

INSTAGRAM & BEAUTY MICRO-INFLUENCERS: STRATEGIES OF SELF-
PRESENTATION USED FOR PERSONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Instagram & Beauty Micro-Influencers: Strategies of Self-Presentation Used for Personal Brand Development

The visual quality of Instagram has allowed for it to become the prime platform for user-generated content that features brands and consumer goods. Millennials report learning about brands after being exposed to them on social media (GlobalWebIndex, n.d.-a) and a significant percentage of the U.S. population reported posting reviews online. Some users have turned their Instagram profiles into blogs – a space where they can share their thoughts on beauty products like makeup and skincare. Gaining followers and likes have become standard in the role of micro-influencers.

By monitoring the behavior of beauty six micro-influencers on Instagram, this study was able to identify the strategies of self-presentation used, including selfies, self-disclosure, editing techniques for authenticity, and more. Moreover, beauty content produced by micro-influencers focuses on the aesthetic of products rather than providing in-depth information of the products and brands featured.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Instagram launched in 2010, I was 16 years old. For the later part of my teenage years and currently as I weave my way through adulthood, Instagram has played an important role in how I develop my personal identity. While understanding the effects of Instagram and other social networking sites on regular users is important, what I was most interested in was the potential role Instagram can play in the beauty marketplace. For a long time before the development of the web 2.0., beauty reviews from consumers were limited to word of mouth. With the appearance of web 2.0, user-generated content became a possibility (Van Dijck, 2013) and consumers began to play a more important role in brand perception (Booth, Matic, & Goodman, 2011). Blogs, Facebook groups, Twitter, and now Instagram, are all sources I have turned to when wanting to learn more about a product I am interested in. What Instagram now also offers is exposing consumers to products and brands that they might have never heard of before, playing a passive role in spreading brand awareness.

A study found that 24% of U.S. online shoppers reported user-generated content to be extremely influential in their shopping decisions and 29% reported it being very influential (TurnTo, n.d.). Another study identified millennials as the age group who discovered the most brands via recommendations they'd been exposed to on social media (GlobalWebIndex, n.d.-a). Not only are users becoming exposed to brands via social media, but they're also engaging by sharing their own reviews. When looking at the percentage of global internet users who posted online review in 2017, 52% of 25-34-year

old's reported reviewing products online and 47% of 16-24-year old's (GlobalWebIndex, n.d.-b). The numbers show there is a clear and growing percentage of the population who participates in this type of behavior online. While research on the beauty industry and its presence on social networking sites is limited, the goal of this study is to expand the available research on beauty spaces online, especially Instagram.

In 2018, Instagram reached 1 billion users. There is no data that shows the percentage of those 1 billions users who share beauty reviews on Instagram, but based on the number of posts that have used the hashtags as of April, 2019, #makeup (227 million), #skincare (38.2 million), #haircare (6 million), #bodycare (2 million), and #fragrance (3.7 million) it is possible to establish beauty's strong presence on the platform. At this time, Instagram offers the space for individuals to create and share content, but it is up to the user to stand out. Some users might share reviews of products without that being the main focus of their Instagram profiles, but other users have turned to using Instagram as blogs – a space where they can share all their thoughts on a particular topic, in this case, beauty. So, what makes some users stand out more than others? What causes some users to gain thousands and tens of thousands of followers while others only have a few hundred? By exploring the behavior of a group of users on Instagram, I identify the strategies used and the role of users in tailoring the content they produce to resonate with a particular audience.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Networking Sites, Instagram, and User-Generated Content

Prior to the appearance of social networking sites (SNSs), finding information about other individuals was harder – it would require knowing their phone number or address – while SNSs offer a way through which people’s lives exist online if they so desire. With the evolution of the internet, technological devices like smartphones and tablets, SNSs have become more prominent. The current most used sites are YouTube, launched on 2005; Facebook, launched on 2004; Instagram, launched on 2010; Pinterest, launched on 2010; and Snapchat, launched on 2011 (Pew Research Center, 2018). These sites offer users a way to create and share content with a selected group of people (Pittman & Reich, 2016) or with everyone if they decide to make their accounts public. Each of these platforms provide different things to its audience, but overall, it is about sharing content with others, what changes is the type of content that gets shared and the way “friendships” and “connections” get made. Boyd & Ellison (2007) defined social networking sites as, “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (p. 210). Based on this definition, Instagram is a social networking site.

In September 2017, Instagram had 800 million monthly active users, and in June 2018 it reached 1 billion (Instagram & TechCrunch, n.d.). Instagram is a visual platform. It allows its users to do everything from within the smartphone app, from taking the picture or video, to editing, adding filters, and sharing them on Instagram or across other platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Unlike other SNSs, Instagram started as a mobile application for iOS devices. It allows users to share content to their feeds and to their stories, follow, like, comment, save, and share. When sharing to stories, users with over 10,000 followers and with business profiles can use a “swipe up” feature that allows them to link content. This feature is also available to verified accounts. In addition, it offers brands the option to create shoppable posts, allowing users to purchase products from within the app. Instagram also has an Explore page, where it exposes its users to content that they might not be following but that might relate to their interests based on the accounts they interact with on the platform.

During the summer of 2018, Instagram launched a new feature and separate app called IGTV. Until now, Instagram users were only able to share 15-second stories or 1-minute videos to their feeds, but with IGTV, they now have the option to share videos up to an hour long. This feature might be Instagram’s way of competing with YouTube (Constine, 2018), as it will allow users, social media influencers included, to share highly produced content – much like the type of content shared on YouTube. Unlike YouTube, the videos shared on IGTV are portrait, 9:16 videos that take over the entire phone screen. With the launch of the new feature, Instagram also launched an accompanying app through which users can access all IGTV content (McCue, 2018).

In addition to the standard features mentioned previously, Instagram offers users the ability to set up their profile as a business profile “to get access to features to help establish a business presence and achieve business goals” (Instagram, n.d.-a, par. 1) that must be linked to a Facebook page. When switching to a business profile, a few more features are added. In the bio space, users can add calls-to-action like Email, Call, and Get Directions. Another feature that becomes available for business profiles is Instagram Insights which “lets you learn more about your followers and about how your content is performing with your audience” (Instagram, n.d.-b, par. 1). With Instagram Insights, users are provided with information describing how their posts and stories are performing including, Impressions, Reach, Likes, Comments, Follows, Website Clicks, Saves, and it also provides data on where your posts were seen and how other users found them (Zantal-Wiener, 2019).

Content on Instagram varies greatly and categorizing it is not as simple as it is for other platforms. On Twitter, content has been categorized by sampling the public timeline (Kelly, 2009). While defined categories do not exist, it is possible to get an idea of the type of accounts that are valued on Instagram based on the posts that have received the most engagement as of April 2019. The top most-liked posts all belong to celebrities like Beyoncé, Selena Gomez, and Cristiano Ronaldo (Joyce, 2019). The most-viewed stories included celebrities like Neymar Jr. and Kim Kardashian, but also, social media influencers like Lele Pons. Pons first grew a following on Vine, another social media app, but her presence is now on YouTube and Instagram where she has over 24 million followers (Spangler, 2018). Pons’ content on Instagram is both video and static. Marketers have also identified the most-profitable niches on Instagram, and these include

health and fitness, beauty, travel, business, and fashion (Darma, 2018). According to Instagram, the fashion and beauty communities “are the top producers of video across feed, stories, and IGTV” (Rao, 2018, par. 9).

Like with other SNSs, there are certain needs users seek to satisfy when using Instagram. An Instagram study identified five primary motivations to use Instagram, Social Interaction, Archiving, Self-Expression, Escapism, and Peeking (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). A second study identified Surveillance/Knowledge about others, Documentation, Coolness, and Creativity as motives for Instagram use (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The sample age mean for the study was 22 years old. Another study that compared Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, surveyed users on the following motivations: information sharing, self-documentation, social interaction, entertainment, passing time, self-expression, medium appeal, and convenience (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). The findings show Snapchat taking the lead for four of the motivations except for self-expression where Instagram came first. This reflects that Instagram is commonly used as a space for users to express themselves via images in their feed, the textual captions, and the stories.

Because SNSs like Instagram offer users the opportunity to share content, in this case, visual, the rise of user-generated content (UGC) continues. Defined as, “material that a platform sources from its own end-users” (Luca, 2015, p. 565), user-generated content can come in the form of textual reviews and recommendations, videos, images, and more. Scholars are polarized in those who believe UGC can have an impact on the world, and those who believe it is “too unreliable” (p. 568) to cause any change.

Luca (2015) identified five types of actors in UGC platforms like Instagram. First, contributors – those who provide content and consumers – those who consume content. These are not mutually exclusive as those who share are also consuming. Third, advertisers – “people and organizations that are trying to reach users” (p. 567). Fourth, bystanders or the subjects of the content being shared. For example, a Yelp review on a restaurant. The restaurant being the bystander. Last but not least, “a designer who sets the rules that shape contributions and interactions on the platform” (p. 567). In the case of Instagram, the platform regulates how the content can be shared, the character limit for captions, how many hashtags can be used per post, etc.

User-generated content has been found to be more credible than traditional media (Bahtar & Muda, 2016) as it is regular users, with no apparent commercial intentions sharing their opinion on a product, service or experience. Users share images or articles that highlight a brand or a product from the brand. Often, UGC ends up being brand-related. Brands have realized the power their consumers have and have encouraged the production of brand-related content (Geurin & Burch, 2017). Scholars refer to this trend as user-generated branding (Burmam, 2010; Geurin & Burch, 2017). Defined as, “the handling of all kinds of voluntarily created and publicly distributed brand messages undertaken by non-marketers – from original user comments to reviews, ratings and remixes with corporate messages, to even full artistic work” (Burmam, 2010, p. 2). While some brands don’t get involved in this process, others take interest in the content produced by users and encourage it (Geurin & Burch, 2017). Companies have identified benefits like cost effectiveness and the ability to keep track of what their consumers are saying about the products (Burmam, 2010).

Social Media Influencers & Influencer Marketing

At times, the user-generated content (UGC) shared on social networking sites (SNSs) like Instagram has resulted in some users garnering significant popularity. Some grew a following from creating content on YouTube, others have had their start on Instagram and Twitter, others found a home in Vine, but what connects them is that they all started as normal individuals creating content from the comfort of their home. Known as social media influencers, defined as a “user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. A social media influencer has access to a large audience and can persuade others by virtue of their authenticity and reach” (Pixlee, n.d., par. 3). Others have defined them as “a form of microcelebrity who accumulate a following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal, everyday lives, upon which paid advertorials – advertisements written in the form of editorial opinions – for products and services are premised” (Abidin, 2016, p. 86). These definitions share the need to have a large following to be considered a social media influencer. Having an audience to influence is important.

Unlike traditional celebrities, social media influencers have only garnered influence and fame through the SNS they share their content in. Some make use of multiple social media to increase their reach, but traditionally, they have not become known for any other skill (i.e. acting, singing, sports, etc.). Their use of social media platforms like Instagram is also connected to the possibility of self-branding and creating a brand of themselves and their lifestyle (Khakis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). It is important for influencers to identify their unique selling point, what makes them different from

other social media users, and tailor their feeds in a way that will be appealing to their followers and to companies looking to work with them.

The audience component is what make social media influencers particularly special and the relationship with their audience, different from traditional advertisement. Studies show that consumers trust the opinion of their peers, family and friends the most (McCaskill, 2015). In addition, social media influencers build a community around a niche. While celebrities like Kourtney and Kim Kardashian are considered influencers, the rise of micro-influencers is one that this study will focus on. While there is no universal definition for “micro-influencer,” some have defined it as a social media user with anything from 3,000 Instagram followers (Tait, n.d.) to 100,000 followers (Wissman, 2018), but most importantly, micro-influencers have an engaged audience. Unlike celebrities, micro-influencers will spend time making sure they’re building a strong connection with their audience. Their audience will feel comfortable coming to them with questions, asking for advice, and sharing their experiences because they know they will receive a response.

While research on social media micro-influencers specifically is still expanding, there have been studies developed around Twitter and opinion leaders (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011; Hung & Calderón, 2011; Fernandez Muñoz & García-Guardia, 2016), which while different, hold some similarities to social media micro-influencers. Defined by Lazarsfeld, an opinion leader is “an attractive person with outstanding features in his/her psychological, physical and social aspects which has a credible knowledge in a given domain” (as cited in Bamakan, Nurgaliev, & Qu, 2019, p. 200). In

a study that looked at opinion leaders in social networks (Yang, Qiao, Liu, Ma, & Li, 2018), the following characteristics were identified, “they have abundant information resources. Secondly, they prefer to express their views and their discourse are thoughtful or critical. Thirdly, they have a strong ability on the media” (p. 453).

Several interactions can take place on Twitter –favoriting tweets, retweets, replies, and direct messages – much like Instagram – making Twitter an ideal platform for electronic word of mouth (eWOM; Erkan & Evans, 2016). As an eWOM platform, Twitter is ideal for corporations and businesses to reach a mass audience (Goodrich & de Mooji, 2014). The reach and connectivity not only happen from companies’ own Twitter accounts but also from influencers and opinion leaders that companies target in word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM; Groeger & Buttle, 2014). In much the same way, beauty companies send products to social media influencers in the hopes that they’ll “use, share, and talk about the product with their friends and family” (Groeger & Buttle, 2014, p. 21) and their millions of subscribers and followers.

The importance of eWOM lies in the new information provided by influencers, and not the information released by the companies putting out the products (Reichelt, Sievert & Jacob, 2014). Research has shown the influence of eWOM on purchase decisions. It highlights content from blogs and rating sites, comparing them to chat rooms and IM where eWOM is not as valuable (Riegner, 2007). For this reason, it is important for companies to choose their influencers wisely, sending products to those who connect with their audience and reflect the brand’s values, beliefs, and desires (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Because of the potential social media micro-influencers have in spreading messages online and reaching their audience, brands have started investing more in influencer marketing (Brouwer, 2017). Described as “a type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive your brand’s message to the larger market” (TapInfluence, 2015, par. 5), influencer marketing was found to be the second most effective promotional strategy in 2017 among U.S. marketers (as cited in Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, in press). In the past, beauty brands would use Hollywood personalities or models, but social media influencers “have built their reputations on their opinions as well as strong online personalities, and it is these, rather than their appearance, which win them followers” (Khanom, 2018). A 2018 IZEA report identified 10 objectives why marketers used influencer marketing including, engagement-building, awareness-building, w-o-m/buzz, guaranteed exposure, attitude improvement, direct sales/purchase, indirect sales/purchase. Engagement-building and awareness building were the top two. It is evident from these numbers that marketers’ main goal is not to drive sales, but to spread the word about products and to start a conversation with potential consumers (IZEA, 2018).

The Beauty Industry

In 2017, the United States had the most profitable beauty industry in the world generating 86.1 billion dollars in revenue, followed by China with 53.5 (ABIHPEC, n.d.). The beauty industry, or cosmetics market, as it is sometimes referred to, is comprised of cosmetics, fragrance, and personal care products. Between 2004 and 2018, the industry has only continued to grow. In 2018, it grew 5.5% compared to the previous year (L’Oréal, n.d.). Even during economic recessions, the industry continues strong but

cautious (Sena, 2018). Currently, the industry is also benefited from a stable economy where “consumers will generally increase expenditures on nonessential items (e.g., makeup) and/or upgrade to more premium brands” (Smith, 2018, par. 2), in addition to men who have taken a more active role in building beauty and personal care routines (Smith, 2018).

The beauty and personal category is a mature necessity-driven market, which is reflected in steady growth year-over-year. With high level of consumer confidence, shoppers are trading up to higher-priced offerings while also opting for professional beauty services. More importantly, as younger consumers continue to rely on online resources for information, it is imperative for brands to be transparent and honest in their practices. (as cited in Macke, 2018)

While most of the industry reflects growth, the nail color and care category has struggled (Gaither, 2018).

The continued growth of the industry is evidenced in the opening of stores like Ulta Beauty and Sephora, that are replacing the more traditional small-scale stores (Fernandez, 2018). In the next five years, “revenue is anticipated to grow an annualized 0.4% to \$23.6 billion as consumers buy more cosmetics” (Fernandez, 2018, par. 3). When asked about the top beauty trends, 45% of respondents mentioned “Natural beauty products,” as the population becomes increasingly conscious about the types of ingredients that can be found in cosmetic products. There is criticism to U.S. regulations when it comes to the ingredients allowed in cosmetics (Macke, 2018). In addition, the growing multicultural population of the United States also greatly benefits the beauty market as Hispanics and Asians tend to be more concerned with their routines (Gaither,

2018). When it comes to purchase decisions, “trusted friends or family members are the most influential” (Macke, 2018), but the 25-34 demographic also values social media reviews which shows the importance of social media influencers and UGC.

RQ1: What strategies of self-presentation do beauty micro-influencers use on Instagram to develop their personal brands?

RQ2: Do micro-influencers tailor their content to present the version of themselves that will better connect with their audience?

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Impression Management, Self-Presentation & Authenticity

Whether it is intentionally or unintentionally, what social media influencers are doing is creating a persona on social media for their audiences to connect to, and because they're not engaging in direct face-to-face interactions, trust plays a particularly important role (Liu, Jiang, Lin, Ding, Duan, Xu, 2015). In the case of beauty influencers, their feeds are filled with product reviews, #MOTDs (Makeup of The Day), flat lays, and video tutorials. Occasionally, influencers' share posts revealing more about their personal lives. Through Instagram Stories, influencers reveal more than they do in their feed. They can show the physical space they're in, but they also focus the topics of conversation to product reviews and beauty-related conversations with their followers. Through these tools offered by Instagram and other social media platforms, social media influencers play a role in shaping their audience attitudes towards products and brands (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry, 2018).

In recent years, numerous way for consumers to avoid traditional advertising have emerged. From ad blockers to ad-free streaming services, brands and marketers have had to expand the ways through which to reach their target audience. Social media influencers present a new avenue for advertising and research shows how important authenticity is as an attribute (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry, 2018). In order to have influence, social media influencers must be perceived as authentic by their audience and the brands interested working with them. A way through which SMIs build their

authenticity is through strategies of self-presentation with the goal of developing parasocial relationships with their followers (Caliandro, 2018). In their study, Caliandro (2018) identified the strategies of self-presentation as tools that “help us better understand the structure of the online social formation in which they are situated, as well as the cultural values circulating within the ecosystem” (p. 566). While numbers play a role in identifying if an influencer has potential, online influence is about quality and not quantity (Freberg, Graham, & Freberg, 2011), which highlights the importance of understanding the strategies of self-presentation used by influencers.

The concept of self-presentation was first introduced by Goffman (1971). In his book, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, he used a theater metaphor to describe social interactions as performances. It details how every social interaction we have is calculated in terms of how we want others to perceive us, what we want to get from them, and what we want to give them as it is not always a selfish action. Goffman argues people adjust how they present themselves depending on the social situation and who they’re interacting with, “Regardless of the particular objective the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective (...) he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression” (p. 3). By modifying how they present themselves to others, Goffman maintains that people are goal-oriented and working towards achieving their goals.

Social media has introduced a new way for people to present themselves to others. Each social media platform has a user profile where an individual can choose the name, provide biographical information, have a profile picture, and more. In addition to having a profile, social media allows users to interact with others and manage their social

relationships online (Moon, Lee, Choi, & Sung, 2016). No matter the type of social interaction, it is important for people to have the ability to manage the impression they give to others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Other terms that have been used to refer to the act of self-presentation on social media are self-promotion and self-branding. Self-promotion focuses on users' interest in getting "likes," a number that validates their status among their peers or their community (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). It is also common for users to promote their work, interests, and themselves in the case of social media influencers. Much like self-promotion, self-branding "involves individuals developing a distinctive public image for commercial gain and/or cultural capital" (Khakis, Ang, & Welling, 2017, p. 191). By turning their identity into a brand through their social media profiles, individuals develop a unique selling point, something that differentiates them from everyone else (Khakis, Ang, & Welling, 2017).

When it comes to social media influencers and online personalities, authenticity has been identified as a valuable attribute to possess when connecting to an audience. In the case of YouTube vloggers, authenticity is "located in its excessive direct address, in its transparent amateurishness and in the sheer volume and immediacy of 'conversation' responses, by comparison with and relative to the constraints of traditional broadcasting" (Tolson, 2010, p. 286). Self-disclosure has also been identified as a way through which micro-influencers build and maintain their authenticity (Ferchaud, Grzeslo, Orme, & LaGroue, 2017). Traditionally, self-disclosure referred to the sharing of personal information between two individuals (Cozby, 1973). With social media, self-disclosure takes place online where users can interact with each other. Audiences continue to expect

authenticity from influencers in order to trust their opinions on product reviews and lifestyle recommendations (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, in press).

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

This study aims to identify the strategies of self-presentation used by beauty micro-influencers on Instagram and if those influencers tailored their behavior to fit a specific image that would better connect with their audience. With the rise of virtual communities, virtual ethnography has become a common method through which to study the behavior of online users and communities. It is flexible and can be adapted to the researcher's needs and the platform's capabilities (Pink et al., 2016). Virtual ethnography has been used in the past to study and follow the behavior of individuals to get a better understanding of culture, religion, and social practices. Christine Hine (2000) refers the Internet as a product of culture, a "technology that was produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities. It is also a technology which is shaped by the ways in which it is marketed, taught, and used" (p. 9). When discussing the benefits of virtual ethnography, Hine's argues "it offers the promise of getting closer to understanding the ways in which people interpret the world and organize their lives" (p. 42). Virtual ethnography allows researchers to identify the strategies of self-branding/self-presentation they use (Caliandro, 2018).

Because identity on social networking sites is constructed through an individual's behavior, virtual ethnography was the best way to look at the big picture. From content analysis when looking at the photos shared to textual analysis when observing the captions, virtual ethnography offered the most opportunities to understand the behavior of micro-influencers on Instagram. As mentioned previously, Instagram is a social

networking site that offers users a variety of ways through which they can interact with the app, giving glimpses into their personal lives but also showcase their online persona. IZEA (2018) identified Instagram as the most-used creator platform in 2018, surpassing Facebook and Twitter. In addition, long-form written platforms like blogs have experienced a huge decrease in use by creators like micro-influencers, showing how SNSs like Instagram continue to take prominence in the influencer industry.

In order to identify the ways through which beauty micro-influencers on Instagram establish a community and connect with their audience, I followed the behavior on the social networking site of a select group of 6 micro-influencers from the beauty niche for two weeks, from January 21, 2019 to February 2, 2019. For the purposes of this study, a micro-influencer was defined as an Instagram user with a following between 10,000 and 500,000 (Wissmann, 2018). The behavior on the platform was defined by content posted to feed, Instagram Stories and IGTV, in addition to their interactions with other users via the comments of their posts or via Instagram Stories features (polls, questions, etc.). Components that were considered included captions, hashtags used, and photography style. Unfortunately, data on follower growth is no longer available via third-party apps. The follower growth was tracked during the data collection stage of the research.

To identify the beauty micro-influencers to follow during the two-week period, a search of the hashtags #makeup, #skincare, and #beauty was done. This led to more narrow hashtags, #skincareobsessed, #skincareaddict, #naturalmakeup, #beautycommunity, #skincareroutine, #makeupoftheday, and #makeuproutine. Based on the top posts shared according to Instagram, a list of 100 beauty micro-influencers was

built. Using a number randomizer, six beauty micro-influencers were selected: @byglamjoy, @boise.beauty, @mod.young, @sharmtoaster, @blondeyouadieu, and @ohuprettythings. They will only be referred to by their Instagram handle. The content of all seven accounts focuses on beauty – makeup, skincare, nail care, and/or fragrance. No background information was known about each of the micro-influencers prior to the start of the study. Only three out of the six micro-influencers identified a location in their profile biography, @byglamjoy identified being from Mexico, @sharmtoaster from New Jersey/New York, and @ohuprettythings identified being from Brooklyn. In addition to location, other contact information included emails, type of skin, qualities like “sassy” ([@mod.young](#)) and “style seeker” (@ohuprettythings). Moreover, in terms of names, only one micro-influencer didn’t have any reference to their name and only identified with their handle, @ohuprettythings. Others had a variation of their names or only their last name, as was the case of @mod.young who had M. Young. @boise.beauty and @sharmtoaster only had what is assumed to be their first names, Danielle and Sharmili respectively. In the case of @blondeyouadieu, she appeared to have her first and middle names, Faith Marie, and @byglamjoy was the only micro-influencer to share her full name, Andrea Cabrera.

While the follower counts of all seven accounts did not necessarily equate a strong engagement with their audience or was in correlation to the amount of posts they had, there was a good variety in the micro-influencers selected. At the time the study begun, @byglamjoy had 18.1k followers and 500 posts, @boise.beauty had 12.4k followers and 1,318 posts, @mod.young had 13.3k followers and 382 posts, @sharmtoaster had 25.9k followers and 1,731 posts, @blondeyouadieu had 14.9k

followers and 240 posts, @ohuprettythings had 40.3k followers and a total of 863 posts shared to their feed.

The data was collected in a spreadsheet where each of the micro-influencers had a tab. There was also a summary tab where weekly number of followers and number of posts were recorded. For two weeks during the month of January 2019, everything that had been shared on Instagram by each of the micro-influencers was recorded (see Table 1). This included type of post shared, if it was a flat lay where only product was visible or if the photo included props like mirrors, flowers, shelves, bookcases, or windows, items that could enhance the image of the micro-influencer and provide users with a deeper knowledge of the life the micro-influencer shares. Also, captions, hashtags used, accounts mentioned and tagged, and the number of likes and comments the post had at the time the data was recorded. When recording what they had shared on stories, a description and type of media was recorded. Whether they had shared video or an image, whether it was direct-to-camera or if they tended to show the environment they were occupying and showcasing the products instead of their faces. Data on how many views or engagements stories get is not accessible to other users other than the owner of the account, therefore this information was not recorded.

Table 1. Summary of beauty micro-influencer data collected during two-week period.

| Beauty micro-influencer | # of followers Week 0 | # of followers Week 1 | # of followers Week 2 | # of feed posts Week 0 | # of feed posts Week 1 | # of feed posts Week 2 | Disclosed sponsored feed posts |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| @mod.young | 13.3K | 13.3K | 13.3K | 382 | 387 | 391 | 2 |
| @byglamjoy | 18.1K | 18.9K | 19.2K | 500 | 509 | 515 | 0 |
| @ohuprettythings | 40.3K | 40.7K | 40.9K | 863 | 870 | 874 | 1 |
| @sharmtoaster | 25.9K | 26K | 26.3K | 1,731 | 1,738 | 1,745 | 3 |
| @boise.beauty | 12.4K | 12.5K | 12.7K | 1,318 | 1,331 | 1,346 | 4 |
| @blondeyouadieu | 14.9K | 15.2K | 15.4K | 240 | 243 | 247 | 0 |

CHAPTER V

THE TEXTUAL FEED

This analysis brings to light how the various components that are used on Instagram serve the primary purpose of building an online persona and allow beauty micro-influencers on Instagram to manage their interactions with their followers. For this analysis, the data was divided in three – the textual, the visual, and the numbers. The textual section discusses captions, hashtags used, language used in videos, mentions (also known as tags on Instagram), and comments with followers in recorded posts. The visual details the images shared to the feed and stories, the various elements that make them up, and how the environment is built. Finally, the numbers provide an overview of follower growth experienced by the selected micro-influencers from January 21st to February 4th, 2019.

Social networking sites like Instagram provide users with a variety of ways through which to interact with others. In the case of Instagram, users add captions, hashtags, and verbally communicate through videos posted to the feed or Instagram Stories. Goffman's (1971) theory of self-presentation focuses on the role of social interaction for impression management. Through the different avenues Instagram offers, users can interact with other users address them directly, ask questions, and more.

The Captions

As of April 2019, Instagram allowed 2,200 characters in captions (Jackson, 2017). Data showed that beauty micro-influencers use this space to connect with their followers by sharing details about products, life updates, and ask questions. There wasn't a pattern

in terms of length – there was a variety in how much detail the micro-influencers shared. For example, @ohuprettythings had captions as short as “Watch your step. Perfume is perfuming. ✨” (Ohuprettythings, 2019a) that didn’t really express anything specific, it could be about any perfume, to,

ad | Today is my final installment for the clean brand, @necessaire. Today I’m focusing on “The Body Wash”. Let me preface by saying I love this minimal packaging, it’ll give a vibe in any bathroom! About: The Body Wash is a daily multi-vitamin cleanser for skin health. Three luxe oils—Marula, Cacay and Meadowfoam—help to nourish and soften skin. Mild plant-derived surfactants gently cleanse without stripping or leaving residue. Available in Fragrance-Free, and in two pure essential-oil scents: Sandalwood and Eucalyptus. Non-irritating. Non-sensitizing. Packed with Vitamins A, B, C, E, Omega 6 and Omega 9... I love that it’s truly bodycare. My favorite scent is Eucalyptus and I love the way it lathers on the body, and leaves my skin super soft. I like to use this in tandem with “The Body Lotion”. Cost: 25\$. — And lastly, I have a discount code for my followers! Use the link in my bio to save 10% just enter “pretty10” when checking out . If you pick something up, let me know! #careforyourbody #necessaire (Use link in Bio to shop these products). (2019b).

The second caption starts with “ad” which indicates the post was an advertisement, a paid promotion for the brand Necessaire. This could explain why the post is a lot more detailed, it not only gives the opinion of the micro-influencer, but it also shares details like the cost, the ingredients, and a discount code. In addition, the line “I love this packaging, it’ll give a vibe in every bathroom” reflects how it is not only about the

quality and efficiency of the skincare product, but also about the look of the product, how it fits within the bigger picture of a person's life, and it highlights the importance of owning products that look good.

Another example of a long caption was shared by @blondeyouadieu on January 30, 2019, when the user posted,

Kale-lalu-yAHA, I Krave you. . . Kale-lalu-yAHA from @kravebeauty is an acid treatment composed of a mild, yet effective 5.25% glycolic acid (AHA) to help with congestion and clogged pores. If your skincare isn't absorbing very well, or if you are battling texture- this is the product for you! It's packed with dark, leafy greens ☐ (kale, spinach, parsley) to deliver a healthy serving of antioxidants as well as aloe, hyaluronic acid and vitamin b5 to hydrate and soothe the skin. . . I use Kale-lalu-yAHA 2-3x/week directly after cleansing. If you're a beginner, this is a perfect introduction to acids- use it alone or mix it into your moisturizer, you decide! With a pH 3.5-4.0, you will likely experience a slight tingle at first (I know I did), but that should disappear quickly. If you feel a burning sensation or experience any redness, stop treatment. . . I adore Kale-lalu-yAHA. It's the perfect balance of mild exfoliation and hydration. Never harsh, always a skincare dream at an affordable price point (\$25)! I often find myself reaching for this over other acids in my collection because it's effective, yet gentle... and it's straight to the point. Another home run from @kravebeauty! I couldn't recommend Kale-lalu-yAHA more. #BYAApproved ✓ . . At this point, @liahyoo has gained my full trust and confidence (the Matcha Hemp Hydrating Cleanser made it to my best of #kbeauty last year)! I can't wait to see what this brand has in store for us! .

. Have you tried anything from Krave? I'd love to hear what you think if you have! If you haven't, what's your favorite acid treatment?! Let's chat in the comments! ❤️Faith. (F A I T H • M A R I E, 2019a)

This caption is a lot more instructional and educational than the previous one. Unlike @ohuprettything's post, which was sponsored, this one has no indication of being in partnership with a brand. The Federal Trade Commission in the United States requires individuals to disclose relationships with companies, but IZEA (2018) reported that in 2018 28% of influencers received requests from brands to not disclose partnerships. This could be because research has found audiences to be "more receptive to noncommercial sources than advertising messages" (Myers, 2017, p. 1377). The moment the micro-influencer adds "ad" or "sponsored" to a caption, the perception from their followers can shift. The decision to not disclose is a way for the micro-influencer to manage their public impression, but it is unethical according to the Federal Trade Commission which "protects consumers by stopping unfair, deceptive, or fraudulent practices in the marketplace" (Federal Trade Commission, n.d., par. 3). Without the micro-influencer disclosing the partnership with the brand, only assumptions could be made about the nature of the post and the relationship with the micro-influencer and the brand.

Moreover, @blondeyouadieu's caption addresses her followers directly with the use of "you" and lets them know that this a product they need. Another personal element is the signature of the caption, "❤️Faith," which makes it feel like a letter. Out of the six beauty micro-influencers, Faith was the only one to close her captions in such a way. In addition, @blondeyouadieu includes text like, "I'd love to hear what you think" and "Let's chat in the comments" to engage with her audience and encourage her followers to

engage with her. The use of language in Faith's captions invoke a collective "we" to build a community with her followers

While captions, for the most part, focus on products and brands, there were captions that focused exclusively on the micro-influencer's feelings. For example,

I've found myself being really critical of..... pretty much everything about myself lately. It happens, right? To the best of us? My skin isn't perfect and sometimes that makes me feel like a straight up imposter here. I've also kind of just never really fit anywhere, and a product of that and the feelings that come with that is a messed up relationship with food, my body, and my face. I've made tremendous strides, but I'm not immune. I slip up. I compare myself at times, and I'm sometimes my own very worst enemy. Life is weird and hard and I don't ever what to project a "perfect" image. I'm not perfect and I won't ever be. But! A thing I force myself to remember and I hope you realize and remember, too?? . . . I hope you realize that you are as close to perfection as anyone should ever be. So appreciate every quirk, intricacy, facet, and flaw. You are, after all, the best friend you'll ever have. Act like it. ♥ . (M. Young, 2019a).

This caption reflects @mod.young's insecurities. The use of rhetorical questions like "It happens, right? To the best of us?" are a way for her to make her followers reflect on this subject matter, to start a conversation. While the overall focus of the account is to share beauty reviews, this caption doesn't mention any products, or references any brands, it is exclusively about a person, M. Young. Research has identified self-disclosure as a critical step in the process through which close relationships are formed (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and authenticity is built (Ferchaud, Grzeslo, Orme, & LaGroue, 2017). It also

serves to build an idea in the mind of her audience of who M. Young is. While they might know what her skincare preferences are, sharing deeper emotions like the ones in the previous caption transforms M. Young from Instagram user into a real person (Contena, Loscalzo, & Taddei, 2015).

In the case of @byglamjoy, some of her captions were bilingual, in English and Spanish. The Instagram bio of @byglamjoy locates her in Mexico which explains why she shares her captions in Spanish. Most often, they weren't literal translations and the Spanish version was more extensive than the English version. For example,

Hello Monday, with a natural makeup look ✨ love @lauramercier radiance primer is my favorite !!! Doesn't leave greasy or shiny just a radiant natural look, as her tinted moisturizer is my go to for everyday ... which is yours? . Hola Lunes 🙌👏.
Y como los lunes son de flojos.. un buen makeup fácil y rápido! Siempre me preguntan de mis bases favoritas ligeras para el diario esta es una de ellas #lauramerciermx es súper ligera no se siente nada plastosa, es de cobertura ligera pero me encanta ☺ y si estás buscando un primer luminoso pero que tampoco esté brillante o seboso este es el ideal!!! Te deja la piel súper luminosa, sin verte brillante!! ✨ ustedes? Cual es su favorita para el diario? (Andrea Cabrera, 2019a)

The first two lines are in English, but the rest of the caption is in Spanish and it shares her feelings about Mondays and her makeup preferences for the everyday. She asks her followers to convince her mom of sharing a product with her by sharing her mom's username, encouraging her followers to go to her mom's profile and comment, "Andrea's mom, we need you." There are multiple reasons why @byglamjoy shares her content in both languages including the role language plays in developing an identity, but also, how

she is perceived by her audience (Nurhantoro & Wulandari, 2017). Using English and Spanish tells her followers she's bilingual. It also allows Andrea to reach a broader audience – those who understand English and those who understand Spanish. Most of the brands featured during the two-week period were U.S.-based and sharing her content in English can also serve to connect her to these brands and be recognized by them as a potential beauty micro-influencer to work with.

The Hashtags

Defined as, “a word or phrase preceded by the symbol # that classifies or categorizes the accompanying text” (hashtag, n.d.), hashtags are used on social networking sites like Instagram and can be used to find related content. As of April 2019, Instagram allowed users to include up to 30 hashtags in each post and 10 hashtags in stories (Aynsley, 2019). During the two weeks of collecting data, all six micro-influencers used hashtags in their posts to varying degrees. Some included them directly in the caption, while others included them in the comments. It is hard to know the exact reason why they would choose one over the other by just looking at profiles. Another presentation of the hashtags was having them interwoven with the rest of the text, instead of in a block at the end of the caption or in the comment. While there were hashtags in common from post to post, they were never in the same order. The most used hashtag was #makeup (18), but it was mostly used by @boise.beauty and once by @byglamjoy, while the hashtag that appeared in most accounts was #skincareobsessed (15) that was used by three out of the six beauty micro-influencers.

Overall, the hashtags used fit the “beauty” niche. Additional examples include, #skincarejunkie, #cleanbeauty, #skincareblogger, and #motd. Other type of hashtags used

are the names of brands. For example, #drunkelephant, #maybelline, #kravebeauty, and #natashadenona. Using the names of brands allows those who are interested in those brands find the content shared, but it is also a way for the brands to learn what is being said about their products.

The last type of hashtag used reflects the influencer's brand. Three out of the six micro-influencers used personal hashtags. In the case of @ohuprettythings, they didn't always include hashtags with their posts, but when they did, they included #ohuprettythings. The hashtag was used in 7 out of 12 feed posts. Another example was found in @blondeyouadieu. In a post from January 22, 2019 the hashtag #blondeyouadieu (F A I T H • M A R I E, 2019b) was included, and on January 30 they included #BYYApproved (F A I T H • M A R I E, 2019a). The consistency evidenced in @ohuprettythings' case would allow users to search for the hashtag and find content that has been shared to the account. Seeing the hashtag in @ohuprettythings' posts might encourage others to also use the hashtag when sharing content resulting in additional traffic to their Instagram profile (Yim, n.d.) and increasing their reach. In addition, the use of hashtags also builds communities (Baker & Walsh, 2018) as it connects all of those who have used the same hashtag. In the case of @blondeyouadieu, her audience would know to look for the hashtag #BYYApproved to find other products that the micro-influencer has tried, reviewed, and recommends. They can also use the hashtag when they've used products recommended by @blondeyouadieu.

The Mentions (Tags)

On Instagram, users can mention other users in the captions and comments, and tag them directly on the photos/video posted to the feed or stories. Based on the collected data, it is evident mentions and tags fulfill the primary purpose of alerting brands that micro-influencers have said something in relation to one of their products. For example,

This selfie happens to feature 3 products that I didn't love, even though they seem to be well liked on insta 🙄 What products have you recently tried that don't live up to the insta hype? 🙄 ☐ First up, the @asarai red clay mask (@urbanoutfitters PR.) Unfortunately, I found this to be drying on my skin, even in the fall when my skin was pretty normal. It's also very messy and will incarnadine your shower when you try to rinse it off (SAT word come thru.) 🙄 ☐ Next, @glossier zit stick. It has cute packaging... but the \$3.50 up&up benzoyl peroxide cream that I buy from @target works better. Also while the packaging is cute, I find that the cream dries up in the applicator and I have to wipe off the crusty bits the next time I use it. 🙄 ☐ Lastly, the new @firstaidbeauty retinol eye cream (PR.) This is thick for an eye cream, and properly moisturizes my under eyes. BUT it gave me milia after 2 weeks of use so it's a no from me. (Sharmili, 2019a).

While most of the reviews and opinions shared during the two-week period were positive, the previous caption reflects negative opinions about products from three different brands. Sharmili had the option of not directly mentioning the brands in the caption by removing the @, but they made the choice to alert the brands that they had said something negative. Because micro-influencers need to appear authentic to their audience (Preece, 2015), it is important to share negative reviews in the same way they do positive.

By sharing the review without the brand tagged or mentioned, the micro-influencer can give the impression that what matters most is the perception of the brand and not of their following. On the other hand, the language used to review the products is not overly negative and focused on Shamili's personal experience and not the product itself.

Tags and mentions are also used for Instagram giveaways. During the two-week period, only one of the micro-influencers hosted a giveaway. @byglamjoy started the post by saying that she wanted to give back to her followers, thanking them for the love and trust in her knowledge of skincare and makeup (Andrea Cabrera, 2019b). This is an example of Goffman's (1971) argument on idealized impressions where Andrea is showcasing socially admirable traits by giving back to her audience who have supported her. In addition, these giveaways are an opportunity for micro-influencers to drive traffic to their pages as it is common that one of the ways to enter the giveaway is asking followers to tag friends in the comments like in @byglamjoy's post, "Etiqueta a 3 amigos, entre mas comentarios mas oportunidades tienes de ganar" (Andrea Cabrera, 2019b). Here she encourages her followers to tag as many people as they can. The more they tag, the higher the chances of winning. Another requirement to participate in the giveaway is that users must be following the micro-influencer. At the time of collecting data, the post had received 2,356 comments.

During the two-week period, tags and mentions were also used in Instagram Stories. At times they were used just like they are used in captions, to alert brands, but they were also used to acknowledge the engagement of other users. For example, @blondeyouadie shared another user's story where she had been tagged with the text,

“@blondyouadieu made me do it” and a screenshot of an order confirmation (see Figure 1).

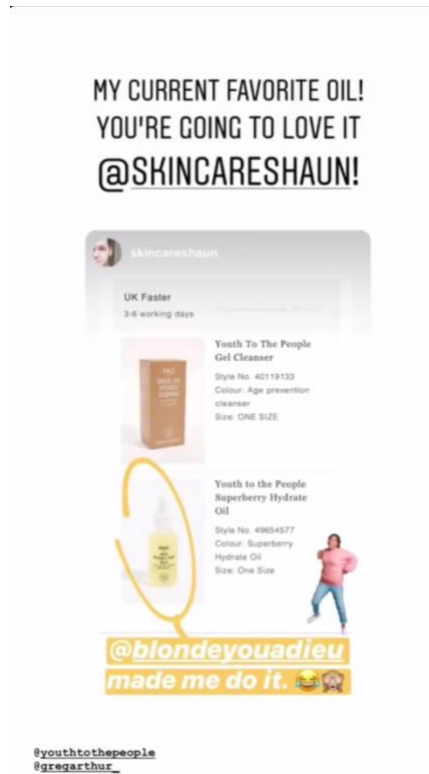


Figure 1. Example of Instagram Stories’ tagging of other users. F A I T H • M A R I E [@blondyouadieu]. (2019c). Stories [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved January 26, 2019 from <https://www.instagram.com/blondyouadieu/>.

By sharing posts that they’ve been tagged in, micro-influencers like Faith can directly interact with their followers and foster a closer relationship with them (Chung & Cho, 2017). In addition, sharing stories like these also allows @blondyouadieu’s to manage her followers impression of her by letting them know that she has supporters who have bought products because of her recommendations. It solidifies her ability to reach her audience as a micro-influencer (Rohani, Shayaa, & Babanejaddehaki, 2017).

Instagram Stories

While captions were the place where most of the beauty content was shared, the six micro-influencers used Instagram stories to share more about their lives and opinions on other subjects in addition to beauty. The feature was introduced by Instagram in 2013 (Read, 2018) and it allows users to share videos and images that disappear after 24 hours, unlike feed posts that are permanent unless deleted by the user. Instagram Stories' content can be shot directly from the app or uploaded. Users can add filters, draw, add stickers, music, and more. The owner of the account is able to see who has watched their Instagram Stories. Based on the two-week Instagram Stories activity by the six micro-influencers, the feature was mainly used to expand on what they were sharing on their feeds, behind the scenes content, or content that didn't directly relate to what they usually shared on their feed.

For example, while @byglamjoy used her stories to share her morning and nighttime skincare routines, discuss haircare and body care products, she also discussed her fitness journey, how she takes care of herself, and various workouts. She also shared moments with her boyfriend where they discussed breakfast meals. On January 25, @mod.young shared a screenshot of a text conversation with her father where she asked him if he'd heard about Meghan Markle's bunion to which he replied, "Oh hell yes." This screenshot was followed by a book recommendation. In another instance, @sharmtoaster shared a screenshot of a tweet that discussed the Jussie Smollett hate crime scandal to which @sharmtoaster added, "Call it what it is: a homophobic and racist hate crime perpetrated by MAGA heads who are listening to a president whose call to action has been to violently silence dissidents or anyone falling under 'other'" (Sharmili, 2019b).

Features like Instagram Stories' polls and questions were also used. Sometimes they were in relation to beauty like in the case of @byglamjoy who polled her followers on whether they would like to see a review on eyeshadow palettes with the options Yes and No. @sharmtoaster also used the poll feature to ask her followers what new beauty release they would like reviewed first. By asking their followers directly what they would like to see or learn more about, both @byglamjoy and @sharmtoaster can manage their expectation and create content that will resonate with them. According to Goffman (1971), having information on social situations allows the performer, in this case the micro-influencer, to adjust their behavior.

In another instance, @byglamjoy asked her followers to ask her questions using the questions feature in Instagram Stories. Most of the questions @byglamjoy answered were asking for skincare advice, top product recommendations for particular skin concerns and makeup needs, but other questions she answered related to her personal life like her age, her preference over skincare and makeup, for how long she has been dating her boyfriend, and what her job is (see Figure 2). This is another great opportunity for the micro-influencer to disclose and share additional information about herself that others can relate to. While the content she shares through her feed can build her image as someone knowledgeable on makeup and skincare, the additional interactions that take place in Instagram Stories help reinforce this.



Figure 2. Examples of Instagram Stories Questions feature. Andrea Cabrera [@byglamjoy]. (2019c). Stories [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved February 3, 2019 from <https://www.instagram.com/byglamjoy/>

CHAPTER VI

THE VISUAL FEED

Instagram is an “image first, text second” platform that creates a visual-oriented culture (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). While text can be added anywhere, it is impossible for text to exist without the visual. The visual can exist without the text as it is not required for users to include captions with their posts. During the two-week period, the six beauty micro-influencers shared content almost every day. There wasn’t one day where none of them engaged on the platform.

Flat lays

Flat lays are a type of photos where objects are organized on a flat surface and the photo is taken from a birds-eye view, meaning it is taken from above. This type of photography was evident in @boise.beauty’s account the most. She uses this technique to showcase her #motd’s (makeup of the day) and it allows for every product to be visible (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Examples of flat lay photography used by @boise.beauty. Danielle [@boise.beauty]. (2019a). Posts [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved January 31, 2019 from <https://www.instagram.com/boise.beauty/>

With this type of post, the focus is on the products. By only showcasing the products used, Danielle manages the conversation with her followers and keeps it focused on the makeup used. When using flat lays, the only other thing visible is the surface, but this doesn't say much about the real-life space inhabited by Danielle. Moreover, there is minimum use of editing.

Another example of flat lay photography was posted by @mod.young. Unlike @boise.beauty's posts, @mod.young included additional props unrelated to the products (M. Young, 2019b). There are leaves framing the products that give the impression of the camera looking through a plant, and the photo is brand focused with fewer products than the ones shared by @boise.beauty. The products are also displayed in a messier manner. The difference in technique allows for different types of moods to be reflected in the

photos. The lighting in @mod.young's post also helps to enhance a more lifestyle-type of photo (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. @mod.young's use of flat lay photography to showcase product. M. Young [@mod.young]. (2019b). AD | Happy Monday, friends. Today, @naturopathica has #sponsored this post [Instagram Post]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtMpF57HnJa/>

Lifestyle

The lifestyle category includes content where there is more of the space visible other than the surface in which the products are. This type of post was common in @ohuprettythings' profile and @byglamjoy's. While the conversation is focused on the products, the space in which the products are photographed says more about the environment and lifestyle of the micro-influencer. Big mirrors, vintage vanities and dressers, sinks and shelves were just some of the spaces featured in @ohuprettythings' photos. These spaces were also heavily featured in their Instagram's stories. Unlike @boise.beauty's posts, @ohuprettythings displays a lot more products in her posts. The composition of the photographs and the amount of product can convey luxury and status.

One of the posts shared during the two-week period is set on a dusty rose, velvet couch, a large gold mirror leaning against a white wall, a gold and pink tray holding an assortment of candles, a stack of Kinfolk magazines, flowers, and photographs against the mirror (see Figure 5). Some of the candles featured retail for over \$35 and each magazine retails for \$18. Another example is a shot from what appears to be a desk filled with product organized in wooden and marble trays. The focus isn't on any one product, but on the space itself. There is also a mirror, but much smaller than in the previous shot.



Figure 5. @ohuprettythings Instagram post with candle collection. Ohuprettythings [@ohuprettythings]. (2019c). I can't even bring myself to light this Loverboy candle from @dirtyboygetsclean [Instagram Post]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtJV2s2nN3M/>

Similar spaces to the ones featured by @ohuprettythings were also present in @byglamjoy's posts and stories. Andrea frequently shared videos that showcased her collection of makeup and skincare products, the place that is assumed to be her home

including her bathroom, bedroom, and kitchen, and her engaging in activities outside the home like working out, in her car, and getting beauty treatments (see Figure 6). On January 28, 2019 she shared a video in her car with her boyfriend where the brand of the car is visible, a BMW (Andrea Cabrera, 2019c). Andrea was the micro-influencer to disclose, share and show the most of her life, both beauty-related and non-beauty related content. Her Instagram Stories frequently started with her in a bathroom discussing her morning routine, posing in front of her mirror, and displaying her abdominal area to show progress. She also shared a lot of direct-to-camera videos addressing her followers, answering questions about products, ingredients, and her personal life. In addition, she frequently shared videos of herself applying her makeup and using the products she reviewed on her feed. By showing herself using the products she reviews, she builds her authenticity as her audience can trust her review of the product as she's displaying how she uses them.

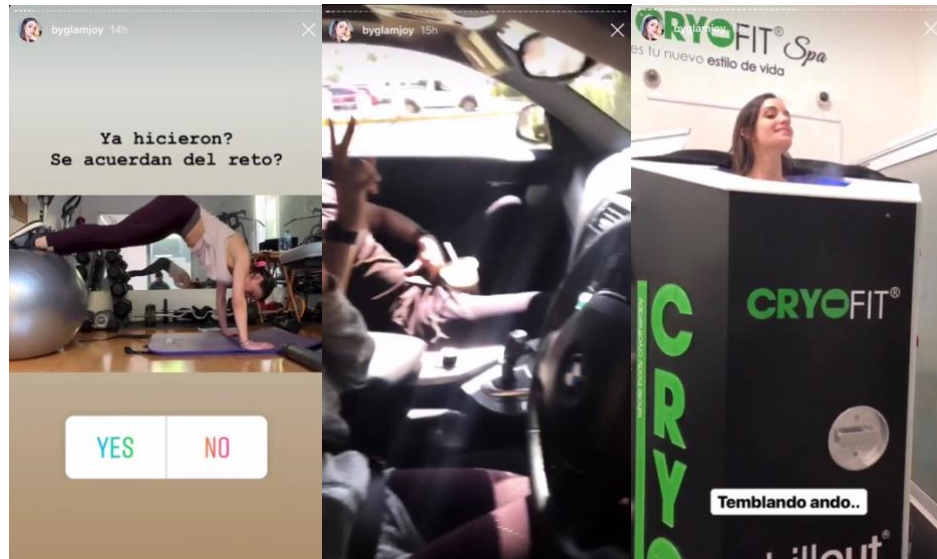


Figure 6. Examples of lifestyle content shared to @byglamjoy’s Instagram stories.

Andrea Cabrera [@byglamjoy]. (2019d). Stories [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved January 29, 2019 from <https://www.instagram.com/byglamjoy/>

Aesthetically Focused

While all the beauty micro-influencers had aesthetically pleasing profiles where the photos shared to the feed didn’t have clashing elements or colors, some showed more editing processes to achieve cohesiveness. In the case of @boise.beauty, her posts worked together because they all had the same background and are organized in a similar manner. On the other hand, @sharmtoaster’s feed showcased a wide variety of settings, angles, and lighting situations, but the editing of the colors and tones of the photographs allowed them to work together (see Figure 7). The photos all have a pink, warm-toned appearance that resembles the colors of a sunset. Achieving this cohesive of a profile exhibited @sharmtoaster’s photo-editing skills and helped create a mood. While having a theme is not as important when looking at individual posts, it is significant when

reviewing a user's profile and considering whether you're interested in following them or not.



Figure 7. Screenshot of @sharmtoaster's warm-toned feed. Sharmili [@sharmtoaster]. (2019c). Posts [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved February 4, 2019 from <https://www.instagram.com/sharmtoaster/>

Other ways in which the focus in aesthetics was evidenced was in @blondeyouadieu's profile. While her photos didn't have the same coloring as @sharmtoaster's, they were all very bright and white which enhanced the colors of the products. On February 4, 2019 @blondeyouadieu shared a flat lay of a collection of yellow, bronze, and teal products on a white background (F A I T H • M A R I E, 2019d). The white background contrasted with the saturated products. In addition, one of the products was open and the lighting of the image enhanced the texture of the cream (see Figure 8). Another post was of a shelf filled with white and pink products. Products of

showcase the actual products used, the selfie showed the result of using the products. The three selfies were taken in the same setting, a cream-colored room and the position of Danielle remains the same throughout. On two of the selfies, @boise.beauty included more than one image per post resulting in a carousel. In one occasion, the second photo was with her eyes closed to show the eyeshadow look she did (see Figure 9). The images didn't show any additional about Danielle, the focus was on her face and the makeup.



Figure 9. Selfie showing off eyeshadow look. Danielle [@boise.beauty]. (2019c). Happy #glamsaturday💕 Since it's February, I thought I would start testing out looks for Valentine's Day! [Instagram Post]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtZYds6hsIL/>

On the other hand, @mod.young posed while holding products for two of the selfies and all three were taken with a different background. In one of the posts, a working space could be visible in the background with a desk, computer, and a gold wire wall grid with images pinned to it (see Figure 10). M. Young's face expressions alternated from selfie to selfie, but they all reflected a positive mood. In the same post,

M. Young is holding a product in front of her face which directs the audiences' focus to it and makes it clear that that's what the post is about.



Figure 10. A selfie shared by @mod.young where she is holding skincare product. M. Young [@mod.young]. (2019c). Soooo... more yellow. And I just uploaded a new video discussing retinol and A-Passioni onto my YouTube channel [Instagram Post]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bs6oIAGHpvF/>

CHAPTER VII

THE NUMBERS

At the beginning of the two-week data collection period, the posts and follower count of each of the beauty micro-influencers was recorded. In addition, when taking notes of the content shared to the feed, the number of likes was also recorded. While it isn't 100% accurate because each micro-influencer posted at different times and the posts had been live for different amounts of time, it does give a glimpse into the engagement on the micro-influencer's account. No numerical data was collected from the Instagram Stories as this information is not available to other users, only the owner of the account.

@blondyouadieu

On day 0, @blondyouadieu had 14.9k followers and had posted a total of 240 times. At the end of the two-week period, Faith had 15.4k followers (+500) and 247 posts (+7). The post with the highest number of likes had 937 likes (F A I T H • M A R I E, 2019e) and the least number of likes had 404 (2019f). The major differences between the two posts are the number of products featured. The most-liked post was an image of a bathroom cabinet filled with products from different brands while the least-liked post featured one main product and two blurred in the background.

@boise.beauty

On day 0, @boise.beauty had 12.4k followers and a total of 1,318 posts. Two weeks later, they had 12.7k followers (+300) and 1,346 posts (+28). The most liked post had 259 likes (Danielle, 2019b) and the post with the least number of likes had 82

(Danielle, 2019d). In this case, the most-liked post was a flat lay that featured multiple makeup products from various brands. On the other hand, the least-liked post featured only products from one brand and it had more body care items than makeup.

@ohuprettythings

On day 0, @ohuprettythings had 40.3k followers and a total of 863 posts. Two weeks later, they had 40.7k followers (+400) and 876 posts (+13). The most liked post had 1,239 likes (Ohuprettythings, 2019d) and least liked post had 630 (Ohuprettythings, 2019e). These two posts are drastically different. The most-liked post featured an assortment of perfumes on a gold tray on top of what looks like an old chimney. There is also a gold mirror resting in the background and some white and black photographs. The least-liked post was set on a kitchen counter, a person is standing behind it, and there are a couple of skincare products mixed in with food items like eggs, strawberries, and tabasco sauce.

@sharmtoaster

On day 0, @sharmtoaster had 25.9k followers and 1,731 posts. At the end of the two-week period she had 26k followers (+100) and 1,746 posts (+15). Sharmili's most-liked post had 895 likes (Sharmili, 2019c) and least-liked post had 385 (Sharmili, 2019d). The main difference between these two posts is that the least-liked post was a collage of photos from other accounts the micro-influencer had saved, while the most-liked post is a carousel of three photos featuring an assortment of skincare products.

@byglamjoy

On day 0, @byglamjoy had 18.1k followers and after two weeks she had 19.2k followers (+1,100). To start with, she had 500 posts and at the end of the two-week period she had 515 (+15). The most-liked post during this time had 1,649 likes, but it was a giveaway post where users were encouraged to engage for the chance to win the products featured on the photo (Andrea Cabrera, 2019b). The least-liked post was one that has now been removed from the account, it had 230 likes, and it was a flat lay featuring three products – silver hoop earrings, a makeup primer, and a room spray (see Figure 11).

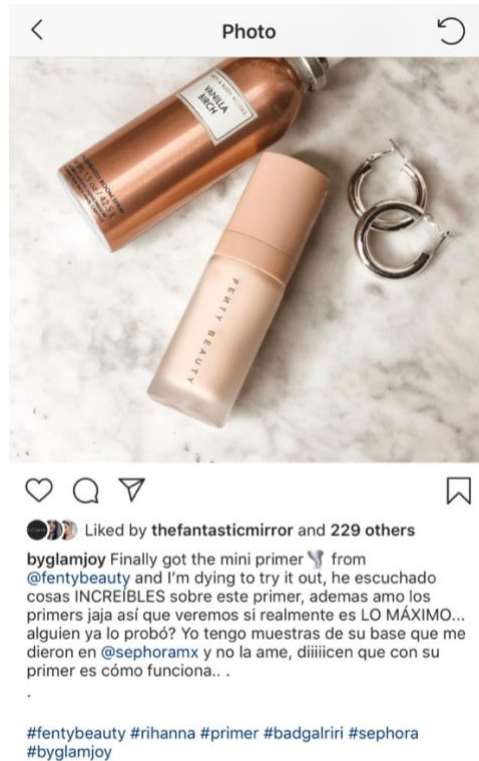


Figure 11. Now-deleted post from @byglamjoy featuring beauty products over a marble surface. Andrea Cabrera [@byglamjoy]. (2019e). Posts [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/byglamjoy>

@mod.young

On day 0, @mod.young had 13.3k followers and a total of 382 posts. After two weeks, she had 13.3k followers (+0) and 391 posts (+9). During the two week period, @mod.young's most-liked post had 495 likes and it was one of the selfies that she shared during the two-week period (M. Young, 2019c). The least-liked post had 207 likes and it was in collaboration with a brand as indicated by the "AD" at the beginning of the caption (M. Young, 2019b).

CHAPTER VIII

INSTAGRAMMING THE SELF: CONCLUSION

Over the course of two weeks during January 2019, the online behavior of six beauty micro-influencers on Instagram was recorded. By situating this analysis from the context of self-presentation and the process through which micro-influencers develop their personal brands, following them in their environment and paying close attention to their actions online allowed to get insight into the various components that take part in this process. In addition, by taking a close look at the content shared it was possible to identify whether appealing an audience influenced their online behavior. The analysis was broken up in to three main sections – the textual, the visual, and the numbers. Instagram has been identified as a primarily visual platform (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015), but the text shared also played a role in building micro-influencer’s brands.

Text was shared via post captions and Instagram Stories. While the majority of the content focused on beauty reviews, micro-influencers used strategies like self-disclosure to develop a clear and unique voice. For example, when @blondyouadieu adds “Faith” at the end of all of her captions as if she’s signing a letter to a friend. These two main techniques make it so that the text shared can only be of that specific micro-influencer, instead of it being interchangeable because there is nothing personal about it. Moreover, the use of personalized hashtags like #ohuprettythings that then are used by other users allow micro-influencers to turn themselves into brands and spread brand awareness (Chen, 2018). In addition, having branded hashtags like “#ohuprettythings” and “#BYYApproved,” enable the micro-influencer to build a community and engage

with those who have used the hashtag and identify their audience. They go from being “Faith” to being “blondyouadie.”

The data shows that the feed is where the majority of information on beauty is shared. On the other hand, Instagram Stories was the place where micro-influencers appeared to feel more comfortable about sharing additional details about their personal lives and non-beauty related subjects. This could be because Instagram Stories are temporary and disappear after 24 hours. They are not part of the first impression users get when visiting a micro-influencer’s profile. First impressions are limited to what appears on the feed. In the case of @byglamjoy, she spent a lot of time discussing fitness and sharing herself spending time with family members at her home. In addition, she shared a lot of her space – bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and closet – that allowed her audience to get to know her and her lifestyle better. While some of her audience might not relate to one aspect of the content they share, discussing a wide variety of subjects, sharing about personal struggles and mental health, is a way through which beauty micro-influencers can expand their reach and resonate with a larger audience (Bamakan, Nurgaliev, & Qu, 2019). Self-disclosure was more prominent on Instagram Stories as evidenced in @byglamjoy’s account who shared more about her non-beauty related life than the others. She also presented the highest follower growth during the two-week period. While it is not possible to conclude the increase in followers was caused by the amount of self-disclosure, it is important to highlight the difference in the use of Instagram Stories by @byglamjoy to the other micro-influencers and how it can be possible that her audience finds more to connect to her with.

Visually, all six micro-influencers showcased having a clear and distinctive understanding of the look they wanted their feeds to have. Much like the video content shared in Instagram Stories, the photographs shared to the feed featured beauty products, but also spaces, selfies, and lifestyles. The editing of the photos also played an important role. By building a cohesive feed and a unique image, the micro-influencers reinforced their authenticity by creating a look that was personal to them. While there were some similarities in the way products were displayed, using the environment like @ohuprettythings did or being consistent like @boise.beauty's flat lays. Regardless of whether a caption was a positive or negative review, the products discussed were always presented in a positive light. There were no visual differences between a positive and a negative review. The user would have to read the caption to learn what the micro-influencer thought of the product. Beauty micro-influencers showed a lot of effort in the quality of the photos that they shared during the two-week period which reinforced the importance of Instagram's visual quality.

Goffman (1971) developed the theory of self-presentation before the age of social media and mediated communication via smartphone screens. While some of the strategies discussed by Goffman still apply in terms of individuals putting up performances when interacting with others in order to achieve their goals, in the age of social media and micro-influencers there is an economic transaction taking place. When micro-influencers engage with their followers, they're not only pushing for them to use discount codes they receive commission on like @boise.beauty and @mod.young did via their Instagram Stories, but they're also continuously managing the image brands have of them that can result in material and financial compensation.

In terms of the beauty micro-influencers' tailoring their content to present a version of themselves that better resonated with their audience, the data collected showed how important the focus on beauty is. There were only a few instances in which the caption of a post was not beauty-related, but the image that accompanied it still fit the beauty theme. Moreover, polarized issues like politics were never discussed during the two-week period. The most controversial matter was shared by @sharmtoaster to her Instagram Stories about an alleged hate crime against Hollywood actor Jussie Smollett.

It is important to consider and acknowledge that the authenticity constructed by the micro-influencers during the two-week period might not be the "real them," and a role they're playing to appear authentic to their followers. Research shows how authenticity is valued by consumers and individuals who *need* to believe in the idea that there is still realness in a capitalist world (Banet-Weiser, 2012). On Instagram, the authentic image built by the micro-influencers is rewarded in engagement, followers, and getting noticed by brands that might want to potentially work with them. Therefore, building an "authentic" image is not a selfish act.

While the numbers provided some insight into the overall performance of the micro-influencers, there are a lot of moving pieces and a two-week period was not enough to draw conclusions on what caused some to gain more followers than others. This would be a great opportunity for further research where two or three Instagram profiles are closely monitored for a longer period of time. More importantly, Instagram is an algorithmic platform. The algorithm affects all of the activities that take place on it (Barnhart, 2019), and it is not public which makes it impossible to know what exactly the social networking site is doing and how it reacts to users' behaviors.

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