

The Rare Impact: “Rare Beauty Is as Real as It Can Get on Social Media”

A qualitative study of how Generation Z perceives the portrayal of authenticity in Rare Beauty’s marketing content on Instagram.

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, Selena Gomez founded Rare Beauty, a cosmetics brand that aims to redefine beauty standards by prioritizing mental health and celebrating individuality. Unlike traditional makeup brands, Rare Beauty focuses on authentic representation and diverse initiatives such as the Rare Impact Fund, which supports youth mental health worldwide. The brand’s social media presence is credited for representing different age groups, ethnicities, and abilities, promoting an inclusive community. This thesis explores the perceived authenticity by Generation Z of Rare Beauty’s content and its impact on customer behavior. The research question guiding this study is: *How do Generation Z individuals perceive the portrayal of authenticity in Rare Beauty’s marketing content on Instagram?* Using qualitative in-depth interviews with ten Generation Z participants who actively follow Rare Beauty on social media, the data was analyzed thematically to identify key themes and patterns. The results show that Generation Z perceives Rare Beauty’s content as genuinely authentic and relatable, particularly due to Gomez’s personal engagement and the brand’s commitment to inclusion and mental health. Participants appreciated the brand’s blend of entertainment and meaningful storytelling. They recognized the commercial intent, but also appreciated the transparency and inclusivity that aligned with their values of self-acceptance and social responsibility. This thesis enhances the understanding of how celebrity-led beauty brands can effectively engage Generation Z through strategies based on authenticity and inclusivity. It highlights the importance of genuine storytelling and social responsibility in cultivating a trustworthy brand image in the competitive beauty market.

KEYWORDS: *Authenticity, Beauty, Celebrity, Social Media, Digital Marketing*

PREFACE

Exactly one year ago, I could never have imagined that I would be standing here today with a completed master's thesis and writing about a topic that matches my passion for the beauty industry. With great pleasure and a sense of pride, I hereby present you with my master thesis titled *The Rare Impact: "Rare Beauty Is as Real as It Can Get on Social Media"*. The research process has been an incredibly rewarding journey, full of ups and downs, that has allowed me to deeply explore the realm of authenticity in social media marketing, focusing on a beauty company I have been following since its launch.

This work would not have been possible without the support of the important people around me. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their constant support and encouragement throughout this journey. A special thank you goes to my mom, who tirelessly reviewed my work and helped me look at this thesis from different perspectives during the writing process.

Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Luuc Brans, for his time, expertise, and invaluable advice. I am deeply grateful for your dedication and guidance, without which this thesis would not have been possible.

Stella Gold

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1. Introduction

“This is makeup made to feel good in, without hiding what makes you unique” (Rare Beauty, n.d.). This message on Rare Beauty’s website sums up the fundamental mission of the brand - to embrace the true and unique self and emphasize that it is perfectly acceptable to not conform to society’s ideals of perfection.

In the landscape of contemporary beauty standards, Rare Beauty, founded by singer and actress Selena Gomez, has emerged as a force that challenges conventional beauty norms. As Socrates once stated, “Beautiful things are difficult” (Sisti et al., 2021, p. 2164), emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the concept of beauty. Feminine beauty standards, shaped by cultural nuances, differ around the world and time, with Western society currently emphasizing attributes such as thinness, attractiveness, certain skin tones, hair textures, and facial features, and further specifying ideals such as height, ample bust size, and flawless skin (Frederick et al., 2015, p. 3). Research by Sisti et al. (2021) suggests that individual perceptions of beauty significantly influence judgments of other people’s personalities regardless of their actual attributes (p. 2166), which is consistent with the “beautiful is good” (p. 1) bias documented in studies such as Frederick et al. (2015). In the realm of a growing global industry characterized by influencers and digital platforms, the beauty industry plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of beauty (Amalia et al., 2023, p. 2). As consumers increasingly rely on social media for beauty recommendations, the industry’s influence on beauty standards is becoming ever more apparent (Britton, 2012, p. 5).

Since 2020, the number of celebrity-led beauty brands has increased, which has led to consumers questioning the motives of brands more (Clark, 2023). Rare Beauty claims to set itself apart from an industry that historically upheld restrictive beauty standards by emphasizing the importance of embracing one’s authentic self to promote self-love (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 941). Gomez’s commitment to a world that celebrates individuality is evident not only in the brand’s products but also in its overarching mission. Through its social media presence, featuring people of different ages, looks, and ethnicities, the brand uses authenticity to represent diversity and inclusivity (see Figure 1). Unlike brands that adhere to a single beauty standard, Rare Beauty defines beauty as an authentic expression of self that installs confidence and promotes a healthy relationship with one’s body (Rare Beauty, n.d.). At a time when social media is flooded with “images of perfection that are unrealistic and unattainable“ (Gill, 2023, p. 13), there is an increased desire for authenticity among audiences, especially young women. This thesis will look at the evolving notion of ‘celebrity authenticity’ and how a celebrity’s actions are perceived by their followers to match their true self. Given that Rare Beauty is owned by a globally influential celebrity, this research is particularly relevant (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 173).

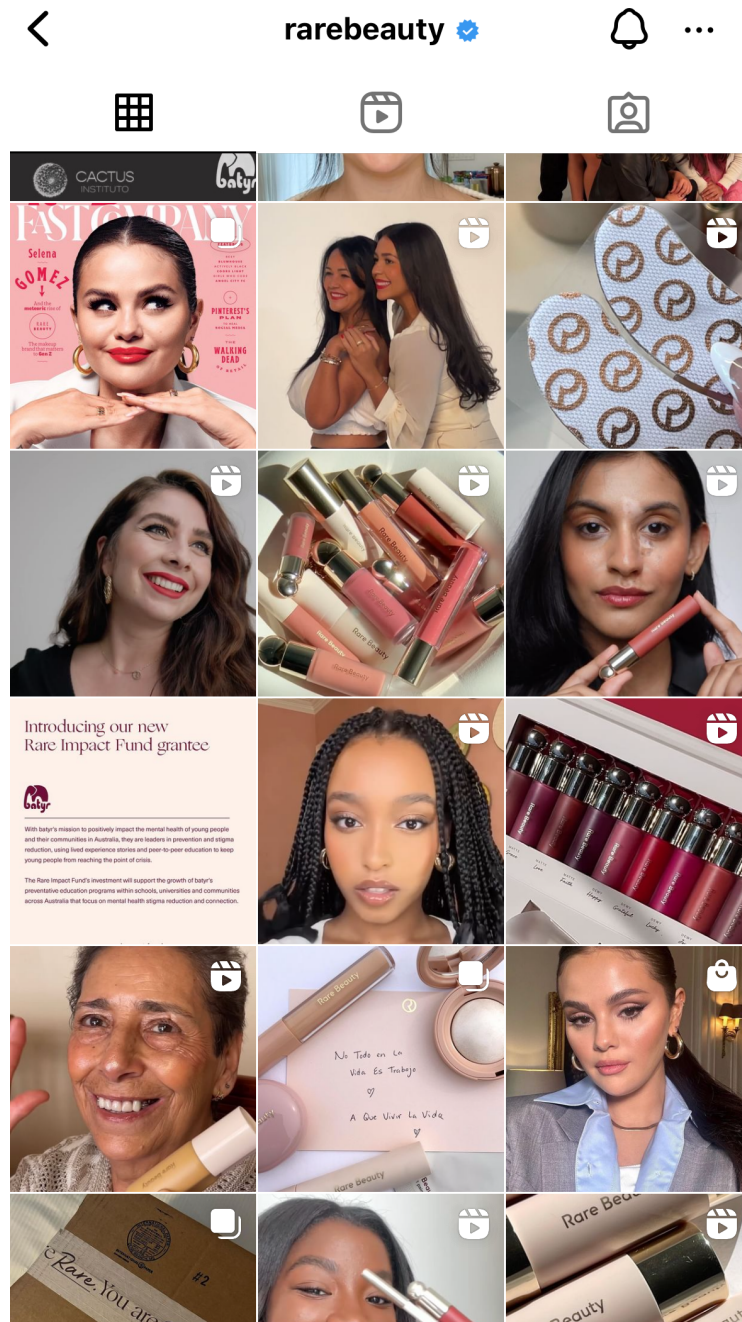


Figure 1. Screenshot of Rare Beauty’s Instagram feed

For this reason, this master’s thesis aims to explore Generation Z’s perception of Rare Beauty’s authenticity and contribute to the understanding of how celebrity beauty brands promote authenticity resonating with younger demographics on social media platforms. Additionally, this study will enhance the understanding of authenticity on social media by conducting interviews and analyzing the literature on this topic. The following research question guides the course of the work: *“How do Generation Z individuals perceive the portrayal of authenticity in Rare Beauty’s marketing content on Instagram?”*.

Beyond its cosmetic offering, Rare Beauty also promotes mental health and wellbeing. The brand actively supports the ‘Rare Impact Fund’, an initiative set up by Selena Gomez to promote

mental health and self-acceptance worldwide (Rare Impact Fund, 2023). The fund aims to improve access to mental health services and educational opportunities for younger generations, helping to destigmatize mental health issues. They are working with funders, donors, and communities to combat mental health stigma and provide critical resources. The campaign is supported by donating 1% of Rare Beauty sales, as well as contributions from philanthropic foundations, individuals, corporate partners, and the community (Rare Impact Fund, 2023).

The openness with which Selena Gomez talks about her own struggles with mental health is a strategic component that emphasizes the brand's portrayal of authenticity. The brand Rare Beauty strives to redefine beauty norms and position itself as a central player. Selena Gomez plays a crucial role in shaping the brand personality and emphasizes authenticity to create a genuine connection with its consumers (Arnesson, 2022, p. 529). One notable aspect of Rare Beauty's approach is its interaction with its audience through various marketing strategies, such as Instagram posts featuring handwritten personal notes from Selena Gomez, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. These messages serve as a constant reminder to cultivate positivity and self-love, trying to create a connection with the brand's audience that consumers may perceive as accessible and genuine. The commitment to social responsibility demonstrates the central role that authenticity plays in the brands' marketing strategy, as the concrete measures are in line with the proclaimed values.



Figure 2. Screenshot Rare Beauty Instagram post **Figure 3.** Screenshot Rare Beauty Instagram post

In the area of social relevance, understanding and effectively utilizing influencer marketing is crucial for brands today, as it allows them to build a real presence in digital communities and enhance perceived brand authenticity (Hugh et al., 2022, p. 3507). In today's digital marketing space, influencer marketing has become a central part of digital marketing, with Instagram being used the most by Generation Z and where almost 50% of the users are female (Dean, 2024). Beyond the business implications, understanding and utilizing influencer marketing is critical to society as it shapes the way people perceive and interact with brands in the digital age. By examining consumer interaction with influencer-led beauty brands, particularly among Generation Z, this study provides insights into broader societal trends and preferences and contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamic between consumers and digital marketing influencers.

In addition to its social relevance, this study is also of academic importance as it addresses a gap in the field of influencer marketing, particularly in the beauty sector. While the existing literature addresses influencer marketing and product endorsement (Belanche et al., 2021, p. 187; Cheah et al., 2024, p. 2), a gap remains in understanding consumer engagement with beauty influencers, with the focus on celebrity influencers, particularly through qualitative aspects. Consequently, this study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how celebrity-led beauty brands, where celebrities act as influencers, utilize digital marketing and how Generation Z perceive such practices. In addition, Rejeb et al. (2022) point to the growing number of research studies on Instagram in recent years and therefore emphasize the need for structured reviews, which further underlines the novelty and importance of this study (p. 2). Moreover, some studies look at the role of influencers as content creators and marketing tools for specific brands (Oliveira et al., 2019, pp. 116-118). However, relatively little research has been conducted from the consumer perspective, particularly regarding the Generation Z demographic.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework, which includes the concepts of authenticity, influencer marketing, and the role of celebrities. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including data collection and thematic analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study, followed by a discussion in Chapter 5 in which these results are interpreted in the context of the existing literature. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings, their implications, and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will look at the key concepts relevant to the research question. This includes conceptualizing authenticity, social media marketing, and the role of celebrities in influencer marketing with a specific focus on Rare Beauty's digital marketing strategy, supplemented by subsections explaining other relevant concepts. This study aims to expand existing theories and provide deeper insights into the topic.

2.1. Conceptualizing Authenticity

Before examining Generation Z's perception of Rare Beauty's authentic advertising, it is crucial to understand the concept of authenticity. What forms authenticity and how is it applied in brand evaluation? How can authentic content be recognized in the vast digital landscape? And what exactly makes the content feel authentic to consumers? Due to its complex nature, there is no universally accepted definition of authenticity, as Schwarz and Williams (2020) said: "Using such a pluralistic concept in one's work requires care and analytical focus" (p. 2). However, its growing importance for today's social values underlines the need for further research. In this thesis, I refer to the term 'authenticity' according to Somogy and Guignon (2023) as the principle of being genuine and truthful to oneself, which is often considered a moral virtue (para. 1.1). This means acting by one's own beliefs and values, which in turn favors sincerity and genuineness in interactions with others (Somogy & Guignon, 2023, para. 1.1). In the modern context, authenticity is seen as a praiseworthy behavior that is valued for its intrinsic worth (Somogy & Guignon, 2023, para. 1.1).

In the context of this work, authenticity refers specifically to the perceived realness of the Rare Beauty brand by Generation Z. In the following section, I will attempt to answer the questions posed above and explain how I arrived at the definition of authenticity for this work based on various theories and approaches. I will then look at the phenomenon of 'being authentic' from the perspective of social media marketing, examining how online content is marketed as authentic and its importance in today's digital marketing. Finally, the importance of authenticity to brand perception will be analyzed and its profound impact on individual perception will be considered. This investigation aims to deepen our understanding of the role of authenticity in contemporary marketing discourse.

2.1.1. Defining Authenticity

Authenticity is a concept that has attracted a great amount of attention in various fields (Lehman et al., 2019, pp. 3-4). A recent Google search for 'authenticity' offered almost half a billion results which underlines its widespread use and the resulting challenge to provide a consistent

definition of the term. Derived from the Greek words *autos* ('self') and *hentes* ('doer', 'being'), *authentikos* means that someone acts on their own initiative (Södergren, 2021, p. 646). Although authenticity has its origins in Western belief, indicating the rejection of conformity and outside influences, its modern use as a synonym for genuineness or sincerity in the English language only came about in the 18th century (Trilling, 1972, p. 12). In the extensive search for an ultimate definition, it becomes clear that scholars use the term 'authenticity' in different contexts and give it different nuances. In all these variations, the term always involves a process of verifying whether something is "real" or "genuine" (Lehman et al., 2019, p. 5). This is consistent with Dutton's (2003) note, that 'authenticity' is a "dimension word" (p. 258) whose exact meaning depends on the context in which it is used. In other words, the meaning of the term remains uncertain as long as the context is unknown.

As the focus of this thesis is on the portrayal of authenticity through the social media marketing strategies of the Rare Beauty brand, the primary 'dimension' under investigation is social media marketing. Consequently, the central investigation revolves around the interpretation of authenticity in this specific area.

2.1.2. Authenticity in Social Media Marketing

With a large user base of more than 5.07 billion people worldwide, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok are the most widely used (Chaffey, 2024). Generation Z (Gen Z) is predominantly engaged with platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with 35% spending more than four hours a day on social media, mainly for entertainment and scrolling (Thomas, 2024). The rise of authenticity in digital marketing has become paramount and a cornerstone of contemporary marketing strategies (Yang et al., 2021, p. 1). This trend underscores the values that consumers prefer in their interactions with today's brands and is considered "the biggest determinant of success" (Oliveira et al., 2019, p. 118). As I previously mentioned, these values include truthfulness, genuineness, and reliability, which have a positive influence on consumers and their interaction with brands (Yang et al., 2021, p. 1). Apart from these aspects, humor is also a powerful and effective marketing tool as it improves consumer perception of the brand (Trinh, 2024, p. 12). According to Trinh (2024), the combination of humor and honesty in marketing communications enhances their positive impact on consumers' brand perception (p. 12).

To understand the nature of brand authenticity, it must be recognized that it is not only a consumer expectation but is also intentionally cultivated by brands as a "strategic way of connecting with consumers" (Guèvremont, 2018, p. 2). In a market characterized by continuous growth and countless competing brands with similar products, authenticity has proven to be a key element in building credibility and trust with customers (Schallehn et al., 2014, p. 192). A study by Thurnell-

Read (2019) illustrates the modern desire for authenticity, where people are looking for real stories and experiences (p. 1462). This also applies to companies that are forced to develop compelling stories about their company, brands, and products (Thurnell-Read, 2019, p. 1462). Success in this context depends on the ability to stand out from the crowd through nuanced storytelling and authentic performances (Thurnell-Read, 2019, p. 1462).

As authenticity is still a broad term, I will now place it in the context of social media. In this context, I understand authenticity, like Cinelli & LeBoeuf (2019), as a “subjective evaluation of genuineness” (p. 41), which is referred to as ‘perceived authenticity’. An authentic person is perceived as more predictable and consistent in their behavior, guided by their inherent identity and principles, thereby reducing perceived risk, and increasing trust (Schallehn et al., 2014, p. 193). In the context of brand authenticity, brands are therefore forced to cultivate an authentic online presence to instill trust, enhance customer perception, and foster loyalty, to remain relevant in the industry.

Having explained brand authenticity, I will now explore authenticity in the realm of online marketing. Creating authenticity in the virtual world is a challenge, but companies can set their brands apart and establish them as genuine and exceptional through the skillful use of social media marketing strategies (Audrezet et al., 2020, pp. 565-566). Social media platforms make it easier for customers to interact with brands and each other and enable shared value creation through shared experiences and feedback (Hasan et al., 2022, p. 874). Brands increase consumer engagement by creating entertaining content and using social media to communicate news and products (Demmers et al., 2020, pp. 67-68). Moreover, the perception of authenticity is reinforced by the level of engagement with social media content and can lead to a positive consumer perception (Hasan et al., 2022, p. 874).

In the area of online advertising in the beauty industry, Duffy’s (2013) description of three key tropes – “promoting natural, organic products, celebrating normal-looking women, and encouraging self-discovery” (p. 132) - serves as a valuable framework for understanding the use of authenticity in this thesis. Findlay’s (2019) term “aspirational realness” (p. 1) can be derived from this, which means that the product or person presented is real and authentic, but also contains an element of aspiration for something better or desirable, which can be attractive to the consumer.

The rise of authenticity in digital marketing represents a fundamental shift in consumer preferences, bringing values such as truthfulness, genuineness, and reliability to the forefront of brand interactions. The understanding of brand authenticity as a subjective evaluation of genuineness is of crucial importance for this master’s thesis, as it influences consumer trust and perception and ultimately shapes brand loyalty.

2.1.3. The Role of Authenticity in Social Media for Generation Z

As Gen Z was selected as the interview participants for this thesis, a brief introduction to this generation will be provided. Defining generations has long been problematic, as the age groups overlap considerably, making it difficult to precisely determine their common characteristics in comparison to other generations (Kertzer, 1983, p. 130). To make a general estimate of the officially recognized age range Gen Z includes people born between 1997 and 2012 (Beresford Research, 2024). It is known as the largest generation ever, as it makes up almost 30% of the world's population, and 98% own a smartphone (GilPress, 2024). This serves as a relevant factor to interviewing Gen Z individuals for the purposes of this study as they also grew up with internet and social media technology. Still, they are the best-educated generation yet, with great awareness of the climate crisis (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). According to the Pew Research Centre Gen Z is a group that is "almost constantly" online regarding their social media use (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

The following section shows what an important role authenticity plays in social media for Generation Z, as it highlights how pervasive societal ideals disseminated through social media can influence women's perceptions of self and others and emphasizes the desire for genuine and authentic representations to promote healthier online environments. The majority of Rare Beauty's target group are women (Rarebeauty.com, 2024), a detail that is explained in more detail in the Methodology chapter. This paragraph therefore places greater emphasis on how authenticity in social media affects young female consumers. Three key factors primarily influence young women: peers, parents, and the media through beauty ideals and comparisons (Walker et al., 2019, p. 3355). Platforms such as Instagram, which favor visual content over text, often prompt users to engage with comments about appearance (Walker et al., 2019, p. 3356). Increased social media use has been linked to heightened body image concerns and eating disorders, with Instagram considered particularly damaging to young people's mental health and well-being (Walker et al., 2019, p. 3356). Daily exposure to edited content on social media encourages self-comparison and contributes to how individuals are perceived in society with negative body image, lower self-esteem, and an increased risk of depression and anxiety (Henriques & Patnaik, 2021, para. 1-3; Walker et al., 2019, p. 3356). Regardless of the product advertised on social media, women tend to focus more on the model shown in the advertisement than on the actual value of the product (Amalia et al., 2023, p. 12). This phenomenon contributes to women experiencing body image issues at an early age, promotes the desire for social acceptance, and the idea that a slim body is the perfect and ideal body type (Henriques & Patnaik, 2021, para. 2-5).

There is a huge demand for authenticity and open discussions about mental health issues, which means that people value brands that are genuine and authentically stand for a meaningful cause (Brown, 2023). Authenticity is seen to strengthen the personality by focusing on genuine self-expression and showing everyday imperfections, creating space for more diversity and inclusion

(Duffy, 2017, pp. 159, 170). This perspective particularly resonates with Gen Z, who value genuine and relatable content in the social media environment (Thomas, 2024). Gen Z exhibits a proactive approach to exploring new brands and discerning authenticity, favoring content that aligns with brand identity (Thomas, 2024). This generation's extensive social media presence offers opportunities for connections and marketing, highlighting the demand for genuine engagement and open discussions about meaningful causes like mental health. In the 2023 Gen Z segmentation study by EY, a multinational professional services partnership, authenticity was the most important personal value, with 91% of respondents saying it was extremely or very important (EYGM, 2023, p. 19). Gen Z may have negative feelings about social media, associating it with poor mental health, but they still value it for its role in seeking support and fostering a sense of connection (Coe et al., 2023). As Duffy (2017) said, the appeal to authenticity is at the heart of advertising messages (p. 155). In the context of this thesis, authenticity therefore refers specifically to the authenticity perceived by Gen Z, which is generated by the Rare Beauty brand through marketing strategies.

2.2. Audience Perceptions in Social Media Marketing

O'Reilly (2007) details the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, emphasizing the transition from static to interactive platforms and the transition from passive to active audience participation (p. 17). According to a Pew Research Center study, over 81% of teens see social media to stay connected to their friends' lives and 69% to better anticipate their friends' feelings (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). In addition, approximately 68% of young adults surveyed stated that social media supports them during difficult times (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Despite the appeal of the seemingly free nature of social media, it is important to recognize that its 'free' status is primarily driven by business motives (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018, p. 1).

But what does audience perception mean in this context? Here, the audience refers to social media users, emphasizing how social media influences their perceptions of marketing strategies' effectiveness. This aligns with the earlier discussion on the subjective motivations behind social media usage. One definition of audience perception describes it as the personal interpretation that a viewer applies to media content to derive a meaning that is shaped by the individual's sociocultural background (Crouse, 2017, p. 4; Freeman et al., 2009, p. 191). According to Hall (1980), encoding refers to the creation of a message by the sender and involves the selection of signs and symbols to convey specific meanings (pp. 117-118). Decoding is the interpretation and understanding of the encoded message by the audience based on their cultural background and experiences (Hall, 1980, pp. 117-118). Hall discusses encoding and decoding as interconnected processes that are not necessarily equivalent or predetermined (Hall, 1980, pp. 117-118). The audience decodes social media by actively engaging with content, analyzing language and sentiment, and forming an image

of brands based on their online presence (Ludwig & De Ruyter, 2016, p. 1). Brand perception in the context of social media refers to how the audience perceives and evaluates a brand based on its online presence, communication strategies, and interactions on social media platforms (Ludwig & De Ruyter, 2016, pp. 124, 130). By understanding how customers interpret and engage with social media, companies can adapt their communication strategies to effectively reach and engage with their target audience (Ludwig & De Ruyter, pp. 125, 131).

This next chapter discusses influencer marketing, its differences and parallels with celebrity endorsement, the case description that entails Rare Beauty's digital marketing strategy, and the central role of audience perception in these domains.

2.2.1. Definition and Evolution of Influencer Marketing

In today's business world, social technology is considered a "given in business" (Evans et al., 2021, p. 3), with influencer marketing, which is rapidly expanding in the marketing landscape, attracting much attention in marketing research (Harrigan et al., 2021, p. 2). An influencer is someone who expresses their opinion on products, services, and brands via social media platforms, taking on the role of an opinion leader who engages with extensive networks of followers (Harrigan et al., 2021, p. 2). Moreover, online influencers utilize platforms like Instagram and TikTok to blog, vlog, or create short-form content, portraying their daily lives and opinions (Leung et al., 2022, p. 228). They maintain active relationships with followers by interacting regularly and responding to comments (Leung et al., 2022, p. 228). Social media influencers are highly attractive to brands as they are perceived by consumers as personal, authentic, credible, and comprehensible sources of information (De Veirman et al., 2017, pp. 800-802). Their extensive network gives brands access to a large target audience (De Veirman et al., 2017, pp. 800-802).

This emerging sector of influencer marketing illustrates the general shift from traditional to digital consumer purchasing behavior. The shift from traditional to digital consumer purchasing behavior. The linear progression presented in the traditional marketing funnel (see Figure 4) has become less relevant as consumers no longer strictly adhere to the individual steps when purchasing (Noble et al., 2010, p. 2). Instead, recommendations from influencers and trusted individuals have become more important (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019, p. 251). As a result, word of mouth has become a decisive factor in purchasing decisions. Meanwhile, electronic word of mouth has overpowered the traditional word of mouth, therefore hashtags play an important role in this dynamic (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019, p. 252; Kumar et al., 2022, p. 1404).

The field of influencer marketing has seen explosive growth, evolving into a multi-billion-dollar industry that includes millions of influencers across various sectors (Le & Aydin, 2022, p. 449;

Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 82). Within this scope, the beauty industry is proving to be a particularly popular area for influencer engagement, offering influencers the opportunity to collaborate with prestigious brands or launch their own successful ventures (Britt et al., 2020, p. 111). As consumers navigate through a vast amount of brand recommendations daily, brands are actively seeking key strategies to cultivate authentic partnerships with their audience through influencers (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, pp. 85-86). When influencers work with companies, they are responsible for actively engaging their followers, promoting the company's offerings, and influencing followers' mindsets and behavior (Leung et al., 2022, p. 228). Over time, influencer marketing moved beyond mere recommendations to include sponsored content, product placements, and influencer-created material (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 82). The selection of influencers who focus on authenticity and trust emphasizes the importance of genuine connections between influencers and the products they recommend that align with the expectations of the target audience (Leung et al., 2022, p. 237). Furthermore, influencer marketing today includes various forms such as influencer partnerships, affiliate marketing, and influencer-created content (McKinsey & Company, 2023).



Figure 4. Traditional marketing funnel (Patel, n.d.)

2.2.2. *The Influence of Celebrities and Social Media Personalities on Consumer Behavior*

Consumers' fascination with celebrities has long influenced their purchasing decisions, and brands are capitalizing on this by using celebrities as advertising partners to shape perceptions and increase the popularity of their products (Hussain, 2020, p. 3; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, p. 345). Similarly, social media influencers, who are known for their expertise and large followings, have a significant impact on consumer behavior and build trust with their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 59; Yuan & Lou, 2020, p. 133). While there is some overlap between celebrity endorsement and

influencer marketing, the main difference lies in the level of trust that followers place in influencers. According to McCracken (1989), a celebrity endorser is “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (p. 310). Consumers are often misled by influencers’ motives for advertising their products and may not realize that there is a formal, paid agreement between brands and influencers, especially if this is not transparently disclosed in the advertising (Acm, 2024). Similarly, celebrity endorsements do not always lead to increased sales as they may not align with the product, which underlines the importance of selecting celebrities that match the brand’s identity and values (Ahmed et al., 2015, p. 2; De Lamônica Freire et al., 2018, p. 291; Khan & Lodhi, 2016, p. 104). Moreover, the perception of brands by consumers can diminish if a celebrity advertises several brands inconsistently (Kennedy et al., 2021, pp. 2075-2076). Nevertheless, such collaborations generate enthusiasm and increase brand awareness, which can have a positive impact on customers’ expectations of the brand (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019, pp. 105-106).

A social media influencer with many followers and influence is often considered a social media celebrity (Lina et al., 2022, p. 2). Social media celebrities gain their fame directly through online platforms, bypassing traditional institutional intermediaries, as they become known through their online presence (Brooks et al., 2021, p. 528). In contrast, fame in the traditional sense is associated with individual achievements, such as success in the entertainment industry, independent of advertising measures (Brooks et al., 2021, p. 529). A good example of this is Selena Gomez, who first became famous as an actress and singer through her work with Disney. However, she is also known as a social media celebrity and is still the woman with the most followers on Instagram with 429 million followers. Her social media prominence is due to her successful career in the entertainment industry and the fact that she is a generally popular celebrity among adolescents (Ouvrein et al., 2018, p. 265).

Several factors contribute to consumers being influenced by celebrity endorsers, including credibility, appeal, and expertise, all of which increase purchase intent (Jamil & Hassan, 2014, pp. 4-6). Famous social media personalities, who are considered more credible and influential than traditional celebrities due to their perceived authenticity, can significantly increase product awareness and appeal to consumers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018, p. 1442, Lina et al., 2022, pp. 2,6). It can be concluded that a celebrity with a positive public image can significantly increase awareness and appeal of the advertised product, which ultimately leads to increased consumer interest (Khan & Lodhi, 2016, p. 104).

Beyond mere endorsements, some celebrities venture into entrepreneurship, creating products aligned with their personal ethos and aspirations, which is referred to as ‘celebrity entrepreneurship’ (Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 2073; Teng et al., 2020, p. 3). The credibility of celebrity

CEOs has a significant impact on the brand image (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2021, p. 639). While the credibility of a celebrity enhances a brand through endorsement, this credibility can only have a positive impact on fans' attitudes toward a celebrity company, not those who are considered 'non-fans' (Teng et al., 2020, p. 6). Moreover, customers will develop a more favorable attitude towards a celebrity's business venture if they perceive an alignment between the celebrity and the venture (Teng et al., 2020, p. 6). Consequently, while celebrity credibility promotes a positive attitude toward the brand among fans, it may not have a direct influence on the purchasing behavior of non-fans (Teng et al., 2020, p. 7).

Linking celebrity endorsements back to authenticity shows that consumers can scrutinize celebrities and accuse them of only supporting a brand for financial reasons rather than truly believing in the product or brand (Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 2077). Consequently, consumers show a more positive attitude and behavioral intentions when they perceive a celebrity and their engagement with a brand as authentic rather than inauthentic (Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 2093). Therefore, this discourse is also used to examine whether Selena Gomez's celebrity status influences the followers of Rare Beauty.

2.3. Contradiction Celebrity vs. Authenticity

Returning to the interaction between authenticity and celebrity, this connection points to a potential contradiction, as celebrity status is often associated with exclusivity (Giles & Rockwell, 2009, p. 185). This exclusivity may make the notion of inclusivity, which is associated with discussions about authenticity, obsolete (Foster, 2022, p. 9). This section explores this issue in more detail by examining the evolving relationship between authenticity and celebrity in social media.

The intersection of 'celebrity authenticity' in marketing presents a paradox worth exploring. More recently, marketing literature has increasingly focused on the authenticity of people, especially celebrities (Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 2073). According to Kennedy et al. (2021), consumers tend to react more positively to brands owned by celebrities than to celebrity endorsements (p. 2074). While authenticity is revered as the cornerstone of contemporary marketing strategies, celebrity endorsements bring elements of perceived artificiality and commercial interest (Khan & Lodhi, 2016, p. 104). Despite this dichotomy, brands often use celebrities to enhance their authenticity and credibility, blurring the lines between genuine representation and promotional efforts.

At the heart of this contradiction is the tension between consumer trust and commercial influence. On the one hand, consumers are attracted to brands endorsed by celebrities they admire, seeing these endorsements as validation of the product's quality and appeal (Chan et al., 2013, p. 168; De Lamônica Freire et al., 2018, p. 291). On the other hand, the authenticity of such

endorsements is often questioned as audiences speculate about the sincerity of the celebrity's endorsement and the underlying motivations (Khan & Lodhi, 2016, p. 104). The emergence of celebrity-owned brands continues to blur the lines between authenticity and commerciality. Even though celebrities seek to express their true selves through entrepreneurial ventures, the success and credibility of these businesses are dependent if the customer is a fan of the celebrity and if the business aligns with the celebrity (Teng et al., 2020, p. 6). Tolson (2001) adds another layer to the concept of authentic celebrity, referring to it as "moral justification" (p. 456), in addition to credibility. This dimension can be described as the use of fame for altruistic purposes. Tolson (2001) even goes so far as to describe it as "humanitarian" (p. 456) and to extend its scope to the whole world. In terms of Rare Beauty and Selena Gomez, the brand's mission-oriented approach, which aims to improve access to mental health services and education for youth worldwide (Vega, 2024), aligns with Tolson's concept of moral justification. While Selena Gomez appears authentic on paper, the crucial question remains: is this perception reflected by Generation Z in reality?

While influencers are celebrated for their perceived authenticity and relatability, their strategic partnerships with brands often call into question the authenticity of their endorsements. Ultimately, the contradiction between authenticity and celebrity highlights the complex interplay between consumer perception, brand identity and marketing strategies. In the context of Rare Beauty and Selena Gomez, the intersection of authenticity and celebrity gains additional meaning. Rare Beauty embodies her values and personal ethos and offers a compelling image of authenticity in the beauty industry. However, the extent to which consumers perceive this authenticity is influenced by the perception of Gomez as a celebrity and entrepreneur.

2.4. Case Description: Rare Beauty's Digital Marketing Strategy

Given the specific focus of this research, this section is dedicated to describing the case: Rare Beauty's digital marketing strategy. Rare Beauty achieved annual net sales of over 400 million dollars in the last 12 months leading up to February 2024, catapulting it to an enterprise value of 2 billion dollars (Jordan, 2024). To get behind the reasons for Rare Beauty's success, it is important to investigate the details of their strategy. Selena Gomez, the founder of Rare Beauty, has created a remarkably inclusive space with the launch of the brand, outlined by the tagline "Makeup made to feel good in" (Rare Beauty, n.d.). Rare Beauty distinguishes itself by offering a cosmetics line that is accessible to all people who want to emphasize their uniqueness and feel good in their own skin (Valby, 2023). In the 2020 promotional video, a variety of models were presenting the brand to emphasize the inclusivity of the make-up line (see Figure 5). In the background of the video, Selena Gomez spoke about the deeper meaning and beauty behind the word 'rare', which "eliminates all of the perfectness" (Rare Beauty, 2020). The central message is: You are authentic, meant to be who

you are, and truly rare (Rare Beauty, 2020). Efendi & Hardjanto (2023) emphasize the importance of using specific types of sentences to create positive beauty campaigns, which are crucial to appeal to the audience and promote beauty awareness (pp. 189-190).



Figure 5. Picture of models and Selena Gomez during promotional video shoot (Rodriguez, 2022)

Rare Beauty's YouTube ad meets the criteria for positive campaigning, as demonstrated by using uplifting phrases to promote positive beauty, as Efendi & Hardjanto (2023, p. 188) state. Rare Beauty chooses its language for its marketing strategy very carefully, which is reflected in the names of its products: Hope, Happy, Joy, Love, Cheer, and Truth (Cover Media, 2024).

Rare Beauty's campaigns focus largely on digital marketing and attribute their success to an unconventional and distinctive marketing approach (Cucu, 2023). When Rare Beauty made its debut amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, the company fully embraced the emerging platform TikTok and utilized its viral potential to promote its products (Morrison, 2024). The brand began creating content tailored to the platform's audience, emphasizing authenticity, and implementing a four-pillar TikTok marketing strategy that included product showcases, humorous and relatable POV scenarios, inspirational mental health education videos featuring Selena Gomez, and community request tutorials (Cucu, 2023). A key feature of the brand's marketing strategies is the inclusion of human elements in its content, for example featuring human voices and faces in their videos (Cucu, 2023). Gomez takes center stage as the heart of the brand image and brings a spirit of relatability to Rare Beauty, which has taken on an identity that transcends Gomez herself (Valby, 2023). In addition to using TikTok to engage its audience, Rare Beauty also showcases a variety of content on its Instagram page, including images, graphics, reels, and user-generated content (Jaramillo, 2023). Throughout its social media presence, the brand places a strong emphasis on storytelling, not only

focusing on Selena Gomez and her journey to mental health but also telling the stories of people who use their products (Jaramillo, 2023).

Although Selena Gomez is at the center of Rare Beauty, around whom the brand's story revolves and who showcases her beliefs and aspects of her life, Rare Beauty is more than just a celebrity brand. Gomez's mission in creating this brand was to challenge the beauty industry's standards of perfection (Patel, 2022). She achieves this by personally filming numerous videos for the brand's social media platforms, many of which are inspired by her personal journey, experiences, and challenges (Davidson, 2023). The result: Rare Beauty is characterized by its personal and relatable approach. While some may doubt Selena Gomez's makeup skills, her lack of them makes her story more relatable than a complicated task for millions of followers who prefer makeup as a simple and enjoyable part of their routine (Rodriguez, 2022). Uploading short videos of 10 to 15 seconds duration is one of the smart marketing moves, considering that the attention span is decreasing among the audience (Davidson, 2023).

Talking about health issues in general and specifically being vocal about mental health issues is a major part of their marketing strategy. This approach reflects Selena Gomez's commitment to mental health and enhances the brand's authenticity. For instance, the brand's Instagram posts often highlight the #WeAre campaign, which encourages people to share stories about what makes them "rare" (Chia, 2020). Ultimately, Rare Beauty's marketing goes beyond product promotion and emphasizes topics such as mental health that resonate with its target audience. This approach makes the brand appealing to consumers who feel supported by its values (Rodriguez, 2022). Backed up by products that have time and time again proven themselves to be some of the best in today's market (Asafu-Adjaye, 2023).

Rare Beauty's strategic marketing plans also include considering the shift from traditional to digital consumer purchasing behavior. The traditional marketing funnel (see Figure 5) now represents an outdated view of the marketing process, with recommendations from influencers and trusted individuals becoming increasingly important as deciding factors in purchasing decisions (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019, p. 251). Online hashtags have become just as important, exemplified by campaigns like #RareRoutine, which encourages users to share their favorite or most frequently used products from the brand (Rodriguez, 2022). Examining the brand's digital marketing strategy is important to understand how participants in this study interact with and perceive Rare Beauty's social media activity.

The theoretical framework provides a comprehensive overview of the key concepts and their relevance to the research question. By understanding the multi-layered nature of authenticity, influencer marketing, and the role of celebrities, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how these elements intersect and influence Generation Z's perception of Rare Beauty.

3. Methodology

This chapter explains the methodological choices made in collecting and analyzing data to answer the research question. First, the reasons for choosing qualitative research methods, in particular in-depth interviews, for this study are explained. The sampling procedure is then outlined, including a profile of the ten people involved in the study. It also details the operationalization of the research question and explains how the exploration of experiences with social media sites could be made tangible. Finally, the measures taken to ensure the credibility and validity of the results are presented.

3.1. Research Design

In this study, a qualitative approach is used to explore students' perception of Rare Beauty's Instagram social media account. The qualitative method was chosen because it can decipher the nuances of individual opinions and meanings, providing a comprehensive understanding that quantitative approaches may overlook and allow for flexibility (Mack et al., 2005, pp. 3-4). Using in-depth interviews, this study aims to explore the multifaceted perceptions of Rare Beauty's online practices to portray authenticity. Semi-structured interviews will be designed for a less formal and rigid format, aiming for a conversational style that facilitates discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee (Holloway, 2005, p. 39).

The use of a qualitative approach in conjunction with interviews allows this study to explore the complexity of Rare Beauty's social media practices and the underlying factors of how Gen Z connects with the company and how they perceive them. The nuanced insights that emerge from this methodology will contribute to a better understanding of online practices in the context of recent social media marketing tactics and the evolving dynamics of authenticity within the beauty industry.

In the next paragraph, I will explain why Gen Z is the target group of the people I will be interviewing. Millennials and Gen Z are well-acquainted with the digital realm, with Gen Z even being coined 'digital natives' by Munsch (2021, p. 11) due to their daily exposure to technologies such as the internet and mobile devices (p. 11). Considering that these two generations are the main users of social media, there is a strong reason to choose Gen Z as the focus of this analysis. Gen Z is characterized by an increased willingness to take risks and individualism, a global outlook, and a strong educational background (Maioli, 2016, pp. 4, 7). Despite their openness, this generation is experiencing a notable rise in anxiety and depression, due in part to social media, where constant comparisons with others online contribute to these mental health challenges (Schenarts, 2020, p. 5). Generation Z is very concerned about the impact of social media on mental health (Twenge & Campbell, 2019, p. 312). This unease is primarily due to fears about the use of beauty filters, the idealized portrayal of influencers, and the widespread dissemination of inaccurate and misleading

information on various social media platforms (Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2018, p. 119). Members of Gen Z actively seek help from mental health professionals more than any other demographic and are willing to openly discuss these challenges (Schenarts, 2020, p. 5). Gen Z was therefore selected as the most suitable target group for my interviews.

3.2. Data Sampling

For this study, the sample must fulfill a few criteria. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a method in which the researcher deliberately selects individuals who are expected to provide relevant and valuable insights that are consistent with the theoretical research problem and questions (Campbell et al., 2020, pp. 653–654). This approach is intended to increase the depth of understanding of the study (Campbell et al., 2020, p. 653). The researcher contacted the participants via WhatsApp in November 2023 with a short message briefly explaining the study and asking a few questions to confirm that they met the requirements:

Hi! I hope you're doing well! I'm working on my thesis about how Generation Z perceives Rare Beauty's portrayal of authenticity. If you're familiar with the brand and the beauty industry, and you follow Rare Beauty on Instagram, I'd love to interview you. Even if you don't currently follow them, you can start now and still participate. Your insights would be incredibly valuable to my research. Would you be interested in participating in an interview for my thesis? Thanks a lot, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best, Stella

Generation Z participants were selected based on the demographic overlap with Rare Beauty's primary customer base, typically people between the ages of 18 and 34 (see Figure 6). In addition, Gen Z was selected as a target group because 42% of them have been diagnosed with a mental illness, a key issue examined in this study (Ascend Healthcare, 2024). Therefore, this generation provides an interesting lens through which to examine the intersection of social media influences and their perceptions of marketing content on social media. To provide a rich flow of information related to Rare Beauty's social media activity, participants needed to follow Rare Beauty's Instagram account. As this paper examines user perceptions on Instagram, respondents needed to meet the criteria of having accounts on Instagram and being active users of the platform. While Rare Beauty's brand appeal isn't exclusively female, my theoretical focus on women made gender a relevant criterion for selecting the sample. This study investigates the experiences of ten participants of varying ages, nationalities, locations, and gender will be interviewed. The participants were or still are university or college students in various fields, are familiar with the Rare Beauty brand, and follow Rare Beauty on Instagram. The interviews were conducted in English, primarily in

person, but also via Facetime for participants living in other countries where a face-to-face meeting was not possible.

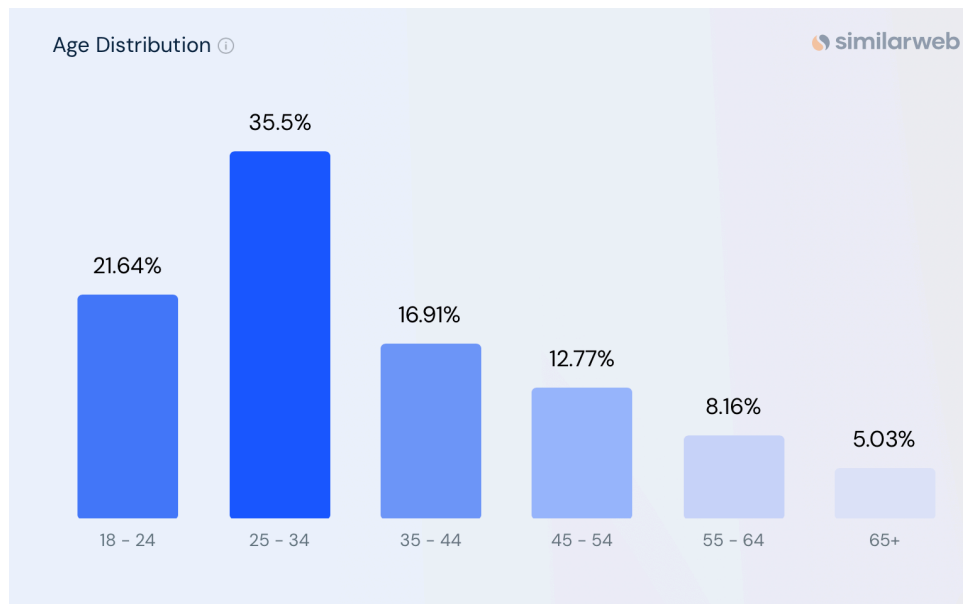


Figure 6. Rare Beauty website traffic demographics (Rarebeauty.com, 2024)

Eight of the ten interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted 40 minutes on average, with the shortest lasting 30 minutes and the longest lasting 45 minutes. The participants included nine women and one man. I primarily chose women as interviewees because Rare Beauty’s audience is predominantly female, which is more in line with the theoretical focus and makes the thesis more relevant. While eight participants lived in the Netherlands, two lived abroad and represented different national backgrounds (see Table 1 for detailed demographic data of the participants). The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 26 years, with an average age of 23 years. All participants were university students from various disciplines such as media, business administration, and psychology, some of whom worked part-time alongside their studies and one of whom had a full-time job. All participants were familiar with the Rare Beauty brand and actively followed it on Instagram. Six participants were based in Rotterdam, which allowed for face-to-face interviews, while others were interviewed in Germany, with two interviews conducted online via Facetime. All interviews were conducted in English. Finally, as the brand appears to target women in its marketing and 81.21% of its audience is female (see Figure 7), the study’s theory on the impact of social media on young people focuses primarily on women’s perceptions (Rarebeauty.com, 2024).

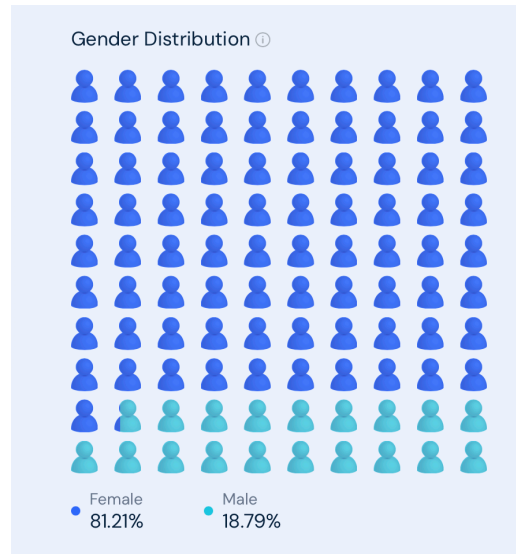


Figure 7. Rare Beauty’s audience gender distribution (Rarebeauty.com, 2024)

PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER	LOCATION	NATIONALITY	OCCUPATION	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	DATE
EMILY	22	Female	Netherlands	Spanish/ French	Student, Road Transport Controller	Postgraduate at University	08.04.2024
DANIEL	25	Male	Netherlands	Croatian	Student, Employee at Supermarket	Postgraduate at University	08.04.2024
JESSICA	25	Female	Netherlands	Croatian/ Dutch	Student, Employee at Fitness Center	Postgraduate at University	02.04.2024
OLIVIA	22	Female	Jordan	Jordanian	Student	Postgraduate at University	25.04.2024
HANNAH	22	Female	Netherlands	Dutch	Student, Employee at Clothing Store	Postgraduate at University	09.04.2024
RACHEL	26	Female	Germany	German	Working Student	Undergraduate at University	18.04.2024
LAUREN	24	Female	Netherlands	German	Student	Postgraduate at University	18.04.2024
SOPHIE	24	Female	Netherlands	Italian/English	Working Student, Event Planner	Postgraduate at University	08.04.2024
KATIE	23	Female	Netherlands	Dutch	Online Marketeer	Postgraduate at University	09.05.2024
SARAH	23	Female	Netherlands	South African/ Cypriot	Student	Postgraduate at University	13.05.2024

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

3.3. Operationalization

Operationalization was applied in the creation of a comprehensive set of interview questions that aligned with the theoretical framework. The formulation of these questions aims to create a conversational environment that allows participants to seamlessly engage in the discussion by drawing on their knowledge and sharing personal experiences on the identified topics.

I structured the interview questions to align with the key concepts of the theoretical framework and effectively answer my research question of how Generation Z perceives the portrayal

of authenticity through Rare Beauty's social media practices on Instagram. The interview guide, which is included in Appendix A, focused on several main themes: social media usage, familiarity with Rare Beauty, understanding of authenticity, evaluation of Rare Beauty's authenticity, and the influence of Selena Gomez as a celebrity founder on perceived authenticity. Questions aimed at determining awareness of Rare Beauty included whether they were familiar with the brand and whether they followed it on social media. This helped to ensure their level of engagement with the brand. To explore participants' perceptions of authenticity, they were asked to share personal experiences of authentic content on social media and discuss the importance of authenticity in marketing campaigns. In assessing Rare Beauty's authenticity, participants were asked to describe the types of content they found authentic and to recall specific posts or campaigns that exemplified this perceived authenticity. Moreover, to explore the influence of Selena Gomez as a founder, questions were developed to determine whether her involvement influences her interest in the brand and how her role as the face of Rare Beauty influences her feelings towards the brand. In addition, participants were asked to compare Rare Beauty with other celebrity-led beauty brands, with a focus on launches in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were asked what in their opinion made Rare Beauty stand out compared to other brands launched at the same time. This was to capture their insights into the emergence of celebrity-led beauty brands amid the lockdown and identify characteristic elements of Rare Beauty's marketing approach. Finally, respondents should reflect on a statement comparing Rare Beauty to another prominent brand, Rhode by Hailey Bieber. They were questioned whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that Rare Beauty emphasizes a sense of inner beauty, while Rhode represents a trendy aesthetic. This comparison helped participants reflect on Rare Beauty from a different angle and how they stand out in the beauty industry. This structured approach ensured that the questions were comprehensive and focused, allowing participants to provide insights that directly related to the theoretical framework and research question. Each main topic was supplemented by targeted follow-up questions to gain nuanced insights into their perception of the authenticity of Rare Beauty in social media.

To ensure a thorough investigation, interviews lasted up to 45 minutes. For accurate transcriptions and efficient analysis, I selected Dovetail as the transcription software that will simplify the process of extracting valuable insights from the interviews. This structured approach aims to decipher the intricate dynamics of Generation Z's engagement with Rare Beauty on social media and their consumer perceptions.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1. *Setting*

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 8th and May 13th at times

convenient for the participants. The interviews took place either on the university campus or at my home, ensuring minimal background noise. I consistently suggested conducting the interviews in person, as I recognized the value of face-to-face contact with participants to facilitate genuine conversations, which can be difficult online due to inherent technical barriers. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the participants, with consent forms signed electronically. Following the interviews, I transferred the audio recordings to my laptop to transcribe them using the program Dovetail which creates verbatim transcripts, omitting unnecessary speech to improve readability.

3.4.2. *Thematic Analysis*

The qualitative data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews. All ten interviews were transcribed using the transcription software Dovetail. Thematic analysis emerged as the most appropriate method for analyzing the qualitative data, with a focus on reading through the data set to identify patterns and extract themes. This analytical approach as explained by Boeije (2009) involves the identification of text segments, which are then categorized into codes in a three-stage process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (p. 96). In the first phase of open coding, the data is read and fragmented, then similar segments are grouped together and subsequently labeled. During the second step of axial coding in this process, the data is reorganized, links between groups are established and finally, subcategories are identified. Ultimately, selective coding is about identifying relevant connections between the categories to understand the events in the field and answer the research question (Boeije, 2009, pp. 96-114). These three steps together formed a coding tree (see Appendix B), from which the most relevant themes in the data emerged.

3.5. Ethics, Reliability and Validity

3.5.1. *Ethics*

To ensure compliance with the ethical principles, a brief discussion was held before each interview in which all participants confirmed their consent (see Appendix C). The participants were informed verbally about the principles and asked to give their consent by signing a form electronically shortly before the interview. The consent form outlined the aims of the study and the rights and obligations of both parties. In addition, confidentiality and data protection were consistently maintained by protecting the identity of the participants and using pseudonyms for the participants.

3.5.2. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the quality of the study, reliability and validity are important criteria. In general, reliability focuses on the consistency and reproducibility of the results, while qualitative research refers more to the consistency of the interpretations obtained from different sources (Thyer, 2009, pp. 355-356). Thus, while reliability expresses the trustworthiness and consistency of the answers, validity refers to whether a method investigates what it intends to investigate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 327). To ensure reliability, a pilot interview was conducted to test the understanding and effectiveness of the interview guide. The interview guide was designed to cover all relevant concepts and factors consistent with the theoretical framework during the interviews. Ensuring validity is inherently more complicated because there is no single universal standard for validation; instead, validity relies on different conceptual frameworks (Ratcliffe, 1983, p. 158). As different researchers may elicit different responses when answering these questions, the gender and age of the interviewer could also potentially influence the results (West & Blom, 2016, pp. 188, 190). To ensure reliability and validity, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. It is important to note that due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized and are therefore not representative of the wider population (Babbie, 2020, p. 226). However, as the study aims to explore individual experiences, opinions, and interpretations, it is not the aim to generalize the results.

4. Results

This chapter presents a qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews conducted. It examines how participants perceive the authenticity of Rare Beauty's social media marketing content. Based on the interview results, supported by relevant quotes and images, this analysis looks at the key themes that emerged from the thematic coding process. These themes provide deeper insights into the participants' responses and perspectives. The chapter is organized into the following sub-themes: relatability and realness, marketing approach, engagement drivers, founder presence and personal connection, and alignment with brand values.

Originally, TikTok was also included in the research, as indicated in the interview transcripts. However, after conducting the interviews the results showed that the content was insufficient for a comprehensive analysis, leading to an exclusive focus on Instagram. Therefore, one notable finding that emerged early on was that Instagram is the social media platform of choice, with TikTok not playing a significant role. This suggests that participants are more actively engaging with the brand and its content on Instagram. TikTok was only mentioned in the context of participants becoming aware of the brand through viral trends or informative content. However, due to the nature of TikTok and the algorithm of the 'For You' page, which limits users' control over what they view, discussions with respondents focused mainly on Rare Beauty's Instagram marketing. This suggests a stronger and more meaningful interaction with content on Instagram compared to TikTok.

4.1. Perception of Authenticity in Rare Beauty's Social Media Content

This section of the chapter shows the results that are relevant to answering the research question: *How do Generation Z individuals perceive the portrayal of authenticity in Rare Beauty's marketing content on Instagram?* The following sub-chapters examine the various aspects through which the participants perceive authenticity and experience how it becomes tangible for them. When looking at the results, it is important to consider one important point: the 'perceived authenticity' of Rare Beauty. Several respondents mentioned this already in the interviews. The perception that Rare Beauty is authentic to them for various reasons is subjective and may not be universal. As Daniel put it, "The illusion of authenticity plays a big role". This means that while the content may be perceived as authentic by one person, it may not necessarily correspond to reality for everyone. Authenticity is ultimately a question of individual perception.

4.1.1. Relatability and Realness

The first identified theme that emerged in the interviews was that the participants' perception of authenticity in Rare Beauty's marketing content depends largely on the concepts of relatability

and realness. These elements play a decisive role in addressing the target group, which places value on authenticity in social media. Emily, for example, emphasized that Rare Beauty’s content resonates so well because they “allow people feel comfortable with themselves” and use makeup to “enhance their own beauty, but not to mask what they already have”. This approach fosters a sense of authenticity by conveying a message that resonates with the participant’s desire for self-acceptance and natural beauty. This aligns closely with the theoretical concepts of authenticity defined by Somogy and Guignon (2023), which emphasize being genuine and truthful to oneself. Daniel noted the shift in social media towards authentic, relatable content. Most participants expressed a common desire for influencers to address important issues and not just show the perfect side of life. They appreciate it when influencers on social media talk about their struggles and share their experiences of a bad day, which makes the content more credible and authentic. Emily additionally noted that “people are fed up with this 2015-2016 aesthetic where everything is plastic and fake” and are now looking for content that is “natural and real, even if they’re not perfect”. This sentiment reflects the importance of imperfection on social media for my respondents and corresponds to the authentic representation of Rare Beauty’s content. By portraying real people with authentic features, such as unedited skin that shows pores and imperfections like irritations (see Figures 8 and 9), the brand effectively builds trust and empathy with the respondents.

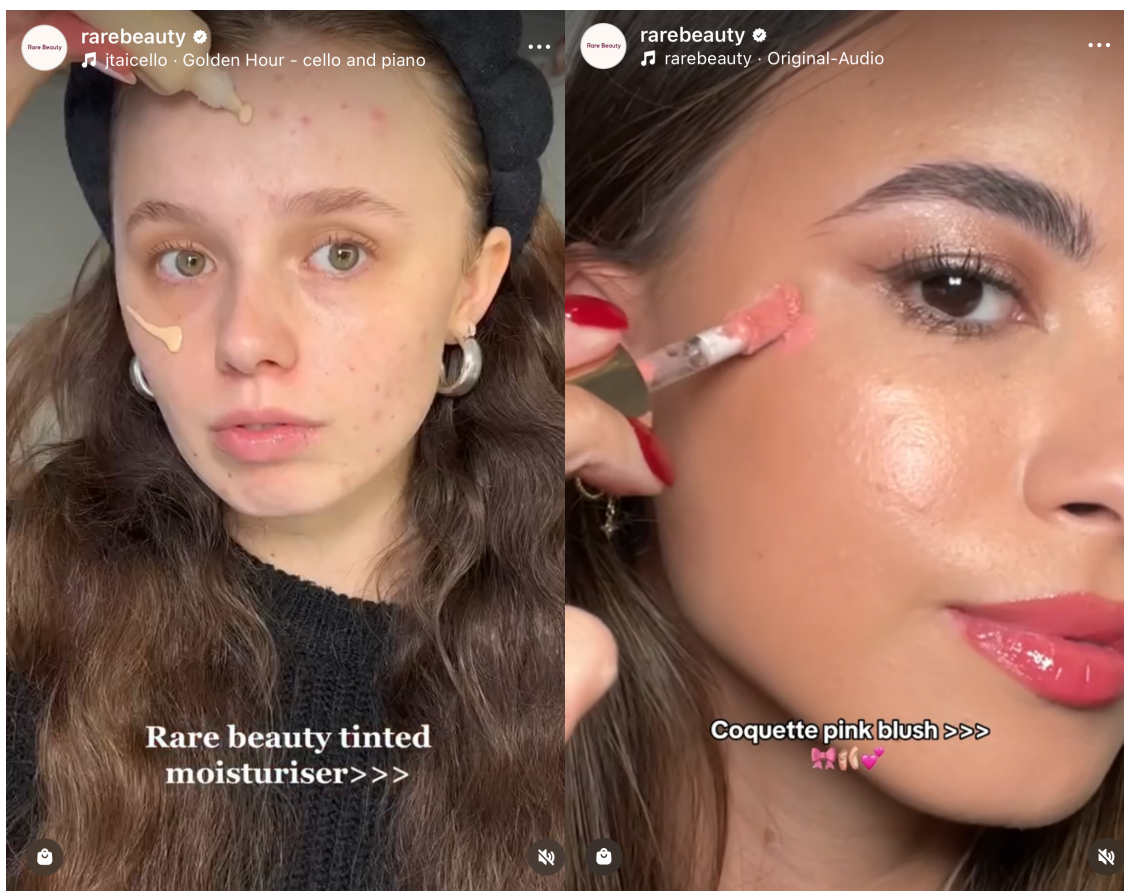


Figure 8. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram video **Figure 9.** Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram video

Interviewees also spoke about the role of influencers in reinforcing the perceived authenticity of Rare Beauty. Influencers who share their everyday struggles, imperfections, and unfiltered moments contribute to a narrative of authenticity that resonates strongly with the respondents. Emily mentioned that influencers who “show more of their day-to-day life, maybe without makeup or with their hair not done” make them appear more credible and authentic. This raw and honest portrayal helps to bridge the gap between the brand and its consumers, making the content feel more personal and less commercial to the interviewees. In addition, the integration of inclusivity into Rare Beauty’s marketing, e.g., the accessibility of products for people with disabilities, was cited as a key factor in the brand’s authenticity. Jessica appreciates the brand’s commitment to inclusion and points out that the wide makeup color palette of shades makes them accessible to everyone. According to the respondents, this inclusive approach not only broadens the brand’s appeal but also strengthens a genuine and thus authentic connection with a diverse audience and reflects its commitment to diversity.

Participants’ emphasis on relatability and realness underscores the theoretical framework’s assertion that authenticity in social media marketing is rooted in conveying genuine self-expression and addressing the audience’s desire for content that mirrors their own experiences. This supports Cinelli & LeBoeuf’s (2019) notion of ‘perceived authenticity’, where the subjective evaluation of genuineness plays a crucial role in brand perception. To sum up the collective opinion of the interviewees, Rachel made a compelling statement: “Rare Beauty is as real as it can get on social media”.

4.1.2. Marketing Approach: Storytelling, Humor, Inclusivity

Participants cited Rare Beauty’s marketing approach as a key factor in their perception of the brand’s authenticity. This approach encompasses several elements, including genuine storytelling, showcasing the “human side” of the brand, inclusivity, and a focus on mental health.

One standout element highlighted by participants was Rare Beauty’s commitment to relatable storytelling. Jessica, for example, commented: “When they tell stories, it’s not just about the product. With Rare Beauty it’s about the people who use the product and their experiences”. Olivia also noted, “They share a lot of reviews from regular people, not just influencers” which suggests that combining product use and personal stories gives consumers a sense of intimacy and authenticity. The participants also pointed out the “human side” of Rare Beauty’s marketing. For example, Sarah mentioned: “Her posts about real-life challenges make the brand seem more human and trustworthy”. Many participants mentioned that they particularly like the behind-the-scenes content as it allows them to see the people behind the posts, as illustrated in Figure 9. They appreciated that Rare Beauty shows the human side of the brand by telling stories, introducing the

brand's employees, and showing how they create their content (see Figure 10). This approach, which aims to showcase personal content, makes the brand seem more approachable and authentic, fostering a deeper connection with its audience. Thurnell-Read (2019) argues that modern consumers seek real stories and experiences, and Rare Beauty's focus on genuine storytelling and the portrayal of different identities directly support this theory. Furthermore, the use of relatable narratives and personal stories aligns with Audrezet et al. (2020) argument that authentic brand presences are crucial to differentiate a brand in a crowded digital space.



Figure 10. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram post



Figure 11. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram reel

It became evident that inclusivity and diversity play a relevant role in the participant's engagement with Rare Beauty's social media content because it enhances relatability. Katie remarked, "I see myself in their campaigns because they don't just pick one type of beauty. They show everyone". This suggests that Rare Beauty's efforts to feature a variety of models and influencers enhance the brand's appeal and reinforce its authentic image by reflecting the diversity of its audience. Sophie echoed this sentiment: "Seeing different types of beauty makes the campaigns feel inclusive and real". This reflects Lamont's (2023) concept of 'recognition', which goes beyond simple identification to acknowledging and valuing the existence and worth of individuals (p. 6). By actively introducing and valuing them, their marginalization is reduced, and these individuals are

recognized as integral members of the inclusive Rare Beauty community (Lamont, 2023, p. 6). The brand's commitment to representing a wide range of identities resonates very well with the informants, who value authentic representation. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of seeing different faces and stories in Rare Beauty's content (see Figure 12). Daniel said, "I think it feels very diverse, whether it's, like, gender or racial diversity". Participants appreciate the diverse and inclusive content that Rare Beauty creates. This not only increases the perceived authenticity of the brand but also serves as a strong motivator for engagement. Rachel noted, "I think Selena's message of rare is that everyone is rare". This inclusivity is reinforced by the pricing of Rare Beauty's products. Unlike most celebrity brands, which are often in the higher price range and only accessible to a certain audience, Rare Beauty offers more affordable options and is therefore accessible to a wider demographic. Sophie noted, "I was quite surprised to see the prices. So, it was nice of her to keep it actually still available to a bit more of the larger population".



Figure 12. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram post

By showcasing a broad spectrum of beauty, Rare Beauty challenges traditional Western beauty standards and promotes a more inclusive definition of beauty. This inclusivity and diversity are evident not only in the brand's selection of diverse models but also in its commitment to

disabled-friendly packaging and affordable pricing. Rare Beauty's marketing strategy is perceived as unique as it focuses on inclusivity, which aligns with Duffy's (2017) framework for authenticity in digital marketing. This approach reflects the theoretical assertion that brands that incorporate diverse representations and encourage self-discovery are more likely to be perceived as authentic. The diversity aspect is also reflected in Rare Beauty's content offering, which was highly appreciated by the participants. The brand takes a mixed marketing approach with different content that goes beyond just product promotion and creates a richer and more engaging experience. Rare Beauty's commitment to diversity is evident in the content presented by models representing a wide range of ethnicities, body types, and ages. This intentional inclusivity resonates well with the participants. In addition, Rare Beauty's marketing strategy goes beyond conventional product advertising to include a variety of content formats, such as educational tutorials, behind-the-scenes looks, and user-generated posts. By addressing topics such as self-expression, empowerment, and mental health awareness, the brand creates a richer and more meaningful experience for its audience, fostering genuine connections and brand loyalty.

Sophie remarked on the brand's diverse content, noting:

I think I'm really drawn to someone who does something a bit differently. So, like, I just don't want to see repetitive content that I consume daily. At least if it's something a bit more different, more like real. I'm automatically more drawn to it, so that makes me want to engage with Rare Beauty.

Moreover, the emphasis on mental health within Rare Beauty's marketing was frequently cited by participants. The brand's Rare Impact Fund, which allocates 1% of sales to mental health causes, was seen as evidence of Rare Beauty's commitment to real issues. Rachel commented, "It's refreshing to see a brand not just talking about beauty, but also focusing on mental wellbeing". This focus on mental health aligns with the values of the respondents who value holistic wellbeing and social responsibility.

Transparent communication was another highly appreciated aspect by the participants. Rare Beauty's honesty about product development and business practices, such as their open discussion of cruelty-free practices and sustainable packaging efforts, was emphasized. Lauren pointed out, "They don't just say they are cruelty-free; they show us how they do it. This transparency builds trust". This suggests that openness in business practices fosters a deeper connection with consumers who value ethical and sustainable practices.

In summary, participants identified several key elements of Rare Beauty's marketing approach that contribute to their perception of authenticity. These include genuine storytelling, inclusive representation, a focus on mental health, portraying the "human side" of the brand, and transparent communication. Together, these elements create a brand image that is perceived as real,

relatable, and therefore authentic by participants. This is how the participants decode Rare Beauty's marketing efforts: they actively engaged with the content, analyzed the language and sentiment - whether humorous or serious - and thus formed a brand perception that proves to be authentic (Ludwig & De Ruyter, 2016).

4.1.3. *Founder's Presence and Personal Connection*

The presence and personal connection of Rare Beauty's founder, Selena Gomez, plays a central role in participants' perception of the brand's authenticity. Participants consistently emphasized that Gomez's involvement increased their interest in the brand and fostered a level of trust and familiarity that set Rare Beauty apart from other brands.

Selena Gomez's active presence in Rare Beauty's marketing content is an important factor in the perceived authenticity of the brand, supporting Kennedy et al.'s (2021) claim that a brand's authenticity is enhanced when a celebrity acts as a founder. Participants noted that her personal story and the openness with which she spoke about her mental health struggles touched them deeply, having grown up with Gomez on the Disney Channel. Sophie commented, "I feel like I had the level of trust on it" because of following Gomez from childhood into adulthood. Unlike other celebrity beauty brands where the face behind the brand is less known, Gomez's transparency and vulnerability had impacted how participants perceived Rare Beauty. Her openness not only humanizes the brand but also aligns with its commitment to mental health, creating a stronger emotional connection with the respondents. Although not all participants were fans of Gomez, they still had a positive impression of the brand. While some respondents admitted that they don't like Selena Gomez, Sarah added that while she does like Gomez, owning a brand doesn't automatically mean she buys the products. This suggests that the brand's values allow it to stand for itself, regardless of the celebrity status of its founder.

The participants also appreciated the fact that Gomez is not just a figurehead but is actively involved in creating content for the brand. Hannah noted: "When you see Selena using the products herself and talking about them, it makes it feel even more real. It's like she's personally invested in what the brand stands for". Interviewees appreciated that Selena Gomez was featured in videos on Instagram, whether she was filming a 'get ready with me' video with the products, creating humorous content, or talking about mental health (see Figure 13).

Olivia noted Gomez's genuine and kind nature, noting that these values and her positive reputation flow seamlessly into the brand's reputation. This hands-on involvement corresponds with the participants' idea that Rare Beauty is an extension of Gomez's values and personal experiences, not just a business venture. During the interviews, my informants' responses reflected that Gomez

builds a strong personal connection with her audience, which also adds to the credibility of the brand. Aside from nostalgic childhood memories of Gomez’s Disney Channel appearances, Jessica said, “When Selena talks about beauty and self-acceptance, it feels real because you know she’s been through similar struggles”. This closeness is crucial for the respondents, who value authenticity and can quickly distinguish genuine engagement from pure marketing tactics. This ability to distinguish between authentic engagement and business motivation was evident in Sarah’s statement, who noted, “I think it does for me kind of bring up a contradiction when you’re so heavily contracted and you’ve got all this management, maybe also if you have a PR team, and someone managing your social media accounts”.



Figure 13. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram video

Participants also highlighted the impact of Gomez’s authenticity on the brand’s inclusive message. Participants often emphasized the brand’s accessible packaging for people with medical conditions, which fosters a stronger connection to the brand and its mission. This connection is further strengthened by Gomez’s background and her openness about her mental health journey and illnesses. Selena Gomez, who herself struggles with lupus and has problems with the mobility of her hands, has put a lot of effort into developing disability-friendly beauty products (Gajica, 2023). For example, her lip balms and glosses have a simple twist mechanism that requires minimal effort, making them easy to apply for people with limited hand strength or mobility (Fullmer et al., 2024, p. 13). Some interviewees knew that Gomez worked with specialists to design products that were as accessible as possible for consumers (see in Figure 14). Rachel noted, “If it would only be about

profit for Rare Beauty, they wouldn't care how the packaging looks like". This personal endorsement from Gomez not only affirms the brand's values but also expands its reach and impact, making the brand's mission even more compelling to a wide audience.

The larger number of the participants rated Gomez's involvement as a major factor them being attracted to the brand. When asked if her interest in the brand was influenced by the fact that Gomez is the founder, Hannah gave an exemplary answer: "I'm sure of it, because from a young age, I really already liked Selena Gomez a lot". Lauren agreed: "She's like a person that's been very present ever since I've been young. So, I think that's just what naturally strengthens my interest in the brand". This interest is of course linked to her celebrity status, but also to the fact that she embodies kind and humble values.

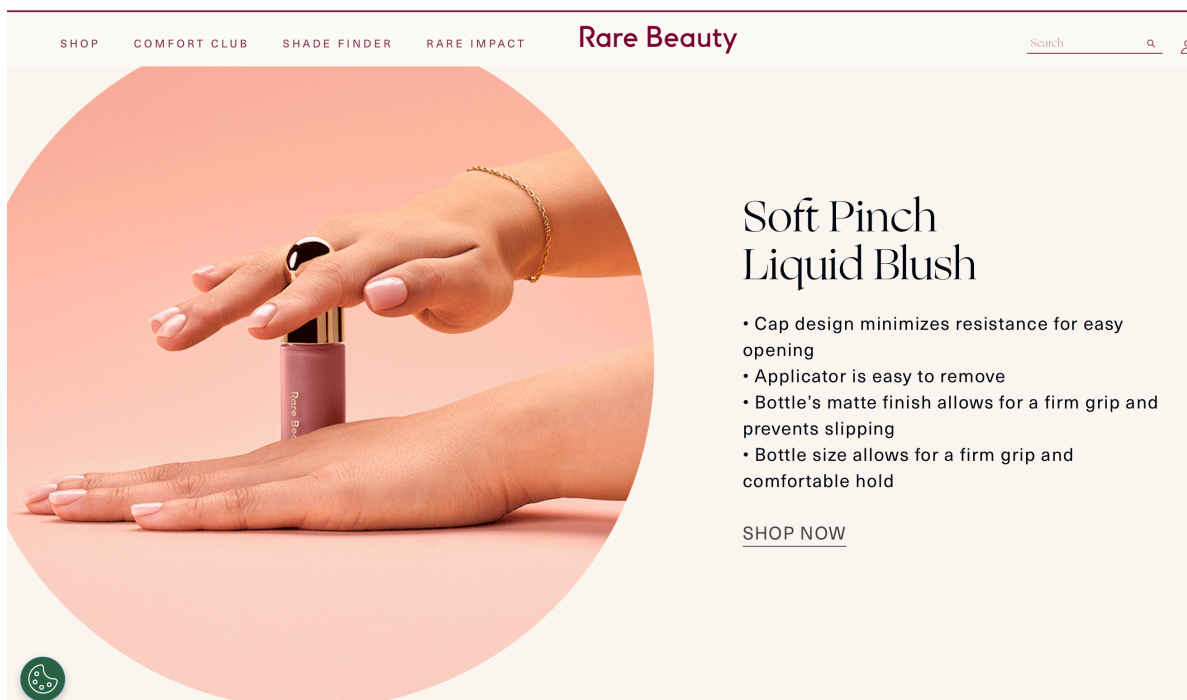


Figure 14. Rare Beauty Website accessible packaging example

Gomez's active participation in the brand's social media campaigns, such as sharing her beauty routines and discussing her personal health challenges, reinforces the brand's authenticity. This also aligns with Tolson's (2001) concept of 'moral justification', where the use of fame for altruistic purposes enhances perceived authenticity. By sharing these personal moments, she creates a credible and trustworthy image that attracts followers who value genuine and sincere engagement. Sophie stated, "I could tell with her brand she probably wanted this approach of body positivity, and this was also connected to her journey in my opinion".

The seamless integration of Gomez's personal values with Rare Beauty's ethos was cited as a key factor in the brand's success. When I asked the participants if they believed a celebrity could be authentic online or if it felt contradictory, they all recognized the potential contradiction,

especially in the age of social media. However, they were convinced that Gomez effectively bridges these concepts through her unique approach. She strives to create content that is relatable to the average person and actively engages with her audience. Rachel explained, “Rare Beauty, and with Selena being the founder, is one outstanding example of authenticity and exclusivity coexisting”. This tension between celebrity and authenticity will be revisited in the subsequent discussion section.

In summary, Selena Gomez’s presence as the founder of Rare Beauty enhances the brand’s appeal and engagement with the participants. Her influence goes beyond her fame as a singer and actress; her personal connection to the brand and authenticity resonates well with followers. Gomez’s credibility as a celebrity with a positive public image (Khan & Lodhi, 2016, p. 104) is further enhanced by her venture into entrepreneurship, creating products that reflect her personal values and aspirations (Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 2073; Teng et al., 2020, p. 3). Gomez’s involvement with Rare Beauty is more than just a marketing strategy; it is a key element that forms the brand’s identity and appeal. Her genuine connection with the brand and its audience fosters trust and loyalty that resonates strongly with its followers. This strong appeal of the celebrity founder, based on authenticity and shared values, is the compelling reason why most participants are interested in engaging with Rare Beauty. Selena Gomez, who is primarily known for her career as an actress and singer and previously had no direct connection with owning a cosmetics company, has effectively integrated her beliefs and values into Rare Beauty. Participants acknowledge this alignment, which has significantly increased consumer interest (Khan & Lodhi, 2016, p. 104). Gomez revealing her issues, her hands-on involvement in product packaging and content creation, and her alignment with the brand’s values foster a sense of authenticity and familiarity. Participants perceive this personal involvement as a key factor in their trust and emotional attachment to Rare Beauty, making the brand’s messages more impactful and authentic.

4.1.4. Engagement Drivers

Firstly, respondents frequently highlighted the brand’s ability to produce entertaining and enjoyable content that feels genuine and evokes a positive association with the brand. Daniel mentioned that he likes to see entertaining content online and not just brand advertising as it makes the experience more enjoyable. This statement stresses the necessity of the brand providing entertainment value. Sarah agreed with this sentiment, stating that she enjoys consuming humorous content that she can share with a friend who has the same sense of humor, which prompts her to follow and engage with Rare Beauty. The brand uses platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to create content that is not only informative but also entertaining, appealing to a wider audience (see Figure 15). This approach supports the findings of Demmers et al. (2020), who emphasize that entertaining and interactive content on social media platforms is crucial for building a strong and

authentic brand presence. According to several interview respondents, they enjoy the inclusion of humorous videos, relatable scenarios, and dynamic visual content helps to break the monotony of traditional marketing approaches and keep the audience engaged. Humor is a powerful tool in digital marketing, especially on social media, where users are looking for quick, engaging content. Rare Beauty's use of humor makes the brand more approachable and personable, aligning with the preferences of the interviewees, who appreciate brands that can entertainingly convey their message. The humor and lightheartedness of the content contribute to the perception of authenticity as it shows a more personal and less scripted side of the brand. This aligns with Trinh's (2014) theory that incorporating humor into marketing content can positively influence consumer's perception of the brand.

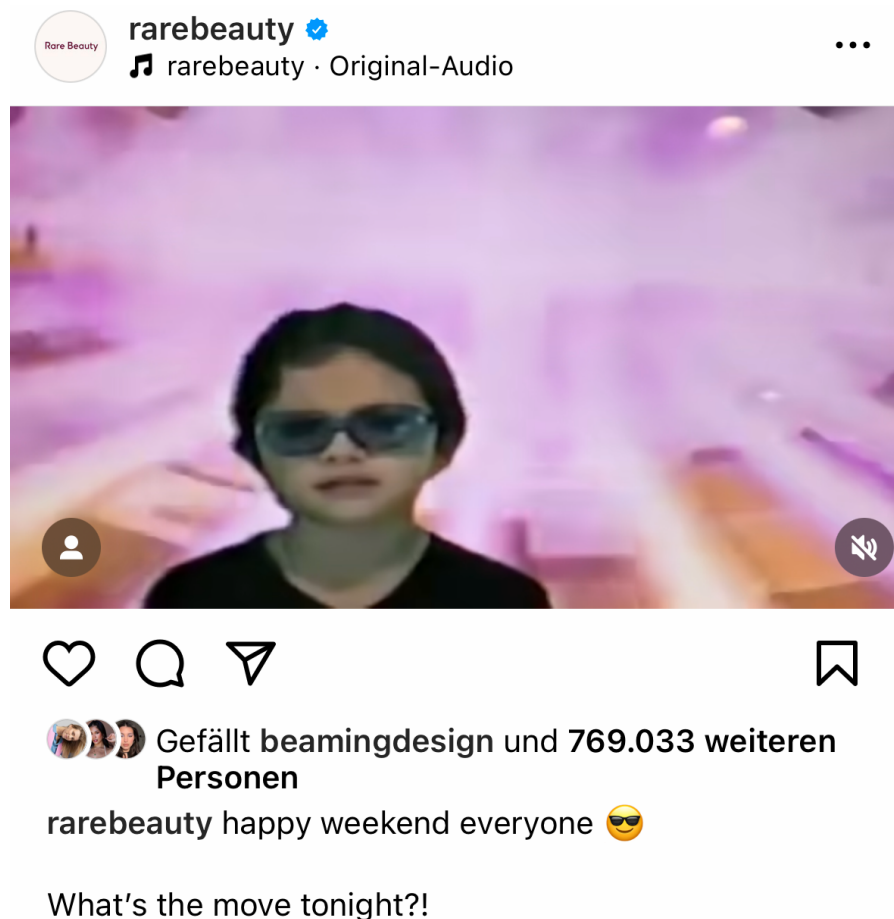


Figure 15. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram video

By featuring Selena Gomez in various informal and candid videos - such as 'Get ready with Me' segments, playful interactions, and light-hearted conversations - Rare Beauty presents a more human and authentic image according to the participants. They consistently follow trends by incorporating popular music, which increases the appeal of their content. Sarah added, "With Rare Beauty, I would say definitely the hype around it sometimes makes it stand out". This approach helps to build a stronger connection with followers as it shows a more personal and less scripted side of the

brand. Seeing Gomez in authentic moments, whether she's doing a TikTok, talking about her mental health struggles, or going about day-to-day activities, underlines the brand's commitment to authenticity and genuineness.

Moreover, engaging with Rare Beauty's content isn't just about humor. According to the interviewees, the aesthetic appeal of content is a key reason for using social media. Consequently, this was a strong motivator to follow Rare Beauty, as their visually appealing content contributes to an enjoyable viewing experience. This sensory pleasure increases user satisfaction and encourages repeat engagement. The authenticity of the production quality, where the content does not appear overly polished or artificial, adds to the genuine appeal of the brand.

Rare Beauty's strategy of incorporating entertainment and fun into their social media presence is proving effective in attracting and retaining the interest of the participants. By combining humor, high-quality production, and credible content with an authentic approach, the brand is successfully creating an engaging and entertaining online environment. This approach not only strengthens the brand's appeal but also encourages a loyal and enthusiastic community of followers. This strategy is in line with the findings of Hasan et al. (2022), who emphasize that engaging content on social media is crucial to encourage consumer interaction and leads to a positive perception of the brand by consumers.

Secondly, the brand's strategic use of campaigns not only promotes its products but also fosters a sense of belonging and participation among followers. Jessica highlighted this by saying, "I also like to follow them because of their #WeAre campaign and how they engage the community". Rare Beauty's campaigns are designed to be interactive and inclusive, encouraging users to share their own stories and experiences. This engagement creates a two-way dialog between the brand and its audience because it makes followers feel valued and heard. Another campaign that was mentioned by Lauren is the #RareRoutine "where Selena shows her get-ready routine and motivates her audience to share their routine". By promoting user-generated content, Rare Beauty allows its followers to become part of the brand narrative. Campaigns like #RareRoutine invite users to share how they incorporate Rare Beauty products into their daily lives, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. This participatory approach not only increases engagement but also builds a loyal community around the brand.

Another aspect that has become apparent is Rare Beauty's talent for engaging their audience with intriguing content and sparking curiosity. Last year, on April Fools' Day, they posted a picture on Instagram of a giant version of their popular liquid blush, captivating their followers (see Figure 16). Daniel noted, "There was this post about last year's April Fool's Day where they made a big liquid blush. It was fun to see that part of the team coming up and working on content. It breaks that fourth wall". A more recent example mentioned by interviewees is the creative announcement of the

official cruelty-free certification, where playful content was shared featuring dogs using Rare Beauty products as toys. This imaginative approach is not only entertaining, but also communicates key brand messages, fosters a sense of community, and strengthens the sustainable community by highlighting the brand's commitment to non-animal testing.

Ultimately, when analyzing engagement drivers, it breaks with the traditional marketing funnel (Figure 6). The steps outlined in the funnel have become less relevant as many participants stated that they trust recommendations from influencer friends as their main source of information about Rare Beauty. This supports Cooley & Parks-Yancy's (2019) theory that trusted individuals, such as friends and influencers, have become more influential. Therefore, word of mouth is a decisive factor in respondents' purchasing decisions. Rachel noted, "I've bought a lot of blushes, not only because of the videos and the positive social media messages and cool, up-to-date videos they post but also because a lot of friends use the products".

Although some of these examples are not directly related to the products themselves, participants appreciate this aspect of Rare Beauty's social media content. Katie stated the following why she enjoys the brand's content:

I think their content is maybe not per se different, but they use a lot of different things within their content. So, for example, they have videos from Selena. They have a lot of videos from their customers and reposts of their products. I think it's a nice mix of the informative videos showing how to use it and showing the reasons behind the brand and why they do certain things.



Figure 16. Rare Beauty Screenshot Instagram reel

4.1.5. Alignment with Brand Values

Based on the interviews, the perception of Rare Beauty’s marketing strategy is closely interwoven with the brand’s core values and focuses on inclusivity, diversity, and mental health. This alignment appears to be decisive for the perceived authenticity of the brand and its resonance with the target group. Interview participants frequently mentioned that Rare Beauty’s consistent communication of these values had a positive impact on their perception of the brand. Emily emphasized, “I also feel like they preach a lot for inclusivity and feeling beautiful in your own natural beauty”, highlighting how the brand promotes self-love and confidence without adhering to traditional beauty standards. This focus on natural beauty is in line with the general social shift towards authenticity and away from unrealistic beauty ideals that are often propagated by the beauty industry. This supports Duffy’s (2013) framework, which highlights the importance of diverse representation, self-discovery, and celebration of normal-looking women in achieving perceived authenticity.

Rachel also emphasized the importance of Rare Beauty’s values: “Their focus on mental

health and self-acceptance is really important to me”. Rare Beauty’s commitment to health in general and mental health, in particular, is reflected in initiatives such as the Rare Impact Fund, which aims to improve access to mental health services and reduce the stigmatization of mental health problems. Other health conditions are also considered by Rare Beauty. As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, the accessible packaging designed for people with health restrictions was mentioned positively in the interviews. This initiative not only supports an important cause but also highlights the authenticity of the brand by showing that it truly cares about the well-being of its community. Another important aspect that was mentioned about brand values is diversity. This has already been mentioned in the section on the marketing approach but is of particular importance to respondents. Diversity can be seen in various elements such as the range of models from different ethnicities and age groups, the diverse content, and the inclusive color palette for the skin foundation.

Rare Beauty’s consistent promotion of inclusivity, diversity, and mental health sets it apart from other beauty brands in the eyes of respondents. This alignment with brand values fosters a strong, authentic connection with participants, who highly value authenticity and social responsibility in their interactions with brands.

In summary, the results show that the participants perceive Rare Beauty’s social media marketing as authentic because it is a combination of relatability, storytelling, and the founder’s personal connection. The brand promotes self-acceptance and natural beauty by using unedited images that show real skin, which appeals to the target group’s desire for authenticity. Their marketing approach is deeply human, with user stories and behind-the-scenes content, making the brand accessible. Inclusivity seems to be key, with diverse models and accessible products for people with medical conditions, reflecting a real commitment to representation. Respondent engagement on Rare Beauty’s online accounts is driven by entertaining, engaging content. The brand uses humor and light-hearted posts, especially those featuring Selena Gomez, to make it more personal. Gomez’s active engagement and openness about her mental health struggles greatly enhance the brand’s trustworthiness. Her genuine engagement and alignment with the brand’s mission create a strong personal connection with the audience. These findings extend the theoretical framework by illustrating the practical application of authenticity in modern digital marketing. This aligns with Schallehn et al.’s (2014) view that authenticity in brand marketing fosters trust and loyalty and reinforces the notion that the strategic use of storytelling and genuine brand engagement is central to building a trustworthy brand image in today’s digital environment. The results of this research show that the participants perceive the authenticity of Rare Beauty’s social media content as a carefully crafted yet genuine representation of the brand’s values. Participants acknowledged that they are aware of the falseness often found in social media and the profit-driven motivations behind content creation. However, they appreciated the brand’s efforts to maintain a perceived authenticity that matched their desire for genuineness and reliability.

Ultimately, storytelling, humor, and addressing serious topics like mental health create a sense of genuineness among the participants, which they decode as an authentic social media presence. These elements are the essential ingredients of authenticity that foster a genuine connection with the audience and set Rare Beauty apart in the highly competitive beauty industry. In the following discussion section, I will go into more detail on how these elements combine to reinforce the brand's authentic image.

5. Discussion

This thesis explored the perceived authenticity of Rare Beauty's social media marketing among Generation Z and provided several key findings that relate to the existing literature on authenticity, influencer marketing, celebrity-owned brands, and social media engagement. The main findings to be discussed are divided into three key areas: the ingredients of authenticity, the paradox between celebrity and authenticity, and the increasing importance of authenticity in social media marketing for Generation Z.

As already mentioned, the findings discussed here do not generally apply to Gen Z. Although I use the term 'Generation Z' in this discussion, it is important to understand that these findings are based on a small group of 10 people and cannot be generalized to the entire generation. Therefore, although I am applying these findings to Gen Z, they represent the perceptions of this sample.

5.1. Ingredients of Authenticity

The interviews revealed that Rare Beauty's marketing approach, which includes elements such as realness, storytelling, inclusivity, humor, and transparency around conversations that deal with mental health, is perceived by participants as a genuine representation. All these elements form what can be described as the 'ingredients of authenticity'.

To further illustrate these elements, almost all participants repeatedly mentioned the behind-the-scenes content. It was highly appreciated that Rare Beauty share behind-the-scenes of photo shoots, the set-up process, reposting clients that use their products, product production, and the journey to the final product carried out by the individuals responsible. This highlights Gen Z's desire for 'human content' on social media and not just perfectly crafted posts or advertisements for the product. As a member of Gen Z myself, I believe that in our rapidly evolving technological world, where artificial intelligence is increasingly integrated into our lives, we are developing an intrinsic motivation to align our focus towards human values. The 'human touch' is valued more than ever, and according to the interviews, Gen Z's desire is these values to be reflected in their daily social media feeds. As Evans et al. (2017) stated, "It is important to understand the role of your customer" (p. 7). In the case of Rare Beauty, the customer plays a multi-faceted role: they are an active participant, community member, feedback provider, and even co-creator. Rare Beauty has recognized the value these different roles bring, which enables them to successfully deliver content that its customers like and engage with on social media.

The next important asset is inclusivity, which played a major role for the interviewees when they were referencing to the brand's authenticity. Rare Beauty's focus on the 'human being' is evident not only in its social media posts but also in the brand's broader mission. The brand aims to provide a

safe space and community where young people can develop a sense of belonging. In addition, Rare Beauty spreads awareness and offers support to young people suffering from mental health issues worldwide by the work of the Rare Impact Fund. The brand has even gone a step further and made its products accessible to people with physical limitations to ensure that no one is excluded to experience the world of beauty. With this commitment to inclusion Rare Beauty sets new standards in the beauty industry and challenges other beauty brands. It ties back to the theories of ‘aspirational realness’ (Findlay, 2019) and ‘moral justification’ (Tolson, 2001). Findlay’s (2019) concept of ‘aspirational realness’ applies not only to the brand but also to its founder Selena Gomez. Both are perceived as authentic in their portrayal on social media, but this authenticity includes an element of striving for something better or aspirational - in this case, supporting people affected by mental health issues. This approach resonates well with Gen Z as it reveals the meaningful purpose behind the brand. This connects seamlessly with Tolson’s (2001) concept of ‘moral justification’ and adds another layer to Gomez’s authenticity. She is using her popularity and influence for altruistic purposes to address and improve societal issues, specifically mental health challenges. Her business, which includes the sale of beauty products, is not solely financially motivated, but rather serves as a means to even further support their mission. This moral justification is evident in her efforts to use her platform to raise awareness of mental illness and thus funds for resources to support people affected. Gomez is thus able to present her activities as morally sound, as it reflects the self-image of a responsible and caring celebrity with the aim of making the world a slightly better place.

Returning to Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding theory, it is important to note that encoding and decoding are interrelated processes that are not always equivalent or predetermined (p. 6). However, when analyzing the results of this study, it becomes clear that they strongly challenge this notion. While it is acknowledged that perceptions of social media content can be subjective and vary from person to person, in this case, the social media content encoded by Rare Beauty was consistently decoded in the same way by the participants. Even though respondents decoded elements differently, their interpretations were still grounded in authenticity, confirming the validity of the theory in this context.

5.2. Paradox between Celebrity and Authenticity

The contradiction between these two aspects was highlighted in the theoretical framework, where it was noted that they do not usually coexist well in theory. However, in the case of Rare Beauty, participants agreed that Selena Gomez bridges these elements effortlessly which results in a harmonious co-existence. I argue that she can do so successfully through her skillful interplay of humorous elements in her marketing content offers whilst still addressing serious life issues, such as mental health. This combination of light and dark elements creates a realistic depiction of life that

people can easily identify with. A connection can be made to ‘cruel optimism’, a concept that criticizes the tendency to address significant cultural problems such as depression or addiction with simple, individualized solutions using optimistic language (McDaniel, 2023). This criticism suggests that such approaches are overly simplistic and potentially harmful as they do not adequately address the root causes of these problems (McDaniel, 2023). Selena Gomez’s efforts to raise awareness of mental health by posting humorous videos and sharing words of encouragement, on the other hand, can be seen as an embodiment of this criticism. While her intentions may be well-intentioned, her approach can be seen as a continuation of the same simplistic and individualized solutions that the concept of ‘cruel optimism’ seeks to criticize.

Gomez succeeds to combine these two aspects effectively with Rare Beauty, as the results of the interviews underline. They are consistent with the theoretical framework, indicate that Selena Gomez increasingly attracts the audience’s interest in the brand. Most participants stated that influencers are generally more credible and trustworthy than celebrities when it comes to authenticity. This supports Lina et al. (2022), who argue that social media influencers tend to convey more credibility and trust to their audience than traditional celebrities.

However, participants expressed skepticism towards brands owned by celebrities if they do not align with the celebrity’s usual professional values. This contradicts the findings of Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka (2021) and Kennedy et al. (2021), who claim that celebrity-owned brands inherently have higher credibility. However, all participants admitted that Rare Beauty is an exception among celebrity-owned brands, managing to offer both celebrity and authenticity side by side thanks to her founder. Interestingly, this research both supports and contradicts Teng’s (2020) theory that fans of celebrities perceive more credibility than non-fans. The respondents included both fans and non-fans of Selena Gomez, but both groups had a positive perception of Rare Beauty. This suggests that the brand’s credibility and appeal stand on their own regardless of Gomez’s fame.

Finally, reflecting on the functionality of the social media platforms themselves offers considerable potential for discussion. When you’re on the platform, you often feel like you’re catching up with friends, especially when you run into familiar faces from your childhood, such as celebrities you grew up with. This familiarity can create a feeling of closeness, almost as if you know these celebrities personally. However, behind the facade of this friendly interaction often lies the strategic agenda of accounts like Rare Beauty’s. Ultimately, Instagram nowadays serves as a significant tool for businesses to connect with and market to their audience, rather than just acting as a typical social platform amongst friends. With that in mind, one might contemplate whether celebrities can only effectively convey authenticity in marketing if they have a long-standing relationship with their audience, as is the case here with Selena Gomez. Many participants recalled watching Gomez on the Disney Channel as a child, evoking a sense of nostalgia, and deepening their trust in the brand because of this emotional connection with Gomez. This outlines the dual nature of

social media platforms such as Instagram, where personal relationships mix with commercial interests. Such observations raise questions about the role of celebrity-led beauty brands and nostalgia in building consumer trust and brand perception. Research indicates that advertising that evokes nostalgic reactions has the potential to promote a more positive perception of both the advertisement and the advertised brand, thus increasing the likelihood of a purchase (Pascal et al., 2002, p. 45). Investigating how celebrity-led beauty brands and nostalgia influence consumer trust and brand perception therefore offers promising avenues for future research.

5.3. Growing Importance of Authenticity in Social Media

The transition from the artificial social media landscape of circa 2016 to a more authentic one was described in detail in the results section. Pursuing the question who would prefer edited images online rather than authentic content? One aspect not to be underestimated is the amount of time people, especially Generation Z, spend on social media.

This thesis centers on authenticity and its growing importance in social media marketing strategies. However, the interviews revealed that it depends on several factors, of how significance is rated. While authenticity is a crucial motivator for the respondents' social media engagement, it is neither the only nor the most important one. The increasing importance of authenticity for Generation Z arises from their extensive exposure to inauthentic content over the past decade which led to a high sensitivity towards this issue. Interestingly, they often consume inauthentic content deliberately just for the sake of entertainment purposes. Referring to the EYGM (2023) study, which found that authenticity is a key personal value for Generation Z, suggests that real-life authenticity holds greater value for them than online authenticity. As digital natives (Munsch, 2021, p. 11), Generation Z possesses the ability to distinguish between fake and genuine content, helping them navigate the vast amount of social media content. This research supports the findings of the EYGM study (2023) that Generation Z is aware of the risks of social media but still seeks support for mental health issues online - a need that Rare Beauty effectively replies to by providing access to an inclusive and supportive community.

While considering the risks of social media and its potential impact on mental health, I immediately referred to Duffy's (2013) three important tropes for online advertising in the beauty industry: "promoting natural, organic products, celebrating normal-looking women, and encouraging self-discovery" (p. 132). Celebrating normal-looking women and encouraging self-discovery are particularly relevant for this subject. Participants valued Rare Beauty's authentic representation of different body shapes, ages, and ethnicities, where flaws are not hidden but celebrated. However, one insight from the interviews, particularly from Emily, offers a contrasting perspective. Emily found that despite the widespread advocacy of inclusivity and authentic representation on social media,

young girls often favor unattainable standards of beauty. She explained, “I feel like everyone preaches for wanting people to be inclusive and wanting to find a relatable person that has maybe not a socially ideal body shape and shows their imperfections and stuff. But when it comes to the people that you follow or you admire, sadly, the people that you go for are the unattainable ones”. This reflects a very subjective and personal preference in terms of online content consumption but offers an interesting perspective on the topic. It also leads to a distorted mindset that is likely due to the social media trends of the last decade, particularly Instagram, which is notorious for its abundance of photo-edited and fake content. Nevertheless, several participants expressed concern that authenticity is not sufficiently recognized in social media and expressed a desire for more authentic content. Lauren added, “Honestly, I think it’s not embraced enough”. They also expressed the wish that various companies should deal more openly with the issue of mental health.

I believe this approach helps to raise awareness among other beauty brands and encourages them to have a more authentic and genuine presence on social media by showing real bodies and normal-looking women. This shift can help younger generations, who are most influenced by social media, to develop a healthy relationship with their bodies and minds and understand what real beauty means. Influential brands that fail to show authenticity online can often lead to damaging self-comparisons, which in many cases can lead to mental health issues among young people. Influencer-led brands are having a significant impact on consumers, particularly Gen Z, who are constantly online (Parker & Igielnik, 2020) and place a lot of trust in these influencers. These brands have the potential to drive positive change in the beauty industry by encouraging genuine self-expression and acknowledging everyday imperfections (Duffy, 2017, pp. 159, 170). Therefore, this work can serve as inspiration and encouragement to stop promoting unattainable ideal body types.

While this study underpins many aspects of the theoretical framework relating to authenticity and celebrity endorsement, it also highlights significant discrepancies that challenge established theories. For example, while authenticity in social media marketing is praised as a cornerstone for being appealing to Generation Z, the notion of celebrity-driven authenticity has inherent contradictions. The findings show that while Selena Gomez's personal engagement and transparency contribute to the perceived authenticity of Rare Beauty, this authenticity is paradoxically reinforced by her celebrity status. This raises critical questions about the nature of authenticity - is it truly about being genuine and credible, or can it be manufactured through strategic celebrity engagement?

Furthermore, participants expressed skepticism towards other celebrity-owned brands, suggesting that Rare Beauty’s success may be an exception rather than the rule. This contradicts Teng’s (2020) assertion that fans inherently ascribe more credibility to brands endorsed by celebrities, as both fans and non-fans of Gomez rated Rare Beauty positively, suggesting that the brand’s appeal extends beyond its celebrity status. These findings suggest that while celebrity

involvement can improve brand perception, they do not automatically confer authenticity. Instead, authenticity must be established through consistent, genuine engagement and alignment with core values. This finding urges a reevaluation of the theoretical framework and emphasizes that authenticity in the digital age is a complex, multi-layered construct that cannot be attributed to celebrity influence alone.

6. Conclusion

This thesis explored how Rare Beauty's social media marketing strategies on Instagram are perceived by Generation Z, with a focus on authenticity. The main objective was to uncover these perceptions through an in-depth analysis of interviews held with ten respondents. The findings indicate that Generation Z perceives Rare Beauty's social media presence as genuinely authentic and identified key elements that contribute to this authenticity. These elements include genuine authenticity, compelling storytelling, inclusivity, humor, and transparent discussions about mental health.

A key factor that promotes the authenticity of the brand is Selena Gomez's personal engagement. Her openness about her own mental health struggles and active participation in social media campaigns resonates well with Gen Z. Participants emphasized that Gomez's sincere commitment and personal connection to the brand's mission make her a credible and trustworthy figure that reinforces Rare Beauty's perceived authenticity.

Significant overlap was found between the aspects of Rare Beauty's social media marketing that were perceived as authentic by participants and those highlighted in the brand's digital marketing strategy (Case Description). With Selena Gomez as the face of the brand and a viral success with a product on TikTok shortly after launch, Rare Beauty gained significant initial exposure. However, it is the execution of Rare Beauty's social media strategy on Instagram that makes the company stand out for the respondents in the beauty industry. The research findings show that participants view these social media strategies as authentic and genuine, describing them as "really refreshing" amidst the plethora of overly perfect content on Instagram. Participants appreciated the unconventional mix of light-hearted humor and serious discussions about mental health and found this combination personable and engaging. In addition, the brand's authenticity was reinforced by its commitment to inclusion, portraying different types of people, and Gomez's active participation and personal involvement in social media content. Finally, the results strongly challenge the traditional marketing funnel, as both word of mouth from friends and trusted individuals, as well as electronic word of mouth through hashtags, trusted influencers, and brand virality on social media, have made the traditional funnel less relevant. This indicates that the funnel needs to be rethought and adapted to the new standards of modern digital marketing. Together, these elements help to ensure that participants continue to perceive Rare Beauty as an authentic brand and continue to engage with its content.

The discussion confirms many of the theories presented in the theoretical framework and shows that Rare Beauty's strategy is carefully designed and incorporates elements from previous successful online advertising concepts. Rare Beauty has evolved these strategies by leveraging technological advances and new functionalities of social media platforms, such as reels on Instagram, to amplify their impact. However, it also reveals significant contradictions. While Selena Gomez's personal

engagement and transparency reinforce the perceived authenticity of the brand, her celebrity status paradoxically simultaneously supports and challenges this authenticity. Some participants expressed a general skepticism about celebrity-led brands, suggesting that Rare Beauty's success may be an exception. These findings indicate that while celebrity involvement can improve brand perception, true authenticity requires consistent, genuine engagement and alignment with core values, suggesting a re-evaluation of the theoretical framework for authenticity in digital marketing. For example, Kennedy et al. (2021) argue that consumers inherently respond more positively to brands owned by celebrities, a statement that should be reconsidered or placed in a similar context to Teng's (2020) research suggesting that fans of celebrities perceive greater credibility than non-fans. Another theory that requires reevaluation is Oliveira et al.'s (2019) assertion that authenticity on social media is the "greatest determinant of success" (p. 118), which contrasts with my findings. While authenticity is still crucial, my research shows that it is not the primary determinant of success; other factors play an equally important role. This view aligns with Dutton's (2003) characterization of authenticity as a "dimension word" (p. 258), which highlights its contextual nature. While authenticity may dominate in digital marketing, in social media consumers place equal, if not more, value on factors such as entertainment and engagement. Therefore, these theories that my research challenges are dependent on specific dimensions or contexts.

A limitation of this study is the sample size and diversity. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of ten respondents, with nine being female and one male, which does not fully represent the wider Generation Z. Participants were selected based on their familiarity with Rare Beauty on Instagram and the beauty industry, resulting in selection bias. This limited and specific sample size may affect the generalizability of the results to a larger population. Future research should include a larger and more diverse group of participants, encompassing different backgrounds, a more balanced number of different genders, geographic locations, and levels of engagement with the brand. For example, expanding the study to include a larger sample size and from different countries and cultures. Including more respondents from Eastern societies, as this study consists mainly of Western participants, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of global perceptions of Rare Beauty and its perceived authenticity.

Another limitation of this research is that the focus is primarily on Instagram and may overlook how Rare Beauty's marketing strategies are perceived on other social media platforms such as YouTube. Each platform has unique features and user demographics that can influence the effectiveness and perception of marketing strategies. This limitation may suggest that the overall impact cannot be captured in its entirety. Future research could examine a broader range of social media platforms to gain a more holistic view of Rare Beauty's digital presence and strategy effectiveness. For example, analyzing Rare Beauty's marketing on YouTube, where longer content allows for more in-depth storytelling, could provide further insight.

A final limitation of this work is its sole relation to a specific time span and does not consider technological changes in social media, consumer behavior, or Rare Beauty's marketing strategies that may occur in the future. Technology is constantly evolving and so are social media platforms and marketing tactics, which are influenced by technological advances, changing user preferences, and competitive dynamics. These changes could affect the relevance and applicability of findings over time. Longitudinal studies that track perceptions over time could provide deeper and more meaningful insights on how brand authenticity and consumer engagement evolve. For example, a follow-up study conducted one year later could show how new marketing campaigns and changes in social media algorithms affect consumer perceptions and engagement.

Selena Gomez wanted to make Rare Beauty more than just a beauty brand; she envisioned the company as a positive force for change for a better world. Her strategy for Rare Beauty's social media accounts was heavily inspired by the brand's core mission: to challenge and break unrealistic standards of perfection in the beauty industry. As reflected in the brand's Instagram message, "There is no right or wrong when you are yourself" (Rare Beauty, 2024).

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Main Topics	Support Questions
Background Information	What is your name and age?
	What level of education did you complete?
	What is your nationality?
	What is your occupation?
Social media use	What social media platforms do you use?
	What kind of pages do you mostly follow?
	Based on what do you decide to follow these pages?
Familiarity with Rare Beauty brand	Are you familiar with Rare Beauty?
	What is your perception about the brand?
	Please name a few reasons why you are interested in the brand?
Familiarity with Rare Beauty socials	Do you follow Rare Beauty on social media?
	Why do you follow them on these platforms?
Understanding authenticity	Can you share a personal experience where you encountered original content on social media? What made it feel real to you?
	In your opinion, what role does truthfulness play in shaping your social media experiences?
	What role do you think realness plays in the success of marketing campaigns on social media platforms?
	Based on your interactions with Rare Beauty's

Evaluation of Rare Beauty's authenticity	social media content, what kind of content makes it real to you?
	Can you recall a specific post or campaign by Rare Beauty where you felt the brand's realness was particularly evident?
	What aspects contributed to this perception?
Celebrity-owned brand	Do you think your interest in the brand has to do with Selena Gomez being the founder? Why?
	Does Selena Gomez being the face of Rare Beauty influence the way you feel about the brand?
	Do you believe there is a contradiction between realness and celebrity status on social media? Why or why not?
Motivations to engage with Rare Beauty socials	What motivates you to engage with Rare Beauty's social media accounts?
	To what extent does realness play a role in your decision to engage with Rare Beauty's content?
	Have you ever purchased or considered purchasing Rare Beauty products based on their social media content?
	If so, what factors influenced your decision?
Rare Beauty launch in 2020 amidst COVID-19 pandemic	What do you think made it stand out compared to the other brands? And if so, what aspects specifically?
Concluding statement about comparing Rare Beauty (Selena Gomez) – Rhode (Hailey Bieber)	A girl in an interview said: When you buy Rare Beauty products, you want to feel beautiful within yourself and enhance your beauty and just feel good about yourself. But when you buy a Rhode product you want to be Hailey who

	<p>represents that trendy, clean aesthetics girl. You want to be that girl.</p> <p>Do you agree or disagree with this statement?</p> <p>And why?</p>
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Appendix B

Coding Tree

Main Code	Sub-Theme	Quotes
Perception of Authenticity in Rare Beauty's Social Media Content	Relatability and realness	<p><i>"They focus a lot on making people feel comfortable with themselves and using makeup as something to enhance their own beauty, not to mask what they already have"</i></p> <p><i>"It feels more real when they show normal people using their products"</i></p>
	Marketing approach	<p><i>"Their marketing approach is really good because they focus on making the people feel comfortable with themselves"</i></p> <p><i>"When they tell stories, it's not just about the product. With Rare Beauty it's about the people who use the product and their experiences"</i></p> <p><i>"I enjoy their humorous content; it adds a fun element to their brand"</i></p> <p><i>"I think Selena's message of rare is that everyone is rare"</i></p>
	Founder's presence and personal connection	<p><i>"Selena herself being involved gives some sort of authentic dimension because it is her brand"</i></p>

		<p><i>“When Selena talks about beauty and self-acceptance, it feels real because you know she’s been through similar struggles”</i></p> <p><i>“If it would only be about profit for Rare Beauty, they wouldn’t care how the packaging looks like”</i></p> <p><i>“I mean, of course it’s the appeal that it’s owned by a celebrity”</i></p> <p><i>“She’s like a person that’s been very present ever since I’ve been young. So, I think that’s just what naturally strengthens my interest in the brand”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel like I had the level of trust on it”</i></p>
	<p>Engagement drivers</p>	<p><i>“I follow them because of their campaigns like #WeAre and how they involve the community”</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve also seen the #RareRoutine where Selena shows her get ready routine and motivates her audience to share their routine and tag them by using the hashtag”</i></p> <p><i>“With Rare Beauty, I would say definitely the hype around it sometimes makes it stand out”</i></p> <p><i>“Their videos are entertaining and fun to watch, which makes more enjoyable than only</i></p>

		<i>watching products being promoted”</i>
	Alignment with brand values	<p><i>“I also feel like they preach a lot for inclusivity and feeling beautiful in your own natural beauty”</i></p> <p><i>“Their focus on mental health and self-acceptance is really important to me”</i></p>

Appendix C

Information and consent form

Authenticity in Rare Beauty's marketing strategies

Introduction

Dear participant,

My name is Stella Gold, and I am currently writing my final master's thesis paper for Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am conducting research on how Generation Z perceives the promotion of authenticity in Rare Beauty marketing strategies on social.

I will explain the study below. If you have any questions, please ask me. While reading, you can mark parts of the text that are unclear to you. If you do not understand words or concepts, I can provide an explanation. You can ask additional questions at any time.

If you want to participate in the study, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

What is the research about?

My research is about the perceived authenticity of Rare Beauty's social media practices. The aim of the study is to understand how Generation Z perceives Rare Beauty's authenticity marketing on social media, whether they recognize it as such and what role Selena Gomez, the celebrity founder, plays in shaping this perception.

Why are we asking you to participate?

We ask you to participate because you are a member of Generation Z, you are familiar with the Rare Beauty brand and its social media accounts, have valuable social media knowledge.

What can you expect?

The study lasts 3 months

If you participate in this study, you will take part in:

An interview:

This interview will last up to 45 minutes. If you do not want to answer a question during the interview, you are not required to do so.

I will make an audio and video recording of the conversation.

At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to comment on your answers. If you disagree with my notes or if I misunderstood you, you can ask to have parts of them amended or deleted.

You decide whether to participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts while participating in this study.

What do you get for participating? / What are the benefits of participating?

There are no immediate, or financial benefits for participating in the study, however sharing your experiences will shed more light on the situation concerning the perceived authenticity of .

What data will I ask you to provide?

I will store your data so that I can be in contact with you. For the study, I will also need other data from you. During the interview, I will ask you about the following personal data: sentiments about / feelings about / opinions about the Irish film and television industries and industry workers.

Who can see your data? / What will happen to my data?

- I store all your data securely.
- Only persons involved in the research can see (some of) the data.
- Recordings are transcribed. Your name is replaced with a number/made-up name.
- Data such as your name (direct personal data) will be deleted separately from your answers/the transcription.
- I will write an article about the results of the study which may be published (publicly share the results) in (academic) journals and/or books. The results would be accessible by anyone.
- We may use your specific answers in the article. If your answer can be traced to you or we would like to mention your name, we will ask your permission first.

Although we do not include your name in publications or communicate it to other participants or third parties, there is a risk that you could still be indirectly identified. [This for example because they are familiar with the organisation you work for.]

How long will your personal data be stored?

Your data will be retained for 10 years after completion of the research. We retain the data so that other researchers have the opportunity to verify that the research was conducted correctly. [Your name and contact details will be deleted within one year].

Using your data for new research

(Part of) the data we collect may be useful in anonymized form, for example for educational purposes and future research, including in very different research areas. We ensure that the data cannot be traced back to you/we do not disclose anything that identifies you.

In addition, in the consent form we ask you to give us permission to use your personal data [excluding name, mail address] for follow-up or other scientific research. The data shared are pseudonymized.

(Part of) the data we collect may be useful for educational purposes and future research, including in very different research areas. In the consent form we ask you to give us permission to use your personal data [excluding name, mail address] for follow-up or other scientific research. The data shared are pseudonymized.

What happens with the results of the study?

You may indicate if you would like to receive the results.

Do you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data, please contact me.

Name: Stella Gold

Phone number: +49 1709037288

Email: 705656sg@student.eur.nl

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

Do you regret your participation?

During or after the study, you may regret your participation. Until you submit the survey, you can still decide not to take part in the research. [If you stop, your data will not be stored.] After you click 'send', we cannot trace what data you have shared with us anymore.

Ethics approval

This research has been reviewed and approved by an internal review committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam (approval number: ETHXXXX-XXXX). This committee ensures that research participants are protected. If you would like to know more about this RERC/IRB, please contact <https://my.eur.nl/en/eshcc-employee/research/ethics-privacy-data-management>.

Declaration of Consent

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered.

By signing this form, I:

1. consent to participate in this research;
2. consent to the use of my personal data (applicable)
3. confirm that I am at least 18 years old;
4. confirm that I understand that participating in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time;
5. confirm that I understand that my data will be anonymised for publication, educational purposes and further research;

Check the boxes below if you consent to this.

Data

I consent to the collection, use and retention of the following data: Opinions, sentiments, feelings, past experiences.

Audio recording

I consent to the interview being audio recorded.

Visual recording

I consent to the interview being filmed.

Name of participant:

Participant's signature:

Date:

You will receive a copy of the complete information and consent form.