

Haley Barbosa

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### The Power of Youtube Beauty Gurus

With over 40 million views to date, NikkiTutorials' 2015 video "The Power of Makeup" ignited the flame for an entire new movement within the Youtube beauty community. Birthed from the overwhelmingly negative social media posts directed towards women who wear makeup, the Dutch beauty guru took the initiative to paint half her face with makeup and leave the rest bare (Willett). The intended message from this video was that makeup should be an enjoyable, creative medium, and should not be correlated with low self-esteem or authenticity. In the words of NikkiTutorials herself, "I've been noticing a lot lately that girls have almost been ashamed to say that they love makeup...I just want people to know that makeup is fun and there are no rules" (NikkiTutorials 0:05- 0:20). Her impact was quickly seen across the online beauty community, with Youtubers of diverse backgrounds like Patrick Starr, Promise Phan, Sadaf Wassan, ShalomBlac and many others uploading their own 'power of makeup' videos and displaying both full glam and natural beauty. Nikki started a trend that showed the immense influence that the Youtube beauty community has in terms of shifting societal perceptions of beauty. Additionally, this online community wields the power to create, influence and popularize a majority of the trends in fashion and makeup that consumers see today. And with the global beauty industry valued at approximately \$532 billion (Biron), along with the global apparel industry valued at 1.5 trillion (O'Connell), this is an inconceivable amount of power.

“The Power of Makeup” was a clear representation of how the Youtube beauty space can easily empower its own participants, particularly female youtubers and viewers who are often ridiculed for using makeup. The nature of this digital space offers women the opportunity to “educate themselves, to seek support/advice, to empower themselves and others, to participate in the cultural economy, to create and consume content, and to engage in social movements” (Anarbaeva 3). This reciprocal relationship between the community itself and its users allows women to escape societal judgement and embrace their authentic, creative selves, while simultaneously offering this same experience to others through videos. Based off this, Youtube beauty community could be viewed as a global, virtual support group for makeup enthusiasts, free of the pressures and beauty standards that are characteristic of a patriarchal society. In fact, women are now outnumbering males in this online space, as the “internet is quickly becoming feminized” as women continue to “produce and share their own stories, edit their own histories, and have the freedom to construct their own meanings. Hence, their ability to create their own stories makes them powerful, not weak” (Anarbaeva 5). Female beauty gurus also have great agency over their content and any negativity that appears within their space, which is a feature embedded in Youtube’s code. Beauty gurus are easily able to edit and upload whatever content they please, as long as it complies with the terms and service, and block any haters that leave negative comments on their videos while giving more attention to positive feedback (Anarbaeva 5). Mothers are especially liberated through their participation in the Youtube beauty community. Historically, it was believed that motherhood would put additional stressors onto worklife. However, beauty gurus such as Bubz, Patricia Bright and SunKissAlba prove that Youtube gives control over their work-family balance. As discussed by Casabianca, “beauty bloggers present

ideas about how thankful they are for having Youtube as their full-time job because it allows them to take care of their children by staying home. These videos suggest that work arrangements through Youtube could give women the opportunity to feel fulfilled in several roles of their lives” (Casabianca 35).

Although the Youtube beauty community is a safe space for women overall, it is an especially empowering space for women of color. The accessible nature of Youtube allows anybody to participate, which allows Asian, Black, Latina or women of any underrepresented background to view reflections of their own beauty online. Casabianca analyzed an Asian-American beauty guru named Holly, who contributes to Asian representation in the online beauty community, along with serving as an inspiration to Asian women who watch her. Based on personal experiences related to her race, she is able to connect with viewers on a deeper level that goes beyond makeup application. This ranges from struggles of not being able to find the right foundation shade as a teenager, to microaggressions she experienced at the makeup counter. Casabianca goes on to explain that “many women want to feel like they are not the only ones who might be experiencing similar feelings...many of Holly’s fans are those with a different skin tone who also have had a hard time finding the right shade of makeup at the store...they want to fit in with their looks...and they can if they can create Holly’s makeup looks” (Casabianca 7).

Another example of the Youtube beauty community empowering women of color can be seen in the tutorials uploaded by dark skinned Black women. Prior to the rise of beauty Youtubers such as Jackie Aina and Nyma Tang, it was difficult for dark skinned Black women to find videos featuring women who looked like them, tested makeup brands and techniques that catered to their deeper hue, or that advocated for greater diversity in foundation shades. “The

beauty bloggers provided darker skinned women with something they may not have a tutorial for: the confidence to wear bold colors, to stand up to haters, and more important, to choose how they present themselves” (Garcia). Not only is this representation a significant source of empowerment, but it also serves as a wake-up call for the beauty industry to formulate products that work for every skin tone. As Jackie Aina, a Nigerian-American beauty guru with over three million subscribers stated, “it’s not just about creating shades for darker people...when companies do not reach out to darker-skinned people to learn about their skin, both the companies and their customers miss out” (Garcia). Youtube has served as a significant platform on which marginalized groups are able to express themselves creatively while simultaneously advocating for greater representation in the beauty industry.

A major, yet obvious, institution that is upheld by the Youtube beauty community is the beauty industry and world of brand marketing. From drugstore brands like Maybelline to luxury names such as Nars and Fenty Beauty, beauty gurus are leveraged by major cosmetic and personal care companies to spread awareness about products and gain profit, while earning a check in return (Forbes). These figures are essentially third-party product endorsers who influence product sales and brand awareness through sharing their opinions online, product hauls and reviews, tutorials and molding audience attitudes. Most high-achieving participants of the Youtube beauty community reach their status as any average social media user – by initially posting regular Youtube videos, transitioning to a consistent flow of uploading content, amassing a large following, and then gaining recognition from companies who are looking for brand ambassadors. The factor that differentiates Youtube beauty gurus from typical brand representatives or celebrities is the level at which they feel or appear ‘organic’ to their audience.

They are real people sharing real opinions, and that is incredibly appealing to people because it makes these figures relatable on a personal level. Viewers can test out products vicariously through another “real” person in their eyes before they try it, which leads to them searching the product online and purchasing it in an instant. A statistic that provides incredible insight on the impact and importance of beauty gurus’ content is the fact that “3% of beauty-related content on Youtube is brand-led and controlled, meaning 97% of content is made by beauty vloggers” (Kinski). Lachowicz uses the example of Youtuber and beauty influencer Zoella, who has a following of 11 million loyal subscribers. This influencer could recommend a cosmetic product, and that particular product will receive a “40% clickthrough rate to their site. That’s more than any advertising could ever buy” (Lachowicz). From major cosmetic brands such as L’Oreal and Estee Lauder to smaller, indie brands, everyone benefits from the contributions of the beauty community on Youtube.

The current dynamics of the Youtube beauty community demonstrate evolution, and departure from, historical arrangements of power. One example of this stems back to the discussion of Youtube as a convenient full-time job, especially for mothers. Historically, women were assumed to find fulfillment within the domestic sphere, and had no desire for higher education or a full-time career. This is described as the ‘feminine mystique’, which author Betty Friedan claims to “deny women of their basic human need to grow” (Churchill). Friedan also argues that a woman’s identity can be developed through a sense of personal achievement, or through a career. Youtube as a source of employment for beauty gurus further denies this concept of the feminine mystique by proving that women, particularly beauty enthusiasts and makeup artists, can find immense success, influence and personal fulfillment through pursuing a career in

a field that they are passionate about. A career on Youtube also demonstrates that a woman can successfully operate as both a mother and self-made career woman, essentially having the best of both worlds. Another example of this departure from historical arrangements of power is seen through the beauty gurus of color. Within the beauty industry, whiteness has long been the standard. This is seen in examples such as advertisements that primarily feature white or lighter skinned models, and the limited shade ranges for various complexion products. Historically, “white women constructed a culture of beauty that placed themselves and their complexions at the center...female whiteness became actively equated with personal qualities of goodness, purity, innocence and candor” (Cain 32-33). This standard then places darker skin and non-white features lower on the beauty spectrum, and even contributes to the lack of visibility for women of color within the Youtube beauty community. However, with the growing diversity of beauty gurus, this standard is slowly evolving into one that is more inclusive and representative of all races and skin tones.

The main aspect of the Youtube beauty community that could be changed is increasing the visibility of female beauty gurus of color, which was previously discussed. If this is accomplished, there is potential for greater changes within the beauty industry and societal beauty standards overall. Tracing back to the example of Jackie Aina, a well-known Black beauty Youtuber with over three million subscribers, she leveraged her popularity and success to infiltrate the beauty industry through paid brand sponsorships and ultimately the release of her own eyeshadow palette with Anastasia Beverly Hills, a well established makeup brand. If other beauty youtubers of color are able to gain this level of visibility within the community, there

would most likely be greater representation and inclusion in the beauty industry. In order to achieve this, Youtube itself would be the obvious place to begin.

Youtube's algorithm places great emphasis on the video recommendations provided its users. In fact, "for more than 70 percent of the time you spend watching...you're lured in by one of the service's AI-driven recommendations...almost like a synthetic or personalized channel" (Solsman). In order to maintain their channel livelihood, content creators ensure that they stay consistent with uploading and maintain a brand for their channel, which will keep subscribers engaged while luring in new viewers. This system appears to keep top-subscribed channels on top, while lesser known youtubers may struggle to build up their brand and grow in popularity. That is the seemingly cutthroat nature of the Youtube algorithm, to "get more people watching and engaging with more videos" (Jaffari). In relation to increasing the visibility of beauty gurus of color, one way of achieving this may be through playing into the algorithm. These youtubers could work to fully engage their committed viewers, which would result in their videos continuously appearing within their audience's recommendation lists. This committed fan base is likely comprised of people who share a similar racial or ethnic background to the youtuber. It is important to solidify a fan base prior to expanding outward towards new audiences or demographics. This is somewhat similar to the 80/20 ratio in marketing, in which brands gain 80% of their revenue from 20% of customers, which are their most loyal consumers. After building a solid fanbase, the process of expanding outwards to new audiences would likely become easier. Once this is achieved, the youtuber would begin appearing in more suggestion lists and gain greater visibility within the beauty community on Youtube. This could certainly be a lengthy and difficult process, but working with Youtube's algorithm may be a realistic way of

achieving greater inclusion within the beauty community. Despite the progress that still needs to be made within this online community, Youtube beauty gurus have certainly proven to be a powerful influence on the cosmetics industry, the shifting standards of beauty, and within their own community.

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