

**How Social Media Democratized Beauty: South African  
Influencers' Experiences of the Transformation of Cosmetics  
and Work in the Beauty Industry**

BY

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Over the last decade the beauty industry has undergone a 'digital makeover'. Not only have companies selling beauty products adopted a digital language, but the way in which beauty products are being produced and consumed has also been transformed due to this mediatization. Additionally, social media platforms allow beauty related information such as how to use products and which products to purchase; as well as images of beauty to circulate more rapidly and more widely. Thus, this digital transformation has democratized beauty by way of making more information about cosmetics available to more consumers and by allowing them to actively take part in the conceptualisation of beauty through user-generated platforms. This has also created the opportunity for passionate individuals to navigate this overload of information on behalf of consumers as well as mediate the conversation between those selling and those purchasing beauty products, namely beauty influencers. Globalized interactive communication networks allow beauty influencers from around the world to establish careers around this activity and in South Africa's beauty industry, dominated by global mega-brands, local beauty influencers have become a valuable tool for them to reach local consumers. South Africa's beauty influencer market has been a space for many entrepreneurs to take control over their careers although they face many obstacles, both local and global. While social media enables connectivity with a global audience, the beauty industry in South Africa operates at a local level and therefore restricts local beauty influencers' opportunities to go 'viral'. This thesis investigates this digital transformation of the beauty industry as well as its limitations from the perspective of South Africa by interviewing different role players in the local beauty industry about their experiences and interpretation of this transformation and by conducting a virtual ethnography of media images in which beauty is performed.

## Opsomming

Oor die laaste decade het die skoonheidsindustrie 'n digitale transformasie ondergaan. Maatskappye wat skoonheidsprodukte verkoop het nie net 'n digitale taal aangeneem nie, maar die manier waarop hierdie produkte vervaardig en gebruik word, het ook verander weens hierdie "mediatization". Sosiale media platforms laat toe dat inligting oor skoonheid soos hoe om produkte te gebruik en watter produkte om aan te koop, sowel as beelde van skoonheid te sirkuleer teen 'n spoediger pas en aan meer verbruikers. Hierdie digitale transformasie het dus skoonheid demokratiseer deur inligting oor skoonheid beskikbaar te stel aan meer verbruikers en deur hul in staat te stel om aktief deel te neem aan die konseptualisering van skoonheid. Dit bied ook die geleentheid vir passievolle individue om hierdie oorfloed van inligting namens verbruikers te navigeer so well as die gesprekke tussen die wat skoonheidsprodukte koop en verkoop te bemiddel, naamlik 'beauty influencers'. Globale interaktiewe kommunikasie netwerke stel 'beauty influencers' in staat om van regoor die wêreld loopbane te vestig rondom hierdie aktiwiteit. In Suid-Afrika, wat se skoonheidsindustrie domineer word deur globale 'mega-brands', het plaaslike 'beauty influencers' 'n waardevolle manier geword vir hierdie besighede om plaaslike verbruikers te bereik. Suid-Afrika se 'beauty influencer' mark het baie entrepreneurs in staat gestel om beheer te neem oor hul loopbaan alhoewel hul baie uitdagings in die gesig staar, beide plaaslik en globaal. Alhoewel sosiale media konektiwiteit met 'n globale gehoor in staat stel, werk die skoonheidsindustrie in Suid-Afrika op 'n plaaslike vlak en daarom word plaaslike 'beauty influencers' verhinder om 'viral' te gaan. Hierdie tesis ondersoek hierdie digitale transformasie van die skoonheidsindustrie sowel as die beperkings wat dit inhoud vanuit die perspektief van Suid-Afrika deur met verskillende rolspelers in die plaaslike skoonheidsbedryf onderhoude te voer en 'n virtuele etnografie uit te voer van media-beelde waarin skoonheid vertoon word.

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## Prologue

In February of 2018, Kylie Jenner, owner of the billion-dollar cosmetics empire Kylie Cosmetics, posted an image to Instagram, a social media platform, announcing the birth of her daughter, captioned “stormi webster”. This was the first time the new-born baby was revealed to the world. This Instagram post broke the world record for most liked post as it reached more than 18 million likes. But some were not impressed. In January of 2019 someone posted a simple image of an egg, captioned “Let’s set a world record together and get the most liked post on Instagram. Beating the current world record held by Kylie Jenner (18 million)! We got this”. Kylie was left with an egg on her face as the

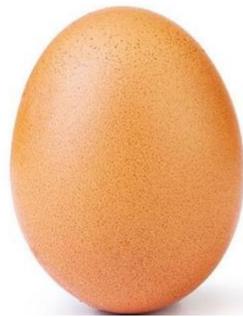


Figure 1.1 The World Record Egg



World Record Egg went on to get 53 million likes. Figure 1.1 shows the Instagram post of the famous egg.

Supposedly the egg was posted to Instagram as a comment on Kylie Jenner's outrageous online fame as she became the youngest "self-made billionaire ever" at age 21, according to Forbes (Robehmed, 2019). But Jenner's cosmetics empire was in construction long before she released her signature "lip kits" as she started to build a massive social media following from a very young age. Currently, Kylie still announces product releases, previews as well as products she is wearing in images on her various social media platforms where she has more than 175 million followers combined; about three times the entire South African population (Robehmed, 2019). After her remarkable success selling her cosmetics online, she teamed up with beauty chain Ulta where her products are sold in 50 different states in the United States to reach even more consumers (Robehmed, 2019). According to Ulta's senior vice president of merchandising, the retailer has not spent a dime on traditional marketing to launch the brand because Kylie is able to communicate so well with consumers in "a snap"-shot (Robehmed, 2019).

Shortly after Kylie was defeated in this Instagram "battle", she posted a short clip in which she playfully gets revenge by cracking an egg on a road attempting to fry it in the hot weather. The clip was captioned, "take that little egg". After this back and forth banter the egg started to make its appearance all over social media and even within the cosmetics industry. The World Record Egg was used as inspiration for other cosmetics brands as well as beauty influencers<sup>1</sup>, beauty guru's or content creators in order to stay

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<sup>1</sup> A beauty influencer is any person who creates and posts beauty related content on social media platforms where they have an (large) audience that follows them.

relevant or capitalize on Kylie’s online fame. The images below are examples of the World Record Egg seeping into the cosmetics industry indifferent ways.



Figure 1.2

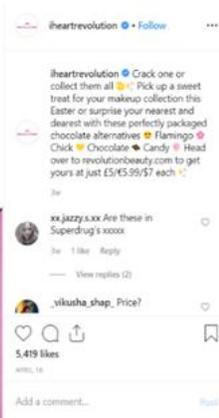


Figure 1.3



Figure 1.4



Figure 1.5

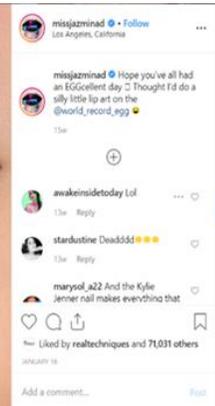


Figure 1.2 shows an Instagram post by Revolution Beauty in which the brand launches makeup palettes in the form of eggs during the Easter holiday of the year the World Record Egg dismantled Kylie Jenner’s world record. Similar product releases include; an egg foundation brush by Foxy Beauty and the egg makeup brush cleaner by

PunaStore. Figure 1.3 is a screenshot captured from a YouTube video, uploaded a few weeks after the egg incident by @sadiaslay a beauty influencer doing her makeup routine with a boiled egg from start to finish. This video was one of many that surfaced in which the egg was referred to as the “egg blender”, a clever wordplay on the beauty blender sponge commonly used to apply makeup. Figure 1.5 shows an Instagram post of lips that have been painted with cosmetic products to resemble the original Instagram post of the egg as well as a painted nail with the image of Kylie Jenner looking distraught over losing her world record. So began the #eggmakeupchallenge in which makeup enthusiasts not only painted faces onto eggs, they painted images of eggs on their faces such as cracked eggs (figure 1.4), and some even transformed their entire heads into eggs.

The egg’s skin-like tone, dimples and freckles are dauntingly similar to human faces as these images became imbedded in them. Suddenly, an egg was no longer just an egg. Every egg that was placed in relation to cosmetics became the same World Record Egg to those familiar with the social media show-down. The way in which this production and consumption of cosmetics has become loaded with meaning was made possible by the “digital revolution” of the beauty industry, as consumers have turned to online platforms to share information and knowledge of cosmetics products as well as how to use them to make themselves beautiful.

But, as we can see from the World Record Egg, social media has become much more than a platform for sharing information about cosmetics. Cosmetics products have become increasingly designed with social media in mind while digital media has become imbedded in the way we consume cosmetics and ultimately perform beauty. Jansson’s

conceptualisation of cultural products in the following statement can be used to interpret the particular form and use of beauty products in this context,

Throughout social life, objects appear as components and outcomes of cultural practice and cultural communities; they become important for the creation of webs of significance, and through the very same processes they themselves become culturally meaningful (2002: 9).

What meaning, then, do these beauty products hold for society in the context of media culture at stake here? Crucially, the way beauty products are used in this context, and the different kinds of looks that they have attempted to fashion, shows that beauty is not universal nor constant (Wolf, 1990: 11). A related example of this is the way in which Kylie Jenner has completely changed her appearance by tanning her skin, enhancing her lips and making her body curvier and now closely resembles her famous Romanian half-sister, Kim Kardashian. Unsurprisingly, Kylie is often accused of cultural appropriation for the way in which she has transformed her appearance although this has not affected her business and fame significantly. In fact, this has strengthened the image of her famous family. Today, more and more women aspire to curvy bodies and tanned skin as the Kardashian-Jenners have become the most photographed family in the world.

## Introduction

### *It pays to be beautiful*

The egg has had a long history with beauty, a history that sheds light on women's relationships to their appearance. The use of eggs in the beauty industry has a long history both in the West and across the globe. Egg whites are widely believed to be a natural source of protein and collagen as well as albumin which has a skin-tightening affect (Kallor, 2016). According to Vogue Magazine (Kallor, 2016), the egg is making a "topical comeback" in Asia and has become a cult Korean beauty (termed K-beauty in the West) skincare craze. Another egg exported to the West came via Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle brand, Goop. Goop, popularized the so-called ancient practice of placing a gemstone egg in the vagina (Yoni egg) which was advertised to "cultivate sexual energy, clear chi [sic] pathways, intensify femininity, and invigorate our lifeforce" (Gunter & Parcak, 2019: 1). In more symbolic terms, the egg can be taken as a representation of

women's roles in reproduction and childrearing; while the banality and domesticity of the egg can refer to women's social responsibilities of home making, and meal preparation traditionally conceived in many societies.

The presentation of feminine appearance has long been a terrain of contestation. Body image, following Fallon (2014: 80) is matter of both self-perception and societal recognition, but crucially such images of the body are not only different in content for men and women, but different in social form and in expectation for men. In Fallon's (2014: 81) reading of contemporary Western society, women are more likely than men to equate self-worth with their body image and women's body image rely more heavily on their perception of attractiveness than men's, who use fitness or physical effectiveness to inform their self-concepts. Accordingly, the body image is experienced as a reflection of the self, more so for women than for men.

Following the work of literary theorist Anne Cheng (2013: 8), I propose that women's experiences with their body image in conceptualising the self is a result of a phenomenon that emerged as part of the Western mind/body dichotomy and was evident in psychoanalysis. Author of *The Beauty Myth* (1990) Naomi Wolf, adds to this by arguing that cultural stereotypes of femininity allow women a mind or a body but not both, often referred to as the beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence-without-beauty conundrum (1990: 59). For many women, this has led to a tension between using cosmetics and their political commitment to feminism and whether investment in the beauty culture betray their commitments to feminism (White, 2018: 144). Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez attests to this conundrum imposed on women when she proposes that you are damned if you double cleanse and lazy if you do not (Ferrier, 2019).

Ocasio-Cortez, who from mid-2018 became the face of progressive, anti-racist, politics in the United States with her successful run to Congress through a grassroots campaign in New York, publicly discussed her skincare regime in early 2019. Her beauty routine divided opinion, with the implication that a progressive feminist figure should not have to resort to such a routine as it proclaims vanity (Ferrier, 2019). Ocasio-Cortez is also well known for her signature red lip she wore when she was sworn into congress. After she revealed the name of the lip product on Twitter it has been sold out numerous times at Sephora. Lubitz calls this the AOC-effect (Lubitz, 2019).

Flamboyant singer Lady Gaga, in the process of launching of her own cosmetic line, provides a powerful account of the mind/body dichotomy that inspired her launch,

When I was young, I never felt beautiful. And as I struggled to find a sense of both inner and outer beauty, I discovered the power of makeup. I remember watching my mother put her makeup on every morning, basking in the glow of her power to put on her bravest face as the hard-working woman she was. I then began to experiment with makeup as a way to make my dreams of being as strong as my mother become true. It was then that I invented Lady Gaga. *I found the superhero within me by looking in the mirror and seeing who I wanted to be.* Sometimes beauty doesn't come naturally from within. But I'm so grateful that makeup inspired a bravery in me I didn't know I had. I've come to accept that I *discovered my beauty by having the ability to invent myself and transform.* They said I was just weird, but really, I was just Born This Way (Lady Gaga, 2019).

In this statement Gaga speaks to the transforming “power of makeup” which allowed her to invent Lady Gaga and empowered her to achieve continuity between her inner and outer self as beautiful. She also suggests that sometimes beauty does not come “naturally

from within”; in other words, the perception of being beautiful (a positive body image) is not a given and therefore has to be forged. Ultimately contradicting herself, Gaga claims that beauty is not so much something to be “discovered”, but rather that it emerges from developing the ability to transform the physical self, the body.

Fittingly, in her reading of the body as a surface, text and performance, Anne Cheng proposes that “human skin” has accumulated significant meaning by the twentieth century as the “substance and contours” of the body were being renovated (2013:8). The industrial revolution allowed for medical advancement and visual technological innovations such as photography to form a fantasy about a modern, renewed and disciplined body (Cheng, 2013: 8). But as the body has become viewed as a signifier of social status over centuries (Woo, 2004: 59), access to this fantasy was not equally available. As such, products used to beautify the body were most often restricted to elites in industrialised nations. In African societies, very different methods of beautification existed. Among the Tswana, for instance, beautification involved covering the body with goat’s fat and the hair with grease and clay of red ochre (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 225). This theme is covered further in the section called “Beauty in South Africa”.

In Western Europe, the mass production of beauty then allowed more people to make choices about how they looked and smelled, and enabled participation in social conceptions of taste, fashion and style (Jones, 2011: 275). The industrial revolution allowed for the production of cosmetics in bigger volumes, for cheaper prices and enabled cosmetics to be accessible in farther regions while rising incomes allowed more consumers to engage in spending (Jones, 2011: 887). This extended women’s access to beauty products, allowing those from less affluent backgrounds access to them, as those

economic constraints on women loosened, the perception of beauty flourished (Wolf, 1990: 14). The notion of beauty also thrived in the name of choice as consumers were given the impression of a highly competitive economy producing quality products when in fact companies do not care which products you choose, as long as you choose one of them (Morgan, 1970: 184). Crucially for this thesis, this extension of beauty products allowed more access to them as consumables, but knowledge about beauty, and the production of beauty products, remained largely in the hands of elite classes, an expression of both economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of capital or accumulated labour. Economic capital are those resources that can be converted into money, cultural capital involves cultural goods and education while social capital is derived from social connections or relationships that can be converted into economic capital in particular conditions (Bourdieu, 1986: 43).

Human skin also became the most beautiful object of consumerism as body ideals and desires for beauty were exported around the world (Woo, 2004: 55, 59). As the body and the idea of beauty became conducive to profit making, the supposed “liberation of the body” was in fact the historical process of its commodification (Woo, 2004: 59). The selling and exportation of beauty products to women around the world is described as a “warlike effort” unleashed in the name of consumption as cosmetics convinced women that the “real you isn’t enough” (Morgan, 1970: 190, 191). As beauty products were exported based on the perception of a universal desire for beauty, beauty ideals, assumptions and routines prevalent in the West, spread as global benchmarks as brands carried strong assumptions from their societies about what it meant to be “beautiful” (Jones 2011: 358, 391). These ideals included the aspirational status of Paris as the

capital of fashion and beauty, joined later by New York city. Country or city of origin assumed an ever-greater importance as an indication of quality and prestige (Jones, 2011: 891-892).

As beauty companies came to form part of the eco-system of Hollywood and celebrity, the television reinforced its impact in diffusing Western ideals of lifestyle, fashion and beauty (2011: 893, 895). The broadcast of beauty pageants such as Miss World in Britain and Miss Universe in the United States meant that feminine grooming became a media spectacle that set expectations and defined aspirations (Gundle as cited in Jones, 2011: 895). Women's magazines played a particular role in diffusing such expectations as the theme of self-control and containment ran through most of the advertisements aimed at the female market (Morgan, 1970: 186, 190). The, then new, mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television) shaped people into one-dimensional receivers of communication and its message was to "consume!" (Morgan, 1970: 176, 179). The coming of mass media is therefore linked to women comparing themselves to a mass-disseminated physical ideal of 'beauty' that could not have existed before the industrial revolution (Wolf, 1990: 14).

By the 1980's the spread of mega-brands and the globalization of celebrity culture meant that certain beauty ideals such as wide-eyes, pale skin and thin bodies became widely diffused worldwide (Jones, 2011: 904). The global diffusion of beauty ideals meant that beauty also came to mean white (Jones, 2011: 892). Before the nineteenth century European societies were probably the dirtiest societies on earth (Jones, 2011: 892). But by the end of the century Western soap brands successfully associated cleanliness with "whiteness". Crude racial stereotypes were used to advertise soap and other toiletries

which were presented as an effort to “civilize” colonial people. One traditional Greek soap firm proclaimed that their product could turn a black person white to not only suggest that blackness should be associated with filthiness but also that cleanliness can civilize black people because it would make them “white” (Jones, 2011: 892). This meant that light and untanned skin came to signify privilege, power, and higher social class in the centuries before recreational tanning became popular (Chen, Yarnal, Chick & Jablonski, 2018: 257)<sup>2</sup>.

Over the following decades increased globalising efforts as well as increasingly diverse Western societies meant that international brands had to be made locally relevant to the farthest corners of the globe and as such marketing campaigns increasingly paid attention to incorporating considerations of cultural and ethnic differences in markets (Jones, 2011: 897, 906). While some luxury brands kept their global appeal with associations to Paris and New York, others used local ingredients and made use of local celebrities to appeal to local consumer markets (Jones, 2011: 897, 902). Additionally, as parts of the world were re-integrated into the international economy such as the former Communist as well as colonised countries such as South Africa, there has been a re-assertion in local traditions that enable alternative visions of beauty to be sold to consumers worldwide (Jones, 2011: 903).

Regardless of the fact that beauty is not universal or generic, what makes the beauty industry important to understand, for Jones, is the fact that it sells products which impact body image and the perception of attractiveness (2011: 886). Our perception of being

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<sup>2</sup> *Lifebuoy men, Lux women: commodification, consumption and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe* by Timothy Burke, 1996

physically attractive, whatever that may look like, is considered important because of the notion of a “beauty premium” which allows those perceived as more attractive to earn higher incomes, get acquitted more often in jury trials, earn higher student evaluations and benefit in other ways (Jones, 2011: 886). Khamis, Ang and Welling (2017: 199) suggest that young people in particular are convinced that good looks, good living and conspicuous consumption warrant admiration and imitation. Research on this topic has found evidence both in favour of and against this idea, particularly in the labour market, but whether or not it exists is irrelevant if consumers believe that it pays to be beautiful. The convention of using beauty products to enhance appearance can therefore be considered as rooted in the aspirations of consumers to access the beauty premium in an ongoing quest that fuels the beauty industry to expand into new ways to obtain it. Has the democratization of beauty and the fact that beauty is no longer homogenous enforced or weakened the perception of the beauty premium?

## ***Beauty 2.0***

Thus far I have argued that industrialization and globalization were crucial developments that afforded more consumers the opportunity to participate in the pursuit of beauty in more ways than before. However, the practice that contributed to democratizing -by broadening not just who consumes beauty products but who can claim knowledge and expertise of these products- the beauty industry more recently, is digital media and the transformation of photography. Pierre and Mary-Claire Bourdieu (2004: 601) suggest that the value of photographs as texts to be read, should not be taken for granted. Accordingly,

I propose that the surface, the visible and the skin be read discursively for unravelling more nuanced social and cultural phenomena in which images serve as meaningful objects for study. But how can photographs be used to understand the way in which we fashion ourselves and ultimately consume beauty products?

For Benjamin (1969: 52), photography was the first revolutionary means of reproducing art. Art came into existence in relation to rituals and its unique value was also based as such, but its ritualistic value decreased as the cult of beauty developed and the idea of “pure” art emerged. The mechanical reproduction of art not only released it from its dependence on ritual but allowed art to be based on the practice of politics (1969: 53). In other words, for Benjamin the development of a set of technologies in the 20th century created the possibility for removing art (and beauty) from the hands of elites and make it a matter of popular consumption, critique, and even production. According to Bourdieu and Bourdieu, when photography became available for public use in the nineteenth century, it was reserved for special occasions such as weddings where it served as sociograms to keep record of ceremonies of family and collective life (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2004: 603). For Benjamin, the portrait was the focal point of early photography because it involved the ritual of remembrance of loved ones before photography’s cult value was overshadowed by its exhibition value (1969: 54). That is to say, the possibility of the mass circulation of photographs offered the possibilities of contesting aesthetic values that were once the preserve of elites.

As cameras became more common, occasions in which photographs were taken became more frequent. During the information revolution improvements in technology allowed cameras to become smaller, more convenient to use and more affordable. Today,

cameras are small enough to fit into smartphones and have become an important consideration for many consumers when they choose which smartphone to purchase. Initially, smartphones that included cameras were referred to as camera phones, but that title soon fell away as nearly all smartphones manufactured today include them. This illustrates that photographs have become significant to the way in which we communicate and ultimately transfer meaning.

Before smartphones and social media could even be conceived of, a piece of software was being crafted that would greatly impact the perceptions we have about appearance today. In 1987 PhD student, Thomas Knoll, designed a program called “Display” that allowed him to display grayscale images on a monochrome display (Brown, 2015: 91). With the help of his brother, Knoll transformed the program into an image editor he renamed “Photoshop”. The following year the program was bought by Adobe, and Photoshop 1.0 was released in 1990 for Macintosh computer use (Brown, 2015: 91). Since then, fourteen different versions of Adobe Photoshop have been released and the program was made available to the Windows operating system in 1992.

Photoshop became widely used in the advertising and publishing industries for editing images that would appear in magazines, billboards and in-store advertising, especially those targeting female consumers. Beauty magazines, in particular, have come under fire for making models on their covers look unrecognizable with Photoshop or even distorting one of their limbs in the process. Image editing software such as this was initially used by large companies and professional photographers because it was expensive and difficult to understand, but as smartphones became equipped to take photographs; smaller, more

user-friendly applications of editing software became available to smartphone users for free.

Social media applications, Snapchat and Instagram, that are based on images already include editing software specifically adapted to the face. A good example is Facetune which allows users to change the shape of their jaw, nose, eyes and eyebrows; change their skin tone and even replace, “patch” as used in the application, parts of their skin. In this extent the concept of ‘fine tune’ becomes a grave understatement. In an article in The New York Times, Eve Peyser (2019) uses the concept “Instagram face-lift” to refer to the combination of cosmetic surgery and digital alteration that produce the beauty images we see on social media. Having access to such applications means that consumers now have even more control over their digitally mediated appearance.

The incorporation of cameras into smartphones was also driven by the trend of self-photography; the selfie. Iqani and Schroeder (2016: 405) define a ‘selfie’ as an image of oneself taken with a smartphone or webcam that communicates a message about the self and is shared through digital platforms. This definition is well suited since it emphasizes the role of sharing in this popular activity. This characteristic means that selfies do not necessarily take place when a photograph is taken but rather when it is shared with others. The person taking the selfie is therefore engaging in a productive consumption similar to the plastic surgeon who produces the patient’s body as a new object (Woodroffe, 2003: 6). The crucial part of sharing the selfie also implies that selfies are fundamentally meant to be seen by others and therefore are very social. This questions the popular notion that selfies have made society self-obsessed, because they

impose social interaction with others and are used to convey a message, even if it is about the self.

In 2013 the word 'selfie' was officially included in the Oxford Dictionary although some researchers claim that the phenomenon is not new at all. For Warfield (2014: 1), the selfie can be seen as a multimodal convergence of older and newer technologies; a mirror, a camera and a stage or billboard. Tracking its origin back even further Iqani and Schroeder (2016: 409,410) argue that the selfie represents the latest manifestation of the artistic self-portrait which they consider to be a mirror for the subject and the society in which they live. Self-portraits used to be rare and were produced among the wealthy whereas now selfies are understood as a ground-up phenomenon because they are produced by consumers (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016: 407). To illustrate its longstanding history, these authors refer to selfies as "self-portrait snapshots" (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016: 410).

So how did selfies impact the beauty industry? According to Iqani and Schroeder (2016: 410), individuals often represent themselves at the peak of their own attractiveness in their selfies and because selfies are taken under the control of the photographer, they offer consumers the chance to communicate their attractiveness to others in the fashion of their choice. Simultaneously, selfies' proximity to the body and its consequent objectification reinforces the preoccupation with external appearance; the surface and the visible. Following the popularity and ease of self-photography, a wide variety of "camera ready," "high-definition" or "photo-ready" cosmetics have been released by beauty brands which are meant to improve one's appearance on a digital screen by being suited to the demands of digital cameras and their high resolution (Rocamora, 2006: 516).

But these products were only the tip of the iceberg. The coming of the information age characterised by an informational, global and networked economy (Castells, 2010: 77) sparked a digital revolution for the beauty industry. The beauty industry had undergone a 'digital makeover' that implicated consumer behaviour, geographical assumptions and an explosion of data and communication channels including social media (Digital Makeover: The Social Video Beauty Ecosystem, 2016; Curtis, 2015). Social media platforms, or mass self-communication (Castells, 2010: xxx), provided a platform for as consumer-to-consumer communication about beauty as well as the circulation of beauty images. Additionally, global information networks mean that relationships can be conducted across the world, irrespective of time and place (Hine, 2011: 2). Castells uses the term "space of flows" to describe the way in which our sense of "place" has been restructured. He argues for the dissociation between spatial proximity and the performance of everyday life's functions such as work because of these horizontal networks of interactive communication (Castells, 2010: 442)

The emergence of the online video-sharing platform, YouTube, in 2006 is central to the beauty industry's digital transformation. Out of the need for recommendations from other women, consumers began to post videos in the "How to & Style" category in which they shared their tips and tricks as well as experiences with particular beauty products. Makeup products are a particularly prominent topic as its effects are immediately visible and it can be removed with a swipe. Initially, only a handful of women took to YouTube to share their knowledge and experiences in a very informal manner, but this led to the emergence of the YouTube beauty community which consists predominantly of women

aged 14-34 who have “fostered a collaborative, knowledge-sharing community about makeup, skincare, hair and nails” as defined by Berryman and Kavka (2017: 308).

Celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner led the way to popularising the consumption of makeup products as beauty influencers, by showing consumers how to recreate their makeup looks. The influence of reality television, celebrity and drag culture as well as image editing software became characteristic of the way in which cosmetics are displayed, popularised and commodified through social media. New versions of beauty such as Kim Kardashian’s signature small waist and big “booty”, emerged as alternatives to tall and thin ideals of femininity, associated with models of Northern European origin. Soon, these new versions of beauty were mass broadcasted on social media and manufactured by consumers around the world.

As brands began to take notice of its marketing value the content of these videos became more brand-related and brand-resourced. As the beauty community grew and became more competitive, beauty influencers invested more in their appearance and content. Soon the beauty community became commercial as beauty influencers could generate income from the platform by monetising their videos through the YouTube Partner Program as well as working with beauty brands. Beauty influencers all over the world (including South Africa) could now create beauty content on social media for a living and today there are large number of them who do just this. Additionally, beauty influencers’ enhanced appearance, glamorous lifestyle and attention from beauty brands meant that these social media entrepreneurs came to embody the beauty premium. If beauty influencers are seen receiving free gifts, paid vacations and endorsements on

social media, it is no coincidence that young people perceive their physical appearance to be the source of their fortune.

The image-based social media site, Instagram, is considered a natural fit for showcasing beauty products and makeup techniques, leading marketers to leap in headfirst (Pixability, 2018). The addition of short videos (under 30 seconds) to the site is now used to show mini-tutorials, product previews and swatches as well as sneak-previews for longer videos on YouTube. Live streams such as Instagram “stories” or “Instagram tv” allow beauty influencers to connect with consumers in real time and share a glimpse of their daily life. In the beauty industry, image-driven platforms such as Instagram are associated with the productive consumption of beauty images and performances of beauty; while a platform such as YouTube which consists of moving images (video) is associated with showing and teaching consumers how to make themselves beautiful with cosmetics. Because of user-generated platforms that allow the pervasiveness of media images of bodies, the concept of beauty has become even more fluid than ever before.

The emergence of the online beauty community and the market’s response to it means that the consumption of beauty products has become recreational and allows consumers to express and experiment with different social and cultural identities as well as to participate in claiming which beauty products to use and in effect, to help to define what beauty is. Fashioning beauty through public display and consumption of makeup can be considered a form of play or experimentation with different performances of beauty without having to commit to one. After the performance is completed and the subject is satisfied with it, the makeup can be removed. In this way the subject can develop a

repertoire of performances of beauty and do not merely have to aspire or limit themselves to one ideal.

Access to digital applications such as Photoshop and Facetune, and social media platforms where information and media images can be shared means that the information age has even further democratised notions of beauty by providing new ways in which it can be manufactured and performed. However, this requires that consumers be tech-savvy, have access to a smartphone or computer, and the internet, to manufacture beauty in this way. Access to this form of beautification is therefore restricted to particular individuals.

The modernist, individualising idea that you can be in control of your appearance—and how you are perceived-- may appear as a kind of agency. But having this ability to control other's perceptions of us is becoming mandatory in today's society as we are more aware of how we appear to those around us than ever before. Does the increasing tendency toward self-branding perhaps influence us to comply with some kind of version of beauty? The omnipresence of camera phones and images act as a plethora of mirrors from which we can perceive ourselves from the outside. This means that we are made aware of our physical appearance because we are constantly surrounded by images of human bodies through social media.

### ***Beauty in South Africa***

Similar to Anne Cheng's approach to the body as a surface, text and performance, Liesl Teixeira's thesis that explores the "Specific Cosmetic and Skincare Needs of Women of

Colour in South Africa” (2006) addresses the skin as an organ of communication. So, what message does the notion of skin confer about beauty and appearance in South Africa? As a former colony with a longstanding history of institutionalised racism, conceptualisations of beauty in South Africa are closely linked to a pursuit of modernity and conspicuous consumption.

Again, in alignment with Cheng’s account of the split between essence and cover, mind and body, Jean and John Comaroff (1997: 223) suggest that “a tension between inner and outer realities, between the enterprise of spirit and things of the sensuous world, lay at the core of the civilizing mission from the start.” Here, the growing crevice between the inner and outer self is put in relation to the essence of colonial South Africa described as the British effort to incorporate African communities into a global economy of goods and signs (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 221).

Similarly, Posel (2010: 163) proposes that the inward transformation brought about by the “acquisition of civilization” was inseparable from the outward transformation of the body. This outward transformation is not only described as the consumption of goods but as the consumption of Western dress too; as the early evangelists in South Africa were from a society in which distinctions of dress had long been part of their self-fashioning (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 222). In Europe at the time, there had developed a commodified fashion system in which consumption was a major index of social standing and was already becoming a gendered, female domain (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 228). Fittingly, Protestantism was described as a “garment to be worn, which may be put on and taken off as the occasion requires” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 223).

In their book *Of Revelation and Revolution Volume 2* (1997) Jean and John Comaroff proposed that fashion made the “native body” a terrain on which the battle for selfhood was to be fought, on which personal identity was to be re-formed, re-placed and re-inhabited (1997: 220). According to these authors, Western dress made available a language that was expansive, expressive and experimental and with which Africans could construct new social identities and senses of the self and speak back to whites (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 235). Ultimately men were fashioned into migrant labourers while women adopted the “ethnicized folk” costume of the countryside (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 222).

Before colonialism, Africans’ use of beauty related products served functions adapted to their environment. The figure of the “greasy native”, used in popular literature by the mid nineteenth century, arose from the use of animal lard and butter as a moisturising cosmetic; a practice used in the hottest and driest regions to protect the skin from the drying air (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 224). In fact, in much of southern and eastern Africa a glowing skin was believed to radiate beauty and status (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 225). But black South Africans were not passive consumers of European commodities. The favouring of shining surfaces, glossy cosmetics and glinting coins was in sharp contrast to Nonconformist Protestant ideas of beauty which emphasised restraint and inward reflection (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 223; 251).

These ruminations of how the “colonial subject” was re-fashioned, spiritually and materially, suggest that the most crucial realm of enlightened consumption, for the colonial evangelists in South Africa, hinged on the human form. For Comaroff and Comaroff (1997: 220, 221) this was pertinent as it was the body that the commodity came

into contact with and therefore cloth and capitalism were deeply embedded in one another. In the nineteenth century, however, the regulation of black consumption was central to the “civilising mission” and so the workings of race became inseparable from the symbolic meanings of material acquisition and deprivation (Posel, 2010: 164).

Fast forward to post-colonial Africa in which the abolition of Apartheid allowed for South Africa’s reintegration into a global economy in which, according to Posel (2010: 160), conspicuous consumption was expected to emerge among the country’s black population who had been excluded from participating in it. Tremendously, the desire and power to consume had been racialised which has in turn had a profound effect on varied imaginings of ‘freedom’ in post-Apartheid South Africa (Posel, 2010: 160). More recently, Watt and Dubbeld (2016) explore an alternative experience consumption in post-Apartheid South Africa by voicing the dissonance and peculiarity of the Milnerton Market where prices of commodities are negotiable and dependent on the skill of exchange and bargaining (Watt & Dubbeld, 2016:143). At this market, the relationship between consumption and racial distinction is particularly relevant because the market celebrates the ability to trade and consume in a way that is reminiscent of pre-industrial exchange where white people may have had some capacity to negotiate the exchange relations of capitalism (Watt & Dubbeld, 2016:157)

Despite a deeply unequal landscape in contemporary South Africa, consumers’ strong preference towards makeup goods helped the South African cosmetics market register strong growth. A similar trend is reported by Mordor Intelligence as an increased inclination for better appearance. Rapid urbanization and increasing disposable income

are also seen as drivers for market growth as well as women's increased participation in the labour market (Marketline, 2016: 70; Mordor intelligence).

Today, South Africa is established as the "capital of African glamour" as the growth rate of the cosmetics and personal care industry ranked at 12% per annum from 2012 to 2016 (Borgna, 2017; Department of Trade and Industry). Another source indicated that the makeup market in particular, showed 8.6% growth annually from 2012 to 2016 and its volume grew by 6.7% per year during the same period (Marketline: Makeup in South Africa, 2016: 8-9). Borgna (2017) ascribes this to the trend of consumers increasingly focusing on looking and smelling attractive, as well as Africa's modernisation attracting the attention of big cosmetics companies. Further, black women take, on average, three times longer than a white woman of her own class, to take care of her hair (Borgna, 2017). Additionally, on average black women are believed to consume nine hair products, seven makeup products and five skin care products more than their white counterparts (Borgna, 2017).

Although established as the "capital of African glamour" and an important node in Africa's beauty network, South Africa's beauty influencer market cannot be regarded in isolation of the global beauty industry. Subjected to colonial and imported perceptions of beauty and now to global communication networks that diffuse beauty ideals even more rapidly, the local context's engagement with the beauty myth will continue to remain global. As such, this research takes account of the local beauty industry's position to the global in order to comprehend it in its networked, informational and globalised state.

Considering the beauty industry's recent digital makeover, this thesis explores the way in which beauty products and their use have been transformed as a consequence of how beauty is manufactured and performed through digital media today. It also reveals whether this recent democratization of beauty has allowed consumers to be more authentic and inclusive in their perceptions and performances of beauty. The changes brought about by the digital transformation of the global beauty industry are also revealed, particularly in terms of structure and form, as beauty influencers have emerged to fulfil new and old functions. In this thesis, these ideas are explored from the perspective of different role players in the South African beauty industry including beauty influencers, bloggers, magazine and digital makeup artists, among others. The analysis in this thesis is guided by their interpretation and experience of this digital transformation in the beauty industry. The following questions are used to guide this endeavour,

- How has social media impacted the production and consumption of cosmetics products?
- What role does the beauty influencer play in the digital transformation of the beauty industry today?
- How can the beauty influencer's nature of work be characterized?

### ***Literature and concepts***

Over the last few years there has been a rapidly growing body of literature that attempts to understand and explain the nature and existence of the YouTube beauty community including beauty influencers; 'vloggers', 'gurus' or content creators. For Ledbetter (2018: 288), the purpose of the videos that women made for the beauty community is often instructional in nature and serve as a means for communication between community

members and expression of identity. Ledbetter also describes the beauty community as a diverse, global, commercially mediated online space in which women do entrepreneurial and identity-building work using rhetorical moves such as storytelling and instruction (2018: 297).

Garcia-Rapp (2016) contributes to current debates on online popularity development, self-presentation, and audience building by analysing the content of Bubzbeauty, a prominent beauty guru active since 2008 on YouTube. Garcia-Rapp (2016) proposes that the online beauty community is made up of two active spheres of influence or media ecologies. The commercial sphere which involves YouTube as a business platform, through tutorials, and the community sphere which is based on the power of the beauty guru's emotional ties with her audience through spontaneous 'vlogs' (video blog). This means that the beauty influencer's commercial and economic relevance is promoted through tutorials while her social value is promoted through vlogs (Garcia-Rapp, 2016). This thesis does not use this approach as it argues that economic value is precisely generated through social capital because it attracts viewers to their content. Additionally, economic and social value cannot be distinguished since makeup tutorials are used to create social capital and not all beauty influencers make use of vlogs, yet they have a lot of social capital.

Berryman and Kavka (2017: 308) address the process of "celebrification" by similarly focusing on a popular young YouTuber, Zoella, who has successfully capitalised on youthful femininity in her trajectory from amateur vlogs to a highly influential fashion, beauty and lifestyle video channel. These authors do hint at the idea of reflexive accumulation when they suggest that the line between user-generated content and

commodity production has become blurred as many YouTubers have released their own cosmetics and beauty products (Berryman & Kavka, 2017: 308).

The thesis of Zoë Glatt argues that 'YouTube stars' can be understood as a particularly virulent strain of homo *æconomicus*<sup>3</sup>, who are produced and commodified through the techno-capitalist structures of the platform (Glatt, 2017: 43). Her thesis addresses the production of a neoliberal rationality in YouTube stars by exploring the practice of self-branding, the role of authenticity as well as post-feminism on the platform. The concept of self-branding has become popular in fields such as marketing and consumer research as a tool for self-promotion in a context where entrepreneurialism is increasingly valued (Gandini, 2016: 124).

By studying the use of social media for self-branding purposes, Gandini (2016: 134) found that among freelance knowledge workers in London and Milan, there is a shared perception that the management of social media presence and social relationships can result in an improved reputation which can boost their employability. But for Gandini this practice is no longer merely promotional or for competitiveness as social media activity can be seen as performative practices of sociality that construct value for freelance workers (2017:125). As a consequence, he ties self-branding practices to the production of socialised value and therefore to social capital, defined as the combined resources associated with having a network of strong relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986: 248-249). Similar to Gandini's findings, this thesis

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<sup>3</sup>This concept refers to the way in which institutional and human action being measured 'according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a microeconomic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality' as quoted in Glatt (2017: 13)

demonstrates the value of branding the self through social media, for beauty influencers as well as self-employed and freelance workers who participated in this research, in order to increase their social capital.

Another thesis that deals with post-feminism more directly is that of Andrea Weare (2016) which explores how systems of power such as capitalism, patriarchy and multiculturalism are articulated in the YouTube beauty community. She argues that the beauty community can be characterised in terms of its false commitment to female empowerment and rhetoric of choice when women willingly sign up to be “made over” literally and figuratively; a perspective that aligns with contemporary discourses of post-feminism such as Wolf’s, *The Beauty Myth* (Weare, 2016: 23).

In contrast, research by White (2018) suggests that there is space for feminism in the beauty community as feminist makeup tutorial parodies provide a way to engage with cultural concepts of feminism and various forms of misogyny (2018: 153). White sheds light on how feminism and beauty tutorials can function as a critical language and therefore refutes some feminists’ assertions that “cosmetics are inherently part of an objectifying system that structures and normalises women” (White, 2018: 141). Proposed as a liberating mechanism for women around the world, social media is considered to celebrate different versions of beauty that do not ascribe to the ideal of tall, thin and pale bodies. This research attempts to reveal whether social media has empowered women to improve their body image or whether it has simply created new ways for women to compare themselves to mass-disseminated ideals. Do women show awareness of the pitfalls of the beauty industry on social media or is the beauty community purely about indulging in beauty?

Further, has this mediation of beauty on global communication platforms altered the products themselves and how we consume them? Rocamora's article on mediatization in the field of fashion (2016) engages with the role of digital media in the fashion industry and includes a short discussion of the growing market of "camera-ready" cosmetics. This concept of mediatization is derivative of "mediation" wherein a medium can affect both the message and the relationship between the sender and recipient (Hjarvard, 2013: 19). Mediatization on the other hand, refers to the long-term process in which social and cultural institutions, such as the fashioning and expressing of the self, have changed as a consequence of the media's influence (Hjarvard, 2013: 19). As illustrated through the example of the World Record Egg, the concept of mediatization allows for cross-disciplinary work such as consumption and media because it is concerned with the role of the media in the transformation of social and cultural affairs (Hjarvard, 2013: 5). In his article called "The Mediatization of Consumption" (2002) Jansson takes notice of the particular relationship between media and consumption cultures and argues that in today's mediatized society, the media cannot be excluded from consumption studies (Jansson, 2002: 6).

The development of mass media has meant that in their everyday lives, various sorts of media texts provide consumers with images of goods that may be acquired and incorporated into their expressive style (Jansson, 2002: 14). This means that commodities such as beauty products become imbued with meaning that is communicated through the media images that are attached to them and so become cultural products. The idea of an image culture is used to express the way in which media images and commodity signs are increasingly being used for expressions of cultural identity (Jansson, 2002: 5). Posel's

conceptualisation of consumption is useful here as it not only refers to the acquisition and use of durable and nondurable goods but also to the cultural, political and psychological antecedents and effects that accompany such consumption (2010:161).

The concept of reflexive accumulation is used by Jansson to refer to this condition in which economic and cultural processes are closely interwoven (2002: 5). Derived from the economic term flexible accumulation, reflexive accumulation means that production becomes a process of symbolic circulation and creation of semiotic rather than functional needs, as suggested by Lash and Urry (Jansson, 2002: 6). According to Jones (358), the creation of aspirations was a powerful driver for the growth of the beauty industry. Associations with celebrities, fashionable cities and wealthy countries offered people the chance to feel that they shared a part of those worlds. Today, digital media has meant that consumers aspire to look airbrushed and filtered when they purchase cosmetics products. If cosmetic commodities have longer been sold as the means through which to attain socially acceptable appearances, and even beauty, especially for women, the changed medium for the circulation and display of these cosmetic commodities has not only reproduced older patterns, in which social inclusion is purchased in particularly gendered ways, but it has also included a range of new actors who offer a diversity of opinions and test more cosmetic products, in effect, producing and modelling a greater diversity of models of beauty.

Although social media has been accompanied by a particular way of producing and consuming beauty products, the concept of beauty does not only exist online and cannot be considered in isolation of local conceptualisations of beauty. The perception of beauty has a longstanding history and has become imbedded in gender, race, class and culture

and has long been represented and even produced in art. By implication the online beauty community must also be regarded in its materiality in order to understand how perceptions of beauty are mediated across a global platform but within very different contexts. Only by providing an understanding from the perspective of the South African beauty industry and its booming influencer marketing industry can the impact of social media on the beauty industry be understood from the ground up rather than simply as another global export.

### ***Methods and chapter outline***

Alongside the growing body of literature around virtual communities such as the beauty community, there has been a similar response to how researchers (and market researchers) are to engage with digital media as sources of data and methods of data collection. As demonstrated in Toi's research on South African mommy bloggers (2018), social media can be the site for research such as observing and interviewing virtual communities through platforms such as WhatsApp, while they can also serve as existing sources of data such as through blogs. There are a number of reasons as to why conducting research online can be beneficial, some of which encountered in this research as well. Because internet-based platforms transcend time and space, social media can be a great way to reach individuals that may be hard to reach (Quinton, 2013: 404). Additionally, conducting research online allows quicker response from participants as well as immediate data collection from existing pools of data. According to Quinton (2013:

404), the potential for more rapid completion of research can also assist in improving the currency of academic published research in a context that changes so quickly.

However, researching online communities can have its limitations since research on and through the internet puts into question the concept of the field site as the internet is often considered a 'placeless' context. But, according to Hine (2000: 21) the online context should not be thought of as detached from any connections to 'real life' and face-to-face interaction because it has rich and complex connections to the material context in which it is used. In this case the material consumption and production of beauty products is key to the functioning of the beauty community which is not self-evidently located in place. The consequence of this is that the field site could be considered a field flow that is organized around tracing connections rather than locating it in a singular bounded site such as South Africa (Hine, 2000: 19). According to Hine (2000: 19; 21), taking a connotative approach such as online ethnography does not mean that no bounded locations exist, but such an ethnography should be thought of as mobile rather than multi-sited. In fact, by focusing on sites, locations and places researchers may miss out on other ways to understand culture which are based on connection, difference and incoherence (Hine, 2000: 19).

Accordingly, this exploratory research was conducted in a mobile manner that included data collection from online ethnography, face-to-face interviews as well as secondary sources of data such as blog posts or online articles that include interviews with key role players in the local and global beauty industry. Ethnography is suited to this research since it can provide rich descriptions and does not rely on a priori hypotheses

(Hine, 2000: 22). It also allows the researcher to understand the ways in which people interpret the world and organize their lives (Hine, 2000: 22).

Online ethnography was utilised in order to explore the nature of consumption of beauty products through digital media. This involved the study of media images produced by consumers on the social media platform, Instagram, as well as observing makeup tutorials on the video-sharing platform YouTube. The media images and videos that were engaged with were chosen based on my personal Instagram and YouTube feed's algorithms and recommended content because this research is not necessarily concerned with making statistically representative generalisations but rather with collecting rich data and allowing the platforms to lead the research in the way any other consumer would engage with it. This online ethnographic work undertaken in this project is based on global and local materials. Social media platforms at times blur the boundaries between local and global, and yet I attempt to engage both their local and global iterations, as a window onto how the beauty industries operate today.

Because I as the researcher, had already been engaging with these platforms and content in my everyday life, it is worth noting that establishing exactly when data collection had begun and thoughts were being formed, would be difficult. Additionally, I also consume beauty products and follow makeup tutorials that show you how to create certain looks and have made purchasing decisions based on recommendations from social media. In this research I use this consumer/user experience to inform my data collection as I engage with the concepts from consumers' perspectives.

Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with nine participants from across different sectors of the beauty industry in South Africa. These interviews were semi-structured but varied considerably as they provided different perspectives. The participants were chosen based on purposive sampling as well as snowball sampling in an attempt to follow the social networks, and my own social networks and experience within the industry. Purposive sampling (sampling participants in a strategic way) is best suited for this research as it allows for variation in this broad and diverse research field (Bryman, 2012: 218). Variation in age was an important consideration as many of the participants lived and worked through the beauty industry's transformations and before digital media was as accessible. Participants from the publishing, makeup artistry and photography industries were included as well as beauty influencers such as bloggers and vloggers in order to get a multidimensional perspective of the local beauty industry.

The following is short descriptions of the participants alongside their pseudonyms:

Cindy has a long history as a beauty and fashion editor for female magazines and started her own beauty blog five years ago after leaving the publishing industry during its decline. Cindy still does freelance writing and styling for magazines and press releases.

Renate is a popular and social media-active makeup artist who introduced me to Cindy. She is also the owner of a makeup artistry business and has a number of professional makeup artists working for her. She has twenty years of experience as a makeup artist and was introduced to me through a friend who is a makeup artist and was trained by Renate

Angela is a world-renowned makeup artist who specialises in magazines and started her career in makeup artistry as a visual arts student. The decline of beauty magazines meant that she since had to branch out to other areas such as bridal makeup. I was introduced to Angela through Renate who has trained Angela as a makeup artist.

Sandra was introduced to me through Angela as the person who knows everything there is to know about the South African beauty industry. Sandra was a beauty editor for a large publishing house during the height of the publishing industry. Since then she has scaled down to managing the social media of a South African beauty company on a casual basis.

Madelin and Joanna are freelance makeup artists who specialise in bridal makeup for high profile weddings but also have experience with magazines and television. They have between ten and twenty years of experience in the beauty industry. Joanna was introduced to me through a personal connection during an informal discussion of my thesis topic.

JC is a professional makeup artist and photographer who I connected with through Madelin. JC also teaches makeup artistry to students at his photography studio.

Maryke is a full-time beauty influencer based on YouTube and Instagram for more than two years and is based in Gauteng. Maryke also works as a professional makeup artist for weddings and special occasions.

Lisizwe is a beauty influencer with experience in journalism and has her own beauty blog and YouTube channel, she resides in Cape Town. I connected with Lesizwe after seeing Maryke and Lesizwe do a YouTube video together.

Because the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, the online ethnography and use of secondary sources did not require strict scheduling and took place in-between the interviews. The secondary sources of data included online articles and blog posts about the beauty industry's digital transformation. Any discussions or existing interviews regarding the role of social media and digital media in the beauty were also regarded as equally valuable sources of data. I offer what informants say here not as the truth of the transformation of the industry in South Africa as such, but rather as collection of experiences that might shed light on how the transformation has been lived by some of its participants. Some of the particular sentiments and prejudices offered by my informants are not my own, but nevertheless are included as it makes clear the particular subjectivities who have been involved in these changes locally.

### ***Chapter outline***

The first chapter of this thesis demonstrates how the productive consumption of cosmetics through social media have led to the emergence of a particular mode of consumption that is inextricably tied to the online context of the beauty community as information technology allowed our sense of 'place' to be disrupted. This has resulted in the emergence of a subculture that operates around the recreational consumption of cosmetics and the production of cultural products in the form of media images which are investigated at length herein. Digital media have therefore become imbedded in the way in which consumers fashion their social and cultural selves through the use of beauty products.

By establishing the role of the beauty influencer or beauty content creator in the local and global context in chapter 2, the thesis shows how the beauty premium has been solidified and personified through the commercialisation of the beauty community. This chapter demonstrates how the beauty community emerged and has become self-sufficient through this commercialisation. The analysis outlines the new and old functions fulfilled by the beauty influencer alongside the changing nature of media from publishing to posting. Among the multitude of roles the beauty influencer performs, this chapter shows that the beauty influencer's main preoccupation is generating social capital by performing authenticity and sharing "human" narratives. It also shows how

The final chapter, "Work, Place and Autonomy" describes the South African beauty influencer's experience of working as a full-time entrepreneur, free-lancer and contractor in today's globalised and informational economy characterised by flexible, de-spatialised labour. By establishing how beauty influencers generate income in South Africa, one of the crucial contradictions within this economy is revealed that puts into question the notions of a global labour force and global audience.

# 1

## **The Production and Consumption of Cosmetics through social media**

In this chapter I will show that beauty products are now consumed and produced virtually. While we might approach this as additional to “real life”, my analysis shows that the boundaries between “real” and “virtual” have been blurred to the extent that it is no longer possible to regard the world of social media as ephemeral or subordinate to the real world of production and consumption. The way in which the consumption and production of cosmetics have been mediatized due to digital media’s influence is also demonstrated with the example of media images of this particular mode of consumption. I will also discuss how virtual presentations of beauty are now taken as real and are spaces not only for advertising or marketing, but spaces in which consumers themselves produce the desire for products through the productive consumption of cosmetics. As consumers are

now able to take part in conceptualisations of beauty, user-generated communication platforms allow for multiple versions of beauty to exist. Beauty can now be manufactured not only through cosmetics and plastic surgery but also through digital media as well. Functions and characteristics associated with digital media software such as enhancing, filtering and airbrushing images have now become part of the way in which cosmetics are produced and consumed. This, however, has not meant that this is the new ideal of beauty but rather that beauty can be manufactured in new ways that requires new tools and skills. Finally, I will demonstrate how, based upon this mediatized consumption of cosmetics, a subculture of makeup enthusiasts has emerged that is based on the recreational consumption of cosmetics in which social and cultural expressions are created.

### ***The Mediatization of Beauty products***

The market has responded to consumers' desire to look airbrushed, filtered and photoshopped by producing cosmetics that mimic those effects. In view of the popularization of the selfie and the advancement of smartphone cameras, a range of products was released designed to enhance selfies. The Wunder2 Perfect Selfie HD Photo Finishing Powder, Physicians Formula #InstaReady Setting Spray, PÜR Bronze Your Selfie Skin Perfecting Face and Body Liquid Bronzer and #Instaperfect foundation by Essence are only a few of the many products designed to improve the quality of people's selfies. Because smartphones became ever present and the likeliness of being photographed and tagged on social media became more pressing, cosmetics are increasingly "camera ready", "high-definition" or "photo-ready" because it is suited to the demands of digital cameras and their high resolution (Rocamora, 2016: 516). The

makeup industry is tailoring products specifically to fulfil consumers' needs to look good in pictures and simultaneously reproduced such a need.

As software designed to enhance selfies became readily available, it was followed by the release of makeup products that could supposedly mimic this software. The Becca First Light Priming Filter, PÜR No Filter Blurring Photography Primer, NYX Cosmetics #NoFilter Finishing Powder and Becca's Soft Light Blurring Setting Powder are designed to give you a filtered appearance, proper lighting on your face and blur blemishes so your face will look edited, filtered and enhanced without the digital software, even without being photographed. These products present a desire for consumers to appear, in real life, as they would in photoshopped and filtered images.

The increased focus on facial appearance afforded by the selfie also leads to a specialization in cosmetics products. Different product categories are allocated to different parts of the face (eyes, eyebrows, lips, face) and each category now also consists of products that are used to make the actual makeup perform better for longer. Often the products that have been designated for specific parts of the face contain similar ingredients to others although they are marketed and packaged as specialized products. This means that more steps and products have been added into one's makeup routine in order to make each part of the face look beautiful. Celebrity makeup artist, Scott Barnes (JLo's Makeup Artist Does My Makeup, 2019), feels that cosmetics companies do this to sell more makeup. More products also imply more tools with which to use them. This emergence of more needs also flows over into the skincare market in the form of products designated to prep the skin for makeup and for removing it afterwards. Lastly, the skincare and makeup markets have increasingly overlapped as more makeup products include

ingredients used to nourish the skin and colour cosmetics have become incorporated into skincare products such as colour correcting moisturizers or blemish balms (BB creams).

Television shows and media franchises have also started to participate in the makeup industry with the release of makeup products such as Disney's Villain Makeup collection with ColourPop, Urban Decay's Game of Thrones collaboration, Nickelodeon's eyeshadow palette, The Lion King's collection and MAC's Aladdin makeup collection that previewed the launch of the movie. Other consumer companies such as Crayola Crayons, Coca Cola and Cheetos have also released makeup products and the company Glamlite Cosmetics have produced makeup products in the form of hamburgers, pizza's, taco's and French fries. The way in which these cosmetic products have become image loaded demonstrates that media consumption weaves together with other forms of consumption to the extent that these domains have become inseparable (Jansson, 2002: 6). This shows that loaded with meaning, cosmetics have become cultural products.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Consuming beauty online***

"Makeup has changed — even the behaviour, how people consume makeup and learn about makeup — because of digital. It transformed the market" (Michelle Phan in Ramanathan, 2018).

In this statement, pioneer beauty YouTuber, Michelle Phan, reports the multifaceted transformation of the makeup industry. We have already established how "makeup has

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<sup>4</sup> Cultural products are human creations that function as signs or representations of something more than just their physical properties (Jansson, 2002: 9)

changed”, but what about how we consume it? She suggests that digital media has directly influenced the way in which makeup is consumed through the way we behave. In fact, social media have become synonymous with this particular form of consumption referred to as ‘Instagram makeup’, ‘selfie makeup’ or ‘camera makeup’. By establishing the nature, origin and presentation of this trend, I am able to illustrate how digital media has become semi-autonomous as it exerts influence over the way in which makeup products are consumed today.



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

The images above are examples of the ‘Instagram makeup’ trend that were randomly selected in the category ‘beauty’ on Instagram. The popular ‘Instagram makeup’ trend is characterized by theatrical, colourful and bright eyeshadow encased in defined and carved eyebrows, sculpted and contoured facial features and clear or cartoon-smooth skin as it’s referred to by Ramanathan (2018). Blemishes, freckles, facial hair and fine lines are hidden or covered up to create a clear wax-like canvas and replaced by reflecting

light shining from the high points of the face described as a “C3PO cheek” (Hou, 2016). Dark and fair makeup products are used to manipulate light and shadow, creating depth and dimension to a flattened-out surface similar to that of a blank page of a “paint” application. According to beauty influencer, Christen Dominique, “When you take a picture, you lose the dimension on your face. The light will wash it away.” (Ramanathan, 2018). Here, photography is also suggested to remove dimension from the face which can be replaced by strategically sculpting it. ‘Instagram makeup’ is also defined by tan, sun-kissed skin that is created using bronzing products while the skin underneath is always protected by SPF.

Intricate and deceptive eye makeup is its most astonishing feature as it shows off the skill and creativity of the artist with details so precise and fine that it can only be admired from up close or by having the eyelids closed. In many instances the different parts of the face are captured in isolation in order to draw attention to it and allow the consumer to notice its precise detail. This explains why the proximity afforded by the selfie is ideal for this type of makeup use.

Now that the character of ‘Instagram makeup’ has been established, I will look back to its origin to further explain why the consumption of makeup products exists in this form and to explore the possible influence of digital media herein. Different perceptions exist about the origin of ‘Instagram makeup’, however, different forms of media are persistent in participants’ accounts of where this trend came from. The first and perhaps biggest influence of this trend is reality television, particularly the celebrities of the show *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. Kim Kardashian is known for her contoured and sculpted face,

That is the kind of makeup, makeup artists do, heavy tv makeup. So when you are on tv you need a lot of makeup, you need a lot of contour, a lot of colour, because of the harsh light. Women don't actually understand how much makeup is on those people. And it has become mainstream for the past six, seven years, I mean the Kardashians have now been around for 15 years almost, so it's become mainstream. And don't get me wrong I mean I love the Kardashians, but it just shows you their influence (Cindy, 2019).

This participant makes the important assertion that "this kind of makeup" is intended particularly for television because of the harsh lighting conditions that can cause you to lose dimension in your face. According to Madelin (2018), the Kardashians made contouring commercial, but its history goes back to when it was used in theatres to see actors' facial expressions more clearly.

But is it just the show's popularity that made millions of people want to copy the family's signature look? Perhaps not. Kim Kardashian is especially praised for her constant camera-ready appearance and according to Kathleen Hou (2016), this is what makes Kim perfect for Instagram. Kim "prepares her face with the meticulousness of someone who knows she's going to be photographed by E! camera crews and paparazzi all day long" (Hou, 2016). This suggests that the trend setting celebrity consumes makeup in a way that is fit for television and photography, not for real life. Kim Kardashian is therefore giving a performance of someone who is documented in their everyday life, yet she intentionally presents herself in a way that would not be considered to be 'realistic' for a day-to-day basis. This television makeup can take two hours to apply and very few women have "time in the morning to do a face like that" (Cindy, 2019). With this performance taking place on reality television, and the way social media has become

imbedded in our everyday lives, doing your makeup in this way has become normalized and mainstream. A key difference is that Kim Kardashian's makeup is done by "genuinely talented makeup artists" (Dubroff as cited in Hou, 2016).

For Ramanathan (2018), this consumption of makeup has become the "ubiquitous face of the Internet, a strange mirror of Kim Kardashian's visage". You can now go onto social media and watch tutorials or 'pictorials' that show you how to copy or imitate Kim Kardashian's camera-ready makeup. What this means is that the internet has provided us with different versions of beauty that is attainable through consuming makeup products in a particular way; a consumption that is mediatized. The consumption of makeup for this particular context (television and photography) is now copied and mass broadcasted to the public where consumers apply it to their everyday life. This method's purpose thus changed from giving life to characters on a stage to imitating a celebrity. Its consumption therefore shifted from a particular use in a particular context to an expression of social or cultural identity.

Another important influence of the 'Instagram makeup' trend identified by participants is drag makeup. As previously mentioned, Kardashian's makeup style is borrowed from television and stage makeup and as others argue, drag makeup. Sasha Velour, the season 9 winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, states that drag and the beauty industry have always influenced each other, even if they are on opposite sides (BEAT, 2018). Drag transformed from an underground art form into pop culture, but unfortunately lost traction in the United States fashion world (BEAT, 2018). There was a resurgence of drag into pop culture in 2009 thanks to the reality television show, *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The television show put drag queens back on the map of the fashion world, as contestants

competed for the title of America's Next Drag Superstar. JC recalls that for some people before the show, drag queens were laughed at and seen as silly, but the show made it mainstream and "all of a sudden these drag queens were famous" (2018). According to Velour, social media is hugely responsible for drag becoming acceptable whereas before social media it was considered taboo (BEAT, 2018).

*RuPaul's Drag Race* inspired the drag community to pull out their makeup and practice their craft as she continued to raise the standards of drag makeup (BEAT, 2018). According to drag queen, Vivacious, everyone started to play with makeup trying to copy what she was doing with her face and "all of a sudden, queens were now watching other queens doing makeup trying to copy some of their style and add it to theirs" (BEAT, 2018). This is not unique in today's digital media since everyone has become producers of media. With social media consumers could now share, watch and recreate how others do their makeup. Celebrity makeup artist, Sarah Tanno suggests that everyone pulls inspiration from everyone at the end of the day (BEAT, 2018).

Tanno suggests with the consumption of 'Instagram makeup' "you're basically doing drag whether you know it or not" and Vivacious refers to it as "baby drag" (BEAT, 2018). Troy Surrat, creator of Surrat Beauty, even goes so far as to say that all makeup is drag because it is all artificial on some level, quoting RuPaul that "we all wake up and put on our drag for the day" (Hou, 2016). Vivacious claims that drag is just "bigger, brighter and bolder" than 'Instagram makeup' (BEAT, 2018). The key difference between these two cultures of consumption is that 'Instagram makeup' is meant to make one facial feature "pop" while drag makeup is designed to be over the top and make everything "pop" (BEAT, 2018). This explains why images of 'Instagram makeup' often only feature an eye

or lips instead of the entire face and body. Drag queens are essentially performers such as in television and theatre, and therefore their makeup also overemphasizes and exaggerates in order to translate to an audience.

Additionally, drag make-up lays claim to femininity as an explicit performance, while Instagram make-up, as a direct product of the internet, attempts to express the performative possibilities of contemporary media more generally. The aspirations of Instagram makeup' is therefore not always and of necessity a contestation over femininity as performed and does not necessarily offer the same radical challenge to the fixity of gender that drag does (although it may do so in certain instances). Instead, Instagram makeup is of necessity the imitation of commodity images, the images that have already been mediatized. Because drag culture involves an expression of gender identity that is explicitly performative and 'Instagram makeup' contains elements of this culture, the consumption of such products on social media have become loaded with gender as something that is malleable. This is illustrated by JC's statement about 'Instagram makeup', "it's drag makeup. Isn't it the craziest thing? You're a woman who looks like a man who's trying to look like a woman" (JC, 2018).

This participant is therefore suggesting that women who consume 'Instagram makeup' are putting on a gendered performance of someone else putting on a gendered performance. Therefore, it appears as though the drag has allowed queer people in society to be accepted as normal as Sasha Velour proposes (BEAT, 2018). While the popularization of drag has made the consumption of makeup by men more acceptable, it is only if you consume it in this way. This means that drag makeup has become increasingly acceptable for men because it is normalised through television and social

media although a man only wearing mascara or lipstick would still be deemed inappropriate, leaving men with an all or nothing sense of liberation. This begs the question of whether such a normalization changes social acceptance of queer identities, or if its apparent acceptance is just a consequence of the commercialization of 'Instagram makeup' which contains elements of drag. At stake in discussing social media's democratization of beauty is the extent to which it makes different possibilities of beauty available, not only to images to be consumed, but as images that can be produced by anybody. Insofar as social media may embrace drag and make its images available for circulation and mass consumption, it may help to change particular gender normative assumptions about beauty. However, we have to be more cautious when it comes to Velour's claim: not only because drag and queer are not the same thing, but also because the increased possibilities of producing and consuming images of beauty does not straightforwardly translate into how people relate to other's gender identity or sexual orientation. It is quite conceivable that somebody could enjoy watching RuPaul's Drag Race and then participate in an act of violence against queer people.

The third and perhaps most crucial element that influenced 'Instagram makeup' is digital media. Digital media is not only the platform through which 'Instagram makeup' is consumed and produced, but it has become imbedded in the way we consume makeup products to the extent that it would be impossible to differentiate between the two. Unlike drag makeup which takes place in real life, 'Instagram makeup' predominantly takes place online and is invariably bound with digital media, "the full-beat face was born of the Internet and remains largely for the Internet" as Razzano argues (Ramanthan, 2018).

'Instagram makeup' is meant for your online life and in real life it would look "extreme" according to YouTuber Christen Dominique (Ramanathan, 2018).

The way in which this consumption of makeup products has been made part of our day-to-day lives through social media contradicts the more formal contexts from which it originates. The appropriateness of 'Instagram makeup' is frequently evaluated in relation to the pedestrian activity of going to the store or buying groceries in order to exploit this contradiction. Renate (2018) recalled, "no one walks around like that in stores...you'll look crazy" and JC (2018) said "you can't even go to the store like that". The normalization and commonality of 'Instagram makeup' on social media is therefore not considered functional for everyday life because for these participants this kind of makeup is meant for television and stage and not everyday use.

According to Warfield (as cited in Rocamora, 2016: 516), smartphones act as a camera, stage and mirror. In a selfie, she writes, one is both a model and "a self-reflecting embodied subject with a mirror". The selfie does function as a mirror in as much as it reflects what it is shown, however, a mirror only gives back the reflection to the person in front of it whereas selfies as media images are projected and mass broadcasted. It can even be stretched so far as to say that the selfie would have no use if it were only seen by the person who captured it and therefore it is inherently social. It is a subject that "is negotiated, performed and mediated" (Rocamora, 2016: 516), or rather mediatized, in that it is a self that is practiced to appear online, as an image to be shared and circulated on a digital screen, and so needs to be fashioned accordingly. Indeed, social media users can draw on a variety of techniques to style themselves for an audience and give themselves new faces (Barose as cited in Hou, 2016).

Another reason why 'Instagram makeup' is considered 'fake' lies in the controlled environment that social media creates. The artist can control the lighting in the room, the angles from which they are observed, they have control over what images are made public and are able to alter these images to their liking. "Instagram is a controlled situation, a little square that can be manipulated" (Barose as cited in Hou, 2016). Additionally, the isolated capturing of separate parts of the face also puts into question the reality of 'Instagram makeup' given the unlikeliness that only one of a person's eyes will be seen at a time or only their lips and from such a close distance. This suggests that this mode of consumption is exclusive to the specific context of the online world but when it is removed and applied to a real-life situation it appears inappropriate. So how do you post a picture online, that is suitable for social media, while the image has to be taken offline? Because the consumption of makeup products has been mediatized, it cannot be seen to belong exclusively to the virtual/online.

One of the critiques levelled at 'Instagram makeup', is that collapse between the real and the virtual causes consumers to overestimate the power of makeup. Renate, professional makeup artist and business owner says, "there is amazing power in what we do but there is only so much you can do. And that's where social media makes it a bit unrealistic." 'Instagram makeup' is designed to give you features that you do not actually possess like beautiful skin, a small nose and bigger, brighter eyes (Ramanthan, 2018). But it is not just makeup that is responsible for these adaptations. According to Cindy, "how your makeup looks will depend on how you look after your skin" and JC suggests that "surgery and fillers" also go unnoticed by consumers. These media images have therefore boasted the value of makeup for consumers to the advantage of commerce.

What happens if you buy all the right makeup products and do not get the same results as the person in the image? You take further steps to change your skin care regimen, get Botox or fillers to remove wrinkles and plump the lips, remove all facial hair and even inject fillers to enhance the cheeks, change the jawline or sharpen the chin. This produces even more needs for consumers to indulge in in order to resemble media images. This is because consumers are presented with mediatized images of makeup looks but have no idea how many filters and photoshopping those images go through, as Madelin (2018) argues. According to celebrity makeup artist, Pati Dubroff (Hou, 2016), this alteration of the self can take place in doctors' offices or on computers.

If your jawline is not very sharp, it's not a bad thing to give it a little shadow. But that's not to say that every single plane on your face needs to be rejiggered. People look in the mirror and want to look like the retouched version of the world. But it's not real, none of it's real, whether it's being done in doctors' offices or on the computer (Dubroff as cited by Hou, 2016)

The ultimate consequence of photoshop and filters are that people want to look like the retouched version of the world (Dubroff as cited by Hou, 2016). Therefore 'Instagram makeup', as a mediatized form of consuming makeup products, functions as a real-life filter. This mediatization has caused us to treat our faces like images that need to be photoshopped and edited, and therefore the consumption of makeup products has taken the form of correcting and fixing rather than enhancing, more so than ever before. Social media has been flooded with 'beauty transformations' in which women are drastically transformed in a matter of seconds. Women are taught to reconstruct their faces with makeup so they can make their noses look thinner or their cheek bones more prominent. Rocamora (2016: 517) proposes that being "camera-ready" also implies the correct use

of makeup which has become built into one's ritual when getting ready, and even one's daily routine. The transformation of functional into symbolic "needs" and aspirations of commodities means that these symbolic needs become interpreted as functional and necessary in respect to daily survival and leave consumers scrutinized and ridiculed for their so-called dependence and reliance on these commodities. This mediatized consumption of makeup products is understood as self-doubt and rejection of oneself and leads to what Dubroff argues as no "self-love" (Hou, 2016).

Joanne suggests that changing one's face to this extent can ultimately remove your identity or act as a mask. They say, "It's almost too perfect, it takes the realness out of people. Everything you see on your face is how you live every day. It's your circumstances that make you who you are. It feels like they're wiping it all out and pastes another one on top" (Joanne, 2018).



Figure 2.3

Figure 2.3 is a clear illustration of Joanne's idea that 'Instagram makeup' serves to camouflage the face into perfection and remove all signs of "realness". Here the demarcation between the face and rest of the body can be seen clearly as the eye moves

from the smooth sun-kissed face to the more pale and freckled neck and shoulders, almost as if another face was pasted onto the body. This supports the idea that the 'Instagram makeup' is a mediatized way of consuming makeup products in that it is used to make a person's face look edited and filtered in real life.

The mediatization process explains the emergence of this particular way of manufacturing beauty as product in which digital media has become imbedded in the consumption of makeup products. This consumption is, however, not new according to Renate (2018) who suggested that "it's all recycled". The influence of reality television, celebrity and drag culture as well as image editing software is clearly revealed in this 'new' trend as they converge to form "a perfect storm" as JC (2018) suggests.

### ***A new beauty standard?***

Over the past two decades, there has been a pluralization of beauty ideals. Jones (2011: 362) suggests that "globalization is no longer a one-way street" and points to the export of different representations of beauty from across the globe to the West. This purported pluralism, and a kind of "democratization" of beauty standards is contested by one of my participants. In contrast to this democratization, JC (2018) proposed that there is a new standard of beauty in the following statement,

If you are 15 years old and you have an oval face and upward tilt eyes and full lips then it's easy to paint yourself beautiful. Then, what happens is everyone sees this same beautiful face done with the same recipe and then I start to think "what's wrong with me? I don't look like that" "why aren't people like me on YouTube?" and then I start to think it's because I don't

wear enough foundation, because I don't have fillers in my lips, because my eyes are droopy. Then I start to fix these things and I start to become sad and then everyone starts to think that is the standard of beauty (JC, 2018).

The quotation above is a critique levelled at 'beauty influencers' by a participant who is a professional makeup artist and photographer. If you already conform to what is taken as "beautiful" then selling your look as beautiful with the use of make-up is not a difficult task. He describes this beautiful person as youthful and possessing attractive facial features such as full lips. This person, already seen as a conventionally beautiful person then shows you how to apply makeup to make you look beautiful as well. But the problem is you are not 15 years old and you do not have the same facial structure so it is unlikely that you will be able to mould yourself to look as 'beautiful' as her. He then goes on to say that this causes confusion for the consumer who does not resemble the image they were imitating even though they followed the same recipe. The consumer then starts to think of other ways in which they can improve their appearance such as using more makeup or enhancing the lips and consequently notices the 'problem areas' or 'flaws' on their faces.

Over centuries of trying to improve our appearance, different ways in which beauty can be manufactured have developed, methods which involve different resources and skills. This means that beauty has become less of something that you are born with and more of something that requires resources and labour. Here, the participant's "standard of beauty" does not suggest a particular way in which beauty has to be manufactured but that the minimum effort with which to obtain it is much more than in previous times. According to JC (2018), the consumption of makeup products is no longer enough for some to feel beautiful. Consumers feel that they have to change the structure of their face

as well. The measures that have to be taken in order to obtain beauty have therefore become extravagant and requires continuous investment. JC's concern is that this ordeal has become so popular and common that it has set a higher standard for women to aspire to. Through these accounts it appears as though social media has caused women to think of beauty not as an individual attribute but as a check list that never seems to end.

Today however, it is not only advertisers who make us believe that we can alter our appearance through the makeup we buy, but also digital media, which is used to produce commodity images. Does this mean that digital media is solely responsible for the new standard of beauty? No, because this confuses medium and message. While the medium does allow the consumption of beauty products in new ways, that changes the time and authorship of the production of these products, it is ultimately people who are the agents of the new images of beauty. This is evident in JCs statement (2018) that "we're feeding that unhealthy obsession with appearance" and "we have to be more responsible", suggesting that "we" as consumers are responsible for the growth of this high standard of beauty by "feeding" it through consuming and reproducing. Their articulation of an "unhealthy obsession with appearance" could also be considered as a sign of our society's increasing self-reflexivity.

A higher standard of beauty also implies a bigger investment of resources, time and labour. In order to partake in the productive consumption of 'Instagram makeup' or 'camera makeup' consumers need the appropriate makeup products and tools, good quality cameras and lighting as well as good skin care to make themselves appear more attractive. An even more critical necessity for such consumers is time. Similar to different constructions of skin colour as mentioned prior, selfies also acquired associations with

free time. Snapshots have generally been associated with leisure, time “off,” having fun, and family memories of good times (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016: 409). As noted by Bourdieu and Bourdieu (2004: 607), in the 1960’s photography was considered a luxury as the camera was one of the distinctive attributes of the “vacationer” reserved for those with time and money to waste.

Unfortunately, beauty influencers or content creators are also perceived of as having more free time. Planning, filming, editing and uploading of beauty content can be extremely time consuming even though the content is on a ’10-minute makeup routine for working moms’ for example. Cindy articulates this issue when she says, “they’re obviously not mothers or a busy career woman...they’ve got all the time in the world to sit in front of their video cameras and indulge themselves” (2019). But the idea of beauty as conditional is not a new phenomenon. According to Fallon (2014: 94), beauty and wealth have been associated with each other throughout history and in many cultures. He suggests that the most powerful members of a group are able to obtain “that which is most valued to the particular group” which speaks a lot to the value that is placed on appearance today. The use of cosmetics, fashionable clothing and plastic surgery are therefore considered a more reliable signifier of class than shape and weight (Fallon, 2014: 95).

Beauty influencers or content creators are not only considered responsible for this new beauty standard, but they also function as enforcers of the beauty premium because we see them receiving free products, vacations and cars “simply because they are beautiful”. In fact, the beauty premium is considered even stronger today by some of my participants. According to JC if you were beautiful in the “older days” you could either be

an actor or a model but today your beauty “opens up doors”. He also suggests that although celebrities were worshipped in the past, you always knew that you would never be one. But today, however, beauty influencers make you think that you can also be famous, and products could be “thrown at you”, and ultimately that you can create your own success and popularity (JC, 2018).

JC hinted at this construct when he said the following,

Why should I study, why should I work hard if I can surgically enhance myself like Kylie Jenner and get success? She showed that with thin lips and a boyish figure you're getting nowhere. No one knew she existed. She changed her whole face and body and what did the world do? Worship. So you learn thin lips equals failure, but fake and you have everything. And then the makeup brands throw things at you as well. So, we're feeding that unhealthy obsession with appearance. We have to be more responsible with those kinds of things (JC, 2018).

JC also suggests that changing your face and body in a certain way can result in having “everything” and makeup brands showering you with gifts, similar to Kylie Jenner. Part of the famous reality television family, Kylie was always in the background until she tanned her skin, enlarged her lips and made her body curvier. For this participant, these celebrities contradict the idea of working hard and studying to that of being beautiful, in which case the former would not be necessary. He continues to suggest that, “when you are beautiful you are successful. You get invited to launches, you get products, you get the boyfriend, you get everything” (JC, 2018). JC also suggests that his makeup artist-students share similar perceptions when he discusses the question of what beauty means for them. These experiences and opinions of beauty on social media suggest that if you

can make yourself more attractive with cosmetics, then perhaps you can change your fate and receive the same affordances as those who are attractive.

The perception of the beauty premium on social media also enforces beauty ideals among consumers in different contexts. Because cultural communities are no longer place-bound (Hjarvard, 2013: 38), the online “beauty community” harbours its own ideals of beauty. The mass broadcast of makeup tutorials or tips-and-tricks means that the consumption of cosmetics through social media platforms has become instructive rather than intuitive and implies a correct way of consuming it. The emphasis on correcting and fixing in tutorials also perpetuates the existence of an ideal face which has been crafted over centuries.

For Cindy and JC (2018, 2019), social media has meant that new versions of beauty have also come to create new ideals. They provide the example of the Kardashian-Jenner family who have become an iconic beauty empire and whose images fill social media. These participants propose that the abundance of tutorials and ‘how to’ videos that show consumers how to use cosmetics to make themselves look like these celebrities has meant that consumers “all morph into looking like Kim Kardashian”. Participants also argue that this has not led consumers to embrace their individual beauty on social media since it causes some women to look like clones and is described as generic and copy/paste when they follow makeup tutorials that aim to imitate these celebrities (JC and Madelin, 2018). According to JC, unique beauty is lost and there is no diversity in that and Cindy reports, “I don’t want to look like anyone else” (2019). For Joanne (2018), these media images are so influential that she is fearful of losing her own style of doing makeup on clients by getting an urge to copy it. This raises the issue of authenticity and the

question of whether social media truly influences consumers to enhance their individual appearance and perception of beauty. Although somewhat dramatized, the reason for these participants' concern is that because this way of consuming cosmetics produced on social media has seeped into consumers' consumption as well and has had significant social implications that can be expressed in the hashtag 'iwokeuplikethis'.

### ***#iwokeuplikethis***

There is amazing power in what we do but there is only so much you can do. And that's where social media makes it a bit unrealistic. And young people get depressed. They look at social media and say 'why don't I look like that? I bought all the makeup the blogger uses. But what the blogger does...they have ten lights on them, they put post production on their photos (Renate, 2018)

In this statement by a participant who is also a mother, addresses one of the biggest social concerns accompanied by social media. She argues that social media is a source of depression, particularly for young people, because they compare themselves to media images and are disappointed with the results. As established previously, social media has accompanied the emergence of new standards and multiple versions of beauty through mediatized images being broadcasted to the public and accepted as real life. The manufactured spontaneity and playfulness that characterise selfies create the impression that people are captured in their normal everyday life. A good example of this is the trending hashtag 'iwokeuplikethis' in which women post "raw" selfies or images that

suggest that they have no makeup or beauty products on and that they look this beautiful without any superficial beautification.

The issue is, however, not that the image produced is not real or does not exist, the issue is that the image is produced by a range of processes that only take place in a specific controlled environment. For example, a model is photographed in an advertisement for a new skin care range. Only she never used that skin care, she has makeup covering her skin and the photographs are edited and filtered afterwards. The person looking at this advertisement does not aspire to beautiful skin as they might think, they aspire to clear, enhanced, edited and filtered skin. Makeup products are therefore promoted as a way in which you can “fake” this mediatized image and get the same result. As Renate (2018) argues, young people get depressed because they bought the same makeup a blogger used on social media, but they still do not look like the image they end up with. This might suggest that consumers are purchasing media images when they purchase beauty products and expect the same results associated with those images when they consume it.

A number of participants believe that those who are particularly vulnerable to these images of beauty are young people and young girls (Maryke, Renate, Madelin, JC, Joanna, Cindy: 2018, 2019). Joanne identifies the problem with the fact that young people “look at it and think it’s the norm” and JC argues that young people believe everything they see on social media. According to several participants, the reason why these media images are impacting consumers negatively is because of its emphasis on correcting and fixing, as mentioned previously. Madelin articulates this thought clearly when she states,

So you are basically saying to someone ‘like you look now, you are not good enough...you are not beautiful enough. Let’s change everything about you so that you look beautiful according to society’s standards of beauty’. And I don’t agree with that. (Madelin, 2018)

What this participant is implying here is that “society’s standards of beauty” requires change and a lot of it. Changing “everything” about yourself therefore means rejecting the way you look and accepting that you are not beautiful enough. According to celebrity makeup artist Pati Dubroff, living in an airbrushed society makes it harder to accept oneself as beautiful (Hou, 2016). The idea that society is ‘airbrushed’ is a realization of the blurring distinction between the real and the virtual and serves as the pit of all evil. Our aspirations to be flawless, filtered and photoshopped in real life is considered to create a negative self-image among consumers. Unfortunately, efforts to educate consumers about how these media images are created is challenging and are seldom successful “because there it is”; it is real.

Joanna argues that the normalization and internalized of mediatized images of beauty impact women in particular by allowing them to compare themselves to each other “constantly” (Joanne, 2018). As more women use and experiment with makeup, the more it becomes a basis for which to flaunt their skills. According to Cindy (2019), “I think that kind of makeup makes women feel bad that they can’t achieve that perfection in makeup”. The result is that women not only compare themselves to other women but that they are threatened by social media because they think this level of skill is what is expected of them, as women and as consumers.

Going back to the introductory quote, Renate argues that “there is only so much you can do” with makeup. This suggests that not only have consumers’ expectations for themselves changed, but also their expectations of what makeup can do to help them change. For Madelin (2018), professional bridal makeup artist, it is impossible to fulfil clients’ expectations because, “I’m not a photographer”. They are suggesting that consumers now expect makeup artists to photoshop and edit their faces using makeup. Another participant reports that clients expect to look like they have had surgery and fillers when their makeup is done by a makeup artist (Madelin, 2018). Photographs (and the subjects) go through so many processes to create the final image that it is impossible to delineate between what is real and what is not, and what is a result of the makeup. These different “layers” of beautification also means that the manufacturing of beauty is a continuous and cumulative process.

### ***Subculture -Anastasia Beverly Hills***

‘Instagram makeup’ or ‘selfie makeup’ is not the only by-product of the mediatization process that has impacted the beauty industry. In her vignette describing the role of drag culture in society, drag queen Sasha Velour reported that as a child she experienced discontinuity between who she was on the inside and what she looked like on the outside. This is indicative of an essential function of cosmetics which is to allow the expression and continuity of the self. Makeup has become a cultural expression of oneself in attempting to determine ‘who am I?’ (Rettberg as cited by Ramanathan, 2018). But this self-expression perhaps reaches further than the beauty industry as the search for

identity, “collective or individual, ascribed or constructed” has become the fundamental source of social meaning in “a world of global flows of wealth, power, and *images*” as argued by Castells (2010: 3). What is so profound about the beauty industry then is that it makes possible the fashioning of identity in the aspirational sense of ‘who do I want to be?’. Further, the consumption of cosmetics has meant that these sources of meaning flow into one another so that cultures are reflexive of one another. So how does this take place?

The recreational consumption of cosmetics has implicated that selfies not only act as a stage on which the performance of beauty is delivered, but that the face has also become the canvas for such a performance. The face, and even specific parts of the face, now act as a digital screen or even a greenscreen from which media texts are projected. Therefore, the consumption of makeup products has come to produce cultural products. Jansson (2002: 9) describes cultural products as material and immaterial creations which function as signs, in subjective experience and in relation to a context. These creations can either feature on isolated parts of the face such as the eyes or mouth or cover the whole face and neck (everything that fits into a selfie). The images below are examples of such cultural products that express media culture itself.

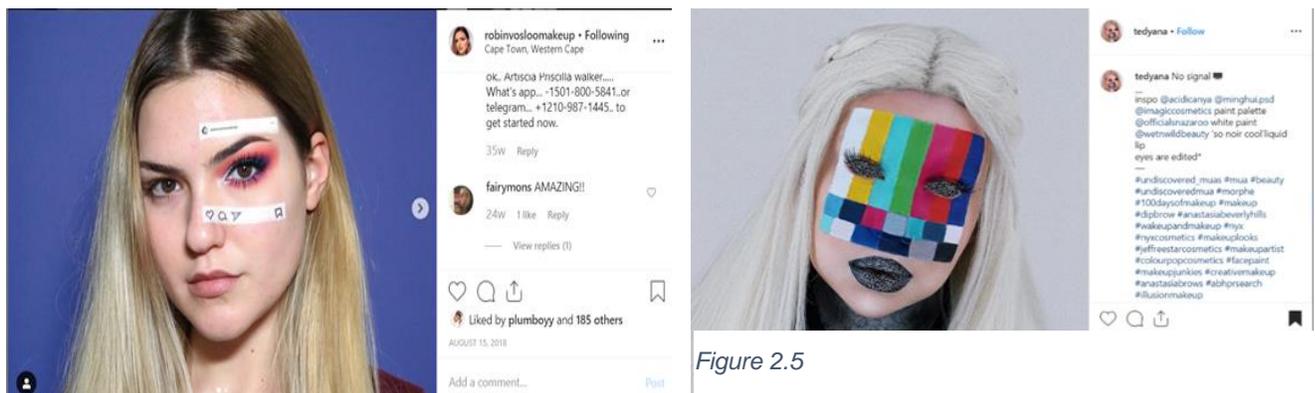


Figure 2.5



Figure 2.6



Figure 2.7

Figure 2.4 is an image posted by South African @Robinvosloomakeup with the look entitled “inception”. This ‘Instagram makeup’ look involves applying makeup to a square section of the face, mostly one of your eyes, and then drawing a square around it with the appropriate symbols and name as it would appear in an Instagram post. The rest of the face is left bare. Figure 2.5 shows a face with a square box filled with a spectrum of colours and grey noise (static) on the lips and neck entitled “no signal”. In Figure 2.6 the girl applied her makeup in very small squares to make it appear as though her face is made out of very large pixels. Figure 2.7 shows South African beauty influencer, @Plumboyy, with a makeup application titled “glitch” which contains different colours of stripes and squares that are so straight that it gives the illusion that there is nothing on his face but rather that the screen has a glitch. These examples show how cosmetics products are used to create layered images which are essentially different slides of images that combine to make a final design (Pagin, 2013). The introduction of layers into Adobe Photoshop in 1994 revolutionized image editing as it allowed the designer to manipulate different parts of the image individually, without affecting other parts of the

design. This and other aspects present in this pioneer image editing software such as filters are imitated in the recreational consumption of cosmetics.

These cultural products suggest that there has been a functional shift in the beauty industry that is made possible by the productive consumption of cosmetics. According to Joanne and Lesizwe, putting on makeup or changing one's makeup routine has always been greeted with the response of "you look nice, where are you going?". Previously makeup was associated with "getting ready to go out" but now makeup is increasingly being consumed behind closed doors. It appears as though makeup has developed a new function resembling that of a hobby or "pastime for a generation of young women and men" (Ramanathan, 2018) that involves play, collection and entertainment through the use makeup products. This means that the activity of applying makeup is no longer a means to an end, for the purpose of appearing in public, but has become an end in itself; you can put on makeup just for the fun of it or to practice your craft.

This means that the recreational use of cosmetics now allows consumers to play with different identities and expressions of beauty. This idea is well articulated in Rettberg's statement that "the face doesn't need to be worn out in public to work its magic. It's almost as if it's enough to simply know you could look like Kim Kardashian if you wanted to." (Ramanathan, 2018). Therefore, cosmetics allow you not to only compare yourself to others, but to turn yourself into them and ultimately show that you can be as beautiful as the person in the media image if you want to be. Being able to command beauty at your own will also means that you can access the beauty premium or exercise a performance of class when you need to which further makes the "obsession with appearance" not so trivial.

This has fundamentally changed our perception that makeup should be used by virtue of being in a public space where it can be observed by others. What has changed is not the fact that makeup is now used in a private space where it cannot be observed, but rather that this observation takes place in an online public space. This online space of social media is therefore still a public realm but within which interaction is more intentional and purposeful than randomly walking past someone in the street. In this sphere people who share interests and passions can interact and engage in a public and communal way. This explains participants' previous remarks that you would not see this sort of makeup when going to the store because this activity or hobby operates in a specific context, and not because its unpopular per say. However, to suggest that this subculture is strictly an online community would miss the point because the boundaries between the real and the virtual have dismantled. Also, Jansson (2002: 26) argues that image culture has emerged according to the logic of capitalism and are therefore grounded in very 'real', material conditions.

Joanne describes this activity as

“[i]t feels like a whole other world...it feels like a whole other industry. It feels like it's another type of makeup artist. Because it's one thing to makeup yourself a hundred times a day and create these beautiful looks but it's a different ballgame to do it on someone else. So I don't even want to put it into the same category” (Joanne, 2018).

According to Joanne, “creating beautiful looks” using makeup is fundamentally different from putting makeup on someone else. The artist is using the same canvas repeatedly to display essentially, works of art. This pastime is also described as a “whole other world” and a “whole other industry” suggesting that we are dealing with a break from

conventional makeup artistry and even a new market, as Joanne suggests. This phenomenon can only be explained as a subculture of makeup enthusiasts. This subculture is made possible by the media's creation of a new, shared global realm of experience that is more general and abstract than place-bound cultures (Hjarvard, 2013: 38). According to Jansson (2002: 15), these types of communities are established in relation to popular culture (pop culture) such as advertising and consumer goods such as cosmetics. Because of the mediatization process cultural products have become important cultural referents and contributions to the development and maintenance of cultural communities such as this one (Jansson, 2002: 15).

So how do consumers decide what images to paint on their faces or what the topic should be? A variety of themes are presented in these creations that relate to aspects of media and consumer culture. That means that these cultural products are always created in relation to something else such as the painted cracked egg or the World Record Egg painted onto lips. This can be explained by Jansson's conceptualization of commercial intertextuality which involves the internal co-existence and referentiality of various externally derived texts, genres and discourses (2002: 19). This means that images of consumer products are composite message systems that are made up of a variety of interrelated texts (or posts) and because of the rapid circulation of images through the media, closer webs of intertextuality are spun, continuously created and re-created (Jansson, 2002: 19, 20). Harvvard's (2013: 34) concept of cultural reflexivity is also useful for explain this intertextuality as it proposes that "cultures" can no longer develop in isolation from others because media products cross more and more frontiers. These circulating images regularly feature popular art recreations, features out of films and

animated media. More subtle references often contain Instagram’s iconic blue, purple, red, orange and yellow that without even adding the famous camera symbol it is obvious that this is a reference to the social media application. Take the examples below,



Figure 2.8



Figure 2.9



Figure 2.10



Figure 2.11

These images are only a few examples of the cultural products that are created through the consumption of makeup in this subculture. Figure 2.8 is a makeup look created by Nikkie Tutorials in aspiration of a music video by Billy Eilish. Figure 2.9 shows the Instagram post of a recreation of Van Gogh’s, *The Scream*, on the artist’s lips. Figure

2.10 is a creation inspired by genre of comic strips and Figure 2.11 is a creation that presents skin peeling of the face to reveal the iconic Louis Vuitton fashion design underneath. Many of these images are created in such a way that represents something underneath the skin bursting or peeling through to reveal itself as if to show what they look or feel like on the inside.

The expression of different fabricated images of face and appearance coming together in these cultural products that are portrayed as self-expressions, such as media culture and others, points to the undeniable presence of cultural reflexivity, a term used by Hjarvard in his quest to expose the mediatization of culture and society. The concept holds that floods of media products and communications that cross more and more frontiers will mean that no culturally bound image of beauty will be able to develop in isolation from others (Hjarvard, 2013: 34). The demonstration of cultural reflexivity as well as commercial intertextuality in the productive consumption of beauty products puts into question the frequented notions of plagiarism and cultural appropriation as the boundaries between what is original and what is copied have been disrupted. When should you give credit for an idea or inspiration and how do you give credit for an idea that you didn't know existed? For Benjamin, the question of authenticity and the presence of the original is directly related to photography because photography implies reproducibility. A reproduced work of art lacks presence in time and space and by making many reproductions of it, a plurality of copies is substituted for a unique existence (Benjamin, 1969: 50, 51).

The playful and recreational use of cosmetics also suggests that the sole purpose of beauty products is no longer just to beautify. Cosmetics are now also used for

entertainment purposes and consumed as a skilled craft. Does this point to a push back on behalf of the beauty community and women in general that beauty products are to be consumed primarily to fulfil ideals of feminine beauty?

# 2

## The Beauty Influencer

Before social media, beauty blogs and YouTube's beauty community allowed consumers to share their own perceptions and experiences so widely, magazines were responsible for transmitting information about beauty products and diffusing beauty ideals. In fact, magazines were considered to represent women's mass culture, according to Wolf (1990: 71). But since global electronic communication networks have been developed this has all changed. The emergence of social media platforms not only allowed more versions of beauty to be created and broadcasted to consumers, but it also created space for conversations, knowledge and assumptions about beauty to be shared among consumers across the world.

The internet and these mass self-communication platforms have given a voice to consumers to communicate their own perceptions and assumptions about beauty as well

as share images in which beauty is performed. These horizontal networks of communication as Castells (2010: 442) states, have served to democratise beauty as it has made information and conversations about beauty more accessible through smartphones and computers and allowed more sources to emerge for women to consult. Today, beauty influencers are a popular source for beauty tips and tricks and product recommendations as they create social media content around educating and informing consumers on all-things-beauty. They are the democratizers of beauty in the current state of things. This chapter will show how this transition from organized to more unprompted sources of information and knowledge about beauty has taken place, the role that the beauty influencer plays within the beauty industry and how they manage to influence consumers by using their social capital. Finally, as top-down broadcast models have been replaced by user-generated models of communication, confusion and contention has risen as anyone is now capable of recommending products and instructing consumers on how they should use beauty products. The chapter will conclude by demonstrating how this contention takes place within the South African context.

### ***From publishing to posting***

Before social media consumers of beauty products relied on magazines, books and professional makeup artists for information about cosmetics, how to use them and which products to purchase. For those who work in the beauty industry as professional makeup artists, magazines were an important source for inspiration and information. According to Angela (2019) (professional makeup artist), “magazines have always been my bible”.

Sandra (2019) recalled that as a former beauty editor of *Femina* they would go to their publishing house where they had a whole room filled with the latest beauty magazines where they got the bulk of their ideas, concepts and trends. This was considered “homework” (Angela, 2019) to these professionals as it required reading and research of not just visual sources. Press releases and product launches were another valuable source for those who worked in beauty magazines. Here they would receive in-depth information about products, reword and rework it and send it out to the public (Cindy, 2019). According to Cindy, they were invited to these launches because they were the ones who put it in print and educated consumers.

For magazines, the focus was considered to be with the people who place the advertisements, “there was enough money, they had these big ads...it was amazing” (Sandra, 2019). The participant continues to say that they flew around the country to attend big launches, they were sent boxes of products and if they put one of those items in the magazine the brand would be happy. But even though they worked closely with sales, hanging on to readers with integrity required that “what you say comes from the heart” (Sandra, 2019). This required balancing the interests of both parties. Sandra further reports that working for a magazine meant that you had to speak in the magazine’s voice that is taking on a particular kind of authority. The magazine was responsible for making sure that your writing sounds like the magazine speaking.

The decline of the magazine industry which has been felt world-wide is considered to drive advertisers away from publishing in magazines to posting on digital platforms. According to The Washington Post (Ramanathan, 2019), the magazine industry has been tightening its belt for years thanks to “advertising famine”. Women’s magazines have felt

this in particular with magazines such as Glamour and Teen Vogue, and Fairlady, Elle and Glamour in South Africa closing their doors or converting to digital formats. According to former beauty editor and blogger, “I realised that magazines were undergoing a change and dying. I realised no one was buying magazines anymore and most of the magazines that are in digital form aren’t working either” (Cindy, 2019). This may be because social media costs more money considering that editors have to do ten photoshoots instead of just one because it is digital (Renate, 2018).

By sellers also fulfilling the role of educators it allowed beauty companies to make “crazy claims” and cleverly word things so they couldn’t get into trouble legally (Cindy, 2019). Additionally, the expansion of the cosmetics industry meant that women have even more products to choose from but also more choices to make. Therefore, the need for a platform or voice that could help consumers “cut through the clutter” and allowed consumer conversations, emerged.

In 2004 blogs became a way for people to share and connect and at the time the blog was considered “social” publishing compared to magazines and newspapers (Bazaarvoice, 2014: 3).

I think social media has impacted in a big way. I think more and more women, in general, want recommendations from other women and they don’t trust advertising, and I don’t blame them. I know the media you know, ads are designed to encourage you to spend and are not a 100% truthful and often times products don’t live up to its claims. So I think a recommendation from a blogger or a fellow woman who has tried a product, they can be honest, you know, about that product, how it works and whether it did or didn’t live up to their expectations. So I think social media impacted,

especially the beauty industry, in a huge way because these beauty companies could make crazy claims, “this cellulite cream will get rid of your cellulite in 30 days”, bullshit nothing is going to do that. Or they would cleverly so they couldn’t get into trouble legally because the wording was so deceptive. So I think there is a lot more trust with bloggers and just with women in general (Cindy, 2019)

For this full-time blogger “there is a lot more trust with bloggers” or a “fellow woman” because they can be *honest* with you about a product, how it works and whether it did or didn’t live up to its expectations. The lack of trust in advertising meant that more and more women want recommendations from other women; i.e. consumers. The blogger was therefore perceived as an independent voice who has consumers’ interests at heart because she is also a consumer and a woman. Although blogs were a major step forward and many people read them, the majority of people didn’t participate in writing blogs (Bazaarvoice, 2014: 3).

The emergence of more social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram provided for the further democratization of the beauty industry as it improved access to and the dissemination of information and knowledge all things beauty. Social media is considered a great equalizer as it shifts the power away from any entity to anyone with the ability to share (Solis, 2018: 3). It does so by allowing consumers to talk back and take charge of the conversation about a brand (Horwitz & Zimmer, 2017). Social media platforms also allowed casual conversations to take place online through what can be referred to as a collective of consumer-to-consumer networks that democratize relationships, connections and information (Solis, 2018: 3). Consequently, the majority of

people now contribute by sharing opinions, ideas, thoughts and pieces of their lives through these social networks (Bazaarvoice, 2014: 3).

The next crucial development that allowed consumers unprecedented access to information about beauty and beauty-related products was the video sharing platform, YouTube. The first beauty related videos started to surface on YouTube in 2007. These early versions featured young female consumers sharing makeup tips and tricks, demonstrations of “makeup looks” and product information filmed with computer cameras or video cameras. According to a report by Pixability (2018), consumers continue to turn to YouTube as their primary source for creator content and beauty tutorials. From 2006 until 2017 there have been 349 billion total views of beauty videos and 169 billion views projected for 2018. This leaves no doubt as to why YouTube is referred to as a global beauty hub (Horwitz & Zimmer, 2017). Beauty influencer, Jen Luvs Reviews, explains why YouTube was so significant to the “beauty community”,

What was unique about YouTube was that in order to get that kind of knowledge you get from a YouTube video, you had to go to a makeup class, you had to physically travel out of your house in order to get that kind of information. And now Marlena and other people like Alecia from Xsparkage were bringing those tips into your house and it was amazing. (LIVE CHAT - Marlena Stell Leaving YouTube, Jaclyn Cosmetics Website Down & More!, 2019)

Her statement clearly points to a kind of domestication of information and knowledge that is made possible by the social media platform. Lesizwe (2018) suggests that video allows the message to get out much quicker and in today’s rushed life many people don’t have time to read. Unfortunately, this flowing mass of user-generated content can be hard to

navigate because anyone with access to the internet can share their opinion irrespective of their background or experience with the topic. Therefore, the amount of information and sources of information to choose from complicates consumers' ability to delineate between what information is useful, correct and applicable to them.

Instead of having to comb through hours of video or product information and purchase the wrong product until you find the right one, consumers can invest in one or two particular individuals to make guide their decision making. Consumers can simply follow an influencer with similar personal taste, physical features or similar skin tones, complexions and concerns to find out what products they recommend and how to use them. It's easier for a consumer to judge the validity and trustworthiness of the source, the beauty influencer, and to continuously rely on their opinion until you no longer identify with them or their credibility has been damaged for some reason.

Beauty influencers not only sought to provide consumers with much needed information and product recommendations, but they also claim that they have knowledge of beauty and how to produce it,

the reason I started is that I believed every woman wants to be beautiful, every woman wants to feel good. Doing your hair and makeup can give you a bit of confidence. So my idea was to get the message across that you are beautiful. Beauty comes from the inside, but this is what you can do to feel more confident on the outside. I've learned that it's about personality and then makeup became just something I loved. So it's not about hiding yourself its more about expressing yourself and bringing out the beautiful. (Maryke, 2018)

This beauty influencer's statement explains what motivated her to quit her job become a full-time beauty influencer and content creator on YouTube. According to this beauty influencer, being beautiful, a characteristic usually associated with physical appearance, "comes from the inside" but it does not necessarily translate to the surface. This dissonance between inner and outer beauty can be improved by making oneself *feel more confident* about one's physical appearance with the use of beauty products which this beauty influencer proposes to assist women with.

It wasn't long before these online conversations and consumer networks were discovered as a valuable source of data about consumers' preferences, experiences and opinions of beauty products. Social media also allowed professionals access to very precise information on the profiles (demographics) and consumption habits of their particular consumer market (world press online). This source of consumer data is made possible because social media not only allows consumers to engage across social networks, but it also makes these conversations available to the public and allows it to be stored indefinitely. It can be argued that social media has placed the whole beauty consumer market under close surveillance as beauty brands can now see what their consumers want and give it to them. Cosmetics companies have also noticed that beauty-related videos on social media platforms such as YouTube have a significant impact on consumers' purchase decisions and brand preferences as opposed to a traditional web search (Horwitz & Zimmer, 2017).

Beauty brands have since become part of the conversations on social media in an attempt to communicate with consumers and to create and sell products in new ways. Today, beauty brands not only have their own social media persona's, but they also work

closely with beauty influencers through sponsorships, collaborations and marketing campaigns. Increasing brand presence and commercial interest on social media means that more resources are being ploughed into it by beauty brands as well as beauty influencers. When the opportunity for economic gain was realised the social media “beauty space” became commercial and organized. The following are examples of beauty tutorials by South African beauty influencer Kandykane from 2013 and 2019. A closer look at these snapshots reveal some of the significant ways in which beauty influencing transformed in the last decade following the monetization of YouTube videos, increasing involvement by cosmetics brands as well as the consequent increase in competition among beauty influencers.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

As these examples demonstrate, the early beauty related videos that started to surface on YouTube were considerably different to what we see today. Videos were filmed with low quality cameras such as computer cameras which meant that the footage was blurry. Natural light and poor sound had to suffice. These videos were filmed in consumers' homes with no backdrops or special background decorations. Many early efforts didn't have live talking but rather a voiceover that was recorded after the video was filmed. With regards to the actual makeup tutorial, only a few products and tools are used. Today, beauty content creators/influencers have their own beauty studios (dedicated space) geared with ring lights, expensive cameras and other equipment, back drops or staged backgrounds and microphones dangling from the sky. Another aspect not visible to the viewer is the editing and production software that have turned these beauty enthusiasts into full-blown media producers. The space in which the beauty influencer

films is now less spontaneous and more deliberate, yet spontaneity is still staged by the influencer (the reason for which will be expressed in the following section).

Ramanathan (2018) also notices this transformation when she recalls one of the first beauty content creators on YouTube, Michelle Phan. She reports that one of Phan's first videos was a fledging tutorial on natural-looking makeup which has been viewed 10 million times. Today, for a single beauty tutorial to be viewed that much is rare and by today's standards Phan's tutorial would be considered "quaint" (Ramanathan, 2018). Maryke (2018) also suggests that in those days there were only a hand full of people who created beauty content while today the market is "saturated". She goes on to say that "everyone wants to create a channel now and everyone is posting about makeup now so it's very competitive" (Maryke, 2018). Another participant reported that there is competition between beauty influencers but that it doesn't necessarily have to be a negative thing. Here, competition is considered a driver of better-quality content because it creates a need for your "interpretation of makeup to be unique" as Lesizwe (2018) suggests.

Another possible driver of this commercialization is the recreational use of cosmetics in this new subculture. Because the consumption of makeup has also become a hobby or past-time as mentioned in chapter 1, the dissemination of information is not the only function that social media fulfils in the beauty industry. Social media content became increasingly about entertainment. Videos based platforms and image platforms have become bigger than written platforms like blogs because it's "fun" (Lesizwe, 2018). Today, people spend less time watching television and more time online which means that brands have to follow consumers in order to reach them.

## ***Influencer marketing becomes a thing***

The use of human brands or celebrities<sup>5</sup> to market and sell beauty products is not a new phenomenon. As argued by Jones (2011: 893), beauty companies formed part of the ecosystem of Hollywood and celebrity as actors and screen stars shaped perceptions of female beauty through television. But as the demand for local content grew and global mega-brands such as Revlon (23,2%) and Loreal South Africa continue to dominate the local makeup market, they increasingly look to local celebrities to appeal to consumers (Marketline, 2017: 12). Celebrities can then use their own media to influence the audience and become synonymous with the brand and the product (Khamis et al., 2017: 193). Although influencers are considered human brands they cannot be likened to traditional celebrities and according to Solis (2018: 4), this sort of interpretation has led influencer marketing to confuse the principles of traditional celebrity endorsements with the promise of social capital in digital networks.

As mentioned in the introduction, social capital involves the cumulated resources linked to having a strong network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986: 248-249). These networks can be large or small but all of them require an “unceasing effort of sociability and a continues series of exchanges” as Bourdieu proposes (1986: 250). For this reason, brands have to look at this new generation of

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<sup>5</sup> A human brand or celebrity is defined as a well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts and is considered different from traditional advertising because they bring their own audience into the equation (Khamis et al., 2017: 193)

influencers differently than they would traditional celebrities and paid endorsements (Solis, 2018: 3). Take the following statement by a beauty influencer as example,

When you send a video back to clients and they want all of these changes and I just say 'listen guys, if you want an advert then just hire a model and a creative director and have them shoot the whole thing' because now it's like I'm just a model...the face of the whole thing. (Lesizwe, 2018)

Her statement demonstrates that beauty influencers are not models, celebrities or brand ambassadors as traditional celebrities have been used for marketing purposes in the past. Influencers should be considered as creators and not a "media buy" in order to maximize their potential (Solis, 2018: 7). Influencer marketing involves plugging into new communities and connecting the brand to new audiences through the voice of the influencer (Solis, 2018: 3). Lesizwe further describes this relationship as, "they want to use your authentic voice to send their brand message. So it's a fusion of putting things together" (2018). This suggests that a beauty influencer acts as a strategic mediator and translator between the beauty brand and consumer. The influencer translates the message into the consumer's language. Ledbetter (2018: 297) similarly describes beauty influencers as interlocutors between corporations and consumers who allow audiences to participate in constructing their content and facilitate opportunities for interactivity.

Unfortunately, there exists a common conflation between popularity and influence that still has many companies believing that an influencer is simply someone who has a lot of followers (Solis, 2018: 3). According to Lesizwe (2018), international brands look at followings; they don't want influencers with less than half a million followers and they don't bear in mind if the followers are bought. Solis (2018: 4) states that influence is not

popularity but rather the ability to cause effect or change behaviour which means that popularity is merely a by-product of influence or authority. This means that reaching or influencing consumers is fundamentally different from traditional marketing and if not recognized, influencer marketing just becomes a new tool used in old ways (Solis, 2018: 4)

Although the number of followers an influencer has does not necessarily reveal how much influencing power they have, it does show what kind of influencer they are. Influencers can broadly be distinguished into two important groups; micro (low-reach) and macro (high-reach) influencers. Micro influencers are characterized by a following of 5000 to 100 000 followers while macro influencers are those who have upwards of a million followers (Tapinfluence, 2018: 2). According to the report by Tapinfluence that analysed campaign and performance data (3), micro influencers have considerably higher social engagement rates on their social media posts than macro influencers. In fact, social engagement rates were seen dropping consistently as total reach grows. Further, micro influencers were found to charge less for social media posts although they remain underutilized in campaigns (Tapinfluence, 4). High-reach (macro) influencers, meanwhile, help spread brand awareness to the largest number of consumers, while lending their celebrity cachet to the brands they choose to promote.

This means that a marketing campaign's choice of influencers should align closely with its goals and not be fixed on large numbers. Being able to distinguish between different kinds of influencers becomes crucial when beauty brands consider their specific goals and the target audience they want to reach. Because South Africa's beauty market is smaller and more fragmented than the United States, for example, macro influencers

in the beauty realm are rare. The beauty influencers that beauty brands work with commonly are micro influencers who have around 25 000 followers. According to beauty blogger (Cindy, 2019), if a beauty influencer in South Africa has more than 35 000 followers than it is probably bought or puffed up and inconsistencies across different social media platforms is usually a sign of foul play.

Influencers such as in the beauty community should rather be conceived of as ‘micro-celebrities’ or celebrities of self-branding as Khamis et al. (2017: 197) suggest. These authors describe this concept as “a mind-set and a set of practices that courts attention through insights into its practitioners’ private lives, and a sense of realness that renders their narratives, their branding, both accessible and intimate” (Khamis et al., 2017: 202). ‘Micro-celebrities’ are ordinary individuals who have cultivated a fan base through social media whose success is registered through likes, shares, tweets, followers and comments (Khamis et al., 2017: 197). Maryke emphasizes the idea that anyone can become a celebrity when she states that “I just started as a girl who loved makeup” (2018). The following statement reveals more about how this sense of celebrity is cultivated,

I think when I started it wasn’t a thing like it is today so for me... I just think the last two years I have been working on myself full time I noticed how important it is to establish your brand because now there are a lot of other bloggers. But when you started then you just did it because it was a hobby and its fun but because it has become a thing your brand creates a reputation and a reputation is something that can be bended like this or it can go viral. (Maryke, 2018)

Her statement demonstrates that the increasing demand for beauty content and increased competition among content creators has required her to establish her brand, in

other words, brand herself. Maryke also reports that creating a brand involves creating a reputation which can be detrimental to your success. For Gandini (2016: 124) reputation is simply the form that social capital takes in digital environments where social interaction takes place at a distance. Once an intangible asset, reputation is now tangible and visible through the activity of social media users (Gandini, 2016: 135). Social media activity can therefore be considered performative practices of sociality in which reputation functions as the cultural conception of value (Gandini, 2016: 125).

Because social media promises fame and wealth to 'ordinary' users and encourages practice of micro-celebrity (Khamis et al., 2017: 194), performances of beauty on social media can be seen as enforcing the beauty premium since beauty influencers are seen receiving free products, vacations, cars and significant wealth (chapter 1), and because "there is no one on social media that isn't beautiful" as JC argues. Similarly, Berryman and Kavka (2017: 309) suggest that the unprecedented success of YouTubers highlights the capacity for new media technologies to grant and facilitate fame in the twenty-first century. Therefore, beauty is still considered the pathway to fame and wealth for some individuals when in fact it is social media that allows the commercial viability of beauty influencers. Although there no longer exists a singular ideal of beauty, being able to manufacture and perform beauty when necessary is still praised. This explains why social media has propelled the beauty industry unprecedentedly.

Micro-celebrities are also different to traditional celebrities because self-branding requires them to sustain a more 'real' relationship with their audience compared to traditional celebrities (Khamis et al., 2017: 197). This relationship can be perceived as 'real' because we are invited into their homes, they sit in their pyjama's or play with their

dog while they film (JC, 2018). Similarly, snapshots such as selfies often appear rushed, carelessly composed, taken almost by chance, thus revealing a subject unposed and spontaneous (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016: 409). This means that the environment in which the beauty influencer positions his/her performance (their stage) is non-threatening and personal so that the consumer perceives them as a friend or person they can trust. Berryman and Kavka (2017: 310) suggest that in this context intimacy is produced through the spatial, temporal, social as well as medial dynamics that enable “commodification through intimacy”.

Another way in which a ‘real’ relationship is established is by portraying oneself in a manner that performs ‘authenticity’, by which we mean ‘relatable’. But in the context of self-branding and human subjects possessing this quality, authenticity can be interpreted as ‘being *really* or *truly* human’. The following statement can be used to make sense of this idea,

I struggle with dry skin, for example, so followers with dry skin... when I talk about a product for dry skin they are like ‘oh my word that’s exactly how I feel’ or if I say I don’t like a foundation because it flakes on my skin they would say ‘that’s exactly how I feel’. I feel like for them it’s not just this face and they think ‘her makeup always looks good’, ‘she’s so perfect’; they can also see that you’re struggling. You go through tough times, you don’t always wear makeup and you also try to gym to get a good body. So, there is that trust relationship and also, it’s more relatable. (Maryke, 2018)

This beauty influencer proposes that being able to identify and relate to someone harbours a relationship of trust with an influencer. This is fairly straightforward, but the more interesting part is that the common ground used to relate to consumers is flaws,

imperfections, struggles and insecurities; the things that make us human. Because beauty can be so intimidating it serves the beauty influencer well to offset it with other flaws or vulnerabilities they consider 'unattractive'. In this way the beauty influencer is telling the consumer that beauty does not require perfection because 'I am not perfect' and therefore fame and celebrity does not require perfection. Another participant reported a similar phenomenon,

I know what bookings I get from social media because I do the social media. And 90% of it doesn't work but then there's that small thing that you post that you think is insignificant and then you get ten bookings. And then you think what made it different and you realise it's the more real stuff. The stuff where I do tutorials on myself and halfway through my daughter comes in and kisses me or I'm drinking a glass of wine. It's real. People want imperfection. (Renate, 2018)

This is the voice of a long-time professional makeup artist and business-owner. According to her experience of branding her company on social media, the content that gets the best response from consumers is the "real stuff". Examples of this are also given. However, these "real" moments she identifies are not even related to physical flaws or imperfections. What makes it unique from traditional celebrities is that beauty influencers not only develop a fan base of people who admire their beauty, but they form meaningful relationships around topics that aren't necessarily related to beauty. This suggests a relationship that is based on more than just aspirational beauty in which the beauty influencer proclaims that she is more than "just this face" (Maryke, 2018).

Therefore, what makes beauty influencers unique is that they are able to sustain the hallmarks of effective branding such as consistency, distinctiveness and value through

*narratives* shared across different social media platforms (Khamis et al., 2017: 196). It is through these human narratives that meaningful relationships are built on social media. Ledbetter (2018: 293) similarly suggests that storytelling plays an important rhetorical function in the beauty community, including identity building as well as relationship-and credibility building. She also argues that in this context, storytelling is used as identity work which she describes as “work that serves to articulate and realise the complex nature of identity among participants” (Ledbetter, 2018: 296)

Unfortunately, branding a person does pose challenges of its own, of which the largest is the ability to sustain consistency (Khamis et al., 2017: 192). According to Khamis et al. (2017: 192) a brand’s value is premised on the promise of consistency as it alleviates the risks for the consumer. As stated earlier, the beauty influencer alleviates risk by allowing the consumer of beauty products to identify with a few individuals who they perceive as trustworthy and credible without having to evaluate all the information that shared on social media. But the self is not fixed; it is fluid and changes over time. So how do you sell a brand that is susceptible to change, if successful branding is predicted on consistency? Simply put, you manufacture a self that is more or less consistent. Madelin (2018) expresses this idea as “you are kind of creating an illusion of someone”.

One way in which consistency can be maintained is by keeping your social media content focused. According to Maryke (2018), “it’s challenging to try and do something new in the hopes of having your video go viral”. Although she does include some fitness and hair content on her YouTube channel, moving away from beauty too much would end up diluting her brand. Lesizwe (2018) mentioned that while writing her blog she started to focus on beauty alone and because of that she started “gaining traction”. Being consistent

on social media by regularly posting or having a fixed posting schedule is another way in which the beauty influencer can create consistency and reliability. Maryke (2018) recalled that when she decided to do her brand full-time, she realised that she needed to be consistent by uploading more regularly to social media and creating more content. Once she did this beauty brands started to notice her.

But professional makeup artist (Madelin, 2018) argues that because people start seeing you as someone “you have to be that person all the time” which can be very hard work. Khamis et al. (2017: 203) express this idea clearly when they say that micro-celebrity requires constant vigilance and monitoring of this authentic self that is paradoxically both edited and ‘real’. The participant uses the example of having a bad day when she does not feel like putting on makeup and wears her pyjamas all day (Madelin, 2018). But self-branding does require sharing such human experiences and emotions so why would a pyjama-day and no-makeup day be bad publicity? Because it creates a problem of consistency for the beauty influencer. Being consistent on social media requires regularly posting fresh content which means that being in front of the camera is not optional. Often times beauty influencers have “pre-filmed” videos that they use when something unexpected prevents them from filming.

Cindy, the professional makeup artist and business-owner, also states that it’s hard work to post what she’s doing every morning, but she knows this is at the cost of growing her brand. This consistency required by branding the self therefore seeps into the everyday lives of micro-celebrities and requires an ‘always-on’ work mode as Khamis et al (2017: 203) suggest. Additionally, because social media has become the dominant mode of self-branding, social media presence is no longer optional for micro-celebrities.

As JC (2018) suggests, “we all have to adapt to it and use social media to grow our business. We’re going to have to play the game”. The mediatization of culture and society can be considered a contributing factor as the media have achieved a degree of self-determination and authority which forced other institutions to submit to its logic (Hjarvard, 2013: 3).

Manuel Castells (2010: 405) traces this idea back even further when he states that in the new system of communication (which is based on the digitized, networked integration of multiple modes of communication) only *presence* permits communicability and socialization of a message. As a consequence, all kinds of messages in this new society function in a binary mode of presence and absence (2010:405). This realization is commonly expressed by participants as ‘out of sight, out of mind’ (Renate, 4, 2018). For some, even our existence is conditional on our communication on digitized and networked platforms, “these days you don’t even exist in consumers’ minds unless you chat with them on Twitter, have followers on Facebook or publish a blog” (Armellini & Villanueva, 2011: 29). Similarly, beauty brands are forced to use social media to communicate with consumers, directly or through beauty influencers, because having a good product is no use if no one knows about it as suggested by Renate (2018).

In contrast to these viewpoints on consistency within a human brand, one participant argued that social media does allow some leeway for change,

You can always evolve and develop your brand as you go along, and I think for me I always said I’m going to stop blogging when I’m thirty. I can’t be I front of the camera when I’m thirty, that’s so embarrassing. But at the same

time YouTube is so broad you have mommy bloggers who are in their 30s and 40s and they're like interiors and I love that. (Lesizwe, 2018)

This influencer's statement reveals that YouTube is flexible enough for a micro-celebrity's brand to grow and change as they do. But it's not only influencers who get older and go through different life stages, their audience changes as well. These follower-networks are also fluid because of constant flows of new fans joining and others disconnecting. Regardless, beauty influencers' careers are often challenged by the notion of longevity and age, as this beauty influencer does. In critiques of beauty influencers participants often question how long such a career may last because "it's hard getting older" (Renate, 2018) and brands are getting "younger and younger" meaning that they are targeting younger consumers (JC, 2018). Age therefore poses an existential challenge to beauty influencers in particular. Another beauty influencer expressed a fear of makeup becoming a passing trend that would one day only be remembered as a "2010's thing". Because beauty influencers have emerged in the culmination of different events, they face different sets of challenges.

### ***A new way to get there***

It was always magazines or makeup artists, or celebrities who inspired us to buy a product. Now all of a sudden, we are all mirrors for other people to buy products. So now we're the new billboards. So, what changed is that we all now have the power to be advertisers for brands...we can now recommend products. Makeup artists don't get invited to launches anymore, they don't receive free products and they are the people who worked in the industry for years and years. But the beauty industry just said 'sorry, you're

not young anymore or cool or funky and you don't have a hundred thousand followers.' (JC, 2018)

This participant's statement points to the way in which social media has given a voice to consumers to the extent of pseudo-celebrities who are perceived as "billboards". We, users of social media, have power to influence others. Since consumers now turn to social media platforms such as YouTube for information and knowledge about beauty and beauty products, there has been a noticeable shift in the beauty industry with regards to who has the most influence and who has the biggest voice to share information and ultimately reach consumers. As suggested in the above quotation by JC (2018), the opinions of magazines, makeup artists and celebrities used to hold the most authority in the beauty industry until social media enabled consumer voices to be shared. Of these consumers, beauty influencers or content creators have particularly become valued as many beauty brands rely on their skills to boost their presence on social media and reach their consumers (The digital revolution is central in L'Oréal's recent US acquisitions, 2016). The participant's statement suggests that the opinion of beauty influencers has become more valuable to beauty brands than those of makeup artists or magazines since they are the ones being included in launches and campaigns.

Solis suggests that the reason that influencers now have the biggest voice is because they possess social capital (2018: 3). Additionally, social media enables two-way communication between beauty influencers and their followers that allows a more intimate and engaging relationship and therefore an opportunity to increase their social capital. In accordance with other authors, Gandini equates self-branding with social capital in a context such as this freelance-based labour market (2016: 125). So how does social

capital earn them an income? As stated in the end of chapter 1, social media has enabled the emergence of a beauty community that is based on the recreational consumption of beauty products and the sharing of beauty- and product related information and knowledge. The commercialization of the online “beauty community” through the monetization of YouTube as well as sponsorships and collaborations with brands meant that social capital could be converted into economic capital.

Although many popular makeup artists have a tremendous amount of social capital, the difference with beauty influencers is that the “mutual acquaintance and recognition” between the influencer and the consumer takes place online and in public. As suggested by Gandini, reputation is now tangible and visible (2016: 134). The fact that messages in the network society function in a binary mode of presence and absence as suggested in the previous section, means that the beauty influencer’s online communication and relationship with those in their networks has become integral to their success.

In fact, there have been numerous debates around the relationship of the internet to social capital which have mostly taken the position that the internet has weakened social capital or that the internet has increased social capital. Nan Lin (1999: 46) argues that “access to free sources of information, data, and other individuals create social capital at unprecedented pace and ever-extending networks”. While it can be agreed upon that social capital has increased in new spaces and decreased in others, this idea does not explain why social capital increasingly takes precedence over other forms of capital such as that which professional makeup artists possess.

Being a professional makeup artist requires cultural capital, in the embodied state in particular. This form of capital requires the labour of investment and assimilation and is acquired through self-improvement (1986:244). Cultural capital also requires time to be invested by the investor and its value is established through the mediation of the time needed to acquire it (1986: 246). This form of embodied wealth cannot be transmitted instantly or be purchased (Bourdieu, 1986: 245) such as “bought likes” frequently referred to in the beauty community. Professional makeup artist and business-owner (Renate, 2018) expresses this embodied capital clearly when she states, “I have been working in the industry for twenty years and I work on my skill every day”. However, as society is increasingly becoming networked, beauty brands are drawn to those with large social networks in order to reach more consumers at a faster pace.

As social capital plays an increasing role in the beauty industry, its value increases and often supersedes the value of cultural capital. Professional makeup artists argue that their years of experience in the industry are overshadowed by the number of followers they have on social media (Reante, Madelin and JC; 2018). Another participant reported that this has led to a loss of respect for makeup artists and even employment opportunities. She stated that she has lost many jobs because she doesn't have enough social media followers and ironically states “I never thought in my life that someone would say to me that I can't get the job, not because I'm not the best, but because I only have five thousand followers” (Renate, 2018). This means that their merit as makeup artists is increasingly being weighted on their social capital (social media ratings) instead of their experience (invested time) and skills. Madelin (2018) sarcastically stated that beauty

influencers “must be more important and know more than the person with thirteen years of experience, actual industry experience...having done thousands of different faces”.

Additionally, in the spirit “how-to” and “do-it-yourself” most beauty influencers and content creators taught themselves to do makeup and practiced their makeup skills on their own faces in their free time. As a consequence, these content creators have developed remarkable skills and techniques in face painting as seen in chapter 1. Because the consumption of makeup became so popular many consumers enjoy it as a hobby or past time and showcase their progress on social media. Social media became a great way for such talented people to be discovered and according to Troy Surrat, “it’s a new way to get there” (Hou, 2016).

Unfortunately, this new type of makeup artist (chapter 1) has not been received with open arms by others in the beauty industry. According to JC, “the makeup world became very difficult because those who are bloggers and influencers are getting booked for makeup workshops and masterclasses” (2018). Celebrity makeup artist Patti Dubroff similarly states that social media has given a big voice to non-professional beauty enthusiasts claiming to be professionals. For professional makeup artist, Madelin (2018), this has watered down professional makeup artistry and has perpetuated the idea that makeup artistry is not a “real job”. In fact, it has affected the market of professional makeup artists because there are so many self-taught makeup artists who do makeup for clients at a very low price which does not validate the time needed to acquire their experience and knowledge. This leaves consumers confused as to why professional makeup artist have the rates they have and to ultimately question their value (Madelin, 2018).

This contention and conflict within the different sectors of the beauty industry can be attributed to what Gandini calls the reputation economy in which the acquisition of reputational capital has become the main element for employability in a context where entrepreneurialism is praised (2016: 134). This means that because social media allows anyone to build a reputation by branding themselves through social media, this reputation also provides them with opportunities in the beauty industry that are offline. In this way, beauty influencers are enabled to transcend the online context and grow their businesses in their material context. As a consequence, the notion of an expert and who can be an expert is challenged in this reputation economy.

The commercialization of the online beauty space and influencer marketing becoming a popular means for beauty brands to reach consumers has meant that beauty influencers such as bloggers, YouTubers and Instagrammers have gained a big enough influence to be able to turn their personal brands into a “serious job” (The digital revolution is central in L’Oréal’s recent US acquisitions, 2016). Since the online beauty community has become commercial, beauty enthusiasts from around the world have been able to generate an income from creating beauty content through social media. Accordingly, the following chapter investigates the nature of the work local beauty influencers are involved in, how this relates to the global beauty industry as well as how this impacts the influencer’s sense of autonomy and control in their work.

# 3

## Work, Place and Autonomy

The ability to assemble and disperse labour on specific projects and tasks from anywhere, anytime, created the possibility for the coming into being of the virtual enterprise as a functional entity (Castells, 2010: 302)

Castells here asserts not only how the structure of work has changed during the information revolution but also how it allowed virtual communities such as the beauty community to become self-sufficient. The restructuring of work made possible by information technology involves lean production methods such as subcontracting and outsourcing, the individualization of labour, the reversal of salarization and the decentralization of work tasks, among other features (Castells, 2010: 282). Sennett (1998: 9) describes these flexible work patterns as “people do lumps of labour, pieces of

work over the course of a lifetime". For him, the most important consideration of this transformation is its impact on personal character which, he argues, has been under attack under in an economy devoted to the short term (1998: 10).

In his discussion of the transformation of work in the information economy, Castells (2010: 282) draws on four key elements identified by Carnoy in his examination of flexible patterns of work. These include working time, job stability, location and the social contract between employer and employee. A closer look at the working conditions of full-time beauty influencers also reveal these flexible work patterns and how they impact these individuals. While some feature more prominently than others, some of these transformations take on a highly contradictory form to reveal the more particular challenges and insecurities which South African beauty influencers face. However, participant accounts show that beauty influencers are not ignorant of these challenges as they demonstrate ways in which combat them. Flexible labour merely describes their nature of work while the challenges and threats they face can rather be ascribed to their marginal spatial location in relation to the global beauty industry.

### ***What does the job entail?***

With regards to the tasks beauty influencers perform in the beauty industry, Cindy (2019) and Sandra (2019) suggest that they are not so different from their jobs as beauty editors during the height of the publishing industry in South Africa. Although there are fundamental differences such that beauty influencers are self-employed and beauty editors are employed by magazines, both were once sought after by the press and invited

to beauty events after which they would reword and share the information they received with their audience (both act as a go-between for beauty brands and consumers). Similarly, beauty editors were flown across the country to attend launches and beauty companies sent them “boxes of products” (Sandra, 2019). But, according to her, “the whole system changed”. Whereas an editor wrote their pieces in the magazine’s voice, content creators has more freedom of expression (Sandra, 2019). Finally, she comes to the conclusion that “it’s the same concept actually but now it’s more online... it’s a lot more visible.”

So how do beauty influencers make an income from creating content and posting it to social media? The main ways in which they generate income is through YouTube where they receive an income generated from the advertisements run on their videos or through brands who sponsor content, collaborate or affiliate with them on campaigns or products being advertised. For example, a brand can sponsor a YouTuber’s video in which they briefly talk about the brand or their product or the viewers are given an affiliate code with which they can get a discount on particular products and brands can track their sales linked to that influencer. In more rare instances a brand will collaborate with a beauty influencer on a product which means that the beauty influencer gets to give their input during its development and have their name on the packaging. To be considered a micro-influencer you need to have at least 2000 ‘authentic’ (not bought) followers as well as a high engagement rate on your social media posts (Kohler, 2019). Beauty influencers are remunerated according to posts, videos and other content they create. This may vary from one influencer to the next, depending on the size of their audience and how much

engagement their content evokes. A rate card with this information is used to estimate their value as an influencer and how much will be charged for different types of content.

However, as with many other creative jobs, there are many misconceptions around being an influencer. The opportunity for fame and free gifts that is commonly associated with being a beauty influencer has meant that having it as a job is often perceived as glamorous. According to Rawbeautykristi, “doing a creative job such as playing with makeup doesn’t mean you only have to do the things that you want to do” (Where I have been, 2019). This suggests that having a job with desirable aspects can overshadow the common responsibilities involved in any other type of work. Additionally, because beauty influencers are ever-present on social media, their posts are perceived to reveal what their everyday lives are like. However, in order to draw the attention of viewers, entertainment value takes precedence over realistic representations of their daily life. According to Maryke (2018), people only see the events and the nice products you get but they don’t know what goes on behind it. As an example, she describes what attending product launches or beauty events are like,

I am so stressed when I go to events because I’m so afraid of missing something. I am just sitting and taking notes and in between I have to post on Facebook and Instagram or take stories. It’s like listen; take stories; post. It’s very stressful. (Maryke, 2018)

This beauty influencer’s statement takes us behind the scenes of those glitzy beauty events where beauty influencers are seen ‘living their best life’. Unfortunately, attending these events is not all fun and games because, like the participant said, they have to perform multiple tasks at the same time while appearing relaxed and in-the-moment in

the images they post onto social media. This participant further reported that being a beauty influencer can be glamorous at times but unfortunately, they do spend most of their time on their computers doing administration, editing videos, creating content and planning new content. According to Maryke (2018), this job involves a lot more than looking pretty although that is only what people see on social media because who wants to see a video of a beauty influencer editing videos?

Ironically, professional makeup artists differentiate themselves from beauty influencers on the basis of the loads of administrative work their job involves while they perceive influencers as only painting their faces and making themselves pretty. They also claim that social media makes being a makeup artist look glamorous and causes it to not be considered an “actual” job (Madelin, 2018). But beauty influencers share this same sentiment when they argue that they don’t like being called an “influencer” because it’s not taken seriously and because the word has acquired a bad reputation. Lesizwe (2018) suggests that she would rather be associated with the media and press while Maryke (2018) suggests that she sees herself as an entrepreneur.

Regardless of how different beauty influencers identify themselves, they are all in the business of creating social capital through their micro-celebrity. Gandini suggests that working in the knowledge economy requires the acquisition of reputational capital through one’s personal networks and while self-branding is often regarded as a form of free labour, he found that for his participants self-branding is a useful and profitable invest that is strategically pursued rather than exploitation (2016: 135). For Bourdieu (1986: 250) the creation of social capital presupposes an *unceasing* effort of sociability, “a series of continuous exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and re-affirmed”. This

crucial aspect of their job is also expressed in the sentiment of ‘always-on’ which Khamis et al. (2017: 203) use to describe the micro-celebrity’s nature of work. The nature of social media also requires beauty influencers to have a constant social media presence because if you don’t post every five minutes then no one sees your posts, as Renate (2018) suggested. Creating social capital and maintaining real relationships with their audience can therefore be considered the main goal of beauty influencers for whom this is a full-time job.

### ***You can choose to have free time***

The shift from fixed to flexible labour time is one of the biggest and most visible hallmarks of the informational economy in accordance with the “supersession of time”, as Castells, (2010: 467) suggests. Flexible labour can generally be described as work that is not constrained by the traditional pattern of 35-40 hours work per week (Castells, 2010: 282). The following beauty influencer’s statement describes how she navigates and negotiates her working time on such a flexible schedule,

I have started using fixed hours this year. I am obviously married so it got to point where it consumed my life and my husband said “listen, you have to set working hours” because I do sleep late, I would get up at eight o’clock but then I would start working immediately. But his viewpoint was that when he goes to work, I work and then when he comes home, I am still working because I loved it so much. But I had to set working hours, but I don’t stick to it completely, but I try. (Maryke, 2018)

For this participant, not having set fixed working hours has caused tension in her home because the time she works does not correspond to her husband's which means that they have less time to spend together. However, work-time flexibility could provide the basis for time-sharing in the household (Castells, 2011: 473). But because she is able to work from home and is self-employed, she has to set her own working hours and structure her time. She tries to structure her work time by enforcing fixed working hours on herself although it's still difficult to comply with because she enjoys her job so much.

Although it seems like she is working longer hours than her husband, flexible labour time does not necessarily mean that people are working longer hours. According to Castells, (2010: 473-474) there has been a dramatic shortening of actual working years in major industrialized countries because people are entering the work force at a later age and fewer people are working over the age of 50. Rather, skilled labour is required to manage its own time by adding more work time while at other times reducing working hours (Castells, 2010: 467). For example, this participant reported that she had "good months" in which she has to get a lot of work done but she also has "slower months" which means that the amount of time she works can also change from one month to the next (Maryke, 2018).

According to beauty influencer Rawbeautykristi (Where I have been, 2019), in a video confessing her struggle with anxiety and self-sabotage, she recalls that she thought having a life that is more free-flowing (in terms of work and personal life), would make her feel more care free but she realised that a lack of structure did not serve her well and without it she always feels rushed. According to Castells, (2010: 473), the diversification of working time in the information economy is measured in terms of each worker's

capacity to manage time which means that structuring working time has become a very individualized and subjective process that may vary from one person to the next. This means that nothing prevents these influencers from having the traditional nine to five work-day if they should choose to do so.

For Maryke (2018), being in control of your own working time by being self-employed also puts you in control of your income. She suggests that you can choose to have free time whenever you want but, “no work, no pay”. Consequently, being self-employed makes taking time off from work more difficult as Maryke suggests, “I am still learning to take things slower”. This points to an increasing emphasis on individual responsibility and accountability when it comes to structuring our work and personal life and consequently more control in doing so.

Another significant way in which our experience of time has changed as a consequence of flexibility is the pace at which work is done due to the compression of time (Castells, 2010:467). This means that time per operation has been shortened and the turnover of resources has speeded up. This is evident in former beauty editors’ experience of working in the publishing industry. According to these participants (8 & 9), magazines in South Africa work three to four months in advance which meant that presentations or pitches for beauty content had to be done months in advance.

According to Sandra (2019), in previous decades the beauty editors would be invited to the launch of a perfume four months before it was due to be released. They were allowed to see it, take it with them and shoot with it but they weren’t allowed to put it in the magazine until it is released. While beauty editors had time to plan content months in

advance, beauty influencers go to launches and take photos with the product and within a few minutes they have posted about it online. Therefore, beauty influencers have to release content quicker and more often, “it’s instant pressure” as Sandra (2019) suggests. However, when considering Maryke’s experience of attending a beauty event, this term can also be adapted to ‘constant pressure’ to express their mode of work.

### ***Nothing is guaranteed***

Another way in which the restructuring of work in the informational economy impacts individuals is through job stability. Carnoy phrases the decline in job stability as a consequence of the task-oriented nature of flexible work as it does not include a commitment to future employment (Castells, 2010: 282). Beauty influencers in South Africa are affected by this restructuring since they mostly work with beauty companies on a contractual basis. These contracts are not based on limited time periods but rather on social media posts, videos, appearances and numerous other tasks that each have their deadline or due date. The work load of beauty influencers therefore involves small and large unrelated projects that can include different formats and platforms, and different brands, each with its own unique voice. This requires moving between different projects and platforms while regularly creating and uploading content for their own brand. Additionally, working on different projects for different periods of time means that beauty influencers had to adapt to a flexible income as well. According to Maryke (2018), she worked her fingers to the bone to make enough money every month but later realised that

during some months she would make more money than others but that does not mean her business is underperforming.

However, according to my participants, being self-employed is not any less secure than being permanently employed. As mentioned previously by Lesizwe (2018), she received a very low income before she left her job to work on her brand full-time. Participants also argue that regardless of having permanent employment the future is unpredictable and therefore they believe in principles such as not 'putting all your eggs in one basket' (Maryke & Madelin, 2018). Madelin suggests that with "every career in any field" having more than one income has become necessary. She uses the example of working for a bank that has existed more than a hundred years (a claim which they often make) yet you still have no guarantee that it will be there tomorrow. This is because workers have generally lost institutional power and have become increasingly dependent on individual bargaining conditions in a labour market that is constantly changing, as Castells (2010: 302) argues. Similarly, in his narrative of the onslaught of flexible labour practices on workers' character, Sennett proposes that "pursuing many possibilities at the same time requires a particular strength of character; that of someone who has the confidence to dwell in disorder" (Sennett, 1998: 62).

These participants' experiences of labour time and job stability perhaps point to the emergence of a more autonomous character that is built on responsibility and self-discipline with which beauty influencers manage and create their personal brands. This is similar to Gandini's study that found that freelancers are more inclined to see themselves as entrepreneurs, creatives and innovators as opposed to a precarious

working class (2016: 135). He suggests that digital freelancers are reluctant to be associated with precarity despite often struggling with income (2016: 135).

Khamis et al. (2017: 200) posit that self-branding through social media is particularly used as a way to retain and assert personal agency and control within a context of uncertainty and flux (Khamis et al., 2017: 200). According to Lesizwe (2018), “you don’t own YouTube. It could shut down tomorrow and if that’s where your goal ends, you’re finished as a brand”. Maryke shares a similar concern when she states that you should not keep all your eggs in one basket and therefore influencers are urged to start their own business “to get their own security” (Maryke, 2018). Working in a volatile environment such as social media means that “you could lose your channel tomorrow or all your subscribers. Or someone could hack your channel and then you lose everything. Nothing is guaranteed” (Maryke, 2018). This means that while social media becomes a tool for self-branding, the goal of self-branding is to transcend social media and establish a brand that is not limited to the virtual world. For Maryke, this means investing in a franchise for example. Although social media is essentially a public space because it operates under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act<sup>6</sup>, users have very little control over how these platforms operate and this can change at any moment.

One such incidence has recently come to life when Instagram announced it will be running a test in seven countries in which some users will not be able to see the number of “likes” or video views that users’ have. According to TIME, this has been an effort by

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<sup>6</sup> This piece of legislation was designed not only to protect the owners of internet platforms from being held accountable for users’ opinions but also to protect users from material that can be considered to be obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable (Introduction to Section 230: B).

the Facebook owned company to get users to focus on the content that people share and not how many “likes” they get (Fitzgerald, 2019). However, users will still be able to see how many “likes” they receive on their own posts if they wish to. This announcement has come in response to social media being linked to mental health issues among young people and research that shows that social media can be addictive as “likes” sends a rush of dopamine to the brain (Fitzgerald, 2019).

Consequently, there have been mixed responses to this announcement by Instagram especially out of concern for beauty influencers. Some argue that this will help weed out influencers who have bought followers while others believe that it could pose problems for establishing influencers’ worth. One issue that problematizes the proposed effects of this movement is that users are still able to see how many “likes” or “views” their own posts receive and can therefore still make a judgement about how others perceive them. In fact, claiming that users experience a ‘dopamine rush’ when getting smartphone notifications such as “likes” suggests that this effect is linked to users’ own “likes” and not necessarily to the likes other users get and yet users can still choose to be notified when their own content receives “likes”.

In addition, this change by Instagram presupposes that social media engagements such as “likes” are fundamentally a source of anxiety and distress for users and overlooks its value as signs of celebration to a person who has beaten cancer or support to a new mom who feels insecure about her body, for example. It also presupposes that users share their photos and videos just for the sake of being *validated* in some way when in fact this argument is actually about the negative experience faced in the absence of “likes” and therefore it is still about a *lack of validation*. Can this adaptation perhaps be

interpreted as a restriction of what is supposed to be public information and can “likes” or “views” truly be obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent or harassing in and of themselves? Either way, the effect that this is going to have on beauty influencers is yet to be discovered. This can constrain beauty influencer’s relationships with their followers and vice versa.

### ***A global audience?***

The final noteworthy and perhaps most significant way in which work has changed in the age of information technology is through location or rather dislocation. According to Castells (2010: 425), the development of electronic communication and information systems allow for an increasing dissociation between spatial proximity and the performance of everyday life's functions such as work. Castells developed the term ‘space of flows’ to refer to the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows of information, technology, images and capital among others (2010: 442). Particularly, this has been made possible due to the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication, such as social media, that connect local and global and formed a multimodal, multichannel system of digital communication which integrates all forms of media as we have seen throughout this thesis (Castells, 2010: xxvii). Lesizwe (2018) explains its repercussions for workers around the world when she states that, “online and digital override time and space. It doesn’t matter where you are.”

Since beauty influencers can work from anywhere in the world due to this digital communication, they have become a valuable tool for megabrands to connect with local

consumers through campaigns and sponsorships. According to Jones (2011: 907) consumer demand for local content grew stronger in the recent decades which led to more local models to be used in advertisements. Today, using local beauty influencers is even more lucrative than local models since they have meaningful relationships with consumers and transfer information in their vernacular. As global mega-brands such as Revlon (23,2%) and L'Oréal South Africa continue to dominate the local makeup market they increasingly look to local “human brands” to stay locally relevant (MarketLine, 2017: 12).

Unfortunately, there are limits to this dislocation because the space of flows is not placeless; meaning that it does not permeate down to the whole realm of human experience in the network society (Castells, 2010: 443, 453). Although the space of flows is based on an electronic network, this network links up with specific places; some communication hubs and some nodes of the network that serve particular functions (Castells, 2010: 443). Maryke expresses this ‘space of place’ when she states that,

you can do what you want to anywhere in the world. So, for example if I go to Australia I can still film videos and upload them and I can still have my South African market. I think maybe if you live in the country-side then it's a bit of a problem because you can't just quickly go to MAC or Benefit. So you'll have to go to “town” or Cape Town to get certain products. But with online shopping you can almost get everything. Location isn't a big issue when it comes to what you want to do. (Maryke, 2018)

Despite this beauty influencer's conclusion, the example she provides suggests that physical location is relevant for access to beauty products, which forms the basis for beauty influencers' content. The participant who suggested earlier that “online overrides

time and space” also recalled that a lot of influencers want to be in Johannesburg because that is where the opportunity is and you are more likely to be invited to events if you live there, “there’s access there”. She attributes this to the additional cost that a beauty brand would undertake to fly a beauty influencer to Johannesburg to attend an event as well as better chances to meet “important people” because they reside in the city. This suggests that the city of Johannesburg serves as a node within the beauty industry network of South Africa and living there can increase a beauty influencer’s access to that network.

Additionally, beauty influencers in South Africa are able to generate an income through social media but not as directly as larger beauty markets such as the United States. Because the YouTube market for beauty videos is so small in this country, South African beauty influencers generate very little income from YouTube itself. In fact, people rarely get paid (Maryke, 2018). If a beauty influencer has accumulated a large enough following and activity on their social media, they can get contracted with a beauty related media company that offers the beauty influencer a rate per view which is more reasonable than YouTube’s monetization, although this is not where the bulk of their incomes come from.

Most of South African beauty influencers’ profits are generated through beauty brands in the form of sponsored posts or videos and campaigns to launch new products, for example. My beauty influencer participants all have agencies who negotiate on their behalf and handle correspondence with brands. Contracts are set up that outlines the terms of their agreement which can include information the beauty influencer is obligated to share around the particular beauty products as well as information they are not allowed to share. Beauty influencers are also remunerated at different rates. According to Maryke

(2018), every influencer has their own rates which are based on their influencer statistics such as followers and engagement, in the form of a rate card, as well as a description of “what kind of brand you are”.

Because South Africa is so diverse in terms of race and culture, the beauty market is divided even further into smaller segments which makes it more difficult for beauty influencers to attract large audiences and charge higher rates. This also means that competition among beauty influencers are “culturally specific” (Lesizwe, 2018). For this reason, Lesizwe proposes that collaborations with other beauty influencers can be beneficial because you never know who you are reaching. In fact, collaborating with influencers with a considerably different audience can help to reach new viewers and form part of their social networks. Lesizwe: I think with the black audience we are all about makeup...beaten up... they want to see like the brightest highlighter, the flawless skin so... I think, for black culture the more makeup the better

However, collaborating with a beauty brand on a cosmetic product or range of products is merely a dream for South African beauty influencers, “It’s not going to happen here. You have to be global for that”, according to Lesizwe (2018). This participant suggests that although local beauty influencers work on a global electronic network, their audience is local and therefore tied to a particular physical context. She continues to explain why this is the case,

If you want to work with a brand, they want to see your stats and if your whole audience is from America then they will say it’s a waste of money because no one is going to buy anything here. (Lesizwe, 2018)

Since beauty influencers in South Africa are used by mega-brands to appeal to local consumers and sell products locally, they are required to have a strong local audience. Additionally, local beauty influencers argue that 'locals' are necessary because 'the internationals' use a lot of products that aren't available in South Africa. Participants particularly make reference to the cosmetic chain Sephora which is located in the United States and sells a large range of luxurious makeup products. Unfortunately, South Africa does not have such a store and consumers are forced to buy products privately from people who bring small amounts into the country which can be very expensive (Madelin, 2018). This means that access to beauty products is rather restricted in South Africa and therefore beauty influencers are restricted in terms of the content they can make since their audience cannot easily buy the products locally and affordably.

Additionally, Madelin argues that South Africans already have access to international beauty influencers and spending money on 'local' would be frivolous. The United States is considered the biggest "YouTube hub" and therefore became a beauty hub for the global beauty industry. Local beauty influencers still rely on 'international' beauty influencers for ideas and inspiration for content since "everything starts with the internationals" who reside in this node (Maryke, 2018). Additionally, following the trends and format of 'the internationals' on social media allows local influencers to be competitive on a global level and perhaps transcend the spatial boundaries that restrict them. Maryke states that she wants to be on par with them and is tired of lagging behind. For professional makeup artist and photographer, JC (2018), South African beauty influencers have the opportunity to be unique because they have their own market but unfortunately, they follow the same recipe which he considers disappointing.

Another challenge that local beauty influencers face because of their material context is related to access to the internet and therefore social media. According to Lesizwe (2018), “people need data to watch videos to see how I am promoting my makeup products”. Unfortunately, the price of data is quite expensive in South Africa and free WIFI is not available everywhere which means that consumers are reluctant to use their smartphone data to watch YouTube videos (Maryke, 2018). According to this participant, YouTube is not at the level it could be because of the restricted access to internet and mobile network companies need to provide consumers with specific data options for YouTube that consumers can afford (Maryke, 2018).

Such restrictions to global networks that transcend time and space exist because the speed of technological diffusion is selective and therefore large areas of the world are switched off from this new technological system (Castells, 2010: 32). According to Castells, this is a critical source of inequality in our society today and given the supposedly placeless characteristic of the technology, it is one of the most striking paradoxes of the Information Age (2010: 22, 377). This means that the challenges faced by South African beauty influencers are far more structural in terms of ‘global access’ to beauty products and information technology and continues to put into question the notion of a global audience.

A visible manifestation of South Africa’s unique context in relation to the global is the perceived dissociation between social media users and consumers with the most disposable income, as numerous participants have pointed out (Renate, Madelin, JC, Cindy). According to Renate (2018), “young people don’t have money” and JC (2018), “how much money can a kid of 18, 19 spend on makeup?”. On the other hand, Renate’s

age group is in their 40's but she argues that this group is not very socially active on social media. Looking deeper into their claims, I have found that the greatest number of active social media users in South Africa are between the ages of 16 and 34 while the age groups from 15 to 34 have considerably lower disposable incomes compared to the age groups from 35 to 55 years (General Household Survey, 2017; Statista, 2014).

As a consequence of this mismatch, beauty brands are considered chasing young people to make “a quick buck out of them. Meanwhile they scare off a lot of other potential clients” (JC, 2018). According to Renate, the age group targeted through social media is also quite small and beauty brands aren't seeing their sales go up. Using young beauty influencers as brand ambassadors can also be a risk if the brand's target demographic is more mature (Renate, 2018). This shows once again, how notions of beauty intersect with class and income in contemporary society, but unfortunately is overlooked by large sectors of the local beauty market. Another crucial contradiction in the local beauty influencer industry is the way in which it intersects with the global beauty market.

### ***It pays to be nice: interacting with international brands from South Africa***

If you look at my Instagram stats you will see most of my following is from South Africa, there are a few from the USA and UK. I would definitely like to grow that because I could work with international brands and then I am allowed to say, “this Maybelline foundation is shit”, you know. And it would be okay. (Maryke, 2018)

The contradiction between the local and the global existing in the South African beauty influencer market presents more than just structural challenges; it affects beauty influencers' ability to express their opinions freely and as well as the measure of creative freedom they can exercise. According to Sandra, social media allows beauty influencers more freedom of expression than being employed by a magazine because you can write in your own voice. She recalls that when writing for a magazine, you have to be very specific to reflect the brand's image and not to veer off too far (Sandra, 2019). For Lesizwe (2018), having more creative freedom was one of the reasons she was happy to quit her job as she was then able to use more of her own ideas.

But working with beauty brands is not completely carefree since you also have to keep in mind the brand's tone as well as their goals. According to Lesizwe (2018), you have the creative freedom when sending a proposal but when you are in a briefing and you are given guidelines that are very black and white it can restrict that your freedom of expression. A good example of this is given by Maryke when she recalled that she did a campaign with a beauty brand for their face masks in which she wasn't allowed to mention any other skincare products during the entire month which made her describe her job as walking on eggshells sometimes.

This restriction on their ability to express their opinions freely, as Maryke suggests above, is rooted in the fact that these local beauty influencers work with beauty brands who want to reach the local consumers. This means that their employment opportunities are limited to beauty brands who sell products in South Africa while the majority of their income is derived from working with brands through social media posts, videos and sponsorships. Lesizwe (2018) expresses this by stating that, "if you are not looking to

make a career out of it then you can probably do just whatever it is you want and not answer to anyone". She continues by saying that if a beauty influencer is looking to make this their livelihood, "it pays to be nice".

Establishing good relationships with beauty brands can also put you ahead in the market by being the first influencer to share a new product with their audience or the first influencer to post about something before it becomes available in stores (Maryke, 2018). Additionally, the mega-brands that dominate the South African makeup market own a number of beauty companies that make use of similar marketing strategies and operate within the same networks. For Maryke (2018) this means that if a beauty company has a bad experience with a beauty influencer, its "sister" company may be reluctant to work with the beauty influencer as well. Similarly, JC (2018) suggests that if you give an honest opinion about a product that did not perform well, a company can take you off their PR lists which means that you would not receive their products anymore. As a matter of fact, products sent by brands aren't even considered gifts but rather business transactions since brands hope you will post about their product (Maryke, 2018). If a beauty brand has sent you products a few times and you have failed to post about it, chances are that they won't include you at all.

Consequently, beauty influencers in South Africa do not have a large enough voice for a brand to change or reformulate beauty products in response to their opinions (Maryke, 2018). Lesizwe (2018) draws a comparison to beauty influencers from the United States who supposedly "slay brands". She reports that if they do not like a product, they can throw it in the trash while filming a video because "that's how far they are with the influencer industry" and the brand would ask them how they could improve their

product. Whereas in South Africa, beauty influencers tip-toe around it and wait until they have “all the power” to be completely honest (Lesizwe, 2018). This reference suggests that the more social capital or influence a local beauty influencer has, the more freedom they have to express their honest opinions and the less they are restricted to their material sense of place.

Although beauty influencers work closely with beauty brands, it does not mean that beauty influencers have become commodities owned by companies or that sell themselves to consumers as suggested by Zoe Glatt in her thesis on the commodification of YouTube vloggers (2017). According to Glatt (2017: 13), “the commodity being sold in their videos is the vlogger themselves”. Glatt makes use of Wendy Brown’s concept, *homo æconomicus*, because she argues the concept is fitting for analysing vlogger’s participation in and inseparability from the exchange of capital (2017: 12). This concept might be useful in relation to the case of the world’s biggest beauty influencer she uses in her analysis but, there should be cautioned against grouping all beauty influencers together as they are not a homogenous group. Further, the use of this concept does not explain what makes beauty influencers different from, say, freelance makeup artists since “at the end of the day it’s nothing new. People do it to make money. We all do what we do to make money”, according to a professional makeup artist (Madelin, 2018).

Additionally, not all beauty influencers or content creators are remunerated for the content they create and having a platform on which to share their creations with others is enough reward. Secondly, an economic argument such as this is in direct contrast to why beauty influencers emerged a decade ago and the majority exist today; to help consumers make good purchasing decisions and to ultimately save money. It also assumes that

consumers are ignorant, passive and unable to realise the true intentions of beauty influencers which is not the case since image culture does not render consumers passive, manipulated dupes but presupposes the cultural creativity of interpreting subjects and “followers can see through that” (Jansson, 2002: 24; Lesizwe, 2018). Finally, beauty influencers’ success is largely predicated on their ability to convince consumers that their primary motivation is not financial. As a matter of fact, self-branding through social media relies on rhetoric of freedom and agency (Khamis et al., 2017: 200).

Beauty influencers clearly demonstrate their autonomy by stating that “I made it clear that I don’t need their approval to post videos” and “my feed is not an advertisement...I will say no to a brand if I feel like the conditions, they are setting aren’t fair” according to Maryke (2018). Unfortunately, many in the beauty industry believe that because the beauty community has become commercial, it is less authentic (Renate, JC, Cindy, 2018, 2019). According to JC (2018), beauty influencers do unethical things because they make money from it whereas magazines had to protect their reputation. What is often overlooked in these sentiments is the fact that if beauty influencers want to be successful in the long run, they have to protect their brand just as much as any magazine.

In fact, beauty influencers are under more scrutiny than magazines and often feel like they are walking on glass (Maryke, 2018). According to Maryke, people go back to your posts and try to find something wrong, “people love to judge”. She continues by saying that when this happens, she would cry for days and couldn’t tell anyone because it would make her seem weak. For Hjarvard, ridicule, gossip and scolding take on new forms because of the distance between the user and the audience which makes it less intrusive and less consequential for the individual than if they had been applied in a face-to-face

situation (2013: 31, 32). Additionally, the user-generated nature of social media means that these platforms have to a large degree become self-regulatory as more content is committed to point out the exploitations and lies told by some of the beauty influencers as well as beauty brands. Consumers then have access to this information as to guide them into learning which sources, they can trust for beauty related information.

## Conclusion

As I was starting my master's degree journey in the beginning of 2017, I felt motivated and ready to face what lied ahead. But before I knew it, I began to crumble under the pressure I had put on myself and from stretching myself too thin. I became disenchanted with the thesis topic I had chosen and had already been working on for several months. In trying to avoid this alluding timebomb, I started binge-watching YouTube beauty videos courtesy of my university residence's free WIFI. With some of my leftover savings I went to the store and picked up a few affordable makeup products recommended by some of my favourite beauty guru's on YouTube as well as a small round mirror. I began playing around with the products I bought and created a different look every day following the precise steps the girls in the videos showed.

Although this was a soothing escape, I still had to face reality and write a research proposal for what I thought I was going to be working on for the next two or three years. But in the midst of presenting my proposal to my colleagues and lecturers I found myself

talking more about this beauty community I had stumbled upon and I can still recall thinking ‘this would be a great thesis topic for someone’. After still feeling dissociated from my thesis proposal and just having finished watching the latest YouTube beauty drama unfold, I grabbed my car keys and headed over to a fellow student’s place to get some clarity. There, she convinced me that this topic was worth pursuing and the next day she helped me develop a game plan I could use to convince my supervisor as well. Since those horrid few months I have never looked back as I have taken on this rather challenging topic which has not seized to surprise me.

Before and during my investigation of this phenomenon, I realised that this beauty community is not there by accident. Beauty and social media have come together in a way that fuels an industry selling products designed around perceptions of beauty. Deeply intertwined with the epochal cross-national transformations of industrialization and globalization, digital media has served to diffuse notions of beauty and create new ideals and aspirations. While developments such as globalization increased consumer access to beauty products, today digital media provides access to information and knowledge about beauty and cosmetics, particularly through images and video, in an ongoing effort to democratize beauty. This is driven by the notion that consumers can now make better purchasing decisions by being informed, learn to use products correctly and improve their skills of using cosmetics. Additionally, user-generated communication platforms allow consumers to actively take part in discussions and conceptualisations of beauty by producing media images in which beauty is performed. Beauty as something to be manufactured, performed and purchased has become reinforced through social media as more and more content about beauty is created and shared among consumers.

Manufacturing beauty is now also associated with increased economic value as social media users are able to make money from performing beauty and from showing others how to manufacture it. This thesis contributes to the growing body of research on social media's effects on perceptions of beauty in three distinct ways.

By using the concept of mediatization, the first chapter demonstrates the increasing role of the media in not only how beauty products are designed and produced, but also how they are consumed. By consuming beauty online, consumers engage in the productive consumption of media images in which performances of beauty are produced in a very public way. Further, digital media has impacted consumers' assumptions and perceptions about beauty through that consumers aspire to look airbrushed and filtered in real life. These aspirations have created a new beauty standard in which consumers not only need to use cosmetics with more skills, but they also need to be tech-savvy and have the appropriate cameras, equipment and software to reach this standard. In the section *#iwokeuplikethis*, we can see that the blurring distinction between the real and the virtual are considered to distort people's perceptions about beauty with regards to what makeup can and cannot do for them.

The chapter is concluded with the idea of a subculture which is focused around the recreational and playful use of makeup in which cultural products are produced. By using the concept of commercial intertextuality, this chapter illustrates that images of beauty and cosmetics are made up of different interrelated texts and images and that these images "speak" to one another. The recreational and artistic consumption of cosmetics that has emerged through image-based social media platforms can also be regarded in terms of Benjamin's argument that art has always been reproducible (1969: 49). The

transformation of cosmetics demonstrates how, similar to art, information technology removes art from the hands of the elite and makes it consumable and producible for the masses. But, does democratization imply authenticity? As cosmetics have become loaded with social meaning the use of cosmetics, as art and social and cultural expression, is also reproducible through photography. As such, beauty as a reproducible “political act” cannot be authentic. The chapter is concluded with the question of whether this subculture of makeup enthusiasts can be regarded as a push back on assumptions that beauty products solely exist to help women achieve a desired ideal and that cosmetics imply that the real you isn’t enough?

In the second chapter, “The Beauty Influencer”, the role(s) the beauty influencer plays within this increasingly digital beauty industry is explored. Initially, only made up of a few girls posting makeup tutorials onto YouTube, the beauty community came into existence when users were able to monetize their content and beauty brands increased their involvement in this type of content. Beauty brands began to send these creators products in hopes that they would discuss it on their platforms as more and more consumers turn to social media for product reviews and recommendations on what to buy. As a consequence, the beauty community became commercial and beauty influencer became the new buzz-word. In South Africa, beauty influencers are predominantly used by mega-brands who dominate the South African cosmetics market in order to reach local consumers.

The title of this chapter expresses the role of the beauty influencer in solidifying and perpetuating assumptions and notions of beauty. Because beauty influencers conform to beauty ideals and enhance their appearance accordingly, they are seemingly awarded

for this by receiving free products, vacations and even cars. This perpetuates the idea of a beauty premium as consumers are convinced that 'it pays to be beautiful'. Through social media consumers are made to believe that obtaining beauty is the pathway to fame and wealth while it is rather social media that allowed the commercial viability and micro-celebrity of beauty influencers in the first place.

In this chapter it is also established that the concept of the beauty influencer is both old and new in that it involves functions previously performed by other players such as beauty editors. The beauty influencer can be characterised a hybrid figure made up of a +consumer, journalist, marketer, photographer, makeup artist, entrepreneur and media producer. I have also suggested that what makes beauty influencers unique to traditional celebrities is that they have social capital and engage in self-branding in order to increase it. By branding the self on social media, beauty influencers are able to build a reputation that flows over into the offline context as well. Participants demonstrate that the increasing value of social capital in today's economy is a source of contention and conflict as professionals and non-professionals are able to compete in the same market.

The final chapter explores the nature of work that beauty influencers are involved in and how it relates to flexible work patterns characterising the information economy. I have found that beauty influencers' main preoccupation is generating social capital by branding themselves on social media. This thesis has found that beauty influencers' nature of work can largely be characterised in relation to flexible labour practices made possible by the information revolution. Beauty influencers work on their own schedule and on a contractual basis per post, video and other content they create. Although working on a platform so volatile, the beauty influencers I spoke with do not consider their jobs

precarious. Fully aware of the threats and challenges this job holds, my participants suggest that it gives them more control and creative freedom than they had when they were employed by other companies. Additionally, self-branding on social media creates a reputation that translates into the offline context and allows their brands to transcend social media.

These findings correlate with Gandini's study of freelancers in which he states that these networked branding practices workers in the digital economy engage in, show that they have internalised the characteristics of the market (2016: 136). Additionally, notions of self-discipline and self-control are common in my participants' descriptions of their work. Can it be argued that these neoliberal values closely align with the notion of modern femininity that presupposes self-control and restraint recalled by Morgan (1970)? Does this alignment perhaps connect beauty with the neoliberal economy in a unique way?

This chapter also questions the notion of a global audience in relation to South Africa's beauty influencer industry, not because it doesn't exist but because the influencer industry is inextricably tied to the local beauty market. Local beauty influencers predominantly work for beauty megabrands who want to reach the local market and so most of their income is based on working with these brands. This requires that they have a local audience and prioritise their content according to it. Even if a beauty influencer has a great number of followers, if their audience is not local enough it would not translate to sales. Since the local beauty market is quite small, beauty influencers here do not generate much income from YouTube itself. Consequently, their dependence on beauty brands restricts their autonomy and freedom to express their opinions fully. For these

local influencers, becoming global sensations would allow them to generate income from YouTube and attract global beauty brands, thus removing their physical restrictions.

Unfortunately, influencer marketing is often used as a one-size-fits-all solution to reach consumers but in South Africa its relevance has been put into question. As revealed by participants, social media targets young people and in South Africa young people don't have as much money to spend on beauty products than, say, consumers in their middle years. This leaves out a large sector of the beauty market as more and more advertising resources are ploughed into digital platforms. This and other contradictions in the South African beauty influencer market puts into question information technology's ability to despatialise work and ultimately override space. Castells' (2010: 443) assertion that the space of flows is not placeless is clearly demonstrated as there exist particular nodes that determine the nature and scope of this market in South Africa.

Today, Jones' statement that beauty is rife with contradiction is truer than ever (2011: 911). The emergence of mass self-communication platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Facebook allow consumers to participate in assumptions and notions about what it means to be beautiful compared to a few decades ago when beauty firms, magazines and television were largely responsible for establishing beauty ideals. As a result, different varieties and versions of beauty have become widespread on these platforms in an attempt to diversify perceptions of beauty. For example, men's participation in drag culture and showing drag tutorials has become a popular theme on social media. Whether this has promoted men in general to use cosmetics is however, questionable. Additionally, social media stars such as Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner have caused millions of women to change their exercise regimen to also get those curvy bodies. Have these

celebrations made us believe that everyone is beautiful in their own way or do they merely represent new ideals and standards for consumers to aspire to?

The fact of the matter is that if everyone is beautiful then no one is beautiful. The concept of beauty inherently implies distinction and comparison and has no less waned in today's efforts to diminish its impact. This raises the important question of whether the democratization of beauty is in fact favourable to society? And does extending the definition of beauty to include more versions of it, relieve more women from the expectations and standards they hold their appearance to? Although social media allow consumers to make better choices about their consumption and purchase of beauty products, their participation in consuming beauty is no less expected. While the beauty industry is increasingly praising different versions of beauty and celebrating diversity within its conceptualisation, it does not tell consumers that they don't need to be beautiful.

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