

Stream chosen : Communities and Social Media

## Beauty Influencers, Marketing and Advertising on Social Media and Authorial Identity

### Abstract:

This paper will deal with the understanding of beauty influencers on social media platforms, primarily Instagram, and how the concept of an influencer has become a marketable asset for beauty brands in the promotion of their products. We will analyse the way that influencers interact with their following to create trustworthy bonds between follower and influencer. The way in which an influencers authorial identity and performative identity is represented through various examples will help illustrate the way in which the influencer influences their following through their consistent and inconsistent online identities. With the analysis of the influencer follower relationship this paper will follow on to use the concept of author-reader contract which will help determine the importance in the way social networking has evolved and easily changes throughout time and throughout events. With the use of the example of Jaclyn Hill's failed lipstick launch for her cosmetic line *Jaclyn Cosmetics* (*Jaclyn Cosmetics*, 2021), we will be able to see an illustration of these ideas and understand the concepts further.

### Introduction

The concept of influencer is commonly known amongst the world of social media and its networking capabilities. According to Crystal Abidin an influencer is “everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles”(2021, para. 29). She follows this definition by explaining an influencer as a person who interacts and engages with their followers whilst obtaining financial profits from advertising products for companies on their social media platforms (2021, para. 29). The influencer therefore has a level of reliance on their following which shows that there is a building of trust between the influencer and follower when it comes to promoting and advertising of products. Establés, Guerrero-Pico, &

Contreras-Espinosa state that, “the most popular influencers increasingly depend on the industry to maintain their professional activity at the cost of seeing the complicity with their audience diminished”(2019, p. 220). We can therefore understand that whilst influencers promote and advertise brands within the beauty community, their online identity and communication with their followers may easily be damaged through the risk of breaking the unwritten contract between the consumer and the influencer. As a case study this paper will analyse the case of Jaclyn Hill and her release of her lipstick collection in 2019 and how her social media presence and identity was damaged on twitter and Instagram through the promotion and reception of her own cosmetic brand “Jaclyn Cosmetics” (*Jaclyn Cosmetics*, 2021). Therefore this conference paper will argue that beauty influencers interact with consumers to promote beauty and lifestyle brands using the affordances of YouTube and Instagram platforms to encourage sales and promote their own online identity however this new way of social networking may break away from an “author-reader contract” between the consumer and the influencer.

The concept of a beauty and lifestyle influencer can be seen in the way that their online identity is portrayed as relatable whilst being interactive within social media platforms which reinforces strategic relationships between the influencer and their audience. “According to a survey by Cosmetics Europe, about 51 per cent of consumers find information on cosmetic brands’ websites, blogs, social media networks, beauty tips forums, and smartphone applications, which the cosmetic brands use to connect with consumers”(Siti Hasnah Hassan, et al. 2021. p. 2). This shows that there are many platforms that rely on social media to communicate with audiences. However, for these brands to be fruitful in their marketing strategies, they are often reliant on using popular influencers that agree to promote their products in exchange for a percentage of money from the sales. In this case we are looking at beauty influencers on Instagram. According to Konstantopoulou, Rizomyliotis, Konstantoulaki and Badahdah, “When consumers trust influencers, they accept recommendations that could alter their purchasing decisions”(2019. p. 311). Therefore, the relationship between the influencer who is promoting the product and the consumer who is at the same time often a follower and supporter of the influencer consists of a mutual trust between each party. Furthermore, “For companies to establish a good relationship with their customer base, it is important they work

with influencers who are trusted by most of the target audience”(Konstantopoulou, et al. 2019. p. 311).

As an example of a relationship between a beauty influencer promoting a brand and product on Instagram we can look at posts such as reality tv star social media influencer Abbie Chatfield who promoted in an Instagram post from the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 the famous makeup brand Benefit in which she expresses how much she loves their new eyelash products where she states “Lashes are so long and full thanks to my @benefitaustralia They’re Real! Mascara”(Chatfield, 2021). We can also see the exact same photo of her holding the products on Benefit Australia’s own Instagram page in which they show a more informational caption promoting the product and its effectiveness whilst promising that their client (Abbie Chatfield) also adores their product which is why they should purchase it. With the emergence of the ‘beauty influencer’ there is a level of effectiveness in using influencers who promote beauty and lifestyle in their everyday lives. Influencers with beauty and lifestyle social media pages habitually are a great source of marketisation in that it reinforces the trust and communication between the influencer and brand and the consumer/follower. Kádekova and Holienčinová state that “Even though influencer marketing is a relatively new strategy, it continues to be a viable solution for marketers who are willing to think outside the box while building relationships with their target market” (2018. p. 91). Therefore, with the example of social media platform Instagram and its affordances in relation to the promotion of beauty products through the use of beauty influencers, we can see that it is essential for the consumer to trust, engage and communicate with the influencer and their brand promotions for there to be an effective marketing strategy for sales within the brand.

Within the “beauty community” which is commonly linked to influencers who interact and communicate with their audiences and followers, we are able to see the foundations in which the influencer influences and attracts people who have similar interests or who are new to the topic of beauty. It is also apparent that whilst beauty influencers are promoting beauty tips and lifestyle tips, they commonly use tools to remind their audiences that social media platforms are not ‘reality’, thus creating a more trustworthy approach towards gaining their followers trust and keeping their integrity on their social media platforms. According to Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Lauritsen, there are two essential components that

brands try to find in social media presences when it comes to trying to market their products and having an influencer that will be able to live up to the challenge of promoting products despite having to disclose the paid ad on the post (2018. p. 337). These two components are “The Source Credibility Model” and the “Source Attractiveness Model” (2018. p. 337).

These two models relate to the influencers ability to engage and captivate the audience and guarantee sales and involvement from the followers and “Though there are many personal qualities marketers favor influencers to possess, each of the source models narrow the list down to the attributes that make influencers most persuasive”(2018. p. 337).

With the example of Holly Hagan on Instagram, we are able to see an influencer with a large following of 3.8 million followers. In her post from the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, we can see her promoting and advertising a giveaway to her followers for the brand Doll Beauty in which she reposts a caption from @\_dollbeauty who state that they have teamed up with the influencer and are giving followers a chance to win a prize from their beauty line (Hagan, 2020). With this example, we are able to see that the influencer, Holly Hagan has let her brand deal with Doll Beauty be advertised in a way that shows that she is in a partnership with the brand and shows the audience that she herself has complete trust in the brand (Doll Beauty, 2021). She achieves this by promoting a giveaway of the brands products, and in promoting herself through the brand as a collaboration between the influencer and a high sought after brand. We can therefore see, that the influencer puts trust and gains trust in her online identity. However, whilst Holly Hagan shows a seemingly trustworthy and professional approach to her brand deal and Instagram post promoting makeup, we can question whether her online identity can be seen as performing identity (Hagan, 2020). According to Lillian Lem Atanga, “Georgalou notes that performing identity is not a matter of articulating a single identity, but of mobilizing a whole repertoire of momentarily positioned identity features”(2018. p. 303). Therefore, when we examine the Instagram page of Holly Hagan we can determine that whilst she promotes many lifestyle and beauty posts, there is only a small amount of posts that promote makeup and cosmetics that are not paid partnerships compared to posts that are gifted or personal products. Therefore, with the inconsistency of her identity in the beauty area and her sudden admiration for a brand, we can think of this as performing identity in a way that may show a shift in the way that the influencer interacts and communicates with their audience. This therefore comes across as inconsistent as she is only promoting brands that are giving her a percentage of money from the sales and the advertising she is providing. Whilst performing identity is not a negative attribute, it can contribute to the breaking of trust between the influencer and the follower.

Inconsistency within the way that social media influencers portray themselves through their relationship with their followers can be compared to the idea of the author-reader contract. According to Tierney and LaZansky “Assuming that there is at least an attempt made by an author to communicate a message, and by a reader to interpret that message, it then seems reasonable to assume that there is an implicit contract between author and reader—a contract which defines the role of each in relation to the text”(1980. p. 606). In this case, the influencer is the author and the follower is the reader. With the influencer posting on Instagram, there is an unwritten agreement in which the influencer is meant to promote and post content that is true, trustworthy and disclaimed of any relevant information that could be false. When the author (influencer) breaks the trust of the reader (follower), it can be linked to the concept of the breaking of the author-reader contract that can be found in untrustworthy acts that compromise the influencers credibility and reputation. Examples of broken author-reader contracts on Instagram within the beauty industry include false advertisements in which influencers will post about a product that goes against their usual values and identity, as well as advertising products and brands that have received backlash in the past or have been controversial. This brings us to the concept of cancel culture. According to Eve Ng “digital practices often follow a trajectory of being initially embraced as empowering to being denounced as emblematic of digital ills”(2020. p. 621). Whilst a beauty influencer is able to be empowering and be looked up to by their following, cancel culture has brought along the quick shift in which an influencer can break the author-reader contract but is unable to come back from these events or mistakes. This can therefore show that their online identity and performing identity is tarnished and shows that social media and its new way of networking and communicating within distinct platforms, can show a very different side to the way that people communicate and interact with brands that promote products that rely on the influencer as a marketing ploy for their company.

To illustrate the concepts above, we shall be looking at the case of Jaclyn Hill and her first launch of her cosmetics line *Jaclyn Cosmetics* in 2019 (*Jaclyn Cosmetics*, 2021). On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2019, Jaclyn Hill posted a YouTube video entitled “*Introducing Jaclyn Cosmetics*” (Hill, 2019). In this video Jaclyn announces that her very own makeup brand is launching and that she will be starting her collection with a lipstick launch in which she will be releasing 20

lipsticks to introduce her followers and fans to the brand (Hill, 2019). Unfortunately, shortly after the release of her lipsticks, reviews started to emerge stating that the lipsticks were faulty, had small plastic bubbles in them and fluffy white fibres (Ilchi, 2019). Whilst her main promotion of the lipsticks was on Instagram and YouTube, which is where she started her journey as an online beauty influencer, most of the backlash concerning her lipsticks was in fact found on Twitter. Many statements followed by proof pictures were posted with captions such as “Why is my @jaclyncosmetics Decaf lipstick clumpy?? @JaclynHill this can’t be ok right??” (Ilchi, 2019). From this backlash, Jaclyn Hill was considered to have lost all credibility in her authorial identity as a YouTube and Instagram influencer. She was therefore labelled through this backlash as “cancelled”. According to Georgina Laud “Cancel culture is a term which has been growing in popularity in recent months, with public figures facing widespread criticism often termed as “being cancelled” across social media”(2020. para. 2). In relation to the author-reader contract and the way she has portrayed her online identity and advertising of her own brand, we can see that whilst she was attached to her own social media platforms as an influencer, she equally attached her identity to the brand. Whilst being shown as an influencer and brand owner, she lost credibility when she broke the trust that she had created through her platforms. The use of Twitter being prominent in this case could implicate that it is the fastest way to communicate with influencers and call out inconsistent behaviours or events. According to Nasir and Whitehead “brands and customer satisfaction are both positively related to users' behavioural loyalty”(2016. p. 743). Whilst Jaclyn Hill had created a loyal and engaging following, she still broke the values that she had been preaching on her platforms for a long amount of time. Therefore as Nisar and Whitehead stated, the way in which consumers interact with a brand and their loyalty to it, heavily influences their behaviour towards the brand and its products. Through the affordances of Youtube and Instagram, Jaclyn Hill was able to promote her own brand which would be a source of trust within her following as she was responsible for the company itself. However, she broke the author-reader contract which therefore made her authorial identity and social media presence unreliable and inconsistent (Hill, 2019). This way of networking shows that the consumer and provider have a strong reliability on each other for which beauty brands and advertising on social media can be made redundant through the way in which an influencers online identity is portrayed and which values and performing identity they choose to pursue.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, beauty influencers interact with consumers to promote beauty and lifestyle brands using the affordances of YouTube and Instagram platforms to encourage sales and promote their own online identity, however this new way of social networking may break away from an “author-reader contract” between the consumer and the influencer. Whilst social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter have shown that influencers use these platforms to market and promote brands and deals that have been offered to them, we are able to see that influencers can easily break away from their perceived identity and performing identity which in turn shows the breaking of trust and credibility between the follower (consumer) and influencer. This may bring the questioning of the genuineness of the ideology of an influencer and how this may affect different demographics within their following. Whilst the promotion of beauty brands is often seen in beauty influencers, the way in which the follower and the influencer communicate and portray their online identity shows that brands heavily rely on influencers to promote their products even at the detriment of the influencers' authorial identity within their social media platforms.

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