The American Dream:
Understanding the Charismatic Capitalism of the Beauty Industry

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Abstract

This thesis aims to gain understanding of the reasons behind makeup being one of the most resilient products of consumer culture. It consists of a detailed analytical study of the makeup industry in the American marketplace with a focus on two innovative business strategies developed in the last decade and in the 1950s respectively. Two case studies were carried out. The first case study examines the concepts of community and consumerism within YouTube beauty videos and their influence on the audience's purchasing aptitude. The second case study explores the selling methods and distribution channels of the beauty company Avon which benefited the makeup industry in the post-World War II period. This project will conclude with a discussion of the lipstick effect that will help to scientifically break down the reasons behind the conspicuous consumption of makeup products. This thesis is devoted to the exploration of the social and cultural forces that affected and created business techniques in the makeup industry, where product innovation and its marketing strategies are the leading factors to its ceaseless success.

Keywords: consumer culture, makeup, marketing strategies, new media, direct selling, advertisement, YouTube, Avon, lipstick effect, female empowerment, American studies.

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Preface

I have always been interested in and fascinated by the beauty culture myself. I actually share most opinions regarding what women today think of what might enhance their appearance and increase their self-confidence: a passion for makeup. I actively search for YouTube beauty tutorials to not only learn new tricks and techniques on how to apply makeup, but I also find this kind of content extremely entertaining. This offers me the tools that give me some insight into the American society of today, as most YouTubers I follow happen to be from the United States. The extensive variety of beauty videos thus gives me the chance to enliven my passion and curiosity towards what young American women consider beauty and their journey towards success.

Beauty is a passion that I have had for many years, as makeup has come to represent more than a mere style code, it has also become a statement about female empowerment, strength, and independence for me. Aesthetics have always played an important role in my life, growing up I have always been surrounded by beauty icons who influenced my view on what is beautiful and appealing to the eye, from Italian movie stars to the closest women in my life. In many ways, my enthusiasm about makeup and the beauty culture in general made it possible for me to analyze the development of the promotion of women's beauty and make it an ideal fit with both my personal interests and American Studies. This in turn allowed me to critically explore how beauty companies have made their way into women's identities, and grasp the circumstances that turned us women into consumers.

My particular interest in the discussion of the cultural and social influences on the marketing of women's beauty was bolstered by the curiosity of discovering the intermediaries that regulate the appeal and sale of beauty products. In my study of consumer culture, I found that companies like Avon, which are led by ambitious women, are examples of what Nicole Biggart refers to as "charismatic capitalism," as theoretical accounts of the American globalization process actually made their way in the branches of American culture (22-23). I wanted to pay close attention to the forces that shaped the thinking patterns of women along with the factors that made them loyal consumers of American beauty products. My intent is to understand how much of this "charismatic capitalism" is translated into a global phenomenon and to what extent this process involved the local marketing campaigns – such as that of Avon – and the evolution of advertising and marketing professionals. In this thesis I investigated many of the ways in which advertising for beauty products has been propagated in the United

States. I mainly focused on the know-how's of YouTube beauty vloggers and of the Avon sales representatives, from the birth of Avon and other local women's businesses that led to the rise of the mass market in the early 20th century to the modern everyday cosmetic practices shared in the media.

I chose the post-World War II period in particular because I have found that era to be particularly important for analyzing the selling and distribution strategies of direct selling beauty companies such as Avon. The choice to use Avon as a case study in particular was made because in the post-World War II period this company offered women door-to-door selling as a way to success and economic independence, and because Avon in a general sense symbolized female empowerment at that time (Burch 741-751). Hence, I find these aspects to be relevant to the understanding of the role of makeup in American capitalism.

Originally launched as the California Perfume Company in 1886, Avon was first listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1964 and it is one of the biggest direct-selling companies today (Kumar et al. 289). Companies like Avon that use direct selling marketing actually work differently than traditional companies. Direct selling companies give the opportunity to both consumers and customers of making a standard income and according to the American sociologist Nicole Biggart, they are forms of charismatic organizations, hence the expression "charismatic capitalism". Direct selling companies incorporate a system of beliefs and values not exclusively related to efficiency or profitability, but to ideals such as duty, honor, pursuit of beauty, religious calling, personal loyalty or the importance of a cause (Biggart 107-110). Furthermore, I find that analyzing Avon in particular is important in order to understand the relationship between beauty brands and the construction of American popular culture. I will thus analyze what ideologies makeup brands attach to selling, buying and using beauty products. Nowadays makeup is marketed as a symbol of female empowerment, as a result of what was the representation of the lifestyle of middle class American housewives in the 1950s.

The specific study of beauty marketing strategies through YouTube aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the correlation between women's use of beauty products relating to their role in society and to their self-identity, and the financial development of cosmetic companies. In this research on theories of media studies and U.S. consumer culture, many accounts of marketing strategies of beauty companies are based on theories in the field of American Studies – that will be explained in the theory section- which

allowed this project to be an interdisciplinary study on the subjects of personal choice, as well as allowing me to switch the focus from a corporate to a cultural and intellectual perspective.

Coming from the field of American Studies, I have found that my attempt to identify the cultural changes within the marketing of American beauty products has been at times challenging. It has thus been interesting to try to converge the academic research belonging to my studies with the commercial context of the subjects. It was nonetheless complex, but for me it did not make the topic any less fascinating, as I feel that American Studies has allowed me to operate within a wide range of theories and academic approaches such as gender and performance theory, race theory and media studies that I have applied as theories to analyze my case studies in this thesis.

Throughout my research I have explored different ways regarding how to examine the connections between beauty businesses and their influences on society and more specifically women. I have relied on the fact that strategic American media products have definitely played a role in expanding the commercialization of beauty products and that the enterprises and expertise of many women successfully allowed beauty companies to grow rapidly even in periods of economic downturns. Writing my Master's thesis has given me the chance to broaden my horizons in regards to understanding the connection between advertising and mass media, which are critical elements for the promotion of not only American beauty products, but also of American beauty standards in the world.

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Introduction

Advertisements – especially for beauty products – represent women in numerous roles and tell the audience through images what the ideal beauty of a woman should look like. One study by Stephens, Hill and Hanson conducted on American women shows that false representations of a flawless female beauty are linked to commercials which are aimed at and surround the audience incessantly (141-150).

The woman in a way is compelled at an already early age to learn that she has to spend a considerable amount of time, energy and above all money – allowing cosmetics companies to largely benefit from this - striving to achieve this epitome of a perfect woman. Women continuously respond to the most sophisticated marketing tactics that persuade them to buy, and the extensive success in the beauty industry suggests that the optimal prototype of beauty seems to strongly influence women's conception of what is beautiful. These techniques and the diffusion of unrealistic representations have very serious adverse effects on individuals in general, but more specifically on women. Indeed, advertising is not only a guide to the consumption of a product, but it also produces an overall effect on promotion and of ideological legitimacy of the consumption itself, considering it as a lifestyle and as a social imaginary (Trekels et al. 173-189). Representations of idealized women not only have a negative effect on the self-esteem of women, but also affect the perception that men have of women (Tuncay Zayer et al. 1-12). As theorist Laura Mulvey states, the woman in the advertisements (as in general in mainstream culture) appears as an object and is transformed into a projection of a man's desire (6-18).

Today women are confronted with a world dominated by materialism which does not concern abstract and immaterial phenomena. It is instead structured as sets of matter, tangible entities - beauty products in this case - able to interact not only with their bodies, but also with their minds; not only with their senses, but also with their thoughts: therefore products become true "cult objects", rather than mere items (Van Binsbergen et al. 30-36).

Commodities, or more specifically beauty products evolve into solid objects that are part of women's daily life, no more spontaneous products of a given world, but actual artifacts created to comply with specific demands. Female consumers then turn products into objects of meaningful consumption experience (Venkatesh et al. 13).

Regarding the financial aspect, the marketing and campaigning process has been made possible in the United States by the convergence of technological development, the extension of a mass market, and above all the boost to capitalist investment in the rising industry after the First World War, which gave a new meaning to mass production, along with reviving its image and its role in everyday life (Kessler-Harris 108-142). Accordingly, consumers' needs were identified in products that mass production has made available to a rapidly increasing number of people. This includes tools and devices, which in large parts were dealing with the basic needs of the consumer but also satisfying other types of demands. By acting on people's desires and attributing new values to objects their use soon translated from utilitarian into being related to consumer culture. They are no longer simply utilitarian items, consumers now buy these products even when they do not need them because of the advertisements that are aimed at them. An example is precisely that of the beauty product: it does not merely perform as an object of utility but it now plays a crucial role in a culture dominated by the economy and by the most stringent standards of beauty.

The main research question that will guide this thesis is as follows: What are the reasons behind makeup being one of the most resilient products of consumer culture and its undisrupted success in periods such as the 1950s and from 2008 onwards? The sub questions that will be explored in order to answer the main question are: 1) What methods does the American beauty industry use to create the extreme interest the consumer has towards beauty products under the scope of new media? And 2) What social and cultural forces affected and created marketing plans and campaigns for Avon in the 1950s? Although there is research about Avon on its own and about YouTube on its own, there is not much research that compares and contrasts the two, and this thesis aims to fill this gap in the research.

- Theory

The category of beauty videos will be closely examined in order to show their influences on women and the beauty business. The videos that will be analyzed have been created by female users, as the most subscribed YouTube beauty channels are owned by women (VidStatsX). These YouTubers share their beauty tips and expose their everyday life, which very often shows the audience secrets for managing career goals and their personal life. The audience seems to be attracted to the lifestyle shown by beauty influencers on their vlogs, which often present the epitome of a work-family balance. The content of these videos often presents a

modern version of the concept of the American Dream, as new social roles among women are revealed: a beauty vlogger's regular day seems to be far from what a prototype of a day in corporate America looks like.

In order to thoroughly explore the issues of the beauty industry and the role of women, this thesis follows a case study design, with in-depth analysis of marketing strategies through YouTube beauty videos and the rise of the mass market and the launch of the brand Avon.

To better understand the extent to which media affect the perception of the female body, it is fundamental to understand how advertising as well as beauty industries work. Advertising, in its current condition of global medium, plays an increasingly crucial role in society, not only in the broad field of mass communication, but it also performs an irreplaceable function to support economic and cultural orientation within the system of mass consumption: the active duty of the media, without which the signs and messages of the beauty culture would not be possible to circulate (Pounders et al. 538-555).

Advertising, in this sense, can successfully reach the audience mainly because it captures messages and meanings already existing in the collective imagination to then reintegrate them directly in the goods and commodities available for consumers, so that the goods themselves can influence the consumers. Recent studies have found that global brands recognize the importance of YouTube as an effective tool for the promotion of their products (Dehghani et al. 171).

Advertising is a creative field that uses different tools to win the consumers' minds: a promotional campaign is more likely to be successful if it fits with the consumer's own personal values and aspirations. As Lev Manovich explains, today's process of increasing aestheticization of everyday life through advertising can be realized by working jointly with grasping the manifestations of the consumers' needs (320 – 324).

In order to understand how YouTube videos and other media products contribute to shaping the viewers' perception of women, it is useful to have theories that can provide an oversight of the academic literature this thesis argues. Furthermore, theories that can help to define the features of the dynamics that shape the social and cultural relations between the marketers and the consumers of beauty consumption will be discussed. In relation to my analysis, YouTube videos help forge our ideas about American society (in the case of American beauty vloggers) and our ideas about feminine beauty. As will be shown later, women represented leading figures in many parts of society even during critical periods of war and economic recession.

However, their representation often respects rules of male perception as these videos focus mainly on the woman's body, which is seen as an example of commodification as it attracts a mass audience. Thus, the use of the female image in beauty videos, along with the promotion of beauty products, can be considered highly instrumental.

As Mulvey states, many media products are based on voyeurism and the fetishization of the female body and along with the beauty products that are being promoted, they become imprisoned in the role of a highly desired object (3). YouTube's use of beauty videos has confirmed such representations. YouTube is thus a fertile ground for cultivating these perceptions because of the viewer's affinity towards such videos and beauty companies' eagerness to make massive profits. Although over forty years have passed since the publication of Mulvey's work, her concerns are still relevant in relation to current gender and work issues. It is evident in this thesis that the same issues Mulvey discusses still exist today. The combination of different theoretical approaches from the most recent works to older literature about gender theories, media studies and theories of marketing with their focus on the American market and society, will constitute the ground of the theoretical framework of this thesis**.**

Lev Manovich's theoretical approach to mass cultural production will be relevant for my discussion about the relationship between media products such as beauty videos and the consumption of beauty products. In his theory, Manovich notices the "participatory culture" of the consumer in the social media environment. He claims that new media is constantly evolving and adapting to new trends and many companies (in this case beauty brands) use online strategies to reach out to potential customers. Thus Manovich claims that strategies and tactics switch places according to new demands and tendencies: "subcultures themselves rarely develop completely from scratch; rather they are the result of the cultural appropriation and/or remix of earlier commercial culture" (326). Along the same lines of theoretical approach, Roger Silverstone's theory on the consumption cycle will prove useful insights for discussing the consumerist message of beauty videos. He describes his model of mutually dependent consumption and production as a cycle consisting of six moments. This model will provide a suitable observation for the relation between beauty products, YouTube and the amateur media in the twenty-first century in general (124).

In order to examine what methods American beauty industries use to create the extreme interest the consumer has towards beauty products under the scope of new media, I will apply theories that will allow me to understand the popularity of YouTube beauty videos. A theory by Marcel Mauss puts emphasis on the value of human experience in social relations, and in this thesis this theory will be applied to the relation between a YouTuber and their audience. In 1925 the French sociologist Marcel Mauss published *An essay on the gift: the form and reason of exchange in archaic societies*. The gift consists of three phases: giving, receiving, reciprocating; and this is the obligation which constitutes the foundation of the social bond that is often established between YouTubers and viewers. The study conducted by Mauss highlighted a flaw in Western thought and it represents a refuge against a capitalist society, and more specifically in a moneymaking context such as YouTube, where acts of sharing, communalism and conviviality can be experienced. Mauss began to think that the gift was not a form of trade typical of only ancient societies and that his theory could be applied even in a civil society. Thus, the theory of the gift is also present in modern societies and can be applied to modern contexts such as YouTube.

Moreover, a very important theoretical approach has been the notion of Americanization and Romance with America by Winfried Fluck which allowed me to analyze the relation between beauty and female empowerment under the scope of the narrative of the American Dream. I will show how Fluck's position on Americanization worked towards reinforcing narratives of American popular culture, which he points out to be an "unexpected manifestation and consequence of modernity" (263).

The concept of female economic empowerment will also be examined in the second chapter which will analyze the marketing strategies of the American beauty company Avon. In order to do so, this project will conduct an inquiry on the origin of this direct sales company, which in conjunction with the media aspect of YouTube, it intends to determine the extents to which social and cultural influences allowed the promotion of materialism and consumerism in the United States and abroad. The objectives of the first two chapters therefore are to determine whether consumerism only endorses beauty products or also American ideals and ways of life which are presented to the whole world through media. Theories of the consumption cycle - as will be discussed in the first chapter following Roger Silverstone's approach - and mediated experience have shown how media consumption and production inform and overlap with each other (Elliott et al. 131-144).

Lastly for my theoretical approach, it would have being nearly impossible to discuss the representation of female beauty through media without referring to Mulvey's view on feminist film theory, who uses a psychoanalytic approach. She shows how in films the male gaze rules, as films use sexual pleasure through observing, producing obsessive voyeurs, to show that the male gender construction is predominant in our society (3). It was possible for me to transpose this discourse onto YouTube as both male and female viewers look through this male gaze as the vlogger directs the camera in this way. I believe that we can thus summarize the case of YouTubers becoming the images of meaning rather than the maker of meaning as follows:

> Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (Mulvey 2)

The goal of my thesis is to use visual semiotic analysis to investigate the ways in which beauty culture has evolved through contemporary media and the impact that beauty products have on women's lives.

- Methodology

Through a visual analysis of the semiotics of YouTube beauty vloggers, I noticed that much of YouTubers' literature follows a consumeristic structure. This perspective agrees with the argument already indicated by Marsha L. Richins: self-realization can be achieved through materialistic means (beauty products, in this case) (325).

I will also examine the extent to which visual communication influences the sales of beauty products in periods of financial and political disorder. Visual communication will thus be an important factor for understanding the success of beauty marketing strategies over the years. In light of these criteria and following a similar approach such as Gillian Rose's, the interpretation of visual images nowadays communicate great meaning: "the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies" (6). Visual analysis thus tells us a lot about modern society and is the methodological approach that allowed me to take a closer look at images – what depictions YouTubers portray – and what messages beauty products convey.

Rose's book gives us the tools to better understand the cultural dimension of consumerism. In this project I will highlight how consumer culture surrounding beauty products is marketing oriented. Accordingly, the consumption of these products not only influences the economy but also the consumers' ideals of what beauty is. Beauty, how women appear and how other people perceive women's appearance are key aspects to the ways in which cultural and social factors are created, as well as the way they are communicated (through social media), and promoted. In the words of Gillian Rose, semiotics plays an important role to decode the meaning of objects (69). Respectively, beauty products are also a product of signs and meanings. The objective of this thesis is to understand in what ways beauty businesses envisage this reality, and how they turn cultural meanings into the marketing of beauty products.

YouTube videos communicate many important messages to the viewers since they transmit particular information about beauty culture and beauty products, the latter done in an entertaining and sometimes subconscious way. By analyzing the semiotics of different videos, I was able to extrapolate views on political, social and cultural issues of American society. YouTube videos are means that today should not be underestimated as they propagate ideologies, as argued by Rose: "Ideology is those representations that reflect the interests of power. In particular, ideology works to legitimate social inequalities, and it works at the level of our subjectivity" (70).

This thesis will conclude with a discussion of the lipstick effect phenomenon which will aim to bring to the forefront the dominant cultural aspects of the relationship between women and beauty. The lipstick effect is a phenomenon that occurs during periods of economic stagnation, namely the tendency for consumers to purchase smaller scale luxury products, such as high-end lipsticks – hence the name of this financial theory – rather than big luxury items (Nelson). Recent research on the lipstick effect has observed this phenomenon and its possible causes mainly in the United States (Hill at al.), as the sales of American beauty companies showed growth during periods of recession (Elliott). Although extensive research has been carried out on the lipstick effect thus far, it has been challenging to pinpoint the exact motives behind such consumerist behavior. Accordingly, the lipstick effect will serve as a tool of discussion in my conclusion as I will attempt to focus on the curious pattern of spending by female consumers. Women's spending behavior might be influenced by their desire to attract mates through the use of cosmetics (Sacco et al.), a hypothesis that is strongly

tied to the discourse of visual attention and communication which constitutes the overarching theme of this thesis.

- Delineation of Thesis

First chapter – Marketing strategies and media: the case of YouTube's Beauty Community

In the first chapter the context behind YouTube's beauty vloggers will be examined along with their use of beauty products on camera in relation to their attitudes and self-portrayal and how they influence the viewer, as well as the concepts of self-enhancement, friendliness and visual communication. In order to explain the influence of these factors on YouTubers' video content, the vloggers' involvement in wearing makeup will be examined through the analysis of different examples of beauty videos.

The first chapter will thus analyze the content of different beauty videos in order to understand the relation between makeup to women's values and how beauty companies adapt to issues of race, gender and class. The first part of this project will also examine the specific methods that beauty vloggers use in order to communicate with their viewers. It will be noted that vlogs present very personal aspects of the creators' lives, as a large part of YouTubers use this platform as a personal diary, showing their daily routines to the world (Tolson 277-289).

Therefore, in the first chapter the content of different videos will be analyzed concerning the specific approaches that help build communicative relationships with the audience, as well as exploring which factors representing the American society are portrayed in these videos and how they influence and engage with the audience.

Beauty gurus exploit different kinds of video formats such as tutorials (the YouTuber will guide the viewer through the realization of a certain makeup look showing each step). Through the use of different online social network services, YouTubers are able to build a real-person public figure, which interacts with her/his followers, and they are able to share personal emotions and news from the beauty world. By aligning other social media networks with YouTube, the guru allows the viewer to get a closer look at his/her personal life, in this way the image of mere virtual entity fades into the accounts of a real person.

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr and other social networks, along with websites, blogs and forums, are created to help transfigure virtual entities into "ordinary people" and "the girl next door" to which companies gift products (which the YouTuber does not necessarily have to be

pleased with, which increases their level of trustworthiness) (Rapp 360). Through these actions the amount of attention on a given brand or specific product increases. YouTubers ensure that their opinion is never compromised by any brand nor influenced by any external factors, as quite often they review products that they have received negatively, because they did not like them or they did not perform as expected.

Beauty industries are well aware that YouTubers are compelled to give an honest opinion about the products they receive. Nevertheless, it seems like companies still prefer to use social networks to promote their products despite the risk of YouTubers discussing the company or its product(s) negatively, simply because this strategy can stimulate product awareness (Stanford Graduate School of Business). It has not been proven if this kind of marketing approach always happens to be successful. Nevertheless, it seems that many beauty businesses tend to use this method nowadays. An iconic quote by Oscar Wilde here presented will give an insight on this peculiar aspect of advertising:

"There is only one thing in the whole world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about." [1]

- Oscar Wilde, 1890

Written in 1890, this quote continues to resonate with modern society, especially in relation to advertising. Regardless of the significant number of negative critiques these cosmetics brands might receive over YouTube, it would appear reasonable for the beauty industry to discard this kind of marketing strategy. However, the public awareness about a product grows (it can be either positive or negative) and is directly proportional to the brand's reputation and its selling rate, as ultimately all publicity is good, no matter of its connotation (Shontell).

Second chapter – The rise of the mass market: the case of Avon

The second chapter will focus on the development of new organizational structures and of selling and distribution strategies of beauty brands in the 1950s, namely of Avon in particular. This chapter will argue that the sales of direct selling beauty brands relied heavily on a door-to-door business model, female workforce and overall I will illustrate how social networking represented a key point in Avon's philosophy.

[1]Quote from:
Wilde, Oscar. "Chapter 1". The Picture of Dorian Gray. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992. 6.Print.

A close examination of Avon's marketing strategies will present new insights on understanding the gendered dimension of capitalism; and the impact of social and cultural factors on American beauty companies.

As Biggart explains, direct selling focuses on people's personal lives, relationships and networks (4). The second chapter will analyze the extent to which Avon involved social factors in its marketing strategies to increase the appeal of its products.

As Patricia S. Wilder states, situations of social and political unease did not only stimulate marketing innovations but instead actually seemed to reinforce American beauty companies' traditional approach to managing their distribution channels (28-32). What seemed to be the key equations of the often surprising success of the beauty industry throughout history is a system that is strongly based on visual communication with the customer, a business technique that sells products and approaches the clientele in a 'face to face' way. Selling door-to-door or person-to person, and employing sales representatives are business systems that might differ in their organizational and managerial patterns but are very similar and belong under the term 'direct selling' (Peterson et al. 1-16). This term is used to describe the business formula employed in this instance by the American beauty company Avon Products, Inc., which reports revenues of around $10 billion, making it the world's largest direct selling company (Goudreau).

Chapter 1

Marketing strategies and media: the case of YouTube beauty community

This chapter will seek to demonstrate the extent to which the content of beauty videos influence the audience. In order to understand which factors come into play, this chapter will analyze the tools used by beauty vloggers to attract and interact with their viewers. The goal of this chapter is to understand which aspects of beauty influencers' motivational literature help cultivate an audience, as well as to promote the consumption of beauty products. The aim of the first chapter is thus to show how YouTubers' promotion of self-empowerment, success and independence - along with messages of race and gender equality - work in harmony with cosmetic advertising.

Nowadays beauty industries find new ways of marketing their products, as the relationship between advertising and the contemporary media landscape continues to evolve. Allegedly, when buying new cosmetics, customers would pay attention to the quality of products and especially in the field of makeup-related products, customers would prefer to try the product on hand to check the quality before committing to splurge on a relatively expensive item. However, this process evolves differently when the physical contact between the beauty product in question and the customer vanishes, and is replaced by a virtual mean. Through YouTube, the "hard work" of testing products before their purchase is already done by beauty vloggers, who will test out the newest product on sale and almost in a scientific way, analyze the longevity, the color selection, the performance, the scent and so forth. Catchy titles such as "Test it out Thursday" or "Hot or Not" will attract viewers in search of a review for the latest beauty product that has just been launched on the market.

YouTube is a creative world based on innovation and novelty, user-created content, viewer interaction through DIY/Maker culture. The boundary between consumer and producer presents a dynamic fluidity, as innovation comes from the active participation and direct interaction of the user, and at the same time the producers reinvent content often advised by the consumers. As Marta Dynel explains, unlike televised programs, YouTube participation structure can be categorized as multi-party interaction, where speakers and hearers/listeners interact with each other constantly (38). On this account, vloggers are not just producing videos and approaching the viewer unilaterally, in a traditional system of the distinction

between producer and consumer of the media, but they are they are producing content as part of an interactive system. This is what, in my opinion, makes YouTube different from previous mass media platforms, an online playground where users and viewers interact with each other continuously.

Eventually, many beauty vloggers who make a name for themselves on YouTube have the chance to create their own makeup line in collaboration with cosmetics manufacturers. This is the case for a lot of YouTubers in the United States and abroad: when a big name vlogger teams up with a cosmetics company, the success of the sale is to be considered almost guaranteed because the purchaser immediately trusts the product, presuming that the product has been curated by a trusted source and not by a faceless makeup company.

This constant interaction between YouTube content creators and audience can also have significant impacts on cosmetics marketing. In their product reviews, the vloggers' appeal is able to trigger a psychological mechanism in the minds of the viewers, allowing them to believe that what is being watched *has* to be true. It is not uncommon to walk by makeup stores and hear a customer asking the salesperson for that divine lipstick that a very popular YouTuber had raved about that week, only to bitterly find out that it has been sold out for days. The treasure hunt begins when the 'Holy Grail' product – which performs better than any other products previously tested - seems nowhere to be found, not even on makeup websites; when the purchase button is replaced by an Out of Stock mark. In my opinion, it is quite unlikely that the success of such strategy could be achieved in parallel without the help of media, especially YouTube. According to a previous study conducted by Siyoung Chung and Hichang Cho, viewers trust the opinion of these micro-celebrities, consequently enhancing the cosmetic brand's popularity. My view in the relationship between social media interaction and source trustworthiness is thus supported by this study which claims that brands that use social media marketing strategies report a considerable boost in their products sale (490).

The mechanism by which the product is desired therefore appears to be strictly tied to the beauty influencer's opinion. The possibility that those same products would not have had the popularity they actually achieved - or that they would have been put on sale at a different price at which they were effectively sold - if they were not supported by the added value of "personal branding" included in the product itself, are still high. A number of studies have confirmed that consumers are highly influenced by members from online communities (Keel et al. 698). Yet the decision for beauty companies to collaborate with YouTube personalities

consists of a more interesting and challenging strategy than that of merely sending products for review purposes: choosing this approach, creativity is stimulated and brought into play in new ways which, while still maintaining the ultimate goal of sales, make it possible to follow different and unconventional paths, full of passion and inventiveness.

The need for beauty experts that offer consultation about products is translated in the modern era into a virtual experience that utilizes YouTube beauty videos. Recent studies show that makeup advertisements that appear in magazines, even when featuring celebrities, seem to not have the same marketing potential as YouTube beauty videos, or at least, not anymore (Winer 111). Many makeup brands seemed to have grasped the know-how of social media marketing strategies as they consist of personalized ways of advertising; their products targeted to specific groups which are interested in in the beauty world, unlike traditional advertising which targets a broader and unspecific audience. Beauty companies' decision to co-create products with YouTubers therefore seems to be a good bet compared to "regular" celebrities. The amateur status helps to keep the level of trustworthiness among beauty vloggers very high, by collaborating with popular beauty gurus, companies need to ensure that the vlogger would present honest advices about products, which establishes a certain degree of credibility.

The level of credibility of beauty vloggers is fed by their relationship with the viewer, as they reach their audience on a regular basis with a relatable, likable and consistent upload of videos. This is why it is very delicate and challenging for beauty brands to create an affiliation with YouTubers to an extent where it will not collide with their traditional intent and practices. In fact, the lucrative aspect of YouTube regarding beauty products is not as simple as it seems. The immense creative labor, passion and perceived authenticity these YouTubers show in their videos would be highly compromised if the content would be produced with the only purpose of a financial return. These videos are circulated freely with the intention of sharing a benefit, to establish social relationships around their production activities. Beauty videos may be entrenched in a culture of consumerism, but they have also an important aesthetic value. Lewis Hyde argues that the creativity efforts resemble the logic of a gift mechanism, where videos are as goods shared in a community for a collective benefit rather than sold for a pecuniary benefit:

> Unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between parties involved. Furthermore, when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized cohesiveness emerges" (cited in Burgess at al. 120).

According to a cost-benefit logic, each of us (vloggers-viewers / producers-consumers) tend to make decisions according to what will bring greater benefit. This approach can be interpreted to define the symbolic imagery that shapes the relationship between YouTubers and viewers. Sociological and especially anthropological studies antagonized the universalism of this theory: the race to profit or interest as the only criterion to recognize and give value to the human experience seems even to be unknown in some societies. In 1925 the French sociologist Marcel Mauss published *An essay on the gift: the form and reason of exchange in archaic societies*. The gift consists of three phases: giving, receiving, reciprocating; and this is the obligation which constitutes the foundation of the social bond that is often established between YouTubers and viewers, where relational dynamics prevail over purely instrumental motivations.

Moreover, not only the needs of the vlogger are being satisfied, but those of the entire beauty community. The study conducted by Mauss highlighted a flaw in Western thought and it represents a refuge against a capitalist society, and more specifically in a moneymaking context such as YouTube, where acts of sharing, communalism and conviviality can be experienced. Mauss began to think that the gift was not a form of trade typical of only ancient societies, and that his theory could be applied even in a contemporary society.

Thus, the theory of the gift is also present in modern societies and modern contexts such as YouTube, but it certainly does not escape utilitarian and economist constraints. Though stripped of its significance for social integration, the gift can be reduced back to being one of the tangible forms of exchange between human beings (Mauss, 83-107).

For this reason, in a marketed domain such as How to and Style community on YouTube, it is challenging for beauty brands to wisely utilize new media for promoting their products. In order to carefully exploit the power of YouTube videos, advertisers have to first convince cosmetic companies of the massive potential behind digital tools, especially by collaborating with YouTubers. It requires innovating brand strategies on how YouTube can outperform other ordinary forms of communications or advertising, which might still sound rather surreal for many brand executives. However, brands are noticing that investing in new media advertising is more cost effective than the old-fashioned, stick-to-the-norm ways (Frey). The perfect balance between the world of YouTube and YouTuber collaborations seems to lay in the ability to powerfully involve the target audience in immersive experiences generated by in-the-flesh users (Kim 62-64).

The beauty community on YouTube represents a very interesting segment since it denotes a new form of entertainment, which goes hand in hand with experience: women's makeup, which has ancient origins, has been a subject of evolution. As Manovich suggests, rituals, traditions, routines and fun are all terms associated with the everyday practices such as makeup, at the same time is equivalent to the pervasiveness of involvement arising from personal experimentation mediated by the senses, to the point that the person involved becomes the object of his/her own experimentation drawn by experience (320-331).

1.1 Structure of YouTube beauty videos

I have so far introduced how YouTube is setting the future model of marketing and advertisement for beauty products. In order to get a closer approach to the successful campaign YouTube beauty vloggers promote, I will examine the difference between several beauty videos and provide examples of various video bloggers.

YouTube beauty videos are articulated in a multitude of versions with each one aiming at either instructing and/or entertaining the viewer (Choi et al. 85). The latter can request the author to produce one kind of video rather than another, and the YouTuber usually accomplishes his/her subscribers' demands. The beauty video in general shows vloggers – usually young women – are often referred to as 'beauty gurus' (makeup and beauty how-to specialists) as they teach makeup techniques, share their skincare regimens, review cosmetic products and so on. A subcategory of beauty videos is the "beauty tutorial". In video tutorials, the YouTuber explains the use of a certain product, as he\she proposes different looks using the same products to demonstrate its versatility while engaging with the users asking, beyond the simple visualization of the content, a sort of interaction that involves comments and both likes and dislikes. Comments are useful to detect the kind of users that approach these videos: according to the different languages adopted along with peculiar jargons, a crowd of female adolescents typically emerges as the bigger section of users. Depending on the overall reaction obtained, these beauty experts can affect the decisions of thousands of potential buyers, thus becoming very important figures in the marketing strategies of beauty industries.

Moreover, other types of beauty videos consist of 'DIYs' (acronym for Do It Yourself, this kind of videos instruct the viewer through the preparation of homemade beauty remedies), hauls (showing usually a widespread quantity of recently purchased or gifted beauty products,

to demonstrate what beauty companies have recently released on the market), reviews (where the YouTuber describes the pros and cons of a specific product), giveaways (the viewer is able to participate to a contest where beauty related prizes to be won are presented in the video which seeks to increase the amount of subscribers), tag videos (each user creates a video based on a very specific topic. An example of successful video tag, which runs online for years on end, is "What's in my bag?". The author of the video would then tag other YouTubers who are very likely to also participate by posting their own videos, paving the way for a mechanism similar to a virtual chain letter). Tag videos constitute an interesting phenomenon on YouTube as they can easily go viral; the video content is usually based on a predetermined set of questions or tasks that everyone that has been 'tagged' has to follow. More personal videos include the "Get to know me" tag (where the vlogger has to answer questions about his/her life), or the "Boyfriend tag" (where the vlogger's boyfriend has to answer questions about his girlfriend/boyfriend's life). The content of these videos tends to show a personal side of the vlogger. Recent studies show that these types of videos are quite popular among viewers of beauty videos, as the spectators particularly enjoy to gaze in the private sphere of who they are interacting with (Christian).

One of the most interesting types of YouTube videos is the "vlog". Short for ''video blogging,'' this term refers to video content embedded in a blog. Typically, the video content on these vlogs is not centered on the products like the other set of videos previously cited, so here the vlogger is able to create contentment for the viewer by showing the personal life of the author; these kind of videos present everyday activities that reach the attention of the viewer even in the most mundane thing, thanks to the genuineness of the content. The purpose of the video is to show the author's lifestyle without ulterior aesthetic or commercial motives, or at least this was not their original intent. Daily vlogs are particularly helpful to reinforce the bond between vlogger and viewer, to shorten the physical distance created by the medium which in most cases does not require much in the way of technological proficiency or costly equipment.

The growing ease of vlog production has definitely contributed to the success of this genre (Usman et al. 7). Many of these vlogs usually feature the person seated in front of the camera and talking directly to the viewer. Browsing through the comment sections of any of these videos, it is possible to see many viewers advertising their own videos, in order to help their channel grow. This shows that the YouTube beauty community is not limited to the über-popular beauty gurus, but is widespread and welcomes all sorts of participants, no matter their

level of beauty experience. The viewer is able to bypass constraints typical of unmediated interactions and shift from a distant relation to a person-to-person interaction with the vlogger (Dynel 38). As a recent study by Jacob Gardner and Kevin Lehnert explains, this almost direct approach with the viewer fosters a sense of trustworthiness that allows to progressively diminishes the idea of the vlogger as a virtual figure that sells beauty products over the internet (24). Here vloggers show their passion, flaws, sense of humor, sexual preference and so on, just like a dearest friend would do.

Beauty vlog channels on YouTube constitute a part of the full spectrum of the vloggers' social media brand, which includes Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat accounts. The vlogger is able to express his/her personality in multiple ways:

> The vlog reminds us of the residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication and provides an important point of difference between online video and television. […] traditional media content doesn't explicitly invite conversational and inter-creative participation, as might be measured by the numbers of comments and video responses. It seems that, more than any other form in the sample, the vlog as a genre of communication invites critique, debate and discussion. Direct response, through comment and via video, is central to this mode of engagement (Burgess at al. 54).

As this article claims, vlogs testify the importance of communication since it is visual, vocal and personal. While they achieve great popularity and easily go viral, they are still able to show that the video author can reach the viewer on a deeper and more personal level. Vlogging touches all senses by not only providing information about the author's everyday life, but also by establishing itself as a source of inspiration: the viewer will embrace an enlightening story that almost resembles a movie experience. As Burgess and Green explain, this format:

> requires a certain propensity for self-revelation and even self-promotion: ongoing participation as a vlogger requires that you be willing to commit yourself to being visible to the community and, potentially, to the wider public – to put your head on camera and put yourself 'out there.' As much as YouTube supports performative and productive engagement in participatory culture, issues remain about how space can be made for other, quieter forms of participation to be recognized within the YouTube community, and to be properly valued as components of digital literacy elsewhere (Burgess at al. 74).

As Burgess shows, the rise of this kind of social relationship over the Internet, now unobstructed by physical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic limits, has brought great challenges to traditional notions of societies, communities and marketing.

The beauty community on YouTube gets a lot of attention and represents a transnational environment since the most popular channels are from all over the world. Shannon Harris ("Shaaanxo") from New Zealand, for example, has the highest number of subscribers in her country, while Nikkie De Jager ("Nikkietutorials") has the second most subscribed channel in her country, The Netherlands (VidStatsX). This suggests that the how-to and style category has a significant position on YouTube. These videos provide an interesting insight on the relevance of video amateurs in consideration of new media technologies. They also constitute a particular type of emergent media production, because this category is not just confined to style and beauty, but it represents an intersection between the world of entertainment and the world of aesthetics (Choi et al. 81). Many of these videos mentioned so far are informational and show viewers how to create a certain look, or master a certain makeup technique. Thus, these videos are clearly instructive, but they can also disassociate from a strictly practical purpose and constitute aesthetic objects themselves.

Since beauty videos serve as an interesting hybrid between entertainment and tutoring, it might be hard to delineate what part of what part constitutes art: the makeup look perfectly achieved by the vlogger, the observation of the process, or both? Beauty videos in this sense can be analyzed under the terms of "Art as Experience" by John Dewey: "the intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handwork, caring for his materials and tools with a genuine affection, is artistically engaged" (4). The artistic process of creation is indeed similar of that of a beauty guru when she meticulously applies her makeup, elaborately perfecting the symmetry of the lines on her eyes and enhancing the suppleness of her lips. According to Dewey:

> the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals. These people, if questioned as to the reason for their actions, would doubtless return reasonable answers. The man who poke the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it (3).

This expression articulated by Dewey mirrors well the beauty vlogger experience, as the primary intention may be instructive, there is definitely something mesmerizing about observing the journey; obtaining the artistic masterpiece. The application of makeup is perceived by the viewer as a joyful transformation, able to carry emotions. Beauty videos show the aesthetic value of everyday practices and objects, which observation is fairly fascinating. Kandee Johnson ("kandeejohnson"), Nikkie De Jager ("nikkietutorials") and Lauren Mychal Mountain ("Glam and Gore") are few examples of makeup artists who create peculiar makeup tutorial videos that showcase such transformations.

Figure 1: Kandee Johnson and Nikkie De Jager using makeup to achieve extreme looks

They use their artistry and skills to transform their faces so they can resemble characters from movies, video games and celebrities or also monstrous creatures.

In her videos, Kandee Johnson demonstrates every step of the process she uses to achieve these looks. She illustrates how she uses makeup to change her skin tone, contour her cheekbones and nose, reshape her eyebrows and lips and so on, which gradually allow her to achieve dramatic transformations. This is not to say, however, that who will watch these videos will necessarily recreate the look suggested, but these videos will indeed hold an entertaining and aesthetic value that go beyond the practical purpose of the video (whether or not this was its original intent). Similarly, Lauren Mychal Mountain's videos are of little use to most of the viewers, except maybe for special occasions that require participants to wear a costume, such as Halloween. Yet, these tutorials are still extremely popular as her channel counts over one million subscribers, and her most popular video – transformation into a superhero movie character - has over four million views.

Following the approach on visual analysis of contemporary Western societies by Gillian Rose (6), it is clear that the visual dimension of communication plays an important role in the

cosmetics industry, mainly developed through this platform rather than through other forms of social media. This suggests that these unique videos' appeal does not solely concern the educational activity, but also serves as a spectacle.

The viewer is thus enchanted by Lauren's ingenious manipulation of her facial features, which gradually take shape into a drastic transformation, all embedded in a video that is usually no longer than ten minutes.

Figure 2: Lauren Mychal Mountain as the superhero Deadpool

Much of what these YouTube gurus endorse is thus an aestheticization of the ordinary, of everyday life. The astounding beautifying character brought into routine activities by beauty vloggers can be seen from the perspective of Michael Owen Jones as an aesthetic side of human behavior:

> while self-taught, much of our behavior is also traditional, based on precedent and exhibiting continuities and consistencies through time. It is aesthetic too, in that we strive to perfect form in some of the endeavors in which we engage because of the sensory pleasure and intellectual satisfaction of doing so, the compliments received, the self-image generated and reinforced, the enhancement of utility, the transformation of the quotidian; in a word, the creation of something 'special' (60)

The view supported by Jones is relevant to everyday practices such as makeup: everyday products and daily activities such as getting ready in the morning, applying makeup, getting

dressed following a certain style code. These things not only hold an important aesthetic value, but get also commodified and absorb a deeper meaning.

A recurrent type of beauty tutorial video is the 'Morning Routine'. These videos show the YouTubers' everyday morning activities as they get ready for the day. Wearing makeup can be considered a form of art, with the face considered to be an empty canvas, and applying makeup creates an image that boosts confidence and reinforces vloggers' self-expression in their everyday life. There are different version of these routine videos, each one dedicated to a different situation, time of the day, or special occasion: "Fall Morning Routine", "School Morning Routine", "Pregnant Morning Routine", "Night routine" and so on are dedicated to extensively describe what seem to be dynamics of trivial nature, however these activities are such presented and explained in a way that they assume an almost ceremonious connotation.

Through exhibiting their daily rituals, beauty vloggers demonstrate the essence of everyday aesthetics. One example of such a video is "My Hygiene Routine" by popular beauty vlogger Samantha Maria. This video begins with a caption "My Hygiene Routine" as the beauty guru opens the blinds in her bedroom, letting the sun glare hit the camera, followed by short glimpses of her using a bath sponge, successively of brushing her teeth and playing with her dog. The next shot is of Samantha talking about the choice of making the video while seated in front of the camera. As she accompanies the viewer through her ritual, she inserts shots of the beauty products on the bathroom counter, and explains the use of each product and the methodology of her practices.

Throughout her hygiene routine, Samantha Maria's activities engage the theory of everyday aesthetics expressed by Michael Owen Jones. The sophisticated way in which she conducts an ordinary activity such as brushing her teeth and her choice to display her products in a storefront fashion, inform the viewer about her great sense of taste, flair and creativity. By the end of the video, the viewer is thus left impressed by every step narrated in the routine, having followed her through the process. Therefore, a meticulous attention is paid to every detail, as the lighting is an important factor for a successful video. The filming is done in high definition and the professionally composed shots, fostering even more the aesthetic value of the video itself.

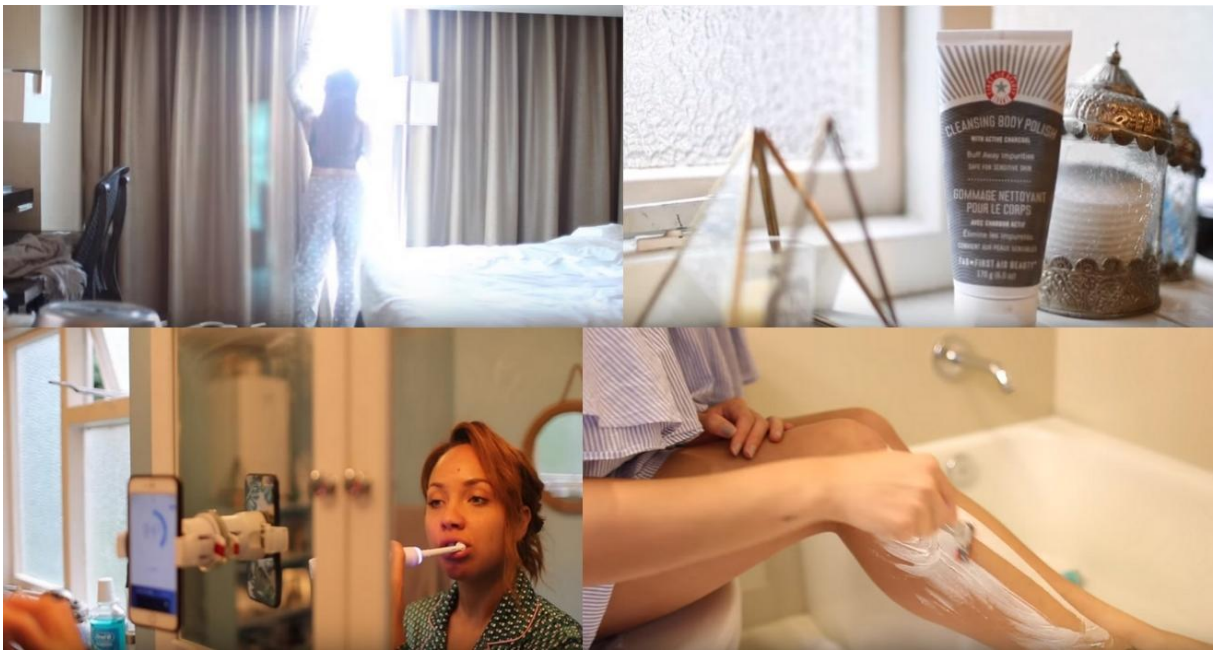

Figure 3: YouTuber Samantha Maria in four screenshots of the video about her hygiene routine.

1.2 Social involvement of beauty videos

The daily routines shared with passion by beauty vloggers are a few of the many aspects of YouTube that attracts millions of viewers. Unlike television viewing, previous studies have shown that one of YouTube videos' distinctive aspects is the vloggers' involvement in social issues (Haridakis et al. 318-321). For instance, YouTubers are able to build a network of people that share certain social causes. Even though it has been challenging for me to detect the motivational wave that affected both vloggers and viewers about a conscious use of cosmetics, through a close examination of different beauty videos it can be observed that social involvement is an element that brings users together. I will now discuss how cruelty-free and vegan beauty products have the power of creating a community.

Previous research has established that online social participation has proven to be a useful tool in distributing information that creates and enhances social awareness (Rotman et al. 1-4). Sensitive topics such as veganism, environmental preservation and respect for nature position cosmetics as a medium for philosophical and political standpoints, and in particular YouTube comes to be a platform where proper actions can be taken. Considering the amount of views of social and politically involved videos, current issues as the opposition to exploitation and cruelty to animals become meaningful matters to the eyes of viewers almost at the same level

of the prestige and esthetic quality of a beauty brand or even the efficacy of the product on their skin.

The case of beauty guru Carli Bybel is best known in the YouTube's beauty community; Carli a beauty guru from New Jersey, boasts a channel with almost 5 million subscribers. In one of her videos, she declares to have transitioned to a vegan lifestyle, emotionally addressing the viewer by sharing cruel clips of animal slaughter. This video has quickly reached almost 1 million views after its upload on Carli's channel and has prompted astonishing consequences: judging by the comments on the video, many fellow YouTubers immediately followed her lifestyle change, as if such action was one of a number of different beauty trends that enter and leave the YouTube beauty community on a regular basis.

The message provided by beauty gurus therefore exerts significant leverage over their viewers and fellow vloggers alike. It is necessary to again point out that the promotion of this liberal form of veganism was advocated by a beauty guru, who would allegedly talk about all things beauty and leave these kinds of subjects to other YouTubers who, for example, create content in the field of education and lifestyle – though - the success of this message may be largely due to the attractiveness of the beauty guru herself. In this case, Carli Bybel is also known because of her physique and remarkable facial features. The success of such movement might be related to the viewer idealizing her as the epitome of the perfect model (Vonderau 119-121). By following her makeup methods, fitness routine and even her lifestyle choices, viewers are prone to think that they are on the right track to achieve her looks. There are different factors at play when it comes to propagating a successful message through vlogging. In this case the YouTuber's creative use of artistry allows him/her to gain popularity. Carli's attractiveness and at the same time social commitment forge into a 'feel-good' wave that lures people into being part of her trend, even though viewers may have initially decided to watch her videos with the intention of learning about beauty. Above all, the message is well established when is shared within a community, because it allows viewers to share common experiences, often related to their individuality and to constructs a collective sense of belonging through following a specific trend (Rotman et al. 47-48). Beauty gurus use YouTube therefore to advocate for messages, build communities, express interests, all while entertaining. Yet all of this content is performed for viewers well within the reach of smartphones or computers. Beauty community becomes a platform for negotiation about new social norms.

A study conducted by Nell Haynes argues that social media provides a semi-public stage for performances of the self: "Social media is at once a private communication medium, mode of mass broadcast and method of aligning oneself with various relationships, identities and ideologies, particularly for expressing identification as marginalized as well as performing as a 'good citizen'" (40). Indeed, such videos are almost flawlessly integrated in our everyday lives… until the next train comes along and something new is in like manner quickly adopted.

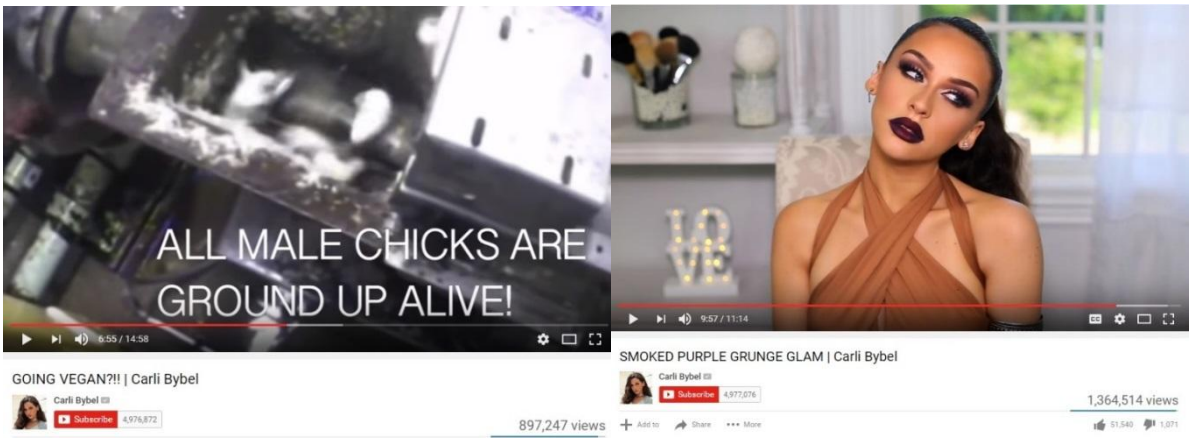

Figure 4: Beauty guru Carli Bybel explains her decision to transition to a vegan lifestyle. On the right, the YouTuber gives a tutorial on a makeup look.

As discussed so far, viewers are attracted to content they can relate in some way, and beauty gurus' videos reflect that. YouTube, therefore, is a platform that offers great opportunities for vloggers to be more interactive with their viewers. Social campaigns are an example, as racial and gender issues are freely discussed on YouTube and attract millions of viewers. Race plays a big role in the YouTube beauty community, as it simultaneously follows current issues that unfold outside the virtual screen. Racial issues are also widely discussed on YouTube and are able to reach a broader audience (Antebi 297-310). The beauty community on YouTube allows the vlogger to address sensitive subjects without risking to either frighten, overwhelm or even bore viewers: in beauty videos any kind of political message can be encoded, within the framework of beauty, the viewer can be transported and allured into an ideal the beauty guru wants to share. Many beauty vloggers for instance started the video challenge "B.O.M.B. challenge" (which stands for black owned makeup brands), in order to empower and support small black and minority-owned beauty businesses. Beauty vloggers would in this case use only products of black beauty brands, in light of what has been happening recently in the media, as a response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Beauty gurus found a way to use their voices to contribute to that in the best way they know, considering that their channel is mainly related to beauty. As noticed, beauty videos are to uplift viewers, as showing how

makeup can enhance facial features and improve its appearance, it can release a feel-good sensation other than being visually gratifying.

Through YouTube, ethnic minorities manage to raise awareness for their issues. This platform is able to bring strangers together forming communities that unanimously represent social policy matters such as supporting community relations. Ethnic communities maintain their connection to their history and culture, confirming that the social platform is meaningful for forging solidarity and speaking freely. In their book, *Social Consequences of Internet Use: Access, Involvement, and Interaction,* the authors James Everett and Ronald E. Rice explain the syntopian view of the internet: "primary use by Americans is an extension and enhancement of their daily routines" (13). YouTube's beauty community can thus help overcome ethnic and racial diversity as beauty videos are tools of communication and – as well as Michael Owen Jones reminds us – a combination of vloggers' aesthetics of everyday life and their online activities.

The community formed within beauty videos on YouTube allows building social movements, as online users establish new relationships within each other. The exploitation of social movements through YouTube can be seen as the expression of both personal and social needs. YouTube beauty videos, like the "B.O.M.B. challenge" contribute in this case to social movements and support other conventional ways of expressing social engagement, since it can gloss over the dystopian representation of these political issues. YouTube beauty videos thus promote involvement, which leads to new forms of social communication. Whatever the matter might be, from complaints about minor issues like the lack of dark shades of a foundation of a specific brand (which seems then to be compelled to expand the collection in order to democratically reach out to all its customers), beauty YouTubers are able to engage with deeper issues by sharing their everyday lives and struggles through their vlog videos. Some vloggers, especially black beauty gurus, would often complain about the limited shade range of makeup products that would complement their skin tones. The "B.O.M.B. makeup challenge" videos often address the difficulty of finding the right shades of makeup in mass marketed makeup brands, black beauty vloggers may be required to transition to lesser known makeup brands that offer darker shades, brands that are mentioned in the makeup challenge videos.

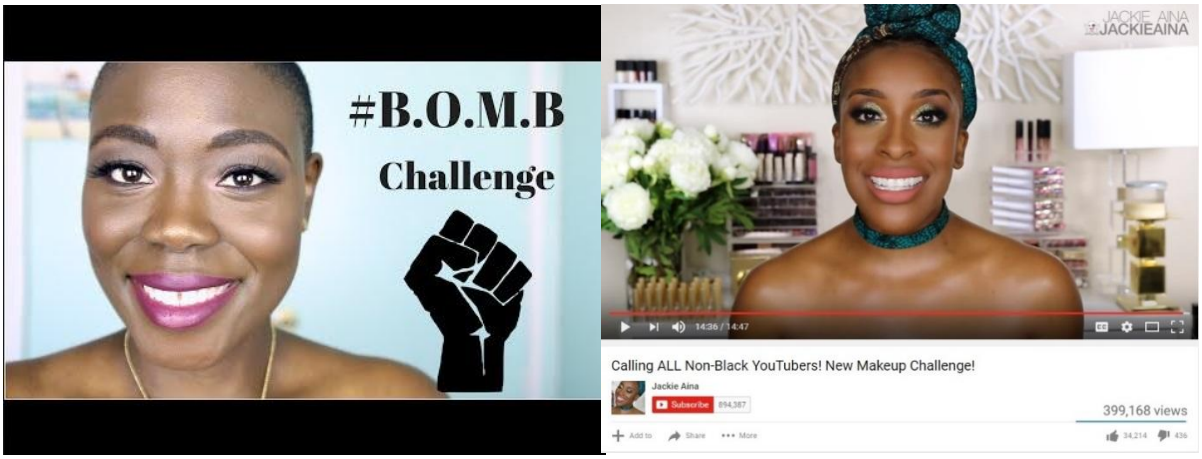

Figure 5: YouTubers Wahima and Jackie Aina show their support on the Black Lives Matter movement by creating makeup tutorials which involve mainly products of black beauty brands.

The effort to 'democratize' beauty brands is evident in the case of the low-cost makeup brand CoverGirl, which created the Queen LaTifah sponsored "Queen Collection", designed to reach women with dark skin complexions. CoverGirl paved way for other makeup brands to reach out to different cultures and ethnicities (Clarke). It is interesting to note that one of the first beauty brands to offer a diverse range of shades for face makeup and to reach out to women of color was indeed Avon, and there were a number of key factors that led to the success of that campaign:

> Avon pioneered what proved to be the most successful strategy, extending existing product lines to include a wider range of foundation shades and makeup colors. Market research indicated that most women of color "didn't want to be singled out" with goods identified by race or ethnicity, but preferred to be approached "as an American". Avon also hired African-American sales agents and produced Spanish-language catalogues to improve distribution (Peiss 263).

Peiss here shows that women of color represent a driving force in the beauty industry, as many beauty companies nowadays are learning to move towards cultural values that represent a vast range of women.

I have analyzed so far how YouTube's success is also the result of vloggers targeting specific groups and their needs, including viewers from different racial, ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds. The vlogger is aware that his/her videos can interact with viewers from all over the world, which allows them to approach racial issues from a new and different angle, unlike the strongly mediated version represented by more traditional outlets.

On the other hand, YouTubers who belong to ethnic minorities give off the unvarnished truth about their lives, living as immigrants in sometimes hostile environments, where beauty standards are intermeshed with white identity (Perry 595). The internet may be considered a utopian society where race, gender, class ability and so on are erased; where users are able to hide behind a layer of anonymity, making it possible for people to escape the 'real life' identity completely. Unfortunately, this is not the case for YouTube. As the vlogger present himself/herself to the world, he/she unmasks his/her identity along with his/her gender, race, ethnicity and so forth. I will analyze further this aspect in the subchapter that follows.

1.3 Representing the American Dream

As I have discussed so far, the capacity for interaction between content creators and viewers is what seems to be a key element for the popularity of these videos. Moreover, viewers who belong to minority groups support the messages of the vlogger, which targets the viewer's needs and personal struggles. It should not be forgotten that in most cases the beauty vlogger is an ordinary person in front of a camera, a "girl next door" (Rapp 360) who encounters just as many everyday struggles as the viewer. Videos that narrate the personal life of YouTubers thus can represent an aid to the viewer who might seek for guidance (Lange 40-44).

For example, video tags such as "Draw my life", are often interrupted by tears, as the vlogger narrates the struggles she/he had to endure as an outsider, sometimes an illegal immigrant. This type of video is a chronological report about the YouTuber's life, which though usually ends on a positive note. These video tags are associated with two well-known beauty influencers in particular. Dulce Candy Tejada Ruiz ("DulceCandy") and Yasmin Torres ("Beautyybird") explain how they began their life in America from being immigrants *sin papeles*[2], fleeing from a state of financial unease. In these videos, they narrate how they started from a place where they had nothing to signing thousand dollars-worth partnership contracts with major beauty companies. In this manner, these two Latina beauty gurus bring to their viewers in my opinion a renovated notion of the American Dream. For Mexican-Americans, the concept of the American Dream that encompasses happiness, success and respectability has through history been seen as a goal that implied hurdles, often making it an unattainable reality (Flores et al. 57-84).

[2] Literally translates into "without papers". A term usually employed by the Latino community in the United States.

Figure 6:YouTuber Dulce Candy Tejada Ruiz presents her book. On the right, Dulce on the cover of Parents Latina magazine.

Conversely, Hispanic beauty gurus often claim that success, happiness and respectability can be obtained through YouTube. The current generation of Mexican-American beauty vloggers portrays YouTube as a new consciousness, free of prejudices and able to escape myths and stereotypes. Hispanic beauty vloggers often talk about their experiences of being Latino in the United States: through their videos it is possible to grasp how they were able to hold on their heritage and the extents to which they absorbed the mainstream culture. Indeed, analyzing Mexican-American beauty vloggers' assimilation and cultural exchange with contemporary American society allows us to understand how their personal accounts represent the American Dream. For instance, many of these YouTubers, once they have reached success, tend to assimilate to a lifestyle typical of white upper-middle class, often forgetting their identity, and with that often forgetting to speak their native language.

This type of videos are mainly produced in English. Vloggers get to buy the house of their dreams, surrounded by cotemporary consumer goods, praising a materialistic lifestyle, however they barely make any reference to the ethnic community they belong to. A predominant example is DulceCandy's evolution. This change does not go unnoticed, however, as viewers in the comments express their rage about how the vlogger forgot to be herself/himself. When race is no longer a topic of discussion, it is possible to notice in the comments that the assumption that the viewer makes of the YouTuber is that he/she turned white. The negligence of race will not do much but foster the culturally unspoken domination of whiteness and covert racism. It was thus possible for me to realize that whites are, in all social locations - even in media landscapes - relatively privileged. As W. E. B. Du Bois refers to the "wages" of whiteness, whites have no obstacles to access to symbolic capital of the

dominant racial group. Even if a person decides not to claim himself/herself as white, it does not mean that he or she does not benefit from belonging to the white identity (1860-1880).

An article by Amanda E. Lewis brilliantly illustrates the issues of addressing identities in our society and the challenge of expressing what is racialized as non-white and especially white, and the differences within these two contexts:

> it is practically impossible to divorce the social category whiteness from its role as a force of domination and subjugation. This makes it essential that studies of whiteness not attempt to discuss racial discourse or "culture" separate from a discussion of the material realities of racism. In fact, studying dominant racial categories requires particular care in order that it not make white fashionable or undermine long-fought-for space within the academy for minority scholars and ethnic studies. Studying whiteness or white people absent of social context obscures the precise reason why it is important to focus on whiteness in the first place--in order to remove the cloak of normality and universality that helps to secure continuing racial privilege for whites. The politics of whiteness studies not withstanding (see Talbot 1997), it is essential to place whiteness and racial privilege within the purview of social research and under the lens of critical examination. It is important to do so, though, not because it is hip, not because whites have been left out, but because doing so is a necessary step in confronting the continuing reality of racial inequality (623).

According to Lewis, YouTube indeed might appear like a color-blind stage, but it mirrors a reality where vloggers who belong to ethnic minorities are often unable to express their own identity. Despite the adversities Latino beauty gurus have to face when claiming their identity, they nevertheless choose to portray themselves as the embodiment of the American Dream, showing that it has been possible for them to pursue success through talent, hard work and persistence, even when starting from basically nothing. YouTube becomes a vital turning point in their lives. They created content, uploaded it on the website, gained recognition and within few years (or months for the most talented) and YouTube became their unique job, yielding a return they could live on comfortably. These videos usually get a high number of views, making them a source of inspiration for people who are sharing the same difficulties at some point in their lives. Their experiences serve as examples for people who face similar battles, by gathering together through online communities, they are also able to support women’s empowerment by increasing self-esteem.

At the same time though, the ideal of white female beauty is slowly facing new challenges, as it seems to be almost unthinkable for US beauty vloggers to not reach to viewers of different ethnic groups. The United States Census Bureau projects that America will be a majority-minoruty nation by 2050, as the growth of the foreign-born population is estimated to exceed that of natives, resulting that by 2050, 54 percent of the population will be minorities, with Hispanics composing more than 30 percent of the working-age population:

> By 2030, one in five Americans is projected to be 65 and over; by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone); and by 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born (1).

This demographic change is definitely mirrored by the rise of the amount of Latina beauty vloggers. Nevertheless, the message sent from these YouTube gurus and the impact that has on viewers from across the globe can be analyzed in the terms of American form of 'soft power' and its leadership in the world system. Joseph S. Nye, Jr - political scientist and Assistant Secretary of Defense for international affairs during the Clinton administration - in the early Nineties coined the expression 'soft power' in order to explain the ability to achieve the desired outcomes through persuasion and attraction rather than using coercion, unlike hard power, which utilizes military or economic power sources (94-100).

Figure 7: Dulce Candy Tejada's video about her newly purchased apartment.

As discussed so far, by showing their everyday life and expressing their passions online, beauty vloggers are able to monetize their content and earn a living making videos on YouTube. Many YouTubers, before completely dedicating their career to producing videos, had 'ordinary' 9-to-5 jobs, which many times implied situations where their creativity would not have been employed, or the tasks were exhausting. Different beauty vloggers anyway have had a beauty related working experience, mostly related to retail. But YouTube is what seemed to have 'saved' these beauty gurus from draining stressing work shifts, draining working conditions and so on. Many indeed are the videos where beauty vloggers narrate their working evolutions, or as they like to call it, 'the road to success'.

Figure 8: Sari Reanna addressing in a video to have quit working in retail and making YouTube her full time job. Tati Westbrook narrating about her jobs before her career on YouTube.

As with Hollywood movies, American media products have the – soft - power to influence the rest of the world as a result of a "charismatic capitalism". It is important to remember that people who can access the internet are able to watch a YouTuber's videos from all over the world. In this manner, many American YouTube beauty gurus and most importantly

American-made advertisements can transmit their message not only within the United States but also across the globe. For instance, when exposed to advertisements for products that claim to improve a person's love life, it is easy for non-American viewers to envision the United States as a land where dreams can be pursued – or better – purchased. As Croteau and Hoynes explain, American media products manufacture a political system ruled by materialism:

> While different products use different sales pitches and the entertainment media explore a range of themes set in various locations, most American media – especially those that are exported – share an underlying frame of reference that defines America by its combination of consumer capitalism and political freedom. Because media are owned and operated by profit-making companies, it should not be surprising that the cornucopia of images converges in the promotion of the benefits of a consumer society. Given the rapidly growing global economy, American-based companies see the international market as one of the keys to twenty-first-century success (189).

Following this study, American media products such beauty videos created by American beauty vloggers serve as international promotional tools for the American way of life by placing a heavy emphasis on the material opulence and consumer opportunities present in the United States. Consider the beauty trade shows held in different cities in the United States. IMATS, BeautyCon and the Makeup Show are some of the beauty conventions that became widely popular in recent years due to the social media revolution and the influence of YouTubers on younger generations (Mediakix). Often YouTubers set meet-ups at these fairs, where the most dedicated fans from all over the world travel in order to meet their favorite YouTube personalities.

However, the phenomenon of globalized entertainment and products promotion should not be exclusively confined to the United States. Rather, what the United States is really promoting through videos are products of its culture and society such as freedom, pursuable dreams, ambitions, individuality which happen to perfectly suit the customer's needs. These dreams seem to be fulfilled by choosing the right product to buy, the product that will make the viewer as happy as the vlogger who flaunts a dazzling smile and leads a perfect life. Although advertisements may cross national boundaries, with the help of beauty videos of American production the ideal of beauty is based to a great degree on American images and products: "FCCP (foreign consumer culture positioning) is defined as a strategy that positions the brand

as symbolic of a specific foreign consumer culture; that is, a brand whose personality, use occasion, and/or user group are associated with a foreign culture" (Alden et al. 77).

1.4 Success of marketing strategies

As discussed so far, YouTubers' credibility and trustworthiness are of great importance to viewers, and believed to be distinctive aspects of success of the YouTube's beauty community. In this subchapter, I will discuss how these micro-celebrities build social relations with their viewers while endorsing multimillion-dollar beauty companies. Furthermore, I will discuss some of the strategies employed by beauty brands to promote their products through social media and the difference between traditional advertising (print ads) and new media interactive advertising which involves beauty vloggers' impact on brand promotion. The argument that follows will show how YouTube shaped new dynamics between beauty brands and their consumers.

As discussed so far it is important for beauty companies to carry out well-suited and distinguished social media marketing campaigns in order to successfully promote their products and to achieve advantages over competitors. A leading factor to that seems then to be the YouTuber's ability to communicate with extreme spontaneity towards the target that the YouTuber wants to reach and attract (Gardner et al. 294-297). Improvisation in these cases does not support this mechanism. In reality, it constitutes a threat that can backfire severely and irreparably against the company and/or the brand that sponsored the video: when users have the suspicion that a beauty related video might be manipulated by a corporation, viewers would immediately gather together in a forceful action to boycott the alleged steered move through writing endless complains in the comment section of the video, a community of numerous users forcing the author of the video to give explanations.

Frey affirms that when YouTube videos shift from a form of entertainment to a money-making scheme, the quality is compromised: "art produced for the market is often pooh-poohed as "commercial". Poor taste is allegedly unavoidable with this form of supply" (107). The possibility to reach the YouTuber directly has diminished the feeling of physical distance between the producer and the consumer. The opposite is true for magazines and television advertisements, where the message is absorbed by the viewer without the possibility of denying any legitimacy. YouTubers thus must walk a thin line between perceived authenticity

and commodity, making it challenging to assure the audience about the credibility of the content that has been created.

YouTube-based performances therefore have a big impact on commercial activities and many individuals who might have formally sought consultation on beauty on magazines or in conventional retail stores will now turn to such sites as YouTube. When we consider the impact of performativity, it already has a significant imprint on the YouTube's beauty community. What appears is the extent to which factors of naturalness, persuasion and sincerity have been adopted to shape the condition toward a revolutionary type of collaboration between marketing and YouTube.

It is clear that YouTube has influenced the way consumers make their purchasing decisions. As recent studies show, traditional advertising techniques can no longer have the effects new media interactive advertising generate (Engel et al. 23-44). Today's consumers search for honest opinions about the products they are interested in and they tend to seek out for someone who shares their same passions and everyday struggles, someone who then seems to be authentic and hence, trustworthy.

It should be noted that YouTube gained importance in beauty marketing not just from the perspective of the viewer. Beauty companies realized that the way to sell and to communicate has changed and since advertising on a well-known magazine is quite costly, a lot more can be accomplished on social media platforms (Evans 359-389). Brands are not only moving around their marketing and advertising dollars, but shrinking them. A commercial ad in *Glamour USA* or *Vogue USA* can be high-priced (Jensen).

Traditional advertising via magazines, newspapers, television and mail were the only possible means around 20 years ago, but these mediums have difficulty in targeting specific buyers with individualized messages. Print and broadcast advertising are surely still used for legacy brands with broad appeal and still work for some products. For instance, for couples watching television around Valentine's Day, it might be reasonable for mass-marketer Chanel to advertise on television broadcasts (but it might not be the same for smaller beauty companies that attract a small niche audience). Or at the same time magazines have still a huge impact on the selling of beauty products. For example, the signature trait of the American magazine *Allure* is the annual Best of Beauty Awards which selects the beauty products deemed the best of the year by the magazine staff to help the reader choose between the vast arrays of beauty products on the market. When a product has been deemed best in its category, it can often be

found on the shelves with the Best Product of the Year by Allure logo, which might assure the customer of its quality (Allure). Likewise, if a makeup company makes special effects makeup like Kryolan, then it would be preferable to advertise in Prosthetics Magazine to reach its professional buyers (but that won't allow it to reach the beauty DIY market).

However - for thousands of other companies - especially niche beauty companies, traditional advertising is generally so wide and broad that it can prove unproductive. As Bas van den Putte explains, big media advertising buys may work for products with mass appeal and wide distribution, but a great strategy for big brands (such as Maybelline and Revlon, which reach large numbers of women with a message of beauty of national appeal) would not work for smaller-scale products (669-690).

A possible solution to this seems then to be for beauty brands to utilize social media, which makes it possible to reduce the costs while maximizing the economic return (Hamel). Video tutorials and blogs have therefore become an important vehicle for commercial promotion and a powerful sales tool regarding cosmetic products. YouTube videos have emerged as very effective tools thanks to the accessibility and the ubiquity of the website (to date YouTube, owned by Google, is the most used search engine after Google (Baldwin)). YouTube is thus an innovative advertising channel and at the moment cheaper than its conventional alternatives.

Unlike television, YouTube users are in charge of what they want to watch. Viewers can personalize their usage patterns and their online preferences. This individual experience is well perceived by beauty companies who are able to target their advertisements to users identified by what they are accustomed to watch. Users might fall prey to the yearning of cosmetics industries that exploit their freedom of expression on the Internet. In a study conducted by Bohdan Pikas and Gabi Sorrentino, it was shown that the successful innovation of YouTube beauty marketing strategies consists also in the ability of targeting a specific segment of the mass audience (70-81). By producing unique content, the vlogger is guaranteed to reach an audience that already has an interest in beauty related products, instead of aiming for a bigger audience. This phenomenon, referenced by Van Dijck as narrowcasting, is able to lead to socially splintered mediascapes (147-160). Beauty companies are aware of the potential benefits of narrowly targeted audiences, validating their investments in beauty videos through advertisements, sponsorships and so forth.

Both niche and legacy brands are finding that vlogger product reviews, customer comments and compelling editorial content across their own platforms are more financially efficient ways of marketing their brands, engaging customers and above all, driving sales. By advertising their products online, beauty companies are aware of the fact that the potential customer is just one click away (Dehghani et al. 165-172). The simplicity of YouTube advertising appeals to many traditional beauty retailers and manufacturers. On the surface it appears to involve merely sending samples to the vloggers and offering a small percentage commission, YouTubers who fail to sell products through their discount codes simply do not get any commission, and therefore cost the company very little in terms of salaries, labor costs and office spaces. Katrina Wu, a lawyer specialized in business and international finance, presented a significant analysis and discussion on YouTube sponsorship in 2016. In her study, Wu explains that when a video is sponsored by a company, the affiliated link that will direct the viewer to the Internet-based shop appears in the info-box below the video, usually offering a discount coupon to insert at the checkout. The viewer will feel compelled to buy, as if they could not have renounced such great opportunity (61-85). In different beauty videos, it can be observed that many YouTubers themselves fall into the same trap, admitting their weakness as confessing a sin. Retail spending on the Internet has attracted many tech-savvy Americans in the last two decades, since at least 72% of American adults surf the Internet on a regular basis (Stein et al. 199). Thanks to social media, beauty industries have developed systems and up-to-date methods that are able to reach out to broader sections of consumers of different ethnicities, genders and locations.

The results of my research, therefore, support the idea that today the advertising industry is crossing a trend where print and television campaigns are being replaced and transferred into digital efforts (Rust et al. 71-77). However, the connotations of this innovative process are unique when it comes to beauty, an industry that relies very much on face-to-face relationships with the customer, and on personal recommendations through which thrive a whole economic mechanism (Shen et al. 629-634). Thus, recent studies have demonstrated that the success of such strategies prove how important the interpersonal relationship is in the beauty industry (Wu 240-263). Cosmetics companies have realized the importance of the online retailing of their products, and the utilization of social media (especially YouTube), blogs, marketing events and more to create brand recognition and increase the demand of their products.

Beauty brands that rely on e-commerce sales thus choose social media for their advertisement. This business model allows the company to really understand the consumers' needs, because they can get direct feedback from them (Hanna et al. 265-273). New market strategies rely on establishing community connections, which is possible through the social-advocacy model. Switching conventional advertising to digital tools – whether that might mean sponsored advertising, or earned media content through gifting – has become a trend that cannot be reversed (Wu 61-85). Estée Lauder spent around $ 2.77 billion in 2015 for its advertising, promotion, production development and merchandise expenses, resulting in an overall decrease of more than 3% compared with the previous year (BusinessWire). Correspondingly, L'Oréal – the French beauty pioneer and world's largest cosmetics company – spent $2.2 billion advertising in the United States alone in the 2014 fiscal year, recording a 2% decrease from 2013 (Sherman).

A strong loyalty marketing approach to beauty brands can be noted here, which is realized through social networks such as Instagram and YouTube. Brand loyalty is an approach of strategic management that measures "the probability of purchasing the same appliance brand as the one previously owned" (Bayus 22) and on the one hand it takes advantage of the consumer's psychological lever of inclusion in a community who shares the same style embodied by the beauty product, and on the other hand it reinforces the dependence of its use through traditional marketing tools such as contests, discounts, coupons or vouchers and personalized offers that may be addressed to each individual user, made possible from what the user shares while navigating through the social network he/she uses and the videos he/she watches.

In the case of YouTube's beauty community, the viewer finds himself/herself desiring specific beauty products, as in videos where beauty gurus show their 'Holy Grail' beauty items and an aura of contemplation levitates around these products. Beauty gurus are therefore 'loyal' to these products and swear by the effects that they can provide, and would not trade them for other alternatives on the market. Loyalty marketing is a very successful strategy that allows the sales rate of a product to skyrocket: "Relationship management promises the newest passageway to the "holy grail" of marketing - customer loyalty. Indeed, customer loyalty ranks as one of the most valuable assets of a firm - the flip side of brand equity" (Shugan 185). Loyalty marketing also involves the sharing of the brand's philosophy by the vlogger relating the various constituent aspects of the company's mission, such as the proposed style (affordable, refined, girly). With regard to the latter aspect, the transparency on

ingredients used in the composition of the products assumes a great importance. In particular, beauty gurus are paying greater attention the quality of the primary sources of cosmetics. Along with that, new trends originate: regardless of what the real reason might be behind YouTubers' position on the use of sustainable products, they will boldly choose to use some products instead of others, and the effects to that on viewers' buyer behavior expand like wildfire.

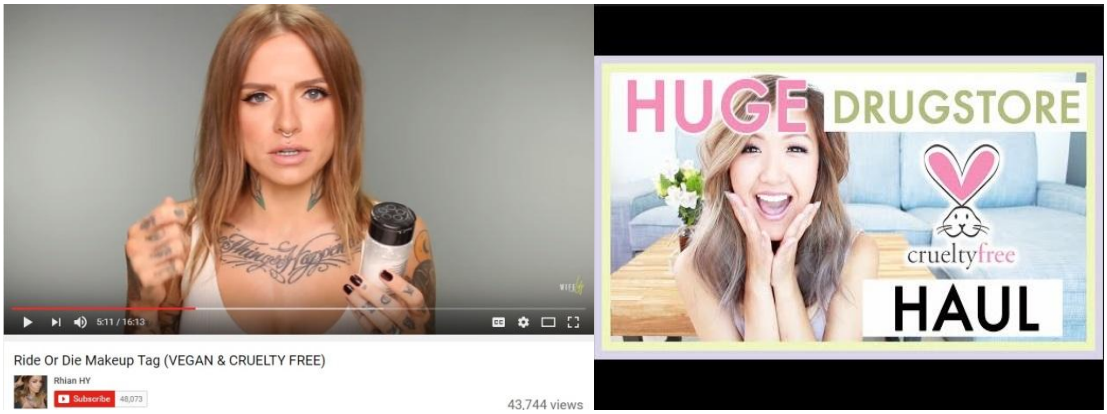

Figure 9: YouTube stars Rhian Hy and Weylie Hoang share their favorite vegan and cruelty-free beauty products.

Like the video shown above, many YouTubers choose to take into consideration the components of the cosmetics, whether they are of plant origin or tested on animals. The packaging becomes environmentally sustainable, in response to the attention of consumers towards respecting the environment. Shifting towards an environment-friendly approach to cosmetics is one of the latest challenges of the beauty culture. By analyzing the comments on the video, it is possible to notice that more and more YouTubers ask for companies to produce their items without testing them on animals and with more natural ingredients. It is worth noticing that consumer demand for healthier and more natural ingredients has already in the past prompted a number of corporate giants to change the formula of their products: attempts to ban dangerous ingredients in cosmetics began as early as the Great Depression, as groups of female estheticians along with the support of Eleanor Roosevelt and the Joint Women's Congressional Committee urged for the passage of a federal law, enacted as the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938. This Act aimed to make beauty products safe for use on skin and hair, under the regulatory arm of the government. Cosmetics that failed to pass the conditions of the Act were considered to be adulterated, due to the harmful and/or composed of

insanitary ingredients. For a cosmetic to be regarded as safe, it had to have the right label (Cavers 2-42).

1.5 Consumerism and superficiality

As shown so far, the naturalness with which YouTubers pose themselves for their viewers seems to constitute an extremely crucial factor for the realization of beauty videos. Therefore advertising messages do not always make an explicit appearance, in order to not compromise the video outcome. I will show in this subchapter, however, that the ideology of consumerism can be just as dominant in this kind of covert advertising as in traditional ads. As demonstrated so far, the beauty guru suggests that the purchase of the product displayed in the video will provide the achievement of the ideal image of beauty, leading the viewer into the belief that such ideal can be simply purchased. Thus, to the viewer this beauty ideal becomes linked to brand names which are endorsed as powerful tools for switching identity. As previously analyzed, the power of makeup allows altering the looks of a person whose appearance switches from fresh-faced to "runway ready".

The consumer-oriented ideology finds the perfect habitat in beauty-related videos, which are particularly advertising-oriented and constantly promote the pleasures and needs of consumption by displaying specific products. Beauty, sexuality and attractiveness are constantly commodified, while social and personal problems can be solved by using and/or purchasing the most suitable product (Choi et al. 81). Beauty gurus often claim: "this product saved my life", or "if you want to keep your man, you need this product in your life" and so on. As YouTube videos are targeted to specific groups which are interested in in the beauty world, unlike traditional media products which target a broader and unspecific audience, beauty videos identify younger women as a consumption category with a set of specific product needs (Choi et al. 89). Most of the time, beauty gurus mention the products and the brands that have been used in the video. Links to direct purchase of almost every item presented in the video can be found in the information box below the video. This is not related to product review videos, but also to other video formats such as "Favorites of the Month", "Haul Videos", tutorials and so on. Beauty vloggers manifest a tendency towards a compulsive shopping syndrome, presenting an addiction to shopping as a sort of maniacal purchasing craze.

As a study by Susan Lepselter shows, it turns out that YouTube is able to unleash even attitudes of compulsive buying and oniomania, also known as CBD Compulsive Buying Disorder. This phenomena describes the morbid tendency to buy, as well as an impulse to purchase every item of a whole collection as soon as it is launched on the market. Nonetheless it is obvious that cosmetics companies might find the sad consequences of such dysfunctional behaviors to be fruitful (920-947).

Numerous businesses disseminate a consumerist attitude and a tendency to encourage a buying behavior, fostering false needs that transfigure the possession of the product into a source of personal happiness and social identity (Shah). In addition, through compulsive buying, some people may feel the need to own specific objects with the alleged positive and superior qualities mentioned by beauty influencers on YouTube. Beauty products – in their ability to transform the outward appearance to different extents - possess the qualities described above, as well as having symbolic connotations that meet the so-called compensatory behavior which consists in accomplishing a certain reaction to contrast a state of bad mood, stress, mental and physical tensions, frustrations, insecurities, fears. These products represent a kind of catharsis, capable of filling voids of a completely different nature. It is sufficient to observe haul videos and video reviews of some YouTube gurus to understand the condition of high emotional transportation that has been carried by purchasing beauty products. A study conducted by Helga Dittmar shows how media evoke a materialistic lifestyle, that is to say that happiness and success are related to strongly desiring and attaining material goods:

> Idealized media models not only communicate that affluence and beauty should be central life goals for everybody, they define the parameters of what it means to be beautiful, successful, and happy. Of course, consumers do not simply take these messages at face value, but it is very hard-if not impossible to remain untouched by the continuous exposure to these normative sociocultural ideals portrayed in the mass media as "normal," desirable, and achievable (24).

The successful beauty vlogger is a perfect example of what Dittmar is explaining in her study. The Youtuber is known globally through her videos and she is often a role model for teenagers par excellence. As the incarnation of a dream come true, there is a halo effect around the materialistic lifestyle of the beauty guru, where the vast amount of products connote independence, happiness and success, as well as strong intimate relationships and a compelling personal life. Even though YouTubers claim to be compelled to maintain their

true self, vlogs do not show their lives in a Big Bother fashion, rather, he/she skillfully decides what to record and how to present his/her life to the viewers. With that, the viewer gets a materialistic and idealized media image and he/she is more prone to negate their emotions and pose problems about their own lives to which solution seems to be the purchase of the products well praised by the YouTuber which will give the impression to get them closer to these ideals. The purchases of specific beauty products can thus enhance the sense of the viewers' self-worth.

Figure 11: Kathleen Fuentes and Jodie Porteous show in the "YouTube made me buy it" tag video their purchase in beauty products that have been influenced by other YouTubers' suggestions.

American beauty products and YouTube videos are very prominent at a global level, but they are facing new challenges from European and Asian companies that also develops innovative products and advertisement strategies targeted to international markets. The consumerist ideology is what seems to join different countries, as the use of new media technologies as a tool for beauty companies marketing strategies might be most prominent in the United States, it has become a global phenomenon and along with that the promotion of the value of possessing things: it is common to walk through the streets of Seoul and be overwhelmed by the amount of beauty stores. This emerging sense of a global culture is a result of an "increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" (Christiansen et al. 319) , where mediascapes facilitate global consumer culture. The economic dimension of YouTube serves as a critical component for cultural and sociological analysis.

Media thus allows for the capitalistic system to spread and be known across the world and as studies show, the American capitalist system in particular holds superficial qualities such as wealth, fame and appearance as core values (Kasser et al. 18-22). Indeed, when analyzing beauty videos, such connotations seem to help achieve for many vloggers the American

Dream. As we have analyzed so far, beauty companies promote their products through beauty videos which often advocate values of consumption. Beauty videos often make viewers believe that they will be happier and more satisfied with their lives if they purchase the advertised beauty products. Beauty videos often associate representations of young women with specific consumer behaviors, and vice versa, their needs constitute an essential condition for the existence of many of these videos. It is therefore hard to make a clear-cut distinction between media consumption and production in the world of YouTube beauty videos, as this platform provides users with tools to both encode and decode their own mediated messages by creating videos.

Roger Silverstone's writing on the consumption cycle may also provide useful insights for discussing the consumerist message of beauty videos. His model of mutually dependent consumption and production provides a suitable observation for the relation between beauty products, YouTube and the amateur media in the twenty-first century in general. Silverstone classifies six moments in the process of consumption. The first phase is called commodification (institutional production) in material and mediated products which influence and are influenced by other dependent moments of the cycle of consumption: imagination, appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion which "themselves feedback, especially the last, to influence, and some would argue particularly in a post-modern context, to define the structure and the pattern of commodification itself" (124). Secondly, the phase of consumer imagination can occur before and sometimes after the purchasing of a specific beauty product. The potential purchase of this product can generate anticipation of the pleasure ownership and vlogger can attach emotional meanings to the purchased products: "purchase in this sense, potentially, a transformative activity, marking a boundary between fantasy and reality, opening up a space (or not) for imaginative and practical work (de Certeau's tactics) on the meaning of the object, either as a compensation for disappointed desire or a celebration of its fulfilment" (Silverstone 126). By simply noticing the titles of tag videos such as "10 beauty products I can't live without" or the "Ride or Die makeup tag" it is possible to point out the emotional burden vloggers can annex to the purchase of beauty products.

Successively, Silverstone talks about appropriation, which consists of the process by which the consumer takes possession of a purchased item. The products take on a meaning at this stage: appropriation participates in the construction of the identity of individuals. The object that enters a given physical space poses a threat to the established order of the same space, to

the aesthetic harmony and to its logical structure (127). The purchase refers to an assessment and to a choice often negotiated among other members of the community, which inscribes the goods within the moral economy providing it with meaning and aligning it with the value structure of the group unit, in this case the 'beauty community'. Products advertised on YouTube, once appropriated, cultivate personal meaning in contexts such as the bathroom, bedroom or the beauty room.

Through this process, the beauty product comes from the universe of the industrial goods to ultimately join the world of meanings concerning the structure of the consumer's personal space. Progressively, objectification refers to the placement of the object in the domestic space, which - through exhibition strategies and positioning the product within personal spaces - comes to build symbolically the same environment (128).

Silverstone argues that during the incorporation (further dimension of the appropriation) the object is incorporated when it begins to be integrated also in the temporal structure, which is in the routine of daily life of the group, bringing out different emotions linked to the product itself (129). The incorporation of a beauty product, along with its objectification, provides a basis for a constant work of differentiation with and between the private domains which is then supported through the showing and the use of the product itself. While the objectification and the incorporation are mostly aspects of the internal structure of an encompassed scenario like the home of the beauty vlogger, the conversion - like the appropriation - defines the relation between the home and the outside world – the boundary through which objects and meanings pass as the home defines itself and claims for itself and for its members a status among the corresponding groups of the community.

The last phase of the consumption cycle according to Silverstone is the conversion of products which defines an exchange of pleasures, meanings and knowledge that are cultivated in the private domain (130). Hence, products that are able to hold meanings that go beyond the home boundaries are brought in broader contexts. Beauty videos for example, are talked about with friends and even strangers on the internet.

Even when videos are not as specialized as Lauren Mychal Mountain's videos, by filming their everyday beauty routines, beauty vloggers turn their daily aesthetic activities into aesthetic objects. Moreover, when the beauty vlogger enters in a sort of symbiosis with the viewer, which is satisfied by what he/she has watched in the video, the viewer gets a positive aesthetic response that involves appropriation and incorporation which produce pleasure and

satisfaction related to the stage of conversion. The consumption of beauty videos and cosmetics has now formed a cycle of commodification that is constantly in flux.

1.6 Virtual and 'real life' communities

As we have analyzed so far, the vlogger approaches the viewer in a direct and friendly way which helps to establish a relationship of trust between them. Studies have shown that YouTube celebrities establish a parasocial relationship with their audience once they show themselves to be open and vulnerable, which enhances the audience's feeling of intimacy and friendship (Chung et al. 489). These relationship help to create a community, and beauty becomes the element of convergence and interest within this community.

Within a community with a common objective, it is increasingly common that a large number of people gather together through a shared interest and spontaneously form a new subset. These communities are not tied to any specific geographical place, yet they share common interests within social and cultural realities ranging from broad topics to more detailed interests or activities. Spontaneity is what differs community development in digital spaces from traditional forms of community: "community is defined less by the intimacy of the relationships that sustain it, than by the connections people make to achieve particular results or satisfy certain needs. […] In the digital age, communities only exist as long as they are needed or as long as the members of the community want to keep working and communicating with each other" (Burnett 159). According to the study conducted by Burnett, in this case YouTube is the community in which a set of users take part by uploading videos, watching videos, or both; and in turn YouTube includes users who are attracted by beauty products, a community that itself encompasses a niche of – for instance – lipstick aficionados; and so on.

The vast amount of content created on YouTube make it possible for many to become niche consumers, as a selected group of people become fans of a specific trend. Thanks to the diversity of the content that can be found on YouTube, minority tastes are catered to, and members of subcommunities are offered greater opportunities to express themselves. Unlike television, where programs are arranged to have the broadest reach, the variety of YouTube channels ensures that even the smallest niches' demands are satisfied:

> most of the content available online—including content produced by amateurs—finds an audience. These audiences can be tiny, but they are not zero. […], every track no matter how obscure found at least one listener. This translates into a new economics of media. As researchers who have studied the long-tail phenomena have demonstrated, in many industries the total volume of sales generated by such low-popularity items exceeds the volume generated by the Top 40 (Manovich 320).

This phenomenon here mentioned by Manovich is called long-tail, has strong implications for culture and politics in media: as the amount of YouTube videos grows and with that the difference of content, simultaneously the cultural level is stimulated and consequently rises. The term long tail was first coined in 2004 in an article related to business by Chris Anderson related to the business strategy of selling a large number of different items which each sell in relatively small quantities, of rather selling large quantities of a small number of popular items (Wired). Beauty videos capture the attention of a particular subcommunity whose member feed this internet phenomenon through their excitement and pleasure. An audience of beauty videos thus can encourage beauty companies to target their marketing strategies to such videos. Inside the community, then, beauty gurus and so on constitute a subcommunity.

Even though a business worth thousands of dollars may stand behind this form of entertainment, no particular marketing strategy is needed to divide potential customers into groups with homogeneous needs because the representative sample of a segment is already established, as the YouTube beauty community usually attracts young women and girls of a specific age range. The way these new forms of communities are being formed in the virtual realm resemble transitory grounds where people who are physically separated can unite in a social organization through common beliefs.

The efficiency of this dynamic cyber-society revolves around social relationships forged within common topics of interest, collective values and shared forms of language as discourse. At the same time, while these communities can be brought to existence in an effortless fashion, such fluidity can disrupt the stability of virtual communities. Scholar Jan Fernback compares the vulnerable characteristics of online communities to the North American society: “The principles of free speech, individualism, equality, and open access are associated with virtual communities, she claims, and are ‘the same symbolic interests that define the character of American democracy’” (qtd. in Lievrouw 62). While many people find themselves preferring to belong to a virtual community (rather than a ‘real-life’) one as it is easier to flee from restrictions that the society might impose on them and to get drawn into

fellowship and commonality in cyberspace, the volatility of such virtual communities do not necessarily represent a safe space and might still contribute to an already fragmented scene of the everyday life.

Chapter 2

Post-World War II economic expansion: the case of Avon

As I have analyzed so far, many American beauty gurus like to show their lives through vlogs that often portray how they achieved success and a luxurious lifestyle through posting beauty related videos on YouTube and being sponsored by beauty companies. As their videos can be accessed globally, viewers from all over the world believe that creating content on YouTube is a way to achieve happiness and self-realization. What YouTubers say thus is extremely appealing to the audience. In this chapter I will show how, in a similar fashion, Avon representatives' selling strategies in the 1950's delivered a commercialized brand of female empowerment focused on notions of success and prosperity. Therefore analyzing Avon's marketing strategies has allowed me to revert to the concept on how advertising and mass media are excellent tools for the distribution of American beauty products specifically, and American cultural products in general.

Personal success stories shared on YouTube are loved by thousands of viewers, as they are inspired and persuaded by such stories. To further grasp the relation between beauty marketing, feminism and its effect on women, I have conducted an analysis through the evolution of Avon – a New York based beauty giant – in order show the extent to which their empowering messages worked as successful slogans for the brand. In my opinion, analyzing Avon's marketing strategies in the post-World War II is particularly important to understand the undisrupted success of makeup. This chapter will therefore shed light on the importance of beauty in the 1950's and its role in American capitalism. In order to do so I will introduce a brief historical background of the period that followed the World War II. I will thus show how Avon's innovative marketing strategies and beauty products in general flourished in that particular period.

World War II was inevitably a source of destruction; as the war ceased though, the cosmetic industry began to flourish and went through an additional economic recovery: new trends were popularized by actresses and musicians, mainly due to the massive diffusion of television (Riley et al. 223-228). The use of television, through advertisements, was the main way to reach the largest possible audience and to increase sales and the ability to disseminate messages (Spigel 11-22). A study conducted by Emily S. Rosenberg revealed that cosmetic ads during the war would promote the idea that the aspiration of fighting for a free country

was closely associated with the ‘duty’ of achieving a flawless appearance (480-489). Thus cosmetic advertising went from depicting the glamorous and untarnished image of the woman’s body as a market commodity to sending a politically conscious message that rearranged the rule of the woman. Women could have finally had their part in collaborating for the freedom of their country, as women did not have to focus only on their appearance, but were praised for their success in protecting the freedom of their country (Goldin 743-755). The glamorous image of the female beauty indicated the American way of life that was worth fighting for; this ideal of an attractive woman became an international model of American ideals shown in Hollywood movies and as advertised by cosmetic companies (Howard 591-610). An article by Stephen Gundle shows in fact that through film (but also via new media such as television) that the American way of life took hold on the European population. Gundle claims that the Italian society after World War II was profoundly affected by the culture of “glamour” that encouraged mass consumption. This culture drew heavily on images and desires created by the American film industry and it would not have arisen in the absence of American glamour (95-118).

The economic boom period that took place after the World War II played a fundamental role in the cosmetics industry. When the United States entered World War II, it was debatable whether or not women should keep their glamorous look, as it was discordant with the poverty and destruction created by the war (Delano 33-36). As for Europe, after World War II, the rise of the United States towards becoming a world power had a huge impact on the other side of the Atlantic. Americans in the European perspective had become bearers of military liberation and, at the same time, bearers of a new way of life consisting of many things that Europeans have never seen before (Rosenberg 490-492). The term "Americanization" is, in fact, showcasing the deep mark imprinted by the United States upon the Old Continent, about two aspects in particular: the diffusion of ideas of freedom and modernity, and the introduction in Europe of a growth pattern based on the expansion of private consumption of individuals and of families (or as the later feared consumerism), based on the increasing use of necessary goods and also of superficial ones (Nolan 17-18). Americanization can be interpreted as a manifestation and consequence of modern culture, leading to growing self-absorption due to a process of democratization. In this point of view, as Winfried Fluck argues, “modernization has unleashed an unlimited and ever escalating dynamic of imaginary self-empowerment that is driven by a restless individualism” (263). In the words of Fluck, the Americanization of modern culture was driven mostly by popular

music, television and film; the latter being the most important of the cultural forms and media of the 21st century. The power of imagery, the importance of appearance and it being the most valuable asset, was translated in the moving pictures as this new form of modern culture distanced itself from any didactic or utilitarian function. From the point of view of Gillian Rose, the social aspects of visual meanings are the focal point of the use of visual research techniques. The visual thus acquires cultural significance (69). The aesthetic experience in this case is brought forward by Fluck: "the classical Hollywood system does not distance the imaginary but absorbs and focuses it powerfully" (255).

Figure 12 – Vintage Tangee advertisement (The Huffington Post)

As shown in movies, typical of the 1950's is the explosion of colors that constituted the reaction to the sadness of the war years (Kindem 33-35). The key words to describe the woman of this time period are: efficient, refined and flawless. Under the appearance of a playful woman devoted to the game of seduction, makeup slowly became a codified practice characterized by specific products and appropriate techniques (Howard 591-594). More and more products appeared on the market, new selling techniques were developed, and those that were already commercially available were going through a process of optimization. It thus can be easy to see the work of PR practitioners as the exclusive force that unveiled the capabilities of women, but there was more to it than that.

2.1 Promoting the glamorous woman during World War II

During the post–World War II economic expansion, manufactured beauty comprises a large sector of the economy and played a fundamental role in the everyday routine of women from all over the world. In the years following this period, the technological innovation of media increasingly linked female identity and self-empowerment with the image of a perfect female beauty, which usually denoted standards of aesthetics of a white and heavily sexualized identity as further expanded upon by Meyerowitz:

> In the postwar era, Rosie the Riveter and her challenge to the sexual division of labor vanished from the mass culture. Magazines rarely presented women in heavy industry or in the armed services. In this sense, the postwar mass culture reverted to prewar assumptions about gender roles (1479).

As Meyerowitz explains, the use of cosmetics changed accordingly to the trends that were popular at that time and was linked especially to the cultural, social, psychological, artistic and spiritual aspect of the feminine.

Especially in the post-war years, advertisements and movies were celebrating a sexualized representation of the female body as if it was a main characteristic of the female psyche (Ford et al. 416-419). The cosmetic industry adapted to the influence of this concept which addressed female consumers in the late 1940s. Conventional notions about heterosexual romance and marriage were widely consumed in advertisements: the woman would decide to beautify herself as an act based in her desire for a man, to basically capture his visual attention. Peiss explains how women yielded to the pressure of turning their appearance into an object of commodification to awaken men's desire:

> Combining an assault on consumer culture with a new emphasis on patriarchy, these critics charged that the male-dominated capitalist economy manipulated female desires and anxieties in ways that served men's personal and political control of women. Unattainable standards of beauty had an effect at once intense and narcotic: women were driven into absorption with appearances, into making themselves the objects of men's visual pleasure (261).

As Peiss argues, the beauty industry at that time promoted the idea that using cosmetics would help to achieve upward mobility. Women's use of makeup in the post-World War II period

thus does not only demonstrate the conspicuousness of cosmetics consumption, but also how it guarantees women economic and social empowerment.

The aftermath of World War II was a time of unprecedented crisis the world industry collapsed, causing the failure of many companies. However, new opportunities arose, such as the emergence and the subsequent expansion of direct selling for beauty products. The political turmoil of that time and the virulent nationalism coexisted with a boost for a sense of fashion and the diffusion of different styles (Twigg et al. 29-31). The emergence of a consumer culture and of trends among young women influenced ideas of women's self-image and self-esteem (Black et al. 112-114).

Using makeup would give women the illusion of having a better performance in the workplace, as psychiatrists and employers claimed the importance of using cosmetics for their alleged positive psychological effects on women. Many companies thus offered many beauty classes in their factories, with MacEuen stating examples such as: "Martin Aircraft and Lockheed Corporation provided cosmetics to their employees. In determining the "essentiality" of materials to be reduced or eliminated from the domestic economy, the U.S. War Production Board (WPB) stepped lightly, deferring to psychiatrists' research results about cosmetics' availability "to counteract fatigue" among working women" (6).

As it has been analyzed so far, women's appearance assumed great importance in the post-war years and cosmetics were of great use to enhance women's looks. Avon's success can thus be seen as the response to the high demand of cosmetics at that time. But it appeared to be more than that. As World War II ceased, the reconstruction efforts created many job opportunities in what was seen as 'women's work'. The use of cosmetics was also influenced by the acknowledgement of the modernized rule of women in the paid workforce after World War II. After the conflict, many more women began looking for jobs that would allow them to support their families financially and that would at the same time not deprive them of the time to dedicate to the housework (Cohen 236-238).

Although direct selling as an enterprise has its origins in the mid-1800s, it was after World War II that this form of selling was exploiting representatives' social networks. Direct selling in the post-World War II period adapted to a newly regulated environment (such as the emergence of consumption behaviors) and above all, to women in charge of the sales (Biggart 20-22). In the early 1950s, Avon was one of the world's leading distributors of beauty products on the market, showing that the system of direct selling was attracting American

women whose role as protectors of the house and the family was in harmony with national and societal values of the time.

As Marsh explains in the following quote, Avon became an extraordinary social phenomenon and distributors' social networks grew exponentially in that period: "After the war, as demand for luxury products grew, so did Avon. By the mid-fifties the company was producing over 500 different beauty products and had an annual turnover of $55 million" (157). Sales representatives' rate per area expanded, a strategy that enabled more retailers to do home selling which allowed the sales to increase over the years. In this way, direct selling seemed to be a harmonious settlement between the American wartime needs, and the social worries of men about women's presence in the labor force.

Avon's strategy fit perfectly in a nascent and fast evolving market and the culture of consumption during the 1950s. Since the company's expansion in the post-war years onward, Avon's managers thought that women were genetically gifted with a considerable attention for the outward appearance, were thus fascinated by cosmetics, and bound to talk, chat, and exchange the same experience of sharing beauty secrets with each other (Simon 29). With the right drive and approach, Avon's salesmen realized that by exploiting such factors, women could have become more active, ambitious, and thus more successful sales promoters than their male counterparts. The common "Avon Lady" confirmed predominating stereotypes that all women would instinctively fulfill (and most important, enjoy) the role of wives, mothers and homeworkers and working for Avon was seen as the ideal path to follow for women to bring their contribution also outside the four walls of a domestic household, though not neglecting their leading duties of caring for their husbands and children (Delano 59-62).

Unsurprisingly, the mechanism that allows women to become ambitious sales representatives and charming beauty vloggers on YouTube focuses on an amount of gender views that form the correlation between these women, the products they promote, and the values they attribute to these products in order to motivate customers and viewers to consume beauty products.

Figure 13: Avon recruiting advertisements resemble in some way Uncle Sam in its manifestation of patriotic emotion (Library of Congress).

Conclusion

The conclusion will review the two chapters by comparing and contrasting YouTube beauty vloggers and Avon sales representatives by analyzing which messages they send to their audiences and the values attached to their narratives. The conclusion will focus on an investigation of another peculiar aspect of women's consumer behavior: the case of the 'lipstick effect'. The financial phenomenon of the lipstick effect as a tool of discussion will be used in order to analyze the relationship between women and their tendency of purchasing makeup. This aspect will be displayed at the end of this thesis since it will attempt to scientifically break down the reasons behind the undisrupted success of the beauty industry.

The purpose of this thesis was to understand the factors that made makeup one of the most resilient products of consumer culture in periods such as the 1950s and from 2008 onwards. The study conducted through my thesis granted me the possibility to explore women's use of beauty products and gain an understanding of the reason why women choose to wear makeup, the role of makeup in the lives of American women today and in the second postwar period, and the marketing strategies American beauty industries employ through the use of new media.

In the first chapter I have investigated the phenomenon of the influence that beauty gurus have on cosmetic marketing strategies. Online communities are becoming an increasingly important part of people's lives as they exert a strong influence on them. YouTube is an example of an extremely influential online platform. Millions of girls and women of different ages - from around the world - watch beauty videos regularly and thus acquire new techniques and learn more about beauty products. This trend has created a beauty community of considerable size on YouTube. In this community there are people, the so-called beauty influencers and, in the specific case of this thesis, the beauty gurus, that strongly affect viewers and their opinions.

Beauty vloggers play a vital role in the viewers' opinions, determining their choices and influencing to some extent their attitudes. For this reason, based on the phenomenon of influence, I have investigated the existing connection between viewers and the opinion leaders, which in this case are the beauty gurus. In order to examine how YouTubers exert their influence, I have started my thesis by analyzing some examples of beauty videos.

Beauty gurus have become digital influencers specialized in connecting with the audience through different social networks. According to Burgess and Green, not all beauty vloggers are experts in this area as they often emphasize that they are not very competent when it comes to describing the products (50-56). For this reason they tend to diminish their authority, declaring themselves to be just normal people. This factor is very important as it makes beauty vloggers more reliable in the eyes of the viewers.

In addition, studies have shown that advertising through a YouTuber's channel is cheaper than doing so in print media (Hamel). Moreover, I have demonstrated that beauty videos are often seen as more credible and reliable than traditional advertising such as magazine prints. This is possible because a review of a product done by a beauty influencer is considered as a piece of advice that the viewer can trust and not as an advertising tool.

However, many users wonder how truthful the opinions of beauty gurus are. I have shown that reliability, naturalness and attractiveness are the variables that have a great influence on the credibility of the source. The more the vlogger is associated with these values, the more persuasive she/he is and can positively influence the consumer's intention to buy the products mentioned in her/his video. Through the analysis of beauty videos it was possible to determine how the beauty gurus influences the viewer's spending behavior. The consumer-oriented ideology finds the perfect habitat in beauty related videos, which are particularly advertising-oriented and constantly promote the needs of consumption through displaying specific products. Beauty videos identify younger women as a consumption category with a set of specific product needs (Choi et al. 89).

In addition, as seen from the analysis of beauty videos, most consumers, due to the presence of sponsored videos, may not consider vloggers' reviews as truthful. Thus transparency is one of the variables that make a YouTuber more influential than the others. The relationship between YouTuber and viewer is based on trust as the viewer considers the vlogger open and honest. YouTubers' popularity and their success are thus based on their fans and if this relationship weakens, beauty companies will consequently lose interest in sponsoring these YouTubers. In conclusion, the power of beauty gurus in the beauty sector is crucial nowadays and companies take it into account.

Companies have thus been changing their marketing strategies by trying to create sponsorship agreements with such influencers in order to benefit from their high number of views. The first chapter has therefore argued that the phenomenon of beauty videos is a new beauty

marketing strategy. I have thus attempted to analyze this innovative way of marketing makeup products through beauty videos and beauty gurus, who act as intermediates between the company and the final consumer.

Messages of empowerment, strength and independence appear to be closely linked to the use of specific products that YouTubers promote, giving the illusion that the American Dream can be achieved through materialistic means. The outcome of this idea thus results in practical benefits for beauty industries which invest in determining the factors that makes makeup so important for women. Cosmetic industries have envisioned YouTube as a fertile ground for vloggers to create content of interest which triggers women into commodifying their ideal of beauty. In the same way, beauty companies respond to the development of women's needs and interests for makeup products, which are influenced by YouTube. In a study investigating modern marketing strategies, Mangold and Faulds reported that nowadays cosmetic companies contrive many ways to establish and enhance new marketing and distribution channels, for instance by developing new advertisement methods that will attract customers and keep their loyalty approach and trust to brands through the recommendations of YouTube beauty vloggers (357 – 365).

Through sharing their opinions and daily thoughts, YouTubers can be seen as role models who are able to attract an audience (Freberg et al. 90-92). Spontaneity, authenticity, naturalness and sincerity represent key components for persuading the viewer. In order to successfully reach the audience, the creator tries to build mutually beneficial relationships with the viewer based on free discussion, collaboration and trust (Green).

The language used by YouTubers is a key factor in the relationship with the viewer and the medium from which subsequent technological junctions are evolved. The beauty vlogger's presence not only predominates in the modern beauty culture, but it also excels in techniques of beauty marketing, sales and represents a key force in the overall business world. Along with Avon's strategy that I have introduced so far, that helped to create a sense of duty and business ownership among their representatives, the career that these beauty gurus created out of their YouTube experience thus serves as a persuading factor and example towards their viewers. Their career motivates the viewers into emulating this path that provides them the power to create and control their wealth and overall lifestyle. Not only do vloggers let their viewers believe in their messages, but they also invite them to become YouTubers as well, since they show how much they have achieved and how far they have come in their lives all through YouTube. They motivate their viewers into joining the club that allowed them to

reach goals they claim they would have never met otherwise. YouTubers somehow assure viewers that creating a channel would provide them with the power to be in total control of their financial situation.

Many YouTubers, especially the ones with a significant numbers of subscribers, show that it is possible to make YouTube their full-time job, which most of the time consists of recording and editing videos. And that is exactly how Avon, an exemplary cosmetics brand that took off during the second post-war period, attracted its workforce. As it has been noted so far, the growth of contemporary beauty companies has thus already happened in the past in other situations, making it challenging to narrow down the common factors of this unceasing financial success.

Similarly, a discourse of self-empowerment has been a significant and distinctive aspect of my study in the second chapter. During economic recessions, finding the way to psychologically attract women to buy and sell (in the case of Avon) makeup appears to be a profitable enterprise in the world of beauty marketing. What I have learned so far has allowed me to rethink how the social circumstances and cultural forces are integral to this marketing process and how women are embedded into the modern scheme of gendered politics and methods of beauty commerce.

The second chapter thus aims to investigate how Avon operated through its system of network marketing and direct selling strategies, mainly regarding its motivational policies during the second post-war period.

Direct selling companies usually have different business methods than traditional marketing companies, since the latter are systematically geared to benefit the sellers exclusively. Direct selling companies - according to the American sociologist Nicole Biggart - are forms of charismatic organizations. These companies incorporate a system of beliefs and values not exclusively related to efficiency or profitability, instead they claim that their belief is based on ideals such as duty, honor, pursuit of beauty, religious calling, personal loyalty and the importance of some cause, no matter what it might be (Biggart 107-110).

The notion of "charisma" can be explained by the presence of followers. According to Biggart, if followers recognize the strength the leaders claim, they have a moral obligation to submit to their direction. Biggart thus claims that:

> Charismatic leaders typically must demonstrate their abilities to followers through miracles, the continued success of a mission, or other proofs. In charismatic organizations that approach a "pure" or "genuine" type, a leader has a following whose interactions are "based on an emotional form of communal relationship" (132).

It is in this sense, as referred to by Biggart, Avon could be considered a charismatic organization because its pulling force belonged not in the products it produced but in the strength of its discourse, more specifically, in the strategies that were able to make its discourse effective. These strategies worked perfectly in the political turmoil of the second post-war period. Avon had an ideology whose principles were based on fair capitalism and were related to the values of the American way of life, of pursuit of success, individual freedom, entrepreneurship, consumerism and materialism. Avon's business after World War II developed through emotional and social interactions that promoted a balance between work, family, religion and community. For many women, being an Avon representative meant having the ability to be independent.

Likewise, YouTube's motivational discourse relates to the notions of women's self-empowerment and financial independence. In addition, according to what I have explained so far, YouTube's motivational discourse appeals to the concept of the American Dream, supporting ideals of creativity and ambition, while advocating the concept of a close relationship with its viewers, which reflects a clever sequence of different values such as self-help, female empowerment, awareness and acceptance of sexual and racial minorities, economic self-interest and meritocracy and a psychological aptitude that characterizes the beauty community on YouTube. Hence, nowadays the beauty vlogger is considered by many viewers a pioneer in female entrepreneurship. The beauty influencer thus resembles the Avon sales lady who, with the ease and refinement of selling cosmetics, was able to provide for her family. As Radhika Gajjala explains:

> these languages of (wo)men's emancipation in globalized media spaces are in fact recordings of familiar liberal feminist discourses interweaved with a capitalist, consumerist rhetoric of individual choice. I suggest that the celebratory discourse of women's empowerment through the Internet that prevails draws on a neoliberal notion of empowerment, which gets mobilized in the service of economic globalization (15).

In line with Gajjala's discourse on feminism and capitalist rhetoric, new cultural approaches to beauty and self-display call for a need for employment for women in an ever growing

beauty business that not only promotes women's presence in beauty, but also in the world economy. Starting with direct-selling businesses such as Avon, and then migrating to the new industry of modern businesses such as YouTube, women found ways to conquer the new frontiers of the beauty industry and have been able to build business empires. From working inside the 'conventional' system of retail selling, Avon representatives and YouTube beauty gurus transformed their jobs into rewarding door-to-door selling operations and successful home-based enterprises respectively.

- Beauty and recession: the case of the 'lipstick effect'

So far I have closely explored how beauty products have made their way into the lives of women by analyzing the different cultural and social factors that influence the beauty industry and its marketing strategies. In this section of the conclusion I will attempt to scientifically break down the aspects of women's behavior that allow them to become loyal consumers of U.S. beauty products.

As analyzed so far, makeup during World War II and its aftermath signified female agency which encompassed empowerment, sexual power and citizenship. But the 1940s and 1950s were not the only instances where the consumption of cosmetics was high, nor were these decades the only instances that denoted the model of the American woman who is active in all facets of the country's mobilization. The Great Depression preserved or even stimulated the beauty business, as cosmetics not only were a tool that provided an edge in the job market, but their use uplifted the spirits of women afflicted by a world full of social and cultural uncertainties, as explained by Peiss:

> In 1930, the beauty editor of Smart Set observed that the cosmetics consumer is "out after something and is disillusioned on empty premises." Her comment heralded a shift in attitudes toward beauty products. Criticism of commercial cosmetics as overpriced, injurious, and fraudulent spread widely. These had been heard before, but now they circulated in a very different context, in which making up was rapidly becoming the feminine norm (196).

Here is where Kathy Peiss grasps the importance of cosmetics use during that time, and why it was so important for women:

> if not depression-proof, cosmetics sales remained strong. Women who went without new clothes could still afford to indulge in a new lipstick. Most families spent only small amounts on personal care items, about 2 percent of their household income, but this added up to a total outlay of $750 million nationally on cosmetics and beauty shops in 1931 (196).

The characteristics of the so-called "lipstick effect" are thus found almost 60 years prior to when the expression was coined. The phenomenon, known to market experts, predicts that in times of economic downturn and uncertainties, the consumption of luxury goods at a low cost such as the lipstick –hence the name - increases. This happens, as marketing strategists explain, because buyers postpone the purchase of more expensive luxury products and 'console' themselves with expenditure on relatively small luxuries (Hill et al. 286-288).

As I have analyzed in the first chapter, American beauty videos often draw the attention of thousands of international viewers as they promote pursuable dreams that are linked to the consumption of makeup. Successful product commerce thus requires from beauty companies a deep understanding of the current social and cultural conditions of the countries where the products are planned to be sold, so critical circumstances such as economic recession can be incorporated into the product's concept. Likewise, door-to-door cosmetic firms such as Avon use a direct marketing distribution system to sell their products among a broad spectrum of women, expanding the company's reach and targeting as many potential customers as possible. In this way, revolutionary selling strategies are also essential for companies hoping to surmount periods of economic decline.

- Psychological and cultural implications underlying the lipstick effect

For many, shopping represents a form of relaxation, achievement and accomplishment. Many consider the act of purchasing objects as a sort of self-reward after a long busy day. It can thus be noted that this psychological aptitude might have helped the economy even in the midst of the financial crisis such as the one taking place during the post-war period. Indeed, the purchase of items that people would have usually relegated to the ranks of the superfluous did not stop. It has often shown to be the opposite case. Jordan Smoller, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard, reminds us that during periods of financial unease such as the Great Depression

sales of cosmetics increased by 25% (and already in the first half of 2008, during the Great Recession, L'Oréal has sold 5% more) (Psychology Today).

A revised edition of the mooted "lipstick effect" would be present in each of these time periods. The effect has been first observed in the United States by Leonard Lauder, the president of the Esteé Lauder Companies (one of the largest companies in the beauty industry) after the fall of the Twin Towers - and the consequent uncertainty, even in the economic field, that followed. Certainly, the phenomenon dubbed by journalists as the lipstick effect has recurrently been taking place in periods of financial and political distress:

> Data collected by Kline & Company, a market-research group, show that lipstick sales sometimes increase during times of economic distress, but have also been known to grow during periods of prosperity (The Economist).

However, some sources, like *The Economist*, find no correlation between economic distress and the incremented sales rate in smaller scale luxury products. After all, it seems to me quite ventured to define this phenomenon as a concatenation of chance circumstances, as I have so far in my thesis analyzed how important and profitable the motivational discourse, uplifting messages and persuading face-to-face connections are in periods of financial and political disorder. I have linked the success of beauty marketing strategies over the years to the high level of visual attention that YouTube gurus and Avon sales representatives have achieved with their viewers and clients. Correspondingly, visual communication might determine women's tendency on spending a lot of money on beauty products under conditions of economic scarcity. A study conducted by Donald F. Sacco highlights the importance of the visual dimension of the lipstick effect:

> if recession primes are a motivational cue for women, and beauty products become a relevant stimulus based on women's current needs, then the same logic of attentional adhesion (and therefore, automaticity) may apply to the lipstick effect. […] women primed with recession cues will display a stronger visual attentional bias for beauty relative to nonbeauty products compared with women in a control prime condition, thus providing evidence that the lipstick effect operates at the level of automaticity (214).

This study demonstrates that the lipstick effect is operated by women at the level of automatic visual attention. This peculiar urge for shopping (while the sales of primary needs goods diminish) appears to relate primarily to clothing or products for personal care. After collecting data about the two decades from 1992 to 2011, a recent study conducted by the psychologist

Sarah E. Hill states that the reallocation of economic resources in the sector of beauty, in times of crisis, is related to ancestral schemes of human behavior:

> conditions of economic resource scarcity should prompt individuals to increase effort directed toward attracting mates, particularly for women. This means that despite dampening consumer interest in most classes of products, economic recession cues may lead women to have heightened interest in products that enhance their desirability to mates, thereby prompting the lipstick effect (275-276).

Accordingly, this study shows that the lipstick effect goes back to where our instincts harbor and our inner behaviors start. This effect, Hill explains, might be closely related to women's mating psychology which thus influences the consumer's buying patterns. A possible explanation for women's increased spending in beauty products during economic recessions is thus the female desire for products that are able to enhance their attractiveness to their male counterpart. Ultimately, during periods of financial anxiety, men would be more likely to choose women who appear more liable to mate. As can be seen for instance in the YouTube makeup transformation tutorials I have previously analyzed, makeup can be a very fascinating commodity with extraordinary functions: a few makeup items can dramatically and immediately change a woman's appearance. Whatever the culture or the time in history might be, a clear and flawless skin is perceived as a sign of a young and healthy face. Beauty is something we recognize instinctively. Studies have shown that beauty is a symptom of health and fertility, for example eye makeup make eyes appear bigger and attractive and blush makes the cheeks look flushed, subliminally indicating sexual arousal. Overall, beauty supports the notion that if one is physically attractive one is assumed to have a more ideal personality than someone of lesser attractiveness (Graham et al. 199-210).

Though, in my opinion, further measures should be considered when analyzing the social actors and cultural processes of the lipstick effect, which cannot be solely confined to the primordial features of the human nature, rather it should be discussed in combination with, for example, the psychological instability after the 9/11 attacks, or the consequences of over-generalized gender stereotypes, or perhaps a combination of all these different factors. Gaining self-confidence is thus an important goal to achieve in the face of psychological disarray caused by terrorist attacks, as confidence would improve women's approach to an uncertain future. Enhancing women's sense of attractiveness, magnified through the use of cosmetics, might thus boost self-confidence in periods of financial crisis. Self-esteem

explanations rather than stories about evolutionary competition for mates will appear, in the case of post-9/11 trauma for example, to be a more plausible explanation.

Whatever the causes of the elusive "lipstick effect" might be, the impacts inspected by teams of psychologists are just another demonstration of how the behavior of cosmetics consumers tends to escape conscious control in the field of consumption. It is our nature, our tendency, to respond to our inner needs, which actually make us relate to a modern version of what Michael Mauss described as *homo economicus*, a rational person which aims exclusively to taking care of his own individual interests (76). For example, it is useful to bear in mind that, often, the purchase phase is preceded in the mind of the consumer by a fundamental reflection: one on the relation between the cost and the opportunities offered by the purchase. When having the possibility to buy a lipstick for $40, potential buyers are usually convinced by the fact that it would not be possible to buy another luxury item for a relatively small amount of money. Buyers neglect the possible alternatives to buy other items in a more sustainable consumption pattern: marketing and information can have a big impact on orienting the consumers' choices (Chao et al. 127-128).

Moreover, the myth that women during recessions do not have enough money to spend on beauty products has been debunked by many companies. In reality, women throughout their lives have an overall constant buying power that allows them to buy – even if on a smaller scale – deluxe beauty products.

To reference once again the terminology of the financial theory I am discussing so far, lipsticks produced by the most exclusive international fashion designers can go up to $65. Recent statistics show that over 33% of women buy expensive makeup as they are intrigued by its innovative factors (DailyMail). These factors include an innovative formula, intriguing packaging and the brand's name which all seem to be features that make purchase opportunities more desirable.

YouTube beauty videos, by bombarding the viewer with an imperative consumerist discourse on how 'fundamental' and 'essential' some beauty products are, thus have great influence on the purchasing decisions of viewers. As the immediate resource constraints are absent, the viewer does not view any particular purchase as entailing sacrificing another – maybe meaningful – purchase. Young adults, being the vast majority of the viewers of beauty videos, usually have a tight budget and should generally mindfully consider which products to purchase and which to reject. However, teenagers are actually the best type of consumers for

the irrational spending often promoted by YouTube's misleading message. As Stephen Spiller suggests:

> When consumers consider their opportunity costs, they are more likely to link money to its end use than to view it as an end itself. Linking money to its end use implies that it will be treated more like its intended use and less like fungible money (606).

In his study Spiller thus claims that people who are given a larger amount of money to spend are less likely to consider opportunity costs than subjects given a smaller amount of money. In addition to this, he affirms that the propensity of spending money depends on how consumers associate a product with a typical use and the amount of its possible uses. YouTube's discourse supplies the necessary incentive to 'force' viewers to neglect other opportunities (Lucas 16-54).

In conclusion, in my attempt to analyze the financial theory of the lipstick effect, I tried to examine the undisrupted success of the beauty business through YouTube and direct selling marketing strategies. However, to this date, it has been quite difficult to precisely narrow down the causes of such an effect, and the psychological attitudes of women towards makeup products in relation to their self-identity. The approach that I engaged throughout my thesis utilized different perspectives: from media studies to gender theories and lastly, to theories related to the phenomenon of the lipstick effect which will guide the reader to further research regarding the topic. Again, and most importantly, the theories regarding the lipstick effect touch upon only a few studies that are available on the possible causes of this phenomenon. Consequently, future researchers must continue to seek further scholarly works on the matter, so that notions about social issues and their relation to consumerist behaviors can be better understood.

Lastly, we need to be aware that the concept of the American Dream is always in flux, and it cannot be defined by a set of notions. The American society, its politics, its issues and so on, are constantly changing, and with that, what signifies for us achieving the American Dream also is. In my opinion, this topic will always be open to endless interpretations.

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