

Influencers: The Dark Knights of Beauty
An Exploration of Internet-Famous CSR Actors'
Role in Diversity Communication

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ABSTRACT

This thesis qualitatively explores how social media influencers whose activity is inextricably linked to the beauty industry perceive their role in diversity communication and what techniques these influencers use to raise awareness and encourage their audiences to engage. With the level of importance that social media has got to in our society, people with prominent online presences might have real social power. The main goal of the research was to approach the phenomenon of social media influencers from the perspective of corporate social responsibility communication as the possibility of influencers being actors of social change has not yet received a considerable amount of attention in the academia. Through a thematic analysis of the data collected via interviews and YouTube videos, the thesis provides an insight into how beauty influencers define their place in diversity communication and how do they make the message regarding diversity and inclusivity most compelling. The findings suggest that beauty influencers indeed see themselves as capable of informing and educating the audiences, inspiring the followers and subscribers to pay attention to companies' diversity-related projects and encourage them to exercise their consumer power. Moreover, influencers recognize their potential to use their social media platforms to effectively pressure companies within the beauty industry into starting a productive discussion or rethinking their marketing and product development directions. The ways social media influencers achieve or attempt to achieve the set goals mainly revolve around framing and active user engagement.

KEYWORDS: *corporate social responsibility, social media influencers, diversity communication, inclusivity, beauty industry*

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1. Introduction

Amnesty International (2018) marks social media, namely Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, an outlet which provides a space for activists to exchange ideas, self-organize and make their voices heard. Indeed, the digital revolution that gave a life to social media reinvented modern day activism (Sivitanides & Shah, 2011). It is only logical that in recent years the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has received a considerable amount of attention due to the rapidly increasing number of companies engaging and implementing CSR initiatives in most countries (Moravcikova, Stefanikova, & Rypakova, 2015). In the realities of XXI century it is crucial for companies across sectors to contribute to the society in order to appeal to the stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2007). CSR is a term constantly being debated and discussed with countless definitions being proposed (Dahlsrud, 2006). For example, The European Commission (2011) defines CSR as: “A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.

Brands within the beauty industry have the resources to make a positive change, and more and more professionals within the industry, consumers and bloggers advocate for inclusivity and diversity (Shapiro, 2018). Now, companies within the beauty industry are actively developing CSR strategies to redeem its image through ethical, eco-conscious and responsible business practices (Organic Monitor, 2010). One of the issues beauty companies pay a greater deal of attention is diversity. The market's most prominent players, Estee Lauder, Shiseido and L'Oreal, all are quite vocal about their efforts for improving diversity and inclusivity in their annual reports. The trend is flourishing in the beauty industry, with a number of companies building their entire brands identities around CSR (Lush, Fenty Beauty, The Body Shop). Diversity itself is a complex multidimensional concept definition and analyzed components of which differs per researcher (Holton, 2005). The concept is often given a definition through other overlapping concepts such as social justice and inclusion (Tribe & Bell, 2017), affirmative action (Hirschman, Berrey & Rose-Greenland, 2016), and setting up anti-discrimination policies (Zapata-Barrero & Cante, 2018). The beauty industry is one of the largest growing industries in the world with the market leader L'Oreal alone generating about 28.6 billion U.S. dollars in revenue as of 2016 (Statista, 2016).

Nevertheless, the positive social change which has been anticipated by the society as a whole might not be developed solely by companies within the industry. First, beauty influencers are routinely employed by various brands to be their spokespeople (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). The following research aims at exploring the role of social media influencers in the encouragement of diversity and inclusivity in the work of companies in the beauty industry as well as diversity communication. A ventriloquial perspective on the constructive dimension of communication has been proposed for the last decade by a pleiad of scholars (Cooren, 2018) seems to be a starting point in the process of understanding the place of influencers in CSR communication. According to the ventriloquial perspective, communications is not restricted to humans and includes all entities and becomes the means by which the world gets “communicated into being” (Cooren, 2018, 3). Cooren (2018) suggests that any organization is communicated into being through spokespersons, press releases, sales persons and websites and should be considered an actor of communication. People carrying out the communication on behalf of organizations are simultaneously puppets and ventriloquists (Cooren, 2018). They take a role of a puppet in order to communicate a company’s specific interests and values, along with being a ventriloquist implying that spokespeople make the organization say what is supposed to be representative of its expectations and preoccupations (Cooren, 2018). The context of influencers and influencer marketing might potentially make this scheme more complicated. Influencers can be spokespeople for the organizations they are affiliated with coupled with being spokespeople for the consumers.

Second, influencers are also bound to communicate their personal brand and their own value system for the purpose of maintaining their influence on the following. Beauty influencers are not purely marketing-oriented projects and as other consumers bring up socially-relevant topics and even start arguments with companies which policies go against their personal convictions. Ultimately, social media influencers have become mediators between companies and customers, which abstain from being neutral and concurrently communicate their interests along with other stakeholders’. The actions of influencers along with them using their platforms to disseminate information and raise awareness can bring the industry closer to being truly inclusive which would affect all consumers.

RQ1: How do beauty influencers perceive their role in diversity communication?

RQ2: What strategies of influence these influencers use to make the message compelling?

Previous research has been analyzing the phenomenon of social media influencers (Freberg et al., 2011) quite extensively (Brown & Fiorella, 2013) yet mostly in connection to influencer marketing (e.g. Gross & Wangenheim, 2018; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). The value of social media influencers is also assessed from a business perspective, often converting it into numbers, for instance, number of followers (De Veirman et al., 2017). Likewise, CSR has received a significant amount of attention in academia (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001) but the possible relationship between influencers and CSR have not yet been comprehensively examined partially due to the novelty of the phenomenon. The literature review elaborates on the relevant concepts practically none of which has been studied in relation to influencers and their involvement in diversity communication. Another reason might lie in influencers not being widely recognized as stakeholders, leading to CSR and its communication being investigated as an occurrence affected by the directly company or the consumers' purchasing behavior. Apart from scientific and social relevance the proposed research can be of practical use for companies in the corresponding field. CSR can potentially be a significant competitive advantage in the beauty industry allowing brands to receive positive PR and create a better differentiation with the rest of the players on the market (Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller, Meza, 2006) as it is reported that the consumers find little to no difference between hair and beauty products due to comparability of their price and quality (Roberts & Ryan, 2005).

2. Literature review

2.1. Corporate social responsibility in the era of social media

2.1.1. Corporate social responsibility and the beauty industry

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept first introduced by H. Bowen in his controversial book *The Social Responsibilities of Businessmen* over 60 years ago (Caroll, 2008). Bowen (2013) highlighted the fact that major US corporations accumulated a substantial amount of power and encouraged them to go beyond meeting formal requirements in order to make a greater contribution to the society. In particular, Bowen (2013) advocated in favor of social responsibility goals being a part of good business practices, decision-making and strategic planning. The approach has been debated, most notably by Milton Friedman (1962), who suggested that the only responsibility of business is making profit in honest and legal ways. Moreover, Caroll (1979) addressed social

responsibility as a societal pressure rather than a business choice. Despite criticism CSR has shown to have a positive effect on business performance (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012), economic value (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003) as well as stakeholders' perception of a company's social and environmental value (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). To date, there is no single universally used definition of CSR (van Marrewijk, 2003). The most frequently cited CSR definitions connect organizations to greater societal, economic, ethic, legal and philanthropic good (Carroll, 1979).

The company that presumably kick-started the trend in the beauty industry is The Body Shop by publishing a CSR report back in 1995 (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998). The report featured a detailed description of the activities and ethical practices the company engages in: internal CSR, ethical trade, terminating animal testing, advocating for human rights, conservation and sustainability (Dennis et al., 1998). The Body Shop's positioning as a CSR-oriented brand and actively communicate it was incredibly successful and resulted in the brand distinguishing itself from the competition (Purkayastha & Fernando, 2007). Moreover, the success resulted in The Body Shop's being closely associated with the "green" positioning that other brands are at risk of being perceived as imitators (Johri & Sahasakmontri, 1998) yet nevertheless, numerous brands have started building their identity around eco-consciousness and communicating CSR efforts (Dennis et al., 1998). Created by The Body Shop trend has been in one way or another picked up by other major as well as indie beauty companies. For instance, Lush is actively experimenting with packaging-free cosmetics, Beauty Bakerie creates paraben-free, vegan and cruelty free makeup, and brands such as Garnier and Schwarzkopf add "nature-inspired" product lines with natural oils and extracts.

Regardless of whether scholars agree on a uniform definition, businesses are taking advantage of the practice captivated by the positive response of consumers (Bhattacharaya & Sen, 2004). The Body Shop case made a breakthrough prior to the age of social media and now companies are elevating their online presence from maintaining online shopping websites to actively interacting with customers and establishing a meaningful relationship (Papazolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). According to Papazolomou & Melanthiou (2012), the focus has shifted from a one-off sale relationship and one-way communication to building a more long-term relationship with clients. The positive influencer of CSR on consumer behavior have strengthen the case for productive socially-relevant contributions and drove companies to invest a greater deal of resources and energy into their development

(Bhattacharaya & Sen, 2004). Eurostat (2017) reports that 47% of EU enterprises used at least one type of social media in 2017, with 84% of these businesses utilizing social media for building a positive brand image and marketing purposes. As socially responsible activities have to be “visible” to the stakeholders to whom they are relevant, companies actively use social media platforms to spread the message (Yang, Basile, & Letourneau, 2018). The degree of both visibility and transparency play a key role for companies in creating an image of socially-conscious businesses and bonding with customers over commitment to shared values (Brito, 2011).

Communicating CSR efforts through traditional forms of marketing such as print advertising television might be not the most effective and can be red flagged by consumers as being self-promotion rather than an authentic gesture (Kesavan & Bernacchi, 2013). Social media provides businesses with a robust way of reaching the consumers, however, getting too comfortable too quick can be a mistake. Listening to consumers’ needs and wishes and entering their new media spaces calls for additional learning if a company wants to be perceived as opening a window to its soul (Kesavan & Bernacchi, 2013). Undeniably, no company can ignore social media in today’s competitive environment and once a brand gets on social media, “it has to play its game” (Gastaldi, 2012, p.123). Companies within the beauty industry are increasingly developing various CSR initiatives and, most importantly, communicate them across social media platforms (Łopaciuk & Łoboda, 2013). If done right, social media’s role goes beyond being a vessel of CSR and becomes a part of its soul embedded in the brand itself as well as its message (Capriotti, 2011).

The following example illustrates how a union of CSR and communication through social media gains the power to make brand a household name and transform the whole industry. Fenty Beauty, a newly established by a famous performer Rihanna brand, has been described as the new generation of beauty due to its core identity being centered around diversity and inclusivity (Singh-Kurtz, 2018). The brand became an overnight sensation (Rearick, 2018) for its universally ingenious foundation shade range, which was made to match all skin tones and each undertone (Fenty Beauty, 2019) and its powerful social media marketing featuring a truly diverse group of models (Muller, 2017). “Fenty Beauty’s immense commercial success and amount of media attention encouraged other brands, including internationally-recognized brands such as Dior, Beauty Blender, ColorPop, to expand their products’ shade ranges in order to suit POC (Schallon, 2018). What is possibly even more crucial is that apart from the brand’s ingenious communication of inclusivity online proving that social

media is an effective tool of diversity communication, the consumers' response to Fenty Beauty showed how relevant and sensitive the issue is for millions of members of the society (Nittle, 2018).

2.1.2. Diversity, inclusivity & their communication

The case of Fenty indicates that diversity communication holds a key to a brand's commercial success. The company's product inclusivity and celebration of every man's and woman's beauty made it a golden standard for other brands in the beauty industry (Mone, 2018). The discussions about diversity and inclusivity have generated a lot of buzz yet when it comes to the term "diversity" itself, due to its polysemic nature its definitions vary from one researcher to another (Cox, 2001). Therefore, providing one comprehensive definition can be problematic. In recent years the term itself has expanded in terms of its scope, shifting from focusing on racial differences to including gender, cultural background, political affiliations, religion and sexual orientation (Roberson, Ryan, & Ragins, 2017). Diversity has become a trendy topic for academia, business and governments (Evans & Suklun, 2017). In the business sphere the emphasis is often placed on workplace diversity. Ferdman (2014) defines "diversity" at workplace as representation of multiple groups and their cultures in a particular organization. On the account of globalization more and more companies started regarding diversity as a competitive advantage (Cox & Blake, 1991), and pay attention to managing it (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005). For example, Shiseido, the fifth largest and one of the oldest cosmetics companies in the world, by implementing a strategy to cultivate corporate culture and encourage women to take active roles (Shiseido, 2016). Promoting diversity in the workplace can help brands to understand their customers and market in general and the Japanese giant plans to keep improving the internal diversity by employing foreigners and people with disabilities (Shiseido, 2016).

Diversity within companies empowers women and encourages them to take leading roles however, the need for diversity and inclusivity plays out on the level of the entire society. There is a general agreement that popular media puts a lot of pressure on both men and women to maintain a certain look (Grogan, 2016). Wykes & Gunter (2005) suggest that a narrow female body ideal (young, white, slender) is being subtly reinforced by the media, keeping alive stereotypes about what bodies are socially acceptable. What is more, along with the media the beauty industry is a peculiar environment that acts as a mirror of societal

standards of beauty while simultaneously dictates what is supposed to be seen as beautiful (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). A study by Tiggemann & McGill (2004) investigated the effects of advertisements on 126 women and found a positive correlation between exposure to commercial displays of idealized female body and body dissatisfaction along with negative mood. The beauty industry has been reinforcing strict gender norms for women so hard that it inadvertently stigmatized the use of makeup by people identifying as men (Mohan, 2018). The rising popularity and demand for diversity and inclusivity in the industry builds a foundation for an important social change. Now, brands through creating inclusive product lines, marketing it online with the help of beauty influencers, and also drastically changing the approach to marketing campaigns in general are changing the discourse on “all things beauty”. Some of the positive changes include expanding product lines to cater for POC, featuring atypical beauty in campaigns, and phasing out retouching images for marketing (Rearik, 2018). For instance, during New York Fashion Week 2018, Olay set up a runway show with all models walking barefaced (Rearik, 2018). In 2018 MAC Cosmetics started using photoshop-less images in their marketing, and CVS made an executive decision to renounce any retouched photos in their stores across the nation (Rearik, 2018). The most recent Tommy Hilfiger X Zendaya capsule’s fashion show featured an all-black cast aged 18 to 70, including iconic women of color such as Pat Cleveland and Grace Jones (Krentcil, 2019). Tommy Hilfiger is not the only brand that decided to improve its inclusivity and make the brand more appealing to a new demographic.

As previously discussed in Section 2.1., social media gives brands a chance to communicate their CSR initiatives such as abovementioned to their consumers most successfully. An example of this can be Too Faced, a much talked about all over the beauty community cosmetic brand, has recently collaborated with a top beauty influencer Jackie Aina (Chadwick, 2018). Jackie Aina has a massive YouTube (2.9m) and Instagram (1.1m) following, and Too Faced wanted to expand the range by adding wearable colors suitable for deep skin tones (Chadwick, 2018). This is not a single instance of brands approaching beauty-focused social media influencers for assistance in promoting their CSR projects. Social media influencers as a phenomenon receive a significant amount of attention in the academia yet most of it is targeted towards influencers being a part of companies’ marketing strategies (e.g. Brown & Hayes, 2008; Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017) yet not a lot of work has been done on determining how influencers exercise their agency or use their influence to

promote diversity. The following chapter's goal is to investigate the role of influencers in diversity communication and their relationships with brands and the audiences.

2.2. CSR actors

The phenomenon of social media influencers is a relatively new trend currently being on the rise (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). With the significant impact of social media on sharing and disseminating the information a range of information about brands and their products come directly from consumers themselves (Kapoor, Jayasimha & Sath, 2013). According to Bianchi (2016), peer reviews and recommendations found online play a key role in shaping consumers perception of brands and what they represent. Additionally, peer reviews allow consumers to make a purchase decision regarding a product prior to coming in contact with it or actually buying it (MacKinnon, 2012). Essentially, social media influencers are consumers who accumulated social media power to influence other people's purchase decisions (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). The success and impact of influencers can be ascribed to their perceived trustworthiness (Freberg et al., 2011). Edelman's Trust Barometer (2016) suggests an inversion of influence due to the irrelevance of the traditional pyramid with elite groups on top. In conformity with the notion is the fact that, in the context of social media, consumers report higher level of trust for their friends, followed influencers and online news sources (Nielsen, 2013).

The major advantage of influencer marketing is such powerful tool as eWOM (electronic word of mouth), which has been recognized in marketing and consumer behavior research to be more effective than traditional advertising when it comes to purchasing behavior (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). eWOM is usually defined as an opinion statement made by a customer regarding a company or its product, which is disseminated on the Internet (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). In this environment influencers become opinion leaders actively and successfully affecting purchasing behavior of other Internet users (Watts & Dodds, 2007). The reason that these opinion leaders become valuable for companies is the awareness and sophistication of customers themselves. Consumers are able to use various software to block ads and frequently use the opportunity to skip commercial on YouTube as well as other platforms.

Potentially any person can become and social media influencer or an influencer (Gross & Wangenheim, 2018) in the "real life" where an ability to influence is often rooted in a

possession of social power (Wilensky, 1967). For instance, a typology popular among management scholars (Elias, 2008) developed by French & Raven (1959) dissects the social power-based influence in the context of supervisor subordinate relationships. Social influence has been an extensively studied subject in social psychology (Bourgeois & Sommer, 2009) and one of the more general definitions explain social impact as “any of the great variety of changes in psychological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behavior that occur in an individual, human or animal, as a result of the real, implied or imagined presence of actions or other individuals (Latane, 1981, p.343). Putting this notion into the realm of brand-influencer-audience relationship, the offline world people have the capacity to influence other people while in the online world they either become social media influencers or have their influence being concentrated in the ability to like, comment and follow. A social media influencer being an opinion leader can have an impact on other social media users as well as put pressure on companies who in turn, have a powerful relationship with influencers through influencer marketing. The research is built around the premise that social media influencers can act as a contact point of between the demands of the audiences and the policies of companies while using their social media power to further the diversity agenda.

Some scholars propose a distinction between influencers and stakeholders as influencers may have an influence but no stake, while stakeholders have a stake in the organization but no actual influence (Ward & Chapman, 2008). On the contrary, Olander (2007) considers this differentiation problematic due to an implication that the media does not belong to the classification of stakeholders despite its capacity to influence companies' projects and activities. Indeed, influencers are dictating trends to their quite substantial, often multi-million following, and that can put pressure on companies to adjust accordingly (Montell, 2018). CSR itself can be looked at as a “moving target” (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), which compels organizations to move beyond sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) towards co-creating (Cooren, 2018). Social technologies help link influencers to other smaller stakeholders (Jurgens, Berthon, Edelman & Pitt, 2016) and help them become a part of CSR co-creation. As communication is a construct communicated into being, the concept of co-creation contributes to CSR being not simply disseminated but made sense of by all the stakeholders and general public, making unofficial actors a channel through which an organization comes to existence (Cooren, 2018). In other words, CSR can be considered a social construct the meaning of which is negotiated between organizations and stakeholders (Barlett & Devin, 2011), and social media influencers as a part of CSR negotiation and often spokespeople for organizations and the stakeholders, are involved in a social change.

In order for that premise to be plausible and the diversity communication to be successful, a social media influencer, as literature suggests, has to be trusted by his audience. A study by Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu (2019) suggests that social media users perceive branded information coming from Instagram celebrities as more trustworthy, engaging and reliable than when branded content is posted by more “traditional” celebrities who are famous from film and music industries, sport or entertainment. Indeed, social media is responsible for the emergence of a new type of celebrities, direct descendants of early 2000s reality TV divas, who create value for themselves through their appealing personal aesthetics, curated personal brands and entertaining content creation (Jin et al., 2019). Recent studies show that social media celebrities, or simply large influencers, make customers feel a stronger social connection with them than traditional celebrities (Tran & Strutton, 2014) and are perceived to be more authentic (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010), which positively affects customers’ purchasing behavior (Tran & Strutton, 2014).

As previously mentioned, social media users see influencers as their peers which makes them considerably more trustworthy than celebrity brand ambassadors, whose public appearances with branded products are viewed as promotions (Silvera & Austad, 2004). Currently there is not enough research to make a concrete statement on the relation between social media influencers’ perceived trustworthiness and the number of their followers, however, non-academic sources are making a case for micro-influencers. Micro-influencers are essentially social media influencers with less than 100.000 followers who, arguably, are able to pay more attention to the quality of their recommendations and more time for audience engagement (Weinswig, 2018). Forbes advises hiring groups of micro-influencers to ensure the best possible returns on the investment on marketing campaigns (Wissman, 2018) as they are accepted as less “commercial” (Greenwald, 2019). Nonetheless, Banet-Weiser (2012) critiques the simplicity of this binary logic of commercial = inauthentic and non-commercial = authentic. The relationship between a customer and consumer culture is a complex affair and a battle between individual resistance and corporate hegemony (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Moreover, in the context of contemporary consumer/brand culture the gradually increasing blurriness of boundaries between the authentic self and the commodity self is tolerated and welcomed (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

Recent examples from the world of social media show that while the viewers and followers are aware of potential brand affiliations or understand the need for influencers to monetize

their activity, they might not be especially forgiving when it comes to being deceived or somehow openly manipulated for marketing purposes. Some of the most discussed cases are related with YouTube and its exuberant beauty community, which has given rise to countless “drama channels” sole purpose of which is discussing the world of “beauty gurus”. Several brands including Becca, Morphe and MAC collaborated with famous influencers to create limited-edition collections the perceived scarcity of which was achieved by not releasing the entire stock simultaneously (Stadler, 2017). The campaigns led to mass hysteria, long waiting lists and further re-release or inclusion in the permanent collection which led to a lot speculation and skepticism from customers due to influencers’ and brands’ dishonesty and inauthenticity (Stadler, 2017).

In academic literature frameworks and theories regarding the effects of perceived inauthenticity of social media influencers on a companies’ brand image, especially when it comes to diversity communication are lacking. In contrast, consumer skepticism towards companies’ CSR initiatives have received considerably larger attention in the academia. Skepticism is listed as a potential consumer response to advertising and promotion (Obermiller, Spangenberg & MacLachlan, 2005), environmental claims (Mohr et al., 1998), crisis CSR communication (Sinigh, Kristensen & Villasenor, 2009) and frequently associate it with specific contexts and situations (Mohr et al., 1998). When proposing a model for CSR skepticism, Skarmas & Leonidou (2013) included stakeholder-driven motives into the framework as one of its influencers. Stakeholder-driven motives can be defined as the beliefs that a brand’s intention behind engaging in CSR activities is meeting the expectations of various stakeholders (Vlachos et al., 2009).

2.3. Strategies of influence

2.3.1. Audience engagement

Successful media presence of brands demands for extensive strategic planning as Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas (2009) concluded after analyzing 725 non-profit organization’s profiles on Facebook. Establishing a good media presence for individual can also be tricky. In comparison with establishing careers and media outlets in traditional media, social media allows users become media producers and consumers without specific technical or journalistic knowledge (Panagiotopoulos, 2012). Engagement with followers and subscribers seems to be an obvious thing but what is even more important, interactions with the audience is a time-consuming process which might also require being savvy with

storytelling, framing and general YouTube trends such as certain thumbnails. TrackMaven (2014) looked into 123 companies that are in the US Fortune 500 list and concluded that the best day for posting content in terms of engagement is Sunday. Other resources and researchers worked on their own patterns, and Latergramme (2017), a service that manages Instagram posts and schedules their posting had a dataset of over 61000 posts and stated that 2 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST are the times when posts get the most engagement, while 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. have the lowest engagement rates. Hence, influencers might also need to keep the patterns of content consumption and user engagement in order to get as much as possible from their Instagram posts. This quest for patterns can be explained with the battle for attention with the platform's algorithm, and influencers need to be seen on a non-chronological field in order to survive and continue their online careers.

2.3.2. Framing & agenda-setting

Social media influencers use often engaging in promotional and quasi-promotional activities (Duffy and Hund, 2015). The likelihood of an influencer relying on advertising and brands' generosity with sending out complementary products might depend on their what they "major in". For example, social media influencers focusing on fashion rely on brands within the industry to stay relevant and popular on Instagram (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2012). Social media influencers working with beauty brands rely on the latter to be supplied with new products before their official releases and receiving products which are in high demand (Lancaster, 2018). Yet the relative accessibility and affordability of cosmetics can be one of the factors leading to influencers "calling out" brands across the industry. In 2018 the largest beauty YouTubers after receiving their PR packages criticized Beauty Blender for releasing a foundation with a shade range not suitable for people with dark skin (Capon, 2018). Later same year the company re-released the product with a more inclusive range (Gerard, 2018), proving that influencers and their audiences can pressure brands and affect their major decisions.

The concepts of both framing and agenda-setting are traditionally attributed to the functions of mass media, in particular when the information in mass media was the only contact many people had with such domains as politics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss & Ghanem (1991, p.3) describe a media frame as a central idea for news content which contextualize and explains an issue through "selection, emphasis, exclusion and further elaboration". Entman (1993) defines agenda setting as deliberate salience of

certain aspects of a perceived reality made in order to encourage a desired interpretation of a subject. In the era when influencers' and brands' rapid rises and falls happening online (Minthe, 2018), every part of the posted content should be well-thought out whether it be setting trends, following them or making a call for action. Harder & Sevenans (2017) argue that while various studies acknowledge the role of social media in agenda-setting, they are not re-examining the groundwork on which the whole theory is based on but rather view online channels as mere novelties. Agenda-setting is based on the assumption that humans process information based on their memory (Scheufele, 2000), meaning that individuals make judgements in accordance with immediately retrievable information from their memory (Iyengar, 1990). In this case, it can be argued that the value of each product review and mention by influencers will contribute to an overall perception of the brand made up by memories of second-hand interactions with it online.

In the era of social media dominance businesses are bound to monitor both positive and negative organic mentions of the brand (Hensel & Deis, 2010). This notion is supported by the existence of numerous tools to monitor brand mentions such as Mention, TweetDeck, Social Mention etc. Not only do companies track the response they get from consumers (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015) but they also need to monitor social media influencers for the purpose of identifying and selecting ones they would like to work with (Gross & Wangenheim, 2018). Being visible for both brands and the audience, social media influencers agenda setting can add to the visibility of the issue with diversity in the industry. More and more studies are looking into the role of social media platforms such as Twitter in agenda-setting. For instance, Rogstad (2016) suggests that blogs and social networking sites created a complex environment of reciprocal influence across platforms and types of media. Social media influencers' relation to agenda-setting especially in relation to diversity communication has not been extensively studied yet, however, following Rogstad's (2016) logic, it is reasonable to suggest that issues communicated by influencers in a hierarchy of importance can have an effect on those who see and trust them in the online space.

Among all, the success of social media influencers might be linked to the success of their personal brands. When the personal brands are seen as relatable and real, influencers are perceived as more relatable and easier to approach which also contributes to social media users' desire to imitate them often despite their highly integrated relationships with various companies (Jin et al., 2019). In conformity with the audience's expectations of social media content creator's authenticity, influencers frame their image as well as their brand

affiliations to stay relevant. Framing as well as agenda-setting are concepts associated with mass media and media effects (Scheufele, 1999), however, obtaining of information is not confined to traditional mass media as the number of people getting their news from social media skyrocketed in the last decade (Messing & Westwood, 2014). In 2014 Russian government attempted to address that issue and equated online resources and bloggers with an audience of over 3000 daily viewers to mass media obliging them to have a proper registration. While the law, dubbed “law about bloggers” proved itself to be ineffective and was abolished in 2017, this instance shows that the perspective of amateurs shaping and manipulating the construct of reality is seen as either plausible or already existing on the governmental level.

The history of framing can be traced to propagandistic messages of World War I and then framing was extensively explored in relation to political campaigns, and then described through the paradigm of social constructivism (Scheufele, 1999). Frames fall into two categories: individual frames and media frames, the latter being defined as mentally stored clusters of ideas that provide an individual with guidance during information processing (Entman, 1993). Media frames can be divided into generic and issue-specific (Wasike, 2013). Generic frames are broad structural themes while issue-specific frames are more subjective (Wasike, 2013) and are probably a better fit for defining social media influencers’ activity across platforms.

Beauty bloggers have not been researched in this particular context, but the following research aims at exploring how influencers use their social media platforms to present an ambivalent and relevant social issue. When analyzing framing of the news for social media users Valenzuela, Pina, & Ramirez (2017) conceptualized frames as dominant emphasized aspects that provide cues for further interpretation of the text through suggesting certain moral judgements and decisions. Similarly, framing might be used by social media influencers to highlight specific aspects of the issue of the lack of diversity, break the argument down and attempt to present it in a convincing way for their audiences. One of the study’s goals is to examine the ways beauty influencers consciously or unconsciously frame the narrative of diversity and the need for it.

3. Methodology

The following chapter describes the method chosen to answer the research questions.

Moreover, it provides a step-by-step explanation of the entire procedure

The first step of data collection (Section 3.3.) involved in-depth interviews, which are characterized by their ability to identify interviewees' perceptions, emotions and opinions regarding the subject (Song & Parker, 1995). Additionally, in-depth interviews stem from the phenomenological approach which offers an insight through the lens of participants and eye-witnesses (van Manen & Adams, 2010). The approach itself is derived from the works of E. Husserl and aims at bracketing, analyzing and comparing for determining the essence of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The key advantage of qualitative interviews is the personal and direct contact involvement which helps establishing a trustful relationship between an interviewer and interviewee (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Moreover, qualitative expert interviews open the doors to learning the information through experience and learning how it was gained and understand a person's level of involvement (Crescentini & Mainardi, 2009). The main drawback of the method is a reliance on the interviewer's skills of successfully carrying out the interviews in a friendly, non-intimidating way (Fisher, 2005). The second step (Section 3.4.) was undertaken to provide empirical evidence to complement the data derived via in-depth interviews.

The Section 3.5. provides an overview of the data analysis process. Thematic analysis was chosen to identify and analyze various patterns of meaning throughout the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as well as illustrate the most important themes for the studied phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, & Gilksman, 1997). Joffe & Yardley (2004) characterize thematic analysis as an effective tool of detecting core clusters of meaning in the collected data.

Finally, the Section 3.6. is a reflection on the research's validity and reliability.

3.1. Research design

To give answers to the three research questions the research employed qualitative methodology as it assists in obtaining insightful results for the studies focusing on the needs of consumers, behavioral elements such as values, ideas and feelings, and branding (Qualitative Research Consultants Association, 2017). To achieve the set goal, it was necessary to explore the opinions and perceptions of beauty-focused social media influencers as well as empirical evidence to support the articulated ideas. A qualitative analysis helps with answering qualitative research questions, starting with approaching the

process of ideas and theories generation inductively in relation to pre-existing literature and theoretical frameworks (Bryman, 2012). The method was chosen due to its experience-based nature in addition to the emphasis on the events and occurrences that can be best evaluated and described by the active participants, making the interpretation done by the research more comprehensive and accurate (Teherani et al., 2015).

3.2. Sampling

The process of sampling and data collection was done in two steps. First, the data was collected with the use of semi-structures in-depth expert interviews. Second, a qualitative content analysis of YouTube content was implemented to supplement the initial data with empirical evidence. A purposive sample logic was employed during both stages due to the need for interviewees to possess a certain level of expertise, and the video materials to be relevant and informative. Sandelowski (2000) notes that a purposive sampling is implemented in instances of a large pool of information-rich cases existence with no obvious reasoning behind preferring one particular case over the rest.

3.3. Data collection & data analysis: Step one

3.3.1. Semi-structured in-depth expert interviews

Social media influencers' status as experts can be attributed to the notion that expert interviewing focuses on the local context of knowledge production, granting an expert role by virtue of a person's role as an informant (Walter, 1994). Cooke & McDonald (1986) argue that expertise often comes down to human intuition, while Bonger, Littig & Menz (2009) suggest that expert knowledge is characterized by an ability to become hegemonial in functional context of a certain field and influencing the structure of conditions of actions for other actors. Despite social media influencers lack of the institutional aspect of authority to construct reality, they possess a substantial amount of insight about the industry due to their communication with brands, which takes a range of forms (sponsorships, affiliations, marketing inquiries, collaborations). Moreover, beauty influencers are well informed about brands' products, marketing and public relations. The research aimed at

In total, the sample consists of 8 interviews with social media influencers operating on at least one major social media platform. The interviewees selection was based on two major criteria: 1) relation to the beauty industry and 2) creation of diversity-related content. The

sample is diverse in regard to the interviewees' country of residence, number of followers and overall involvement in the issue. All 8 interviewees are either highly active on YouTube or name it as their main platform, therefore, the information about them features the number of subscribers specifically on YouTube. Naturally, the number of subscribers can fluctuate and the numbers below (Table 1) are indicative of May 2019. The "language" category refers to the language the interviewee uses when filming videos on YouTube, and the "country" category indicated the country of residence if specified on YouTube info page. Due to the agreement between the researcher and the participants the names of influencers and their channels are a confidential subject.

Code	Gender	Language	Country	# of subscribers	Type of interview
Interviewee 1	female	English	Finland	3k	Skype
Interviewee 2	female	Russian	Russia	334k	Skype
Interviewee 3	female	Russian	Russia	89k	Skype
Interviewee 4	female	English	USA	15k	Skype
Interviewee 5	female	English	UK	267k	Written
Interviewee 6	female	English	USA	45k	Written
Interviewee 7	female	Russian	Russia	401k	Written
Interviewee 8	female	English	UK	137k	Written

As far as the data collection tools concerned, a semi-structured questionnaire was formulated to serve as an interview guide for the researcher. The choice of creating an additional questionnaire suitable for answering the questions in written form was dictated by the limited accessibility of the chosen population. The interviewees (Interviewees 5, 6, 7 & 8) gave their consent to be further contacted for follow-up questions and elaborated on several

aspects. The Skype interviews lasted from 40 mins to 57 minutes with an average time being 46 minutes.

3.3.2. Operationalization

The development of the topic list and the questionnaire with open questions was based on emergent themes derived from the literature analysis. Both aimed at exploring three relevant dimensions: self-perception, framing and engagement. The self-perception dimension addressed the first *RQ1: How beauty influencers perceive their role in diversity communication?* and was measured by such question as:

- Do you think social media influencers such as yourself have the potential to contribute to making the beauty industry more ‘diverse’ and ‘inclusive’? How so? Please explain (with examples)
- What makes (would make) influencers such as yourself powerful to impact the issue of diversity and inclusivity in the beauty industry? What would prevent you from doing so?

3.3.3. Data analysis

After the data collection completion, all recordings of the Skype interviews were manually transcribed into textual format for further thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen to establish common patterns within the data. First, the collected and transcribed data was read through multiple times for the researcher to immerse in it until the data reaches saturation and new categories were found no more (Ayres, 2008). The initial open coding included stages described by Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.61) as “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data”. The initial codes are constituted by relevant for the research aspects of the data that can later be evaluated in a meaningful way which can give a better grasp of the studied phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4. Data collection & data analysis: Step two

3.4.1. Qualitative content analysis

The second phase of data collection followed the purposive sample logic and focused on diversity-related visual content posed on YouTube in the period from 16 Jan 2018 to 19 May

2019. The sample features 12 videos from 10 different channels with the total length of video content is 232.55 minutes or 3 hours 52 minutes and an average of 19 minutes per video. The main criteria for the video selection was for the content being created by an influencer and not a company (e.g. BuzzFeed) and include discussions of relevant diversity and inclusivity related issues of the beauty industry. The selected videos were recorded in English by USA-based social media influencers. The origin of the influencers might indicate that the issue of the lack of diversity and inclusivity in the beauty industry is particularly sensitive in the United States, motivating content creators to specifically diversity-related videos on their channels. The inclusion of a qualitative content analysis is attributable to supporting the data gathered from interviewing beauty influencers and examining the possible applicability of the initial findings.

Code	Name of the channel	Name of the video	Date of publishing	# of views	Length
Video 1	Jackie Aina	Black Girls React to Tarte Shape Tape Jackie Aina	16 Jan 2018	4.625 mil	25:28 mins
Video 2	Aysha Harun	Chatty GRWM “STOP COMPLAINING ABOUT SHADE RANGES?” Aysha Abdul	20 Jan 2018	103k	21:50 mins
Video 3	VariJStylez	CHIT CHAT DIVERSITY IN THE BEAUTY COMMUNITY & SOCIAL MEDIA	2 Jun 2018	1.1k	16:35 mins
Video 4	Nyma Tang	I SPENT \$800 at Sephora Looking	26 Mar 2019	1.529mil	14:21 mins

		For a BRONZER Nyma Tang			
Video 5	Arshia Moorjani	Let's Talk about TARTE & Lack of Diversity in Beauty! + AMAZING inclusive brands	29 Jan 2018	27k	14:42 mins
Video 6	Jackie Aina	PUR Cosmetic 100 FOUNDATION SHADES?! I'm Confusion Luv Jackie Aina	19 May 2019	782k	24:28 mins
Video 7	Lisa Stevens	Real Talk Diversity in The Beauty Industry	21 Jan 2018	2.5k	47:34 mins
Video 8	Timaloveslemons	The Beauty Community is Toxic, Diversity with brands My experience	15 May 2019	3k	18:39 mins
Video 9	Makeup.Just.For.Fun	We Need To Talk Shape Tape Foundation, Shade Ranges + Diversity In Beauty	20 Jan 2018	1.6k	9:35 mins
Video 10	jeffreestar	THE TRUTH... TARTE SHAPE TAPE FOUNDATION REVIEW	18 Jan 2018	5mil	15:55 mins

Video 11	vereena	Diversity on YouTube (there is none)	6 May 2019	745k	16:58 mins
Video 12	Nyma Tang	I Tried the New Fenty Beauty Bronzers Nyma Tang	6 Apr 2019	765k	9:30 mins

3.4.2. Operationalization

The second dimension explored the specific techniques and mechanisms beauty influencers use in order to frame diversity-related issues as urgent and important for the society as well as make diversity-related content more engaging for their audiences. The goal was to provide an answer to *RQ2: What strategies of influence these influencers use to make the message compelling?* This aspect was measured by the following type of questions:

- Do you discuss the issue in relation to your personal experience? What is the response you are getting from your followers/subscribers?
- Do you think the way the audience's reaction to the diversity-related content is different from other beauty-related content? In terms of audience engagement what do you think is more efficient, when diversity content is merged with beauty or is specifically diversity related?
- Do you purposely try to engage your audiences more when it comes to the discussions about diversity and inclusivity? How? Does (would) the reaction of the audience affect the amount of attention you will be giving to a certain socially-relevant topic?

3.4.3. Data analysis

Each of the 12 YouTube videos were carefully transcribed into text to prepare for the process of coding. The content was analyzed from the semantical perspective as the actual action was relatively uninformative. The Videos 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 featured influencers talking directly into the camera for the entire duration of the video while the creators featured in the rest of the videos were applying makeup while speaking. Similarly, to the interviews, thematic analysis was chosen as the most suitable path to answering the research questions. The videos were watched several times and then the transcripts read multiple times as well

to ensure that all the possible compelling elements of the data were properly recorded. Later, the initial ideas were mirrored in the generated open codes.

3.5. Thematic analysis

After the process of data collection was finalized, the interviews and videos were manually transcribed into written text with an intention to further analyze it and highlight constellations of meaning (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The performed thematic analysis followed a six-step guide established by Braun & Clarke (2006). First, the emphasis was put on familiarizing with the previously collected data by reading transcripts of the interviews and videos multiple times before moving on to the next step. Immersing into the data assisted with generating the initial codes which provided a ground for the pursuit of potential themes. The themes were later reviewed and organized to align with the research questions posed prior to the data collection. Lastly, the principal overarching themes were identified, labeled and defined in relation to the dataset for the overall story told by the data could be determined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, the sixth step completed the systematization of initial ideas allowing for the needed reassessment and comparisons.

3.6. Validity & reliability

A qualitative study's relevance and worthiness of attention in the academia rest on its validity and reliability (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability is built upon an assumption that in case of a research's repetition, the conclusions are going to be relatively similar (Babbie, 2008). Validity of a study is attributed to its adequacy in measuring the necessary concepts (Golafshani, 2003). When it comes to qualitative research, reliability might be an issue due to its highly subjective nature. This particular study captures a very recent phenomenon happening in the ever-changing world of social media, meaning that the attitudes and opinions of social media influencers as well as their engagement tactics are susceptible to constant metamorphoses. Therefore, in case of the study's replication, conclusions can turn out to be different. The internal validity of the research can be considered quite high due to the transparency of the used methodology and systematic approach to data analysis leading to the final conclusions.

Moreover, the thematic analysis performed in this study is of inductive nature as the assumptions made are data-driven due to the lack of an existing comprehensive theoretical framework. This approach's advantage lies in the openness towards participants'

experiences which can avoid a perpetuation of biases and assumptions potentially present in academic literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Results

The following chapter presents the results of the thematic data analysis. The first goal of the research is to provide an insight into social media influencers' perception of their own role in diversity communication within the beauty industry and answer the *RQ1: How do beauty influencers perceive their role in diversity communication?* The second goal is to answer the *RQ2: What strategies of influence these influencers use to make the message compelling?* by looking into the interview data and the empirical evidence gathered from videos uploaded on YouTube. The chapter focuses on the themes that emerged in the process of data analysis; each theme is provided with illustrative examples and definitions. The themes are organized in accordance with the research questions and form two groups: *self-perception* (Section 4.1.) and *strategies of influence* (Section 4.2.).

4.1. Self-perception

4.1.1 Opinion leaders

The data analysis showed that influencers are fully aware of the power they possess which is attributed to their primary function, influencing. Influencers seeing themselves as opinion leaders in relation to diversity communication translates into them sharing their advice and information about brands and products through their eyes. Social media influencers are being quite vocal, especially on YouTube, about their perceived duty to use their platform for initiating discussions and productive dialogues about diversity with both their audiences and brands:

“I realized you know I have a platform here that I need to use to help launch the change and I think the more creators that talk about it, whether they're small creators or large creators, it doesn't matter, when we get this conversation going” (Video 7)

Interviewee 3 elaborates on the premise, noting that the larger the number of followers or subscribers, and the more trusted and loved the influencer is by their audience, the greater is the chance that the message will go further and have a longer-term impact:

“It all comes down to the number of followers you have and even more importantly, on how close-knit the community built around your channel is. I believe that even relatively small YouTubers that have followers who are very involved and trust the person’s opinion a lot can really make a difference. If the message touches people and becomes important for them, they will talk about it with their friends, post something on social media and that can be a good start for making an issue more relevant to everyone”

Influencers exercise their influence on the audience to highlight the topic of diversity often in relation to particular brands. The feelings towards beauty brands are manifested most commonly through 1) featuring or not featuring a product or an entire brand on one’s social media 2) supporting or not supporting brands on social media and 3) searching for and recommending dupes for particular products.

Interviewee 1 said that she does not feature any complexion products that in her opinion are not inclusive enough on her channel because “not all subscribers can enjoy it” and it “eliminates” a big part of her audience. Interviewee 2 reinforces this notion by saying that “...even such thing as a feature means a lot for brands. If it didn’t, they wouldn’t send those PR packages and take people on trips. It’s all about being visible on our social media pages for potential consumers to see”. What is noteworthy, influencers do not protest silently; they communicate their decision to not support a brand to their audiences by clearly stating it, give their own reasoning and giving examples of the brands being. Not diverse and inclusive enough (Video 2 & 7, Interviewee 1 & 4). Recommending so-called “dupes” to the audience is another way of communicating the dissatisfaction with a brand. Interviewee 6 admits to using this tactic to “turn people away from a brand” and also avoid using the products themselves for videos or pictures to not give “extra clout when undeserved”.

4.1.2. Powerful consumers

Apart from the power to influence large audiences, social media influencers as any regular consumer have the power to vote with their wallets, while communicating their choices about that as well. Even though beauty influencers receive a fair amount of products straight from brands, they do buy things themselves to review, and they let people know that, among all, to make subscribers and followers know that the content is not sponsored and they are in for an honest review (Interviewee 4 & Video 4). Interviewee 4 mentioned that she and a

number of influencers she watches make videos about products they will never buy, and those lists often feature non-inclusive brands or product lines.

From the perspective of financial markets, “brand equity is the capitalized value of the profits that results from associating the brand’s name with particular goods and services” (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). The participants’ (Interviewee 2, 3 & 4) see their consumer influence as a power to affect a brand’s equity and financial value.

Interviewee 2 strongly believes that *“brands in the beauty industry are very consumer-oriented but what I feel like sometimes they do not realize is that they are also consumer-dependent. This is where our power lies and collectively, we can make or break a brand. The variety right now is so giant that if you don’t support non-inclusive brands, you still have your choices and surprisingly, a lot of those choices are really budget-friendly”*. This point of view is backed up by the creator of Video 2 who was expressing her frustration regarding the launch of a foundation by Tarte Cosmetics with a shade range that was not suitable for darker-skinned people: *“we made you the number-one selling foundation last year”*. This realization leads to an idea that consumers, in addition to being one of the main reasons for beauty-oriented companies’ financial wellbeing, have a way to affect brands’ policies and choices from the product itself to its marketing:

“This is a question of supply and demand. When influencers stop giving attention to certain brands that are not “woke” enough, when we stop buying their products during makeup hauls at Sephora and stop recommending our subscribers to buy it, only then companies can understand that something is up and they need to change in order to accommodate our new needs. Naturally, it helps when your individual choice is known to the brand even if it might seem that they have completely ignored it” (Interviewee 7)

While the position that customer willingness to purchase products from a brand affects its revenue seems logical, in literature, conceptual frameworks for brand equity see the customer as a receiver of companies’ marketing efforts. For example, Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito, & Singh (2016) suggest a conceptual model which places consumers as those responding to social media marketing efforts and a model introduced by Aaker (1991), identifies customers as those, brand equity creates value for. The notion of consumers directly influencing companies’ marketing in the context of online communications between the two needs to be further studied in order to justify this claim.

A number of interviewees and video materials reveal a potential challenge for speaking up on the subject and encourage others to exercise their consumer power. Social media influencers often rely not solely on YouTube ad revenue; they are often quite open for marketing deals with beauty brands. Openly criticizing a brand and urging people to abstain from certain purchases can be harmful financially and close the door for future collaborations, elaborate brand trips and receiving PR packages (usually an extravagantly packaged free sample of a new or upcoming collection sent to influencers for reviewing and using in their tutorials). Interestingly, the opinions on who has a larger stake in this marketing affair split. Interviewees 2 and 4 are firm in their belief that smaller influencers might be more reluctant to “expose” brands as it presents a threat for receiving any marketing offers in the future, and practically killing their career. Interviewee 3 suggests that smaller influencers might, can afford being more vocal as their main goal is to establish a “following” and attract viewers. Others see influencers with more subscribers or followers as more vulnerable in this situation:

*“Influencers, especially people that have a larger audience, really have the most to lose with speaking out to brands, because brands will not want to work with them afterwards, friends that, you know, in the past have paid a lot of money take you on really elaborate cool trips...
“ (Video 2)*

In reality, it might be impossible to determine who is more or less likely to suffer more financial losses, as the majority of sources mention future opportunities which can depend on a brand’s strategy and who it wants to be associated with and represented by. As Interviewee 3 points out:

“It’s hard to be loved by everyone. At one point of your career you want to choose whether you want to focus on being respected for having a strong position or you want to be a teacher’s pet and stay open for more deals. If you decide to speak up and support only diverse brands you might lose a lot but gain subscribers who really appreciate your opinion...and that in itself can be attractive to brands that try to be associated with diversity. But you really never know”

4.1.3. The voice

When it comes to diversity and other socially relevant issues, there are two ways in which influencers become a spokesperson. First, influencers consider themselves to be their audience's representatives, giving the voice to those who do not. The Internet has transformed our reality and made communities and groups that were deprived from having a prominent presence within the society finally got more visible (Mitra, 2004). Studies on diversity in the workplace explore a phenomenon of "subtle bias", which refers to people's favoritism of people who share similar traits, interests and behaviors (Schaffer & Riordan, 2013). If similar bias takes place in the online world, with people following influencers based on the similarities, it can prevent them from being exposed to the voices of marginalized communities and seeing them solely through the fractions echoed by third parties. Second, beauty influencers believe they give the voice to the problem itself by bringing it up and drawing attention to it. The concept of "voice" varies in its interpretation, with some influencers attributing it either to the problem (Interviewee 4) or solely the people who stay invisible for companies (Videos 2 & 7). However, in relation to the topic of this research voice is a way of connecting to a grander realm of social discourse, allowing feelings to be actualized and the self to be established with the other (Smith & Hyde, 1991; Scruton, 1983).

"Unfortunately, not everyone in today's society is equally recognized and is, like, actually visible. If I can help people reach brands and tell them what they want and how they feel excluded and just not even cared about, that would be really cool and, I don't know...satisfying, I guess" (Interviewee 4)

"Despite the fact that the rise of influencer marketing made some people a bit out of touch with reality and for many people Instagram or YouTube became a full-time job, influencers are regular people with simply more followers than an average user has. I think it is important to use your platform to support other people or, for example, raise awareness" (Interviewee 7)

In literature the concept of voice refers to a person making their voice heard, however, not all the interviewed influencers and the video content creators can be considered a part of communities being ignored by a part of mainstream beauty brands. Different group might speak in different voices (Haslett, 1990), and that can indicate a presence of a potential tension between having a voice and being the voice for someone else.

On the other hand, several interviewees (Interviewee 2, 4, 7 & 8) consider themselves to be an active part of the change through raising awareness about the lack of diversity and giving a “voice” to the problem. The interviewed influencers consider them bringing up the issue and engaging with followers and subscribers can make them reflect about diversity and its lack in the beauty industry, participate and further the discussion with companies within in the industry. This idea is backed up by studies suggesting that introducing classes on diversity to college students raise awareness of racism, affirmative action and white privilege (Case 2007; Ancis & Szymanski, 2001).

“It is extremely difficult for one customer to have an impact on what a make-up company does. I think influencers can be the ones helping people to understand the issues that come from the lack of diversity, and perhaps become a force uniting consumers, so together we can really make a difference” (Interviewee 6)

4.2. Strategies of influence

4.2.1. Verbal engagement techniques

When it comes to diversity communication, the interviewed influencers said they often rely on engagement techniques they use for presenting the majority of their content. Firstly, all 7 interviewees named “addressing the audience” as the most commonly used trick they and the influencers they watch and follow use. The analyzed video materials support this claim as the whole sample shared similar features. As Interviewee 4 puts it:

“I am genuinely interested in my audience’s opinion and I often ask for it throughout the video...like “What do you think?” or “What is your opinion about this and that?” ...I try to read comments all the time and sometimes they really open my eyes or change my opinion 180 degrees about some things, I value this a lot”.

Others (Interviewee 2 & 3) said apart from asking for an opinion, they ask the audience to share their thoughts and experience about what can a product be substituted with. The quest for finding a dupe is usually caused by the high price of the original, dissatisfaction with the formula or non-inclusivity of a brand. “Let’s be honest, there are barely any one-of-a-kind products that other brands like Makeup Revolution did not copy by now. I ask my subscribers about dupes so neither of us have to give money to companies who do not care

about its customers enough” (Interviewee 3). Influencers are essentially contributors whose content attracted a number of followers (Etter, Colleoni, Illia, Meggiorin, & D’Eugenio, 2018), hence, if they want to keep their audiences interested, their personal brands and content have to be engaging. Social media being of great significance in today’s society also boosted the strength of social media advocacy (Xiao, Wang, & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). Both social advocacy and interactivity have an effect on the way social media influencers and their expertise are perceived by the public (Xiao et al., 2018).

4.2.2. Non-verbal engagement techniques

The engagement game does not stop at questioning the subscribers or followers. 6 out of 7 interviewees named non-verbal ways of engaging the social media users. 3 interviewees felt that eye-catching thumbnails for YouTube videos are highly effective for this purpose. The thumbnail would include a still image with an easily recognizable emotion, for example, sadness, anger, frustration (Interviewees 3 & 4). Moreover, the still image can feature a name of the brand, their new or highly-recognizable product, emotionally-expressive emojis and “crossing out” brand logos or pictures of products (Interviewees 3 & 4). Instagram Stories and Snapchat were named another two crucial ways of engaging the viewers as they are “short an’ sweet” and “highly visual” (Interviewees 3, 5, 6 & 7). Instagram Stories have a wide range of helpful functions such as linking online resources articles, conducting polls and giving the followers an ability to ask or answer a question. Additionally, Interviewee 1 favors Twitter as the most efficient online diversity communication tool since it allows to tag a company’s official account and Tweets have the potential to “spread like a wildfire” and be also shared all over Instagram as screenshots. *“Brands can see how people like, retweet and discuss something that I posted and then it is really hard to escape the people’s opinion without it turning into a PR disaster for them” (Interviewee 4).*

4.2.3. Cancel culture

In recent years a new phenomenon is taking place in the online space. What beauty influencers refer to as “cancel culture” is a product of consumerism and capitalism, where people are perceived as brands. Influencers are active participants who directly or indirectly invite their audiences to participate in cancel culture through aforementioned ways such as not purchasing particular products or products from a specific brand and suggesting alternatives. Essentially, cancel culture is a public denouncement of support, a refusal to

amplify someone's online relevance and boost financial wellbeing (Bromwich, 2018). The creator of Video 10 defines the highly controversial cancel culture as: *"an interesting thing and it's very much a part of our society right now. People are very quick to completely cut out people or brands for really anything, if they do anything that they do not agree with"* This cultural boycott can be seen as an expression of agency in the subscription-heavy era we are living in. By depriving a person or a company of attention, social media users deprive them of a livelihood; they cancel their subscription and reverse the transaction (Bromwich, 2018). The rejection of "problematic" celebrities and brands, and whether this cancellation is permanent or not can be dependent on the severity of their offense (Garel, 2018). While being cancelled online does not necessarily ruin lives and careers even on the Internet (Garel, 2018), it still can bring negative attention and financial losses.

The cancel culture also referred to as "call-out culture", is a phenomenon de jour which has not attracted a lot of attention of the academia yet. However, cancel culture is deemed "toxic" (Anderson, 2018) due to its perpetuating cycles of abuse and depersonalize its victims (Brooks, 2019). Cancel culture denies people their complexity and reduces them to binary oppositions such as us - them, good - evil, victim - abuser (Brooks, 2019). In the context of diversity and inclusivity in the beauty industry, cancel culture is usually not targeted towards individuals and act as a demand for change. Still Interviewee 3 admitted that social media influencers who are closely connected with a brand that is actively being cancelled can be exposed to criticism, pressure and online harassment:

"It's the ugly side of YouTube. It all starts with a good intention but gets out of hand very very fast. People and drama channels with millions of views hop on the hate train, and it goes as far as pressuring influencers to drop their brand contracts or simply harassing them for being affiliated, especially if they collaborate with the brand"

Interviewee 4 makes a similar point but is acknowledging that not every influencer understands the consequences of encouraging the audience to participate in public shaming:

"I see people putting "cancel" in the video names and thumbnails, it's usually clickbait and they don't seriously talk about cancelling something...but it just normalizes something that is not always right. I know that people get upset with their favorite influencers collabing with companies who don't include them...but like they can't control what a brand does and sometimes this online hate goes really over the top mean"

Despite the negative implications, cancel culture has one redeeming quality. When it is targeted strictly towards companies, it can be an effective tool of speeding up the necessary change and make brands listen to their consumers and react. As Interviewee 3 puts it:

“I don’t see an issue with us talking about cancelling brands; they are not going to lose all their money overnight and it makes them change their attitude. We have examples like Beauty Blender and Tarte that after people bashing them online and not buying their products changed and now try to include more people in their lines and

4.2.4. Double the trouble

While engaging with an audience through participation in cancel culture is an ambivalent strategy to utilize, there is another less controversial approach that half of the respondents indicated to be a highly effective in diversity communication. Some social media influencers make a decision to collaborate with other influencers and create content together. This strategy has a purpose of engaging the audiences of both influencers and posting entertaining content. Interviewee 2 says the simplest reason for considering this method is attracting more attention to the final product, and as a result, the issue itself:

“Making videos with other influencers generates quite a lot of buzz; the numbers, they don’t lie. I am not entirely sure why, maybe people are happy to see influencers they like interact with each other...I don’t know to be honest but then more people get to hear the message and that is great”

Interviewee 6 is under the impression that inviting fellow influencers to co-create makes the message appear less biased and gives it more dimension:

“I think filming videos and recording podcasts with other people gives the topic an extra dimension and highlights the issue from several perspectives. I also think it gives more credibility to the opinions that we share with the viewers as we can disagree with each other or elaborate on each other’s arguments”

This position is mirrored in Video 1 where two popular influencers try own a brand-new complexion product while discussing the brand’s line’s and overall inclusivity. The

influencer whose channel the video is a part of describes the guest influencer as an eye witness and an extra opinion:

“You guys are probably going to think I'm lying because everybody I think usually just expects that I'm going to turn on my camera and roast a brand just for the sake of it. Now, that is fun. I do like doing that every so often. I'm not even gonna lie. I feel like all of the stuff that I talk about and I share in my videos just falls on deaf ears now because some people just don't seem to care...(about the guest influencer) She's gonna be judging, so that way nobody can watch this video and say Jackie's mean, Jackie's a bully, Jackie's always...No, okay, it's not just me. Finally, I have a witness to this for once”

Furthermore, Interviewee 5 suggests that the form of a discussion makes the viewers more emotionally involved because they might disagree, think of extra examples or aspects that were forgotten by the influencers. The viewers also tend to comment and have discussions in the comment section more than they would if the guest influencer was not present: *“A discussion makes people reflect about the problem more and be more opened to share their opinions with other viewers” (Interviewee 5).*

Apart from diversity communication, cooperation with other influencers have other goals. It brings new viewers, subscribers and followers to the channel, diversifies the content and makes the influencers seem more “human” for having friends, engaging in meaningful discussions and disagreeing with each other. (Interviewee 2)

4.2.5. Exposés & criticism

Despite exposé being a format mainly reserved for the so-called drama channels and Sherlock-esque blogs (Interviewee 3), influencers employ similar techniques in order to hint at a company's insincerity. Both businesses and the audiences trust social media influencers due to their reputation, predictability and competence (Christou, 2015). Influencers, in turn, expect a similar level of trustworthiness and transparency from beauty brands, and when the trust is betrayed, the influencers turn to their audiences to share their frustration. Interviewee 3 suggests that the topic's sensitivity is tied to the way beauty and the industries specializing on that are massively affecting public perceptions of physical attractiveness:

“On one hand, a business is a business and they have a right to run their business however they want. On the other hand, it’s 2019 and we understand that in our society, especially for women, beauty means a lot and the beauty industry plays a role in shaping the way we define what is beautiful and what is not. I’ve heard from my subscribers that when they do not see women like them, when they don’t see representation, it makes them feel like they are not beautiful enough, like they don’t fit the standards”

Trust on the influencer side in the brand-influencer dynamic can be harder to define as it is often complicated by personal relationships with marketing teams, official makeup artists or even the companies’ founders. Several interviewees (Interviewee 2 & 3) said the biggest problem they have with brands’ hypocrisy is when they claim to be inclusive and frame their brand as a brand for all women, yet fail to mirror that message in their marketing, actual product line or on social media. Interviewee 2 said she frequently sees online marketing campaigns that have expose a discrepancy between what a brand produces and who it features on social media:

“I am not an expert on this because I’m really pale, which is often a problem as well, but it is so weird when I see women of color here in there on their Instagram and then come to the store and see what they actually have. Sometimes I look at their products and can’t imagine any living breathing human being of that particular color”

Not all content is highlighting the hypocrisy, some point out the points of criticism.

Cambridge dictionary defines “criticism” in several ways including it being simply an *act of stating* that something is bad, an *act of giving an opinion* about the good or bad qualities, and a “*discussion of something* in order to judge its quality or explain the meaning” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). All these definitions align with how academic literature characterize social media influencers and the constituents of their status of word-of-mouth centered opinion leaders. In this context it seems logical that influencers frame diversity communication through criticism. Expressing one’s opinion in this case goes beyond targeting it towards specific brands and incorporates criticizing common practices of the beauty industry, including traditional marketing and online marketing. As previously discussed, open criticism of any particular brand can deprive influencers of opportunities and profitable future deals with brands. Hence, this framing strategy together with the previous one implies a possibility of financial losses and might not be universally adapted by influencers who made a decision to discuss diversity and inclusivity.

The content creator of Video 2 criticized a beauty brand for not evolving with the times and refraining from featuring women color on their social media accounts and social media campaigns. The following quote also indicates a discrepancy in what the brand's stance is and what consumers expect that stance to be. The influencer who made the video is dissatisfied with the brand being vegan, meaning its products do not contain animal-derived ingredients and are not tested on animals, while not having a strong position on another socially-relevant issue. This perceived hypocrisy and unmet expectations are echoed in criticism.

"They barely show any women of color and not even just black people, they barely show Asians, they barely show brown girls it's just all white. It's 2018! Get with the freakin program; people love your products; you do come with great products. I love the fact that you're vegan, you know, but it's 2018 and I hate when people are like it's 2018 but it is okay" (Video 2)

Similarly, the creator of Video 1 displays her disappointment with a brand's marketing and lack of diversity among models and influencers featured on its Instagram account. Moreover, the influencer let it be known that the brand image that she has does not harmonize with her personal values and opinions. The brand image that the influencer has might not fully correspond to the brand's identity, yet the image is what is communicated to the audience:

"This is gonna sound so shady and if you're new to my channel, then you're just gonna have to get used to me being blunt, but Tarte has to be the most whitewashed brand out there. Just from their marketing, their Instagram. This is no shade to anyone who works with them because they do cool trips and stuff like that. They have great opportunities. I'm not gonna knock anyone's hustle. This brand just embodies the exact opposite of everything that I stand for. Sorry, but they don't do anything that makes people feel included" (Video 1)

Several interviewees (Interviewee 2 & 3) said the biggest problem they have with brands' hypocrisy is when they claim to be inclusive and frame their brand as a brand for all women, yet fail to mirror that message in their marketing, actual product line or on social media. Interviewee 2 said she frequently sees online marketing campaigns that have expose a discrepancy between what a brand produces and who it features on social media:

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In recent year inclusivity became a topic widely discussed in the beauty community. With the issue being a sensitive one up to this day, the instances of perceived hypocrisy of brands is met with a highly negative or sarcastic responses such as the below-mentioned: *“If you just casually take a look on their Instagram, I mean I don't know how it looks now, they're probably trying to sprinkle it in with a little more color just to look more inclusive than they are”* (Video 4). Another popular content creator elaborates on the point brought up by her colleague. The influencer also focuses on the issue of representation and relatability with it being an off-putting to her as a consumer. This reaction might be among the reasons why brands make attempts to diversify their social media accounts: *“I look on their Instagram, I don't see anyone who looks like me, remotely close to anyone who looks like me, rarely...There's no effort...There's a lot that goes into it, but they didn't even try”* (Video 1).

4.2.6. Contrast

The following technique utilized by influencers is less drastic and direct than the previous two. The use of comparison is highlighting the particularities an influencer likes or dislikes in a brand. Consistently throughout the sample comparisons of two and more brands were used as a device to show the negative or undesired aspects of brands (Videos 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10).

Video 2 creator uses contrast as an addition to exposing hypocrisy and criticizing the brand in order to present an alternative and encourage people to use their consumer power to make a point. The influencer mentioned competitor brands which she considers to be more inclusive:

“Bobbi Brown is amazing at putting out inclusive products; kind of in their entire range they have, you know, in their foundations...I think all of them have over 30 shades or 30. If you're looking for an alternative, Bobbi Brown is really great with that. Obviously, Mac but I find even in Bobbi Brown's like highlighters and stuff, and they get that some highlighters don't

work for deeper skin tones so, for example, bronze glow is like the perfect deeper skin tone highlight” (Video 2)

The author of the Video 12 builds the content around a trial session of a new line of Fenty Beauty bronzers while simultaneously discussing the brand and communicating her opinion to the public. The reviewer ended up displeased with the shade range for dark-skinned people. Interestingly, while comparing the brand to competition and its previous launches, the influencer did not frame the narrative in a negative way. The reason behind it might be the pre-existing image of the brand the influencer already had. The brand being discussed is known for its groundbreaking efforts in promoting diversity and developing inclusive product lines and commercials. Moreover, the brand is seen as a golden standard and became a referencing point in the beauty community (Videos 1, 2, 5, 7 & 9).

4.2.7. Personification

The following three framing techniques address the realm of emotions and feelings. Another consistently present (Video 2, 1, 6, 9) theme is personification of a brand. Influencers project the patterns of human interaction on brands. First, the content creators address brands as they would a person. For example, the influencers from the Video 1 poses a question to a brand as an entity capable of producing an answer: *“What went wrong, Tarte?”*. The author of Video 6 is displaying gratitude: *“PUR, thank you for doing that”*. The personification of a brand can be illustrated by a quote from Video 2: *“I think, you know, I am gonna give my money to brands that really do appreciate the level of melanin I have”*. Here the influencer indirectly suggests that brands have to possibility to be emotional and in this case “appreciate” the customer. Other instances of brand personification include implications of brands’ rudeness, lack of care and lack of effort (Videos 1, 2, 9).

4.2.8. Appealing to emotions

Some influencers can heavily rely on the realm of emotions to connect with their audiences. Literature suggests that audiences are capable of experiencing interpersonal relationships influencer-follower as an actual friendship (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Para-social interactions are one-sided, yet media users often actively engage in relationships with online personalities (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Interviewee 3 is firm on her position that “influencers are interesting as long as they are relatable, human, have a personality”.

Appealing to the audiences' emotions and freely expressing own feelings might make an influencer more engaging, relatable, likeable and as a result, successful.

The creator of Video 11 framed the content regarding the issue of the lack of diversity in the beauty industry thorough an emotional message to the audience. On one hand, the message conveys sadness caused by the present situation in the industry. On the other hand, the influencer uses it as an opportunity to connect with her audience that might feel in a similar way:

"...I feel so connected to and sad almost. Like I said, I'm not here to expose anyone, I'm not here to like expose any companies or anything like that. I just feel like this is something that should be talked about because I honestly would rather connect with you guys and tell you guys what's on my mind" (Video 11)

The creator of Video 9 shifts the focus from her own feelings to the feelings of her audience:

"Every person who is starting out makeup 100% deserves to see themselves represented and appreciated and portrayed as beautiful. Especially for those younger and teen girls who are starting to create their self-image, they're starting to build their self-esteem. It's so critical that everyone is represented, and everyone is appreciated. Everybody deserves to feel beautiful and feel included" (Video 9)

4.2.9. Relating to own experience

Relation to own experience is the most frequently reoccurring framing technique reported by the interviewees (Interviewees 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Beauty influencers are expected to have knowledge and be up to date with the latest releases. It is not unusual to frame the beauty-related content, especially videos, as a test-drive or a reaction to trying makeup. According to the interviewed influencers, it is a common practice to integrate serious discussions into more familiar to the audience experience-based product reviews. The idea behind it is to keep content entertaining and engaging while infusing it with a powerful message in order for it to appeal to larger audiences. This strategy, influencers believe, is an effective way of convincing those followers who are unsure of the issue's relevance and those who do not feel affected by it. Creating highly-focused diversity content is a framing strategy is most

efficient among followers and viewers who are already interested and emotionally invested in the topic.

Making relatable and rooted in personal experience content is not limited to product review format. The interviewees differentiate between several subgenres of this particular type of content such as “get ready with me”/ “chatty GRWM” and “story time”, often indicated in the name of the video. For example, “Let’s Talk about TARTE & Lack of Diversity in Beauty + AMAZING inclusive brands” (Video 5) and “Chatty GRWM | “STOP COMPLAINING ABOUT SHADE RANGES? | Aysha Abdul (Video 2).

Illustrative examples from “story time” videos reveal a peculiar and often “backstaged” dimension of an influencer-brand relationship. A marketing strategy aimed at boosting a brand’s recognition and improve the image includes inviting social media influencers on lavish brand trips. During a trip influencers are expected to promote the brand by posting photos and videos across their preferred social media platforms and participate in professional photoshoots. The creators of Video 1, Video 2 and Video 11 claim that the list of influencers who get invited rarely feature women of color: *“I think Shayla is one of the only black girls that gets sent on those trips”* (Video 2). Videos on the topic (Video 11, Video 13) are centered around the sharing of personal experience or second-hand experience connected with brand trips. These videos highlight the alleged mistakes of companies’ public relations teams that left out certain demographics or make critical mistakes in trip arrangements. The creator of Video 11 reflects on her highly emotional experience with a brand representative’s decision to accommodate the influencers: *“Is this a reach or is this kind of segregation or am I reaching. Like oh, like no, I can’t be, like it’s just too much of a coincidence”* (Video 11) and *“Daniella posted a Coachella vlog and she was crying and she was talking about how she felt uncomfortable and kind of separated from the rest of the girls”* (Video 11). Framing the narrative through personal experience might not necessarily be factual yet it makes a compelling story that is communicated to the audience.

5. Conclusions

The research aimed at expanding the understanding of social media influencers as a relevant contemporary phenomenon and explore their role in diversity communication in the beauty industry. The analysis was focused in giving an answer to the research questions which

address the ways social media influencers define diversity and inclusivity and then communicate it to their audiences. The rapidly changing media landscape and the importance social media is attributed to in our society led to the need to record and analyze the tendencies and social phenomena prevalent in the online world.

5.1. CSR actors

The thematic analysis revealed that social media influencers see themselves as active actors of social change or at least having the potential to affect a social change and bring it closer. In a way, the role that social media influencers attribute to themselves is reminiscent of gatekeepers. The concept of gatekeeping in the context of the social media rise to world dominance is frequently used in discussions on the future of news making and journalism. Shoemaker, Vos & Reese (2008, p. 73) define gatekeeping as “the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating, and otherwise massaging information to become the news”. Technological advancement of the XXI century laid a firm foundation for social media users to have their own gate and render the boundaries of journalism (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). According to the study results, the role beauty influencers appointing to themselves has characteristics similar to gatekeeping as content creators routinely choose the “news” from the industry to report on and bring up the same “problematic” brands from video to video. Social media influencers also make decisions regarding which brand to talk about and what part of their victories and failures in the quest for diversity and inclusivity to highlight. While beauty influencers might not be truly considered to be gatekeepers, the analogy exhibits a common pattern and aligns with the influencers’ self-perception. The brand-influencer-audience relationship is complicated due to the fact that the followers expect authenticity and trustworthiness while brands entice influencer with financial and career opportunities. The results indicate that the financial dependence of beauty influencers on both brand deals and number of followers and revenue generated from views can have an effect on diversity communication. Therefore, beauty influencers have to find their own balance between what they feel they need to say and how their choices might affect their careers. This pattern can result with the opinions shared with the audience being inherently biased, however, the audience might be the main check and balance reducing the bias. In the current online reality where numbers might be a major indicator of social value and an influencer of online visibility, losing followers or subscribers can also minimize the chances of brands willingness to make marketing offers.

5.2. Cancel culture

The results indicated that beauty influencers identify a specific phenomenon which can also fall in the same category as other strategies of influence such as framing and audience engagement. What social media influencers label as “cancel culture” is a way of putting social pressure on a person or a brand publicly and with the use of one’s platform. By voicing out the concerns and resentment towards an entity or a public persona through cancel culture, influencers de facto encourage their audience to follow their example.

Although according to the results social media influencers define cancel culture as a rather toxic occurrence of content creators and their audiences boycotting brands, people who are affiliated with them and various products, it is possible to interpret it as a drastic concept constituted by a high concentration of everyday practices. Cancel culture is a radical way of taking back, virtually *cancelling* out, the support and a brutal denial of attention and online presence. This particular phenomenon is relatively new and with some of the interviewees declaring that cancel culture is cancelled, it is unclear whether it will continue existing in its present form in the nearest future, and this research can be viewed as a snapshot of the situation in 2019.

The results hinted at cancel culture being utilized as a collective response and punishment of brands who failed to reach the anticipated level of diversity and inclusivity. It is noteworthy that in a general sense, relics of cancel culture are actively used by beauty influencers as a way of framing the content and boost user engagement. Both the interviews and the visual content record instances of cancellation being perceived as an acceptable method of proving the point. When content creators were displeased with a product’s or brand’s attributes or lack of inclusivity, they announced it and communicated their decision regarding featuring or not featuring a brand, supporting or not supporting, and recommended comparable products to discourage the use of a product or brand altogether. By doing so influencers trigger a further discussion and also deny brands deemed non-inclusive media presence on their social media platforms.

5.3. Practical implications

5.3.1. Brand image VS brand identity

The results have other implications relevant for both academia and business. Influencers using their truly massive social media platforms can be regarded as a relatively new addition to the complex power dynamic between brand image and brand identity. While brand identity originates from the company itself, brand image is a consumers' perception influenced by countless factors which are often out of companies' control (Nandan, 2005). The nearly cult-status classic work by Gardner & Levy (1955) suggested that the personality which consumers attribute to a particular brand can have a larger impact than product's technical specifications almost half a century prior to the public commercial use of the Internet. Now, in the era of booming online communication and the Internet being one of the primary sources of information, consumers' perception is influenced by numerous sources.

Beauty influencers are a source of both entertainment and practical advice about the products consumers turn to in their pursuit to get information about products and their quality as well as upcoming product launches. With the use of various framing techniques described in the Results section, influencers consciously or unconsciously manipulate the construction of a brand's image in their followers' or viewers' minds. It is unlikely that influencers possess any power over companies' brand identities unlike the image which is closely tied with the associations consumers have about a brand (Nadan, 2005). Keller (1993) recognizes three components of brand associations: *attributes*, *benefits* and *attitudes*, and the results suggest that influencers share their opinion connected with each of the aspect. Being opinion influencers and professional product reviewers, influencers are communicating their personal views about specific and abstract *attributes* of products, its functional, symbolic and experiential *benefits*, and *attitudes*. Brand *attitudes* are considered to be a learned predisposition to evaluate a brand favorable or unfavorable, and eventually its sum (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). The results illustrate that influencers are actively communicating their moral judgements regarding the companies' diversity and inclusivity, personal associations, frequently immerse the audience in their point of view through the power of storytelling and thus might have an impact on consumers' associations and subsequently image of certain brands. In fact, beauty influencers themselves perceive this dynamic to be viable and efficient as they report witnessing the response they get from their followers and subscribers for their diversity communication efforts. When companies deal with value creation, it might be quite beneficial to take the influencers' alleged power over brand image into consideration and adjust marketing strategies accordingly.

6. Limitations

The maximal transparency of interviewee and content selection, collection of data and its analysis in detail described in the Methodology chapter was attempted to be achieved with the purpose of ensuring the research's reliability and validity. Despite the efforts, the study's results could have been affected by several limitations.

First, the data sample includes 8 interviews and 12 YouTube videos, and while the size is considered to be an adequate, a grander data pool can ensure higher generalizability of the results. Social media influencers are a population reaching which can be challenging but succeeding to interview a greater number of influencers would make the findings more consistent. Furthermore, all the interviewees were from the West, namely United States, Finland and Russia and the content was mainly created by UK and USA-based influencers, therefore, the results might not reflect a global tendency. The video materials were exclusively in English and might not necessarily represent the ways and techniques non-anglophone influencers communicate diversity to their audiences. Including Western influencers who create videos in languages other than English would have given more dimension to the issue.

With the sample being a non-purposive convenience sample due to the hard accessibility of the group, it cannot be characterized as fully representative. The selection of participants could have been influenced by research bias, notably the pre-existing knowledge about content creators who are vocal about the lack diversity and inclusivity in the industry. Additionally, half of the interviews were conducted via Skype and half was done in a written form. The format was determined by the distance between the researcher and the participants and their limited availability which might lack the aspects on real life communications. The video content was collected solely on YouTube, and the future study could have benefitted from examining content on other social media platforms (Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook) and diversify content with still images and supplementary captions.

While influencer marketing is a topic that has received attention from marketing, social sciences and business scholars, little to none research has been done regarding the part social media influencer take in CSR communication. Moreover, the majority of studies done about influencers used quantitative methods of analysis are focusing on the content posted on

various social media platforms. Hence, without sufficient academic literature and empirical input, the interpretation of results can be a subject of researcher bias.

7. Future research

Proceeding from the opinions of social media influencers, analysis of the video content and literature a number of opportunities for further research have emerged. The first and evident direction emanates from the study's limitations. The conducted research is Western-centric with the sample featuring influencers based in the countries which are classified as a part of the Western world. The video materials used are also made by influencers living in the same region. Future research can focus on influencers from non-Western countries, and perhaps, do a comparative study examining the similarities and differences between influencers-performed diversity communication per region.

Secondly, for a future study to have a truly global perspective the diversity of interviewees' origin can be complimented with a larger sample size. A large-scale study with a representative sample would make the results more generalizable. The same logic applies to the video materials; however, a larger sample might demand for the methodology to be revisited and quantitative methods to be considered as an alternative.

The role of influencers in CSR communication has not been extensively researched, and the present study examined the issue purely from the side of content creators. In order to give the phenomenon extra dimension further research can tackle it from the perspective of companies within the industry or consumers. Looking at the phenomenon through the lenses of brands' marketing teams and official representative opens a possibility to investigate whether the influencers' actions are seen as a reputational and financial threat or as a positive opportunity to promote the brand. The effectiveness of influencers' diversity communication can be quite hard to put in numbers yet delving into the topic from the consumers' side can give an approximate idea of how the viewers and followers are potentially affected.

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