

Influencing the Beauty Industry

Natalie Lieber

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Makeup has been around for millennia and will continue to be used and loved for centuries to come. As of 2019, the beauty industry was valued at \$532 billion and is projected to exceed \$800 billion by 2025 (Danziger, 2019). As the industry grows, its communication strategy evolves with it to reach more customers by taking advantage of new mediums. The current beauty industry heavily relies on social media influencers as a part of the overall communication strategy. Social media influencers play an integral role in shaping consumer behavior in the beauty community. This paper will examine how the beauty community successfully uses social media influencers, especially on YouTube. This paper will also discuss the lack of diversity in the beauty industry. Many companies are making an effort to increase inclusivity and representation of different races, ages, genders, and other factors that don't fit the Westernized standards of beauty. Finally, this paper will be examining where the beauty industry is, in terms of marketing, and what the future may look like.

Social media and the ever-evolving digital world have caused companies to shift how they market to their consumers online. Social media allows for brands to directly engage in conversations that build relationships with consumers and encourage brand loyalty (Forbes, 2016). Although brands do not have complete control over the conversation, they can influence it with the use of social influencers online as consumer brand advocates. A social media influencer is a third-party endorser who shapes the attitudes of their audience. Influencers typically have large online followings on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. It is regarded as a "rapidly growing industry that attempts to promote products or increase brand awareness through content spread by social media users who are considered to be influential" in their sphere (Schwemmer and Ziewiecki, 2018).

Influencers are seen as trustworthy and organic opinion leaders because of their peer status. This comes into play when considering word-of-mouth marketing, which is passing information along by simply talking about it. Influencers are masters of electronic word-of-mouth marketing or eWOM. Word-of-mouth has proven to be more effective than traditional marketing efforts that come directly from the brand because consumers believe the message to be more credible (Forbes, 2016). Consumers tend to trust influencers because they come off as more credible and relatable to the everyday consumer. Celebrity endorsement has been around for decades, but these micro-celebrities tend to be more relatable because they live more normal lives that consumers can identify with. People generally tend to trust other consumers, rather than commercial messages from companies, when making purchase decisions. The relatable nature of influencers makes the consumers feel like they know them as a friend, mother, or sister. Makeup companies have taken notice of the success and popularity of social media influencers and their impact on consumer behavior.

The beauty industry has been very successful using social media influencers. In this community, influencers have been dubbed as “beauty gurus.” Influencers have been a successful marketing tool for companies because of the popularity of advertorials. Advertorials are advertisements placed in the context of an editorial piece of content, such as a video or Instagram post. Often times, an influencer will make a video which allows consumers to see products, learn how to use them, and utilize the referral links to further explore the product. Advertorials are an example of the social learning theory’s effect, which explains why influencers are influential in the first place. The social learning theory explains that “people can acquire new patterns of behavior by watching others” (Forbes, 2016). Influencers lead by example by recommending and showing their followers how to use a specific product. Marketers use social influencers as a part

of their communication strategy, especially in the beauty community, in hopes that consumers will replicate the influencers' behavior. Advertorials are effective because they allow for the influencer to mold behavior and influence purchasing decisions of the consumer. Many influencers create video advertorials on YouTube, both as a paid partnership with a brand or as a casual unpaid mention of a product.

YouTube, a video-sharing platform, is a key platform for beauty influencers. YouTube started out as a platform for amateur content creators to share videos online. Today it is used as an effective marketing tool for companies. YouTube is where the majority of beauty influencers reside online because the platform allows for longer advertorials and limitless product promotion. On YouTube, product promotion can be defined as, "communication about a product, brand, or service in order to raise interest of potential customers" (Schwemmer and Ziewiecki, 2018). Product promotion can be seen in various forms such as direct recommendations, communicating a positive sentiment toward products or brands, referral links, and mentioning a product in a haul or in the description box. Product placement is simply incorporating a brand or product into a video in a purposeful manner. Product promotion placed in advertorials makes the content highly engaging and effective in influencing consumer behavior.

Maybelline serves as a key example of a brand successfully using social media influencers as part of their marketing strategy. Maybelline has consistently chosen influencers who embody the characteristics of an effective influencer: relatable, knowledgeable, helpful, confident, articulate, and entertaining. Being relatable creates common ground between the influencer and the consumer and therefore the brand and the consumer. A knowledgeable influencer can provide the audience with insight and awareness. They can provide tips and tricks and demonstrate how to use the product in a helpful way. Confidence is an important trait for an

influencer because it creates a positive environment that can more effectively translate into persuading viewers to purchase their recommendations. The qualities of being articulate and entertaining pull the other characteristics together because it is the ability to clearly present the product in a memorable way. When a partnering influencer has these qualities, Maybelline benefits because they have increased brand awareness and knowledge of the product itself (Forbes, 2016). For Maybelline, video advertorials are the most effective method of marketing to their target demographic they help consumers visualize themselves with the product. YouTube videos allow for longer and more in-depth reviews and demonstrations that are presented in a format that the audience finds enjoyable.

Jackie Aina is an African American beauty influencer with 3.37 million subscribers on YouTube. Aina is a beauty icon and activist who has become “an unapologetic and bold voice for diversity and inclusion in the beauty industry” (Gassam, 2019). Jackie Aina has been outspoken on the issue of diversity in the beauty community. Aina started her YouTube channel because there simply were not any influencers that looked like her. She said the influencers were all either “White or Asian, and I enjoyed their content, but I couldn’t use some of the products or techniques because of my skin tone. It was frustrating” (Gassam, 2019). Aina decided to make her own channel to teach and inspire women who had similar complexions and faced the same challenges that she did. Since her first upload in 2009, Jackie Aina has consistently called out the community for its lack of diversity. In the past, it was common for brands to have shade ranges and campaigns catered strictly for Caucasian females. However, with the rise of social media in recent years, beauty has moved to welcome and represent customers of all skin tones. Aina said, “People demand representation and better representation. The past two years alone, we’ve seen a big rise in brands expanding and making products for people of color” (Gassam, 2019). Aina

suggests that by having more racially diverse influencers, the harder it will be for brands to ignore their feedback and opinions.

The main issue with the beauty community as a whole is that it is whitewashed. The industry has identified its core demographic to be white females. However, a Nielsen report found that women of color spend nine times more than their Caucasian counterparts on hair and beauty products per year (Fetto, 2019). One example of a traditionally whitewashed cosmetic brand is Almay. Almay consistently used blonde-haired, light-eyed, Caucasian celebrities to be the face of the brand, including Kate Hudson and Carrie Underwood. They paired slogans such as: “All-American Look” and “Simply American” with these campaigns, which did not include any deeper shades (Jobson, 2018). Beauty influencers called out Almay on social media for their ethnic exclusivity. Almay responded to the criticism by releasing a new foundation with three shades for darker skin tones with Rashida Jones, whom is half-Black/ half-Jewish, as their spokesperson. While people were excited about these small steps in the direction of diversity and inclusivity, many complained that it wasn’t enough.

Like Almay, many other brands have defined their audience as Caucasian women and have limited their foundation shades to fit this target market. The majority of key decision makers for big beauty brands are white, “which inevitably informs what ends up on advertising material” (Fetto, 2019). On the other hand, many niche companies cater strictly to women of color because of the lack of inclusion from many of the large, dominant companies on the market. Women of color have struggled to find makeup that is suitable for their skin tones. Business savvy women have taken this struggle and turned it into profitable businesses that cater to multicultural women. For example, KJ Miller and Amanda Jackson started their company Mented Cosmetics after they couldn’t find nude lipsticks for darker complexions at the

drugstores (Smith, 2019). Brands that are owned by women of color and cater to their specific needs strive to empower women and inspire confidence. A study by the research firm Kline & Company found that the multicultural beauty market has been growing faster than the overall market (Smith, 2019). This shows that women of color are just as drawn to this industry as other demographics.

Niche beauty brands have been successful in the competitive cosmetic industry. Many people question whether having specific niche brands is a negative thing. For example, Korean beauty has been a global phenomenon in the Western world due to its “one size fits most” claims and all-natural ingredients. The Signature Essence Cushion from Missha, for example, comes in only two colors: light beige and natural beige. This extremely limited shade range is not an issue in Korea because their core demographic fits into a very similar skin tone. However, if Korean beauty brands are trying to expand into a global market, should they be held to the same diversity expectations as the rest of the world? Niche brands have a place in the market because of the lack of inclusion from mainstream brands. Brands who fall under this category, such as Mented Cosmetics and Missha, are successfully meeting an underserved demographic. However, large mainstream brands that claim to be inclusive in advertisements should be held to diversity standards due to their larger demographic and available resources to meet needs.

Fenty Beauty by Rhianna revolutionized the beauty industry with its mission to be inclusive to all. Rhianna introduced the brand by launching an initial 40 foundation shades “evenly spread across the spectrum—from the fairest to the deepest—along with a marketing campaign that made its point of view loud and clear. “Foundation for all” (Schallon, 2018). Women with albinism suddenly had easy access to foundations that were light enough to match their skin tone without having an off-putting orange undertone. Women with very deep skin also

found perfect shade matches for the first time. Women are finding their shade of foundation for the first time and having a real emotional connection to the brand as a whole. Rhianna also used models from a multitude of races and religious backgrounds. The brand openly celebrates diversity in its advertising and marketing campaigns which has inspired others to follow in suit.

Fenty Beauty's inaugural launch and campaign started what has since become known as the "Fenty Effect (i.e., the chain reaction of brands launching more inclusive shade ranges in response to Fenty's fanfare)" (Schallon, 2018). Fenty set the diversity standard for future campaigns across the industry. If a brand launches a foundation with fewer than 40 shades or limited ranges are seen as slacking and will inevitably receive backlash online for not being inclusive. Balanda Atis, director of face development and multicultural beauty at L'Oréal USA said, "The launch was an eye-opening moment in the industry, just to say, 'Are we really doing the best we can as an industry?'" (Smith, 2019).

Many brands are making strides to be more inclusive. L'Oréal Group is the parent company of many drugstore and luxury brands including L'Oréal Paris, Maybelline, Lancôme and Urban Decay. The company sends out scientists to travel the world collecting skin-tone data because "a skin tone is born every day, especially in Western cultures" (Smith, 2019). The work for tone developers will be continuous because as a population grows, different races blend and combine to create different tones. Maybelline's Made for All lipstick collection has seven shades that claim to suit every skin tone. Amy Whang, senior vice president of marketing at Maybelline, said that a group of makeup artists tested shades on women from a variety of ethnicities before narrowing it down to the seven that complimented the most complexions. Estée Lauder introduced its new Double Wear Matte Powder foundation in 41 shades this year after expanding its Double Wear Stay-In-Place foundation from 42 to 56 shades in 2018. Nars Cosmetics has

increased its Sheer Glow foundation to a “global shade range” of 40 hues, which doubled its previous shade selection (Smith, 2019). Sephora now carries 48 brands with 30 or more shades and has begun carrying more niche brands catering to women of color in store in 2019. These are just a few examples of how companies are using their resources to expand shade ranges to meet their demographics needs.

Another stride that companies are making is to use diverse models in their advertising and social media campaigns. This goes hand-in-hand with increasing shade ranges because it allows them to showcase new shades on models with those complexions. Fenty Beauty wasn't the first brand to use diverse models in their campaigns but the thing that makes the brand different is their consistency in doing so. As previously mentioned, Fenty used models from many different ethnicities and religious backgrounds in advertising and marketing campaigns. Duckie Thot, a model known for her extremely dark complexion, starred in Fenty's first campaign. She said that the industry is still in this in-between stage where it's a first for this many black models to be consistently working (Schallon, 2018). Using models from a wide variety of ethnicities and religious backgrounds is shifting how brands market to consumers online. Many mainstream brands have followed Fenty's example and started marketing to its diverse customer base by using models that “look like them”, rather than using traditional white models to try and reach everybody. Social media has been the driving force behind the movement for diversity and representation in the beauty community. Fenty Beauty was the brand to bring this movement to fruition.

Influencers and industry professionals agree that brands having extensive shade ranges is a step in the right direction but worry that it won't last. Right now, every brand is launching 40 plus foundation shades because it is the trendy thing to do. KJ Miller, co-founder and CEO of

Mented Cosmetics said, “brands have gotten into an arms race with how many shades you can have” (Smith, 2019). Will brands get tired of staying competitive in terms of shades? Rhianna made a commitment to have equal supply of shades, rather than limiting production on the extreme ends of the spectrum and having an abundance of mid-range tones. Fenty also carries the entire foundation shade collection in stores, rather than picking and choosing to supply the more commonly purchased shades. This seemingly inconspicuous move potentially allows any consumer to walk into Sephora and find their shade. Many influencers have also warned brands that it is not enough to “put a black model next to Gigi Hadid” or to only carry the deeper shades online (Shapiro, 2018). Influencers, such as Jackie Aina, said that they hope that brands will continue to be inclusive to all ethnicities, genders, ages, etc., in future collections and campaigns.

The beauty industry is constantly evolving. Social media has changed the way that brands and consumers interact. Recent global consumer studies by Ipsos show that women, and increasingly men, define the role of beauty products in their lives (Danzinger, 2019). Over 50% of respondents said that they expected to see campaigns and products that present beauty in its many shapes, sizes and colors in positive and realistic ways. This push towards natural beauty comes as a rebuttal to the unrealistic, unachievable beauty standards of the past. Anastasia Garcia, a fashion photographer and body diversity advocate said, “In the past, the idea was that if you told people they weren’t good enough, they would constantly be spending money to buy products to meet these unattainable standards” (Danzinger, 2019). Nowadays, people want to see marketing campaigns featuring people who look like them, in a non-perfected way. Images that show cellulite, tooth gaps, scars, freckles, wrinkles, etc. as well as including a variety of races, ages, and body sizes and genders are demanded by today’s consumers. Revolution Beauty went viral on social media with an advertisement for a unisex foundation that featured a transgender

activist, a 90-year-old beauty enthusiast, a disabled star, a woman with vitiligo and a hijab-wearing woman. This ad celebrates inclusivity and authentic beauty standards that aren't overly photoshopped and perfected.

The Ipsos study also showed that consumers are becoming more and more attracted to products that are clean, natural and/or sustainable. In recent years, sustainability and protecting the environment have been important themes in society and many consumers have voiced their opinions on social media about the need for more eco-friendly options. Sephora, for example, has taken note of consumers' interest in eco-friendly and clean-ingredient products. They created a "Clean at Sephora" section online and in-store to highlight products that qualify as "Sephora Clean". These products are formulated without parabens, sulfates, phthalates, mineral oils, formaldehydes, etc. This stamp and separate section allow customers to easily identify products that fit their wants and needs. Covergirl also jumped on the trend and launched a "clean fresh collection" that is made with simple, natural ingredients. Social media gave consumers a direct link to brands to voice their opinions. Brands will continue to track trends on social media in order to create products that cater to specific needs and market more efficiently.

In conclusion, the beauty industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry that relies heavily on social media influencers as a part of their overall communication strategy. Influencers are a valuable marketing tool because consumers trust their recommendations more than messages coming directly from the brand. The majority of influencers post advertorials in partnership with brands on YouTube because the platform allows for limitless product promotion in an entertaining way. With the rise of social media, beauty has moved towards inclusivity and diversity. Diversity has been lacking in the beauty community for decades, which resulted in the creation of small niche brands. Rhianna and Fenty Beauty revolutionized the industry with their

commitment to inclusivity and diversity. Many brands followed their example by expanding shade ranges and using models of diverse backgrounds in marketing campaigns. Brands have also heard consumers' demands for "beauty that looks like them" and have made efforts to limit retouching images and using models of all ages, body sizes, ethnicities and genders. Along with physically natural beauty, clean and sustainable cosmetics are also trends that will continue to be profitable for brands. Social media has changed the way the brands track trends and communicate with consumers. Without social media, many of the positive trends such as inclusivity, may not have been as widespread. The beauty industry will continue to be prosperous and will evolve to meet the wants and needs of future generations.

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