consumers to these brands, even in rapid fashion changes, can be attributed to this mix of limited accessibility and cultural belonging. Specifically for Gen Z, the use of cult branding makes sense as it fits their need for truthfulness, culture involvement, and emotionally significant consumption experiences.

2.6 Critical Perspectives and Ethical Considerations

Scarcity marketing methods, though to impact positively, in getting the consumers excited and feeling urgent to purchase the product, are ethically questionable. On purpose, a company can reduce the amount of available products or offer them only for a limited time, thus unleashing

the consumer's fear of missing out (FOMO), which involves the activation of some psychological mechanisms that enhance one's need and lessen rational decision-making. Accordingly, this is a serious problem for such vulnerable groups as young adults who socialize a lot on the internet and catch the online trends. Moreover, people struggling with compulsive buying can find such strategies helpful in creating unhealthy habits towards consumption, where they choose short-term satisfactions rather than mindfulness and sustainability in purchasing (Byun & Sternquist, 2011; Lynn, 1991).

The concept of scarcity, from a psychological perspective, employs some deep-rooted biases in human cognition. As an example, reactance theory tells us that when consumers feel that they are left with less and less choices, then the thing that is limited becomes even more attractive (Dhanya & Jaidev, 2018). Being able to utilize this psychological mechanism as a commercial tool, however, it also brings one step closer to manipulative marketing in the ambit of persuasion. The use of constant promotion cycles, which often feature limited-edition drops, countdowns, and collaborations, results in a never-ending consumer state of anticipation and pressure on the purchasing. The outcome may then be "drop fatigue," which refers to the situation where consumers find themselves disengaging from the brand or being indifferent to the offerings due to feeling that exclusivity has been overly exploited.

In addition to consumer psychology, these approaches have already incited environmental and social issues. The scarcity of editions and the constant changes of the product are major causes of consumption, which is driven by novelty, and as a consequence, the overproduction of stuff that is thrown away once the trend changes. Such a cycle is against the rising demand for sustainability in the beauty industry (McNeill & Venter, 2019). As an example, new releases of limited editions are often considered by both creators and collectors as

objects of art such as annual one-of-a-kind products from Jean Paul Gaultier or Carolina Herrera but visual novelty rather than easy recyclability is often the priority of the packaging, thus giving rise to waste. Likewise, the criticisms for skincare and cosmetics with seasonal releases lie in their beautiful but not environmentally friendly designs.

Creativity and good causes in beauty marketing are becoming more and more the focus of beauty campaigns beside product quality, diversity, and ethical sourcing. CSR is the marketing of the future, and companies that choose the right approach and are honest will win the trust of consumers sooner or later. Communicating a true message about the normal availability of products, not inflating scarcity artificially, and advocating consumption that is in line with individual well-being and care for nature are some of the ethical product engagement features (Porter & Kramer, 2006). For instance, Gen Z is known to be a great driver of change when it comes to sustainability. They push brands for accountability and reward the companies that integrate sustainability and authenticity in their exclusiveness strategies. This pressure helps brands become more aware of the inevitable consequences of relying solely on scarcity tactics and thus going astray of the consumers/and their reputation.

These factors, in the end, lead to a more profound examination of how scarcity-driven marketing influence not only the buying habits of the consumers but also the cultural norms related to beauty and consumption. Should exclusivity be solely employed as a marketing tool, it would have the potential of encouraging consumer skepticism and the development of habits that are not sustainable. On the other hand, companies which combine the exclusivity with genuineness, social responsibility, and sustainability have the potential to gain the trust and loyalty of their customers and assure survival in the market which is becoming more and more competitive due to the continuous growth of consumer awareness and their expectations.

2.7 Implications of Limited Edition Strategies

Limited-edition beauty products have captured Generation Z's attention, sparking purchases through FOMO, social validation, and eye-catching designs. These elements create a sense of urgency and exclusivity that drives quick, often impulsive buying decisions (Yang, Zhang, & Fang, 2021). Brands leveraging such tactics often see impressive sales, viral moments, and heightened audience engagement.

Yet, questions linger about their long-term impact. Research suggests that exclusive products can shift focus away from brand loyalty, potentially limiting sustained connections (Hwang & Lee, 2023). Marketers must skillfully transform momentary excitement into lasting relationships, carefully avoiding both consumer fatigue and diminished product appeal.

Personalization emerges as a promising solution, fostering deeper connections beyond single product releases. Studies reveal that combining rarity with compelling storytelling and design builds stronger emotional attachments (Sundar et al., 2020; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015). Oliver's loyalty theory highlights that impulse purchases only transform into true loyalty through repeated, meaningful interactions.

Real-world examples underscore this approach. Fenty Beauty's holiday collections and Rhode Beauty's seasonal lip treatments sell out quickly but maintain loyalty by intertwining narrative and influencer connections (Fetto, 2020; Mandave, n.d.; NewBeauty, 2024). Likewise, Dior (J'adore) and Chanel (Coco Mademoiselle) perfume lines generate excitement through collectible bottles, yet their enduring prestige stems from rich heritage storytelling.

Simply put, exclusivity isn't enough to win customer loyalty. Smart brands blend limited availability with genuine connections, tailored experiences, and strong community engagement. We need more studies exploring how time impacts beauty marketing strategies, particularly in rapidly shifting product landscapes. The most successful approaches will transcend short-term sales boosts by creating deep emotional bonds that drive sustainable growth in highly competitive and trend-sensitive markets.

3. Research Methodology

The methodological conception is designed under qualitative paradigm which is a better when it comes to the depth, subtlety, and subjectivity of consumer's experiences than other methods. It is different from quantitative approaches that focus on measurement and generalizability. Here, qualitative research allows thorough exploring of the consumer's beliefs,

emotions, and perceptions that are the basis of buying behavior (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is mostly due to the fact that the study is interested in understanding the psychological and social mechanisms of exclusivity rather than just measuring purchasing intentions or sales outcomes.

This opening section reveals the core methodological approach of the research project and explains why qualitative and exploratory method were chosen. The study's context is given by detailing how participants were recruited and samples were selected to capture a diverse range of Gen Z perspectives. The paper then highlights the key data collection tools, with semi-structured interviews being crucial for uncovering participants' genuine thoughts and emotions. It also describes the fieldwork process, including pilot testing, interview techniques, and transcription steps. Finally, outlines the research methods, focusing on the thematic analysis that helped identify recurring themes and insights from participants' narratives.

Moreover, this chapter delves into the ethical issues and the measures taken to ensure compliance with both the academic and professional standards. Among these are informed consent, confidentiality, secure data storage, and participants' rights and welfare, which are treated in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2018). The chapter's intent with these provisions is to evidence the research standards, openness, and trustworthiness, thus, enhancing the validity of the study's findings.

Firstly, such a methodological framework is the guarantee that the research objectives have been addressed in the right academic and ethical manner. It clearly outlines the whole process of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation, thus, setting the stage for the results and discussion of the next chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This analysis employs a qualitative research framework, where the principal method of data extraction is semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach was chosen as the research question aims at investigating the subjective perceptions, motivations, and lived experiences rather than the identification of quantifiable or numerical patterns of behavior. As Creswell (2014) points out, qualitative research is especially instrumental in revealing the in-depth insights of the attitudes, feelings, and meanings, which are the core elements in understanding how the exclusivity strategies influence the consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that qualitative designs permits to find and define the recurring themes that exist in the participants' narratives, thus providing the degrees of one's understanding of how the individuals construct the meanings of consumption.

The research team first contemplated employing a mixed-methods approach to concurrently depict statistical patterns and capture individual perspectives. Nonetheless, after a deep thought, the study shifted solely to qualitative methods. This choice was made based on two grounds: the first being the realization that the richness and depth of individual stories would provide more enlightening insights into the psychological and cultural aspects of exclusivity; and the second being the practical limitations of conducting large-scale surveys or experiments within the allotted time for this project. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative

inquiry is the most suitable way of answering questions of meaning and context, which makes it the perfect fit for consumer psychology exploratory studies.

Through the use of qualitative methods, the study delves deeper than just numbers and trends, thus it figuratively opens the door for a more profound investigation of the Generation Z consumers' understanding, feeling, and participating with the limited-edition beauty products. In the end, these characteristics have been identified as the most correct among capturing the scientific research of the human brain, emotional reactions, and interpersonal relations that form consumer behavior in given conditions.

3.2 Research Setting

I conducted this study online, and all the interviews were done through virtual platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. I chose this environment for both practical and methodological reasons. First of all, it made possible the inclusion of participants from a wide variety of places and thus, the study could cover a larger variety of points of view and experiences. It was therefore possible to go beyond the restrictions imposed by physical proximity to reach a larger sample of Generation Z consumers.

Secondly, online interviews were quite suitable for this demographic. Being the most digitally savvy generation, Gen Z are very familiar with the use of virtual technologies and social media platforms for communication, hence the interaction with me as the researcher was simple and genuine (Turner, 2015; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Their level of proficiency lowered the possibility of barriers in communication, thus the participants felt free to communicate their experiences in a manner which was coherent with their daily way of interaction.

Moreover, previous research confirms that online interviews may be a viable and solid method for collecting qualitative data. Archibald et al. (2019), for instance, state that the virtual set-up may help the participants' supposition of the researcher's role, hence, they may give more truthful accounts; and underlines their merit in overcoming logistical issues and thus in facilitating access to research. My choice of an online format also had the advantage of being more practical with respect to the flexibility of appointments and the ease of moving around, thus also solving the problem of social desirability or performance anxiety which sometimes appears in face-to-face interviews.

By and large, my decision to have an online study environment was beneficial for both the fairness and the quality of the research. It allowed participants to engage on their own terms and even feel at ease, while it also allowed me to gather abundant and varied qualitative data.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

In my study, I engaged with eleven individuals between the ages of 18 and 27. All of them were members of Generation Z. I decided to go with this age range because the topics of scarcity, beauty culture, and digital marketing have been the major influencers of the characteristics of this generation (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Besides that, I needed the participants to be recent users of digital platforms and to be aware of new beauty product releases in the limited-edition category so they could share their thoughts on the topic of the study.

As my study was about participants who had direct experience or knowledge of beauty products and limited-edition campaigns, I decided to go with a purposive sampling strategy. Some of the participants might have bought limited-edition products for themselves, while the others could have just come across these products through several channels, for example, social media and marketing, without making a purchase. By this distribution, I have allowed myself to depict both consumers and observers, thus extending the dataset by including differing perspectives.

The selection of the eleven participants for the study is in line with the recommendations for qualitative research. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) indicate that most of the themes are saturated within the first 12 interviews, while Braun and Clarke (2006) give prominence to the depth and detail of the narratives in qualitative research as opposed to the size of the sample. Each of the semi-structured interviews that I did were about 20–30 minutes long, which was enough for the central themes to be developed by the participants and at the same time they were able to reflect on their own experiences in a meaningful manner.

3.4 Data Collection Strategy

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, a method that was favored for its balance between the fixed outline and adaptability. Semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity to not only keep a steady focus on main themes of the study but also to give room to participants to unfold their own experiences, opinions, and feelings. Such an approach is very helpful to discover the complicated and subjective nature of the phenomenon, i.e., the psychological drivers in consumer perceptions of exclusivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.4.1 Guidelines for the interview were divided into five thematic sections:

- Participant profile – i.e. demographic details, general beauty product habits, and purchasing frequency.

- Experience with limited editions – understanding of purchasing behaviors, emotional responses to (limited) scarcity, and prior experiences with exclusive launches.
- Aesthetics and packaging – discussing the perceived importance of design, material quality, and the relationship between visual attractiveness and exclusivity.
- Storytelling and brand connection – learning about the functions of narratives, cultural associations, and the emotional effect played on the brand perceptions.
- Influence and impulsive buying – concentrating on how social media, pressure, influencer marketing, and FOMO-driven decision-making affect.

This plan was intended to be close to the aims of the study as well as to the psychological factors that were found in the literature. For example, Belk (1988) points out the function of possessions in the formation of the self, Lynn (1991) shows how scarcity makes people see the value of a product to be higher, and Stephen (2016) puts a strong emphasis on social influence and digital environments as factors that affect consumer behavior. With the help of participant stories combined with theory, the interview design was able to achieve a balance between the newly arising ideas and already existing concepts.

3.5 Measurement Instruments

Primarily, the interview guide was the main tool for the present study (cf. Appendix X) and it essentially facilitated the organization of the face-to-face interviews that are partially structured. The guide was comprised of numerous questions that were essentially grounded in diverse academic literatures review concerning scarcity marketing, consumer psychology, and brand exclusivity, which in turn, provided the scientific background for all the questions and their direct correlation to the research goals. For example, Scarcity is defined by Lynn (1991) as a strong behavioral driver that decision-making involving the consumer to opt for scarce things, while Cialdini (2007) talks about one of the several persuasion methods as being social proof and urgency, which is quite suitable to limited-edition marketing. In the same way, Kapferer (2004) shows how brands purposely develop exclusivity as one part of their positioning.

Most of the questions in the interview guide were open-ended, enabling interviewees to express their thoughts, ideas, and notions, which were not limited by the given alternatives. Besides, it is also included some probing questions which allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of what the participants said and to find out their hidden reasons. For instance, a respondent stating the feeling of "pressure" might be a pretext to social media influence, peer group, or the development of personal style through inner-related aspirations for self-expression of which follow-up prompts would have explored further.

The iterative modus operandi is conformable with the standard setting of qualitative research design where adaptability and reflexivity allows me, the researcher to obtain all the minute details of the participants' lives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2015). Generally, the

interviewing guide not only assured the coherence between the different interviews but also the necessary profundity to open up rich, diverse, and systematically analyzable data.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The users of personal networks, social media platforms, and professional interest groups in beauty and lifestyle areas were some of the means by which the participants were reached out initially. In the first contact made, potential participants were presented with a detailed information sheet indicating the purpose of the study, the nature of questions, and the confidentiality measures that were being implemented. They were also informed that participation was at their own discretion and that they had the right to pull out at any time without giving a reason or facing any adverse effects. The principles of autonomy and honesty were the ways to win trust and to motivate free participation, which is quite significant in the case of personal perceptions and consumer behavior (British Psychological Society, 2018).

After the informed consent was obtained the interviews were scheduled at each participant's most convenient time and i considered the different time zones,their personal commitments, and platform preferences. All the interviews were conducted online through Zoom or Microsoft Teams to ensure accessibility and flexibility for everyone The duration of each

interview was from 20 to 30 minutes approximately. and with clear permission, interviews were audio-recorded for easier transcription and analysis. Besides the recordings, also was written important notes during each session to keep non-verbal cues, emotional reactions, and contextual details that may assist in the interpretation.

Word-for-word transcriptions of the recordings of the interviews were done to preserve the participants' narrative purity. Next in line were the anonymization of transcriptions and the assignment of pseudonyms to the participants for confidentiality. To meet the ethical standards for the safeguarding of sensitive information as per APA (2020) and GDPR (European Union, 2016), the data were saved on a password-protected device that only the researcher could access. These measures, in line with the guidelines for the efficient qualitative research, not only provide the procedural rigor but also, assure the rights and welfare of the participants (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015).

3.7 Data Analysis

The data was processed by thematic analysis, a method that is both systematic and flexible for recognizing, defining, and communicating patterns or themes in qualitative research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique was preferred because it gives a transparent structure for dealing with both preconceptions and new ideas, thus being extremely effective in investigating the subjective feelings of being exclusive, socially validated, and the emotional

experience when using limited-edition beauty products. Over and above, the thematic method allows the researchers to keep the balance between the technical part of the work and the depth of interpretation of the richness of the participants' stories (Nowell et al., 2017).

The stages of the analysis were six and they were followed strictly. At the first stage of familiarization with the data, the reading and re-reading of the interviews were done and noted were the impressions and ideas that emerged. At the second stage of creating initial codes, fragments that included the principal idea were marked with appropriate tags like "FOMO," "social media pressure," "aesthetics of packaging," and "exclusivity as identity." At the third stage, i.e., theme searching, the codes were now combined to form categories that not only spotlighted common features but also identified themes like "emotional responses to scarcity" and "validation through digital communities."

In the fourth stage of theme reviewing, the qualities of categories were assured to be internally consistent and at the same time differences between themes were clear, by checking the coded data and the whole dataset to confirm representativeness. At the fifth stage of defining and naming themes, the features of the research in each theme were more clearly presented together with its importance for the research questions, for instance, by connecting "packaging aesthetics" not only to the beauty of the design but also to one's identity through the symbols. Finally, while producing the report, the themes became part of the results and discussion chapters, interpretative comments from the participants were cited verbatim to reflect the honesty and emotional quality of the accounts.

The thorough examination through these steps sequentially, uncovered the intricate and detailed understanding of the impact of limited-edition beauty products on Gen Z's perception of

brand exclusivity. The method of thematic analysis enabled researchers to get a hold of the complicated data of the qualitative type without precluding the discovery of new and unexpected insights, hence the idea of the credibility and the depth of the research findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed to conduct the study responsibly and safeguard participants' rights. Each person received an informed consent form detailing the research purpose, voluntary participation, and steps ensuring anonymity. Participants understood they could withdraw at any time without penalty, respecting the core autonomy principle in qualitative research (British Psychological Society, 2018).

Data anonymization prevented privacy risks. Pseudonyms replaced real identities, and no personal details appeared in transcripts or reports. Recordings and transcripts remained on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Following strict data management protocols, raw data will be permanently deleted after project completion, ensuring confidentiality and security.

Though beauty product research might seem low-risk, personal identity, social dynamics, and consumption behaviors could evoke sensitive reactions. Interviews were conducted with sensitivity, allowing participants to skip uncomfortable questions.

Reflexivity played a crucial role in the ethical process. Given qualitative analysis's interpretive nature, the researcher remained vigilant about potential bias. Literal transcriptions, systematic coding, and direct quotes were used to ensure that the research transparency and credibility were not harmed (Creswell, 2014). Also, the research adhered to the ethical standards of the institution and the Code of Human Research Ethics of the British Psychological Society (2018), placing high importance on the welfare of the participants and research honesty.

3.9 Justification of Methodology

The chosen approach perfectly matches the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews enabled the study to capture rich, nuanced insights into consumer perceptions and emotional responses details that quantitative surveys often miss (Creswell, 2014). This method gave participants the freedom to share experiences in their own words while maintaining enough structure to explore key topics. The data reveals not just consumer behavior but also how they interpret meaning behind limited-edition beauty products.

Emphasizing qualitative data unveils the psychological and social dimensions of Generation Z's connection to exclusivity. Rather than relying on hypothetical scenarios, the research focused on real experiences, offering deeper understanding of FOMO, social validation, and aesthetic appreciation. The thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) systematically organized and coded these personal accounts with precision.

Ethical considerations like informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data management strengthened the research's credibility. By balancing accountability with a clear methodological approach, the study provides reliable insights that not only answer the research question but also offer practical guidance for marketers aiming to create genuine engagement with Gen Z.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The research gathered qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eleven Generation Z participants between 18 and 27 years old. The group was chosen strategically, re-

cognizing them as both current and future beauty industry consumers who are deeply embedded in digital culture and social media trends. During these interviews, participants shared personal experiences while deeper insights were explored, capturing individual perspectives and broader patterns effectively.

Thematic analysis uncovered six key themes related to our research question: 1) purchasing habits, 2) limited edition experiences, 3) psychological motivators like FOMO and social validation, 4) product aesthetics and packaging, 5) brand storytelling and emotional connections, and 6) consumer impulsivity versus brand loyalty. These themes emerged consistently across interviews, though their significance varied based on individual consumption patterns, financial situations, and personal values.

Together, these themes reveal the beauty industry's multifaceted nature simultaneously practical, emotional, symbolic, and social. The findings highlight how Gen Z consumers navigate everyday routines and aspirational purchases, balance personal and social identities, and manage the tension between immediate excitement and long-term brand commitment. By presenting participant voices alongside thoughtful interpretation, we aim to offer an authentic and nuanced understanding of the collected data.

4.1.1 Habits and Purchase Frequency

Most participants regularly bought beauty products, with varying frequency and amounts. For many, skincare was a monthly ritual, focusing on key items like cleansers, moisturizers, sunscreens, and serums—essentials that Generation Z considers core to daily self-care.

Some made purchases every 2–3 months, often linked to product depletion or seasonal releases. A smaller group bought weekly, viewing it as a lifestyle tied to trends and innovation. Perfumes especially stood out, seen as personal identity markers beyond basic use. Several highlighted their emotional significance; one participant shared his dedicated collection space, showing how fragrance represents more than just a scent.

Skincare, in contrast, connected to comfort, prevention, and wellness. Participants frequently described it as a necessity rather than a luxury. Makeup occupied a unique space: a daily routine for some, a canvas for creativity and confidence for others.

Economic factors also emerged in interviews. Some strategically stocked up during sales, while others prioritized quality over quantity, selecting one premium item instead of multiple budget options. This revealed Gen Z's pragmatic approach, carefully balancing budget, personal values, and product trust.

Overall, the findings showcase diverse consumption patterns. Beauty remains central to Gen Z's lifestyle, spanning from practical routines to identity-driven expressions. Across these variations, beauty has transformed from a simple utility to a holistic experience blending health, aesthetics, and personal storytelling.

4.1.2 Experiences with Limited Editions

About 70% of the respondents revealed that they have bought one or more limited-edition beauty products. Thus, the use of exclusivity as the main feature of Generation Z consumer behavior was confirmed as the most attractive. The examples most mentioned by the respondents were Dior lip balms, Maison Margiela's Replica discovery perfume sets, Colourpop collaborations with popular culture franchises such as Sailor Moon or Hocus Pocus, and holiday-themed lipsticks and kits. The functional aspect was not the main reason these products were sought after by consumers; instead, people talked about these products as they were attractive just because they looked like being unique, collectible, and prestigious. A few of the respondents asserted that holding such products made them feel unique, and they frequently showcased them as items that are not only for use but also as the symbols of taste, status, and self-expression.

The acquisition of these products has evoked positive emotions in the majority of cases. Feelings of happiness, fascination, and pride were the ones that were commonly found from the respondents during the interviews. Juliana, for example explained that It feels like happiness to have the item in the collection, whereas Nicolás spoke of the

opposite feeling that he experienced when he did not get the product, and once he wasn't able to get the product he wanted, he felt left out. These responses reveal that exclusivity is an experience that can bring not only satisfaction but also frustration or disappointment in case of denial of access.

Nonetheless, about 30% of people surveyed reported that they had never purchased limited editions, despite the overall positive attitude. Their explanations reflected a mixture of practical, critical, and value-based considerations:

Price barriers: Many mentioned that limited editions typically are more expensive. Daniela stated that she feels brands take the opportunity to charge more.

Skepticism toward scarcity claims: Some doubted the truth of "limited" campaigns. As Daniela continued explaining that sometimes they promote it as limited, but later it is available again.

Sustainability concerns: A small number of participants chose not to engage in what they saw as wasteful or unnecessary consumption. Amelyah declared she likes to think of herself as an observer and stop feeling tempted.

Interestingly, even those participants who had never bought such products acknowledged the compelling effect of exclusivity. Gabriela expressed it best when said that when you hear 'limited edition' it changes a chip in your mind. So, no matter what their actual purchasing behavior is, the scarcity language and framing still have an effect on consumer perception, which is the desirability of both conscious and subconscious levels.

4.1.3 Psychological Drivers: FOMO and Social Validation

The theme of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was mentioned a lot and had a big impact on the interviews as it was the main theme in most of the ideas that participants gave about their experience of limited-edition product launches. Several people interviewed talked about the pressure of the extremely fast sell-outs and in this connection, they often mentioned situations where there were only some minutes left for them to take action before things vanished from online or physical stores. Nicolás in an emphatic way gave the gist of the experience, he shared that the bottom line is that you get just a very short time to get hold of the product because everyone wants it. Usually, this feeling of urgency was brought to the forefront in advertisements by such things as countdowns, waitlists, and real-time stock updates that were most visible at the time of the release and these few people who had already signed up for the alert were at the forefront of the action and they felt the competition more than others.

The interviewees went on to say that along with the rush to buy products in which scarcity was a key feature, missing out on products was the main source of negative feelings they talked about. These feelings accompanied by regret, frustration, and disappointment were usually heightened when they found that these very articles

were promoted on social media. Several respondents wrote that the visibility aspect made the exclusion topic even stronger: a mere missed purchase turned into an absence on a social platform which, in turn, signified that the emotional weight of FOMO was augmented.

Social validation was another element that complemented FOMO and also helped to keep exclusivity alive. Instagram and TikTok kept popping up as the places where desirability was formed and strengthened. People were said to start believing in the necessity of a product if they see the reviews, the very moment the product is unboxed, and also when an influencer gives a recommendation. For instance, one of the interviewees, Juliana, spoke of the significance these platforms have explaining that social media is important, and the campaigns are linked to the life you want to show. Camila said something similar, explaining that when she sees a post, it gives her a feeling of urgency to be part of it. These comments show that social platforms not only help to keep people aware of new things but also make them feel exclusive by being part of a bigger group such as identity, aspiration, and community belonging.

When combined, the interviews showed that FOMO and social validation were not separate phenomena but co-existed harmoniously in a psychological ecosystem where they each heightened the effect of the other. In the minds of the interviewees, limited editions were no longer seen merely as items that might sell out but as social events in which the decision to take part or not was indicative of one's identity and sense of belonging.

4.1.4 Aesthetics and Packaging

Almost all participants real-strongly pointed out a beauty as the single-point reason of buying. They considered in the center packaging as the leading factor in how they evaluate a product being getting with it either more valuable or made for the more exclusive trade. Packaging was often indicated as a vehicle for quality, luxury, and prestige, with the participants declaring that a visually attractive appearance can promote a product to the level above its practical use. For example, Nicolás talked about Montblanc perfumes and stated that it is highly exclusive, you can tell from the fact that it is well made, the quality is very high. He added a broader view with his statement that not only through the scarcity but also through the material and visual presentation are most of the product exclusivity conveyed.

Participants checked details like colors, fonts and material, but the role each one played in deciding varied. For instance, Daniela accompanied aesthetic with practicality, she commented that if it's made of cheap material and can easily break, that will definitely have an influence on her to not buy it. On the other hand, some focused more on the alignment of personal style and taste. Gabriela spoke about her love of pastel colors, which she thought showed gentleness and being one of a kind, while Vincenzo, a design student, stressed the need for subdued colors and chic branding, as he pointed out

that his professional knowledge made him more alert to the design signals. These are just several examples of how packaging design may connect with consumers in the light of their individual values and personal aesthetics.

Many respondents mentioned that, in their opinion, appealing packaging is not only a purchase moment thing but also a packaging that has become part of their collections and displays. Juliana mentioned that she keeps them because it makes her feel special. To her, packaging was not just a container but a collectible artifact, kept even after the product was consumed. Likewise, some others stated that they kept bottles or boxes as decorative items and, therefore, packaging was a means of holding symbolic meaning and being a source of prestige and identity expression.

Merely, these insights suggest that aesthetics and packaging are not only the leading factors at point of buying but they also define the afterlife of the product its value as an object of display, self-expression, and even social signaling. For Gen Z focus group members, visual design and material quality were always the main factors that gave the feeling of exclusiveness which brands tried to achieve by launching limited editions.

4.1.5 Storytelling and Emotional Connection

Storytelling emerged as a subtle yet impactful element in how people viewed limited-edition beauty products. While some participants struggled to remember specific campaigns, those who did highlighted their role in making products feel unique and compelling. For these consumers, storytelling transformed items into meaningful cultural connections beyond simple merchandise.

Daniela, for example, praised Pat McGrath's Bridgerton-inspired collection, explaining how its Netflix series link made the products feel distinctive and emotionally engaging. Vitoria similarly appreciated Rare Beauty's inclusive packaging, noting that social cause alignment increased the product's appeal and significance. These instances demonstrate how storytelling can enhance exclusivity by connecting with cultural references that resonate with consumers.

Even when campaign specifics blurred, participants remembered the emotional impact. Juliana observed that stories help products gain visibility and community traction, while Amelyah valued campaigns that sparked imagination beyond their initial launch. The findings suggest storytelling, though not the primary attraction like packaging or fear of missing out, adds depth and community value to limited editions. While specific details might fade, the emotional connection lingers, showing how stories weave rare products into broader cultural and emotional landscapes.

4.1.6 Impulsivity and Loyalty

Most participants easily admitted that limited editions pushed them toward impulsive buys, especially when low supply and clear demand signaled quick action was key to securing the item. Juliana noted that people get caught up in the fear of missing out and its social appeal, often buying without thinking twice. Many agreed, connecting time-sensitive launches to snap decisions aimed at avoiding future regret, even for unplanned or unnecessary purchases. Several also observed that watching others buy simultaneously intensified the immediate urge to commit.

When exploring brand loyalty, responses varied. For some, limited editions built a sense of connection by creating a shared identity among owners. As Vitoria shared, when you meet someone with the same item, you feel a deeper connection. In this way, exclusivity satisfied desire while helping consumers feel part of a select community, strengthening social ties around the brand.

However, others saw these feelings as fleeting. Once the initial excitement waned, the product quickly lost its emotional significance. Nicolás summed it up simply when he said that the excitement dies down fast. For these consumers, purchases driven by scarcity provided only a momentary emotional boost rather than forming a lasting bond with any specific brand.

The findings highlight a stark contrast between initial enthusiasm and lasting connection. Exclusivity might spark impulse purchases and create emotional highs, but it doesn't ensure sustained loyalty. In reality, brand commitment stems from ongoing storytelling, authentic community engagement, and shared values. Without these elements, exclusivity can feel like a fleeting trend rather than a meaningful relationship with consumers.

4.2 Discussion

The results confirm that limited-edition beauty products are a major influence on Generation Z's perception of exclusivity, however, the ways and effects of this influence are quite complex and ambivalent. Though exclusivity tactics are successful in attracting the target audience's interest and involvement on an emotional level, the extent of their becoming a source of loyalty is still uncertain and dependent on several factors. The next discussion fuses these empirical results with theoretical concepts to uncover the underlying issues and contradictions.

4.2.1 FOMO as a Central Driver

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was one of the key psychological motivators that most participants recognized as having both an anxious feeling and a need for quick action. The respondents explained that the feeling of being under pressure due to the events selling out fast and the negative feeling that regret would have caused them if they had missed were a logical result of commodity theory by Lynn (1991, 1992) and the principle of scarcity by Cialdini (2007) as a persuasion tactic. This study reinforces those frameworks by showing that FOMO is not only a motivator of action but also a source of stress, particularly in the digital age. The negative emotions reported by participants frustration, anxiety, disappointment echo Roberts and David's (2019) findings that FOMO can have a psychological toll on younger consumers. Importantly, this suggests that scarcity-driven marketing strategies carry emotional risks alongside their commercial benefits, an aspect less emphasized in earlier work.

4.2.2 Social Validation Amplifies Desirability

Social validation was found to complement FOMO, amplifying the desirability of limited editions through peer approval and influencer culture. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok served not only as promotional channels but also as status arenas where products became symbolic of belonging and taste. Participants' accounts align with how he can understand how hype cycles work thanks to (Talib et al., 2017), in which influencer endorsement and peer visibility transform products into cultural phenomena. However, this study adds nuance by illustrating how validation can be both aspirational and exclusionary: while some felt included and empowered by being part of these trends, others described feelings of exclusion when unable to access the same products. This dual effect highlights the social risks of exclusivity marketing, which can strengthen community bonds for some consumers while alienating others.

4.2.3 Packaging as Symbolic Capital

Aesthetics and packaging emerged as the most consistently cited driver, mentioned by 80% of participants. Packaging was perceived not just as functional but as collectible and symbolic, supporting Belk's (1988) theory of possessions as extensions of the self. (Sundar et al., 2020; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015) similarly emphasized the role of aesthetics in amplifying perceived desirability, and the current findings confirm this in

the context of beauty products. What this study adds is evidence that packaging serves a dual role: first, as a purchase trigger participants admitted they often noticed packaging before product function and second, as a post-purchase artifact, retained and displayed as part of personal collections. This reinforces the idea that exclusivity extends beyond the moment of transaction into the ongoing symbolic life of the product.

4.2.4 Storytelling as Amplifier Rather than Primary Driver

Storytelling became a factor that was less frequent, but still significant. In such cases, it notably extended the emotional connection, thus reflecting Escalas'(2004) narrative processing theory, which indicates that consumers find characters through stories to be able to relate products with their own identity. Campaigns associated with cultural references or social issues (for instance, Rare Beauty's inclusive design, Pat McGrath's Bridgerton collaboration) were recognized as being influential. Nevertheless, storytelling was not very often considered as a separate source of inspiration, unlike packaging or FOMO; hence, it was a changer, deepening the interaction between beauty and scarcity. It is indicative that stories become strongest when they are in line with other signs of exclusivity, thus, they draw products deeper into the cultural or lifestyle domains.

4.2.5 Short-Term Hype vs. Long-Term Loyalty

Probably, the most unexpected result was the lack of balance between impulsive delight and keeping a lasting faithfulness. Out of participants, 65% confessions were very telling in that they had impulsed to buy because of scarcity, while only 35% had linked these events to their long-term loyalty. This is consistent with Oliver's (1999) model, which differentiates between short-term behavioral reactions and the deeper cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty facets. Indeed, limited-edition tactics seem to be remarkably effective in generating short-term sales and giving emotional thrills, yet, their power to bring about an enduring brand affection is very small if there is no further support such as a well-established narrative, close-knit community, or closeness to consumer needs like inclusiveness and sustainability.

4.2.6 Overall Interpretation

When all the evidence is considered, exclusivity in the fashion and beauty top industry doesn't appear as a mere transactional sales tactic but as a cultural mechanism that overlaps with identity expression, social validation, and symbolic capital. Gen Z consumers interpret exclusivity not only from the perspective of the rarity of products but also in the sense of how products link to the broader lifestyle of aspirations, online visibility, and community belonging. Nevertheless, the managerial dilemma is to turn the transient hype into continuous loyalty. Brands that are just scarce will fall into the phenomenon of temporary excitement and consumer burnout. Those that succeed in weaving exclusivity into their authentic brand stories, cultural relevance, and ethical values are going to be more successful in creating long-term engagement with Gen Z.

4.3 Conceptual Framework of Key Findings

- In essence, the interview findings can be visualized through a conceptual framework that depicts how limited editions impact Generation Z's perception of exclusivity and modify consumer behavior. The framework outlines the sequence of influence with brand strategies at the core, passing through the psychological drivers, shaping perceptions of exclusivity, and therefore, generating both consumer outcomes of short-term and long-term.

- Limited Editions are the primary stimulus, scarcity campaigns, aesthetic packaging, and narrative being the operationalization. Brands deliberately design these features in order to distinguish products from regular collections and to instill a close association of rarity and urgency.
- These signals evoke a host of psychological drivers, which position themselves as mediators between brand strategy and consumer perception:
- FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) adds the element of urgency, imparts the necessity of rapid execution of spontaneous decisions, and heightens the emotional involvement.
- Social validation augments desirability by making products a part of digital communities, wherein influencers and peers contribute to the visibility and the symbolic status by co-creating the same.
- Aesthetics and packaging act as the medium to showcase the standards and the exclusivity of the product, and most likely, be the collectible artifacts that prolong the product's life beyond consumption.
- Through these drivers, consumers become aware of exclusivity, which is their trademark of uniqueness, prestige, and belonging. Exclusivity, in this case, is not simply an attribute of limited availability but is also a socially and symbolically constructed element, upheld through visibility, aesthetics, and cultural resonance.
- At last, this viewpoint results in consumer behaviors on two different levels:
- Short-term results: impulsive buying, emotional arousal, and item accumulation. These impacts can be present simultaneously and are very efficient in sales, but their nature is essentially temporary.

- Long-term results: a possible brand loyalty, though a dependent one. Continuous bonding keeps only when the exclusivity factor is maintained through regular narrative, community interaction, and conformity with consumer values such as inclusiveness or ecology. If not, loyalty becomes weaker with the passing of the newness.

Table 1. Short-Term vs. Long-Term Outcomes of Exclusivity

This table showcases the conflict that exists between immediate and future impacts. Even though an exclusive offer is very powerful in terms of producing a feeling of urgency and a certain symbolic value, these results are volatile if a company does not maintain them by customer relationship management.

Table 2. Drivers of Exclusivity in the Interviews

The table shows that the drivers, collectively, led to the perception of exclusivity, but differently weighted. The main driver of the event was packaging, with most participants

referring to it, whereas storytelling, being less mentioned, had a greater influence when it was present.

4.3.1 Interpretation of the Framework

Simply put, exclusivity in the consumption of beauty products is not a single-factor phenomenon but a result of a complex network of mechanisms as shown in the conceptual framework. It starts with brand strategies which proactively implement scarcity, design, and narrative aspects in offering new products. These indicators evoke consumer emotions and social needs, thus influencing the consumer's perception of the products as exclusive. Exclusivity, therefore, leads to the occurrence of both present behavioral reactions (impulsivity, excitement) and possible longer-term effects (loyalty), though the latter are still unstable without support.

On the whole, the framework indicates that an attribute of exclusivity is most adequately seen as cultural and psychological processes that govern the economic strategies. The main point of this research is that the Z generation builds exclusiveness not only through the scarcity of products but also through their symbolical life, their aesthetics, their presence on social networks, and the stories they tell.

This chapter, therefore, shows that while limited editions are successful in creating the feeling of urgency and cultural desirability among Gen Z, their ability to develop sustainable brand loyalty is still a conditional and fragile matter. If not accompanied by deeply rooted brand strategies in identity, community, and ethics, exclusivity is likely to keep going through short-term hype cycles.

5. Practical Implications and Conclusion

5.1 Practical Implications

One of the key takeaways from the research is that it dramatically highlights the effects of limited editions on pushing young consumers to feel the products are unique, prestigious, and desirable. But most of the effectiveness of limited editions has been proven to depend on such psychological mechanisms as FOMO, social validation, or aesthetic enjoyment being activated, and also on the way in which the exclusivity is strategically presented. To put it another way,

being exclusive does not automatically equate to success; it is more of an impact to communicate, the degree to which it is a symbol, and to what extent it connects with the personal and social Gen Z identities.

Moreover, the study suggests that the managers have to view exclusivity not as a single tactic but as a multifaceted strategy to be designed and adjusted in accordance with the values, preferences, and lifestyles of the offeror. Some of the consumers may be attracted to the product merely by packaging and visual design that metamorphoses a product into a collectible artifact. While for others, exclusivity is most powerful if it is cleverly woven into storytelling or cultural narratives that provide emotional resonance. Furthermore, results reveal that the feeling of being exclusive is a reliable trigger of short-term excitement and impulsive buying. Still, it has the capacity to nurture long-term loyalty only if supported by regular branding, genuine community-building, and values such as inclusivity and sustainability.

When these insights were combined they uncovered what the strengths and the weaknesses are when the exclusivity is utilized as a marketing tactic. To go beyond the mere temporary buzz that is usually generated from limited editions, cosmetics companies need to meet certain requirements to be able to use these as part of a broader and sustainable brand strategy, which can reconcile scarcity with authenticity and novelty with continuity.

5.1.1. Managing FOMO Responsibly

A research paper is laying stress on the fact that FOMO is the greatest one among the powerful levers that are responsible for impulsive buying of Generation Z. People who were interviewed had the same description regarding the feelings of the urgency and the pressure to act quickly, frequently, within just a few minutes, by getting a product to be able to have it before the sale ends. Such a mood definitely brings short-term benefits for brands because of the sudden sales inflow and the product gets presented as 'trendy'. The results also show that there are some negative consequences for the consumers' emotions coming from these tactics, which are stress, frustration, and regret in cases when the items are unattainable. Such effects might lead to weakening of the connection between consumers and brands, as consumers who are repeatedly exposed to anxiety or disappointment may in the end become tired, skeptical, or even react negatively towards the brand.

Firstly, this means that scarcity-driven strategies may still be relevant and effective, however their use should be cautious and balanced. If overused, the feeling of extreme urgency could lead to the decrease of brand equity as consumers might start feeling that they are manipulated or that they belong to a group of people that are excluded. Instead, brands could adopt responsible scarcity management practices that could not only secure exclusivity but also reduce the stress of the consumers. For example, there could be transparent restock policies whereby consumers would know if the product would be available again, establishing waitlist systems that would ensure fair access, or limited pre-order opportunities that could be utilized by those who are the first to show interest in the product without causing an anxiety-driven competition. These

methods let exclusivity work as a differentiating factor but in a way that is consistent with Generation Z's values of fairness, transparency, and emotional well-being.

In daily life managers can benefit from seeing FOMO not just as a sales booster but also as an emotional factor that influences consumer perception. Enterprises that foster enthusiasm yet not overwhelm clients with anxiety will most probably be able to retain the first frenzy of involvement into a positive brand experience and to long-lasting loyalty.

5.1.2. Leveraging Social Validation through Digital Communities

Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have transformed limited editions from simple product launches into vibrant cultural moments that spread rapidly across digital communities. The interviews showed that when participants discovered limited editions through influencer content, peer recommendations, or viral unboxing videos, their perception of exclusivity deepened and often evolved into broader lifestyle trends. This reveals that exclusivity isn't just about scarcity but is also socially shaped and recognized through online visibility.

For managers, peer validation and influencer endorsement are crucial in shaping exclusivity perceptions. Traditional advertising falls flat with Generation Z, who seek genuine, peer-driven content. Brands must move beyond celebrity endorsements and connect with micro- and nano-influencers. These smaller-scale content creators have highly engaged audiences that feel more relatable and trustworthy. By promoting user-generated content like consumer reviews, styling videos, or collection displays, brands can boost authenticity. This approach shows that ownership is truly shared within real, vibrant communities.

Beyond one-off promotional bursts, managers should focus on building digital communities centered on brand identity. This involves creating spaces like branded hashtags, interactive challenges, and exclusive online clubs where consumers feel part of an ongoing narrative. By linking exclusivity to lifestyle or cultural identity, brands can maintain engagement beyond single campaigns and allow consumers to connect exclusivity with a sense of belonging and continuity. Ultimately, exclusivity has transformed from a product feature to a means of self-representation and community connection.

5.1.3 Packaging as a Strategic Asset

Among the participants, the most powerful and consistent factor that influenced the perception of exclusivity was the packaging. Moreover, any other aspect, the company highlighted the importance that design elements such as color, typography, material quality, and overall visual coherence played in forming impressions of uniqueness and prestige. For a lot of people packaging made products become collectibles rather than just products that they can consume showing them might become an indirect way of showing social prestige by displaying or even taking a photo of it and posting it to their social media beauty/lifestyle community. It turns out that packaging not only influences the new purchase decision but also makes the symbolic life of a product much longer than its functional use.

From the perspective of managers, it can be said that this discovery lets packaging become not only a secondary or purely functional issue but also a core component of brand strategy. Products that are digitally-first consumers' culture are very often photographed, unboxed, and social media-shared, which makes the packaging a form of visual currency that ensures exclusivity and identity. If companies use unique, high-quality designs for their limited editions, then they can set up these latter as rosy items that bear not only prestige but also cultural value.

Packaging plays a pivotal role to make limited editions products stand out visually and gain the attention of potential buyers. It can be the usage of minimalistic elegance that represents luxury, soft pastels that draw in the aesthetic preferences of Gen Z, or the product being integrated into the broader creative narratives through collaborations with artists, designers and pop culture universes. Such measures not only

augment the collectability of the product but also are crucial for exclusivity to be shown by the design, the extent of the rarity not being sufficient enough for this alone.

Managers need to understand the fact that the packaging should be considered as a storytelling and differentiation tool which attracts the consumer's attention even before they think about the product function. Z Geners are usually very visual and digitally engaged, thus for them packaging is the very first vehicle of brand uniqueness and one of the most lasting elements of the brand experience. Brands can increase their potency of creating from the limited editions the new cultural icons by integrating packaging design as their strategic asset, thus ensuring that exclusivity will both be felt at the moment of purchase and at the long-term symbolic value of ownership.

5.1.4 Storytelling to Deepen Emotional Connection

Storytelling was identified among the factors that had the greatest emotional impact on the connection with the brand/customer when it was present, although it was not always acknowledged as the main buyer motivator. Participants recounted most of the time remembering those campaigns which were closer to life, i.e., cultural references, social issues, or brand heritage, and referring to these stories as being the ones that made products seem more memorable and meaningful than the ones that were simply released.

For instance, collaborations or collections from the entertainment industry, or that were inspired by the principles of inclusive design, were considered to be the most influential as they not only shared the same associations with the product but also went beyond the product.

This shows that exclusivity works best when it is not solely a factor but rather a component of a larger story that connects with consumer identity. For Generation Z, the most compelling stories were those that dealt with inclusion, sustainability, and creativity as they were in line with the values participants considered central to their consumer choices. Storytelling in this respect was not just selling the product; it was giving the product a cultural and emotional context which made the product more significant and showed it as being a part of a lifestyle or community.

These insights tell managers that scarcity tactics on their own do not hold enough power to build long-term relationships with Gen Z consumers. While the state of being scarce and collectability may be the lure of the first buyers, they are ephemeral without going deeper into the meaning. The method of storytelling can be the medium through which the short-term eagerness is transformed into a long-lasting relationship with the brand whereby exclusivity is seen not only as “having a rare thing” but also as being a part of the narrative that reflects the identity of the consumer or the one that they aspire to be.

Managers should, realistically, come up with genuinely limited editions that feature true stories that tie- in with the culture and the values of the consumers. For instance, they can bring out the past of the brand to evoke tradition and the skill of the

trade, partnering with social causes to show responsibility or simply presenting the releases as one more form of art that praises innovation. Indeed, by scarcity storytelling authenticity brands can see that fairs will not only attract the attention of the audience for an instant but also creating a deeper emotional connection and loyalty.

5.1.5 Balancing Short-Term Hype with Long-Term Loyalty

The study found that there was an imbalance that was present in all cases: exclusivity was one of the main factors that impulsive purchases were triggered, but the ability of getting loyalty was, however, conditional. Managers should not make the mistake of thinking that scarcity on its own can be enough to create deep relationships of trust. What they should do is treat exclusivity as part of a broader loyalty strategy that, along with consistent brand identity, community engagement, and being true to ethical values, is the key to success. Brands that mix exclusivity with their long-term stories, membership programs, or continual cultural relevance are at a better place to turn temporary interest into lasting commitment.

To sum up, the practical implications highlight that exclusivity in the beauty industry is the most potent when it is implemented as a multidimensional strategy. Instead of solely relying on scarcity, the managers ought to balance urgency with

fairness, rouse more significant validation through communities, throw in packaging design, use storytelling for cultural depth, and intertwine exclusivity into long-term loyalty programs.

5.2 Conclusion

This study was to understand how special edition beauty products affect the perception of brand exclusivity by Generation Z. The findings indicate that exclusivity is not an individual characteristic but a multidimensional concept that hinges on different emotional drivers like FOMO, social validation, aesthetics, and storytelling. Accordingly, they reevaluate the ways in which uniqueness, prestige, and community could be influenced. Exclusivity was to them infrequently associated with limited supply of products; instead, they saw it as a social and cultural phenomenon that was supported by online platforms, beautiful design, and symbolic stories.

The data indicate that limited editions are particularly good at grabbing quick attention, and as a result, short bursts of excitement and impulsive purchases are generated, which can lead to the formation of urges, experiences of pride, or remorse. And yet, the power to create long-term loyalty is dependent on a few conditions and is delicate. Loyal customers surfaced only

when storytelling, authentic community-building, and consumer value (such as inclusivity and sustainability) were part of the exclusivity proposition. If these reinforcements are lacking, exclusivity runs the risk of being caught up in a cycle of hype-driven consumption that quickly disappears once the novelty wears off.

The major contribution of this work is the recognition of exclusivity as a cultural phenomenon rather than a mere transactional sales tool, but a mechanism that intersects with identity formation, digital validation, and symbolic consumption. Put simply, this means that brand managers and strategists are expected to look beyond scarcity tactics and come up with exclusivity strategies that are not only authentic but also culturally and environmentally sustainable. For the beauty industry, the study charts a course for the brand to bring exclusivity not only to immediate sales but also to Generation Z's long-term emotional connections.

In an academic vein, this investigation adds to the expanding literature on consumer psychology and generational behavior by acknowledging the ambivalence of exclusivity: it is both a prominent feature of consumer engagement and a possible source of consumer fatigue or exclusion. By focusing on exclusivity as being at the crossroads between scarcity, symbolism, and social dynamics, the research unveils the younger consumers' ways of valuing beauty market.

Ultimately, the results make it clear that the problem for beauty brands is not simply to attract the attention of the audience with the help of exclusivity but rather to transform the short-lived hype into a loyal following. Those brands that handle this crossroads in a responsible and creative way, which involves balancing urgency with fairness, combining packaging with storytelling, and integrating exclusivity with consumer values will become the ones that not only

receive the attention but also get the trust and long-term commitment of Generation Z consumers.

6. Limitations and Suggested Future Research

6.1 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into how limited-edition beauty products influence Generation Z's perception of exclusivity, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations do not undermine the contribution of the research but rather contextualize the scope of its findings.

While this study provides valuable insights into how limited-edition beauty products influence Generation Z's perception of exclusivity, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations do not undermine the contribution of the research but rather contextualize the scope of its findings.

6.1.1 Sample Size and Representativeness

The research was grounded on eleven semi-structured interviews that helped to open up more the personal experiences and views of participants. This interpretative approach provided detailed and subtle understandings of the psychological drivers of exclusivity, however, the smallness of the sample unavoidably sets a boundary on the extent to which the results can be generalized. The findings cannot be expected to reflect fully the diverse range of the whole of Generation Z population due to the differences in geography, culture, income, and consumer engagement with the beauty industry. Besides, the participants were mostly self-selecting individuals who had pre-existing interests in beauty products. This may have caused selection bias to some extent in that those less engaged in beauty consumption and less exposed to exclusivity-driven marketing may not have been represented in the sample. Hence, the views of those indifferent to or resistant against beauty trends, possibly the least represented voices for the understanding of the Gen Z consumer behavior spectrum, were underrepresented in the study.

Still, it is often the case that qualitative research is robust when it manages to access the in-depth aspects of the issues it covers and, hence, the study is able to reveal not only obvious but also less obvious patterns, themes, and meanings of those also hinted in the large-scale quantitative surveys. Consequently, these results may be regarded as a relevant initial grounding and it is necessary to conduct further studies in order to confirm or refute and enhance the trends disclosed here with larger and more demographically representative samples.

6.1.2 Qualitative Methodology

This study was a qualitative project, and the main focus of the primary research was to understand the subject better rather than breadth of coverage. It is impossible to undervalue the importance of the semi-structured interviews in enabling the participants to explain their experiences, emotions, and opinions regarding limited-edition beauty products in simple words. This method had the capacity to produce rich, context-dependent data and enable the themes to be identified inductively from the respondents' narratives. However, qualitative research, by its very nature, is still restricted in several aspects.

Interpretive bias is among the primary issues challenging the research.

Participants might have shaped their responses unwittingly in a way that reflects social desirability bias, for instance, by suppressing the reporting of impulsive behavior and exaggerating rational decision-making to please the listener. Besides, the stages of coding and thematic analysis call on the researcher to make interpretive judgments which can be affected by their own personal background, suppositions, or desires. While great strides have been made to keep the authenticity intact through systematic coding and the use of direct participant quotations, some amount of subjectivity is still present in qualitative analysis.

Another drawback mentions the lack of quantifiable prevalence.

Based on the analysis of interviews, the main themes that frequently recurred in discussions (like packaging, FOMO) were identified; however, this approach does not permit the statistical measuring of how these drivers are prevalent in the general population. Besides, there is no precise quantification of the relative importance of the factors in the matter of influencing the perceptions of exclusivity. Consequently, the findings should be seen as revealing only possible relationships rather than the definite cause-effect ones.

Still, the robustness of the qualitative method is that it can uncover intricate mental processes, cultural connotations and symbols that are hard to be displayed only by surveys. Thus, the study provides a significant base for the subsequent researches, which may implement the numerative or combined-method types to confirm and establish these themes further.

6.1.3 Contextual and Cultural Boundaries

The research was culturally and generationally specific to Gen Z consumers exploring the relationship of exclusivity in the beauty industry. On the one hand, the study had a narrow focus which made it possible to unravel in detail how the demographic perceives and feels the exclusivity. On the other hand, it also limits the extent to which the study could be applied to other fields.

One of the main factors that influence consumer behavior is the identity of a certain generation. Generation Z is usually defined by its digital lifestyle from which social media culture and the importance of such values as inclusivity and environmental consciousness came. These elements were present in the descriptions of participant's contacts with limited-edition products. Meanwhile, other generational groups like Millennials, Generation Alpha, or Baby Boomers may have an entirely different take on exclusivity with the cultural, media, and economic factors being the cause. For example, whereas Millennials might stress the aspect of exclusivity as the symbol of status and the aim of achieving through luxury, Generation Alpha may associate it more with the gamification and digital ownership (e.g., NFTs, virtual goods).

The beauty angle of the study is another contextual barrier that is similar. Most of the time, exclusive beauty products are linked to their desirability, rarity, and the opportunity of the personal identity to be expressed, but in other areas, the phenomena work differently. Fashion, for example, could see exclusivity taking forms such as collaborations with designers and limited runway collections. Tech industry may achieve it through the scarcity of hard innovations while early access to new devices is an example of the gaming industry through digital scarcity. At the same time, some of the drivers of psychology like FOMO and social validation can hardly cut through different types of industries but the roles of packaging, storytelling, and symbolic ownership may be vastly different in each sector.

Hence, the results of this study must be understood with these cultural and work environment limitations in mind and recognizing that exclusivity is a phenomenon dependent on the context. The work done is an important first step to understanding the dynamics of Gen Z and beauty, but still, further studies are required to investigate how these factors appear across different demographics and sectors before claiming to have a general understanding of exclusivity as a marketing and cultural strategy.

6.1.4 Time Constraints

The academic timetable limited this research scope considerably. Long-term data cannot track changes in exclusivity perception. In the beauty industry, trends, seasons, and social media frequently alter perceptions. The sense of exclusivity soon fades from the next item.

A longitudinal study would have captured consumer reactions in greater detail. Feelings like excitement and loyalty sometimes change after a release. This survey indicates just a snapshot in how exclusivity perceptions shift over time in Gen-Z, yet it does not explain in-depth the entire process of change.

6.1.5 Potential Researcher Bias

Some measures were taken to increase the trust and credit of the results, for example, using the same coding practices, and including the participants' quotations, by the nature of their interpretation qualitative research leaves some subjectivity as an unavoidable consequence. The participants' descriptions were also at the risk of self-report bias. People, as you know, may not always remember their actions correctly, or they may provide a picture of themselves according to which they think is the socially accepted way of presentation (for example, they may be understating the impulsive consumption of goods and overstating the rational decision-making).

Furthermore, my academic background and my fascination with branding and consumer psychology might have been the major factors that influenced my viewpoint while analyzing the data. Although reflexivity was maintained throughout the process, it is hard to not bring own ideas into the themes, but letting the themes emerge from the data, it is still very difficult to be absolutely impartial in qualitative analysis. This shortcoming does not diminish the amount of insight but indicates the necessity of acknowledging the subjective aspects of interpretation and inviting further research to verify these findings by different methods, researchers or contexts so as to be more resistant and objective.

6.2 Suggested Future Research

Building on these limitations, several directions for future research can be proposed to expand the understanding of exclusivity strategies in beauty and beyond.

6.2.1 Larger and More Diverse Samples

New studies could utilize quantitative surveys with bigger and more varied populations to verify whether the themes identified here are applicable universally. Besides, with participants from different cultures, areas, or even financial levels, a wider understanding of the behavior of exclusivity across different contexts could be drawn.

6.2.2 Comparative Generational Studies

Social research comparing Generation Z with Millennials or Generation Alpha could investigate what different characteristics generations have in the construction and valuation of exclusivity. Consequently, comparisons of this nature could indicate whether packaging, storytelling, or FOMO are aspects that only the Gen Z finds important or if they are attributes typically found in other kinds of consumers.

6.2.3 Cross-Industry Analyses

One of the differences is that while a study is concentrated on the beauty industry, exclusivity is such a big phenomenon that it puts as a common denominator in the fashion, technology, gaming, and luxury markets as well. Accordingly, future scientific research may verify if these sources of FOMO, social validation, packaging, storytelling are common across industries or, otherwise, the sector-specific dynamic is the one that shapes differently the concept of exclusivity.

6.2.4 Longitudinal and Experimental Designs

A longitudinal study proposition is one that follows consumers' feelings of exclusivity over time, particularly when trends and platforms change. Alongside this, experimental research may be set up to test specific variables such as packaging design or scarcity framing to confirm whether these cause consumer behavior directly.

6.2.5 Ethical and Sustainability Perspectives

Some participants were skeptical about limited editions in terms of sustainability and overconsumption. Therefore, future studies may look into the ethical side of exclusivity strategies. Research could ask questions like: How can brands enjoy the benefits of scarcity and still be committed to sustainability and inclusivity? This area could be really relevant as Gen Z is becoming more and more conscious of corporate social responsibility.

6.3 Closing Reflection

Precisely, the research uncovers subtle insights about exclusivity in the beauty world while inviting further exploration. Future studies could expand these findings using broader and more varied samples, providing deeper understanding across Generation Z. Researchers might compare different generations like Millennials or Generation Alpha to reveal how social and

economic factors shape exclusivity perceptions. Exploring similar patterns in fashion, technology, or gaming could help determine if drivers such as FOMO, social validation, packaging, and storytelling work consistently across industries. This approach would illuminate whether exclusivity mechanisms are universal or industry-specific. The study also sparks important ethical discussions, especially considering Gen Z's strong values around authenticity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Upcoming research should investigate how brands can skillfully balance product scarcity with social responsibility, ensuring their exclusivity strategies remain both profitable and socially meaningful.

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