

Running Head: The Evolution of Modernity: Early 20th Century and Today

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The concept of modernity throughout history has evolved to reflect the cultural, social, and technological changes of different eras. This paper will discuss what it meant to be contemporary in the early twentieth century and how the beauty business contributed to the idea. It will then move on to the current modernity, looking at how contemporary beauty culture and industry express what it means to be modern. Therefore, by comparing these two periods, one may learn about the dynamic nature of modernity and its strong relationship to beauty standards and behaviors.

Early 20th Century Modernity

In the early twentieth century, many societies underwent substantial change. During this period, several significant characteristics of modernism influenced beauty ideals and the beauty business. For example, the advent of electricity, the mass production of consumer goods, and the emergence of automobiles revolutionized daily living and perceptions of modernity. The beauty industry capitalized on these changes by offering new cosmetic products aligned with the desire for progress. As a result, face powders and lipsticks became more affordable to a broader range of consumers, blurring the lines between the elite and the general public (Peiss, 2003).

During the period of urbanization, cities emerged as centers of modernization and provided ample opportunities for employment and a more modern lifestyle. Urban culture and fashion began to impact the modern identity of people. The beauty industry played a crucial role in reflecting and promoting the ideas of urban beauty. The modern woman of the early twentieth century, popularly known as the "Gibson Girl," was a symbol of independence, with a high pompadour hairstyle and an hourglass figure (Stevenson, 1998). The beauty industry responded to this trend by offering hair products and makeup to help women achieve this fashionable look.

During this time, women's suffrage gained momentum, and women began to fight for their right to vote and broader social equality. This social shift impacted beauty standards as women sought to emphasize their strengths and independence (Peiss, 2003). As a result, a more natural and dynamic appearance gained popularity, and the beauty industry evolved to reflect women's changing societal roles by promoting more discreet makeup.

Additionally, the development of mass media, such as periodicals and film, extensively spread beauty and fashion trends. Advertisers played a significant role in how people perceived modern beauty. They advertised beauty items and cosmetics, providing the impression that keeping up with current trends was an important component of being modern. In fact, according to Peiss (2003), advertisers played a crucial part in shaping how people viewed contemporary beauty. Furthermore, the constant exposure to these beauty and fashion trends in the mass media created a sense of urgency in consumers to keep up with the latest styles (Peiss, 2003). As a result, beauty and fashion became a significant aspect of modern culture, where individuals were expected to maintain a specific physical appearance.

Modernity Today

Beauty culture and industry are vital to modernity in the 21st century. Being modern today is closely linked with technology and the internet. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have changed beauty standards and how they are presented. For instance, influencers and beauty companies use these platforms to showcase the latest trends and products (Girard & Harris, 2019), so keeping up with digital channels is important. Modernity has generally evolved to embrace contemporary cultural, technological, and social processes.

Contemporary values have led to a more diverse customer base, and brands celebrate various skin tones, body types, and gender identities (Koenig, 2021). Modern consumers are

increasingly concerned about environmental sustainability and its impact. Therefore, to cater to the needs of environmentally conscious consumers, beauty businesses are now prioritizing eco-friendly packaging and materials (Hajjar & Belkhir, 2020). Nowadays, being up-to-date means choosing ethical and sustainable cosmetic products.

Additionally, self-expression and uniqueness are highly valued in this modern time, and the beauty industry offers a wide range of products that allow individuals to create distinct looks and showcase their personalities. From bold makeup choices to unusual hair colors, people are encouraged to be authentic, embracing their individuality and expressing it creatively (Girard & Harris, 2019). As a result, embracing one's uniqueness and expressing it through personal style is a powerful way to showcase individuality and promote self-confidence today.

In the 21st century, people place great importance on well-being and self-care. The beauty industry promotes skincare and self-care routines as essential components of modern living, emphasizing comprehensive well-being rather than just looking good (Koenig, 2021). Modern beauty culture often celebrates minimalism and natural beauty, contrasting the heavily made-up styles of the past. Many beauty products are designed to enhance natural traits rather than conceal them, reflecting a desire for authenticity and a rejection of established beauty standards (Hajjar & Belkhir, 2020). Hence, the emphasis on well-being and authenticity in modern beauty culture is a positive shift towards promoting health and self-love.

In conclusion, the beauty industry significantly influences one's perception of modernity and its ever-changing nature. By understanding the role of beauty culture and commerce in shaping one's attitudes and goals, people can better navigate the fluidity of society and embrace the changes that come with it. The beauty industry will continue to play a critical role in shaping one's cultural landscape, and it is up to individuals to be mindful of its impact on their lives.

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