

Nail Design as Self-Expression: Nataliia Zapara Explores American and European Approaches

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 25(03), 2494-2498

Publication history: Received on 18 February 2025; revised on 22 March 2025; accepted on 29 March 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.25.3.0972>

Abstract

The article examines the phenomenon of nail design as a form of non-verbal communication and self-expression in modern society. A comparative analysis of the dominant approaches to nail art in American and European cultures is conducted, their stylistic features, technological preferences and socio-cultural determinants are revealed. The theoretical foundations of the perception of nail aesthetics are considered through the prism of fashion psychology and identity studies. Practical aspects of the work of a nail artist are analyzed in the context of various cultural demands of clients. The thesis is substantiated that the choice of manicure style reflects not only individual preferences, but also broader cultural values and trends. The results of the study can be applied by nail artists to improve the quality of customer service taking into account cultural characteristics, as well as by marketers and analysts of the nail industry to understand regional market trends.

Keywords: Nail Design; Nail Art; Self-Expression; Cultural Differences; American Trends; European Trends; Nail Industry; Psychology Of Fashion; Aesthetics Of Manicure.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the nail industry has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a segment of basic care into a powerful sector of aesthetic medicine and fashion. Nail design has ceased to be merely a utilitarian procedure, gaining the status of an important element of personal style and a means of self-expression. In the context of globalization, there is an interpenetration of fashion trends; however, pronounced regional features remain, determined by cultural codes, historical context, and aesthetic preferences. Of particular interest is the comparison of American and European approaches to nail design, often regarded as two poles of modern nail aesthetics. The relevance of this study is due to the growing demand for individualization in the beauty services industry and the necessity for nail professionals to have a deep understanding of the cultural aspects of client preferences. The purpose of the article is to conduct an analytical review and comparative analysis of American and European approaches to nail design as a form of self-expression, relying on theoretical concepts and practical observations in the industry.

1.1. Nail Design in the Context of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Studies

Appearance, including details such as hand grooming and nail design, functions as a system of non-verbal signals transmitting information about the individual, their social status, belonging to a particular group, and personal characteristics [1]. According to the theory of symbolic interactionism, individuals use symbols, including elements of appearance, to construct and present their identity in interaction with others. In this context, nails become a kind of "canvas" for expressing mood, aesthetic tastes, following fashion trends, or, conversely, demonstrating nonconformism.

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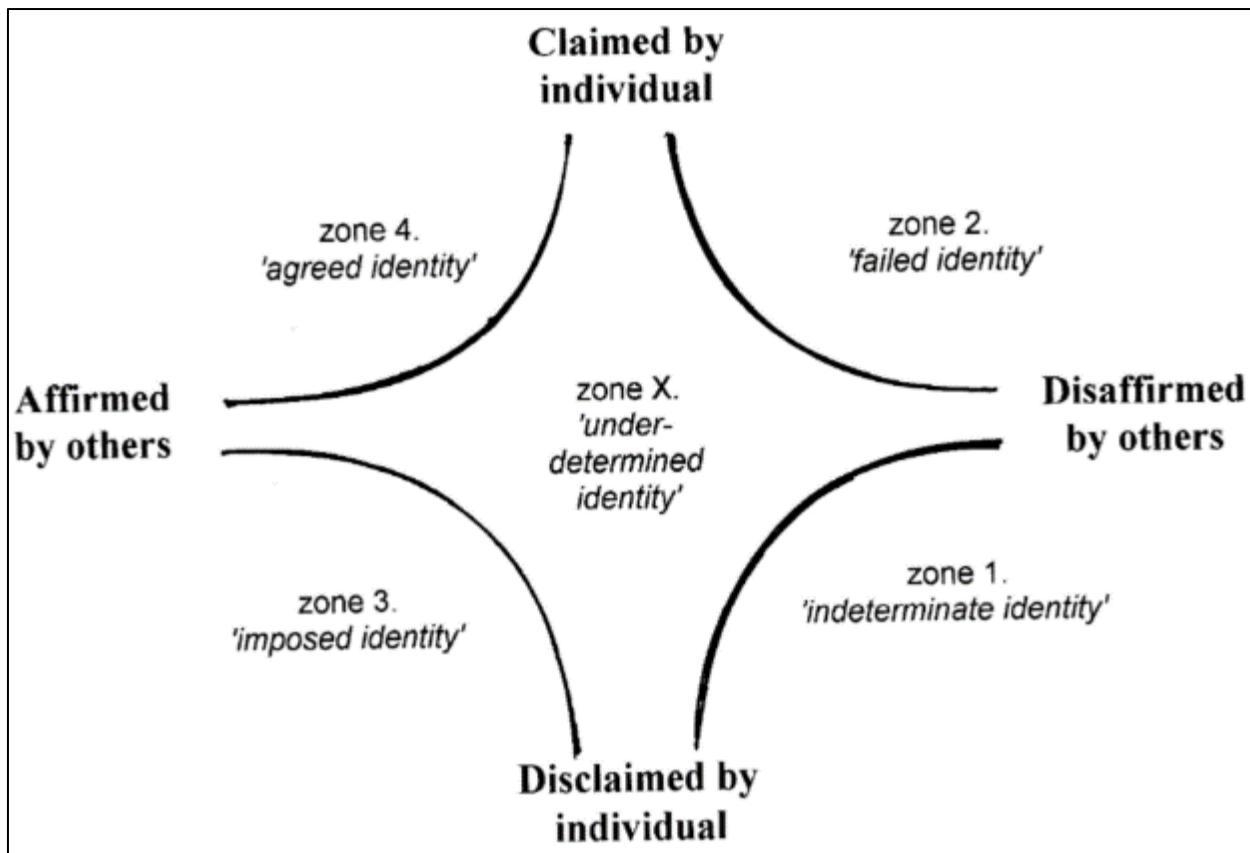


Figure 1 Matrix of Identity Negotiation between Individual and Social Perception

Fashion psychology considers the choice of clothing and accessories, including nail art, as a way of impression management and communication with the outside world. Bright, complex, or unusual nail designs may signal creativity, self-confidence, or a desire for attention, while a restrained, classic manicure is associated with elegance, professionalism, conservatism, or minimalism [4]. Research in the sociology of beauty shows that standards of attractiveness and grooming, including manicure norms, vary across cultures and social groups, reflecting dominant values and ideals [5]. The choice of a specific nail style may serve as a marker of belonging to a particular subculture or social class.

2. The American Approach: Expression, Trends, and Technological Innovation

The American approach to nail design is often characterized by greater boldness, expressiveness, and orientation toward current trends, largely shaped by the influence of celebrities, social media, and pop culture [2].

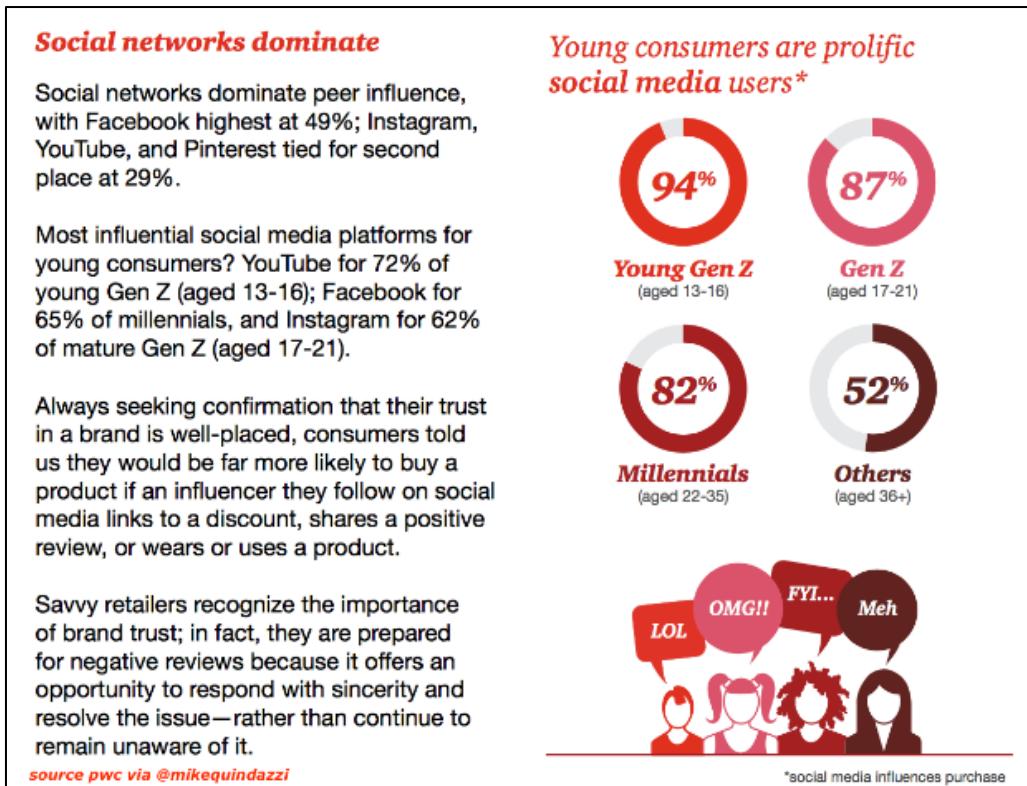


Figure 2 Impact of Social networks

Key features include:

- **Length and shape:** Preference is given to longer nails and expressive shapes such as “stiletto,” “ballerina” (coffin), and “almond.” These forms provide more space for design and visually elongate the fingers.
- **Design complexity:** Complex, multi-component designs are common, including volumetric elements (rhinestones, beads, 3D molding), airbrushing, intricate patterns, and nail piercings. Bright, neon, or contrasting colors are often used.
- **Technologies:** Acrylic extensions are highly popular, allowing the creation of extreme lengths and shapes, and serving as a durable base for elaborate decoration. Gel polishes are also widely used, often combined with extensions or complex designs.
- **Influence of trends:** The American market is very dynamic, with new trends quickly spreading via Instagram, TikTok, and other influencers. Clients often come to nail artists with specific requests based on celebrity looks.

This approach reflects certain aspects of American culture, such as individualism, the desire to stand out, consumer orientation, and the rapid turnover of fashion cycles.

3. The European Approach: Elegance, Naturalness, and Focus on Nail Health

The European approach, particularly in Western and Northern European countries, leans toward greater restraint, elegance, and an emphasis on natural beauty and nail health [3]. Its main characteristics are:

Length and shape: Short or medium-length nails of natural shapes (“soft square,” “oval”) prevail. The priority is a neat, well-groomed appearance of the natural nail plate.

Design and color: Preference is given to classic techniques (French, moon manicure in restrained variations), solid coatings in nude, pastel, or classic red/burgundy tones. Design, if present, is usually minimalist—thin lines, geometric patterns, delicate accents.

Technologies: Gel polishes are highly valued for their durability and the possibility of creating thin, natural-looking coatings. Considerable attention is paid to the quality of the manicure as a care procedure: cuticle treatment, nail plate

polishing, use of therapeutic and strengthening products. Extensions are less popular and are more often performed to correct shape or length rather than to create extravagant looks.

Values: Emphasis is placed on nail health, the quality of materials, and the procedure itself. The aesthetics are often associated with notions of "chic," "elegance," and "well-groomed" rather than shock value.

This approach correlates with European cultural values, where quality, durability, moderation, and classic aesthetics are often appreciated.

4. Comparative Analysis and Practical Implementation for Nail Artists

The comparison of the two approaches reveals not so much mutually exclusive practices as differences in emphases and dominant trends. The American style emphasizes visual impact, trendiness, and self-presentation through noticeable design. The European style focuses on the quality of care, naturalness, and restrained elegance as markers of status and good taste.

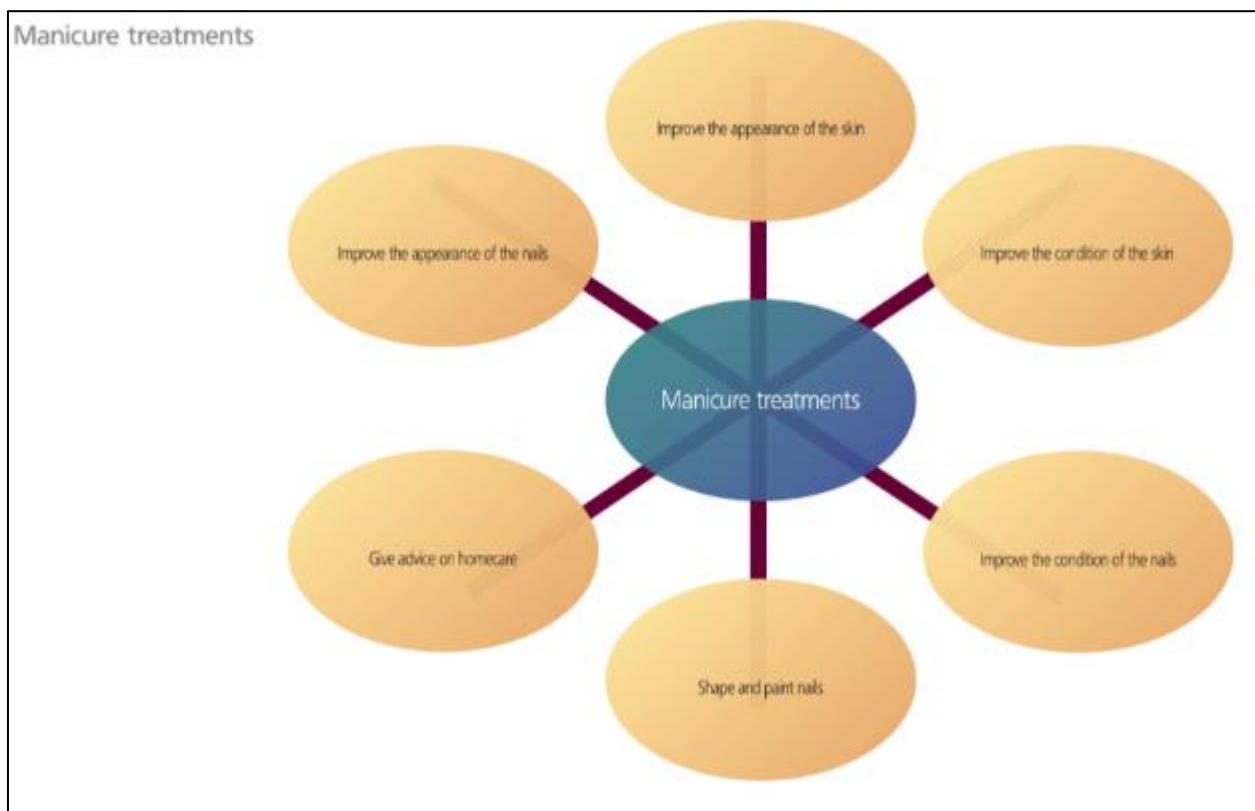


Figure 3 Manicure treatments

For a highly qualified nail artist, understanding these differences has direct practical significance. When working with clients from different cultural backgrounds, it is necessary to consider their expectations and aesthetic preferences. Effective consultation before the procedure helps to identify the client's request, which may be formulated implicitly, through references to certain styles or images. The nail artist must master a wide range of techniques—from classic European manicure and gel polish application to complex extension and nail art techniques characteristic of the American school [3].

It is important to note that globalization and migration processes lead to a blending of styles. In large metropolitan areas in both the USA and Europe, clients with the most diverse requests can be found. A successful nail artist can adapt, offering both ultra-trendy designs and classic solutions, as well as developing individual styles combining elements of different approaches. Furthermore, there is a growing popularity of "hybrid" styles, such as minimalist designs on long nails or the use of nude shades in complex techniques.

Thus, nail design is a significant tool of self-expression, reflecting individual and cultural characteristics. The analysis of American and European approaches demonstrates the existence of stable differences in aesthetic preferences, technological priorities, and socio-cultural connotations of nail art. The American style gravitates toward expression, complexity, and trend-following, while the European style emphasizes naturalness, elegance, and nail health.

These differences are conditioned by broader cultural contexts and value systems. Understanding these features enables nail artists to communicate more effectively with clients and provide services that meet their expectations. In the context of globalization and cultural interpenetration, professionals need to master diverse techniques and be ready for the synthesis of different styles. Further research may focus on studying the influence of social media on the unification or, conversely, diversification of global nail trends, as well as analyzing the perception of different manicure styles in various professional and social environments. The practical applicability of the results lies in the possibility of developing more targeted marketing strategies for nail brands and educational programs for nail technicians, taking into account the cultural specificity of client demands.

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