

Blurring boundaries in beauty advertising
A multimodal critical discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

As content related to cosmetic procedures has rapidly increased in today's social media landscape, Instagram represents a highly popular platform for advertising of cosmetic procedure clinics. In Germany specifically, the numbers of cosmetic procedures are continuously rising; especially in the case of non-surgical cosmetic procedures, the industry is increasingly blurring with the non-medical cosmetic product industry. This blurring process is related to two mutually influencing developments, which are the normalization of cosmetic procedures but also the medicalization of cosmetic products. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following overarching research question: How are cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures conceptually linked in advertising on social media by German Instagram accounts of cosmetic brands and clinics? A multimodal critical discourse analysis is conducted by scrutinizing the images and captions of selected Instagram posts by German accounts of both cosmetic brands and non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics. The main findings are that cosmetic procedures are normalized in Instagram advertising by emphasizing natural results of procedures, omitting medical information, incorporating influencers, and aligning cosmetic procedures to other regular beauty routines. Simultaneously, cosmetic product brands draw on both scientised and medical discourse and borrow terminology from cosmeceutical as well as cosmetic procedure advertising, blurring the boundary between industries. Overall, cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures are conceptually linked by drawing on similar beauty ideals and post-feminist as well as neoliberal discourses to convince women to strive for health and youth by using the advertised products and services. The brands and clinics incorporate their knowledge and expertise in order to position themselves as educators of audiences, providing them with power and persuasive abilities.

KEYWORDS: *Cosmetic procedures, normalization, medicalization, advertising, Instagram*

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1. Introduction

In today's social media landscape, content related to cosmetic procedures has rapidly increased (Gupta et al., 2020; Montemurro et al., 2015; Ward & Paskhover, 2019). Social media channels have developed into popular information sources for cosmetic procedures (Montemurro et al., 2015; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018), with Instagram being a highly popular platform for targeting young audiences specifically (Dorfman et al., 2018). Furthermore, Instagram offers an ideal medium to share visuals that advertise cosmetic procedures (Dorfman et al., 2018). Interestingly, cosmetic procedures are increasingly presented similarly to cosmetic products, meaning that both industries are conceptually blurring (Hermans, 2021). This blurring process can be explained by two mutually influencing developments. On the one hand, there's the efforts that the cosmetic procedure industry is making to position its services as "regular" cosmetic routines (Intel, 2006) and, on the other hand, the cosmetic industry is presenting increasingly medical discussion in advertising (Harvey, 2013). So, the blurring process reinforces both the normalization of cosmetic procedures as well as the medicalization of cosmetic products, meaning that the developments are mutually influencing each other. The blurring process and normalization as well as medicalization will be further elaborated on in the theoretical framework.

The aim of this study is to explore the blurring boundaries of the cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure industry within advertising on Instagram specifically. Therefore, the following research question is proposed and answered through this research: *How are cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures conceptually linked in advertising on social media by German Instagram accounts of cosmetic brands and clinics?* The main aim of the study is to investigate whether medicalization, normalization, and blurring boundaries between the cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure industry can currently be found in Instagram advertising. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis is conducted on Instagram posts by cosmetic product brands and cosmetic procedure clinics. Besides this main aim of the study, there are other reasons why it is important to research this specific topic, which will be outlined here by explaining both the societal as well as the scientific relevance of the study.

According to Saiphoo and Vahedi (2019), Instagram can be regarded as an "appearance focused" (p. 268) social media platform, on which users aim to show their ideal selves (Rodgers & Meliolo, 2016). Instagram users process these ideals through "upward social comparison" (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019, p. 259) with others, which has been related to disorders regarding self-esteem (Thompson et al., 1999). Especially in the case of cosmetic

product and cosmetic procedure advertising, beauty ideals might be employed in order to sell products and services. Therefore, the societal relevance of this paper as part of the main aim is to increase awareness of how advertising posts on Instagram use representations of “ideal” bodies to promote cosmetic products and procedures. Besides the importance of considering body ideals in cosmetic product and procedure advertising as a societal aspect, especially the ongoing normalization of cosmetic procedures poses other societal implications. For instance, the positioning of cosmetic procedures as regular cosmetic routines may reduce users’ perceived need for a professional consultation, making it important to enhance understanding of the blurring boundaries in advertising on Instagram. Several authors have argued that social media should not be considered as an alternative to discussions with professionals that can provide in-depth information regarding cosmetic procedures and their potential risks (Atiyeh & Ibrahim, 2020; Montemurro et al., 2015).

Germany was selected as the regional focus of this study as it was ranked 6th among the countries with the most cosmetic procedures worldwide in 2019 (Michas, 2021); overall, 983,432 cosmetic procedures were conducted, from which 647,188 were non-surgical according to the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery International Survey (Steward, 2021). Therefore, around 65%, thus the majority, of conducted procedures were non-surgical. The most common non-surgical cosmetic procedures conducted in Germany in 2019 were Botulinum Toxin (58.7%) and hyaluronic acid (36.6%) (Steward, 2021). Therefore, this paper aims to further investigate the blurring boundaries between the cosmetic product and especially the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry and how these procedures might be normalized in advertising on Instagram.

Besides the societal relevance of this study, the scientific relevance is to fill a gap in the existing literature surrounding the topic of blurring boundaries in cosmetic product and non-surgical cosmetic procedure advertising on Instagram. Previously reviewed studies focused on the analysis of cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising in traditional media such as magazines (Brooks, 2004; Garnham, 2013; Searing & Zeilig, 2017; Woodstock, 2001), a combination of traditional and online media (Marianos, et al., 2013; Park & Allgayer, 2018; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018) or websites (Chen et al., 2015; Chibnall et al., 2020; Goodman, 2017; Learner et al., 2020; Moran & Lee, 2013). This research therefore aims to contribute new results on advertising of cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures on social media and Instagram specifically. Furthermore, the previously mentioned studies all incorporated advertising of both surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures together, with only Reisenwitz and Fowler (2018) focusing solely on non-surgical cosmetic

procedures. This study, however, aims to demarcate non-surgical cosmetic procedures and focus entirely on their representation in advertising on Instagram. Another study by Searing and Zeilig (2017) acknowledges the interconnection between the cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure industry but did not investigate the blurring boundaries specifically. Therefore, this study builds on the work of Hermans (2021), in which the argument of the blurring boundaries between cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures in advertising is central. Hermans (2021) also claims that “the strong relation between beauty products/services and the (cosmetic) medical industry has, to date, received little attention in academic research” (p. 2), which is calling for further studies examining the blurring boundaries. As Herman (2021) looked at UK magazines specifically, this study can add new findings by focusing on Germany as a different country and on social media as a different advertising medium.

The following chapters are divided as follows: to contextualize the topic, existing literature on advertising of cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures as well as the blurring of both industries is critically reviewed, and key concepts are defined in the theoretical framework. After that, the methodology for this project is explained, which consists of a multimodal critical discourse analysis comparing Instagram posts that advertise cosmetic products and non-surgical cosmetic procedures to analyze the blurring boundaries. Lastly, the results of the analysis are presented and a concluding answer to the research question is given.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Advertising of cosmetic procedures

According to Lupton and Seymour (2003), humans perceive their bodies as ongoing projects. Cosmetic procedures, in turn, are regarded as a means to correct perceived physical flaws within these body projects (Davis, 2002). Before further diving into the sociological context of cosmetic procedures, a clear demarcation of the concept is needed. First of all, it is crucial to set apart reconstructive surgery and cosmetic surgery; the latter will be the focus of this study as reconstructive surgery's goal is to fix physical flaws that happened due to sickness, accidents or birth abnormalities (NHS, 2021). As this study focuses on cosmetic procedures, it is important to differentiate between two types: surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures. The National Health Service (NHS) provides a demarcation and list of examples of procedures that fall under each distinct category, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

List of surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures (NHS, 2021)

Surgical cosmetic procedures	Non-surgical cosmetic procedures
Breast enlargement (implants)	Botox injections
Breast reduction	Face and lip fillers (dermal fillers)
Surgical fat transfer	Permanent make-up
Facelift (rhytidectomy)	Chemical peels
Ear correction surgery (incl. ear pinning)	Microdermabrasion
Tummy tuck (abdominoplasty)	Laser hair removal
Nose reshaping (rhinoplasty)	Skin lightening
Liposuction	Tattoo removal
Hair transplant	
Labiaplasty (vulval surgery)	
Eyelid surgery	

Non-surgical cosmetic procedures will represent the focus of this study as previously presented statistics showed that non-surgical cosmetic procedures represent the majority of total procedures conducted in Germany (Steward, 2021).

Before reviewing previous studies in the field of cosmetic procedures, it should be

pointed out that the literature surrounding the advertising for cosmetic procedures remains focused on a female target audience. Societal expectations and obligations as well as empowerment and choice reinforced by neoliberalism and post-feminism are directed towards women specifically. This sociological context as well as cosmetic procedure advertising and its developments over time will be discussed here.

When looking at consumer attitudes and the portrayal of cosmetic procedures in advertising over time, Woodstock (2001) already found in her longitudinal study between 1968 and 1998 that attitudes towards cosmetic procedures have altered drastically. Advertising was focused on reconstructive surgery, thus helping patients that are in urgent need of surgery due to disfigured bodies in which they could possibly never find happiness, contentment and comfort within society. Therefore, the emphasis was on drastic and life-changing transformations, presenting reconstructive surgery “as almost magical in effect” (Woodstock, 2001, p. 437). Towards the end of her study, Woodstock (2001) discovered that the representation of procedures in American magazines shifted from an emphasis on extreme transformations to natural results for instance from a focus on reconstructive surgery to cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery was not only presented as a necessary solution for disfigured bodies or physical flaws but a choice that women can freely make for themselves (Woodstock, 2001). This notion of choice will be further elaborated on later in this section. Continuing the discussion of Woodstock’s (2001) findings, cosmetic procedures were normalized by constructing them as less invasive through the absence of medical explanation and the alignment to other beauty products and services. Therefore, cosmetic procedures have been normalized by presenting them as part of a beauty routine to improve appearance (Moran & Lee, 2013), meaning that advertising constructs them on the same level as other beauty products and services that are non-medical in nature.

As Woodstock’s study is already 20 years old, it is important to consider the representation of cosmetic procedures nowadays. In a more recent study by Reisenwitz and Fowler (2018), the scholars claim that the media enable access to a large amount of information concerning cosmetic procedures. Social media such as Instagram represent important advertising channels because they enable the sharing of visuals depicting cosmetic procedures and their results (Dorfman et al., 2018). Especially in the case of non-surgical cosmetic procedure advertising on social media, millennials comprise the major target audience because of their high social media usage as well as their increasing demand for non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Saade et al., 2018). Millennials’ main motives for non-surgical cosmetic procedures are the wish for self-confidence, youth and attractiveness

(Saade et al., 2018), which is in line with Reisenwitz's and Fowler's (2018) findings that millennials are most responsive to cosmetic procedure advertising that emphasizes youthfulness. Interestingly, millennials are currently 25 to 40 years old, which might indicate that cosmetic procedures shall serve as prevention of aging or preservation of their current youthfulness. Next to youthfulness as a main motive to undergo non-surgical cosmetic procedures, Reisenwitz and Fowler (2018) also found that millennials are responsive to the portrayal of clients' positive transformations in advertising such as before-and-after images. This emphasis on transformations is in contrast to Woodstock's (2001) earlier findings, that the emphasis on transformations has decreased over the years, and is therefore an interesting point to pay attention to in Instagram advertising in this study.

Looking at the advertising of cosmetic procedures over time and throughout different media, there is an underlying societal context that recurs throughout several studies. Moran and Lee (2013) state that neoliberalism and its implication to strive for one's best self are connected to the idea that cosmetic procedures can help improve the body and its physical appearance. Garnham (2013) picks up on Shilling's (2003) idea of the human body as a "project" (p. 40), which ought to be continuously maintained and improved by its owners through consumption of products and services. Moran and Lee (2013) found that exactly this motivation to work on the body project and obtain the best version of oneself is often highlighted in cosmetic procedure advertising. Therefore, the discourses within advertising are drawing on consumers' duty in a neoliberal society to strive for an optimal appearance (Moran & Lee, 2013). Neoliberalism is closely related to choice and empowerment, meaning that women have the agency of, for instance in this case, deciding for or against cosmetic procedures; if deciding in favor of cosmetic procedures, they are presented as strong, courageous and willing to work on themselves as they are taking up on their right to get a cosmetic procedure done (Moran & Lee, 2013). Therefore, neoliberalism is also connected to post-feminism, which is another important societal context of this study as it "embraces neoliberal tenets of personal empowerment, sexual agency, pleasure, and emancipation" (Rome et al., 2020, p. 548). Discourses of choice are, therefore, central to both neoliberalism as well as post-feminism.

Another study by Brooks (2004) confirms the constant emphasis on individual choice in advertising to undergo cosmetic procedures but also critically questions the twofold message that gets across; while women are empowered to make their own choices and rewarded as brave and progressive, when deciding for cosmetic procedures, some discourses might come across as leaving women with no other choice. This might be explained by the

aforementioned neoliberal context that consumers should always strive for their best self; therefore, deciding against optimizing the body might be constructed as a missed opportunity to adhere to neoliberal expectations. Another explanation might be that women are often assessed based on their looks, which is forcing them to adhere to common beauty standards and societal expectations (Moran & Lee, 2013); thus, the discourse of choice might be masking the obligation and necessity of optimizing the body. While the construction of a woman undergoing cosmetic procedures is that she is “doing it for herself” (Woodstock, 2001, p. 422), Chibnall and colleagues (2020) argue that neoliberalism as well as post-feminism have simply increased societal pressures on women with regards to physical appearance. The scholars also claim that social media heavily contributed to these pressures as the selfie culture obliges women to present their bodies, making it more ubiquitous for women to be exposed to societal judgments.

Related to these neoliberal and post-feminist developments, that are also present in cosmetic procedure advertising, cosmetic procedure clinics focus on the presentation of attractive physical appearance to sell their treatments. As aforementioned, one of young audiences’ main motives for undergoing cosmetic procedures is the wish for youthfulness (Saade et al., 2018), which is why they are most responsive to such advertising claims (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018). Especially for young audiences, this wish for youthfulness might be grounded in the motive to prevent or at least slow down the aging process. Indeed, Marianos and colleagues (2013) found that mostly young women are portrayed as models for cosmetic procedure advertising, while Chibnall and colleagues (2020) discovered that the maintenance or restoration of youthfulness appears as one of the main promises that the cosmetic procedure clinics communicate.

Next to youthfulness, Saade and colleagues (2018) found attractiveness as another main motive to undergo cosmetic procedures. Therefore, advertising often employs textual elements stating common beauty standards, thus signs of attractiveness, such as “smooth” and “tight” (Chibnall et al., 2020, p. 68), which aims to create the strive for excellence among audiences. Intertwined with the aim for perfection is the negative presentation of body parts that do not adhere to the norm. These flaws are presented as uncomfortable, impractical or simply deviating from the “average” by for instance describing body parts as “larger than average” (Chibnall et al., 2020, p. 7). Instead of encouraging consumers to embrace their unique features, equal appearances are promoted, and deviations are constructed as abnormal and not fitting into the societal norm. However, there are important social movements such as the body positivity movement that fight against unrealistic body

ideals in the media (Cohen et al., 2020), which are leaving their impact in advertising especially in recent years. As these counter movements are especially active on social media, it is interesting to investigate to what extent beauty ideals are portrayed in the Instagram advertising of this study.

Apart from these foci on physical presentations in cosmetic procedure advertising, several other studies focused on the psychological gains that cosmetic procedures can create. Confidence and an increase in self-esteem are presented as a benefit of cosmetic procedures (Chibnall, 2020). This focus on self-confidence is similar to young audiences' main motives for undergoing cosmetic procedures (Saade et al., 2018) and post-feminist expectations that females ought to be strong and confident (Dobson et al., 2015) in a sense that they feel confident in their bodies but are also willing to improve them. Besides the emphasis on increased self-confidence through cosmetic procedures, female models in cosmetic procedure advertising are constructed as happy because they are for instance smiling (Marianos et al., 2013); in combination with textual elements which often include therapeutic language by mentioning "self-help" and "increasing confidence and self-esteem" (Marianos et al., 2013, p. 9), cosmetic procedures are positioned as yielding positive psychological benefits. While these psychological benefits are presented to be obtainable, it is challenging to prove whether cosmetic procedures will indeed have such a psychological effect. Therefore, Goodman's (2017) study argues that physical results that can actually prove the effectiveness of the procedures are presented more in advertising than the psychological benefits that are claimed to be achievable through procedures. The scholar claims that especially in online media the focus is more on demonstrable physical results compared to psychological outcomes, which is interesting to investigate in the current study examining online media in the form of Instagram posts.

In light of Woodstock's (2001) previous claim that cosmetic procedures are presented as less invasive than the extreme transformations in past advertising, other studies also confirm the construction of procedures as straightforward "through images and colors that foregrounded notions of positivity, simplicity, [...] and freedom and backgrounded the actual processes and risks involved" (Moran & Lee, 2013, p. 388). Moreover, on the textual level, procedures are also described as simple, quick and minimally invasive (Chibnall et al., 2020). However, Goodman (2017) conducted a content analysis of American cosmetic surgery websites and identified that especially for procedures associated with higher risks, the proportion of information concerning risks even outweighs the proportion of information describing gains. This is in line with consumers demanding more information on cosmetic

procedures and their involved risks (Park & Allgayer, 2018).

Yet, Learner and colleagues (2020) claim that the information regarding cosmetic procedures within advertising is more psychological, by for instance referring to self-doubts and how procedures can help reduce or entirely vanish such negative feelings, instead of informative regarding the medical procedures. Brooks (2004) also discovered that cosmetic procedure advertising often tells a story about people that underwent life-changing procedures, which makes the appeal increasingly personal and relatable. In addition to that, she found that humor was often incorporated in order to minimize negative impressions regarding unwanted secondary effects such as pain or swelling. As her study is already 17 years old, it is important to compare it to current studies to identify possible changes over time. More recent studies support the previously mentioned tendencies of presenting cosmetic procedures in a positive light instead of providing neutral and factual information (Chibnall et al., 2020; Moran & Lee, 2013); however, referring back to Goodman's (2017) findings on the inclusion of information concerning risks, the findings of unbiased and factual information within cosmetic procedure advertising differ among studies.

When comparing these outcomes regarding factual information on procedures to perception studies of cosmetic procedures among American college students, potential clients find information about the doctors, costs, previous clients and risks important (Chen et al., 2015; Park & Allgayer, 2018). It is crucial to note that these perception studies as well as the other studies by Brooks (2004), Chibnall and colleagues (2020), Goodman (2017), Learner and colleagues (2020), Moran and Lee (2013) and Woodstock (2001) included both surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedure advertising, while this study only incorporates material focused on non-surgical cosmetic procedures. It could be assumed that the advertising of non-surgical cosmetic procedures does not stress medical aspects such as risks as much as the advertising of surgical cosmetic procedures due to the decreased perceived invasiveness of non-surgical cosmetic procedures.

2.2. Cosmetic product advertising

After having looked into the literature on advertising of cosmetic procedures in the previous section, this section aims to provide a general overview of cosmetic product advertising in terms of beauty ideals and other developments that are important to take into account when analyzing both the content by the cosmetic product brands as well as the cosmetic procedure clinics in this study. In this paper, cosmetic products refer to substances used to enhance or maintain an attractive physical appearance but not to “cure, treat,

mitigate, or prevent disease” (Fowler et al., 2019, p. 468), which demarcates them from drugs.

When looking at the advertising of cosmetic products, Spyropoulou and colleagues (2020) found similar beauty ideals within YouTube commercials among different countries, including prominent cheekbones, thin noses and jaws, and unblemished skin. Overall, the scholars concluded that symmetrical and youthful facial characteristics are considered universally beautiful. As this study focuses on German advertising, it is useful to look at German beauty standards in advertising specifically in order to examine to what extent cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising are drawing on similar beauty ideals in this study. In German cosmetic product advertisements, big eyes, thin eyebrows and plumped lips (Spyropoulou et al., 2020) as well as pale skin (Ayata & Atasoy, 2019; Spyropoulou et al., 2020) constitute beauty features. Frith and colleagues (2005) claim that in Western societies women in beauty advertising are mostly white and are shown in a sexualized way through tight clothing showing nudity or sexual positions such as curving the back and sticking the chest out. The scholars found that especially in Western beauty advertising such as in the U.S. the focus is more on the body than on the face, illustrating that “the body is a defining factor in beauty” (p. 66). However, Frith’s and colleagues’ (2005) study is already 16 years old and comparing to the previous discussion of post-feminism and female empowerment, the representation of women might have changed to a more empowered instead of sexualized representation; this aspect is interesting to pay attention to in the current study.

Another important development within cosmetic product advertising that should be taken into account in this study is the increasing usage of scientised discourse. Ringrow’s (2016) work on scientised language in beauty advertising underlines that brands use scientised discourse in the advertising for their cosmetic products in order to stand out in a saturated cosmetic product market and to claim effectiveness and credibility, especially for anti-aging products. Scientised discourse can be defined as vocabulary related to science that emphasizes the importance of taking care of the skin with scientifically researched and developed products that shall provide increased chances for improvement (Coupland, 2007). Ringrow (2016) identifies several dimensions of scientised discourse, namely, *scientised product names*, *scientised ingredients*, *measures of verifiability*, *product specifications* and a *new natural and organic approach combined with science*. These dimensions are important to pay attention to in this study as they might also occur in the German Instagram advertising of cosmetic product brands.

2.3. Blurring of the cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure industry

As aforementioned, especially the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry has been blurring with the cosmetic product industry (Hermans, 2021), which relates to the normalization of cosmetic procedures (Mintel, 2006; Woodstock, 2001) and the medicalization of cosmetic products (Harvey, 2013). This means that both industries are increasingly drawing on the same discourses, making it more and more challenging to demarcate the two industries. Beauty salons, for instance, already offer both (pharmaceutical) cosmetic products as well as non-surgical cosmetic procedures in the same place (Mintel, 2006), creating the idea that both components belong together. The blurring of the cosmetic product with the cosmetic procedure industry is caused by, but also reinforces, both the medicalization of cosmetic products and the normalization of cosmetic procedures, which is why this two-way mechanism will be more thoroughly explained here.

One important development of the blurring boundaries between the cosmetic product and the cosmetic procedure industry is the medicalization of cosmetic products, which represents a growing trend in the beauty industry (Marianos et al., 2013; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018). Medicalization can be defined as the process of denoting non-medical issues as medical issues (Conrad, 1992; Smirnova, 2012). One example of turning a natural human process into an illness is the aging process. In advertising for skincare, aging is medicalized by offering products that shall serve as medical regimens. Critiques argue that the medicalization of non-medical matters or non-medical products and services is imposing sickness on consumers, who are in fact healthy (Rubin, 2004).

An example of medicalizing non-medical products is the rise of cosmeceuticals. According to Fowler and colleagues (2015), a cosmeceutical is a “cosmetics preparation that has pharmaceutical properties” (p. p. 467), therefore representing the interface between the cosmetic product and the pharmaceutical industry. Even though this study is going to focus on cosmetic products instead of cosmeceuticals, the reviewed studies were still deemed useful for investigating the blurring process between the cosmetic product and the medical industry. In their study, Fowler and colleagues (2019) discovered cosmeceutical claims such as “adipofill’in complex” or “mexoryz” (p. 470); however, according to Ringrow’s (2016) work on scientised discourse these properties might as well be considered scientised ingredients, which shows that there might be an overlap between discourses in some cases. Furthermore, Fowler and colleagues (2019) even included brands such as Clinique and Clarins in their sample of cosmeceutical advertising, even though it might be questionable whether these brands actually qualify as cosmeceuticals. Another study by Smirnova (2012)

found that over half of the cosmeceutical advertisements in her sample included medical terminology such as “doctor, medicine”, scientised language such as “chemical, tested” or cosmetic surgery discourses such as “lift, cut” (p. 1240). These findings clearly show a blurring process between the cosmetic product industry and the medical field but also that discourses might be more generally scientific. Therefore, it is crucial to have a clear demarcation between scientised and medical discourse, which will follow in the methodology chapter of this paper. Nevertheless, Smirnova (2012) emphasizes that the different discourses are interconnected and, therefore, all important to consider “since science, medicine and consumer culture negotiate acceptable appearances of aging through the prescription of various regimens of aesthetic maintenance” (p. 1237).

Besides the medicalization of cosmetic products, the normalization of cosmetic procedures is another important development that was caused by, but also enabled, the blurring effect between the cosmetic product and the cosmetic procedure industry (Hermans, 2021; Mintel, 2006). This normalization encompasses that some women consider non-surgical cosmetic procedures as a regular element of their beauty routine (Berkowitz, 2017; Woodstock, 2001) and came about through the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry increasingly making efforts to position its services as regular cosmetic routines (Mintel, 2006). Some beauty salons already offer regular cosmetic products and treatments in the same place as non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Mintel, 2006). Moreover, natural cosmetic procedure results and the construction of the procedures itself as less invasive (Woodstock, 2001) contribute to the normalization process. Furthermore, the cosmetic procedure industry is informalized by providing increasingly informal instead of medical information regarding procedures (Marianos et al., 2013; Woodstock, 2001). Overall, these developments of presenting cosmetic procedures similar to non-medical cosmetic products, showing natural results and stressing less medical information reinforce and are reinforced by the normalization of the cosmetic procedure industry.

To illustrate the blurring of the cosmetic product and the cosmetic procedure industry, Searing and Zeilig (2017) conducted a comparative linguistic study on advertising of facial cosmetic products published in *Vogue* ten years before and four years after the introduction of non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Among the most relevant findings for the context of this study is the portrayal of facial cosmetic products as an addition to cosmetic procedures, thus not as a replacement (Searing & Zeilig, 2017). It could be expected that the proposed study finds similar results, meaning that the analyzed cosmetic product brands refer to cosmetic procedures as an addition to non-medical cosmetics. Besides, it is

interesting to pay attention to the non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics and whether these also present non-medical cosmetic products as an addition to procedures.

The blurring between both industries also becomes clear when referring back to the sociological context. The aforementioned discourses of neoliberalism, a choice for youthfulness as well as female empowerment within cosmetic procedure advertising can also be found in an identical way within cosmetic product advertising. In her study on cosmeceutical advertising, Smirnova (2012) refers to “a will to youth” and “a will to health” (p. 1242). She states that according to Rose (2001) women are indoctrinated to strive for health and youth and are given the power as well as the choice to maintain and improve their physical condition and appearance, which is connected to neoliberalism. As neoliberalism implies to strive for one’s best self, it closely connects to the “will to youth” and “will to health” (Smirnova, 2012, p. 1242) as consumers ought to prioritize their body, youth and health. As explained in section 2.1. cosmetic procedure advertising also draws on these neoliberal discourses, showing that there is a connection to the cosmetic product industry based on a similar sociological context. Therefore, cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising are not only conceptually linked based on medicalization and normalization blurring the boundaries but also based on shared beauty ideals as well as societal values presenting the products and services on a continuum.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this thesis as the project focuses on the “meaning and interpretation of symbolic material, the importance of context in determining meaning ...” (Schreier, 2013, p. 173). The construction of meaning plays a key role in this study, which could not be fully explored with a quantitative method. For the purpose of this research to analyze the blurred boundaries between the cosmetic product and non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry, the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) was deemed appropriate due to several reasons. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), CDA looks at language as a societal process, which is supported by the view of Thompson (1990) who underlines the importance of context when examining discourses and their hidden ideologies. This means that discourses have to be interpreted within their societal context in order to retrieve the underlying meaning, which also relates to Schreier’s (2013) emphasis on meaning and context in qualitative research; in this case, for instance, neoliberalism and post-feminism but also the medicalization of cosmetic products, the normalization of cosmetic procedures as well as the blurring boundaries between both industries represent important contextual factors. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of societal developments that lay behind the construction of a discourse to understand the authors’ intended meanings during the data analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

A critical discourse analysis instead of a discourse analysis was chosen as “critical” is to be understood as “embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 9). Since the proposed topic aims to find blurring boundaries, which might not always be obvious, a critical view towards the data is required; for instance, authors might intentionally try to conceal medical information on cosmetic procedures as discovered in earlier studies (Marianos et al., 2013; Woodstock, 2001). Therefore, CDA is a suitable method as it not only considers how discourse is used to express certain ideas but also critically questions the suppression of information (Machin & Mayr, 2013). In addition, the critical nature of CDA helps the researcher to go beyond taken-for-granted meanings. Here, intersubjectivity plays an important role, which will be discussed further at the end of this section.

Another reason why CDA was chosen for this study is that a critical standpoint can help understand underlying power relations which are enacted through discourse. Differences in power within society are connoted and enforced through discourses

(Fairclough, 1989) and CDA is a useful method when investigating power relations within discourses in order to understand who holds the power and which hegemonic ideas are dominant. For instance, in the current study, power could be signified through knowledge that cosmetic product brands and non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics present to the audience. As Foucault (1980) argues that power and knowledge are indivisible, knowledgeable individuals might be perceived as powerful. This is in line with previous studies by Ringrow (2016) and Smirnova (2012) which found that brands and clinics position themselves as experts to be perceived as dependable by audiences that are in turn positioned as laypeople. In the current study, brands and clinics might employ such discursive strategies of superior knowledge, giving them power to educate audiences. This powerful position towards audiences, in turn, might provide the brands and clinics with increased persuasion power to sell their products and services.

Furthermore, it is interesting to investigate gendered power relations, which relate to the aforementioned post-feminism and female empowerment as well as agency (Rome et al., 2020) that were found in previous studies on cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising, presenting women as empowered to choose to improve their bodies with the help of cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures (Brooks, 2004; Chibnall et al., 2020; Garnham, 2013; Moran & Lee, 2013). The producers of the discourses might position their products and services as a means to embrace feminist values but also to fulfil expectations of health and youth that citizens ought to live up to in a neoliberal society (Rose, 2001; Smirnova, 2012). As most of the reviewed studies in the theoretical framework show a clear focus on a female audience for cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising, CDA can help understand how the advertisements draw on feminist and neoliberal discourses in order to persuade women to adhere to expectations such as the maintenance of health and youth but also the continuous striving for the best version of oneself – especially in terms of the body and physical appearance.

As this study aims to conduct a multimodal approach to CDA, Roderick (2018) argues that “rather than theorizing communication as being accomplished through individual semiotic modes such as language, images, music, and so on, multimodality calls attention to the ways in which meaning is always realized inter-modally” (p. 161). Therefore, CDA should not be restricted to textual language solely. Other scholars such as Ledin and Machin (2019) also argue in favor of multimodal CDA as they claim that Fairclough’s (1989) focus on language alone should be shifted towards other modes of communication. However, the scholars point out that there should be a clear focus on which materials to incorporate in a

CDA as multimodal analysis includes a wide range of possible materials, making it impossible to analyze all of them in-depth. According to Bateman and colleagues (2017) it is crucial to establish an “analytical focus” (p. 215) at the beginning of a study, meaning that the research question should determine which modes of communication and societal backgrounds should be considered and scrutinized. As this study aims to look at Instagram as a specific social media platform, both visual and textual material are highly relevant. Instagram represents an ideal medium to share visuals, meaning there is a strong focus on images and videos. As Machin and Mayr (2013) emphasize that images build an important part of meaning making besides language, this study employs multimodal analysis to understand how Instagram posts’ images and captions create meaning together. A concrete description of the sample material will follow in section 3.2.

The aforementioned point of intersubjectivity plays a crucial role within CDA. Referring back to Wodak and Meyer (2001), the “critical” dimension of critical discourse analysis “is to be understood as [...] embedding the data in the social” (p. 9). Considering the context of the data in this study is relevant in order to operationalize distinct concepts as will be explained in section 3.3. For instance, scientised and medical discourse can be challenging to differentiate, as already indicated in section 2.3., which is why the context is key in order to set both discourses apart. Therefore, sensitizing concepts were retrieved during the literature review that helped the researcher gather important background information regarding the topic and be aware of previous works and theories within the realm of cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising as well as the blurring boundaries between both industries. There are numerous scholars that consider sensitizing concepts as analytical tools and as a necessary base in order to begin a qualitative research process (Glaser, 1979; Padgett, 2004; Patton, 2002). Even though qualitative studies generally do not begin with previously formulated expectations, sensitizing concepts support the researcher in an inductive approach by directing her while analyzing and embedding the data in its context (Bowen, 2006). Therefore, sensitizing concepts can aid a thorough comprehension of societal developments (Bowen, 2006), fulfilling the aim of CDA of “embedding the data in the social” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 9). However, Bowen (2006) emphasizes that sensitizing concepts might also distract the researcher. She might (subconsciously) be looking for concepts that are similar to concepts that she encountered during the literature review; this could possibly cause her to ignore new findings that are different from or additional to existing findings. Therefore, this study followed Padgett’s (2004) approach of creating themes based on the immersion in the data but also based on

previous literature in the form of sensitizing concepts. Here, it is important to acknowledge that sensitizing concepts are usually a characteristic of thematic analysis; however, for the CDA of this study, sensitizing concepts were still deemed useful.

Besides the importance of context, Wodak and Meyer (2001) mention the “focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research” (p. 9). When the researcher examines the data, she has preconceived knowledge, which might be based on the previously studied literature and the resulting sensitizing concepts. However, the knowledge of the researcher may not only be based on the literature that she reviewed for the aim of this study, but also based on her personal understanding of meanings. Therefore, it is important to take intersubjectivity into account when obtaining potential meanings of visual as well as textual elements in the analysis. Intersubjectivity refers to how members of a society share and shape certain meanings (Alterman, 2007). Gyollai (2020) points out that intersubjectivity plays a key role in critical discourse studies as it requires researchers to comprehend the predetermined meaning that producers of discourses aim to communicate. For instance, the Instagram posts of the clinics display syringes, which based on common understanding symbolize medical procedures and medical expertise. While this might be a general understanding, culture, however, can make a difference in how certain symbols are interpreted. Krys and colleagues (2016) for instance found in their study that citizens from Western countries tend to generalize the perception that smiling stands for content, confident and affectionate individuals. However, the scholars found that for instance in highly corrupt countries such as Pakistan smiling can cause a person to be perceived as unintelligent and less trustworthy. Therefore, it is important to take into account how the researcher’s own origin from a German, thus Western, society influences the interpretation of in this case German advertising based on shared similar cultural understandings. It can, however, also be considered an advantage that the researcher shares the same cultural background as that of the intended audience and the probable producers of the discourses. Lazar (2007) claims that Western researchers might be challenged with making interpretations while not being able to identify with a different culture and fully understand the intended meanings. Therefore, the researcher in this study has an advanced German linguistic and cultural understanding that can be helpful when analyzing the discourses.

3.2. Sample

Instagram was chosen for the sample because the social media platform developed into an important advertising channel for cosmetic procedures (Dorfman et al., 2018). Due to

the study's focus on the German market, only German Instagram accounts were sampled. For comparison purposes, two cosmetic product brands as well as two clinics offering non-surgical cosmetic procedures were selected. Clinique and Clarins represent the two cosmetic product brands as they both emphasize science and research for product development (Clinique, n.d.; Clarins, n.d.). Furthermore, both brands are available in pharmacies, which is important for the study's focus on the medicalization of cosmetic products as one element related to the blurring boundaries with the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry. The Instagram account of Clarins Germany has 12,200 followers and Clinique Deutschland has 65,000 followers (Clarins Germany, n.d.; Clinique Deutschland, n.d.). Through manual searching on Instagram, these two German Instagram accounts were selected. First, Google was searched with search terms such as "skin care brands", "skin care pharmacy" and "top skin care products Germany". After that, the brands that appeared through the Google search were searched for an Instagram and, in case they have a German account specifically, the followers and the feeds were checked. In the end, Clinique and Clarins were selected as these brands are different in terms of their branding strategy: Clinique is focused on scientised discourses while Clarins emphasizes a more natural approach which made them seem promising to compare and yield rich findings instead of comparing two homogeneous brands.

For the cosmetic procedure examples for this study's sample, two German clinics focused on non-surgical cosmetic procedures with a large number of followers were selected; Dr. med. Emi Arpa has 51,200 followers and Theresa Schleicher has 28,700 followers (Arpa, n.d.; Schleicher, n.d.). Since there is a lack of an overview of the most followed cosmetic procedure clinics in Germany, these two accounts were identified through snowball sampling by checking Instagram accounts of German non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics with large followings and by clicking on the provided recommendations by Instagram for similar accounts. After going through different accounts of clinics and their number of followers, the procedures they offered, and the clinics' content on Instagram, the two accounts by Dr. Emi Arpa and Theresa Schleicher were selected. Both doctors/practitioners emphasize their specialization on non-surgical cosmetic procedures instead of surgical procedures on their websites and Instagram profiles (Arpa, n.d.; Schleicher, n.d.), which is suitable for the specific focus of this study. Furthermore, the accounts of both clinics post on a regular basis and engage audiences with questions, meaning viewers of the accounts are exposed to interactive content by these clinics regularly. Both clinics also repost content of influencers frequently, making it interesting to

analyze how the influencers' discourses regarding non-surgical cosmetic procedures might contribute to the normalization process and the blurring boundaries with the cosmetic product industry.

It is important to note that this research aims to focus on the question whether and if so, how the blurring of both industries is happening in Instagram advertising, meaning that no purposive sampling of posts showing the blurring boundaries took place. Instead, the most recent posts were incorporated in the analysis in order to draw conclusions on whether the blurring of boundaries can currently be found in Instagram advertising.

As multimodal CDA provides an in-depth analysis of data, 15 posts per Instagram account, thus 60 Instagram posts in total, were considered sufficient. In order to include the most recent data, the most recent 15 Instagram posts on each account were sampled; the oldest post in the sample is from March 4, 2021, and the newest post is from April 24, 2021. Posts that included video material were excluded in order to keep the focus on images and text as videos require an additional emphasis such as sound. Referring back to Ledin and Machin (2019), including too much material might create a lack of depth in the analysis, which is why an "analytical focus" (Bateman et al., 2017, p. 215) was created by focusing on images and text solely. An overview of the final dataset can be found in *Appendix A*. The elements that were analyzed in each Instagram post are the image and the caption, as can be seen in the exemplary screenshot below (*Figure 1*). Therefore, user comments were excluded as this study focuses on the content that the cosmetic product brands and clinics are publishing rather than on the consumers' perceptions.

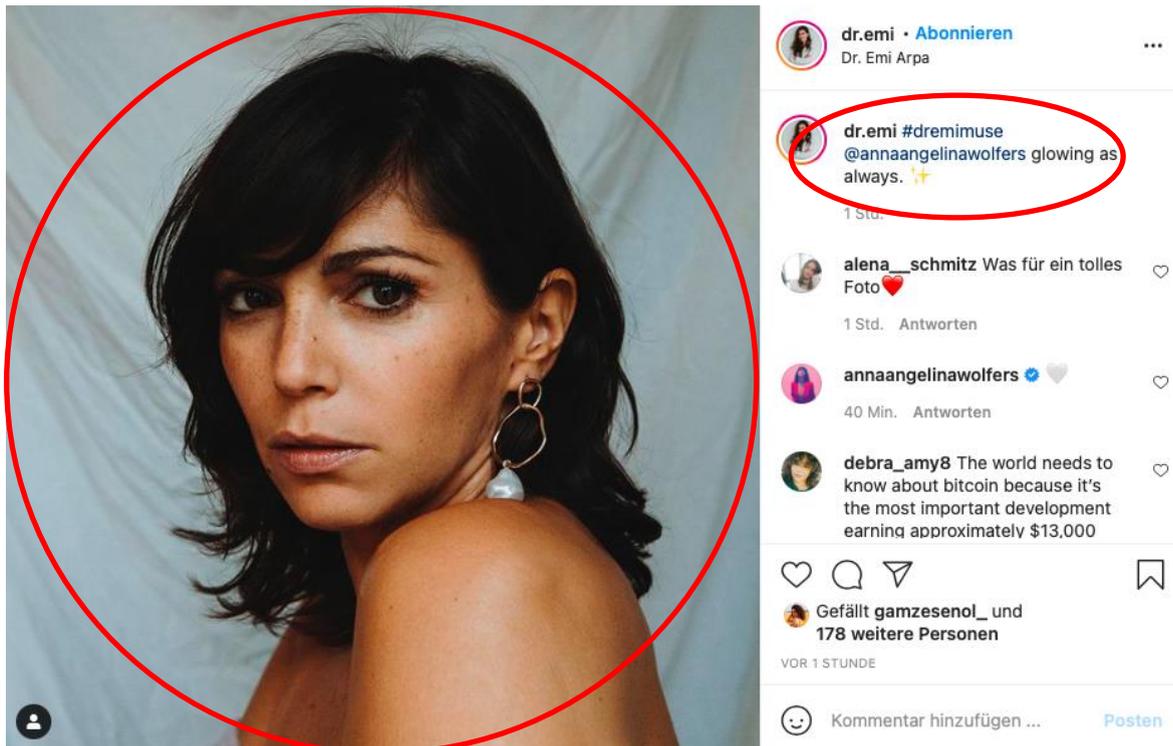


Figure 1: elements of an Instagram post incorporated in the analysis

For Theresa Schleicher's account, the sampling of posts was slightly different. Throughout the analysis, the researcher encountered that the Instagram account of the practitioner often posts the logo of the clinic without a caption. An explanation would be to create a pattern within the Instagram feed, as can be seen in the screenshot below (Figure 2). However, for the analysis that was conducted within this study, the exact same content would have been repeated, which would have not made the results richer. Therefore, it was decided to analyze the logo once but to exclude the recurring visuals and instead include the next most recent posts in the sample.

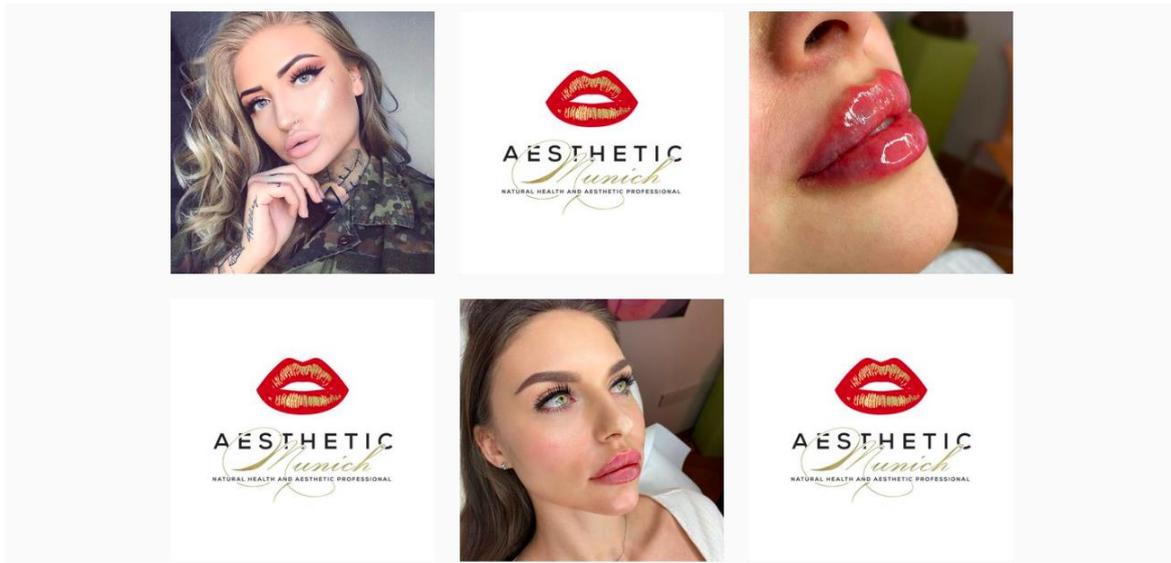


Figure 2

3.3. Procedure and operationalization

The analysis of the data was conducted manually, thus without the usage of any software. Every Instagram post was analyzed through an identical procedure; in the first phase, the image was examined; in the second phase the caption was analyzed. The distinct steps that were taken for each phase are explained in the following paragraph. It is important to note that the images and captions are related, meaning they were not solely analyzed separately. For instance, simultaneously to focusing on the image, the caption was considered in order to understand connections between the visual and the text. In some examples, the caption provides useful information for understanding the image, which is why it was important during the analysis to not analyze the two elements of an Instagram post completely separately.

The first phase of the data analysis was the analysis of the image of an Instagram post. Step one of this visual analysis phase was the focus on the denotation and connotation of the depicted elements. According to Roland Barthes (1977) *denotation* describes what is illustrated, while *connotation* interprets the underlying meaning that is transferred through what is depicted. Therefore, the researcher started by noting down any striking elements in the image and the first associations that came to mind. These associations were sensitized by the previously examined literature. However, elements that were different from or additional to existing findings in the literature were also noted down, when their respective meaning was perceived relevant for the topic of the study.

Step two of the visual analysis phase was to apply more specific tools in order to

create a specific angle on certain elements and their potential meaning. In their work, Machin and Mayr (2013) describe a range of tools for multimodal critical discourse analysis from which several were selected, as these were deemed most useful because they aid the analysis of the images of Instagram posts that this study aims to investigate. Firstly, the *settings* of an image were taken into account, which relates to the surroundings of a subject or object, such as inside or outside context, background colors as well as lighting within an image. In the case of cosmetic procedure advertising, it was important to analyze whether a photograph was taken in the clinic, for instance, which would give it a medical character, or whether the background is neutral which would foreground the depicted products or persons. The lighting in advertising is often focused on the product or service, for instance on a cosmetic product or a patient, to make it stand out. Secondly, *saliency* was used to find a potential overemphasis on specific elements in an image to catch viewers' attention and to underline specific values. *Saliency* has several sub-elements. One sub-element are *colors*; in this study, for instance, white colors might seem clean and clinical. Other sub-elements of *saliency* such as the *size* of or the *focus* on certain products were considered in order to understand how brands and clinics aim to catch viewers' attention. Channeling the viewer's attention can also be done by *foregrounding* products or persons. *Foregrounding* was examined to retrieve which aspects an advertisement wants to emphasize.

Step three of the visual analysis phase was to add other analytical elements which were deemed crucial for the purpose of this study. Firstly, it is important to add that this study is focusing on the exploration of potential blurring boundaries between the cosmetic product and non-surgical cosmetic procedures market, which requires a tool that helps capture the linkage between the two industries. Therefore, this multimodal CDA borrows from philosophy by considering the concept of categorization in differentiating boundaries. While categorization aims to set two objects apart – in this case the cosmetic product and the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry – Varzi (2013) claims that the process of categorization may be challenging as boundaries generally become increasingly unclear due to societal changes over time. Smith (2001) elaborates on the problematic notion of categorization by introducing “*fiat boundaries*” (p. 135), which are challenging to demarcate because they are subject to social, temporal and cultural changes. Especially when categories are subject to change due to societal and timely developments, they often become increasingly similar to other existing and comparable categories (Hsu & Grodal, 2020). In the case of this study, medicalization is transforming the category of cosmetic products, while normalization represents an ongoing change in the category of non-surgical cosmetic

procedures that increasingly aligns procedures to non-medical cosmetic products. Consequently, both categories are borrowing discourses from each other and thus become increasingly similar. Therefore, the analysis additionally focused on categorization and in what way it can be found in the dataset in order to find out whether and how blurring boundaries between the cosmetic product and non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry are constructed. Clear categorization of cosmetic procedures as medical, for example, was considered evident when syringes are shown and a medical treatment is presented. Fiat or blurred boundaries, however, were noted when industries are borrowing discourses from each other, for instance, when the cosmetic product brands depict test tubes next to their products, blurring the boundary to science.

Power relations constitute another additional element that the researcher paid special attention to when analyzing the images in the Instagram posts. As aforementioned, power relations, hegemony and ideology comprise important elements of CDA (Fairclough, 1989, Thompson, 1990) and are also relevant within the scope of this study in order to understand how the producers of the discourses draw on feminist and neoliberal (Rome et al., 2020; Rose, 2001; Smirnova, 2012) discourses as persuasive strategies. Therefore, images that show women enacting powerful positions were included in the analysis of power relations; such powerful positions included the lifting of their chins as Pease and Pease (2004) claim such body language to demonstrate dominance, pride and sometimes even vanity. However, possible indicators of objectification and sexualization (Goffman, 1976) such as open mouths or images in which the faces of models are cut-out were also incorporated as they are claimed to represent the historical representation of women in advertising (Rome et al., 2020).

The second phase of the data analysis was the analysis of the caption of an Instagram post. Step one was to note down denotations, followed by connotations that came to mind when reading the captions, which was guided by the sensitizing concepts within the literature. However, as mentioned above, elements that were different from or additional to existing findings in the literature were also noted down, when their respective meaning was perceived relevant for the topic of the study. The interpretation of emojis was also already considered in this first step of the textual analysis phase. It is important to note that the analysis was done on the original versions of the captions to be able to find specific vocabulary that can be found in German but not in English language such as the use of informal and formal “you” to approach the audience. Extracts that were perceived to be relevant to include as quotes were translated by the researcher from German to English. The

translation was conducted as literal as possible in order for readers of this study to be able to comprehend the intended meaning of the text. For transparency and potential replication purposes, an overview of the original captions that belong to the translated extracts in the following results section can be found in *Appendix B*.

Step two of the textual analysis phase was to apply more specific tools in order to create a specific angle on certain elements and their potential meaning. Machin and Mayr (2013) also provide several useful tools for textual analysis. One is *overlexicalization* analyzing the emphasis on certain words, which in this case are, for instance, medical terminology for cosmetic products to make the product appear more effective and trustworthy. Furthermore, *suppression/lexical absence* is especially important in this study as it considers specific words that viewers would anticipate in a context, which are left out. An example for this is the absence of medical information concerning cosmetic procedures, indicating normalization. Moreover, *structural oppositions* aim to highlight a contrast. For instance, the advertising of cosmetic procedures might highlight the benefits but also the disadvantages or risks of getting procedures done (Goodman, 2017). Lastly, *lexical choices/genre of communication* can show the language that brands use in their advertising in order to position products or services as desirable must-haves. Brands might want to claim medical expertise to make their products and services appear effective and trustworthy, while clinics might employ informal language to underline the normalization of non-surgical cosmetic procedures as regular beauty routines instead of medical treatments.

Step three of the textual analysis phase was to investigate the same additional elements of categorization, fiat/blurred boundaries and power relations. When looking at categorization on a textual level, any concrete mentioning of for instance a cosmetic procedure such as “Botox”, “fillers”, “full face procedure”, and the like which clearly sets a procedure apart from a cosmetic product, was considered as clear categorization of a medical treatment. Fiat/blurred boundaries were identified and coded as such when, for instance, the non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics use the captions to talk about non-medical beauty topics such as make-up, skin care and other non-medical cosmetic products; by discussing these topics on a feed for medical procedures, this could signify an effort to align the medical services to the non-medical cosmetics field. Lastly, power relations were recognized when women are presented as empowered by using certain products and services but also when they are reminded of their duty to be healthy and look young, posing an interesting question of whether the brands/clinics or the consumers hold the power here. Additionally, power relations were also considered when the brands and clinics portray

themselves as more knowledgeable than consumers and position themselves as the audience's educators.

The final discussion as part of this methodology is the operationalization of specific terms. For instance, this study aims to make a concrete distinction between scientised and medical discourse. However, in some cases it was challenging to differentiate as the discourses were highly overlapping. Generally, everything in the dataset that presents a non-medical issue as a sickness (Conrad 1992; Smirnova, 2012) such as the aging process or that presents a non-medical issue as in need of medical treatment (Harvey, 2013), was coded as medicalization. Furthermore, Smirnova provides further criteria for separating scientised and medical discourse such as "doctor, medicine" (p. 1240) for medical discourse and "chemical, tested" (p. 1240) for scientised discourse. Based on this distinction, this study coded everything related to care such as syringes as medical. However, lab coats represent one example for an overlap between medical and scientised discourse. Overall, science is broader than medicine, as scientised discourse might as well be understood as medical discourse. As a solution, this study aimed to constantly consider the context, in which the images or the text are placed in order to decide whether to connote it scientised or medical discourse.

Furthermore, emotion discourse as introduced by Edwards (1999) appeared frequently especially when looking at the discourses by cosmetic procedure clinics, which is why further demarcation of the concept of emotion discourse was needed. By definition, emotion discourse "includes not only terms such as anger, surprise or fear, [...] but also a rich set of metaphors" (Edwards, 1999, p. 279) that describe emotions. Therefore, emotions that are literally mentioned or expressed through metaphors (either verbally or through the usage of artefacts such as emojis) were coded as emotion discourse.

Another important concept to operationalize are influencers, as they are often shown within the posts of cosmetic procedure clinics. If people that are tagged in a post had high numbers of followers (in this case 3,000 or more) and/or collaborate with brands, they can be considered influencers according to Stubb's and colleagues' (2019) definition. In addition to that, it was considered whether the profiles of the tagged people had an Instagram verified sticker, meaning that the platform acknowledges the person as a public figure.

Lastly, the researcher's own interpretation was used for coding several other elements during the analysis such as people's gender and age. In terms of gender, people were coded as female when no beard traces are visible or when hands and other body parts are portrayed as delicate and non-muscular, in case people's faces are not (entirely) visible

in a post. In terms of age, people were coded as “young” when no traces of wrinkles are visible. No specific age was determined as for the purpose of this study it is sufficient to code whether women in cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising are portrayed as “young” since youthfulness is a major selling point for their products and services. In *Appendix C*, one exemplary table containing the full analysis procedure for one Instagram post from the sample can be found.

3.4. Reflexivity, transparency and credibility

When reflecting on the researcher’s role in the study, reflexivity is important. Reflexivity acknowledges how the researcher’s involvement in the study as well as her character traits affect the interpretation of certain findings (Holland, 1999). Therefore, it is important to highlight the researcher’s position towards this study’s topic in order for readers of this paper to be able to comprehend where certain interpretations by the researcher come from. Furthermore, readers should be able to take a critical and well-informed standpoint towards this paper, which should be enabled through transparency regarding the researcher’s position. It should be clarified that my interest for this topic was sparked by the increasing number of non-surgical cosmetic procedures undertaken in Germany, which I was initially made aware of through Instagram. I follow various influencers who increasingly report on their cosmetic procedures and the clinics they visit. After that, I started looking at numerous Instagram accounts that openly and almost “casually” discuss cosmetic procedures, which struck me as a normalization process that I wanted to investigate further. Therefore, my personal experience on Instagram led me to scientifically investigate the topic on this specific platform. As I realized that various accounts discuss narratives of regular cosmetic products together with cosmetic procedures, my interest in the blurring between both industries was sparked. When looking further into cosmetic product advertising, I discovered the interconnectedness of medicalization with the blurring boundaries with the cosmetic procedure industry, which is why I decided to add medicalization to my study as another focus point. Based on the content I was exposed to when researching for my topic, I thought that both industries will heavily draw on each other’s discourses as especially non-surgical cosmetic procedures are gaining popularity due to their decreasing invasiveness and increasing similarity to regular beauty services. Through this study I intended to find out whether these blurring boundaries can be found in recent advertising on Instagram.

Besides providing transparency regarding the researcher’s positionality, the transparency of this study can be ensured through the provision of the original posts that

were translated (*Appendix B*). Readers of this paper are able to verify the translations conducted by the researcher and can additionally consider the original captions for a better understanding regarding the usage of language. In addition to that, the overview of the final dataset in *Appendix A* allows the readers to access the sampled Instagram posts themselves as all Instagram accounts are publicly accessible. By providing the option for readers to examine the analyzed sample material themselves it helps them understand how the researcher retrieved certain meanings but also to critically question the analysis procedure and outcomes. Lastly, transparency is increased by illustrating one complete example of the analysis process (*Appendix C*), which additionally yields the option to replicate the current study or its analysis procedure in a follow-up study.

Lastly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that credibility constitutes an important criterion in qualitative research. According to the two scholars, a study's credibility can be increased by conducting a study over a certain period of time that provides the researcher with the option to immerse herself in the data and repeat processes in order to grasp all potential meanings. The analysis of this study was done twice; after the first round of coding 15 posts from one cosmetic product brand and one cosmetic procedure clinic, the researcher received feedback from her academic supervisor, adjusted accordingly and coded the dataset for a second time. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that continuously considering the context of the topic increases credibility. As aforementioned, CDA requires the researcher to embed data in the societal context, which was continuously attempted during the conduction of this study likewise. Another criterion that Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider important for credibility is data triangulation. As elaborated in section 3.2., 60 posts from four different Instagram accounts were deemed sufficient since saturation was reached at this point of the data analysis. Consequently, sufficient data was included in the study that allowed the researcher to compare, contrast and find patterns among the dataset, which were important for the formulation of final themes to answer the research question.

4. Results

4.1. Advertising by cosmetic product brands

4.1.1. Scientised discourse

As explained in section 3.3., this study makes a concrete distinction between scientised and medical discourses. For scientised discourse, the work by Ringrow (2016) was guiding for categorizing scientised terminology, as elaborated on in section 2.2. When looking at the genre of communication employed by the two cosmetic product brands under scrutiny, Clinique and Clarins both include a remarkable amount of scientised discourse. Several dimensions of scientised discourse by Ringrow (2016) such as *scientised product names*, *scientised ingredients*, *measures of verifiability*, and *a new natural and organic approach combined with science* can be identified in the dataset, which will be presented here.

Firstly, the sampled posts in this study show that Clinique's products have scientised product names, which according to Ringrow (2016) are incorporated in order to illustrate how advertised products and extensive research are intertwined to increase the products' perceived credibility. Clinique uses names such as *Moisture Surge 100-Hour Auto-Replenishing Hydrator* or *Even Better Clinical Serum Foundation*. The products are also often zoomed in on to make the entire name of the product and the text underneath the product name – i.e., “bio-ferment technology”- readable (*Figure 3*). The emphasis on words such as *technology* and *clinical* makes the product appear scientific in nature.

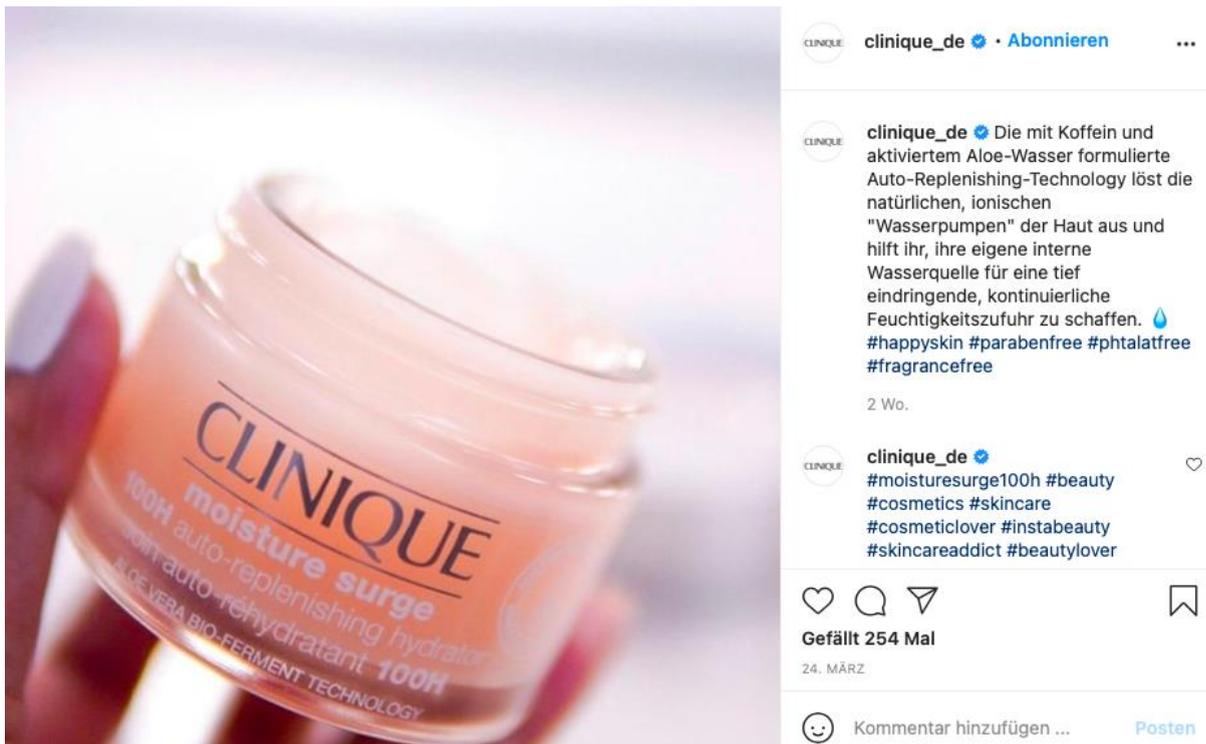


Figure 3

Secondly, the sample shows an emphasis on scientised ingredients such as hyaluronic acid. Ringrow (2016) states that cosmetic brands emphasize such scientised ingredients in order to communicate that the effectiveness of their products is increased due to the rapid effects that active ingredients such as hyaluronic acid can help achieve. She also found the appeal to be even stronger, when several scientised ingredients are linked as in this caption:

Extract 1 (Clinique Deutschland, 2021)

The new ingredient of the Moisture Surge 100-Hour Auto-Replenishing Hydrator, the exclusive¹ (1) Aloe Bio-Ferment (2), is manufactured from controlled biological Aloe-extract powder (3), lactobacillus (4) and active aloe-water (5).

As can be seen from this caption, several scientised ingredients can be distinguished (i.e., “Aloe-Bio Ferment”, “Aloe-extract powder”, “lactobacillus”, and “active aloe-water”). The word “active” is also interesting here, which will be further investigated in section 4.1.2. The

¹ All underlined words within the selected extracts are my own emphasis as I perceived these words as important in the analysis; therefore, the original captions do not include underlined words. The original captions, from which the extracts were taken, can be found in *Appendix B*.

word “controlled” is emphasized in combination with the ingredients in order to give viewers a feeling of safety that biological standards are not solely claimed but also met. Lastly, the word “exclusive” can be interpreted as Clinique presenting itself as the only brand that is able to offer these specific ingredients. Such a discursive strategy shall convince consumers that they can only use products with these special ingredients when choosing for Clinique. *Figure 4* shows how scientific ingredients are presented in test tubes, which are usually used in a laboratory. The caption also describes which specific ingredients are presented in the image (i.e., “hyaluronic acid”, “caffeine” and “vitamin E”), creating a connection between image and caption and making the intended message, that the scientised ingredients are included in Clinique’s product, more understandable for the audience.

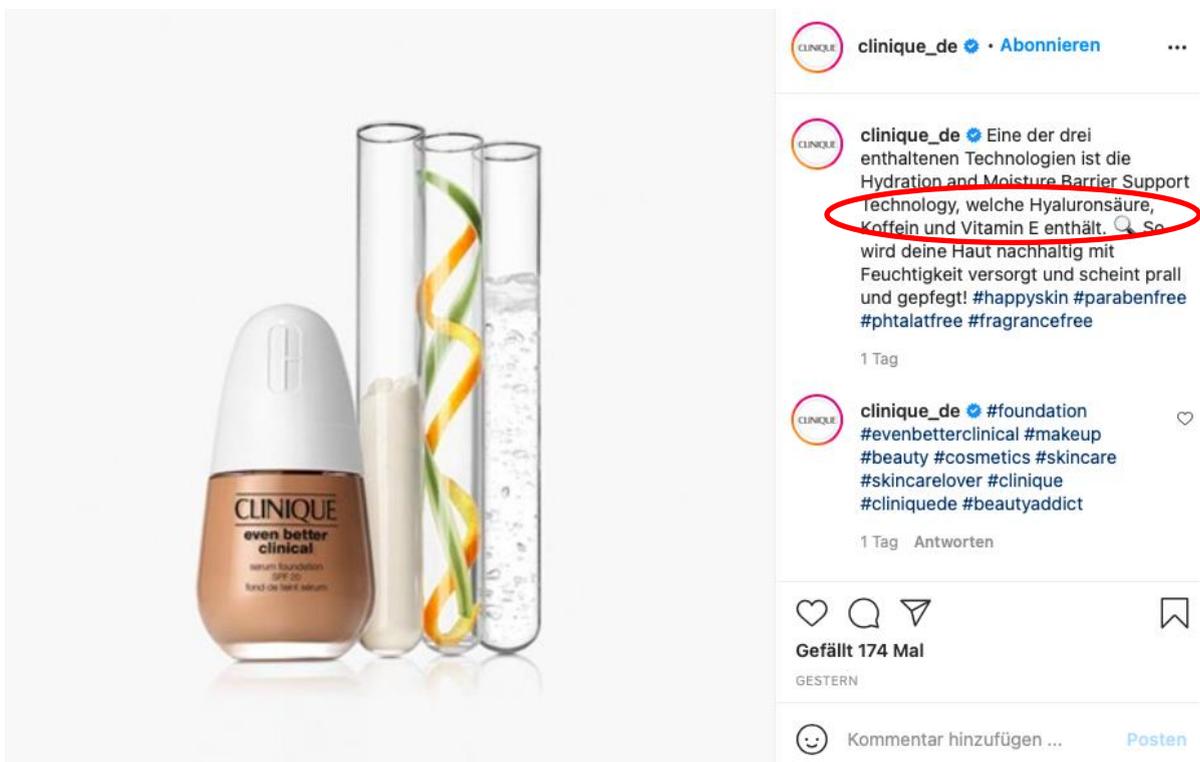


Figure 4

Thirdly, Ringrow (2016) describes measures of verifiability in cosmetic product advertising as numerical data in relation to the products such as the durability of the effect. This could also be found in the case of Clinique as the *Moisture Surge 100-Hour Auto-Replenishing Hydrator* contains the claim that the product lasts 100 hours. Furthermore, there were statements and literal *promises* that the products *last 24 hours*, which may convince consumers of the products’ quality.

Lastly, an important finding of this study is the reference to a *new natural and*

organic approach combined with science (Ringrow, 2016). Clinique for instance posts the hashtags *#parabenfree*, *#phtalatfree* and *#fragrancefree* under every single caption and uses structural oppositions by presenting biological ingredients such as aloe vera as an alternative in contrast to harmful chemicals. Ringrow (2016) already highlighted this increasing emphasis on the word *free* in cosmetic product advertising, which can be grounded in increasing fear of dangerous chemicals threatening human health. For instance, parabens were discovered in breast tumors, which led to new European regulations that forbid several parabens (Ringrow, 2016). By stressing its cautiousness regarding chemicals, Clinique tries to show that it pays close attention to research and is concerned about the health of its consumers. This could possibly result in the audience interpreting Clinique as trustworthy cosmetic product brand that incorporates science and innovation in order to find healthier alternatives. Compared to Clinique, Clarins draws even more on natural discourse, which can be confirmed by Ringrow's (2016) findings on Clarins as well. As aforementioned in section 3.2., Clinique and Clarins have different brand identities, which is why they were ultimately selected for the sample. The data analysis confirmed this difference as Clarins is highly focused on its natural ingredients that it shows together with its products in ten out of 15 posts (*Figure 5*), which is different from Clinique's scientific presentation of ingredients (*Figure 4*).



Figure 5

Throughout the text in the captions, there is an overlexicalisation of the word *biological* and *natural* for both Clinique and Clarins, while the latter even develops its own vocabulary such as the *Gentle Complex*. This *Gentle Complex* by Clarins, which consists of organic ingredients that the brand grows in its own domain in the French mountains, evokes yet another sense of exclusivity and that natural ingredients are gentler. Next to words, both brands also employ plant emojis in their captions in order to underline the natural aspects of their products. Luangrath and colleagues (2017) found that especially young users appreciate the usage of emojis, which is why the brands might employ emojis to please the communication preferences of young audiences on Instagram. However, it could also be assumed that the usage of emojis is closely related to the nature of Instagram as a social media platform since emojis are a key feature.

In addition to the focus on natural discourse, Ringrow (2016) emphasizes the combination of scientised and natural discourse, which can also frequently be found in Clarins' Instagram captions.

Extract 2 (Clarins Germany, 2021)

Since 2019 we cultivated (1) and intensively researched (2) 18 different plant species (3). Four of these plants are already used as ingredients in our products (4)!

As can be seen from the caption, science in the sense of “cultivating” and “researching” is combined with nature in the form of “plant species”. Therefore, Clarins appears innovative yet sustainable in developing its product formulas. It may want to position itself as continually seeking modern solutions but respecting nature and its species, including humans. Clarins also calls the Domain Clarins, where it grows its ingredients, *our outside laboratory*, which again emphasizes the combination of nature as in “outside” and science in the “laboratory”.

Besides Ringrow's (2016) work on scientised discourse, Smirnova (2012) also presents findings related to scientised discourse that are relevant for this study. For instance, it is remarkable how both Clinique and Clarins employ the words *miracle* and *magic*, when referring to their products. Smirnova (2012) explains the notion of “science as magic” (p. 1241), meaning that science might be able to make magic and miracles happen due to the intense research and resulting innovations. However, it should be considered that science remains different from magic as it can be explained, which is a major characteristic setting it apart from magic, which cannot be explained.

Another finding by Smirnova (2012) related to scientised discourse is her argument that scientists are perceived to be experts in their field and are therefore perceived as more knowledgeable and powerful than people who do not possess such knowledge, which is in line with Ringrow (2016), who claims that individuals using scientised discourse seem dependable. This exact concept of power through knowledge goes back to Foucault (1980) whose work argues that power and knowledge are indivisible. Therefore, there are power relations evident within the advertising of the cosmetic product brands as they use scientific knowledge in order to be perceived as knowledgeable, and thus powerful as well as dependable by consumers. To provide a concrete example, Clinique is educating its audience on scientific topics in some of its posts.

Extract 3 (Clinique Deutschland, 2021)

Did you know (1) that our Even Better Clinical Serum Foundation contains the active substance UP301 (2)? This molecule (3) helps blending the skin tone and improves the appearance of dark spots, including aging spots (4).

In this caption, (1) it can be seen that the audience is assumed not to know about this molecule before as most certainly only a small proportion of the viewers has sufficient scientific knowledge to be able to comprehend such specific terminology (i.e., “active substance UP301”). Following, the substance is explained as a (3) “molecule”, which adds to the scientised perception of the ingredient; nevertheless, most viewers will still most certainly not entirely understand what exactly a molecule is and how it works in this product. The focus is fully shifted to the end result of the product, which ought to be the only concern of the consumer, namely (4) the successful fight against the aging process. The same mechanism of the brands as purveyors of knowledge can be observed in a post of Clarins, which *reveals a secret* on how to get the perfect tan by using a specific combination and dose of distinct Clarins products. The brands decide to position themselves as educators and purveyors of scientific knowledge, and therefore simultaneously position their audience as learners and less knowledgeable. This discursive strategy of having to educate audiences in order for them to fully comprehend the claims made by the cosmetic brands situates the brands in a superior position of power due to greater perceived knowledge. Ironically, in most advertisements in the sample, the consumers are still left with little information besides the effect that the product/ingredient will have on the skin.

Overall, both Clinique and Clarins only provide explanations for their scientised

terminology such as ingredients and technologies used in the products in about half of their posts, even though previous literature demonstrated that an elaboration on scientific claims in cosmetic advertising would help viewers in choosing a product (Fowler et al., 2019). This lack of explanation could possibly be grounded in the platform. It could be speculated that the brands do not want to provide too many long captions in order to keep their audiences engaged and to not lose them while explaining complex scientific terminology. One example for a caption providing some explanation on the body's reaction to the product can be found in this caption.

Extract 4 (Clinique Deutschland, 2021)

The with caffeine and active aloe-water formulated Auto-Replenishing-Technology triggers (1) the natural, ionic “water pumps” (2) of the skin [...].

It is interesting how the word (2) “water pumps” may be created for the purpose of making it more understandable for laypeople, which underlines the aforementioned difference in knowledge and power between the brands and the audience that is used as education.

4.1.2. Medical discourse

As aforementioned, this study aims to make a distinction between scientised and medical discourse. Medical discourse per se, as operationalized in section 3.3., could not be found in the advertising of Clinique and Clarins. However, the word *active* in combination with ingredients appears frequently. Therefore, the cosmetic product brands are borrowing discourses from the cosmeceutical, thus pharmaceutical, industry, in which advertisements often refer to active ingredients in order to highlight the effectiveness of cosmeceuticals (Phaiboon-udomkarn & Josiassen, 2014). Cosmeceuticals are positioned as highly effective based on their active ingredients and pharmaceutical properties, which is why Fowler and colleagues (2015) emphasize the challenge of identifying whether cosmeceuticals belong to both the cosmetics and the pharmaceutical industry. The intention by cosmetic brands to align with the cosmeceutical industry might be to claim equal medical/pharmaceutical effectiveness when using “regular” cosmetic products. Interestingly, in a follow-up study by Fowler and colleagues (2019) on cosmeceutical advertising, the scholars included both Clinique and Clarins in the sample advertisements, showing that both brands might be perceived as medical and pharmaceutical. Fowler and colleagues (2019) perceived these two brands to make numerous cosmeceutical claims; however, as aforementioned, according to

Ringrow's (2016) work on scientised discourse, these cosmeceutical claims such as ingredients might as well be considered scientised, which shows that there might be an overlap with scientised discourse in this case as well.

Next to borrowing from the cosmeceutical industry, Clinique and Clarins also use discourses from the cosmetic procedure industry as another medical field. Both brands use the German words "aufgepolstert" = *plumped*, "prall" = *full* and "straff" = *tight*, which frequently appear in cosmetic procedure advertising. Here, it is important to consider that these terms are not medical per se; the words *full* and *tight* rather are in line with current beauty ideals which is why the cosmetic products use them in their advertising in order to present their products as effective in achieving these ideals. However, some words such as *plumped* are borrowed from cosmetic procedure discourse as *plumped* is more easily achieved by cosmetic procedures than by non-medical cosmetic products. This could potentially represent a blurred boundary with the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry since injecting Botox or hyaluronic acid will be more effective than applying a product that simply contains for instance hyaluronic acid. This could indicate a reason why the cosmetic product brands are borrowing discourses from cosmetic procedures in order to claim equal effectiveness for their products.

When looking at medicalization, meaning the construction of a non-medical issue as medically deficient or in need of medical intervention, there are almost no references to the aging process as aging is only explicitly mentioned in the sample by Clinique once, while not at all by Clarins. In her study, Smirnova (2012) for instance found that aging was often constructed as illness, thus a problem/solution situation was presented alongside words such as "repair" and "fix" (p. 1241). In the dataset of this study no such vocabulary could be identified; however, words such as *help*, *support*, *improve* and *foster* appeared throughout the posts, which could be grounded in advertising regulations. The official gazette of the European Union on regulations for advertising of cosmetic products states that "representations of the effect of a product must not go beyond what the existing evidence can prove" (European Commission, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, the brands might circumvent the direct expression of a problem and a solution as they are not allowed to make claims on effects that their products cannot guarantee. While this might be an explanation why the brands are careful when formulating their advertising claims, it still remains noticeable that this dataset does not provide a lot of indications for medicalization and medical discourse. It can be concluded that most discourse can be coded as scientised in nature and therefore broader than medical discourse.

4.1.3. Beauty ideals

Overall, the brands focus on the presentation of the products and their packaging by zooming in on products and making the text on the products readable. Clinique features people in five out of 15 posts; in only two out of these five posts their faces are visible. Clarins only shows a person, whose face is half visible, in one out of the 15 posts. Compared to the dataset of the cosmetic procedure clinics, in which people are shown in 25 posts out of 30 in total, the proportion of images showing people is much smaller. This could be explained as cosmetic procedures are a service that needs to be applied on a human body; it is rather the result that is sold instead of a product. Therefore, the presentation of cosmetic procedures might be more result-focused.

Furthermore, the people in the posts by Clinique and Clarins can be identified as women. When the face is not entirely visible, femininity is signified through delicate hands and manicured nails. Looking back at Spyropoulou's and colleagues' (2020) identified beauty ideals, unblemished skin can frequently be found in the Instagram posts, as the cosmetic product brands claim unblemished skin to be achievable through the usage of their products. Next to that, the criterion of youthfulness can also be confirmed as no model had any indication of wrinkles. Lastly, the beauty ideals of pale skin and plumped lips that Spyropoulou and colleagues (2020) found, when focusing on German advertising, are also evident in the Instagram posts. When considering the skin color of the models, most models (four out of five) are white, which is in line with Ayata and Atasoy's (2019) and Frith and colleagues' (2005) previous findings; in the remaining posts featuring people, the faces are not visible, or the lighting makes it challenging to infer the exact shade of the skin color, thus skin color could not concretely be inferred. Only one post within the dataset of Clinique and Clarins illustrates a model with a darker skin tone; yet, her face is not visible, making it difficult to infer a concrete ethnicity in this case, as skin tone and ethnicity also do not always necessarily overlap.

Overall, ideals deviating from for instance Spyropoulou's and colleagues' (2020) findings were also noticeable in the dataset, such as thick eyebrows as a current trend; however, progression in terms of including racial diversity within cosmetic product advertising remains unconfirmed in this study. Nevertheless, it is challenging to infer racial diversity based on the posts by the cosmetic product brands as simply not a lot of people are visible. Throughout the next section, it will be explored how advertising for cosmetic procedures uses identical beauty ideals in order to sell its services.

4.2. Advertising by cosmetic procedure clinics

4.2.1. Elements of normalization

As the term normalization can imply various meanings, this section aims to look at its different sub-elements: natural results, lack of medical information, influencers, and alignment with other beauty products. These sub-elements are discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1.1. Natural results

When investigating the representation of non-surgical cosmetic procedures by the clinics, Theresa Schleicher is very explicit with regards to the procedures that she offers in her clinic. Ten out of the 15 posts show a before-and-after picture or simply an after-picture of patients that went to her clinic (Chen at al., 2015; Park & Allgayer, 2018; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018) (*Figure 6*).

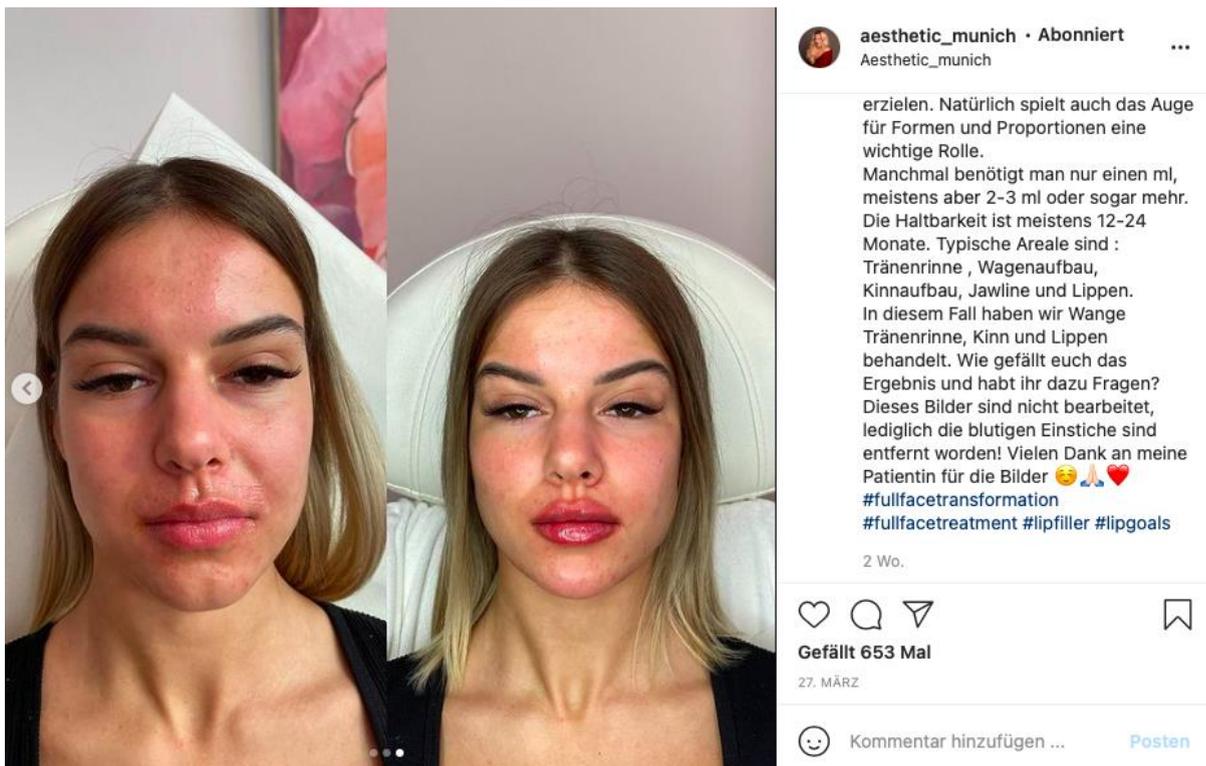


Figure 6

It can be inferred that the patients are laying on a treatment couch because of the background. In combination with the lips in the focus and puncture sites still visible in some cases, these pictures were most certainly taken directly after a cosmetic procedure in order to show the immediate effect. Especially the puncture sites/wounds provide the procedures

with a rather medical connotation, thus anti-normalization. Besides Theresa Schleicher's images, her captions also often refer to cosmetic procedures explicitly by mentioning words such as *injecting* and *2-3ml hyaluronic acid* or hashtags such as *#russianlips* and *#filler*. However, it is noticeable that the word *natural* often occurs in her discourse such as *natural lips* or *fitting your natural look*. She also uses the word *optimize* frequently, implying that she will not change the natural structure of a patient's face entirely through a procedure. This emphasis on natural results can be considered one element of normalization as viewers see the natural results proving her claims. In contrast to the negative images such as immovable and disfigured faces that people used to have in mind when thinking of non-surgical cosmetic procedures in the past (Giesler, 2012), the natural representation of cosmetic procedures and the construction of procedures as less invasive is one element contributing to the normalization process (Woodstock, 2001). However, it is important to consider that in combination with the just-after procedure images, which are more medical in nature, the overall representation of procedures remains nuanced.

When looking at the posts by Dr. Emi Arpa, her representation of cosmetic procedures is different. In all the 15 posts by her Instagram account, she never shows a treatment picture; instead, all images seem created through a photoshoot as they have the same filter as well as background and most photographed people show a naked upper body; thus, there is a pattern showing throughout the posts. One example can be seen in *Figure 7*. When solely looking at the image without reading its accompanying caption, *Figure 7* might as well advertise many other products or services or could be a shot from an editorial shoot. Therefore, such an image as in *Figure 7* cannot clearly be connoted as advertising for cosmetic procedures, as in the case of Theresa Schleicher.

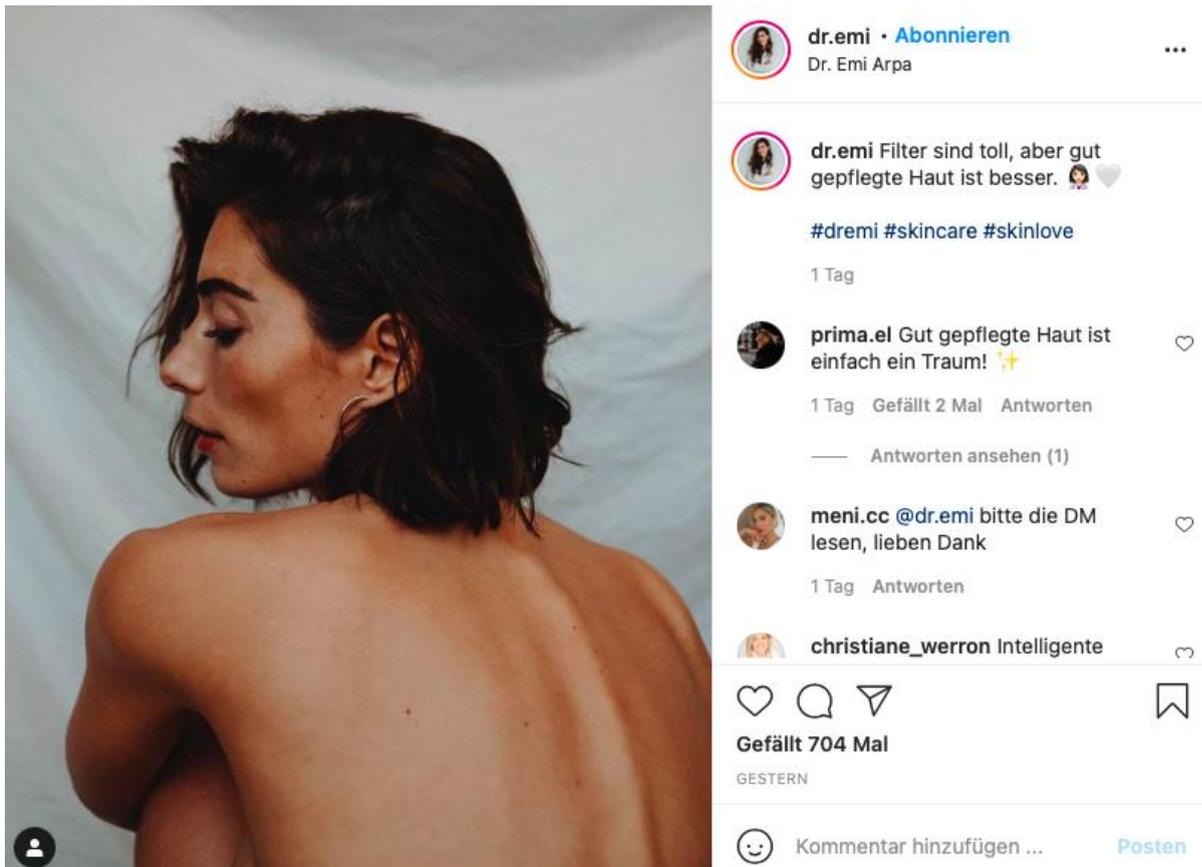


Figure 7

Dr. Emi Arpa shows one before-and-after picture within the dataset (Figure 8 and 9). However, compared to Theresa Schleicher's before-and-after images, Dr. Emi Arpa's example is less realistic as she uses emojis instead of humans to show the results of her treatment. As Luangrath (2017) found, the usage of emojis and their informal way of communicating make brands appear as equals and more personal; in this case, Dr. Emi Arpa's approach of presenting a before-and-after can be considered playful and humorous, which is employed in order to connect with her audience on a more personal and friendly level. Most importantly, comparing women to horses and unicorns, which stand for courage, freedom, joy and pride, refers to the aforementioned societal context of neoliberalism and post-feminism. Women have the agency to decide for cosmetic procedures and are presented as courageous and confident when undergoing procedures.



Figure 8



Figure 9

When Dr. Emi Arpa presents syringes, thus making a more explicit connection to her services, she shows them in an abstract setting and not injected into a human body part (*Figure 10*). Interestingly, this presentation of non-surgical cosmetic procedure instruments is similar to Clinique's presentation of its products, for instance, which are decoratively held by female hands (*Figure 11*). Therefore, the syringe is presented similarly to a cosmetic product in itself instead of a medical treatment. It could also be interpreted that the hands holding the syringe belong to a non-medical professional instead of a doctor (as hygiene rules are recommending against nail polish and requiring gloves in healthcare (World Health Organization, 2006)), which makes the non-surgical cosmetic procedure look less than a medical treatment that would demand the application and supervision by a doctor.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Another interesting aspect to pay attention to in *Figure 10* is that the caption is not related to the presented syringe as Dr. Emi Arpa talks about appointments in her clinic, but not about concrete procedures. Therefore, her caption seems disconnected from the accompanying image. Overall, she only refers to cosmetic procedures either through visuals (e.g., syringes) or captions (explicitly mentioning a cosmetic procedure) in six out of 15 posts; interestingly, she never presents both a cosmetic procedure in an image and elaborates on it in the caption at the same time. Especially when indicating cosmetic procedures on a visual level, one might expect further elaboration; however, medical information is suppressed in some posts. Therefore, it seems as if the producer of the posts assumes that the audience knows Dr. Emi Arpa and the services she provides in her clinic, which should make these “hints” to cosmetic procedures, such as presenting syringes, understandable. One might also argue that people who follow her on Instagram know about the services she offers. Nevertheless, this creates unclarity regarding several aspects: Where is the medical information, which exact procedures did the portrayed people undergo and are the presented people even her patients? The next sub-sections will aim to explore these matters further.

4.2.1.2. Lack of medical information

Woodstock (2001) already found in her longitudinal study in the late 20th century

that cosmetic procedures are being normalized as medical information is increasingly left out in advertising for procedures. Marianos and colleagues (2013) also claim in their more recent work, that the normalization process of the cosmetic procedure industry is aided by the notion that information regarding procedures is increasingly becoming informal instead of medical. In the sample of analyzed posts, Theresa Schleicher discusses medical information regarding non-surgical cosmetic procedures, meaning how the procedures are conducted on the human body, in five out of 15 posts, while Dr. Emi Arpa only provides medical information in one out of 15 posts. However, when both doctors/practitioners provide explanations related to the procedures, the captions are long (up to 350 words), as medical explanations may generally need longer text. This could be related to the presentation of medical knowledge and expertise, which may increase the perceived credibility of the doctors/practitioners. Several studies found that consumers find information on doctors and their credibility an important criterion when informing themselves about cosmetic procedures (Chen et al., 2015; Park & Allgayer, 2018).

In the remaining posts, which do not explain procedures, both doctors/practitioners use short captions (up to 60 words) and hashtags that do not present medical processes. The short captions could again be explained by the previous speculation of keeping audiences engaged by not losing them while explaining complex medical processes. However, this might also be related to advertising regulations. In the German law on the advertising of medicinal products it states that “Misleading advertising [of medicinal products such as Botox] is forbidden [...], when wrongly an impression is made that success can be guaranteed” (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, 2020, p. 2). If the clinics decide to provide detailed information regarding procedures, they are obliged to explicitly state that no success can be guaranteed by for instance mentioning risks. Interestingly, when explaining procedures in a more detailed manner and when the clinics are providing medical information, both clinics also always mention risks, which is in line with Goodman (2017). However, in the short captions, in which they do not provide detailed information about procedures, they are leaving out medical information such as risks as they are only “hinting” towards procedures.

When further looking into the mentioning of risks, both doctors/practitioners appear cautious in terms of accepting patients in some of their posts as they mention to often say “no” to their patients when they assess a cosmetic procedure to be irresponsible. Therefore, Dr. Emi Arpa and Theresa Schleicher appear as responsible doctors/practitioners. However, when visiting their websites, appointments for consultation are optional and not included in

an appointment for a treatment. Also, when booking appointments for treatments, there is solely a short description of the treatment, but no risks are mentioned (Arpa, n.d.; Schleicher, n.d.), which underlines the commercial nature of cosmetic procedures and is explained further in the following paragraph.

When examining the informal information that is in addition to the medical information, example hashtags are *#filler*, *#lipfiller*, *#russianlips*, *#jawlinefiller* and *#chinfiller*; thus, general non-surgical cosmetic procedure hashtags. Since hashtags enable audiences to browse for specific key terms (Tiggeman & Zinoviev, 2019), both doctors/practitioners probably use the above hashtags as they are searched for frequently on Instagram. The hashtag *#filler* for instance had 2,916,230 posts mentioning it on May 4, 2021 (Instagram, n.d.). Therefore, the clinics increase their chances to be seen by Instagram users who search for these hashtags. In addition to that, both clinics have their own hashtags *#dremi* and *#aestheticmunich* in order to spread the word about their brand on Instagram. Interestingly, both clinics use the similar hashtags *#dremilips* and *#aestheticmunichlips*, which can also be connoted as branding since both clinics are presenting their lip filler services as sort of their trademark. Therefore, these acts of branding can be related to the commercial nature of the cosmetic procedure industry and the unique status that cosmetic medicine has in the field of medicine. This commercial nature aids the normalization process as procedures are not marketed as medical treatments but rather as regular consumer goods and services (Brooks, 2004; Goodman, 2017; Learner et al., 2020; Marianos et al., 2013).

Lastly, the Instagram posts by the clinics often present cosmetic procedures as *art* and employ words such as *sculpture* and *#dremimuse*², which also shifts the focus of cosmetic procedures to another area than medicine. This finding is in line with Brook's (2004) argument that cosmetic procedures advertise "the body as a site of creative self-formation and re-formation, a malleable material through which new identities are forged" (p. 227). There is not only the idea of the doctor as an artist but also the advantage cosmetic procedures entail for the patient, namely, to construct a new identity by altering the body creatively as if it were a sculpture.

4.2.1.3. Influencers

One third of the people shown in the posts of the non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics can be identified, as their Instagram profiles are tagged. When visiting and examining

² My emphasis.

their profiles, the tagged people can be regarded as influencers as they have large followings (in this case ranging from 3,000 to 1 million followers) and collaborate with brands, which is in line with the definition for a social media influencer by Stubb and colleagues (2019). Due to the authenticity and authoritativeness that influencers built among their audiences (Stubb et al., 2019), the clinics might employ these influencers in order to promote the non-surgical cosmetic procedures they offer. This influencer marketing normalizes the procedures in a way that more influencers expose their audiences to non-surgical cosmetic procedure content, resulting in more people knowing influencers, who have undergone non-surgical cosmetic procedures, share their experiences, promote the clinics and, most importantly, show natural results.

Referring back to a previous concern mentioned in section 4.2.1.1., in most of the published posts by the clinics it is not clear which exact procedure was conducted on the influencers as the caption suppresses this information. In some cases, the procedures can be assumed based on extremely full lips and lip fillers being the trademarks of both doctors/practitioners (*#dremilips*, *#aestheticmunichlips*), but the posts leave this open to interpretation. Often, it is not even explicitly mentioned that these influencers actually are patients of the clinic. Rather, the influencers are presented as friends through lots of emotion discourse as introduced by Edwards (1999) (*Figure 12*), which will be further elaborated on in section 4.2.2.



Figure 12

Nevertheless, it can be inferred that the influencers underwent non-surgical cosmetic procedures in the clinics since the images are posted on the clinic's account, on which the main objective is to promote the services. Therefore, the influencers contribute to the normalization process of non-surgical cosmetic procedures by increasingly exposing their audiences to non-surgical cosmetic procedure content and promoting it by showing natural results and positive experiences. Most importantly, the featured influencers on the clinics' Instagram feeds are presented in a disconnected way from the actual cosmetic procedures. They are never shown actually obtaining a procedure or shortly after a procedure was conducted; therefore, it can only be assumed which procedure they underwent, when they got the procedure done and how fresh the result is, how often they visit the clinic, how long they are already a patient in the clinic etc. Instead, the glamour of getting cosmetic procedures done is emphasized. Overall, there is no concrete information as the consumers only know that the influencers go to the clinic; at the same time, the consumers are exposed to the beautiful images of the influencers, which might make them believe that they can achieve the same look as the influencers by visiting the clinics likewise.

4.2.1.4. Alignment with other beauty products

As Mintel (2006) found that the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry is increasingly making efforts to position its services as regular cosmetic routines, some beauty salons already offer regular cosmetic products and treatments in the same place as non-surgical cosmetic procedures. This element of the normalization process, in the sense of aligning cosmetic procedures with other beauty products, can also be found in the dataset of this study. Firstly, both clinics employ hashtags that are not strictly related to non-surgical cosmetic procedures but rather beauty products and services generally, such as *#skincare*, *#skinlove*, *#lipsticklovers* and *#beautylips*. When browsing for these hashtags on Instagram, the most frequent posts indeed include advertisements for cosmetic products or beauty spas that, for instance, offer facials. Interestingly, Clarins and Clinique employ some of the same hashtags in their advertisements. Therefore, this clearly shows an attempt by clinics to present non-surgical cosmetic procedures alongside other regular beauty products and treatments.

Secondly, one of the posts by Dr. Emi Arpa discusses cosmetic products in combination with non-surgical cosmetic procedures.

Extract 6 (Arpa, 2021)

We love juicy lips (1), especially together with a nice expressive lipstick or gloss (2). What is your favorite lipstick/gloss, that highlights your #DrEmiLips (3) in a very special way?

As can be seen in this caption, there is an attempt of presenting both industries as complementary, which is in line with Searing and Zeilig's (2017) findings that cosmetic brands portray (2) their cosmetic products as an addition to non-surgical cosmetic procedures in order to highlight the results of procedures. In the posts by the clinics in this study, the mechanism works in an identical way: (3) The advertising recommends using cosmetic products additionally to non-surgical cosmetic procedures (“#DrEmiLips”) for an optimal effect, in this case (1) “juicy lips”. Furthermore, the blurring of both industries contributes to the normalization process in a way that women consider non-surgical cosmetic procedures as regular element of their beauty routine (Berkowitz, 2017; Woodstock, 2001), by highlighting the results of procedures with non-medical cosmetic products and thus applying both procedures and cosmetic products in combination. This attempt of linking both industries can also be identified in the sample of this study, as can be seen in Extract 7.

Extract 7 (Schleicher, 2021)

Full-Face Treatment means that one optimizes the face. Just like in the case of makeup [...].

Besides the discussion of non-surgical cosmetic procedures together with cosmetic products, Dr. Emi Arpa even has several posts in which she discusses other beauty products such as makeup remover wipes and retinol. This finding can be expected in a sense that cosmetic products are part of the larger beauty industry, in which cosmetic procedures are situated as well. However, a discussion of cosmetic products on the feed of a cosmetic procedure clinic might mislead viewers into thinking that Dr. Emi Arpa also offers beauty services that are not related to cosmetic procedures. In any case, she provides the impression that regular beauty routines should be conducted next to non-surgical cosmetic procedures in order to obtain an optimal result, showing that both cosmetic products and procedures should be combined.

4.2.2. Emotion discourse

When looking at the text in the captions of both clinics, the most common expressions including emotion discourse are *glad that you are there, hello my loves, dearest, my heart* and *I love you*, which appear in nine out of 30 posts in total. The expression *thank you* is also frequent, often accompanied by other words such as *thank you for your friendship, trust and support*. Often, the caption is directly approaching the audience in order to express thankfulness for and appreciation of the community. Most often, the emotion discourse is however directed at the patients that are presented as friends by communicating great love for them, showing viewers that the doctors/practitioners (like to) have close relationships with their patients. In combination with informal language by using the German informal word for “you” [‘du’], the clinics reinforce not only the general trend of informalization but also a personal and friendly relationship with patients, making the doctors appear more approachable. Apart from that, this notion of friends instead of doctors/practitioners and patients also shifts the previously mentioned power relations. Dr. Emi Arpa and Theresa Schleicher reduce the perceived power that they have due to their expertise and knowledge by positioning themselves on an equal level as their patients as well as their audience, who in return will perceive them less as doctors/practitioners. This creation of an equal and friendly relationship may decrease the perception of cosmetic procedures as medical treatments.

When considering the emojis that the clinics employ, the majority (13 out of 30 posts

in total) are hearts or kissing emojis. Hearts can be considered a symbol for love, intensifying the thankfulness and appreciation that the text is aiming to express. Furthermore, Luangrath (2017) found that touching emojis such as the kissing emojis in this case illustrate friendships and intimacy, thereby emphasizing the close and trustworthy relationships that the clinics want to establish and maintain with their patients. Compared to the usage of emojis by the cosmetic product brands, it is noticeable that the clinics have a more personal and emotional approach because of the frequency of hearts and touching emojis. Clinique and Clarins also employ hearts but mostly accompanied with emojis such as water drops and plants, which are used to describe and visualize the properties of the products. This could possibly signify a love for an ingredient or product rather than for the customer. Overall, the emojis of the clinics are generally more focused on human interaction and relationships.

Lastly, Learner and colleagues (2020) discovered that cosmetic procedure advertising often lacks concrete information on procedures which is substituted by emotion discourse. This finding can be confirmed by this study as the number of posts containing emotion discourse (13 posts) outweighs the posts with medical information (six posts).

4.2.3. The choice to maintain youthfulness

Rose (2001) and Smirnova (2012) claim that women are obligated to strive for health and youth. Women are given the power, as well as the choice, to maintain and improve their physical condition and appearance (Rose, 2001), which is not only related to the development of neoliberalism but also post-feminism. According to Rome and colleagues (2020) post-feminism “embraces pervasive neoliberal tenets of personal empowerment, sexual agency, pleasure, and emancipation” (p. 548). The whole idea of neoliberalism and post-feminism circulates around the discourse of choice, which was found by various studies on the advertising for cosmetic procedures (Brooks, 2004; Chibnall et al., 2020; Garnham, 2013; Moran & Lee, 2013); however, the theoretical framework showed that women are often not left with an actual choice due to being subjected to societal expectations to always improve the body and its physical appearance. Nevertheless, advertising draws on post-feminism, presenting women as powerful agents. These findings of female empowerment can be confirmed when investigating the images on Dr. Emi Arpa’s and Theresa Schleicher’s Instagram feeds (*Figure 13*). The women are presented as powerful by for instance lifting their chins which can demonstrate dominance and pride (Pease & Pease, 2004).



Figure 13

However, referring back to the question of whether women are left with a choice, the clinics are not only empowering their audience but also reminding them of the societal expectation to strive for youth, as can be seen in Extract 8. It is clear what is expected, namely, (1) to have a smooth forehead without wrinkles, implying the choice to maintain youthfulness. It is also suggested that a smooth forehead can be achieved if a patient chooses to look young by using (2) Botox. Moreover, there are also examples throughout the posts, in which the clinics formulate imperatives such as *Eat your greens* to remind viewers of their duty to always strive for health and youth.

Extract 8 (Arpa, 2021)

[...] *we hope your day was as nice and smooth as your forehead (1) (thank you Botox (2)).*

Two aspects are interesting to point out when looking at the gendered power relations in advertising. The first aspect is that both clinics often post images in which the lips are in the focus while the rest of the face and body are cut out (*Figure 14 and 15*).

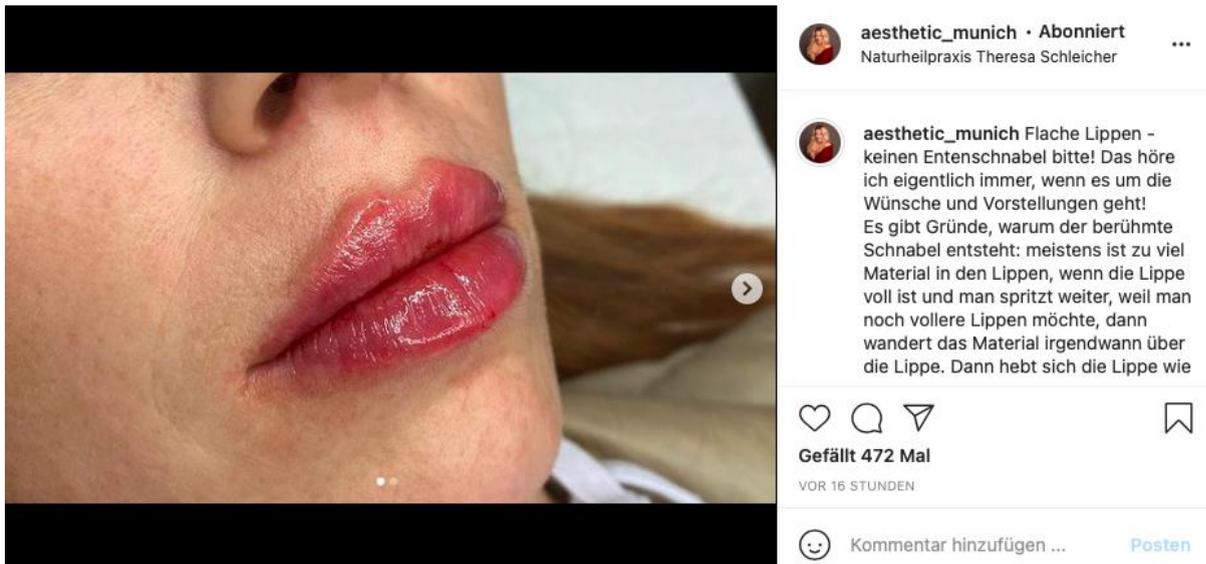


Figure 14

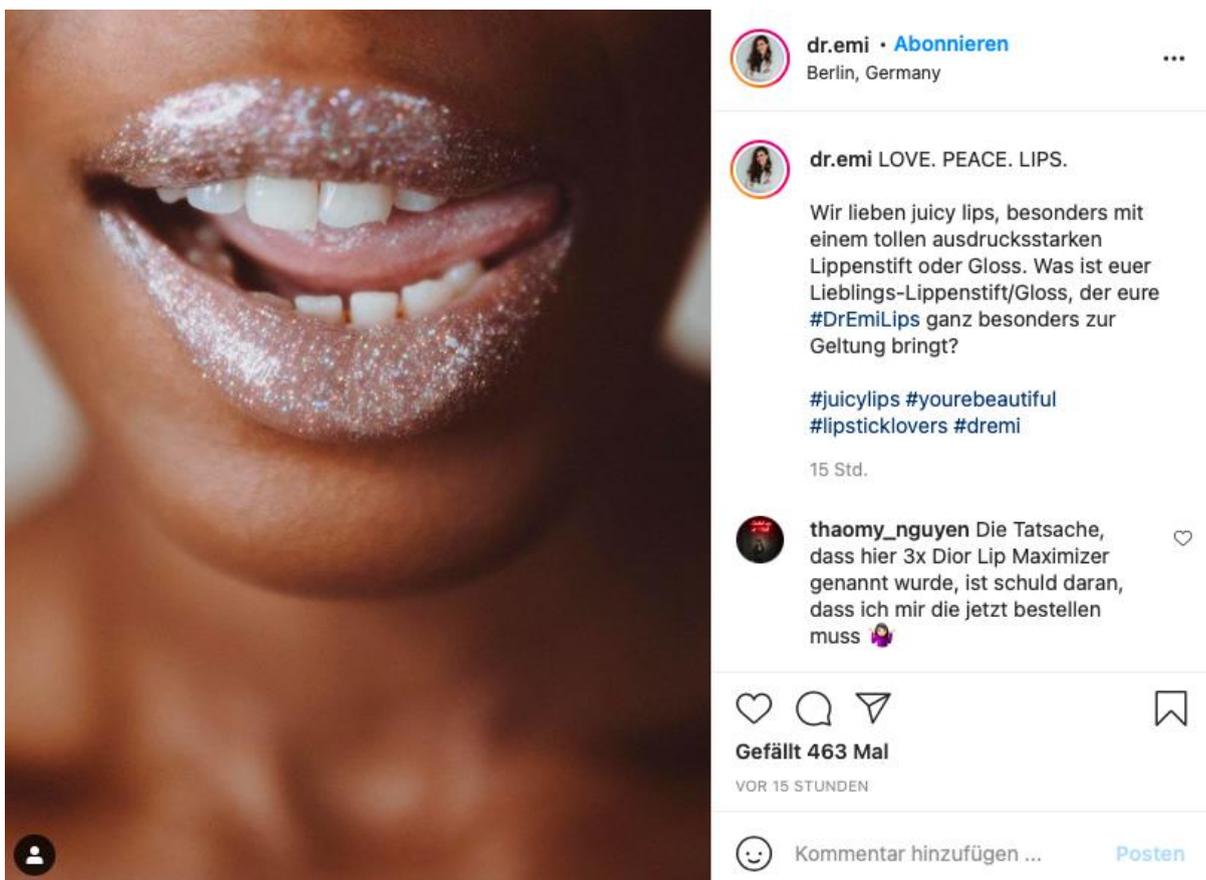


Figure 15

Theresa Schleicher seems to purposefully show the result of her treatment considering that the picture was taken right after the procedure was conducted (Figure 14), which explains the focus on the lips in order to show all the details of the result. Dr. Emi Arpa, however,

chooses to show images on her feed in which women open their mouths and stick their tongues out (*Figure 15*) or carry something in their mouths, which could be connoted as sexualization and objectification (Goffman, 1976). According to Rome and colleagues (2020), sexualization and objectification constitute the depiction of women in advertising in the past and are in contrast to the advanced empowered representation of women in modern advertising; this, however, does not mean that sexualization and objectification are no longer evident. Indeed, Dr. Emi Arpa's posts reveal that female sexuality still seems to play a key role in selling beauty services, including cosmetic procedures, in the present.

The second interesting aspect is that Dr. Emi Arpa also targets men (*Figure 16*); instead of presenting them in the stereotypical masculine way emphasizing strength and muscles, the representation seems more thoughtful and vulnerable by, for instance, resting the head on the arm. This means that the representation of men in advertising is changing towards a more "feminine" and emotional portrayal, which is another aspect that post-feminism aims to sensitize society with (Rome et al., 2020). By openly promoting non-surgical cosmetic procedures for men through images of her previous male clients, she is normalizing the idea of non-surgical cosmetic procedures for men and is thereby also changing the existing hegemony that non-surgical cosmetic procedures and beauty services are mainly socially acceptable for women. This is closely related to the general trend that men are increasingly participating in grooming (McNeill & Douglas, 2011). In the first sentence of the caption in *Figure 16*, however, it states "Yes we also treat men!", making it clear that it is exceptional for men to be interested in cosmetic procedures. Dr. Emi Arpa seems to be aware that it is still not normalized for men to be undergoing cosmetic procedures but by openly aiming to break the stigma, she tries to also approach a male target audience for her services.



Figure 16

4.2.4. Beauty ideals

Previous studies confirm that the cosmetic procedure industry is heavily commercialized by moving medical information in the background and branding in the foreground which aids the normalization process as procedures are not marketed as medical treatments but rather as regular consumer goods and services (Brooks, 2004; Goodman, 2017; Learner et al., 2020; Marianos et al., 2013). However, it is important to consider that cosmetic procedures are elective in nature and consumers have to pay for it themselves; therefore, it is a normal market mechanism that cosmetic procedures are commercialized. Marianos and colleagues (2013) argue that the commercial nature of cosmetic procedures is reinforced through the presentation of cultural beauty standards to be obtainable when undergoing cosmetic procedures. For instance, the advertisements in the sample show women with symmetrical facial features, high cheekbones, thin noses and jaws, unblemished skin and plumped lips, which all confirm Spyropoulou's and colleagues' (2020) findings on common beauty ideals. Furthermore, these depicted beauty ideals are often claimed to be achievable through non-surgical cosmetic procedures, showing that the clinics employ the beauty ideals in order to sell their services. All portrayed people in the Instagram posts also

look youthful as no wrinkles or traces of aging are evident, which confirms the existing literature (Chibnall et al., 2020; Marianos et al., 2013; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018; Saade et al., 2018; Smirnova, 2020) and makes a connection to non-surgical cosmetic procedures as one of their aims is to maintain people's youthfulness. Botox, for instance, is used to prevent or at least slow down the aging process.

Interestingly, Theresa Schleicher only presents white females in the posts of her Instagram feed, confirming other findings in beauty advertising (Ayata & Atasoy, 2019; Frith et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2017; Spyropoulou et al., 2020) as all the patients and models in her posts fit into that category. While Dr. Emi Arpa is already challenging the gendered expectations regarding non-surgical cosmetic procedures by including men in her target group, she also shows three posts in the sample that feature models with a dark skin tone. Therefore, her Instagram feed seems to include more women of color; however, compared to the three dark-skinned models, there are nine white-skinned models, therefore still creating a clear majority. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the face of all three dark-skinned models is either only half visible or entirely cut-out, which could be connoted as objectification (Goffman, 1976) but also inequality between white and black women because only white women's faces are shown entirely within the whole dataset; however, there are also numerous white models with cut-out faces or open mouths, which might as well be connoted as objectifying. More studies are needed in order to understand how women (of color) perceive the presentation of sexualization and racial diversity within beauty advertising as in this study. This is important because female viewers of the advertising might not necessarily perceive sexualization as a negative representation of women; they might as well perceive it as empowering that women can present their sexuality.

When comparing the beauty ideals to the cosmetic product brands, the represented ideals are similar. Both cosmetic product as well as cosmetic procedure advertising claim to help achieve ideals such as youth, unblemished skin and plumped lips. Furthermore, both industries include dark-skinned models in their advertising; however, when considering the sample as a whole, thus all 60 posts of cosmetic product brands and cosmetic procedure clinics together, it is only a small proportion (four posts). In terms of gender, some examples within the sample aim to communicate female empowerment, especially on Dr. Emi Arpa's account. However, the inclusion of all genders, meaning any gender besides female, in the advertising remains minimal, confirming the focus on women in previously studied cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising.

This slow adoption of racial diversity and gender equality could be explained by

considering the producers of the discourse. It is unclear who publishes the Instagram posts for Clinique and Clarins, since both are large corporations. For the clinics, however, Dr. Emi Arpa and Theresa Schleicher are often shown producing content (through e.g., filming themselves), which means that they most probably create the posts themselves or are at least closely involved; also, the clinics are much smaller businesses than the global brands Clinique and Clarins. Considering that both doctors/practitioners are white and female, this might explain the bias towards white and female patients. Lastly, it is also important to consider that discourses of whiteness dominate in Germany. The assumption, which is often covertly conveyed, that white is the norm (including beauty standards) is dominant in Germany as it is the case in most European countries.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures are conceptually linked in advertising on social media by German Instagram accounts of cosmetic brands and clinics. Therefore, Instagram posts were analyzed through a multimodal critical discourse analysis by investigating their images and captions. The following section will be split up into two main parts; firstly, the main results of this study will be presented in order to answer the overarching research question. It will be shown how the medicalization of cosmetic products, the normalization of non-surgical cosmetic procedures, and the blurring boundaries between both industries are depicted in the investigated sample. Secondly, the limitations of this study as well as suggestions for future research on the conceptual linkage between cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures will be highlighted.

One important finding of this study is scientised discourse within cosmetic product advertising. The sample shows various Instagram posts in which the brands use scientised discourse to claim effectiveness of their advertised products, confirming what scholars found previously (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2018; Ringrow, 2016; Smirnova, 2012). Through the usage of scientised discourse, the cosmetic product brands aim to be perceived as experts in the field of cosmetics, constructing them as dependable (Smirnova, 2012) and thus powerful (Foucault, 1980). The consumers, however, are positioned as less knowledgeable laypeople, while the brands decide to present themselves as educators and purveyors of scientific knowledge.

Medical discourse per se could not be found in the sample to a large extent; scientised discourse, which is broader than medical discourse, is more evident. Interestingly, almost no references to the ageing process can be found in the sample, which is in contrast to Smirnova's (2012) findings. Therefore, there are also no indicators of medicalization, in the sense of constructing a non-medical issue as medically deficient or in need of medical intervention, identifiable within the dataset.

However, the cosmetic product brands are borrowing discourses from other industries such as the cosmeceutical industry by stressing the inclusion of *active* ingredients. This might be explained by the fact that cosmeceuticals are positioned as highly effective (Phaiboon-udomkarn & Josiassen, 2014) because they are pharmaceutical (Fowler et al., 2015). Besides borrowing from the cosmeceutical industry, the cosmetic product brands also use discourses from the cosmetic procedure industry as another medical field. Vocabulary related to the great effectiveness of cosmetic procedures reappears in the captions of the sampled cosmetic product brands, which also might be an attempt by the brands to present

their products as equally effective as procedures but also to relate to the same beauty ideals that cosmetic procedures aim to achieve. Most importantly, it can indicate a blurred boundary between the advertising discourses of both industries.

Another important finding of this study is the normalization of non-surgical cosmetic procedures depicted in Instagram advertising by German clinics. This study found several elements contributing to the normalization process. Firstly, non-surgical cosmetic procedures are presented as natural by showing (before-and-) after-pictures that only reveal small changes or by incorporating words such as *optimizing your natural look* in the captions. This makes the procedures seem less invasive, which is in line with previous literature by Woodstock (2001) stating that representation of cosmetic procedures changed from drastic changes to almost invisible results (which also relates to technological advancements). A novel finding by this study is that cosmetic procedures are often not concretely mentioned, meaning that the images often do not show a direct after-treatment-picture but selfies or pictures from professional-looking photoshoots. Often, the images are also “disconnected” from the captions by for instance presenting syringes but not elaborating on cosmetic procedures in the caption. It is also remarkable how syringes are decontextualized in some posts by presenting them similarly to the sampled cosmetic product posts - delicately held by female hands with manicured nails, which lessens the medical connotations. Therefore, cosmetic procedures are rather presented as part of a “regular” beauty routine rather than medical treatments, which is strongly connected to previous findings by Berkowitz (2017) and Woodstock (2001). The sampled posts also show the attempt of the clinics to position their services next to “regular” cosmetic services by discussing topics such as makeup and skincare in their captions, evoking the notion that “normal” cosmetic treatments and non-surgical cosmetic procedures are positioned on the same continuum (Intel, 2006).

Secondly, another element of normalization that was discovered by previous studies (Marianos et al., 2013; Woodstock, 2001), which can also be confirmed based on this study’s sample, is the lack of medical information on non-surgical cosmetic procedures as presented by the clinics. In the majority of posts, the clinics omit information regarding procedures by including short captions with hashtags and emojis. This might be explained by an attempt to keep audiences engaged by not losing them while explaining complex medical processes. It is however important to note that when the procedures were discussed in the minority of posts, the clinics incorporated a discussion of risks, confirming Goodman (2017) and Park and Allgayer (2018), and did not construct procedures as simple, which is in

contrast to Chibnall and colleagues (2020) and Moran and Lee (2013). Interestingly, the majority of posts show attempts of branding by incorporating hashtags promoting the clinics and selling lip fillers as their trademarks (*#dremilips*). This branding relates to the essentially commercial nature of the cosmetic procedure industry as procedures are not marketed as medical treatments but rather as regular consumer goods and services (Brooks, 2004; Goodman, 2017; Learner et al., 2020; Marianos et al., 2013), which are elective and to be paid by consumers themselves.

Thirdly, this study discovered the importance of influencers within the normalization process of cosmetic procedures. One third of the posts by the clinics shows and tag influencers, who supposedly are patients of the advertised clinics. Therefore, the influencers' audiences are increasingly exposed to cosmetic procedure content, experiences in certain clinics and, most importantly, the natural results of the procedures. It is crucial to consider that the featured influencers on the clinics' Instagram feeds are presented in a disconnected way from the actual cosmetic procedure; overall, there is no concrete information besides that the influencers visited the clinics. At the same time, the consumers are exposed to glamorous images of these influencers, which might make them believe that they can achieve the same natural look as the influencers by visiting the clinics likewise.

Considering the aforementioned findings of this study, the research question on how cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures are conceptually linked in advertising on social media by German Instagram accounts of cosmetic brands and clinics will be answered here: besides the aforementioned blurring boundaries between both industries that can be found in this study's sample, it is important to note that the advertising discourses of both the cosmetic product brands and the non-surgical cosmetic procedure clinics are drawing on similar neoliberal as well as post-feminist discourses. Throughout the whole sample, common beauty ideals found by Spyropoulou and colleagues (2020) are confirmed and presented as to be obtainable through the advertised products and services. Moreover, both industries present women as empowered with the right of choosing for cosmetic products as well as cosmetic procedures (Brooks, 2004; Chibnall et al., 2020; Garnham, 2013; Moran & Lee, 2013); simultaneously, the brands and clinics remind women of societal expectations to strive for youth and health. Therefore, the posts in the sample confirm that women constitute the main target group for cosmetic products as well as cosmetic procedures and are consequently also the main group subjected to civic expectations regarding aesthetic perfection. Furthermore, this study touched upon discourses of whiteness as well as sexualization (Rome et al., 2020) that seem to dominate both advertising discourses of

cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures.

After the answer to the research question for this study was given, it is important to consider that this research also has some limitations. Firstly, the sample of four distinct Instagram accounts is rather small. Even though qualitative research does not pursue the goal of generalizability and two cosmetic product brands and two cosmetic procedure clinics were deemed sufficient for comparison purposes, it was challenging in some cases to interpret contradictions. For instance, the sampled posts by Dr. Emi Arpa present cosmetic procedures in a discrete and therefore highly different manner than Theresa Schleicher, whose sampled posts mostly illustrate before-and-after pictures taken in the clinic after a treatment. While these contradictions showed that clinics differ in the way they depict cosmetic procedures, it was challenging in some cases to retrieve a concrete finding as there were only two examples per industry. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to extend the sample of Instagram accounts to be analyzed in order to ensure more grounds for comparison between brands/clinics.

Secondly, this study also only investigated Instagram as a platform. As past studies already extensively investigated advertising of cosmetic products and cosmetic procedures in magazines (Ayata & Atasoy, 2019; Brooks, 2004; Garnham, 2013; Hermans, 2021; Searing & Zeilig, 2017; Woodstock, 2001) and on websites (Chen et al., 2015; Chibnall et al., 2020; Goodman, 2017; Learner et al., 2020; Moran & Lee, 2013; Spyropoulou et al., 2020), it might be interesting to explore other social media channels. TikTok for instance is a highly popular platform among young audiences and known for its playful depiction of entertaining videos, which are also increasingly used by companies for marketing purposes. Therefore, the normalization of cosmetic procedures might also be reinforced on this platform by blurring the boundary to regular cosmetic products and a normal beauty routine, incorporating influencers and displaying procedures as less invasive. An example of a cosmetic surgery clinic using TikTok is Dr. Anthony Youn, who has over a million followers on TikTok and creates lots of content in which he explains cosmetic procedures in a humoristic way (Anthony Youn, 2020).

Thirdly, this study focused on the representation of cosmetic products and procedures by the providers who want to market their products and services. As aforementioned in section 4, the intended meanings by the brands and clinics can only be assumed; the same goes for the effect that these potential meanings may have on the audience. It would be insightful to conduct additional perception studies such as the previous study by Park and Allgayer (2018) on the perception of cosmetic procedure advertising by young audiences.

Future studies could conduct interviews or focus groups regarding the medicalization of cosmetic products, the normalization of non-surgical cosmetic procedures and the blurring boundaries between both industries in advertising in order to understand how audiences construct meaning based on the discursive strategies that this study supposedly uncovered.

Lastly, this study also touched upon topics regarding gendered power relations and racial diversity. It is important to keep Lazar's (2017) aforementioned statement in mind that it might be challenging for Western researchers to make claims regarding cultural as well as ideological differences between her own understanding of meaning and that of potential readers from a different culture or part of the world. In fact, the researcher's nationality, ethnicity, gender and social class might have an impact on the interpretation of findings and the formulation of results. Therefore, the fact that the researcher is Western, white and female might create an (unconscious) bias towards gender and racially sensitive topics. In addition to that, it was not the main aim of this study to focus on these topics; however, when doing CDA these aspects are important to shed light onto as power relations, hegemony and ideology comprise important elements of CDA (Fairclough, 1989; Thompson, 1990). That is why it is suggested to conduct follow-up studies that shift the focus towards gendered and racial representations within both cosmetic product and cosmetic procedure advertising. This study did not construct a thorough theoretical framework surrounding gender and ethnicity specifically to sensitize the researcher sufficiently, which is why future studies could pay more in-depth attention to these aspects within beauty advertising.

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