

Personal shoppers and pampering top South Africans' beauty wish list

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Over two thirds of all South Africans say that beauty is essentially about non-physical attributes but this does not mean that they don't have plans to improve their looks. Top of their list would be personal shoppers and self-indulgent treatments, according to a recent global study on beauty conducted by Synovate.

Synovate tackled a range of beauty issues in a global survey of over 7,000 people in nine markets - South Africa, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Korea, India, Singapore, Spain and the United States. The survey asked people to spill their beauty secrets... how do people define beauty? Where do people from different cultures see themselves on the beauty scale? And would they do anything to change their looks?

The Synovate survey picked up some intriguing attitudes across cultures and across gender. So how did South Africa compare?

- South Africans (43%) and Bulgarians (43%) were most in support of the view that beauty comes from within.
- Compared to the rest of the globe South Africans (32%) were also most confident that they are beautiful just the way that they are.
- Fifty-four percent (54%) of South African women felt that beauty advertisements make them feel inadequate.

Beauty is as beauty does

While much of the survey was about beauty on the outside, Synovate started by asking respondents to define beauty, with two thirds of all people choosing a definition about something other than appearance.

Overall, 35% attribute beauty to 'what's on the inside' and another 32% say it's all about confidence. South Africans and Bulgarians (both 43%) shared the highest scores for the altruistic view that beauty is on the inside.

Don't go changing

Not everyone can actually be beautiful but culture, gender and confidence influence whether you think you are. Synovate asked respondents to place themselves on the beauty continuum, anywhere from 'I am beautiful and do not need to change anything about the way I look' through to 'I do not think I am beautiful or attractive and want to change the way I look'.

South Africans (32%) were most likely to think that they were beautiful and did not need to change a thing, followed by Indians (24%). However, the survey also gave the option of 'I think I am beautiful but there's always room for improvement' and when added together, it seems that South Africans (65%) have a better beauty image than any of the other countries surveyed!

Honore Gasa, Client Services Director (FMCG) for Synovate in South Africa attributed this to the African ideal of beauty. "We have just as many images of beauty around us in South Africa as any other country. But they are diverse and reflect a wide variety of beauty ideals. The acceptance of this diversity and a multi-dimensional interpretation of beauty is why South Africans are able to think of themselves as beautiful and work with what they have."

It's a kind of magic

Nearly half of all people think beauty advertisements make women feel inadequate; and 28% agreed beauty advertisements do the same for men, according to the survey.

In South Africa, 56% of women agreed that beauty advertisements affected their self esteem, with 34% of men also agreeing with this.

So where does all this leave beauty marketers?

Well, the good news for marketers is that there is a world of believers out there. Two thirds of all people think facial or beauty products make a person more attractive; and 72% of women around the globe believe this is the case.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of South Africans said that if money were not an issue, they would buy expensive, branded facial and beauty product to improve their appearance. So clearly there is still a significant percentage of South Africans who believe in the belief these products would work their magic.

Putting your money where your mouth is (and other things people will do to improve their looks!)

When you think plastic surgery, it's hard not to think Hollywood and the United States of America. Think again. While the number of people in the States who would consider plastic surgery (if money was no issue) was quite high, it was eclipsed by the Brazilians. More than four in ten Brazilians would have plastic or cosmetic surgery if their wallets allowed, rising to nearly 60% among Brazilian women.

An overall 19% of respondents across the globe would consider this more radical beauty intervention - 12% of men and a quarter of all women said they would have cosmetic or plastic surgery if they could. Compared to the rest of the markets surveyed, only 15% of South Africans said that they would opt for plastic surgery.

In nearly every market, the number of women who would yield to the knife or needle was more than double the number of men. The only exception to this was India where very few people of either gender would make a date with their surgeon.

In other would-if-they-could findings, 42% of all Koreans would sign up for skin whitening products (61% of Korean women) and only 7% of Spaniards think these products would improve their looks. In an inverse finding, 41% of our Spanish respondents would use a tanning salon (half of all women) but only 14% of Koreans would.

Compared to the rest of the world, South Africans were most likely to try a personal shopping service to improve clothes or style at 59%. Intriguingly, men in both South Africa and India were just as likely (if not more likely) to think this service would make a difference.

The survey also found that, even if money were no object, there are still three in ten people comfortable enough with their beauty (within or without, or both) to do nothing at all... no extra products, no spa treatments, no tanning, no skin whitening or surgery. And that's a beautiful thought.

About the Synovate global beauty survey

Synovate spoke with over 7,000 adult consumers in nine markets around the world - Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, India, Korea, Singapore, South Africa, Spain and the United States of America. The study was conducted in May 2008 using online, telephone and face-to-face methodologies.

CURIOSITIES

- Sixty-seven percent (67%) of South Africans agreed that using beauty products makes a person look more attractive. More Americans than anyone else nominated 'I do not think I am beautiful or attractive and want to change the way I look' but this was the relatively low number of seven percent, creeping up to 10% among American women.

- Mirror, mirror on the wall... The majority of South Africans (48%) said that they spend less than five minutes per day looking in to the mirror.
- Singaporeans relate beauty to confidence more than any other market, with just under half saying it's all about self-belief.
- Ninety-three percent (93%) of South Africans said that a good smile is the most important factor in a person's beauty.
- Forty-one percent (41%) of all respondents agreed that they pay attention to beauty tips in magazines.
- It's good to be beautiful in Brazil and India where 55% of people think you can get away with less work as long as you look good.
- In India, social acceptance and the need to belong mean that 11% of respondents identified most closely with 'Beauty is about being complimented by other people'.
- Beauty doesn't buy you any extra kudos in Korea where 96% disagreed that beautiful people do not have to work as hard.

About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs over 6,000 staff in 121 cities across 63 countries.

More information on Synovate can be found at www.synovate.com and www.synovate.com/southafrica.

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