

EXAMINING THE DUPE TREND AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE
IN ONLINE SPACES: A MEANING-MAKING PERSPECTIVE

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IN ONLINE SPACES: A MEANING-MAKING PERSPECTIVE

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Examining the Dupe Trend as Cultural Resistance in Online Spaces:
A Meaning-Making Perspective

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
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ABSTRACT

Examining the Dupe Trend as Cultural Resistance in Online Spaces:

A Meaning-Making Perspective

The emergence of participatory culture on social media has given rise to viral trends, such as the dupe trend in the beauty community, which influences consumers' consumption habits. Conceptualizing the dupe trend as a practice and further imbuing acts with oppositional dynamics enables an understanding of the dynamics of cultural shifts as relationships among products, acts, and meanings become apparent. Brands and products acquire meaning through continuous interaction with various market actors, including the brand, consumers, and popular culture. More research on cultural meaning-makers is needed to understand better how brands acquire specific meanings. This manuscript, belonging to the interpretive paradigm, contributes to this need in the literature by exploring the meanings associated with dupe practice. Social media influencers are regarded as cultural production systems and meaning-makers who articulate and negotiate cultural meanings in dupe practice. In this practice, affordable products that resemble luxury products in terms of performance are known as dupe products and acquire cultural meanings of accessibility. Dupe consumers acquire symbolic meanings by their preferences, such as smart consumers, and their consumption choices signal achievement and utilitarianism. Further, the specifics of the meaning of "dupe" are negotiated in the beauty community through continuous interactions between social media influencers and consumers.

ÖZET

Çevrimiçi Alanlarda Kültürel Direniş Olarak Muadil Trendinin İncelenmesi:

Anlam Yaratma Perspektifi

Sosyal medyada katılımcı kültürün ortaya çıkması viral trendlerin, örneğin güzellik topluluğundaki muadil trendi, artışına sebep olmakta ve tüketicilerin tüketim alışkanlıklarını etkilemektedir. Muadil trendini bir pratik olarak kavramsallaştırmak ve dahası davranışları karşıt dinamiklerle donatmak, ürünler, davranışlar ve anlamların ilişkilerini görünür kılacağından, kültürel değişimlerin dinamiklerini anlamayı sağlayacaktır. Marka ve ürünler; marka, tüketiciler ve popüler kültürün dahil olduğu pazar oyuncularını ile sürekli etkileşim sayesinde anlam kazanırlar. Markaların nasıl anlam kazandığını anlamak için kültürel anlam yaratıcıları üzerine daha fazla araştırma yapılması gerekmektedir. Yorumlayıcı paradigmaya ait olan bu çalışma, muadil pratiği ile ilişkilendirilen anlamları keşfederek literatürdeki bu gerekliliğe katkı sağlamaktadır. Sosyal medya fenomenleri, muadil pratiğinde kültürel anlamları ifade ve müzakere ederek, birer kültürel üretim sistemleri ve anlam yaratıcılar olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu pratikte performans açısından lüks ürünlere benzeyen uygun fiyatlı ürünler muadil ürünler olarak bilinmekte ve erişilebilirlik kültürel anlamını kazanmaktadır. Tüketiciler bu seçimleriyle akıllı tüketiciler olarak sembolik anlam kazanmakta ve tüketim tercihleri de başarıyı ve faydacılığı yansıtmaktadır. Dahası, "muadil" kelimesi güzellik topluluğunda sosyal medya fenomenleri ve tüketiciler arasında yaşanan sürekli bir etkileşim ile müzakere edilmektedir.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my son, Derin Batuhan and to my husband Gurkan.

My dear son, please discover your passion and pursue it with determination. I wholeheartedly believe that you will! My dear husband, I hope all the opportunities you have given me also come back to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	5
2.1 Practice theory	5
2.2 The practices of everyday life	9
CHAPTER 3: MEANING-MAKING AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION.....	16
3.1 Meaning-making and meaning transfer.....	16
3.2 Social media influencers.....	21
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	27
4.1 Overview	27
4.2 Netnography	28
4.3 Hermeneutics.....	32
4.4 Current study	40
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	54
5.1 Dupe videos as a tactical resistance practice.....	55
5.2 Accessibility	64
5.3 Smart consumer	75
5.4 Achievement.....	90
5.5 Utilitarianism.....	93
5.6 Co-constitution of the “dupe” meaning.....	102
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....	114
REFERENCES.....	123

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Objects and Doings of Dupe Practice.....	60
Table 2. Elements of Dupe Practice.....	61
Table 3. Meanings and Tactics of Dupe Practice.....	62
Table 4. Meanings in Dupe Practice and Their Definitions.....	63
Table 5. Tactics Employed by SMIs in Dupe Practice and Their Definitions.....	63



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. One of the oldest dupe videos on YouTube.....	56
Figure 2. Light toned and glittery make-up by Kelly Strack.....	65
Figure 3. Affiliate links of both luxury and dupe products by YouTuber fuicyjas.....	69
Figure 4. Viral dupe as the object of the dupe practice by Jessica Braun.....	71
Figure 5. Ava Reid shows other content creators' dupe reviews on TikTok illustrate the popularity.....	74
Figure 6. Abbey Yung looks puzzled when pronouncing the price of the luxury product.....	78
Figure 7. SK-II Facial Treatment Clear Lotion Pitera story on SK-II official website.....	80
Figure 8. Tati showing her notebook to prove her “tactical laboring”	87
Figure 9. Pampered Wolf acts like she is giving a secret while saying “Shh!”	96
Figure 10. Laura Lee exaggerates the resemblance through humor and theatrics.....	97
Figure 11. Mia Maples doing split face makeup with luxury and dupe products.....	98

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the nature of cultural shifts driven by trends in consumer culture from a meaning-making perspective. The beauty industry is known for being dominated by ever-changing trends such as wellness, personalization, inclusion, and dupes (*The beauty category's dynamic growth: A 2024 mid-year update*, 2024); hence, the online beauty community, including brands, content creators, social media influencers (SMIs), media outlets, and consumers, provides rich and relevant data to explore changing consumption meanings. Consumers' interest in finding better deals or affordable products similar to their high-end counterparts is not a new phenomenon in the beauty market. However, the participatory online environment of Web 2.0 has influenced both the content and extent of this consumer practice. In the last few years, the economic downturn and rise in inflation have increased the demand for affordable options. More specifically, consumers who desire access to luxury brands and their symbolic associations do so by searching for economic alternatives that give similar experiences to luxury brands (Hood, 2023). Known as dupe culture on the internet (Sandler, 2023), these consumers look for products that look or perform similarly to luxury brands and call these affordable options “dupes,” meaning “duplicates.” SMIs play a crucial role in the emergence and continuity of this trend producing online content about dupe products on various social media platforms, the most popular being TikTok and YouTube. The popularity of dupe products is further supported by other online platforms, such as websites specifically created for consumers searching for dupes of high-end products. Such as www.dupe.com, www.skinkoolbeauty.com, and www.dupeshopbeauty.com. BBC

World Service Business Daily podcast referred to this online trend as a cultural shift in consumer culture that attaches new meanings to affordable products.

In this dissertation, I explore this real-world phenomenon within the online beauty community in order to understand this cultural shift deeply and examine the process by which specific cultural meanings are associated with dupe practice.

MacInnis et al. (2020) have encouraged consumer researchers to move beyond studying constructs commonly found in marketing literature and instead investigate real-world phenomena using theoretical frameworks. This approach then increases the impact of academic research by extending its influence beyond academia (MacInnis et al., 2020).

This dissertation is organized as follows. In chapter two of this dissertation, to comprehend this real-world phenomenon, I conceptualized dupe videos using theoretical concepts which I borrowed from practice theories and cultural studies. I adopt a practice theory perspective to dupe videos, examining the evolving nature of consumption meanings by conceptualizing them as practices. A practice refers to a routine activity that incorporates objects, shared understandings, meanings, and performances (Reckwitz, 2002b; Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005). Therefore, a practice-based approach to dupe videos reveals the meaning-making activities of SMIs within this consumption culture. I begin the chapter by introducing prominent practice theories and their relationship with consumption. Then, I explain my point in adopting Magaudda's (2011) circuit of practice framework to study the dupe trend. In the second part of this chapter, I explore Michel de Certeau's (1984) prominent work, "The Practice of Everyday Life," where he treats everyday mundane activities of individuals as a form of resistance to dominant structures. To his account, resistance is not about opposing or leaving the dominant system; rather,

it is the creative acts of individuals in everyday life that subvert and appropriate the meanings imposed by powerful mechanisms to their own ends. This subtle act of individuals consists of mundane activities such as reading, cooking, and walking, in which he asserts that these simple acts are indeed forms of creative resistance. In dupe videos, SMIs recommend affordable options to luxury brands that perform very similarly, and they praise dupe products. I consider this a subtle form of resistance to luxury branding, exploring the dupe practice from an oppositional perspective. I apply the concepts of de Certeau (1984), such as “tactics” and “strategy,” to explore the dupe practice. More specifically, I shed light on how SMIs articulate cultural meanings and imbue their acts with oppositional meanings in dupe practice. This chapter constitutes the background knowledge and conceptualization of my research area to answer my first research question: How do SMIs articulate cultural meanings in the dupe trend that gives rise to cultural shifts in the beauty realm?

In the third chapter, I explore the meaning-making capacities and roles of SMIs; hence, I introduce the meaning literature that examines brand and cultural meanings. In this dissertation, I regard SMIs as cultural producers, just like celebrities in popular culture. Hence, attention is given to their meaning-making practices to understand how they shape brand meanings. SMIs' role in shaping brand meanings is researched in the cases they collaborated with brands (Kozinets et al., 2010; Vanninen et al., 2023). However, their brand meaning-making capacities for organic content are lacking in the literature. Dupe videos are organic content that lacks brands' direct involvement. Hence, to fill this gap in the meaning-making literature, I shed light on how organic content shapes the brand's meanings. This chapter then sets the background for my second research question of this dissertation:

How are the meanings of dupe practice deconstructed and reconstructed within the beauty community?

The fourth chapter explains the methodology of this dissertation and presents the interpretive qualitative analyses in detail. More specifically, nethnographic analysis is utilized along with hermeneutics to answer the research questions of this study. I also elaborate on the validity of the qualitative research by applying reflexivity.

In the fifth chapter, I present my findings and discuss them, referencing relevant literature. I demonstrate how the dupe trend benefits not only dupe products but also luxury brands by revealing SMIs' tactics in negotiating cultural meanings. Also, I show how meanings are disseminated and shaped in this culture with the collaborative acts of SMIs and consumers.

The last chapter, the conclusion, presents my theoretical and managerial contributions. I also recommend future research areas that use practice theory as a lens to study online phenomena.

In the meaning-making literature, Allen et al. (2008) call for more research on non-marketer meaning-creation systems to better understand the construction of brand meanings in the market. Hence, this dissertation answers this call by recognizing SMIs as cultural meaning-makers and exploring their meaning-making activities within dupe practice.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Practice theory

Practice theory is a school of thought in the social sciences and humanities rather than a single theory that analytically explains the production of everyday life and substitutes for dualisms such as structure and agency, body and mind, idealism, and materialism (Gannon & Prothero, 2018; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017; Shove et al., 2012). Indeed, Reckwitz (2002) and Halkier et al. (2011) use the plural form and refer to practice theories rather than the singular term for this reason. The earliest practice theories go back to the works of Wittgenstein and Heidegger; in this view, actions or experiences of individuals are not the result of intentional decision-making but rather practices that are habits and routine actions that change in a continuous fashion, creating experiences (Shove et al., 2012). Hence, practice theories derive their roots from philosophy and social sciences and the theorization of practices accomplished by Theodore Schatzki (1996, 2002) (Halkier et al., 2011).

According to Schatzki (1996), practices define how people act by providing a framework that lays out factors to consider when performing actions; so, practices are not informing specific actions but rather informing things to be considered when acting; hence it deals with “how” to take action, rather than “what” actions to be taken (Schatzki, 1996). Therefore, actions constitute practices, and practices inform how to take those actions. Schatzki (1996) emphasizes two particular concepts of practice that explain social phenomena, namely, “doings and sayings” and “performing the action.” The first concept of practice defined by Schatzki (1996) is, “. . . a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings” (p.

103).” For instance, cooking practices consist of a set of doings and sayings: following recipes, washing the vegetables, peeling the onion, mixing the ingredients, heating them, sharing the expertise, and so on. All these doings and sayings are then linked in specific ways that Schatzki (1996) outlines as understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structures. Understandings are know-hows, implicit and shared understandings that are both expressed in sayings and also in bodily activities (doings); rules are explicit instructions or principles and intertwined with understandings, meaning that an implicit understanding is needed to fully make sense of the rules, and finally, the teleoaffective structures are the motivations to pursue the practice that are emotionally charged, working with understandings and rules (Schatzki, 1996). The second concept of practice for Schatzki (1996) is the action that takes place implementing the practice; in other words, it is the performance coming into existence depending on the linkages between doings and sayings. One of the crucial concepts of the practice theory of Schatzki (2002) is “intelligibility,” which relates to the meanings embedded in practices that I am specifically interested in this dissertation. He states that “intelligibility,” which refers to “making sense” and “meaning,” is achieved by understanding. The meanings are linked to understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structure. Hence, in order to search for meaning in any practice, a researcher should pay special attention to the linkages among these practice elements. Also, it is essential to note that intelligibility may change as the practices evolve and change, triggered by new actions. One of the crucial concepts of the practice theory of Schatzki (2002) is “intelligibility,” which relates to the meanings embedded in practices that I am specifically interested in this dissertation. He states that “intelligibility,” which refers to “making sense” and “meaning,” is achieved by understanding. The meanings are linked to

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Along with Schatzki (1996), Reckwitz (2002b) theorizes social practices and regards them as the primary organizing activities of everyday life. According to Reckwitz (2002b), practice is "a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is understood" (p.9). For Reckwitz (2002b), routines, which are practices, are made up of the social structure, and agents are the carriers and the ones performing the practices. Both Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002b), recognizes that the unit of analysis is not agents who perform the actions but the practices in which actions take place. However, Reckwitz's focus on social practices differs from Schatzki's (1996) theorization. One facet that distinguishes Reckwitz's (2002b) theorization from that of Schatzki's (1996) is its focus on "things" in practice. Objects are crucial elements of practice, as, in playing football, for example, an object like a ball is needed to perform the action. Also, their role is significant in social change as objects shape social practices (Reckwitz, 2002a).

Even though Reckwitz (2002a, 2002b) regards objects as crucial components of social practices, their recognition as an element of consumption is achieved by Warde (2005). In other words, Warde (2005) introduced the theories of practices to study consumption, replacing the unit of analysis as "consumer" with "practices"

within consumption studies (Halkier et al., 2011). According to Warde (2005), consumption is inherent to practices as it is not confined to goods but also includes services, acts, and information. Hence, every practice deals with consumption of some sort. Drawing from Schatzki's (1996) linkages of practices that hold together the integrative practice, which are understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structures, Warde (2005) defines components of practices as understandings, procedures, and engagements.

As Warde (2005) introduced the practice approach to study consumption, the importance of the objects is thoroughly captured by Shove et al.'s (2012) theorization of practices. Previously, Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002b) acknowledged the role of materiality, though authors placed different degrees of emphasis on it. However, Shove et al. (2012) maintain the fundamental role of materials in everyday practices and lay out three separate elements of practice: materials, competencies, and meaning (Shove et al., 2012). "Materials" in Shove et al.'s (2012) framework include all the elements that constitute the practice, which was before captured by the term "objects" by Schatzki (2002), encompassing not only things but also the body engaging in the movement. "Competences" were discussed by former practice theorists as understanding and knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002a; Schatzki, 1996, 2002), which also includes the concept of skills. Finally, the emotionally charged "teleoaffective" structures, which are represented by the mental framework and motivations later on in Reckwitz's theorization, are framed as "meaning" that has a symbolic facet of practices (Shove et al., 2012). Those three elements then work together to shape everyday practices, and their various relationships and features account for the life of social practices: their emergence, continuity, and change. One of the key insights of Shove's practice theory is tracking

the change and evolution of practices by analyzing the linkages among practice elements. Once the linkages among these elements change, such as if new linkages are made or previous linkages are broken, then the practice changes.

Like Shove et al. (2012), Magaudda (2011) brought practice elements together from earlier practice theories that would account for studying not only one object but other objects prevalent in practices to analyze it in a broader context to study the dematerialization of music due to digitalization. In other words, materiality is constituted as encompassing multiple objects, not only one object, as practices involve multiple things, and their relationships or any change in one object has an effect on the other elements of practice, giving way for a practice to change (Magaudda, 2011). The “circuit of practice” then consists of objects, meanings, and doings to analyze change in practices. Shove’s and Magaudda’s practice theories emphasize change and are beneficial in understanding practice changes. However, Magaudda’s circuit of practice is more efficient for tracking practice change, as it directly shows the interplay among the practice elements during change. Also, the emphasis on doings in Magaudda’s model makes it more effective to analyze dupe videos as practice; hence, for this study, Magaudda’s (2011) interactive practice model is applied to the social media context to explore how SMIs’ articulations and negotiations of cultural meanings shape beauty practices.

2.2 The practices of everyday life

A historian and cultural theorist, Michel de Certeau’s (1925-1984) prominent work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) deals with how seemingly ordinary practices are indeed creative forms of resistance. Dupe videos analyzed in this dissertation are imbued with resistance acts and narratives of SMIs; hence, De Certeau’s (1984)

concepts are appropriate to apply to the context of dupe videos. De Certeau's (1984) work on everyday practices will be discussed from several aspects concerning everyday consumption, as his concepts of "tactic," "strategy," "space," "place," and "poaching," will be elaborated to construct a bases for the analysis in Chapter 5.

In line with social practice theories discussed in the previous section, the focus of de Certeau (1984) in his analysis was not on the individuals but instead on the actions that constitute their practices. He refers to everyday practices as "ways of operating" (a Greek term) and aims to liberate the practices of everyday life from being in the background. Mundane daily activities such as walking, reading, or cooking were then brought to the scene, and such ostensibly ordinary practices proved to be indeed intelligent, and productive acts (de Certeau, 1984). While analyzing everyday practices, de Certeau conceptualizes specific forms of acts, and while doing this, his expressions accommodate metaphors concerning military language, such as "tactics", "strategy", and "battle" (Silverstone, 1989). After laying out two general features of his work, focusing on practices rather than individual subjects, and his heavy usage of military metaphors throughout his study, two essential aspects of everyday practices will be discussed.

The first aspect of de Certeau's (1984) study is his conception of consumption. According to him, consumption is not a passive act, but it is indeed another form of production (de Certeau, 1984, p.xii). Then, consumption does not take a passive form but an active form in his terms (Silverstone, 1989). Individuals engaging in consumption, not only referring to the consumption of materials but also acts, are framed as consumption as well. For example, watching television is a form of consumption, which is given as an example in de Certeau's work and Silverstone's study (1989). Because this type of consumption is not materialized in

products, they are invisible. Nevertheless, they are traceable, embedded in consumers' acts engaging with the products. To put it differently, the consumer's engagement with products (consumption) is not a passive act because while consuming, they are active, not passively absorbing what is out there, but they are decoding, making sense, interpreting, and playing with them, then these acts are a form of production. Hence, it is why de Certeau (1984) emphasized "ways of operating," which could be practices of walking, reading, or cooking. How to perform cooking and what steps should be taken are the "ways of operating". He asserts that there is too much emphasis on "what" is consumed or used, but for him, the focus should be on "how" people use products, hence "ways of using." It is important to note that de Certeau is not interested in actions in themselves, such as "reading" as an action; rather, he is concerned with "modes of operation" (Frow, 1991, p. 59), how one reads, such as what one is doing while reading; hence, one should approach reading as a practice. De Certeau (1984, p.31) gives an example of watching television; rather than taking behavior as the central point, which is "watching" in this example, one should concentrate on "what the consumer does while watching" the television. Hence the use of watching television is the main interest. De Certeau draws away from the behaviorist perspective by not focusing on the act itself. The focus on the "use" aspect of behaviors is also apparent in cultural media studies regarding coding and decoding messages (Hall et al., 2003).

After discussing the agency perspective of everyday practices, a second layer can be added to de Certeau's terminology of "ways of operating," revealing the second aspect of his study concerning everyday practices. That is, de Certeau (1986) views everyday practices as a type of resistance to the established system. Hence, as active agents, consumers perform "ways of operating" that are charged with

oppositional meanings. Here, the terms “tactic,” “strategy,” “place”, and “space” appear to describe how ordinary people operate and against whom they operate (de Certeau, 1984). According to de Certeau (1985, p.xix), subjects or entities that have “control” and “power” own physical “place” in the environment; that “place” demarcates between those who have power and locates the outsider as the other. For instance, an enterprise with a “proper place” can exert its power on the other, in that case, the consumer, or it may be threatened by the “competitor.” “Place” then indicates stability and a proper existence, and it is the first “strategy” of the powerful to separate itself from the other (de Certeau, 1984, p. 36). In short, strategy belongs to the powerful who own and control a physical place and exert power over others. Examples of the strategy are the urban design (roads, streets, and infrastructures of the city are planned to guide and control the movement) and brands (marketing techniques ranging from advertisements to public relations exert influence on consumers, try to control their behaviors, condition them to specific mental and physical activities).

While strategy is the act of the powerful, that is, organized, planned, exerting power and influence over others, tactics then are the practices of the “weak.” In de Certeau's (1984, p.37) terms, “a tactic is an art of the weak”. In that sense, tactics do not own a place. Instead, they occupy a place that is not their own but is owned by the powerful; for instance, ordinary people do not own offices; offices belong to the powerful, yet people inhabit offices and realize their tactics in the offices, the places of the other. Tactics are the political aspect of the everyday performances of the weak (de Certeau, 1984; Morley, 1992; Jang, 2015); they are the creative manipulations of the instances to take benefit (de Certeau, 1984). Tactics depend on moments to perform, yet they do not take ownership; in other words, tactics are the

momentary acts of the weak within the places owned by the powerful; they do not occupy the place, yet do perform within the places owned by the elite (de Certeau, 1984; Frow, 1991; Jang, 2015). Hence, tactics are opportunistic (de Certeau, 1984; Morley, 1992; Silverstone, 1989). They take the chance to perform momentary acts within the places of the powerful yet do not leave a track; that means tactics cannot build up and resist the dominant regime. This aspect of tactics; momentary acts that cannot accumulate can be understood by de Certeau's (1984), following quote about tactics; "whatever it wins, it does not keep" (p.xix). Hence, tactics are momentarily opportunistic and vanish without changing the system of the powerful (de Certeau, 1984; Jang, 2015). Everyday practices such as walking, talking, reading, and shopping are tactical in the sense that if people find an opportunity, they will manipulate the circumstances momentarily by playing within the system on their own terms. These are small winnings against the powerful without eroding its power; de Certeau (1984), calls tactics "clever tricks, maneuvers, joyful discoveries..." (p.xix). To understand the interplay between strategy and tactics, de Certeau gives an example of Spanish colonizers (representing strategy) and indigenous Indians (representing tactics) (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii). Spanish colonizers forced their rituals and laws on natives (Indians), who had no choice but to obey them, yet when looked carefully, these natives indeed reinterpreted those rituals and symbols according to their own interests, which is appropriation (Frow, 1991). Indians did not resist Spanish colonizers because they had no power to do so, yet they created their own meanings within the imposed structure. As de Certeau (1984), puts forward, "... they escaped it without leaving it" (p.xii). According to de Certeau, the same is valid for consumers in everyday practices. According to de Certeau consumption is the "anti-system" (de Certeau, 1984; Frow, 1991). While elites (brands) may impose

their power on consumers through marketing communication, and branding activities, there is space where consumers reinterpret those imposed meanings and instead create their own meanings opposing the system. Here, the term “space” comes to the scene; for de Certeau, “space” denotes human activity, the changing conditions, and the practices of people in everyday life that are happening in the “places.” “Place” belongs to strategy, and it is static, with no human presence, yet place becomes a space when it is inhabited by people bringing action and change (de Certeau, 1984; Jang, 2015; Lammes, 2009). Another term de Certeau heavily uses is the French word “bricolage,” a concept mostly associated with Lévi-Strauss (Dezeuze, 2008; Marion & Nairn, 2011). Bricolage means that an individual engaging with various distinct activities uses different materials belonging to these disparate activities to produce a specific work, which entails creativity (Marion & Nairn, 2011). Hence, a bricoleur uses various separate materials to realize his project. The act of bricolage in consumer culture studies uses the term to refer to materials and the acts of appropriation, re-appropriation, and deconstruction of meanings (Cherrier & Murray, 2007). While bricolage is about the creativity of the individual by making things or meanings with various disconnected elements, the term “poaching,” which de Certeau often used in his study, is similar to bricolage but differs from it by its emphasis on resistance. In other words, poaching is using cultural materials to resist the dominant system. It is reinterpreting, appropriating, and subverting the products of the powerful (consumption objects, spaces, traditions, language, and the like) for one’s own ends to resist. Making do, covering tactics, and poaching is central to de Certeau’s work. Consumers assert their agency in the established system by making do, resisting the cultural products and systems through

their everyday practices without leaving the established market system, as this is the case in dupe videos.



CHAPTER 3

MEANING-MAKING AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

3.1 Meaning-making and meaning transfer

Within consumer culture theory, one stream of research, namely mass-mediated marketplace ideologies, and consumers' interpretive strategies investigate how consumers react to consumer ideology promoted by the mass media (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This research stream, aligning with the postmodernist view of the consumer, acknowledges consumers' agency and pays attention to their interpretive practices (Firat et al., 1995; Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Holt, 1995). Consumer agency means consumers actively use resources in the marketplace to construct their identities; while performing this identity construction, they reflect on the messages distributed by different market actors (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). In this context, consumers engaging with market messages actively decode the meanings of these messages. In simplistic terms, meaning is making sense of the messages or symbols in the cultural world. During the decoding process, the marketer's intended meanings are not always captured by the consumer; instead, the consumer may decode the encoded meaning differently from the intention of the producer, giving rise to a new, distinct meaning (Morley, 1992). According to d'Andrade et al. (1984, p.207-208), there are four functions of meaning: "meanings represent the world, create cultural entities, direct one to do certain things, and evoke certain feelings." Hence, by interpreting media messages through decoding, consumers derive meanings that affect how they construct their cultural worlds and manifest themselves in their consumption practices. Nonetheless, individuals are embedded in cultural, historical, and social contexts, which then makes those backgrounds inseparable from

consumers' interpretation and construction of meanings during their interaction with the market (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). Put differently, cultural, social, and historical contexts, as well as personal backgrounds, which are also embedded in historical and socio-cultural contexts, affect the way consumers attach meanings to their consumption practices and market goods (Thompson, 1997). This is also valid for consumers' interpretation of media communication activities such as advertisements. Consumers' interpretation of advertisements, hence deriving meanings from them by decoding the information embedded in them, is also shaped by consumers' exposure to mass media such as magazines and television programs (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; McCracken, 1989). In their research, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) identify three distinct strategies of consumers deconstructing the meaning of advertisements: consumers interpret advertisements as a source of inspiration, second being critical about the advertisements, consumers read the underlying economic motivations of advertisers and reject those imposed meanings, and lastly, consumers engaging in personalization of the desirable values in the media image, by incorporating them to their self-concept. From there, it is evident that consumers are not passively absorbing the information present in the advertisements. Instead, they are active agents embedded in cultural, social and historical contexts, constructing their own personal meanings by engaging in various strategies in interpreting the media messages. Hence, consumers engage in meaning-decoding acts through their ongoing interactions with market offerings and market agents.

In the meaning-making literature, three different kinds of meanings can be outlined: cultural meanings, personal meanings, and brand meanings. Cultural meanings are the shared understandings by a specific group of people, and they are

actively constituted through the ongoing interactions among individuals and their cultural environments (Tharp & Scott, 1990). Personal meanings are not disconnected from cultural meanings; they are the meanings people personally derive by participating in cultural life, shaped and influenced by their personal values, experiences, and beliefs, which are embedded in social, cultural, and historical contexts (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). Lastly, Batey (2015) discriminates between two types of brand meaning: primary and implicit brand meaning. Primary brand meaning concerns the attributes of the brand and its associations with the product category. Marketers have control on this primary meaning of the brand, consistently communicating the crafted brand meaning through branding, and marketing communication activities. On the other hand, implicit brand meaning is based on consumers' interpretations of the brand identity that marketers create (Batey, 2015). Then, the brand is co-created by both marketers, and consumers (Batey, 2015; Kates, 2006). It is important to note that, according to Batey (2015), these interpretations are shaped by the socio-psychological determinants of consumers and the consumer's cultural context. Because cultural context is essential to implicit brand meaning and culture is not static but dynamic (Fiske, 2010), implicit brand meanings may change over time. In all of the meanings, personal, cultural, and brand meaning, cultural context is inherent, and the acknowledgment of the embeddedness of consumers in cultural context is crucial to understanding their engagements with media and market offerings in their meaning-making practices revolving around everyday consumption.

According to McCracken (1985, p.73), culture is the collection of ideas and performances that create the world by giving its meaning; it is both a "lens" that the world is understood and it is a "blueprint" that guides social practices. People sharing

the same culture or subculture then have similar understandings for some of the market offerings. The term interpretive communities are relevant here to explain that people sharing the same socio-cultural background interpret marketing communication materials in a similar vein due to their employment of similar interpretation strategies (Kates, 2006). For instance, Star Trek fans utilize similar decoding strategies to reveal and agree on cultural meanings (Kozinets, 2001). Hence, to synthesize the aspects made up until this point, the consumer agency reveals itself in interpreting the marketing materials and communication activities, thus attaching meaning to marketing offerings and marketing tools. All of the meanings, personal, cultural, or brand meanings, are embedded in historical and socio-cultural contexts. Also, consumers of the same cultures or subcultures have similar interpretive strategies.

In addition to these aspects of meaning, it is crucial to highlight its dynamic form; meaning is not static but in constant flow. McCracken's (1986) meaning transfer model (MTM) presents a framework that captures how cultural meanings move within consumer cultures and societies. The two concepts, cultural categories, and cultural principles are used in McCracken's meaning transfer model (1986) to understand how cultures imbue the world with meaning. Cultural categories are the organizing frameworks of the cultural world, such as time, gender, class, and status, whereas cultural principles are the underlying reasons why the world is separated into such categories. For instance, the concepts of masculinity or femininity are the cultural principles. According to the MTM, meaning is located in three distinct places: the culturally constituted world, consumer goods, and individual consumers (McCracken, 1986). The culturally constituted world is explained above, where McCracken sees culture as a lens and blueprint that constructs the world and

embodies it with meaning. From this cultural world two distinct instruments carry meanings to consumer goods: advertising and the fashion system (McCracken, 1986, p. 72). In the advertising system, cultural meanings are embedded in the media image and text by creative work that employs techniques to draw attention to specific meanings, aiming to be decoded as the marketer intended. As stated earlier, marketers encode meanings in their creative work, and consumers decode those encoded meanings. However, consumers may construct meanings different from marketers' intended meanings (Morley, 1992). It is aimed that consumers will deconstruct the message as intended by the marketer to complete the meaning transfer (McCracken, 1986). On the other hand, the fashion system has three paths that transfer meanings to goods. The first path resembles the advertising system in that print media, like magazines, transmit intended cultural meanings to readers. The second path, according to McCracken, involves opinion leaders such as celebrities who invent new cultural meanings that manifest themselves in new designs or cultural values. Hence, rather than in a cultural text, meaning is embodied in the celebrity, indeed celebrities possess multiple meanings, and represent multiple cultural categories (McCracken, 1989). The last path is revolutionary in that it involves a radical transformation of cultural meanings and refining the established cultural categories and principles (McCracken, 1986). McCracken gives examples of this path as revolutionary groups such as hippies, punks, or gays. As advertising and the fashion system carry meanings to consumer goods in the ways elaborated above, these consumer goods constituted with cultural meanings transfer meaning to the personal lives of consumers via four different rituals: possession, exchange, grooming, and divestment rituals (McCracken, 1986).

Hence, the MTM is a framework that shows how meaning is transferred to consumers' lives from a culturally constituted world, yet it is not without criticism. The MTM model is challenged because it treats culture as a given, static framework (Belk, 1989). One of the points Belk (1989) raises is that, indeed, the consumption activity itself, along with the fashion and advertising system, creates cultural meanings rather than just transmitting cultural meanings from a given system. Also, Thompson and Tian (2008) challenge the meaning transfer model by criticizing its simplistic, top-down meaning flow model. In their research, the authors investigate the interactions between commercial mythmaking and popular memory by analyzing the interview data of the editors of the two Southern lifestyle magazines. They reveal that different market actors, in this case, these two magazines, pragmatically compete for identity value by commercial mythmaking, serving their own commercial interests, shaping popular memory, and obscuring counter memories. This interplay reveals that market actors do not passively transfer meanings from the culturally constituted world as depicted in McCracken's (1986) meaning transfer model; market actors constantly alter cultural narratives and reframe popular memories according to their best interests for competing for an identity value. This ongoing competition in shaping the popular memories while eliminating the counter memories represents a horizontal rather than a vertical relationship (Thompson & Tian, 2008). Nonetheless, MTM acknowledges the important aspect of the meaning-creation process that happens once consumers buy and consume goods (Belk, 1989).

3.2 Social media influencers

The MTM model (McCracken, 1986), as elaborated on in the previous section, recognizes the role of celebrities in transmitting cultural meanings to consumer

goods. Celebrities possess authentic meanings through their ongoing and consistently crafted media image communicated through their creative works, talent, and performances (McCracken, 1989). Their role in shaping and creating the cultural meanings is substantial though the meaning of celebrity is fluid. Even though talent was once a precondition for becoming a celebrity, the reality show era has diminished its importance as ordinary people become famous by sharing their everyday lives on TV screens (Cashmore, 2014). Hence, the importance of media visibility over talent is overridden, and achieving fame became possible for ordinary people, referred to as the democratization of celebrity (Turner, 2006). Further changes and developments have continued in the fame arena in addition to the democratization of celebrity as the original field, such as the music industry associated with celebrities, has started to encompass distinct spheres like the political arena, and celebrities move to other fields to pursue their careers, which is then referred to as celebritization (Driessens, 2013). Even though the democratization of celebrity allowed ordinary people to achieve fame, the media still plays a huge role in controlling this access to fame for their own profit, which is called the “demotic turn” (Turner, 2006).

Apart from the role of traditional or digital media controlling access to fame, the term celebrity has been further complicated by the rise of social media influencers (SMIs). SMIs are defined as consumers who also become producers in computer-mediated environments by sharing their opinions and appealing to large audiences as they are increasingly recognized as trusted authorities (Vrontis et al., 2021). SMIs have a varied number of followers on social media, and they differ in perceived characteristics such as perceived authenticity, accessibility, expertise, and cultural capital (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 3). Campbell and Farrell (2020)

categorized SMIs according to these features, yielding five distinct types of influencers: nano influencers, micro-influencers, macro influencers, mega influencers, and celebrity influencers. So, celebrities and SMIs intersect at a certain point, and similarities and differences between SMI and celebrities were discussed extensively in the influencer marketing literature. For instance, one of the prominent differences lies in how they achieve their fame; SMIs engage with their audience and create authenticity to increase their reach, while celebrity fame depends on entertainment industry dynamics (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015). SMI's engagement with their audience, crafting their content with respect to their audience's expectations, times co-creating their content with their audiences, receiving support from their community for in their commercialization processes, and the measurability and trackability of their performance metrics such as availability engagement rates make SMIs possible to achieve celebrity capital (Brooks et al., 2021). Hence, depending on different criteria, as explained above, SMIs achieve celebrity status, and even though not all of them acquire this status, they still hold important positions in the marketing communication activities of brands. Owing to their perceived credibility, authenticity, and power of influence, SMIs collaborate with brands to promote their products or services, which is called influencer marketing (Fowler & Thomas, 2023). Hence, like celebrities, SMIs play an intermediary role between brands and consumers through influencer marketing. As elaborated earlier, McCracken (1986) referred to the power of celebrities and opinion leaders in disseminating and shaping cultural meanings in the mid-1980s. The new opinion leaders of the digital era are SMIs, and their role in diffusing information is well-researched. SMIs, as opinion leaders, decode brand and marketing information and share this filtered information with their audiences. Further, their audiences

decode this newly encoded message, as depicted in the “brand communication through digital influencers model” (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014). Their model extends the two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), which states that opinion leaders stand in between the media and the public; opinion leaders who get influenced by the media spread the information to their surroundings, influencing them.

Uzunoglu and Misci Kip’s model (2014) differs from the two-step flow theory by applying it to the social media context; the two-step flow of information becomes a multi-step flow; influencers who decode the message share it with their followers where their followers, through their engagement with the content further diffuse the content with their peers, and each step interacts with each other in the interconnected digital world. While Uzunoglu and Misci Kip (2014) acknowledged the decoding of the marketing information by SMIs and further followers' role in decoding the filtered message of the SMIs, their focus was on the flow of the brand message rather than how SMIs and followers decode it. However, understanding not only how influence travels within the society but also how that influence is created is of utmost importance.

Kozinets et al. (2010), by acknowledging the dual role bloggers hold as both consumers and marketers, researched how bloggers imbue the new mobile phone sent by a brand into their blog content to generate word-of-mouth (WOM). This dual role arises from the fact that bloggers are both consumers that consume products but also, they oversee the possible reactions of their community once they promote the product sent to them by the brand so they act also like a marketer. Hence bloggers apply various strategies to protect their authenticity while promoting the seeded product (Kozinets et al., 2010). Apart from a seeding strategy, Vanninen et al. (2023)

studied how SMIs mediate brand messages by focusing on how SMIs decode the brand message and then encode it through their sponsored content. Their research approached the mediation process from the firms' (destination marketing organizations) and SMIs' perspectives to fully capture the decoding and encoding processes of the promoted content. Authors found that the two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) involves multiple steps, and both the brand and SMIs shape the brand message by decoding and encoding activities (Vanninen et al., 2023). Brands encode the brand message by either employing a decoded or encoded approach. SMIs, encompassing a dual role as a marketer-customers, decode the message according to the format of the information they receive from the brand and interpret the intangible aspects of the destination themes. The encoding process entails SMIs' experiences of the destination, their own style of communication, the expectations of their followers, and the employment of various features of social media platforms, giving way to a constructed mediated reality (Vanninen et al., 2023). The study of Vanninen et al. (2023) sheds light on how the branded message is decoded and encoded by the SMIs in sponsored content. Both studies recognize content creators' dual role as consumers and marketers and shed light on how they create and shape meanings around the seeded product or sponsored brand (Kozinets et al., 2010; Vanninen et al., 2023). However, there is still a lack of knowledge on how SMIs create and negotiate meanings without brands' direct involvement.

SMIs create collaborative, sponsored content with brands (Vanninen et al., 2023), they create content regarding the seeding campaign (Kozinets et al., 2010), and organic content (e-WOM) independently on social media. To elaborate on the organic content of SMIs, they create content about brands with the products they purchased themselves, and produce content at their own will. Also, SMIs create

organic content, such as a YouTube video, involving more than one brand (either gifted by brand or purchased by SMIs). In this type of content, where they produce content with their free will either with products, they purchased themselves or with products given to them as gifts from brands, SMIs also decode and encode brand information, shape brand meaning, and articulate cultural meanings. The brands' control over the production of such content is limited or nonexistent. Unless SMIs are paid to produce content or given direct instructions with a seeding campaign, the production of organic content solely depends on their free will. While previous research shed light on the processes of SMIs shaping brand meanings in sponsored content and seeding campaigns, the organic content of SMIs has not received attention from scholars, even though they also shape brand meanings. Indeed, more research is needed to understand how cultural meaning-makers (like opinion leaders) attach particular meanings to brands, create cultural meanings, and diffuse them (Allen et al., 2008; Fournier & Alvarez, 2019). Sponsored content and seeding campaigns portray only one facet of the meaning-creation processes of SMIs, which involve communication with brands in producing the content. The other facet, organic content, is unexplored. Research about organic content is needed to comprehensively understand how SMIs create meanings around brands and articulate cultural meanings.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Overview

This study assesses the SMIs' articulation of cultural meanings through social media trends through qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005), describe the qualitative research paradigm as follows:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to this world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (pp. 5)

In line with this description of qualitative research, Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasize that researchers focus on *meaning*, which distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative approaches. This research specifically deals with the exploration of meanings: how SMIs articulate cultural meanings in specific social media trends and, in turn, how they create new meanings that change the intrinsic nature of skin care practices. Hence, according to the exploratory nature of this research, qualitative research informs this research's data collection and analysis techniques, which take a naturalistic and interpretive approach to studying real-world phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), in this case, exploring the dynamics of the social media trends. Pursuing netnographic analysis, data in this research is collected through netnography and analyzed through hermeneutic analysis, both of which are discussed in depth in the following sections.

4.2 Netnography

As one of the naturalistic methods of qualitative research, netnography allows researchers to track individuals' behaviors in their natural, online settings (Kozinets et al., 2014). In this research, netnography (Kozinets, 2002) is selected as an appropriate method for data collection in the naturalistic context of YouTube to explore the articulation of cultural meanings and the meaning-creation processes of SMIs within skin care practices. Netnography is a qualitative research method introduced by Robert Kozinets (2002) that derives its techniques from the anthropological approach of ethnography and adapts it to a computer-mediated environment to study consumption cultures and communities formed around brands and consumption practices. Yet, it is distinct from ethnography in the case of choice of online sites, the type of data to be collected, and ethics relevant to the online environment (Kozinets et al., 2014). Also different from ethnography, in netnography, researchers can collect vast amounts of data without introducing themselves to the online communities they study, which is called “lurking” (Kozinets et al., 2010). Yet, it is advised researchers to immerse themselves into the online community by introducing oneself if the objective of the research is to analyze the experience of individuals within an online community (Kozinets et al., 2014). The importance and unique feature of netnography is its emphasis on cultural phenomena. Kozinets (2014, p. 263) refers to netnography as “cultural analysis,” drawing attention to this technique’s emphasis on context, which distinguishes it from other online data analysis methods such as data mining, opinion mining, or social network analysis (Belk et al., 2012). These techniques decontextualize data or perform different analyses to reveal general patterns; however, netnography treats data as embedded in a cultural context (Belk et al., 2012). Hence, observing

behaviors or vernacular of individuals in online settings is a crucial aspect of netnography that reflects its cultural emphasis. Further, focusing on and analyzing only one aspect of a phenomenon based on a specific online context is not sufficient to grasp its cultural context. Kozinets (2014), inform researchers by expressing the following quote:

In order to gain a contextualized and nuanced cultural understanding of the social media phenomenon, the netnographer must be attuned to this multiform communicative connectedness, and be willing to follow multiple links to multiple sites and postings in order to gain a fuller and embedded understanding of the overlapping social worlds enacted through social media. (pp.264)

In addition to incorporating multiple online sites for netnographic analysis pertinent to research questions, it might be relevant to study offline behavior as well.

Nonetheless, if the research interest is solely on phenomena happening online, then it is proper only to analyze the online realm, which Kozinets calls “pure” netnography (Kozinets et al., 2014). After introducing the description of netnography, drawing its distinctions from ethnography and various online data analysis techniques, and highlighting its emphasis on cultural context, it is now appropriate to define crucial steps to follow to conduct netnographic analysis. To conduct netnography, the researcher must follow six steps: identification of relevant online sites, immersion into the online community, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and meeting ethical standards (Kozinets, 2002). The netnographic analysis starts with defining the relevant online sites to collect data; these online sites should contain data relevant to research questions. As discussed earlier, because netnography is an online cultural analysis, the researcher should look for online communities, not just data decontextualized. Also, these communities should have enough active

participants generating discrete data relevant to research questions (Kozinets, 2002; 2014).

As a second step immersion in the community is a crucial step to make sense of the community and its unique culture. The researcher could be an active participant in the community or just be an observer, which is called “lurking” as mentioned before, whether the researcher decides to actively participate into the community or not, here the goal is to spend enough time to familiarize with the community, to understand its dynamics shaping its culture (Kozinets, 2002). The immersion in the community should be long enough to develop a cultural understanding unique to the community.

The next step is the data collection for netnographic analysis. Three types of data are relevant to netnographic data collection: archival data, elicited data, and field note data (Kozinets et al., 2014). Archival data is a type of data in which the researcher has no input in producing it; it is present on the Web and can be gathered from blogs, websites, social media, and other online sources (Belk et al., 2012; Kozinets et al., 2014). If the researcher participates in creating the data by interacting with the online community through interviewing and communicating via email, this is called elicited data (Kozinets et al., 2014).

Lastly, field notes are crucial in netnography, as they are in ethnography, which consists of notes of the researchers according to their observations, reflections, and analyses related to the research (Kozinets, 2002; 2014). The researcher does not share these insights with the community (Kozinets et al., 2014); the purpose of field notes is to help the researcher produce relevant insights from the study. They consist of texts, visuals, audio, and all sorts of data the researcher finds relevant for answering the research questions at hand. It is important to note that field notes are

not purely objective records but also subjective, and the researchers are taking notes about their viewpoints, thoughts, or even feelings. The researcher begins to take field notes at the beginning of the research and updates the previous field notes with newly emerging themes or ideas throughout the research. Here lies the iterative nature of netnography; data collection and analysis happen simultaneously (Kozinets, 2002). So, netnography data analysis proceeds with continuous data collection, updating the emergent themes as new data is incorporated.

The analysis consists of coding the data to develop a theory from the data, known as the grounded theory, or a hermeneutic approach could be adopted for the interpretation (Kozinets et al., 2014). Coding usually happens in two phases: first-cycle and second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). Tracy (2012) refers to first-cycle coding as primary coding because codes change during the coding process, rendering the word “first” meaningless. Generally, these primary codes represent first-level codes that are descriptive in nature but not limited to descriptive codes only.

According to Saldaña (2016, p.68), there are six different methods of first-cycle coding (grammatical methods, elemental methods, affective methods, literary and language methods, exploratory methods, and procedural methods), yielding 25 different types of codes. In secondary cycle coding, these first-level codes move to second-level codes that are created through interpretation (Tracy, 2020). The researcher usually changes the codes as the data collection and analysis proceeds, revisiting earlier codes, changing them, and bringing related codes together; hence, coding is an iterative process (Belk et al., 2012). According to Belk et al. (2012) there are two types of codes; emic codes use the language of the individuals, whereas etic codes reflect the academic lingo. While coding the data and moving from emic

codes to etic codes, researchers can undertake hermeneutical analysis to derive insights and interpret their findings.

In the context of nethnographic analysis, ethical issues are of utmost importance. Before initiating the research, the researcher should be aware of whether the online site is private or public and consider copyright issues. Even if the site is public, the researcher may seek to obtain consent from users whose data reveals their identity and should use pseudonyms for identity protection purposes. Protecting users' privacy is not only restricted to changing their names or usernames but also covers other data that may reveal the identity of users. If the researchers participate in the community, they should communicate their intentions and affiliations so that community members know why they are present (Kozinets, 2002; 2014).

4.3 Hermeneutics

As mentioned above, this research takes an interpretive approach to explore the meaning-creation processes of SMIs. The interpretative paradigm has ontological and epistemological grounds that differ from other paradigms, such as positivist, post-positivist, critical, and post-modernist paradigms (Tracy, 2020). Ontology and epistemology are disciplines in philosophy that shape the methodology of research (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Ontology in research deals with the concept of reality, whether it is a separate entity from humans or whether it is not completely separate from it, and epistemology deals with the concept of knowledge, what is regarded as knowledge that we can acknowledge to be true (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Ontologically speaking, according to the interpretive paradigm, reality is not separate from the individual's mind (Tracy, 2020), and epistemologically, it belongs to

constructivism; knowledge is context-driven and constructed through social interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Tracy, 2020).

In this research, data interpretation relies on hermeneutics, a philosophical approach to interpretation, and an understanding of texts and human experiences that uncovers how meaning is created and how humans understand the world through interpretation situated in a historical and cultural context (Gadamer, 1976). The word "Hermeneutics" takes its name from the Greek messenger god Hermes, who interprets the messages of gods to humans (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). The essence of the interpretive paradigm resides in understanding the other empathetically, referred to as "*Verstehen*" (Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Tracy, 2020). However, hermeneutical understanding differs from *Verstehen*; in *Verstehen*, the researcher aims to understand the individual's pure viewpoint; however, in hermeneutics, the aim of the researcher is not to grasp the exact thinking of the individual because the researcher believes that one cannot understand the pure viewpoint of the other; rather, the understanding of hermeneutics is intertwined with the researcher's pre-understanding and the ongoing interaction with text that shapes the interpretive process (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Indeed, pre-understanding is one of the key tenets of the hermeneutical circle that will be explained in detail, but before, it is best to give the definition of the hermeneutical circle.

In hermeneutics, interpretation of the data is not a linear process, as Thompson et al. (1994), put it forward "This process is an iterative one in which a "part" of the qualitative data (or text) is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the "whole"" (p. 433). In hermeneutics, the analysis of the data, hence understanding, depends on the insights developed in each iteration between the part and the whole. In each iteration, to understand the data, the researcher questions

the previous assumptions, writes, and ponders in a circular manner between the parts and the whole, noting that thinking in each iteration bears the possibility that the interpretation will be changed or evolved (Dibley et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 1994). This dynamic nature of the hermeneutical circle starts with acknowledging the importance of the pre-understanding of the researcher. Pre-understanding, a prejudice in Gadamer's (1976) terms, is the researchers' perspective shaped by their existing cultural and theoretical knowledge that advances the understanding of the world (or text under the study) by providing a frame of reference. Pre-understanding in hermeneutics is studied in the qualitative research paradigm in terms of subjectivity, and being reflexive of one's own perspective of the study is an essential part of qualitative research to overcome any limitations subjectivity may present (Dibley et al., 2020). The section devoted to subjectivity and reflexivity will discuss subjectivity and reflexivity in detail to ensure the data interpreted in this study is free of bias that may result from subjectivity.

Once the researchers bring their own frame of reference to the text at hand during the analysis process, the fusion of horizons takes place (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Gadamer, 1976; Thompson et al., 1994); it is the dynamic interplay between the horizon of the researcher (his or her pre-understanding) and the horizon of the text that eventually transforms the pre-understanding of the researcher where he or she comes to understand the text by grasping its horizon (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Hermeneutics is widely utilized in qualitative consumer research to uncover the underlying meanings of consumption-based phenomena and to link the derived meanings to broader cultural, historical, and social contexts (Thompson, 1997). It is deemed important to point out that consumer researchers apply hermeneutics to marketing phenomenon by not attending to a single hermeneutic methodology

(Arnold & Fischer, 1994). However, there are common characteristics of the hermeneutical approach across consumer research studies that Arnold and Fischer (1994) lay out as the nature and autonomy of the text, semiotic-structural analysis, hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, and critical response. According to Arnold and Fischer (1994), the autonomy of the text means that its inferred meaning is different from the author's intended meaning who wrote the text. Hence, the interpreter may derive insights from the text that are distinct from the author's intended meanings, and this logic is in line with the hermeneutics' difference from the *Verstehen* explained above.

Arnold and Fischer (1994) propose the semiotic-structural analysis stage, which emphasizes the importance of extracting meanings from the text by paying special attention to the linguistics and other elements, like visuals, that produce meaning. This, in turn, enables one to discover the horizon of the text. The hermeneutical circle is the essence of hermeneutical analysis, which implies an ongoing iteration between the parts and the whole to develop an understanding of the text (Dibley et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 1994). Through this process, constraint iteration resolves any contradictions (Arnold & Fischer, 1994), such as earlier codes not representing the phenomena being replaced by new codes as understanding develops during the process.

Hermeneutical analysis happens in two distinct phases namely; intratextual and intertextual analysis (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson et al., 1994; 1997). The intratextual analysis is understanding a single text (a transcript, video, or any document under analysis); the iteration between parts to whole happens between the individual sentences or words of the text with respect to the whole text. Understanding develops in each iteration between parts to whole, and once

contradictions are resolved, a complete understanding of the text develops (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). The second phase is the intertextual analysis, where the aim is to identify common patterns or variations among all the texts and derive “thematic meanings” concerning the whole data by iteratively comparing all the texts (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). By accomplishing intratextual and intertextual analysis in hermeneutical circle, a general understanding is achieved. As the fusion of horizons has already been discussed, the last element common to hermeneutical analysis of consumer researchers’ is the critical response, the acknowledgment that interpretation of the same text varies among interpreters; hence, it is subjective, yet it has to be ensured that the interpretation can be judged according to quality and persuasiveness, similar to creative works that are also subjective in nature (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). According to Arnold and Fischer (1994), first, the interpretation should be coherent and free of contradictions (contradictions should be resolved while conducting the hermeneutical circle), where the themes must be presented to the reader. Evidence should be laid out from the text; second, the literature and its tradition should be documented. Third, the interpretation has to be adopted according to the pre-understanding of the targeted audience at “good will” to ensure their comprehension. Fourth, the interpretation should “enlighten” the audience by being “fruitful” so that new facets of the problem are explicitly discussed and relevant insights generated should change the pre-understandings. Lastly, the interpretations should be presented in an engaging and persuasive way that employs metaphors, similes, and analogies that show the cultural literacy of the interpreters (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). To sum up, hermeneutical analysis is a philosophical stance towards the analysis of qualitative data that interprets and seeks to understand the implicit meanings in text or experiences of

individuals with respect to broad socio-cultural and historical contexts. That is accomplished by an ongoing, iterative process between the parts of the data, such as each piece of the interview or individual text with respect to the whole; understanding of the individual pieces and the whole is updated and advanced in each iteration till pre-understanding turns into an understanding of the research phenomenon by fusion of horizons. Last, the integrity of findings is ensured by taking a critical stance towards the interpretation and ensuring its quality.

It is essential to extend the issue of the quality of qualitative research beyond Arnold and Fischer's (1994) suggestions. In contrast to quantitative research, where the data is numerical, the results are assessed via objective statistical analysis; interpretations of qualitative data are subjective, so it should be ensured that the results accurately reflect complex social phenomena under the study. According to Paterson and Higgs (2005) the quality of interpretive research depends on meeting the three criteria: credibility, rigor, and ethical behavior. Authenticity, plausibility, and trustworthiness are the components of credibility in qualitative research, and employing the hermeneutic circle and the fusion of horizons unveils the analytical process to the reader that adds to its credibility, ensuring the three components are met and further ensures rigorousness (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The other factor satisfying the rigorousness of the research is taking field notes while collecting the data, in this way researchers can be reflective about their own prejudices (Dibley et al., 2020). It is important to note that data analysis is also a crucial part of ensuring the rigorousness of the research; going back to the literature during the hermeneutical circle also enables researchers to add new insights to the parts of the data or the whole understanding. Indeed, in the interpretive framework, theory is an essential aspect of the research, which serves as a filter through which the information is

selected and processed to uncover the issues that answer the research question (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Moisander and Valtonen (2006), assert that “...data and theory are put in a dialogue, and understandings emerge through an iterative process of matching up data and theory, where ideas and preliminary interpretations are tested, challenged and revised” (p.104-105). Hence, interpretation in hermeneutics involves working with theory and data simultaneously to generate new insights. Continuous iteration between the observation and the literature helps researchers choose particular theories to use as a lens to understand the phenomenon. Theoretical perspective informs the data analysis and interpretation by guiding the researcher to pay attention to specific parts of the data, engage with it, deliver an understanding, and provide insights (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Tracy, 2020). Yet, this is not a linear process where the data is constantly interpreted according to a fixed theoretical framework. Instead, while the researcher engages with the data and simultaneously interprets the findings, the emerging findings shape the following evaluations and the previous ones. Also, the revision is not limited to the interpretation of the data, but theoretical perspectives might also change (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). This iteration between the literature and data also adds to the rigor of the research. Another point that supports the rigorousness of the research is the presence of other researchers to discuss the analysis process, referred to as the interpretive team, to reach a shared understanding of the meaning derived from the hermeneutical research and to assess whether presupposed assumptions underlie the results, though not mandatory (Dibley et al., 2020). Indeed, Arnold and Fischer (1994) refer to the act of discussing with other researchers to come to a shared understanding as a “dialogic community”. Consumer researchers have opportunities to benefit from this community by attending academic seminars and special sessions

and submitting their research to academic journals; the feedback they receive via these platforms ensures a shared understanding (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). However, approaching a shared understanding with other researchers is not possible when conducting dissertation research. At this point, Dibley et al. (2020) recommend that hermeneutic doctoral students be reflexive throughout the research; not the presupposed meanings but new meanings should arise during the research, and to be aware of their pre-understandings; it should evolve as the research progresses due to new ideas that emerge during the hermeneutical analysis.

In qualitative research, it is crucial to discuss subjectivity and reflexivity in detail to ensure that interpretive research is free from bias. Subjectivity in qualitative research does not lead to bias, as in quantitative research; rather, it is valued as long as it is reflective (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Wilkinson (1988) emphasizes the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research as follows:

Within a positivist epistemology, with its emphasis on objectivity, such values are considered sources of bias and obstacles to determining “the facts,” but within an alternative epistemology, which emphasises the social construction of multiple realities and takes reflexivity seriously, they may be seen both as central to and as a resource which informs one’s research. (pp. 494)

Reflexivity calls for attention to be paid to the knowledge generated from the research and the role of the researcher in producing that knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). More specifically, the assumptions the researcher brings to the research because of her own identity, called personal reflexivity, and its impact on the selection of research methods, the method of analysis, called functional reflexivity, impact the research results; thus, the researcher’s attempt to consider the subjectivity in these points generates reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Wilkinson, 1988). Regarding personal reflexivity, the researchers should acknowledge that their identity shapes their interests and values, which influences the selection of the

research topic (Wilkinson, 1988). For instance, Wilkinson (1988) states that a feminist researcher should take into account that her identity as a woman shapes her research, further in consideration of the socio-cultural context; her political views regarding feminism also influence the research. Further, Wilkinson (1988) adds that a fully reflexive analysis entails recognizing a reciprocal influence between the research and the life experiences. As such, research also impacts life experiences by altering awareness of the conceptualization of specific life events. The other part of reflexivity, functional reflexivity, draws attention to the effect of selecting specific methods on knowledge creation. The concepts and knowledge researchers derived from the research should then reflect the methodological preferences. Acknowledging these personal and functional influences, the researcher could then assess subjectivity in their research by reflecting on it (Wilkinson, 1988). Hence, researchers should reflect on how their personal interests frame the assumptions they bring to the research and the methods they select to pursue. It is critical to consider reflexivity as not a one-time examination of subjectivity but an ongoing process throughout the research (Tracy, 2020; Wilkinson, 1988). Ensuring reflexivity, both personal and functional reflexivity, is achieved in hermeneutical analysis adds to the rigorousness of research.

The steps taken in conducting netnography, the hermeneutical analysis, and the critical stand towards the interpretation of the study's findings, which will be achieved through reflexivity, will be discussed in detail below for the current study.

4.4 Current study

This research started with fieldwork; an immersion into the culture to gain a deep understanding and proceeded with a two-phase non-participatory netnographic

analysis. The fieldwork provided insights and an insider's view of the beauty community, which constituted a lens that guided the netnographic analysis. In the first phase of netnography, all the trends within the beauty community are tracked and thematically analyzed, specific trends are selected to be included further in the analysis, and the research question is revised. In the second phase of netnography, selected trends are analyzed hermeneutically, and theoretical insights are derived.

To understand the articulations of meanings and further meaning-making practices of SMIs, one should interpret them within a specific cultural framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Geertz, 1973; Tracy, 2020). Then familiarizing with the culture is of utmost importance in interpretive qualitative research to derive meaningful insights; interpretive consumer researchers utilizing different methodologies such as ethnography, netnography, in-depth interviews, phenomenology, observational case study, and the like, spend enough time within the specific culture to gain an insider's view to deeply understand the phenomenon (Giesler, 2008; Holt, 1995; Kozinets et al., 2017; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Thompson & Troester, 2002). In line with interpretive consumer research, immersion into the topic of interest through participation and observation for an extended period guided this research's foundation. This study's fieldwork covers offline and online engagement with the beauty community for a 12-year period. For the last two years, focused online observation and netnographic analysis took place. The first 10 years provided deep knowledge about beauty culture by actively engaging with the community members, which consisted of brands, SMIs, and consumers. I have worked in the beauty industry for three and a half years in the marketing department before pursuing a Ph.D. degree and have firsthand experience in the field. Also, I have produced offline and online beauty content since 2013; my beauty articles have

been published in New Beauty Magazine, I contributed to the Skindie newsletter, and I am still writing beauty content for an online magazine, Guzellik Yayinda. Further, I have my own beauty blog (www.bollovebeauty.com), YouTube channel, TikTok and Instagram account, and podcast channel, "30 Beauty," where I produce and share beauty content. In addition, I attended numerous beauty product launches and influencer events, where I experienced the world of SMIs first-hand. I met with brand managers and went on coffee dates to learn about their brand further. I have been collaborating with brands to produce paid promoted content on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok; I am working with the brand and agency side during the process. I have many SMI friends; we meet for coffee breaks and constantly talk on social media through direct messages and WhatsApp. Through this long-term engagement with the community, I developed a deep understanding of beauty culture, its norms, values, and vernaculars by being on the industry's producer and consumer sides. Hence, this 10-year fieldwork, with extensive observation and engagement, provided cultural knowledge and experience about the field and directed the research interest to the topic of "trends" within the beauty industry. More specifically, this fieldwork revealed the prominence of trends in shaping the consumption practices of beauty consumers. Then, I find it intriguing to explore and understand trends and its implications on consumption practices further within this culture.

The beauty industry is dynamic in the sense that there are constant new brand, product, and ingredient launches that drive the interest of consumers, and trends in the industry, such as wellness, have an influence on those new product and brand launches (*The Beauty Market in 2023: A Special State of Fashion Report*, 2023). By observing and experiencing the influence of trends in the beauty industry

in the fieldwork, the research interest, initially, was to understand the dynamics of online trendsetting by niche brands and its implications on consumption practices. Unlike the quantitative paradigm, which starts with a definite research question, qualitative research allows for refining the research question as each piece of data has the power to evolve and transform the research (Tracy, 2020). This facet of qualitative research is illustrated in the below excerpt of Tracy (2020):

Indeed, you should not worry too much – especially in the beginning – about whether your research questions are “right.” Your general research interests and the context are enough to construct a map of one or two guiding questions. Qualitative research questions can and should be influenced by the field and are usually modified over time. (pp. 19)

That was the case with this research, where I initially explored how niche brands create and diffuse online trends in the consumption context. In line with the study of Mardon et al. (2018), more concentrated research questions emerged during the focused online observation via non-participatory netnographic analysis and iteration between the literature and the data. Hence, the research interest moved from the dynamics of online trendsetting by niche brands to exploring the meaning creation processes of SMIs through online trends, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

The 10-year period of fieldwork provided foundational knowledge, and the research proceeded with a two-phase netnographic analysis. The aim of the first phase of netnography was twofold: to understand the nature of trends and to explore the role of brands, SMIs, and consumers in shaping these trends. Hence the following four research questions guided the first phase of netnography:

1. “What are current trends in the beauty sector?”,
2. “What are the contents of these trends?”,
3. “What type of market actors are involved in the creation of trends?”,

4. “What are the roles of market actors in these trends?”

The first step of netnography, as discussed at the beginning of the methodology chapter, is the selection of online communities to study (Kozinets, 2002), and the beauty context has the potential to offer valuable data to answer the research question of this study due to the high presence of trends (*The beauty category's dynamic growth: A 2024 mid-year update*, 2024). In qualitative research, the context gives meaning to the observed behaviors (Tracy, 2020). In other words, the ethnographer constructs knowledge about the observed behaviors by exploring and understanding the context (Tracy, 2020). As in ethnography, the context is of utmost importance in netnography for a cultural analysis of online communities (Kozinets, 2002). Upon selecting an online community to study, in this case, the online beauty community, the next step is to immerse oneself in the culture to gain a contextualized understanding or to derive the “thick description,” (Geertz, 1973), developing a deep understanding by situating behaviors in contexts to reveal the embedded meanings. Indeed, Geertz (1973, p.10) calls ethnography “thick description”.

During the immersion into the beauty culture, between the years 2022 and 2024, I regularly spent an enormous amount of time reading, watching, and listening to beauty content on official magazine websites such as Vogue, Glamour, New Beauty, Instyle, Business of Fashion, Global Cosmetic Industry, Beauty Matter, Cosmetics Design Europe, listened to beauty podcasts consisting of The Beauty Brains, Fat Mascara, Formula Botanica and Founded Beauty on Spotify, subscribed to beauty industry newsletter Beyond Beauty. Further, on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and TikTok, I followed SMIs creating beauty

content, brands, and beauty industry professionals: dermatologists, cosmetic chemists, and marketing managers. During the focused fieldwork, according to the aim of the first phase analysis, relevant field notes are taken covering the reflections on the research, interpretations, and all lived, subjective experiences, including sensory (emotional) and social (Belk et al., 2012; Geertz, 1973; Kozinets, 2002; Tracy, 2020). Specific attention was given to the industry's online trends; when discussed in one of these sources, relevant, reflexive analytic notes are taken to understand the dynamics of trends. These field notes provided a lens throughout the research, starting from the data collection step in this first phase of netnography. Web searches for the keywords "beauty trends," "cosmetics trends," "skincare trends," "social media trends in the beauty industry," "social media trends in the cosmetics industry," and "social media trends in the skin care industry" are done.

Both archival data (relevant search results) and produced data (reflexive field notes) are saved to MAXQDA24 software and categorized according to their source for the analysis, as follows: online magazines (industry magazines and woman magazines), trend reports (Euromonitor, Nielsen, and Spate), newsletter (Beyond Beauty), case studies (from Business of Fashion) and fieldnotes of webinars. A total of 70 sources are analyzed, and descriptive coding is utilized. From descriptive codes, themes emerged and were identified. According to the thematic analysis, 26 distinct trends belonging to three themes were identified: SMI-driven, brand-driven, and consumer-driven trends. Each theme has different trends. For instance, SMI-driven trends are de-influence (SMIs influencing consumers not to buy certain products), dupes (offering cheap alternatives to high-end products), and self-expression trends (for instance, "vanilla girl," "demure," and "brat summer" trends on TikTok); some of the brand-driven trends are anti-wellness, personalization, skin

microbiome inspired beauty, minimalism, inclusivity, and some consumer-driven trends are self-care, biohacking, sustainability, ingredient-focused beauty trends. Thematic analysis is pursued iteratively; that is, coding is accompanied by going back to the online field, reading about the emergent trend, and returning to data that either changed the coding or recorded as a field note to the "memo" option on MAXQDA²⁴. With this iterative process, the content of specified trends is defined, and it is revealed that the formation of some trends is intertwined such that brands, SMIs, and consumers act together to form a trend. For instance, sustainability trends are promoted by brands, yet consumers, especially Gen Z consumers, also give importance to sustainability, so they demand sustainable products, and SMIs support further trends. Yet, a different insight has emerged regarding specific trends, such as dupe and de-influence. These trends are initiated or, in other words, invented solely by SMIs and further supported by consumers. This is an interesting phenomenon happening online where online market actors (SMIs and their followers) are engaging, and it is worth exploring the dynamics of these SMI-driven trends and their effect on consumption practices. It is important to note that these SMI-driven trends are prevalent both in the beauty and fashion landscape; however, because this dissertation focuses on the beauty community, dupe trends within the beauty landscape are analyzed in this dissertation. Until this point, all four research questions are answered with thematic analysis, and the scope of trends to be analyzed is narrowed to only SMI-driven trends.

SMI-driven trends are further explored by examining social media such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. All forms of data on these social media platforms, photos, videos, and text, are scrutinized. Analysis of online content revolving around SMI-driven trends accompanied by extensive reading of consumer culture theory

(Arnould & Thompson, 2005) literature. The iteration between data and relevant literature is suggested by Moisander and Valtonen (2006), as the theoretical perspective informs interpretation and brings issues to one's awareness. It has surfaced that these trends have implications for consumption practices in that they contain cultural meanings that shape certain practices within the beauty community. Indeed, SMIs engage in articulating cultural meanings in these trends, and with the consumers' engagement through their comments, new meanings are attached to certain practices. Extensively reading social practice literature (Reckwitz, 2002a, 2002b; Schatzki, 1996; Shove, 2003; 2012; Warde, 2005; 2014), giving particular emphasis to meaning-creation processes, it came to the surface that SMIs articulate cultural meanings through trends as interpretive, active agents influencing consumers' consumption practices. Further readings directed the research's attention to the active role of individuals in which they have agency to act against the dominant ideologies. This postmodernist view of consumer agency (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Holt, 2002; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010) was apparent in the acts of SMIs while articulating cultural meanings in their online content. A postmodern philosopher and cultural theorist, Michel De Certeau's (1984) work on cultural practices, specifically his concept of "tactics" and "strategies" in "The Practice of Everyday Life," offered relevant theoretical constructs to study the phenomenon. This iteration between the data and the marketing literature about practices and postmodern consumers refined the study's research questions:

1. How do SMIs articulate cultural meanings in the dupe trend that gives rise to cultural shifts in the beauty realm?
2. How are the meanings of dupe practice deconstructed and reconstructed within the beauty community?

By answering these research questions, this research will contribute to the "mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies" research program in consumer culture theory identified by Arnould and Thompson (2005). By setting research questions informed by the fieldwork, thematic analysis, and practice literature, the analysis moved from the first phase of netnography to the second phase.

In the second phase of netnography, YouTube was selected as a platform to collect data relevant about the dupe trend. Even though Instagram and TikTok data, along with YouTube data, was utilized during the iteration with literature in the first phase of netnographic analysis, they were excluded in the second phase of netnography. The content of the Instagram and TikTok videos and their comments are superficial; it was enough for the first phase of the analysis because the first phase aimed to explore the content of these trends and find relevant theoretical constructs to study them. Hence, studying Instagram and TikTok data along with YouTube data was enough during the iteration with literature to find pertinent constructs that would be a lens for interpretation. However, the study's second phase aims to derive interpretations via hermeneutics, so the superficial content of the videos and comments on TikTok and Instagram is insufficient to derive meaningful insights. In contrast, YouTube video content and comments are dense, hence suitable for deep analysis and interpretation. This is in line with Kozinets' (2002) assertion that the selection of an online community depends on the presence of enough discrete data relevant to research questions.

After the first step of the second phase of netnography, the identification and selection of relevant online sites (Kozinets, 2002), the second step, the immersion phase, began. "Dupe" videos were selected according to purposive searching via the

keywords “dupes,” “drugstore skincare,” “drugstore cosmetics,” “dupe skincare,” “dupe cosmetics,” and “dupe beauty,” by YouTube’s related video suggestions. All the videos covering the dupe trend are selected regardless of the number of views or total followers a Youtuber has. The aim is to analyze the video content; hence, the view number was not important. 100 videos included in the analysis were both from micro and macro influencers. During the immersion phase, familiarization occurred with the vernaculars of the community, its norms, and values by scrutinizing the videos and their comments. The third step; data collection, is achieved by the “import YouTube data” tool of MAXQDA24. All the selected YouTube videos’ verbatim transcripts and comments are extracted and transferred to MAXQDA24. After extracting all the relevant data, data analysis and interpretation is achieved by hermeneutic analysis. Among the various practice theories, Magaudda's practice theory (2011) is selected to base the interpretations because of its special emphasis on meaning and practice dynamic interrelationships. The practices are dynamic, and they change as the elements that make up the practice change and evolve (Shove, 2003; 2012). Also, the concepts of “strategy” and “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984) are utilized as a lens to view data from an ideological point. In this research, SMIs are viewed as cultural meaning-makers, and their narratives are treated as cultural texts. Both intratextual and intertextual analysis were conducted by achieving a hermeneutical circle.

Analysis began with intratextual analysis, that is each video is analyzed separately from a practice theory point. During this intratextual analysis, piece of data such as a relevant narrative like a sentence, is judged with respect to the whole verbatim transcript of the video. Iteration occurred between the data from the transcript and the whole transcript to achieve hermeneutic interpretation. It is

important to note that not only the text but also the visuals relating to the video, such as the attitude and behaviors of the SMIs, the products they showcase, and their look, are analyzed (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Further, as each video transcript is analyzed, initial readings are updated according to the evolving understanding of the whole (Thompson et al., 1994; Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). Texts are read and re-read by closely examining any occurrence of norms, categories (a category defines the person in a specific context, such as a person may represent his or her role as a family member or by his or her profession), category-bound behaviors, stereotypes, and rhetorical tactics employed (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). The first step of interpretive research starts with familiarizing oneself with the data by closely reading the dataset more than one time to make sense of the whole and its context (Kozinets et al., 2013; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). After gaining an initial understanding of the data and its context, one can proceed to the coding step. Coding qualitative data is a process of assigning codes to specific segments of the data in which code refers to “. . . a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4).

Narratives are open coded but also in-vivo codes were applied which are the exact words of the individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2019). Special attention was given to coding the data relevant to the research questions; essential parts were coded (Tracy, 2019). However, that should not prevent the researcher from exploring new issues previously not considered (Dibley et al., 2020). Indeed, that is the potency of exploratory research to uncover novel concepts concerning the research domain. Hence, coding the data simultaneously by exploring meanings related to the research question and by being alert to new concepts or

meanings that may arise in the data is crucial. Indeed, Moisander and Valtonen (2006, p. 107) draw attention to how cultural marketing and consumer researchers share the same understanding of the fluidity of “meaning”: meanings are not out there to be picked up but rather emerge depending on the context and may change once the context changes. Coding allows the researcher to grasp the general ideas or concepts from the data and is usually done in two rounds. In the first-round emic codes are used in case of open and in-vivo coding, and in the second phase etic codes were applied respectively (Belk et al., 2012). Along with coding, if found relevant, notes are taken in the memos. As suggested by Dibley et al. (2020), interpretive summaries are written as memos on MAXQDA24 for each video. In these summaries, the points that relate to the research questions along with the ideas about the emerging themes are noted (Dibley et al., 2020). These interpretive summaries were crucial in conducting the hermeneutic circle to derive the relevant themes. Also, when found relevant, comments are coded to understand the co-creation process of SMIs, and consumers. A total of 2034 codes are applied to YouTube comments. To meet ethical standards names and online pseudonyms are removed from comments.

After completing the intratextual analysis, intertextual analysis was conducted. This stage involved identifying similarities among the videos (consisting of verbatim transcripts and visual analysis) and differences to go beyond superficial understanding and derive cultural meanings (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). As a result, themes consisting of etic codes emerged, and deeper meanings and understandings were achieved.

As mentioned earlier, reflexivity in qualitative research is crucial. To be reflexive in my own research, I begin with personal reflexivity. Before pursuing a Ph.D., I have worked in the cosmetics industry in the marketing department for about

three and half years, holding various positions such as assistant brand manager, brand communications assistant manager, and marketing projects and content specialist. Enormous knowledge, such as practical, factual, and cultural knowledge, I gained in the cosmetics industry equipped me with skills to successfully implement marketing projects and select the best cosmetics products for my skin as a consumer. I brought my knowledge about the industry to the online platforms to share it with cosmetics enthusiasts. So, I produced online content about cosmetics, especially skin care, for about eight years on online platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and my blog. My interest in the skin care industry, which has many brand and consumer trends, certainly shaped my research area and topic. Being familiar with the cosmetics sector both as a professional, consumer, and content creator equipped me with skills to understand the cultural dynamics of the industry. More recently, as digital platforms proliferate and evolve, the cosmetics industry experienced changes. Consumers who previously consulted magazines and word-of-mouth to shop for beauty products now turn to social media to keep up with trends and decide what to buy (Yltävä, 2024). From a content creator perspective, I witnessed firsthand the impact of social media trends in shaping my content and the briefs brands provide me for paid partnerships. For instance, skin minimalism is a huge trend that aligns with my values, and I reflect that trend in my content about product recommendations. Also, although I personally do not like to advise cheap products as an alternative to luxury products, a trend on social media known as “dupes,” my followers keep asking me for my high-end product recommendations. In other words, they want me to recommend “dupes” of original products. So, my followers, whose behaviors are certainly affected by the “dupe” trend on social media, push me to produce the same content. On the brand side, for paid partnership

projects, brands send briefs highlighting specific ingredients, such as “hyaluronic acid,” that have become highly popular on social media. Hence, as various trends became the filter used to produce content, it became apparent that trends have an unseen but massive role in shaping online content. Also, in personal reflexivity, the contextual background is essential to which the knowledge resides (Wilkinson, 1988). As a cultural context, the skin care culture shaped my identity as a social media influencer, affecting my perceptions and beliefs about the industry. The continuous flood of information entailing various trends is complex to keep track of, and at times, I felt lost in those trends; it took the effort to articulate which trends I should base my content on, which then affected my online self-presentation. The personal experiences acting as a resource for the research topic are apparent, but the reverse is of utmost importance in reflexive analysis (Wilkinson, 1988).

Acknowledging my personal background shapes, the selection of the topic of my research, I further reflect on the method I pursue in this study as part of functional reflexivity (Wilkinson, 1988). I had worked on qualitative coding projects before pursuing a Ph.D. and during my years in Ph.D. I have conducted qualitative research to explore phenomena deeply and thoroughly. I am deeply interested in discovering underlying meanings and contextualizing research findings to a broader cultural context. Hence, my approach to consumer research aligns with the interpretative paradigm that played a role in pursuing hermeneutics to analyze data in this research.

Overall, by reflecting upon my research topic and the methodology I pursue, I put forward how my personal background shapes both of these elements in this research. By being reflexive and aware of the spillover effect of my personal background to the research at hand, I made it clear that it is not a bias but regarded as the strength of qualitative research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

MacInnis et al. (2020) argue that consumer researchers have implicit boundaries that limit their impact and relevance on a broader level. According to MacInnis et al. (2020), one of the implicit boundary consumer researchers have been to rely solely on marketing literature to find inspiration that could not go beyond utilizing existing constructs to build theories; they refer to this process as "construct-construct mapping." Alternatively, they advise to go beyond the limits to get inspiration from real-world phenomena and explore by developing theories or through a theoretical lens, which they refer to as "phenomenon-construct mapping" (MacInnis et al., 2020, p. 6). In this dissertation, following the recommendation of MacInnis et al. (2020), I explore the real-world phenomenon of consumption-based viral social media trends, namely the dupe trend. Two theories inform the conceptualization of dupe trends; Magaudda's practice theory (circuit of practice) and de Certeau's concepts of "tactics" and "strategies." These theoretical lenses help to explain the dupe phenomenon. Chapter five describes the dupe phenomenon using the phenomenon-construct mapping technique advised by MacInnis et al. (2020) and conceptualizes dupe videos as a practice subtly charged with oppositional SMI tactics that challenge traditional notions of brand loyalty, exclusivity, and the dominant power of popularity.

Further I explore the co-creation activities of SMIs and their followers around defining the meaning of "dupe" and their normalizing and legitimizing practices of dupe culture. The term "dupe" is a slang word that stands for the word "duplicate" (Chaudhry, 2022). Cambridge Dictionary defines dupe as a noun as "a short form of

duplicate that is used to refer to a product made to look like a more expensive or high-quality product." (Dupe, 2024). However, as elaborated in this chapter, the definition of "dupe" within the beauty community is not as straightforward as in the Cambridge Dictionary. Rather, it involves constant negotiations between SMIs and consumers regarding the meaning of "dupe," these ongoing interactions between SMIs and consumers implicitly support the dupe culture and legitimize its standing in the beauty market.

5.1 Dupe videos as a tactical resistance practice

Consumers of dupe products are referred to as "dupe culture" on the internet (Sandler, 2023), and this term covers the collaborative work of different market actors, from SMIs to consumers. On a BBC World Service business daily podcast, the dupe trend has been discussed as a cultural shift in consumer culture regarding the changing meanings of using dupe products (BBC World Service, 2023). As a part of netnographic analysis, cultural involvement with the beauty community revealed constant new releases of dupe videos on YouTube. Indeed, the earliest dupe videos found for the keywords "dupe beauty" and "dupe cosmetics" go back to 2010. One of the oldest dupe videos on YouTube belongs to Emily Noel (the title of the video is "Lip Color Dupes"), as shown in Figure 1. The newest dupe video on YouTube is the same week that I searched for a dupe video. Hence dupe videos found on YouTube go back as far as to 14 years, and constant new releases of dupe video content is

uploaded to YouTube.

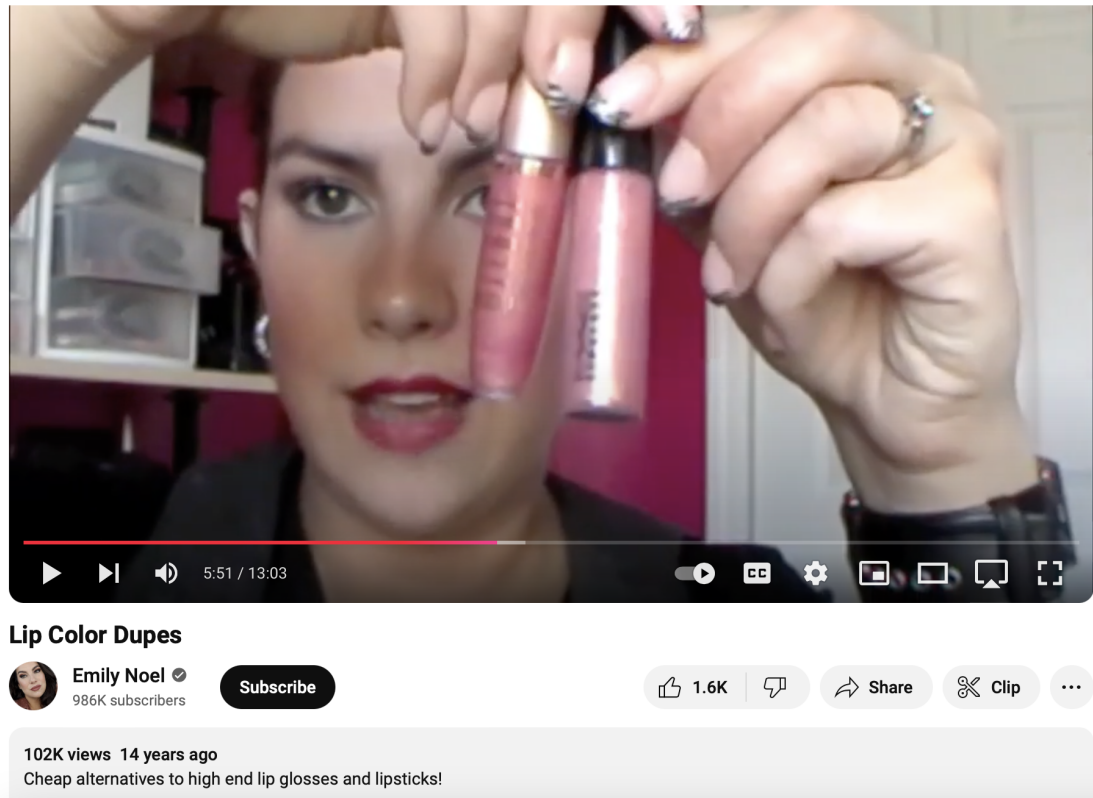


Figure 1. One of the oldest dupe videos on YouTube

Source: [YouTube: Lip Color Dupes, 2024]

Furthermore, some SMIs have produced more than one dupe video. For instance, Youtuber Jessica Braun created a playlist of all her dupe videos under the “Affordable Look-for-Less Makeup Dupes.” The number of videos in this playlist is 29 as of December 2024. This long history of and continuity of dupe videos shows that dupe videos are not fads but a long-term trend in the beauty industry driven mainly by SMIs. According to these insights from my netnographic fieldwork, dupe videos present a specific type of video content that SMIs share with their followers. Indeed, Gannon and Prothero (2018) identified and categorized dupe videos on YouTube as a recurring and common tool among the practices of beauty YouTubers. Also, Scholz (2012) acknowledged the popularity of dupe videos and referred to

them as a distinct content form. In this dissertation, I acknowledge dupe videos as a particular content type. Still, rather than positioning them as a tool in the practices of beauty YouTubers, I argue that these dupe videos are indeed a practice in their own right. Also, I argue that recognizing dupe videos as practice will help me to explain the cultural shift happening in the beauty market. To better understand and explore this cultural shift, theoretical concepts are used as a resource to conceptualize the dynamics of SMI-driven digital trends (Cornelissen et al., 2021).

The first theoretical concept I adopted was Magaudda's (2011) "circuit of practice" analytical framework, which was utilized as a resource to conceptualize the dupe trend. Among various practice theories detailed in chapter two, the "circuit of practice" framework (Magaudda, 2011) is the most useful for understanding the dynamics among the separate practice elements during a shift in practices, in this context, beauty practices. Dupe videos encompass all the elements of the circuit of practice; objects, doings, and meanings. Objects are the skincare or make-up products SMIs use, doings are the make-up or skincare product application, and meanings are the symbolic representations and implications of using dupe products instead of luxury brands to achieve a beauty ideal. The hermeneutic analysis further revealed that each practice element constitutes a routinized way of creating dupe videos. In that way, dupe videos follow a specific script: introduction of a dupe alternative to the original product, giving product information about both the dupe and the original product, application or showing the package of the dupe and original product, and finally, choosing the dupe over the original product. This routinized way of producing dupe videos allows them to differentiate from similar types of video content, such as budget buy drugstore skincare or makeup videos. As routines are one of the defining structures of practices (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Reckwitz,

2002b; Warde, 2005; Warde, 2014), in addition to encompassing three elements of practices, dupe videos further qualify for positioning as practices in their own right. Additionally, as consumption is an integral part of practices (Warde, 2005), dupe practice relates to consumption on multiple levels; SMIs are also consumers sharing their insights about using the products, preference of dupes over luxury products symbolizes cultural meanings around consumption, and consumers engagement with the dupe videos via comments creates a participatory environment fostering actual purchases or creation of shared meanings around the consumption of dupes. Thus, this dissertation conceptualizes dupe videos as a practice, and enables me to discover how cultural meanings are negotiated and how new meanings are attached to dupe products, giving way to cultural shifts in the beauty community.

The second conceptualization of the dupe trend was using de Certeau's (1984) theoretical concepts found in "The Practice of Everyday Life," such as "strategy" and "tactics," as a resource to explore the phenomenon of dupes. Netnographic fieldwork revealed that these routine and mundane activities of YouTubers indeed are charged with oppositional tactics. This second conceptualization, elaborated in the following sections, enables one to uncover the ideological underpinnings of SMIs' dupe video practices, which would otherwise remain obscured. Hence, in this dissertation, dupe videos are regarded as a practice, and de Certeau's concepts position this consumption practice as a form of tactical resistance.

As explained in the theoretical background chapter, the unit of analysis in practice theories are practices instead of agents such as SMIs or consumers. For this reason, rather than focusing on the characteristics of SMIs, the interest in analyzing the dupe videos was on the objects, doings, and meanings of this practice.

Hermeneutic analysis revealed two general types of objects involved in dupe practice: the high-end or luxury product, which is referred to as the original product by SMIs and consumers, and the dupe product, shown as an alternative to the original product. It is possible to detail the product types further; SMIs introduce the original product as one of their favorite products or as a viral luxury, which everyone talks about in the beauty community. Dupe products also differentiate; they are discovered by the SMIs or the viral dupe that everyone in the beauty community speaks of. Doings are the habitual and routinized activities performed in dupe practice, such as showing the original product and its dupe, giving information about the products relating to their performance, feel, smell, ingredients, and prices while at the same time comparing the original and the dupe products to these aspects, sometimes product is applied to the skin, or its package is shown, if it is applied to the skin, SMI shows how it looks on the skin, the final look is also compared if the products are applied to the skin. The video ends with an invitation from SMI to their audience to share their thoughts about the dupes shown in the video and to share their dupe alternatives to help the community learn from everyone's experience. Once I integrated the resistance perspective into dupe practice, further doings in terms of tactics were revealed. Indeed, tactics are a special type of doings. I differentiate doings from tactics as follows: doings are habitual, and routinized performances, whereas tactics are purposeful, creative, and subversive and can be seen as a form of resistance to dominant structures. Hence, I argue that incorporating a resistance perspective into the practice framework has brought the unseen into the scene. If I had not included the resistance perspective in the practice model, the objects and doings in the dupe practice would have been like those in Table 1.

Table 1. Objects and Doings of Dupe Practice

Objects	Doings
Favorite original	Showing the product
Viral original	Giving information
Discovered dupe	Comparing
Viral dupe	Product application
Counterfeit	Showing the result
The Body	Inviting to co-creation

However, with the inclusion of the resistance perspective, tactics were revealed along with doings, and these tactics further aided in identifying the articulated and negotiated meanings in the dupe practice, giving way to profound insights. Specifically, the resistance perspective is the engine of the practice that works as an impetus to mobilize the practice components. It is essential to highlight the distinction between doings and tactics. Tactics are also doings that diverge from doings because they include resistance elements. Then, these oppositional acts signal different meanings articulated by SMIs in dupe practice. Table 2 shows the dupe practice's four components—objects, doings, tactics, and meanings. To illustrate the distinction between doings and tactics, "giving information," as shown in Table 2, is a doing where the SMIs give objective product information without expressing their opinions. Once they provide their views that are affectively charged, then it becomes a "criticizing" tactic.

Table 2. Elements of Dupe Practice

Objects	Doings	Tactics			Meanings
Favorite original	Showing the product				Accessibility
Viral original	Giving information	Poaching from the dominant culture	Criticizing	Appreciation	Smart consumer
Discovered dupe	Comparing	Openly discussing	Inviting to mindful luxury	Gaming	Achievement
Viral dupe	Product application	Achieving the look	Challenging popularity	Employing playfulness	Utilitarianism
Counterfeit	Showing the result	Verifying	Tactical laboring		
The Body	Inviting to co-creation				

It is crucial to recognize that most tactics were absent in the first years of the dupe practice 14 years ago but started to become routinized ways of the dupe practice as more YouTubers incorporated them into their practices. Hence, dupe practice evolves as more tactical doings are incorporated, creating new meanings. However, this dissertation aims not to depict a practice change but to understand the current meanings of dupe practices that give way to cultural shifts in the beauty community. Table 3 shows tactics giving way to four distinct cultural meanings articulated and negotiated in dupe practice. These four cultural meanings are accessibility, smart consumer, achievement, and utilitarianism. Affordable products used in dupe practice acquire the meaning of accessibility, which allows consumers to achieve the cultural beauty ideal by spending less. Also, consumers who use luxury or dupe products and can substantiate their choices acquire the meaning of smart consumers. Those consumer acts symbolize achievement and utilitarianism.

Table 3. Meanings and Tactics of Dupe Practice

Meanings	Accessibility	Smart consumer	Achievement	Utilitarianism
Tactics	Poaching from the dominant culture	Criticizing	Tactical laboring	Verifying
	Openly discussing	Inviting to mindful luxury	Appreciation	Employing playfulness
	Achieving the look	Challenging popularity	Gaming	Gaming
	Verifying	Tactical laboring		

As depicted in Table 3, the same tactic may lead to different meanings; for example, the gaming tactic serves both achievement and utilitarianism meanings. This intersection is because tactics are doings, and the same doing may serve different meanings. To illustrate the point, a gaming tactic highlighting the success narrative is assigned to achievement meaning. However, once a gaming tactic demonstrates the product's utilitarianism, it is assigned to this meaning. In other words, a meaning can be articulated in different ways in the form of tactics, and tactics may lead to different meanings. Hence, tactics do not end in themselves but lead to specific meanings. This distinction becomes apparent by providing definitions of meanings and tactics in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 4. Meanings in Dupe Practice and Their Definitions

Meanings	Definition
Accessibility	Consumers who cannot afford or buy luxury products can still achieve the beauty ideal with affordable products
Smart consumer	Consumers who can substantiate their product preferences, either choosing luxury or affordable options, signal consumer empowerment
Achievement	Substantiating product preferences requires effort to be put into searching extensive information about products, which signals accomplishment
Utilitarianism	Valuing performance over hedonic values of products

Table 5. Tactics Employed by SMIs in Dupe Practice and Their Definitions

Tactics	Definition
Poaching from the dominant culture	Realizing the beauty ideology in different ways than the brands dictate
Openly discussing	Discussing both the positive and negative sides of brands
Achieving the look	Realizing the beauty ideal by makeup application or using specific skincare products
Verifying	Validating the popular opinion present on social media
Criticizing	Decoding the marketing techniques of brands
Inviting to mindful luxury	Using luxury products by being aware of their marketing techniques
Challenging popularity	Not accepting the popular opinion at face value
Tactical laboring	Putting effort and time into finding dupe products
Appreciation	Recognizing and valuing the effort put into finding successful dupes
Gaming	Framing luxury and affordable brands as if they are in a zero-sum game of winners and losers
Employing playfulness	Affectively charged acts such as showing excitement or engaging in role-plays

The sections below are organized according to four distinct cultural meanings present in the dupe practice. Objects, doings, and tactics will be elaborated on with respect to each cultural meaning.

5.2 Accessibility

As de Certeau (1984) differentiates between strategy and tactics, the former belonging to the powerful and the latter belonging to the weak; in the dupe practice, the strategy generally represents luxury branding, and tactics are the doings of SMIs. Luxury is a multifaceted construct (Batat, 2023; Chandon et al., 2022; Dubois et al., 2005; Roux et al., 2017; Vigneron & Johnson, 2017), and one of the facets of luxury is perceived quality and uniqueness (Vigneron & Johnson, 2017). Tactics of the dupe practice resist the privileged stance of luxury brands and take opportunities to demonstrate that beauty ideals are achievable with affordable options.

One of the dominant tactics is poaching from the dominant culture's beauty ideal. The beauty ideal is portrayed through the look of makeup and SMIs' bare skin, and it is also embedded in the narratives of SMIs, such as their emphasis on even skin tone. In makeup dupe videos rather than dark and bold colors for lips or eye shadows, light tones are chosen, and glittery looks are preferred over matte looks, as shown in Figure 2. In the skincare dupe videos, skin is dewy, glows, and untanned rather than a matte and tanned look. SMI Noelle shares her enthusiasm for achieving the beauty ideal as follows:

Do you see that glow? Can you tell how glowy my face looks right now? This product truly is such a beautiful product, and it does give such a pretty, pretty glow. Look how flawless my skin looks right now. Like, are you seeing this? It looks so even! (Noelle Kate, doing my makeup using *ONLY* tiktok viral elf makeup dupes).

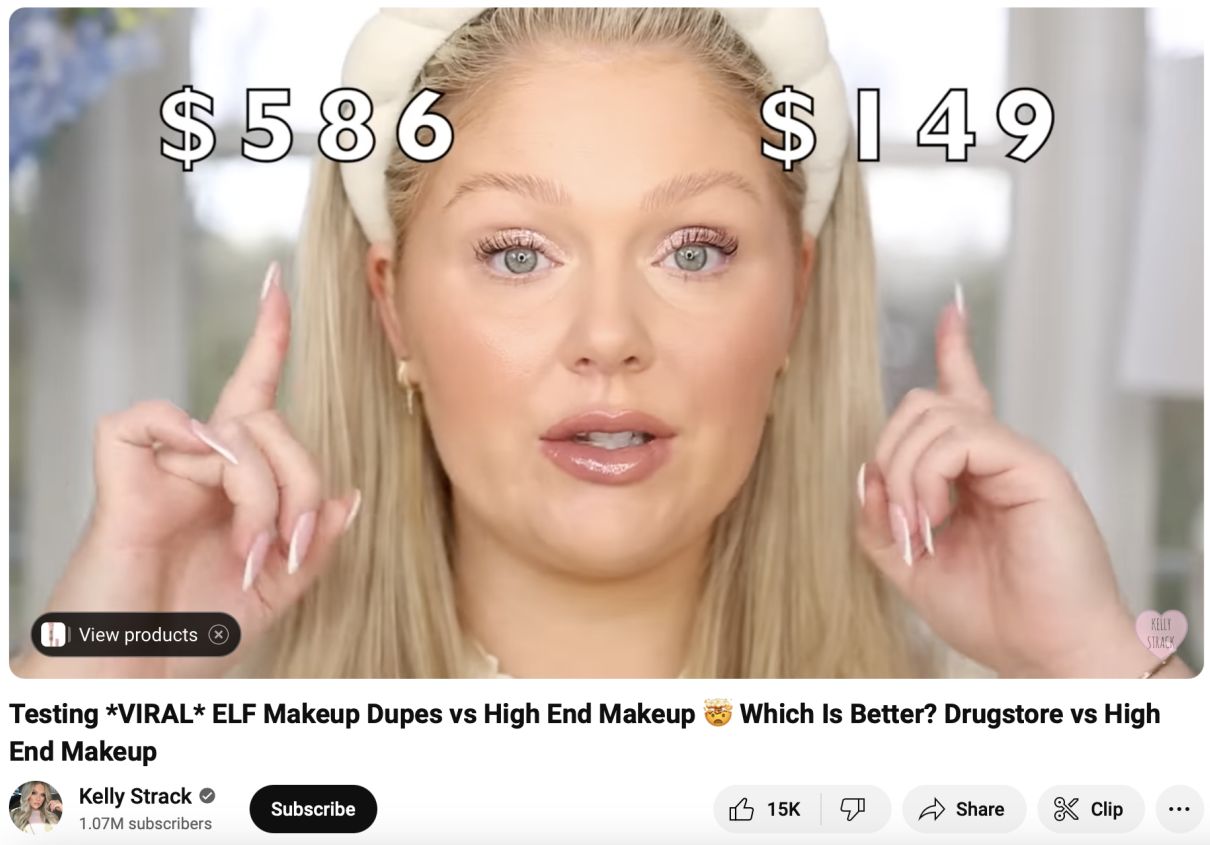


Figure 2. Light toned and glittery make-up by Kelly Strack

Source: [YouTube: Testing *VIRAL* ELF Makeup Dupes vs High End Makeup 🍷

Which Is Better? Drugstore vs High End Makeup, 2024]

SMIs use dupe products, cheap alternatives to luxury products, to resist the notion that beauty ideals can be achieved only with luxury products. This beauty ideal is achieved with alternative products that perform the same or are similar to luxury items. Hence, rather than exclusivity, accessibility is emphasized. For instance, SMI Tati does makeup both with luxury and drugstore, affordable products; on one side of her face, she applies high-end products, and on the other side, she applies affordable options. At the end of the video, she demonstrates how the two sides of her face look similar, and her quote below exemplifies poaching from the beauty ideal and achieving a look with affordable options.

I think both sides look really good and very, very similar. The drugstore is doing such a great job with formulation, color availability, and product availability of every different type and style, and if you do not want to shop high-end, you do not have to, to get a great complete look (Tati, FULL FACE OF DUPES | Drugstore vs Luxury).

Along with the wish to achieve the beauty ideal, the allure of popular luxury products and consumers' desire for them pose another dominant cultural norm. SMIs appropriate the prestige of viral luxury products by promoting dupes as offering the same experience, as exemplified below:

I know why you clicked on this video. You have been scrolling on TikTok, seeing all these cute, aesthetic products that claim to change your life, smell amazing, and are a must-have for your makeup collection or skincare routine. But you are scared. You are scared because you know that if you even attempt to buy three of those items, you are probably going to break the bank. And how do I know this, you might ask? Because I am one of you—I am one of the girls, okay? That is why I decided to make a dupe video. I decided to try out some of the supposed dupes for some of the most viral products on TikTok. These are the same dupes for the same products that are going viral on TikTok. (bossgirlified, i tried dupes for the most viral tiktok product and honestly...).

SMI bossgirlified employs the tactic of poaching that articulates the meaning of accessibility in the beauty community.

Another tactic that serves the same cultural meaning is the SMIs authentic comparisons of luxury and dupe products. Rather than harshly criticizing the luxury brand and unconditionally praising the dupe, SMIs openly discuss the positive and negative sides of both products. Outlining the negative sides of dupes shows an authentic stance towards luxury and mass products and reveals that accessibility sometimes comes with a cost. For instance, SMI Jessica Braun discusses things that can be ignored or tolerated for a cheaper price:

I mean, you are seeing it side by side. You can get a very similar look; it just takes a little bit more work. It is not quite exactly the same formula; this is just a little bit thicker and harder to blend. You can definitely save your

money on this one (Jessica Braun, NEW DRUGSTORE DUPES! Sometimes drugstore really DOES do it better ✨).

Also, SMI Kelly Strack shows a dupe for her favorite luxury blush and points out more effort needed to apply the dupe compared to an easy application of the luxury brand:

Charlotte Tilbury, now this is my favorite blush of all time. I love this; this is in the shade of pink gas . . . this retails for 42 bucks as well; it really is beautiful, though, like I said, one of my favorite blushes of all time. It really does blend like a dream and gives a pretty flush to the cheeks but also a really beautiful glow, so I do really, really like this product. Elf very similarly came out with the blush, so again, this is nine dollars. The shade is Rose, you slay. This is the closest to Pinkgasm. It's not an exact shade match as far as that goes, so you are going to get a different shade from it. This one is a bit darker, so it does not look exactly like the Charlotte Tilbury. I actually find the Elf to be a bit more pigmented. You have to blend them a smidge more on the blushes than the Charlotte Tilbury, I would say, but for the price difference between 42.9, I am good with a little extra blending. (Kelly Strack, Testing *VIRAL* ELF Makeup Dupes vs High End Makeup 🤔 Which Is Better? Drugstore vs High End Makeup).

SMIs here show that imperfections are acceptable trade-offs and that achieving the final look with more effort is reasonable. Rather than the application experience or, in other words, the product usage experience, the final look, the beauty ideal, is the ultimate goal. Hence, the meaning of accessibility is about reaching the beauty ideal with less expensive products. Dupe products, then, do not necessarily have to give the same experience as long as they satisfy the end goal.

Openly discussing tactics also covers the positive sides of luxury products. If SMIs introduce their favorite original products, they do not hesitate to show their admiration for luxury products. They demonstrate their affection for their favorite luxury product while discussing its performance or luxurious feel; nonetheless, after

praising the high-end product they direct the audience's attention to the higher price and frame it as a problem. Below quote from Cassandra illustrates this clearly:

Now I will say this is freaking amazing if you do have 178 dollars; it is a really good antioxidant serum, especially to apply under sunscreen. Australian skincare sometimes they're doing it better, okay, but at the same time, if someone doesn't have that kind of money yet you want something that has vitamin C or Kakadu plum or that's really great for the skin like, what are you supposed to do because although this is amazing it is very very much expensive (Cassandra Bankson, Buy This Not That - 5 Luxury Skincare Swaps!).

She acknowledges the high performance of luxury brands but diminishes their uniqueness by introducing dupes with similar performances at a lower cost. As Cassandra Bankson's quote illustrates, consumption of luxury products is not opposed, as the narrative of "people who have money still can prefer luxury brands" shows. Hence, praising luxury products shows that SMIs are not resisting the strategy, in this case luxury branding, but are redefining the values attached to luxury products. A similar tactic is demonstrated in James's quotation:

SK-II Essence. An icon within the skincare world. Not just in Asia but all throughout. It deserves a lot of respect because it is the first of its kind, and it has actually inspired so many affordable options. SK-II is famous for its Pitera formula, which is Fermented Yeast Galactomyces Ferment Filtrate . . . I feel like SK-II's price tag may have been worth it back in the day when not everybody was making dupes or their own essences. It was one-of-a-kind; it was this miracle ingredient that no one else was using, and eventually, a lot of brands were actually able to replicate themselves. So, we have a full list of alternatives here, and many of these are my favorites more than SK-II (James Welsh, DRUGSTORE DUPES FOR POPULAR PRICEY SKINCARE).

James does not hesitate to overpraise the high-end product. Nonetheless, he disregards the value attached to uniqueness by directing attention of the audience to alternative products that perform similarly to the luxury product. In both illustrations, SMIs criticize the values of uniqueness and exclusivity attached to luxury brands

while still acknowledging their quality. Hence, in the dupe videos, the meaning of dupe is defined, and the meaning of luxury is redefined and reshaped.

Since SMIs are not resisting luxury branding but rather resisting the specific values attached to it, most of them provide an affiliate link for luxury and dupe products in the description box, as shown in Figure 3.

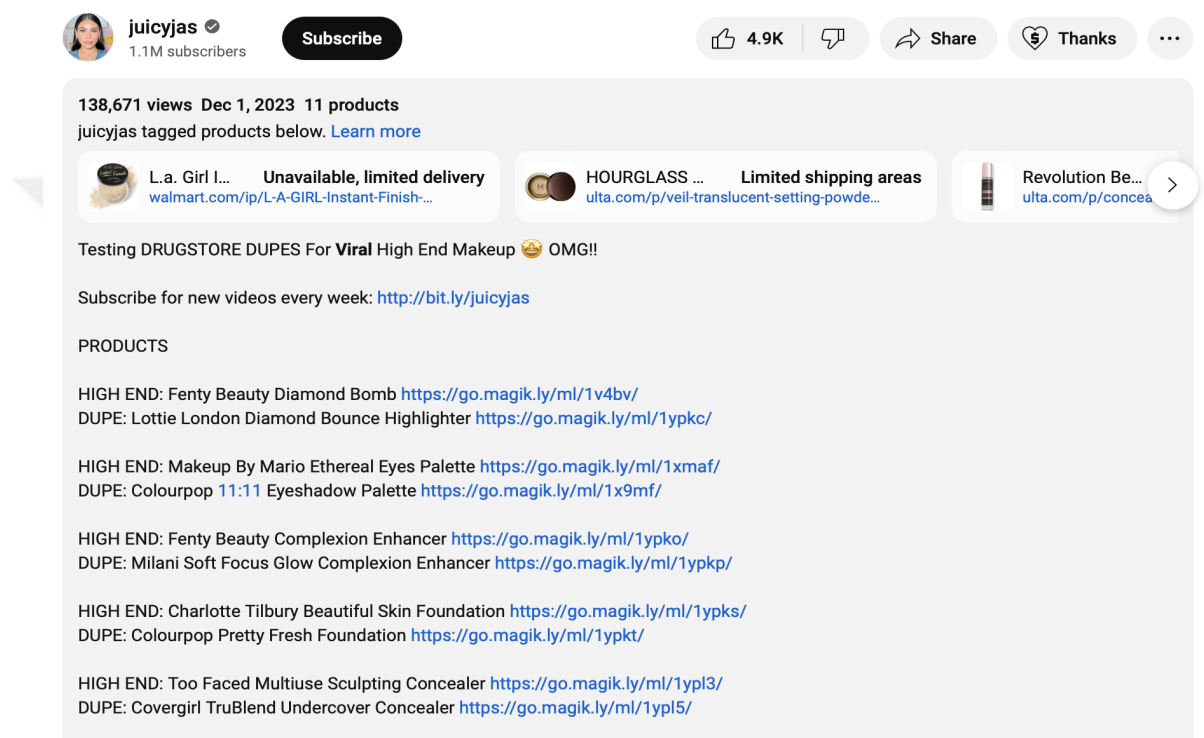


Figure 3. Affiliate links of both luxury and dupe products by YouTuber juicyjas

Source: [YouTube: DRUGSTORE DUPES For *VIRAL* High End Makeup 🤩 Full Face of Drugstore Makeup Dupes, 2024]

This means that SMIs also earn money from selling luxury products. Thus, this exemplifies that their tactics are not to resist the strategy, as they still benefit monetarily from its presence, but to create their own meanings within the dupe practice. While not resisting luxury branding, even promoting it, the narrative that people with less financial resources can still achieve the beauty ideal with cheaper

products reinforces the meaning of accessibility in dupe practice while disregarding the value of the uniqueness of luxury products.

Another tactic SMIs employ in dupe practice is “achieving the look,” which is doing the makeup with dupe products to show proof that one can reach the beauty ideal with the dupe products. Here, the tactic is employed with different makeup application styles; sometimes, SMIs do not show the makeup application. Instead, they welcome the viewer with makeup on; sometimes, they apply the makeup with dupe products while discussing luxury and dupe products, and other times, they apply both luxury and dupe products on different sides of their faces, which I call split face makeup. Once SMIs only use dupe products, they show how the final look represents the beauty ideal; if they do split face makeup, the similarity is emphasized between the left and right parts of the faces, which is indistinguishable in most cases. One crucial point here is that the object of the dupe practice is luxury products, dupe products, and the face of the influencer. Hence, the body of the SMI becomes an object once she does makeup or tries products on her skin.

The last tactic articulating the meaning of accessibility in dupe practices is “verifying,” which refers to SMIs' approval of the dupe product as an alternative to a luxury product. The crucial aspect here is that the presence of verifying tactic depends on the practice's specific object. If SMI is introducing a “viral dupe” to its audience, he or she takes the role of an authority who approves or disapproves of the popular view. If SMI finds the dupe has a similar final look with respect to its original alternative, then SMI approves it as a dupe as shown in Figure 4.

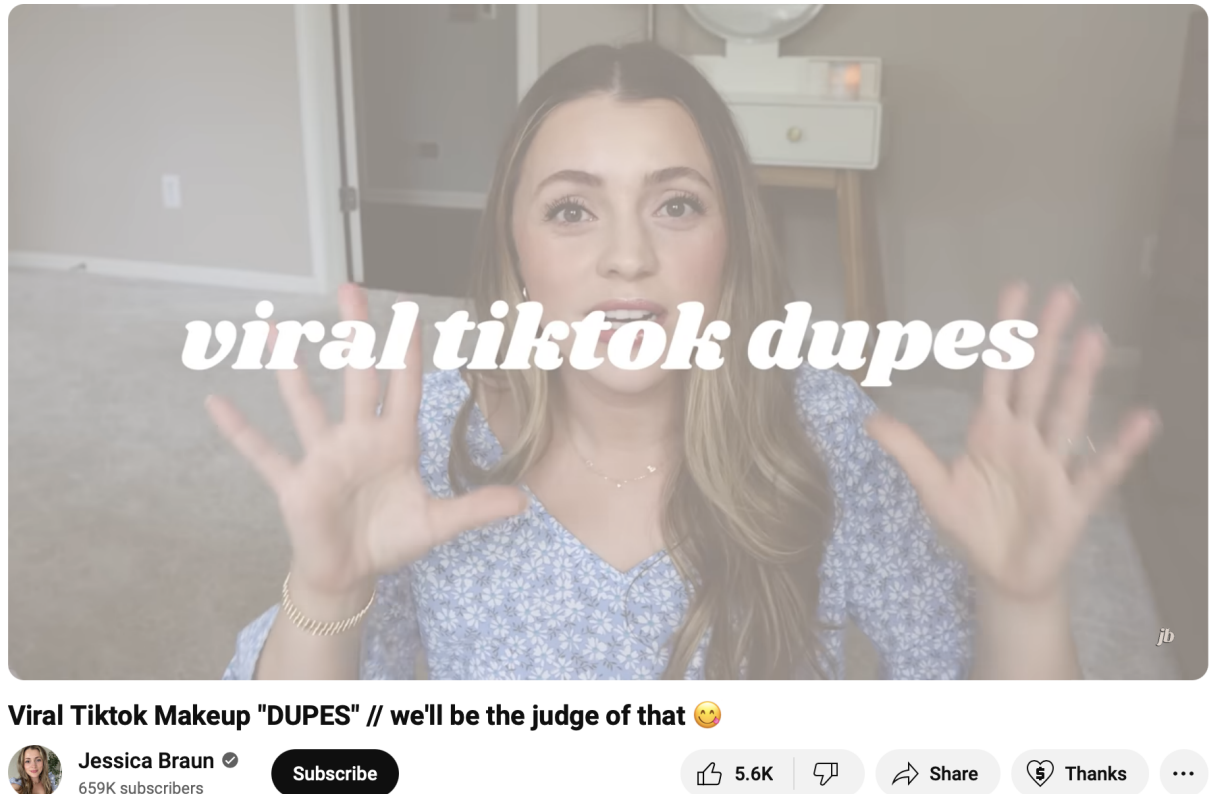


Figure 4. Viral dupe as the object of the dupe practice by Jessica Braun

Source: [YouTube: Viral Tiktok Makeup "DUPES" // we'll be the judge of that 😊, 2024]

Deciding whether the original product's cheaper alternative is a dupe depends on whether it is a makeup product or a skincare product. If it is a makeup product, then visual similarity is the criteria for finding it as a dupe. Sometimes, though, SMIs can add extra criteria beyond the look, such as how long it stays the same on the skin or whether the alternative has other similarities, such as vegan or cruelty-free. For skincare products, formula plays a crucial role in defining the dupe as an alternative to luxury products, along with its performance, sensual experience, and sustainability and cruelty-free criteria.

It is important to note that the verifying tactic is not towards luxury branding. Instead, it challenges the conception that the popularity or virality of information

signifies the truth. Hence, SMIs utilizing verifying tactics for viral dupes recognize the popularity as a form of strategy. To put it another way, SMIs recognize popularity on social media as a system of power; this power certainly differs from what de Certeau (1984) calls a strategy.

According to de Certeau, strategy has a definite place and centralized power, whereas tactics are decentralized and momentarily opportunistic moves that reside in the places owned by the powerful. One might argue that social media platforms represent strategy, and the user-generated content can be framed as tactics. However, Manovich (2009) asserts that the rise of user-generated content on Web 2.0 technologies has changed the dynamics. He argues that as social media companies adopted customization features and provided unlimited space for users, they embraced flexibility, which was once the feature of the tactics, not the strategies. Hence, with Web 2.0 technologies such as social media platforms, strategies have become more like tactics (Manovich, 2009). Moreover, this digital transformation also made tactics resemble strategies. De Certeau (1984) considers tactics transient and invisible, but Web 2.0 technologies made tactics visible and trackable; hence, tactics also resembled strategies (Manovich, 2009). Therefore, although viral content is the product of the weak and decentralized, it is traceable and visible, as Manovich (2009) points out.

By adding on Manovich's (2009) points, I argue that once content becomes viral, it owns a distinct space within the place of the powerful. Then, viral content has the power to influence individuals, just like strategy has the power to assert influence. So, virality represents an influential power similar to that of the powerful. Though it is not the same as strategy, which is organized and centralized power, virality is decentralized and user-driven; however, in terms of influence power, it

resembles strategy from this aspect. Thus, it is reasonable to find strategy features in virality so that viral content can be seen as a form of strategy.

In the dupe practice, SMIs sometimes shift the focus from luxury branding to virality, targeting virality to direct their tactics. This shift then indicates the volatility of the position of the power. Frow (1991) raised concerns about how de Certeau regards the powerful; according to Frow's account, the people who own power are not a singular force, so power may not stay where it belongs forever. However, there are power struggles among the 'many' powerful. Accordingly, he regards de Certeau's conceptualization of the powerful as simplistic and unidirectional, passing from one powerful unit to the public. However, according to Frow (1991), power cannot be reduced to one dimension because it is complex and multifaceted, acknowledging the power battle between different groups of powerful people. The shift of focus from luxury branding to virality and the resistance against the notion that virality presents the truth, dupe practice acknowledges the complex nature of power. The object of the practice, in this case, the viral dupe, recognizes virality as a power source, and SMIs resist the acceptance of virality at face value. As illustrated in Jessica's narrative:

We are going to be talking about something that sometimes gets me going and not in a good way, but today, it got me going in a good way, and that would be talking about viral TikTok dupes. So, here is my experience with this, and maybe you feel the same way. A lot of times, things that I will see on TikTok slash Instagram reels insert whatever short form media you consume; I feel like a lot of people are just doing, you know, dupe videos because they know they do well, which I totally get. I love doing dupe videos for myself, but I also know you guys like watching them, so more people tend to watch them, so I understand. But my point is I feel like sometimes the dupes are just like mmm (making a face that does not liked the dupe) or just not great, so I wanted to test some out ones that I thought like, really, is that really a dupe, or they were new products that launched that are supposedly dupes that's what we're doing (Jessica Braun, Viral Tiktok Makeup "DUPES" // we'll be the judge of that 😊).

Jessica tests several viral dupes in her dupe video by applying them to her skin. She shares her opinion on whether the suggested dupe for the original product could be recognized as a dupe. Referencing popularity is sometimes employed in dupe practice by showing other content creators' dupe videos to illustrate popular opinion, as shown in Figure 5 below. This technique is employed by many SMIs referencing to other videos on YouTube, TikTok or on other platforms.



Figure 5. Ava Reid shows other content creators' dupe reviews on TikTok illustrate the popularity

Source: [YouTube: doing a full face ONLY using viral skincare KNOCKOFFS... are they better than high-end??, 2024]

If SMIs agree with the popular opinion, they verify the product as a dupe for the original. The actual doing here is “testing” the cheap products to gauge whether

they perform similarly to the original. After testing the product by applying it to the skin or talking about its performance, SMIs either verify the product as a dupe or do not agree with the popular opinion, so they disregard the product as a dupe. Applying the tactical perspective here reveals the hidden doing behind the “testing.” SMIs oscillate between the two sources of power: centralized power, luxury branding, and decentralized, content-driven power, popularity. Hence, selecting the object of the dupe practice determines which tactics will be employed in the dupe practice. If the object is the viral dupe, verifying tactic is employed by SMIs. Allie’s excerpt below demonstrates the verification tactic:

That is really nice. No wonder they have gone viral. It is kind of funny how, like, the dupes go viral initially because they are dupes, and then I feel like they stick around because, like, they are actually a really good product, like a standalone product, I think, E.l.f does that really well. Yeah, I really like how this feels, and I have tried a lot of lip products that are nice. I kind of see what all the hype is about. I see why that was viral on its own, honestly. (Allie Glines, We Need to Talk About e.l.f. (& try their new makeup).

She verifies the dupe and praises its performance. Hence, the viral dupe illustrates that the beauty ideal can be achieved, and uniqueness no longer defines luxury products. Reiteratively, accessibility is articulated as the ability of individuals to achieve the beauty ideal regardless of their financial resources through four different tactics employed by SMIs.

5.3 Smart consumer

The smart consumer narrative also prevails in dupe practice, as various tactics are employed to resist values attached to luxury branding and to challenge social media popularity, which resembles a dominant system that elevates certain products. The meaning of smart consumers highlights empowerment and consumer agency in navigating cultural norms in the beauty landscape.

One might expect that preference for dupe products instead of high-end products signifies being a smart consumer in the beauty community; however, the hermeneutical analysis revealed that this community's cultural notion of a 'smart consumer' is somewhat nuanced and multifaceted. In the dupe culture, consumers can either use high-end or affordable options; both choices are welcomed. Hence, in dupe practice, a smart consumer is not someone who prefers dupes over luxury products; instead, it is a consumer who can substantiate his or her preferences.

The tactics that signify smart consumer meaning vary between skincare and color cosmetics products because SMIs' approaches to these two product categories differ in terms of the criteria they apply to consider product dupes, affecting their relationships with these two categories. The details of this difference will be elaborated on with respect to each tactic below.

One of the tactics articulating the smart consumer meaning is "criticizing" the marketing techniques of luxury brands. SMIs criticize different aspects of marketing techniques in the skincare and color cosmetics categories. SMIs' main criteria for color cosmetics dupes is the final look on the skin, meaning that if two products give the same look, they are usually considered dupes. Other factors affect the selection, such as how long they stay the same on the skin throughout the day. In some cases, other features, such as sustainability or cruelty-free criteria, are considered. However, considering a product as a dupe for skincare is more complex as these products work differently from color cosmetics. Performance is the main criterion of the skincare products, which demands a long-term usage to comment on it. SMIs' approach to ingredient lists of two products also differ; some SMIs do not believe formula tells all about the product, while others rely on ingredient lists to gauge the

similarity between high-end and affordable products. SMI Jessica Braun's below excerpt illustrates this point:

I would much rather not spend that much money. There are so many other things in life I would rather spend that money on, and obviously, I want to get something that is really good, if not better, and that is why . . . Okay, where am I going with this? That is why I love doing these videos because I think it is important to recognize that even though ingredients may not be the same, especially when you dip into skincare and stuff like that, yes, it may be different, but especially with makeup if you are really just worried about what it looks like and how it performs that is why I love finding dupes (Jessica Braun, drugstore dupes (some are *better* than high end makeup)).

For color cosmetics, the tactic of criticizing applies to the pricing strategy of luxury branding. If the final look of both the products are same or similar, then paying less for the same performance is valued and preferring dupe product signals being a smart consumer. SMIs Noelle illustrates the case as "Halo glow is \$14, but it is a dupe for the infamous Charlotte Tilbury Flawless Filter, which retails for \$49.14 versus \$49 is highway robbery (Noelle Kate, doing my makeup using *ONLY* tiktok biral elf makeup dupes)." and Bossgirlified exemplify the case below:

There are a couple of things that I have not tried before, but besides the point, I still wanted to try them out because I want to know if these dupes are really, really good. If they are, then there is no point in buying the original, which is probably super (bossgirlified, I tried dupes for the most viral TikTok product, and honestly...).

As these quotes show, the criteria for color cosmetics are their performance in giving similar colors to the skin. If an affordable option gives similar results, then SMIs prefer dupes based on price. Pricing strategy is also criticized in skincare dupe practice, and if the formula and performance of the high-end skincare product is similar to that of affordable ones then the high price tag is rejected as shown in Abbey's below excerpt:

The Skinceuticals CE Ferulic serum is another serum that people are obsessed with for a good reason. It really does have an ideal combination of

ingredients for an Ascorbic Acid serum because when you add vitamin E and Ferulic Acid, both of which are antioxidants, to a solution that has Ascorbic Acid present, it will do a couple of different things . . . which is amazing. What is not amazing is the price point. It is 166 dollars, I do not even, I do not understand; I mean, part of that is just frugal in me, but 166 dollars for a vitamin C serum; no! There are better options out there that are a fraction of the cost (Abbey Yung, Skincare Dupes 2021 | Products I Like Better Than Cerave, The Ordinary, EltaMD, Skinceuticals, etc.).

While pronouncing “It is 166 dollars” she gives a confused look as shown in Figure 6.

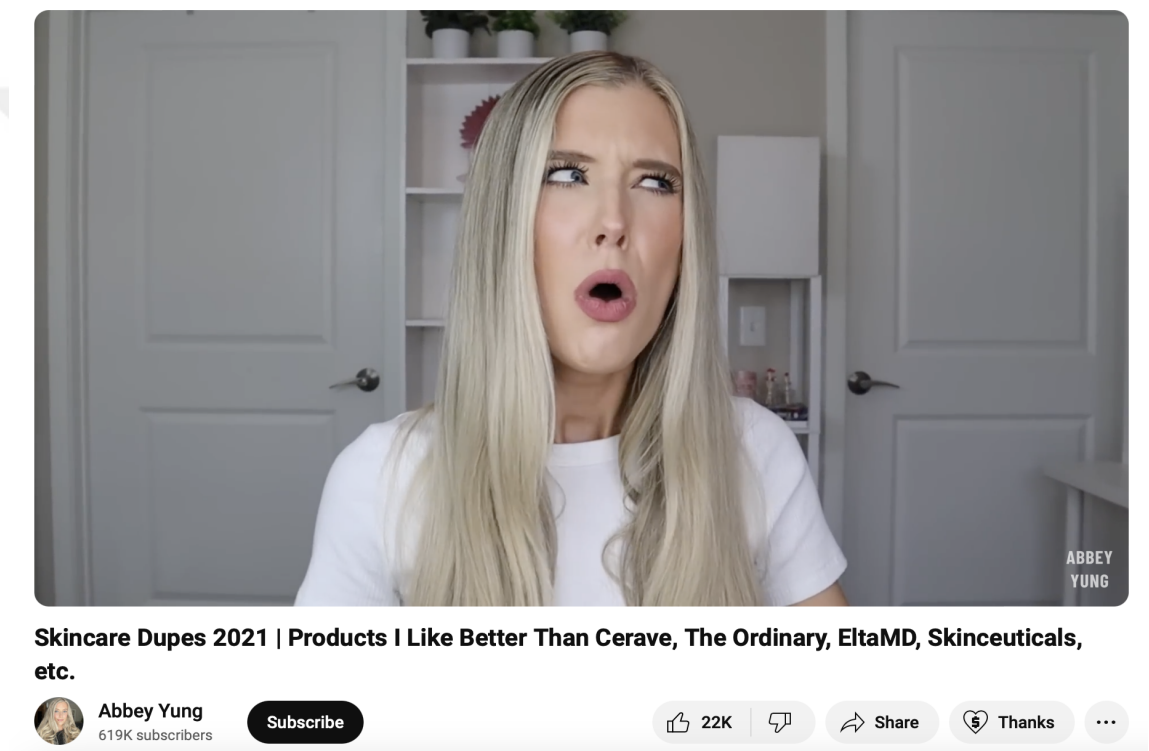


Figure 6. Abbey Yung looks puzzled when pronouncing the price of the luxury product

Source: [YouTube: Skincare Dupes 2021 | Products I Like Better Than Cerave, The Ordinary, EltaMD, Skinceuticals, etc., 2024]

All of the SMIs commenting on dupe and high-end skincare products give detailed ingredient information as illustrated in Abbey's quote, hence they know how to decode the formula.

Thus, in order to criticize the price of the high-end skincare product, the ability to decode the product's formula is needed. Then, the ingredient knowledge and the capability of decoding the formulation are the competencies needed to criticize skincare products. Competences are the required elements of practices that work with materials and meanings (Shove, 2003; 2012). To illustrate the dynamics of the practice circuit, in this case, the object is the viral high-end product, the doings are the competencies in Magaudda's (2011) circuit of practice framework, by the ability to decode the formula SMIs attached a high-performance value to high-end product which represents the meaning. However, at this point, because SMI has the competence to decode the formulation, she introduces affordable options with similar formulas to the viewer. This subtle resistance to luxury branding imbues doings with oppositional tactics. She then, as a tactic, criticizes the high-end product with respect to its performance and value ratio and prefers the affordable option, which then creates the meaning of smart consumer.

Some of the SMIs in dupe practice go beyond decoding the formulation of skincare products to compare them with the formulation of affordable options, and they also criticize the branding strategies of luxury brands. One of the most criticized and at the same time praised luxury product is SK-II Pitera Facial Treatment Clear Lotion among SMIs in dupe practice. This luxury lotion has a trademark ingredient called Pitera, and the brand promotes the story of this patented ingredient in its marketing communication, and on its website, as shown in Figure 7.

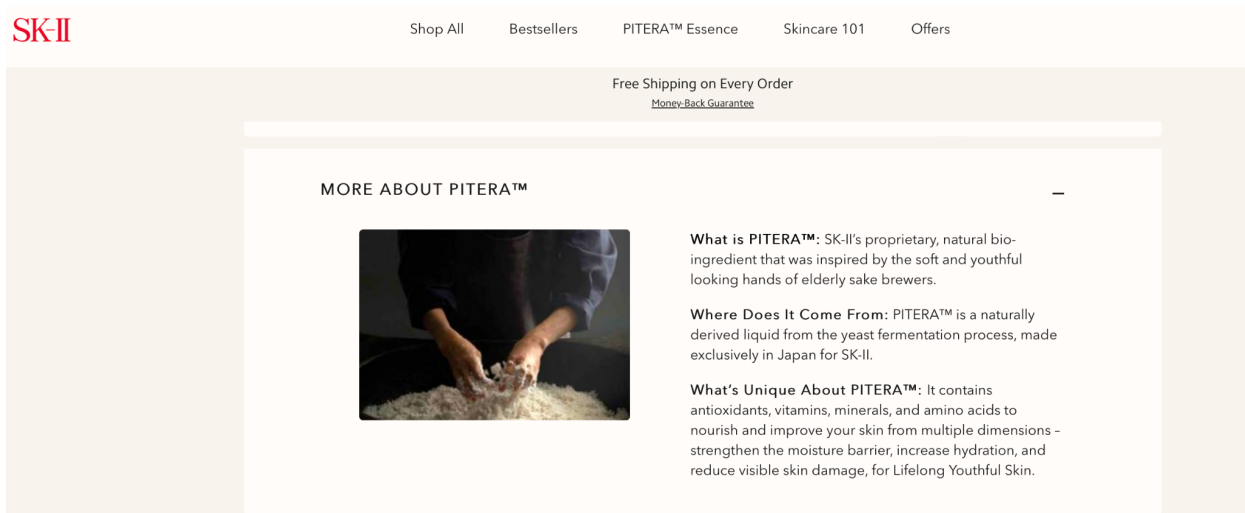


Figure 7. SK-II Facial Treatment Clear Lotion Pitera story on SK-II official website

Source: [SK-II Official Website, <https://www.sk-ii.com/product/essence/facial-treatment-essence>, 2024]

SMI Cassandra Bankson decodes the branding technique of SK-II in her dupe video and asserts that the brand inflates its prices due to this patented ingredient. This tactic then necessitates both the competence of ingredient knowledge and marketing technique as she frames the patented ingredient as a marketing gimmick as illustrated in the quote below:

It is this idea that people in Japan see people working with sake or, you know, working with fermented alcohol, basically fermented rice, and their hands look so beautiful. They were like, "Oh, how do you get such beautiful hands?" They are like, "Oh, it is this magical, amazing ingredient," "We have to take it, patent it, and put it into skincare". Very, very smart from a business perspective, like patenting it, owning it for an amount of time, not letting anyone else have it, charging 200 bucks for it, and getting some celebrities to endorse it . . . Do I think it is the best anti-aging thing in the entire world? No. Is it good for skin support? Sure. But is it worth 100 to 200 bucks for skin support? No. So, of course, I have an option of what I would buy, and did buy, if I did not want to spend this kind of money . . . It is basically this Pitera which is again this patented molecule that they claimed ownership of and charge you 100 to 200 freaking dollars for you. Butylene Glycol, Pentyl Glycol, Water, Sodium Benzoate, Methylparaben, and Ascorbic acid are all fine ingredients. But I am just like, it is basic, and you are just paying for this one, you know, a very liquid ingredient in this Pitera (Cassandra Bankson, Buy This Not That - 5 Luxury Skincare Swaps!).

Cassandra deconstructs the meaning of the patented ingredient and reconstructs it as a marketing tool. Hence, she regards the patented ingredient as a marketing technique rather than a scientific innovation. Below excerpt of SMI and cosmetics chemist Ramon, also shows how he diminishes the uniqueness value of the patented ingredient, and frame it as a hype:

The whole thing about this is, this whole Pitera. I do not know if you can read that Pitera, which is an ingredient that SK-II kind of likes to own, but realistically, what this is is literally just Galactomyces ferment. We see Galactomyces ferment in a lot of other Korean skincare essences . . . Now the company behind SK-II themselves did the study to look into the benefits of what the ingredient can do, and fundamentally, really, it just hydrates. There is some potential that it could have some antioxidant benefits, but realistically, this just really hydrates the skin. It has some minerals and vitamins and whatnot that are really good for the skin as well, but I feel like they really hype up that ingredient, and all these benefits it can give you when, in reality, there is not so much it can really do for you in terms of changing your entire skin complexion (Glow by Ramon, Luxury Skincare DUPES | SK-II Facial Treatment Essence, Estée Lauder Night Repair, Dior).

Ramon criticizes and decodes the marketing technique of SK-II: he frames the trademark ingredient as a marketing tool. While this also diminishes the uniqueness value of the luxury brand, rather than the meaning of accessibility, smart consumer meaning prevails as SMI has the competence to decode the marketing technique.

Another tactic employed in dupe practice that creates the smart consumer meaning is inviting the consumer to mindful luxury. I define “mindful luxury” as a deliberate preference for luxury products despite an awareness of marketing techniques of luxury branding. Hence, in mindful luxury, one can consume and enjoy luxury products as long as one is aware that he or she is paying more than the product deserves. So consumers pursuing mindful luxury are aware of the luxury brand's marketing techniques; they know the brand charges more for a similar experience, but they still choose to act that way. Thus, in dupe practice, deceived

consumers are not valued, but market mavens (Feick & Price, 1987) who prefer luxury brands despite all marketing techniques are valued and regarded as smart consumers. SMI Kelly Gooch clearly shares her thoughts about preference for luxury products and states that she does not judge consumers consuming luxury products:

I want to make it clear that this is by no means a judgment on anyone who enjoys luxury makeup or products in general. I completely understand why someone would want beautiful things—I love beautiful things myself, and I do not think there is anything wrong with that. This is intended more as a conversation, and I want to open up a dialogue (Kelly Gooch, You're being scammed... "luxury makeup" is a lie).

Kelly explicitly shares her opinion about luxury brands; however, other SMIs communicate a similar message while they compare luxury and dupe products.

In two cases, SMIs in dupe practice prefer luxury brands over dupes that signal mindful luxury. In the first case, luxury performs better than the dupe product. In the second case, the luxury product performs the same or is inferior to the dupe. However, the abstract benefits, such as personal meaning or a feeling of luxury, override the utility value of the high-end product. In the former case, the narrative of "the product worth the money" is highly valued, and if a product is deemed to be worth the high price according to its performance, then it is an acceptable choice as illustrated below:

Quite honestly, like just a big spoiler alert for you guys, I really do not believe that there is a dupe for SK-II . . . What makes SK-II so special, right? Like what is so great about this essence?

And it really is the star ingredient here, which is Pitera. Now this is a trademark term from SK-II, but we on the street may know it as *Galactomyces ferment*.

So legend has it, back in the 1970s, SK-II scientists, for whatever reason, were in this sake factory where they make, you know, fermented wine. And they realized that the brewers who were making this sake had really gorgeous hands . . . What we all want to know, right? The results, the benefits of this product, because that's really going to answer the question: is it worth it? And the results are pretty good. I say that with, like, a heavy heart because, you know, I don't want the results to be good. I want to be able to say it's not worth it, you guys, it's not. You know, the results are very good. . . Don't get

me wrong here; there are lots of products, cheaper products, that can definitely give you a glow. But I will say, nothing quite as intense as this product (Kelly Driscoll, SK-II This or That | Missha, Scinic, Secret Key + Cosrx Comparisons)

Kelly explicitly states that there is no dupe for the essence of SK-II. After explaining the story behind the trademark ingredient Pitera, she shares her experience with the product and tells her audience that the high price is worth the performance. The other products she shows in her video are affordable choices similar to SK-II toner, but rather than calling them dupes, she calls them "alternatives" to SK-II. Performing superior in terms of look or the uniqueness of the result for the color cosmetics valued and, in these terms, if luxury brands exceed the dupe, then it can be preferred, as shown in this excerpt "I feel there is no real need to buy a high-end one unless it is truly amazing or features a color that you cannot find elsewhere (Kelly Strack, Full Face of DRUGSTORE Makeup That's *BETTER* Than HIGH-END 😊 Best Drugstore Makeup | Kelly Strack)". Kelly explicitly tells her audience when to choose luxury over dupe, so she invites her audience to mindful luxury by substantiating her preference criteria.

In the second case, luxury products cannot compete on performance but have abstract benefits to consumers. For instance, the choice of luxury products in such cases can be rationalized as products having a personal meaning. James's below quotation about the popular luxury product SK-II Facial Treatment Clear Lotion portrays this case:

SK-II Essence, an icon. An icon, an absolute icon. So the essence is huge, and you can get it anywhere from 95 to £110, which I've seen online. And I love it. And I will be honest, it is a product I do spend the money on. Not because I think it is worth it but because I enjoy using it. As I said, the smell brings back memories. (James Welsh, Cheap Luxury Skincare Dupes! Estée Lauder, Clinique, Glow Recipe, SK-II).

As discussed in chapter three, personal experiences with the product shape personal meaning, so he can substantiate his preference by being reflexive. So, James recognizes the premium pricing and aware that the products' performance does not validate its high price, still prefers the product because the brand signifies a personal meaning.

Also, SMIs embrace the idea that if someone has money to spend on luxury brands, they can still buy them, knowing there are other options with the same performance and lower prices. Hence, consumers are not deceived by the luxury brand that the product is unique in some way, but they know that similar products are available in the market for lower prices. SMI Susan Yara compares the luxury brand La Mer moisturizer with an affordable option, Nivea moisturizer. In terms of formulation, she tells her audience that they are very similar and perform very similarly. Nonetheless, she warns her audience that there might be aspects she may not know about the formulation of La Mer, but she still tells them that she prefers Nivea over La Mer:

Basically, is there much more going on behind the scenes with the formulation of La Mer? There might be something I do not completely understand. I think that is something to keep in mind. If you have the money to spend on a jar of Crème de La Mer, I am happy for you—that means you have the resources to indulge and enjoy it. Then go for it. However, if you do not have the money and still want that moisturization—that good, thick occlusive—your Nivea cream will work perfectly fine (Mixed Makeup, Is Nivea Really a Dupe for La Mer? | Skincare with @Susan Yara).

Susan Yara decodes the formulations of these two products. She compares their formulations with their texture, smell, and feel, and she considers Nivea a dupe for La Mer moisturizer. Nonetheless, she welcomes people who prefer La Mer over Nivea even though they have similar formulations and textures.

The third tactic of the dupe practice involving smart consumer meaning is challenging the popularity of viral products. As discussed in the accessibility meaning, the powerful is not static but switches between luxury branding and social media popularity. Accessibility meaning is associated with the "verifying" technique in which SMIs verify or deny the popular opinion of social media through testing and comparing the products. The "challenging popularity" tactic is employed in the smart consumer meaning rather than the "verifying" tactic. SMIs adopt an interrogative stance towards viral products and do not accept their popularity unless they try to test them. The crucial point here is that viral products could be both luxury or dupe products, and SMIs do not discriminate between those product categories when challenging their popularity. The following quote nicely demonstrates this:

Today I have this e.l.f lip oil, oh my gosh, specifically in the shade Rose Envy. Wow, wow, wow, so this is their Glow Reviver lip oil. It just feels so good on the lips; I love it. This was honestly such a hyped product, and so when I finally tried it out this month, to be honest, I was a little skeptical because I was like, okay, is this actually going to be as good as everyone is saying, or is everyone just like going along with the trend and the hype? No, it's actually so, so good. It has a slight kind of mint feel to it, which is very similar to the Dior lip oil. I just think it looks so good (Allie Glines, The Best Beauty Products of 2024 So Far (Here's Why)).

SMI Allie Glines clearly shows her skepticism towards the viral affordable brand and uses the tactic of challenging its popularity. Similarly, Jen shows her skepticism towards the luxury brand that is popular on TikTok as “When it comes to SkinCeuticals, I feel like so many influencers are always talking about them and raving about them, but I just was not sure (Jen Phelps, SKINCARE DUPES | Alternatives to High-End!).” Hence, virality is regarded as a dominant system, and tactics are employed to challenge it in dupe practice. Then, a smart consumer is constructed as someone who does not unconditionally accept the popular opinion as accurate but as someone who has doubts about it.

The last tactic is what I refer to as “tactical laboring” of SMIs in dupe practice that is associated with the smart consumer meaning. SMIs are market mavens, and in dupe practice, they communicate that finding a dupe for the original product is not easy. SMIs conduct extensive research to find the dupes and a deep understanding of the inherent qualities of the products is needed to compare them. I call this work “tactical laboring” of SMIs in dupe practice where smart consumers use dupe products, which shows that they spent time researching to find and use the dupe product. I refrain from referring to this hard work solely as “laboring” because it is inherently tactical; it is done to find alternatives to popular products. SMI Hiram explicitly tells his audience that he worked hard to find alternatives to popular products. If he had not done that, his audience would have had to do this work, but he handled it.

So, I have decided to make a video giving you guys dupes for the most popular Cerave and Ordinary products that you are not left on your own trying to compare formulas, which is really, really complicated, and figure out alternatives because that is not fun. It takes a lot of work. I'm happy to do the work for you, so I have taken all their most popular products, the ones that are usually sold out from at least what I found, and I'm going to be giving you guys multiple alternative products that you can purchase instead to get similar results (Hiram, Dupes for Every Sold Out CeraVe & The Ordinary Product).

His quote communicates the idea that the skill to read the formulation is needed, and it is not straightforward.

In Figure 8 below, SMI Tati shows her notebook while telling her audience she is working hard to find dupes.

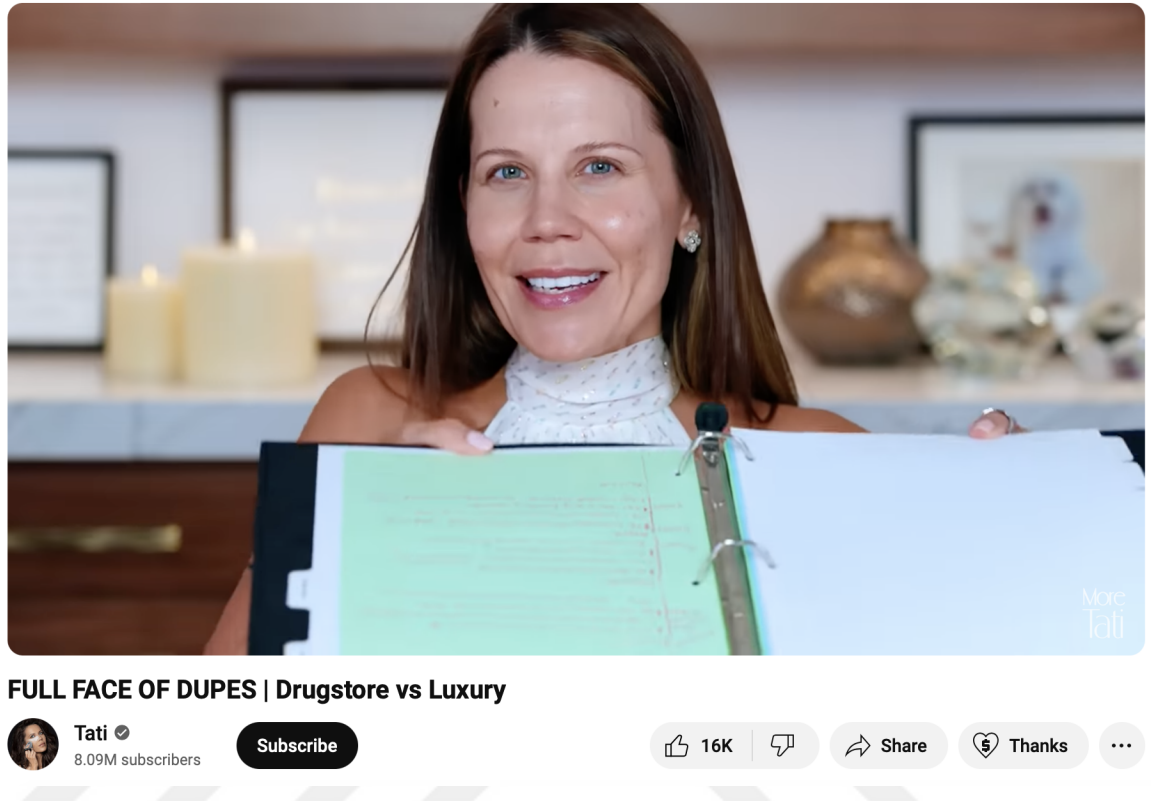


Figure 8. Tati showing her notebook to prove her “tactical laboring”

Source: [YouTube: FULL FACE OF DUPES | Drugstore vs Luxury, 2024]

The object of the dupe practice, “discovered dupe,” also reflects the tactical laboring. SMIs research dupes and communicate to their audience that they either “find the dupe” or “discovered the dupe,” both representing the objects of the dupe practice.

Also, SMIs’ discourses to search for a dupe construct this tactic as tactical laboring. For instance, if they are talking about a viral luxury brand, they use verbs such as “to investigate,” “to find,” “to hunt,” and “to discover.” This narrative then also reflects the tactical laboring. SMIs highly value finding dupes that others have not discovered yet, showing that tactical labor requires deep investigation. The following excerpt illustrates this case:

This right here is a little hidden gem. This is the Physicians Formula Butter Brazilian Brow Lift Brow Gel. It's literally the Patrick Ta brow gel. I mean, I have said this before, I'll say it again—like it's actually the same applicator. So, the shorter one is the Physicians Formula, and then the tall one is Patrick Ta. It's literally the same. It's so nice (Allie Glines, THE BEST DRUGSTORE MAKEUP OF 2023).

One crucial aspect of this tactic is that it is highly valued and appreciated by consumers. So, they acknowledge the hard work and feel grateful for the tactical laboring of SMI. For instance, SMI Jen Phelps, in her video titled “These 30 MAKEUP DUPES Saved Me \$931 in 2022!” shows her audience alternatives to luxury makeup products. In order to find the dupes, she searched products from her makeup drawer and tested each of them according to their look on the skin. This tactical laboring is highly appreciated by her audience, as reflected in the comments section. Some of the comments to her video are as follows:

Your dupe videos are amazing, Jen, thank you so much for your time and effort in finding affordable alternatives to so many high-end products!

Wow you found some incredible dupes, what a massive amount of work you have put into this video. Thank you so much I'll really have to try some of these out...

Jen . . . Mind officially blown!! The amount of time and research that you do for us is truly remarkable. I want to thank you for your diligence in finding really good products that save us real \$\$\$. I see this as a reference tool and will rewatch, take notes and save.

These comments show that the effort SMI put in her video to find the dupes requires extensive research and time associated with the smart consumer narrative in dupe practice.

Hence, four tactics, criticizing, inviting to mindful luxury, challenging popularity, and tactical laboring, are utilized in the dupe practice that is articulated in the smart consumer narrative. This cultural meaning demonstrates that consumers can either use luxury or affordable products to signal the smart consumer meaning

because this meaning is not about “what” consumers are using; but it is about “why” they are using it. If they can substantiate their reasons for using specific products, then they can signal the smart consumer meaning. This requires being reflexive about one’s consumption choices. This is similar to the “reflexively defiant consumer” that Ozanne and Murray (1995) portray; those consumers decode the dominant ideologies imposed by marketing authorities, and by being reflexive, they resist the consumption styles imposed by these structures and construct their own oppositional consumption styles instead. Holt (2002) criticizes these authors in terms of their perspective on the marketing institution as a cultural authority, and he asserts that the authoritarian view of marketing is prevalent in modern consumer culture. In contrast, postmodern consumer culture diverges from this perspective. In the postmodern era, brands act as cultural resources rather than authoritative institutions, just as cultural industries like the music and film industry, and consumers can use the brand as a cultural resource in their identity projects (Holt, 2002). Holt (2002) recognizes the role of cultural producers in presenting cultural tensions to their audiences in a creative way. I recognize SMIs as cultural producers like singers, actors, or actresses in this dissertation. Following Holt’s (2002) premise that cultural producers creatively express the cultural tensions in their works, I propose that SMIs, as cultural producers, realize their creative expressions of the tensions of consumer culture in their dupe videos. Recognizing dupe videos as practice then unveils the objects, they use to employ their various tactics, revealing the cultural meanings they negotiate. Also, I show that in dupe practice, powerful refers to both luxury marketing and social media popularity. I show that even though SMIs resist the values imposed by luxury brands, hence regarding them as an authority, at the same time, they treat luxury branding as a cultural resource that enables them to construct

smart consumer identity in the dupe practice. Hence, luxury branding is seen as both an authority and a resource in this beauty community. Also, I show that social media popularity is treated as a dominant system, like a marketing institution, which can be resisted or embraced according to the shared understandings of the dupe practice.

5.4 Achievement

Using affordable products as an alternative to luxury products in dupe practice, in cases it deems culturally appropriate, signals achievement. Nonetheless, this meaning is also valid for the preference of luxury products if they meet the acceptance criteria elaborated in the previous section. Tactics employed in dupe practice that negotiated and articulated the cultural meanings are not exclusive, meaning that different cultural meanings can share the same tactics. Thus, along with the smart consumer meaning, tactical laboring is also associated with the meaning of achievement. The four tactics articulate the meaning of achievement: tactical laboring, appreciation, gaming, and celebrating.

Tactical labor articulates the meaning of achievement because some effort must be put into it to feel the sense of achievement. The effort of researching and finding products that perform similarly to luxury products, as discussed in the previous section, illustrates tactical labor. Appreciation is very pertinent to tactical labor in the sense that because tactical labor is involved, SMIs can find successful dupes. Some SMIs employ this tactic while expressing their joy of finding dupes.

Tati's quote depicts this tactic clearly, as shown below:

I am so pleased. Woo! I am so proud of myself for finding these dupes. I am really, really excited about it. I love Charlotte Tilbury, but Charlotte Tilbury is expensive. If you are just going in for a lip item that maybe you are not wearing every day of your life, and you just do not want to spend that high amount of money, I have got you covered (Tati, 15 Drugstore Makeup Dupes ... You'll absolutely love!).

Similarly, SMI Angie appreciates herself for finding the dupe product, as illustrated in the quote below:

I think that these dupes are just perfection and, you know, to save like what it is, 275 dollars on the makeup is pretty darn good, and you get the same wear out of it, the same look out of it. I have got to give myself a pat on the back. I think I did a pretty darn good job on this one, so let's run them down and see how they are. So, here's the Chanel versus the Revlon (HotandFlashy, Full Face of DRUGSTORE Makeup DUPES With All Day Wear Test!).

SMIs utilize this tactic in dupe practice where the object of the practice is “discovered dupe.” The interaction between the elements of the dupe practice can be shown using the circuit of practice framework. The object is the luxury product; this can be either the favorite product of the SMI or the viral luxury product. In either case, SMIs have experience with the product and know its features. Then, with the aim to resist the uniqueness value of luxury products, she or he, as a market maven, conducts extensive research to find products that perform similarly to the luxury product but with affordable prices, which I call this process as “tactical laboring”. This tactic is sometimes shown in dupe videos; for instance, SMI visits a local drugstore and shoots the video in this store. In such instances, SMI actively searches for products from the product shelves by reading the labels and ingredient lists. In other cases, SMI does not share the scenes of “tactical laboring” with the audience; SMI just verbally expresses that he or she has searched for alternatives. Tactical laboring results in finding a “dupe product,” which becomes the object of the practice. If the dupe product performs similarly to the luxury product; in this case, SMI either “achieves the look” as a tactic or as a “doing.” She swatches the product, and SMI verbally appreciates her effort and success, which then points to the meaning of “achievement.”

The third tactic employed in dupe practice is gaming. While SMIs compare the luxury and affordable options, they depict the comparison as a sort of game by using words such as “winner,” “rivals,” “trumps,” and “beating” to describe the success of dupe products compared to luxury products. The gaming narrative is represented nicely in the below quote from SMI Chloe Renee:

Who's the winner? I think you can probably already tell. La Mer was the very clear winner for me. I have been a skincare guru since I was like 16 years old. I am 30 now. Oh yeah, that is probably a key factor—I am 30 years old. Most products that are this thick do tend to break me out. This is the first time I have had something that is very thick like this and very emollient to really work for my skin (Frizzandfrillzz, Chloe Renee, I Can't Believe My Skin After 60 Days!!! La Mer VS Nivea Dupe).

Some of the luxury products and dupes are very popular among skincare consumers, and one of the popular luxury dupe couple products is La Mer and Nivea moisturizer. Chloe tests La Mer and Nivea moisturizer on separate sides of her face for 30 days and shares the before, during, and after photos of her journey. She frames the testing journey as a game in which, in the end, one of them will be the winner. The gaming narrative ties to the meaning of achievement regardless of the winner's category, the winner can either be a dupe product or a luxury product because it signals to find the best product with an effort.

Kylkilahti and Autio (2012) explored how consumers manage unexpected service encounters in a creative way by utilizing gameful strategies. The authors considered gaming as a context that consumers construct and tactics are the opportunist moves consumers employ to play according to the rules of the game (Kylkilahti & Autio, 2021). Conversely, gaming is considered a tactic in this dissertation, representing oppositional doings in dupe practice.

The achievement meaning articulated in the dupe practice, and the tactical laboring is similar to the achievement model proposed by Brooks and Wee (2016) in

explaining the phenomena of black Friday shopping or the Apple consumers forming lines in front of the Apple store to buy the iPhone. For instance, consumers involved in laboring by conducting extensive research stay in queues for long periods of time, and after they buy the product, they feel a sense of achievement. This achievement is due to consumer labor and the uncertain nature of the consumption result. This means that consumers may not be able to buy the product even though they undergo consumer labor (Brooks & Wee, 2016). Different in dupe practice, though, is that tactics and meanings are imbued with oppositional resistance. Also, one crucial aspect of being highlighted is that McCracken (1987) invited scholars to investigate the meanings of goods beyond their signification of status. I demonstrated that in the dupe practice, using specific products does not signal status; instead, they signal an achievement.

5.5 Utilitarianism

The last meaning of dupe practice signals a functional value that the functional or utilitarian aspects of products prevail over the hedonic values of these products. SMIs rationalize their choices by putting more emphasis on functionality rather than hedonic aspects of products. Tactics such as verification, employing playfulness, and gaming signal the utilitarianism meaning. It is worth mentioning that functional value is praised not only for dupe products but also for luxury products. SMIs pay attention to the performance aspect of products when evaluating products in terms of similarities. Hence, SMIs using dupe products signal they value functionality over abstract meanings. SMIs using luxury products can substantiate their choices based on performance.

SMIs' verification tactic depends on their evaluation of the performances of luxury and affordable products. Even though some products have very similar packages, textures, or smells, the decision to consider a dupe depends on their performance rather than these aspects. A verification tactic is also utilized to articulate the meaning of accessibility, as discussed before. Verifying an affordable product as a dupe for the luxury product shows that consumers can achieve the beauty ideal with affordable options as well. However, the focus here is identifying the key factor that makes an affordable product a dupe. So, SMIs verifying the dupe demonstrates that functionality is the core aspect that they value, and they rationalize their choices.

Employing playfulness covers their reactions to finding dupes such as excitement, surprise or joy, their theatrical role plays, and the other elements that are affectively charged. This tactic is utilized when a product performs similarly to a luxury product or when its performance exceeds the expectations of SMIs, all pointing to the utilitarian aspect of the products.

One of the most common reactions to viral products, either viral dupe or viral luxury products, is the excitement SMIs show when trying those products. If the object of the practice is the viral luxury product, this tactic then affirms the power of popularity in creating interest. However, in the dupe practice, the tactic of verification either supports the popularity's truth or denies it. Hence, even though SMIs act positively towards the popularity of luxury products by showing excitement, they tactically revert to this scene by offering an alternative. I argue that excitement still serves the dupe product because people will not desire dupes unless they perform similarly to viral luxury products. A mediocre product does not show up in dupe practice; only favorite luxury or viral luxury becomes the object of the

practice. Hence, a luxury product must be highly desirable to create a demand for its dupe; a mediocre product will not generate excitement for its dupe version either. Hence, SMIs do not hesitate to express excitement about viral luxury products. After testing the product, they either support the popularity or deny it, which refers to verification tactics. My special interest here is showing excitement about the performance of products, as illustrated below:

We are going to do highlighter on the expensive side. We have the Cookie highlighter from Benefit, and the dupe is this Milani highlighter. Okay, so here is the color of the Milani one, and here is the Benefit one. Honestly, the colors are pretty identical. This one is a little bit darker, but literally, they are almost the same . . . I am actually so excited to try this. Literally, it is hyped up so much. So, I am just going to take a little bit and put it right here. Oh, my goodness, that glow, that is crazy! Look at that glow. Okay, and then a little bit on the nose. I do not know if the Milani will be able to beat this side. Like, this is so glowy. This one is also really good. I do not know if you can tell, but I think this side is better though. Like, this one is a little more glowy. Personally, I like the Benefit one more (Lowkey.Sophie, EXPENSIVE MAKEUP VS. THEIR DUPES !!).

SMI Sophie does split face makeup with luxury and affordable products. In the case illustrated above, she prefers the luxury brand Benefit over the affordable option due to the shine it gives, which is better than the cheap option. Hence, showing her excitement about trying the product and the excitement after the application constructs playfulness.

Another playfulness act employed by some SMIs is acting like they share a secret once they find a dupe for the luxury product. As mentioned before, finding dupes that are not well-known is highly valued in this practice, and SMIs add playfulness when introducing the dupe, they found. In the case below and shown in Figure 9, Pampered Wolf brings the dupe brow gel close to her lips as if she is quietly sharing a secret so no one else hears:



Beauty DUPES You Need To Try! | Over 40



Pampered Wolf
217K subscribers

Subscribe

2.4K



Share

Clip



Figure 9. Pampered Wolf acts like she is giving a secret while saying “Shh!”

Source: [YouTube: Beauty DUPES You Need To Try! | Over 40, 2024]

I am so super excited about this—I cannot contain myself, honestly. This is superb. I have been really excited about the Anastasia Beverly Hills Brow Freeze Gel ever since it was launched. There have not been very many other brow products that have made it near my brows because I love this so much, and it works . . . However, I have found something that rivals this, and I have to say, I think it is better. Shh! This is the Maybelline Super Lock Brow Glue, and it is out of this world. It does exactly the same job as the Anastasia Beverly Hills Brow Freeze Gel. There are some differences, so I am going to go through them . . . I love both of these, but I am loving the Maybelline more. I cannot believe I am saying that, but it is the truth (Pampered Wolf, Beauty DUPES You Need To Try! | Over 40)

In this excerpt, Pampered Wolf first shares her satisfaction and love for her luxury brow gel, then introduces a dupe that outperforms her favorite luxury product. She introduces the dupe as if she is giving a secret, and she also states that she cannot believe she says that the dupe is better than her favorite product to express how the dupe exceeded her expectations from the product. Another form SMIs add

playfulness elements to their narratives and acts is theatrical gestures. In figure 10, SMI Laura Lee shares her excitement for the dupe product, which performs very similarly to the luxury product, by saying, “Call the police!” while she throws the lip gloss to express her astonishment.

This one is Sizzle from Flower Beauty, same packaging . . . It looks like Sizzle has a little bit more pigment to it, but they basically look the exact same. So, this is the Tarte, and I will put the Sizzle on top without rubbing them together. They look the exact same—call the police, they look the same (Laura Lee, i tried VIRAL TIKTOK makeup dupes... (honest review)).

Here, the performance of the dupe product resembles very much that of the luxury product, and she cannot tell the difference between how these two products give color to her lips.



i tried VIRAL TIKTOK makeup dupes... (honest review)



Laura Lee
4.62M subscribers

Subscribe

14K



Share

Thanks



Figure 10. Laura Lee exaggerates the resemblance through humor and theatrics

Source: [YouTube: i tried VIRAL TIKTOK makeup dupes... (honest review) 2024]

Hence, because she finds their performance identical, she makes fun of the dupe brand stealing the luxury brands' qualities and acts as if she witnessed a theft. SMIs differ in adding playfulness elements to their presentations; hence, not all SMIs act that way. Some add playfulness to their narratives by stating that they do not believe a hyped dupe performs similarly to the luxury brand. Then, they test the products and share their astonishment at the similar performance. Thus, SMIs employ playfulness tactics with different acts in the dupe practice. However, one of the popular playfulness elements is split face makeup by SMIs; in this case they apply one side of their face the luxury product and the other side the dupe product as explained before, and illustrated on Figure 11.

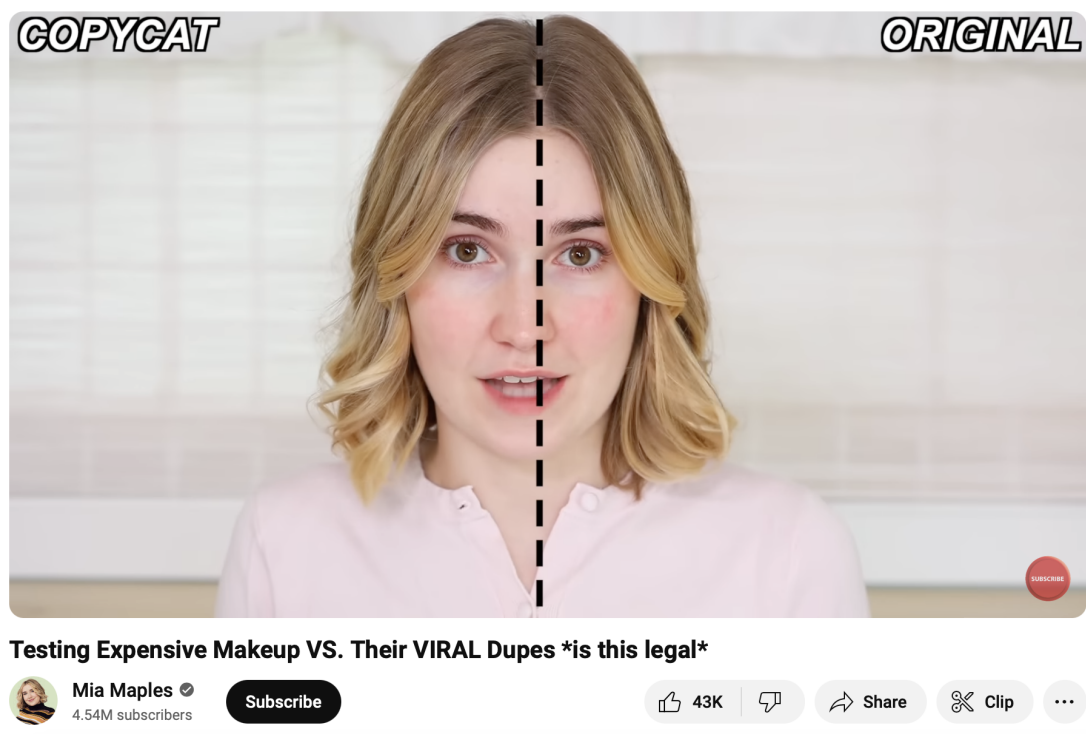


Figure 11. Mia Maples doing split face makeup with luxury and dupe products

Source: [YouTube: Testing Expensive Makeup VS. Their VIRAL Dupes *is this legal*, 2024]

Sometimes SMIs apply the products while giving information about the products and while employing the other tactics, and at other times they meet the audience with their makeup on and they ask the audience to guess which side of the face is done with the luxury and the dupe product. This tactic then introduces the gaming tactic as presented below quote:

What is up, everyone? All right, today we are doing my favorite kind of video, which is a drugstore dupes' video. I have a bunch of new dupes that I am so excited to share with you guys. A lot of them, I just feel in my bones, are exactly the same, if not better, than the high-end version. You are going to get to see them. I have half my face high-end—well, some of the makeup—and half drugstore. Which side do you think is which? I might have given it away with my hand motions. I am not sure. Whoops, anyway (Jessica Braun, drugstore dupes (some are *better* than high end makeup 😊)).

It is worth mentioning that SMIs also do split face tests with skincare products, as illustrated in the case of Chloe Rene, who tested La Mer and Nivea cream on her face for about one month. Some of the SMIs also satirize the luxury about their abstract benefits or with their high prices. For instance, SMI James Welsh imitates someone who enjoys luxurious experience but directs attention to the high cost and in terms of performance introduces a dupe that performs better, as shown in the quote below:

You feel luxurious using SK II because it is SK II, and you are like, oh, I am so fancy. But the COSRX one just makes your skin look good, feel good, and in the long run, it brings amazing, amazing results. You can get the COSRX one for around £20, depending on where you buy it from. And honestly, it is so readily available and so worth the price and the purchase. I honestly think it is one of the best essences I have ever used (James Welsh, Cheap Luxury Skincare Dupes! Estée Lauder, Clinique, Glow Recipe, SK-II).

Moreover, the tactic of gaming entails the narrative of dupe products winning over luxury products as if they were in a competition. This narrative was also present in the achievement tactic; however, here, they demonstrate the performance of the

products as the winner always wins with respect to its overperformance. The utilitarianism meaning is prevalent in dupe practice regardless of the product's price, which shows that the performance of products overrides its abstract benefits. This view might seem contrary to the smart consumer meaning based on mindful luxury, in which SMIs acknowledge abstract benefits may override functional benefits in some cases; however, this does not diminish the value consumers put on the utilitarian side of cosmetics products. On the contrary, in mindful luxury, performance is still the key factor to act upon, and SMIs choose abstract benefits over performance and feel the necessity to substantiate their choices. This act shows that performance is the key factor valued in dupe practice.

In this chapter, I explored the elements of dupe practice and discussed their inherent meanings and relationships with each other in depth. Objects in dupe practice are identified as favorite original, viral original, discovered dupe, viral dupe, counterfeit products, and the body parts of SMIs. Counterfeit dupe videos indeed present a different tone than other dupe videos. SMIs do not trust counterfeit products' quality and test them with suspicion. For instance, SMI Ava Reid buys knockoff products from an online website that sells dupe products and tests them on her skin. She shares with her audience that she risks trying these products because of the possible harm. These videos testing knockoff products employ some of the tactics of dupe products; nonetheless, they diverge from dupe products.

In the case of the “doing” element of the dupe practice, I argue in this dissertation that by employing de Certeau's (1984) concepts from "The Practice of Everyday Life," we can see some of the doings in terms of tactics that are imbued with oppositional meanings. Hence with this conceptualization, tactics employed in the dupe practice are revealed that act towards the powerful, referred to as strategy in

de Certeau's terms. Also, I showed that there is more than one powerful force that SMIs resist: luxury branding and popularity. I empirically demonstrate Frow's (1991) point that power is not a single entity. I regard popular opinion as a dominant system that promotes specific products in the market. In the modern era, marketing institutions are seen as a dominant system that shapes consumers' tastes; Holt (2002) views this institution as a cultural authority. I extend this view to popular culture and treat virality on social media as a cultural authority. I argue that although virality is not organized as a strategy, it still has the power to shape consumers' preferences. Hence, in dupe practice, SMIs interchangeably resist the notions of luxury and virality. Like Manovich (2009), I propose that tactics resemble strategy with the rise of user-generated content by empirically showing that virality acts as a strategy. SMIs resist unquestionably accepting its correctness.

Consumer resistance in interpretive consumer research is studied with a variety of theories and conceptualizations, and the views differ regarding the possibility of breaking out of the market system. For instance, Ozanne and Murray (1995), Firat and Venkatesh (1995), and Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) maintain the ability and possibility of consumers separating from the market system by resistance, contrary to the view of some scholars such as Kozinets (2002) and Holt (2002) (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010), who hold that consumers cannot separate their ties with the market system. In the dupe practice, while it is imbued with resistance to two different sources of power, luxury branding and hierarchies of popularity, nonetheless, it does not aim to free itself from the market; contrary to that, consumerism is promoted. Then, the tactical resistance prevalent in dupe practice is to negotiate meanings attached to luxury and affordable products without diverging from consumerism.

With respect to the third element of the dupe practice; the meanings of accessibility, smart consumer, achievement, and utilitarianism, are negotiated in dupe practice. Some meanings share the same tactics, as discussed above; this can be explained by the fact that the narrative context shapes the meanings. For instance, gaming tactics in specific narratives point to achievement while in others, as explained in the related section, refers to utilitarianism meaning.

The interplay among the elements of the practice is explained by using Magaudda's (2011) circuit of practice context. This framework allows one to show the interplay among various objects, doings, and meanings, which then helped me illustrate the articulations of cultural meanings in dupe practice. It is worth noting that in some cases, the narrative of SMIs employs different tactics; hence, several meanings can surface. For instance, SMIs employ gaming while doing split makeups, playfully engaging with the products, and can decode the marketing techniques of the product she is applying to her face. By conceptualizing doings as tactics, I added one more element to Magaudda's framework (2011). Although doings and tactics are the same according to the definition of doings in practices (Magaudda, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002a; Schatzki, 1996, 2002; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005), nonetheless, they differ such that tactics are unique forms of doing that are oppositional in character. This addition guided me to decode the meanings inherent in this practice, which I use to explain the cultural shift happening in the beauty community.

5.6 Co-constitution of the “dupe” meaning

After defining the dupe practice in detail, I will elaborate on one of the doings of SMIs in dupe practice, co-creation, which refers to the interaction of SMIs and

consumers via comments on YouTube. Dupe videos end with the SMIs calling their audience to share their thoughts about the dupes they presented in the video, and they also want their audience to share their dupes in the comments section. This is illustrated in the below excerpt:

Let me know what your best skincare dupe is for a luxury skincare product, and if there is also one that you would like to see me dupe, you are always welcome to ask in the comments below. I will do my best to put together a video duping out your requests (Zabrena, Drugstore Skincare DUPES That Rival Luxury Brands!).

I deemed it important to understand the role of this co-creation process in dupe practice to explore the cultural shift in the beauty community. Luxury as a multifaceted construct is heavily researched in the marketing literature (Chandon et al., 2022; Dubois et al., 2005; Roux et al., 2017; Vigneron & Johnson, 2017), yet we know little about the dupe phenomenon.

By analyzing the videos and comments of specific videos, the hermeneutical analysis revealed that the collective act of SMIs and consumers as the doing element in the practice supports the formation of dupe culture. In this section, I specifically address the meaning-creation practices of SMIs and consumers in dupe culture. Various practices are indeed intertwined, meaning that one element of a practice can be an element of another practice (Shove et al., 2012). Put differently, different practices may share elements. Hence, the co-creation element, as in dupe video practice, is also an element of the practice of dupe consumption. It is revealed that, in this collaborative act, the meaning of the term “dupe” is negotiated, and the usage of dupes in beauty practices is reinforced and normalized via ongoing online interactions.

First, the meaning of dupe is co-constructed in dupe practice with continuous interactions among SMIs and consumers. This act also covers consumers'

interactions among themselves as they reply to other comments. The meaning of dupe is highly associated with frugality, saving money, affordability, as the excerpt from SMI Laura Lee demonstrates: “Welcome to my channel! You have entered into the world of dupes, so clearly you want to save some coin (Laura Lee, i tried VIRAL TIKTOK makeup dupes... (honest review))”.

While SMIs associate these cultural meanings with the term dupes, they also use different terms to refer to affordable options of luxury products. These terms are "dupe," "hard dupe," "alternative," "swaps," "option," "copycat," "counterfeit," and "knockoff." Some SMIs use "dupe" and "alternative" terms interchangeably, whereas others discriminate between these terms. Once SMIs discriminate between different terms, they explain what they mean by calling products dupes or alternatives. Indeed, SMI highly value the definition of the term they are using; hence, they explain in detail what they consider a “dupe” with respect to the term “alternative”. According to this account, the term “dupe” represents high similarity to the original product in terms of performance, whereas “alternatives” have slightly different performance attributes. Hence, when SMIs cannot find an exact dupe for a luxury product, they inform their audience that they have alternatives that work similarly. However, as was the case for the dupes, swapping the luxury for alternatives is not insisted upon. On the other hand, some SMIs deny the term dupe because of the products' inherent qualities. For instance, SMI Dr. Jenny Liu explains her point as follows:

I specifically stick with alternatives or swaps because I personally do not believe in the term dupes. I feel like it is really hard to prove that a more affordable product is the same thing as a high-end one because no two products are the same. You know, formulation is very nuanced, and a lot of those details are not available. Just because you have the same ingredient, it does not mean that they are formulated the same way; often, they are not (Dr. Jenny Liu, Budget-friendly Korean Skincare swaps).

Some consumers also share the same point as this quote illustrates “NOTHING is an exact dupe, it’s absolutely illegal. Please don’t like that. Alternatives and dupes are two totally different things (comment on Cheap Luxury Skincare Dupes! Estee Lauder, Clinique, Glow Recipe, SK-II).”

Dr. Jenny Liu’s view is generally shared among SMIs and consumers; they value other aspects beyond ingredient lists, such as performance, texture, smell, and feel of the skin. For makeup products, the term dupe necessitates very similar or the same look on the skin. However, some consumers ask how long the color stays the same on the skin throughout the day, which they deem an important criterion when considering a product as a dupe.

Hence, along with communicating the meaning of the term dupe, both SMIs and consumers elaborate on the criteria they consider a product dupe. At this point, they are involved in the co-creation process in the comments section. Below is the discussion of the criteria for considering products as dupe among consumers for the video “Testing *VIRAL* ELF Makeup Dupes vs High End Makeup 🍷 Which Is Better? Drugstore vs High End Makeup”:

Dupes are being so outplayed o (IMO for a while now but w.e). People are comparing things that aren't even dupes. And it does get really frustrating. How can the IT cosmetics and e.l.f camp CC cream be dupes if there is nothing alike besides packaging. Revlon also has a pump packaging like those but no one compares it. Just because some packaging has a sponge at the end doesn't make it a dupe, it's just popular packaging . . .

I completely agree with you. I’m over “dupes” to be honest. Unless the ingredients are identical then they are maybe “alternatives” but not dupes in my opinion.

Yes! I just commented on this. “Dupes” is way overused at this point. When things don’t look the same, feel the same, how is that a dupe?

Dupes means for me similarly wear time, how it applies and similar ingredients. Packaging is just a marketing thing! I recommend watching Marlena's videos, the former owner of MakeupGeek! She explains a lot of interesting aspects of this industry!

Beyond negotiating the definition of “dupe,” this collaborative act also covers instances when the beauty community sets standards for duping. Hence, duping has its own standards and merits that are co-constructed through this collaborative act. Dupe community on YouTube, both SMIs and consumers, even though they are negotiating on the exact meaning of dupe, still consider that the formulas of products are very similar to their performance. They also acknowledge that “duping” means an affordable brand produces products similar to the luxury brands’ formula, so their starting point is imitating the luxury brand. However, it differs from benchmarking in case dupes try to formulate and look similar to the luxury brand, as this community assumes. So, dupe brands try to imitate the formula, performance, and, at times, the packaging of luxury brands. However, analyzing the comments of consumers reveals that this assumption is superficial. This community sets specific standards for considering a product a dupe; if these standards are not met, they exhibit discontent toward the brand. One of the most prevalent findings is that this community accepts duping from a major brand but is against duping from an indie brand. It might be argued that because indie brands have fewer resources than multinational brands and are more vulnerable to competition, they do not find it ethical to imitate indie brands. The term “indie” stands for “independent,” meaning that a brand is owned by an independent entrepreneur without ties to global or major brands. Quotes below exemplifies this case:

The only time I don't have a problem with a dupe is when a company dupes another company and the other company is a larger company and can handle it. What the Revolution did to you was no good. That was definitely terrible, and hit below the belt in my opinion. But with these larger brands, it doesn't matter much . . . (comment on Testing EVERY ELF Makeup DUPE vs the ORIGINAL! is the dupe better?).

. . . I don't mind this brand or most others duping high-end products because not everyone can afford the high price tags. This way, more people are able to try things they never would have been able to otherwise. However, I do hate when brands dupe indie products! It's really unfair and just plain WRONG to steal business from small brands. All that said, this brand does intrigue me, and I'll definitely be trying more from them in the future! (comment on Trying The New 'Dupes-Only' Makeup Brand... THIS IS INSANE!).

Below excerpt is one consumer replying to other consumer's comment:

I remember from long ago when the Makeup Revolution was not only dupe-ing but just copying eyeshadow palettes and frown upon! But now, e.l.f. is kinda celebrated doing the same thing 😊 (comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

I think they get away with it because elf dupes expensive brands where revolution sometimes dupes smaller brands (comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

As the above quotes demonstrate, consumers support dupe culture as long as a dupe brand imitates a major brand; imitating indie brands is not welcomed in this beauty community. Also, SMIs and consumers set another criterion for duping by differentiating between “copying” and “duping.” For these consumers, “duping” stands for getting inspiration from luxury brands, which is welcomed; however, “copying” has no merit and means plagiarism for these consumers. SMI Allie Glines and Tati explore a brand called MCO Beauty, and they both find this brand a copycat rather than a dupe brand. Even though they liked the performance of some of its products, they expressed their confusion and mixed feelings towards copying other brands, as the below passages illustrate:

I do not know I am starting to change my feeling when it comes to dupes not because they are not amazing like who does not love to find a viral product for less or like a similar vibe but with this brand it is kind of like literally, they are copying, you know even down to the packaging (Allie Glines, Trying The New 'Dupes-Only' Makeup Brand... THIS IS INSANE!).”

The packaging is a little bit too spot-on. Do we see? Can they do this? It feels illegal. Someone is getting sued. Someone. I just, I, ah, like I can feel it, right? This is not right . . . What do you guys think? Leave in the comments below. Do you think when a company dupes a little too hard, is that allowed?

Should we support this? Are we like, "Hey, some of us just do not have that money, and I want something like this, so you know what? This needs to happen for those of us that do not want to spend the money. Like there is no wrong or right. Like, in the comments, I love hearing from you guys. I think a product inspired by is fine, but when the packaging itself gets really too similar, there is something that feels a little unsettling to me (Tati, These DUPES are WILD!).

On the other hand, some consumers do not hesitate to use copy brands while others oppose copying, even for dupe brands who copy most of the features of luxury brands, as shown below:

They stole a design...not a dupe (comment on Testing EVERY ELF Makeup DUPE vs the ORIGINAL! is the dupe better?).

I'm not against dupes either. I'm not someone who can afford a lot of high-end or luxury items, but the problem I have with ELF is how blatant they are about duping products . . . Making dupes for people who can't afford expensive products is one thing, but outright copying other popular brands to piggyback off their success isn't something I personally want to support [...] (comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

Is this even legal? If I were Charlotte Tilbury, I'd be pretty pissed off and sue for plagiarism. So weird. I'd never support a copycat company like that (comment on These DUPES are WILD!).

Inspired by is fine, but blatant copying is not on (comment on These DUPES are WILD!).

I don't mind dupes, but straight-up copying, including the packaging, is a no for me (comment on Trying The New 'Dupes-Only' Makeup Brand... THIS IS INSANE!).

Hence, both SMIs and consumers set criteria to enjoy and support dupes, which shows that price point and performance are not the only features consumers value; they also value morality. These brands represent the strategy (de Certeau, 1984), and even though SMIs and consumers cannot change their branding strategies, through mundane activities like commenting, they can negotiate the meaning of dupes, reframe brand meanings, and set standards for what is acceptable or not in a community.

Aside from negotiating the term dupe and setting standards acceptable for duping, ongoing online interactions between SMIs and consumers on YouTube comment section support the dupe culture by normalizing “duping” and legitimizing brands engaging in “duping” practice. These actions are specifically SMIs inviting consumers to comment on what products they use as dupes, and, in turn, consumers share the brands they find as a dupe for a luxury brand. Consumers who enjoy dupe videos, also demand more dupe videos from SMIs. Also, they ask SMIs and other consumers what might be a dupe for a specific luxury brand, and they also share their thoughts about the dupes SMIs introduce them on video; sometimes they agree with the dupe and other times they disagree with the dupe and offer their alternative instead. SMIs praising dupes in their videos and consumers' positive reactions to dupes further support this culture. All these online interactions validate duping as a practice and legitimize the brands' duping practices. The below excerpt nicely illustrates the case when consumers normalize duping by referencing other sectors where dupes are prevalent:

SMI:

Now, let's be real, it is not just ELF—everyone is duping everyone. But I feel like they are the most well-known dupe culprit of the moment (Kelly Gooch, So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

Consumers:

I will never understand the craze over dupes. In every single category of products sold, if something becomes popular, other brands in that industry will create a similar product. This isn't limited to the beauty world, and it's not a new concept . . . (comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

So many people act like 'duping' is a new thing, but it's not. It's just more popular now because of social media, especially TikTok. For years, brands have been duping each other's products. It makes sense because not everyone wants to—or can—spend \$30-\$40 on a mascara or lipstick . . . (comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f. So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

SMIs and consumers appreciating how brands successfully dupe other brands also normalize duping as illustrated below:

SMI:

I feel like e.l.f. obviously takes the cake for duping viral products really, really well, but there are a lot of other brands that are kind of doing the same thing. Part of me gets really, really excited because makeup gets really expensive, like let us be honest, especially if you are a makeup lover and especially if you like to kind of switch things up or keep up with makeup trends. It is honestly impossible to do that with all of the viral high-end stuff. It is not realistic . . . So, I can kind of see how dupes really are appealing because makeup is expensive, and so e.l.f. really does the most by bringing these trends to life in their own products, a lot of them being inspired by existing products (Allie Glines, We Need to Talk About e.l.f. (& try their new makeup)).

We all know Elf has been out here just allegedly duping some of the most viral high-end products and doing it very well in a lot of cases (Kelly Strack, Testing *VIRAL* ELF Makeup Dupes vs High End Makeup 🍷 Which Is Better? Drugstore vs High End Makeup).

Consumer:

E.l.f. keep doing you! We will support you! (Comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

Yet, some SMIs and consumers value innovation and even though they support dupes, they still acknowledge the importance of innovation rather than just imitating other brands as this quotation illustrates, “I think dupes are a nice option for those who can’t afford expensive brands. BUT I also think some brands need to be more original and create things of their own! (comment on Trying The New ‘Dupes-Only’ Makeup Brand... THIS IS INSANE!).” Praising the dupes does not always deal with talking about just the dupes, but at other times, consumers attack luxury branding and its inflated prices to support dupe brands, as shown below:

The truth is, all brands seem to copy each other. If consumers love a certain package or type of product, all brands switch to that. Tarte came out with wands just like Charlotte Tilbury’s. What the high-end brands are really mad about is that it exposes how overpriced their products are . . . (comment on So... Charlotte Tilbury *finally* called out e.l.f.).

How many dupes do we need? Well, I don't call them dupes; I call them quality, affordable makeup. So, we need as many as we can get until they take over the makeup industry and we are no longer victims of the marketing of unnecessarily expensive makeup brands (comment on Trying The New 'Dupes-Only' Makeup Brand... THIS IS INSANE!).

In dupe practice, it is important to highlight that the meaning of dupe is negotiated, and the meaning of luxury is also reshaped. It is important to note that consumers also support luxury brands and acknowledge that the high prices are worth the performance. Nonetheless, these acts also shape the meaning of luxury along with the opposing views. SMI Kelly Gooch discusses the legitimacy of luxury branding openly and invites her audience to participate in negotiating the meaning of luxury:

But it has left me asking the question: can luxury exist anymore, or is the consumer being scammed when they are no longer being offered a luxury experience, and the product they are purchasing is a comparable formula to one they could find at the drugstore, all while being charged considerable markups? I am really curious to hear your thoughts down below (Kelly Gooch, You're being scammed... "luxury makeup" is a lie).

This consumption culture then simultaneously shapes the meaning of both dupes and luxury products. This socio-cultural frame of reference reveals how meanings are negotiated in an online consumer culture, namely dupe culture. This research then adds to the perception of luxury from a community perspective rather than a good-centric approach (Batat, 2023).

The last finding that supports the dupe culture is the gossip tactic SMIs and consumers use about brands. They either gossip about luxury brands or dupe brands; either way, they legitimize duping by gossiping. Following excerpts from SMI and consumers illustrate the point:

SMI:

Our next product, you guys, that we have here is going to be mascara. We have Roller Lash by Benefit by Conspiracy, and then we have the Elf Lash and Roll. I feel like, girl, girl, girl, girl. I feel like this is like, girl, the pink lid

with the black tube—pink lid, black tube, Roller Lash and Roll. Coincidence? I think not. I believe it is a dupe, my conspiracy, allegedly, okay (Manny Mua, Testing EVERY ELF Makeup DUPE vs the ORIGINAL! is the dupe better?).

Manny Mua compares the luxury and the dupe brands side by side and directs attention to the similarities in the packaging and the names of the two products. Because he does not base his assertions on facts such as brand, e.l.f. it has not officially declared itself as a dupe brand, but he gossips about it as a dupe brand. To avoid legal risks, he uses the terms such as “my conspiracy” and “allegedly.” Also, one consumer adds to the gossip that e.l.f.’s mission is to imitate brands as “Elf be coming for brand’s throats 😊 (comment on doing my makeup using *ONLY* tiktok viral elf makeup dupes).”

Scott (1990) regards gossip as a hidden resistance to the powerful, which benefits from remaining inconspicuous. The power of gossip as a resistance tool relies on subtly reinforcing social norms and enabling criticism of the powerful (Scott, 1990). Gossiping online differs from the tactic Scott (1990) lays out, which is hidden; nonetheless, gossiping online strengthens cultural norms and, in turn, contributes positively to the legitimacy of dupe practice. Also, different from Scott’s (1990) case, gossip is not only about the powerful (luxury branding) but also about the dupe brand that gives consumers access to luxury at affordable prices.

SMIs invite their audience to the co-creation process by requesting them to comment about the dupes they presented in the video and offer their own discovered dupes. Nonetheless, consumers, while also engaging the SMIs by offering their favorite dupe products, also negotiate the term dupe and shape the term “luxury.” They set criteria for duping, so they set norms of the dupe culture, and they normalize and legitimize the practice of duping with their ongoing interactions.

Reinforcing the use of dupes is tactical in the sense that it promotes accessibility versus luxury brands' exclusive claims. By empirically analyzing the interactions within the online beauty community, I showed that meanings are co-created and negotiated by both SMIs and consumers. Hence, contrary to MTM model (McCracken, 1986), which asserts that opinion leaders disseminate cultural meanings to goods, and then consumers appropriate these meanings by consuming these goods, I showed that consumers' interactions with opinion leaders display a co-construction of meanings. Hence, it is a loop rather than a top-down flow. Thompson and Tian (2008) challenged the MTM model by illustrating a case that shows a horizontal interaction rather than a vertical one, and in dupe culture, I demonstrated a loop where consumers and opinion leaders co-create and negotiate meanings. Also, previous research analyzed how SMIs imbue brands with meaning (Kozinets et al., 2010; Vanninen et al., 2023), their research was focused on brand collaborations, whereas I explored a phenomenon where the brands' direct involvement was lacking. Hence, in a natural setting, I explored how online community members, SMIs, and consumers co-create and negotiate meanings around brands.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation contributes to the practice theory in several aspects. A real-world phenomenon of dupe culture and its implications on a specific consumption setting, namely the online beauty community on YouTube, has been explored in this dissertation. I was interested in exploring how this online community, consisting of SMIs and consumers, articulates cultural meanings in dupe videos and attaches new meanings to consumption practices. In order to understand the rise of new meanings, I adopted a practice theory approach to this online phenomenon in the beauty community, taking practices as a unit of analysis. Previous research in online settings also opts for a practice lens to study online phenomena involving SMIs, such as taking selfies (Gannon & Prothero, 2016), unboxing (Vaudrey, 2022), and absorption of online influence and its effects on identity projects of consumers (Scholz, 2021). Following these scholars, I acknowledged shooting dupe videos as a practice and specifically paid attention to the content of the videos. That means, rather than focusing on the actual production of the videos, such as integrating technological tools like camera, tripod, and lightning as objects in this practice, I paid specific attention to the contents of the videos and regarded beauty products and SMIs' bodies as objects of the practice. This helped me to identify the cultural meanings associated with these objects and doings. Magaudda's (2011) circuit of practice framework is selected to analyze the videos as it clearly shows the interaction of elements of practice during change.

Further, I approached dupe videos as a practice by integrating the concepts of de Certeau (1984), such as "strategy" and "tactics," to study their oppositional

character. De Certeau (1984) asserts that everyday mundane activities such as reading and walking involve tactical resistance to power structures. This resistance does not aim to free itself from the dominance of the powerful; rather, it is the creative acts of individuals to produce their own meanings within the established system by reinterpreting, subverting, and appropriating meanings imposed on them. This cultural resistance perspective enabled me to identify several tactics SMIs utilize in dupe videos to creatively resist the power structures, namely luxury branding, and popularity as dominant structures. Frow (1991) criticized de Certeau's seminal work with regard to his assumption that a powerful dominant system represents a singular force. According to Frow (1991), the flow of power is not unidirectional, nor is it represented by a sole power. I empirically showed that SMIs switch between two power sources to resist their dominance tactically. Dupe videos can also be regarded as a power source, as they affect the norms in the beauty industry by attaching new meanings to products. Hence, the complexity of power structure is shown in this study, which clearly Web 2.0 technologies changed the dynamics of power structures.

Burgess (2014) approaches virality not from a marketing perspective, which focuses on how many people viral content reaches and its effect on e-WOM; he treats virality as a cultural phenomenon where online popular culture participates in its creation. Hence, from this view, virality is not about transmitting information to the masses. Rather, it is a cultural phenomenon that influences online cultural behaviors and meanings by creating and changing practices (Burgess, 2014). While Burgess (2014) focuses on the participatory culture of virality, analyzing how viral video transforms by individuals' participatory acts such as remixing and reinterpretations, in this dissertation, I focus on how popular content type, namely

dupe videos in online beauty culture is constructed and how it affects the cultural meanings prevalent in this community. Hence, while approaching virality from a cultural perspective following Burgess (2014), I analyze it from different angle. Also, aligning with Manovich (2009), I illustrate the case where tactics become more like strategies in terms of their power to influence due to the rise of UCG on Web 2.0 platforms.

In essence, this dissertation contributes to practice theory literature by integrating a resistance perspective into an online practice, revealing tactics in addition to the practice's doings. By showing how SMIs articulate cultural meanings within this practice, I explain the cultural shift happening in the beauty realm, answering my first research question.

I also contribute to the literature on meaning-making by unveiling the interpretive acts of SMIs and consumers. This dissertation aligns with the branch of CCT, “mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies,” which explores the interpretive acts of consumers, such as their decoding activities of cultural materials of cultural production systems (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). I specifically contribute to this area by showing how SMIs and consumers deconstruct the meaning of luxury and affordable brands and attach new meanings to products. Specifically, I regarded SMIs as cultural producers in popular culture just like celebrities and treated their content as a cultural text. According to Fiske (2010), the economy is not only about the circulation of products and money; there is one more economy: the cultural economy. In this cultural economy, meanings are produced, reproduced, and circulated by popular culture as a form of art that involves creative uses of industrial resources (Fiske, 2010). In dupe practice, both SMIs and consumers negotiate the meanings of dupe and luxury branding through online

interactions. Hence, they act like cultural producers, shaping meanings circulating in the cultural economy. This interaction reveals the content of meanings and the dynamic interaction in these creative processes that support the research of Thompson and Tian (2008) in that the flow of meaning is not unidirectional, as depicted in MTM (McCracken, 1986). The research shows a circular meaning-creation process within the dupe practice. Also, it is shown that dupe brands acquire new meanings, and the meanings of luxury brands are collectively negotiated, which answers the call for research on luxury branding from a cultural perspective (Batat, 2023).

In this dissertation, answering both the first and second research questions, I contribute to Allen et al.'s (2008) general call for more research on uncontrolled and non-marketer meaning producers. Previous research focused on articulating brand meanings with an intentional interaction with the brand side (Kozinets et al., 2010; MacInnis et al., 2020). I explored the meaning-creation processes apart from marketers' involvement. Bengtsson and Ostberg (2006) stated that the cultural meanings of brands are constructed by brand owners, consumers, popular culture, and other stakeholders like competitors, and they added that extensive research is present on brands and consumers as brand-meaning creators; however, research on the relationship between popular culture and brands is scarce. In this dissertation, I regarded SMIs as cultural producers that shape popular culture; hence, by illustrating the relationship between SMIs as cultural production systems and consumers in creating cultural meanings, I added to the meaning literature that lacks extensive research.

This dissertation also has crucial managerial contributions, as brands closely track online trends to participate in them meaningfully. I demonstrate that organic

viral content is not only a tool for marketers to use in their marketing communication and branding activities, but these trends are crucial cultural resources for brands to explore and understand their consumers better. By tracking shifting consumption meanings and understanding the roles of SMIs and consumers in articulating these cultural meanings, brands can resonate with their consumers on a cultural level. Holt (2016) points to the presence of cultural tensions in a given consumer community, and he asserts that brands that can use these tensions as a resource to promote ideologies that resonate with consumers can pursue a cultural innovation that sets them apart from their competitors who solely innovate in a technological sense. In this dissertation, I empirically showed that brands can utilize cultural branding by focusing on changing meanings within a consumer culture. By understanding what new meanings emerge and are attached to specific products, brands can identify relevant ideologies behind those meanings and craft their brand positionings; for instance, the dupe trend in the beauty community points to the ideology of consumer empowerment through information. Hence, this dissertation parallels Holt's cultural branding notion (2016) and communicates to brands that cultural meanings prevalent in consumer communities can signal specific ideologies to act upon. Also, by identifying the key players in the market that drive the change in meanings, brands can engage with these key agents through influencer marketing. By collaborating with SMIs who engage in the dupe trend, brands can communicate consumer empowerment through brand messages.

Furthermore, brands can identify the tactics SMIs pursue and act on specific values with which these tactics deal; for example, openly discussing tactics under the accessibility meaning points to the authenticity value. A brand that aims to communicate the value of authenticity to its consumers can benefit from this tactic

by integrating it into its influencer marketing strategy. To illustrate the point, a brand can collaborate with SMIs and may demand them to discuss both its product's positive and negative parts. In that way, in collaborative content, two-sided reviews from SMIs as a form of openly discussing tactics can communicate the value of authenticity.

Moreover, this dissertation puts forward the importance of meanings created in the market by SMIs and consumers and their power to change the cultural norms in the industry. Brands focus on crafting brand meanings based on their strengths and communicate their distinctiveness through marketing activities. However, it is crucial to understand the changing meanings in the market, and brands can act upon those meanings while building their brand meanings. For instance, brands that counteract the dupe movement focus on the strengths of their brands that differentiate them in the market and communicate the message that their high prices stand for their uniqueness. Makeup brand Charlotte Tilbury is one of the most duped brands in the beauty market, and this dissertation shows that SMIs offer dupes to Charlotte Tilbury products from brands such as e.l.f. Charlotte Tilbury reacted to the dupe movement by creating a marketing campaign called "Legendary for a Reason." The brand made a YouTube video demonstrating how their formulas are unique in their performance and how no other products in the market can imitate them. Their official website shows the most duped products as icons and communicates that other brands cannot dupe their products. In her latest interview, makeup artist and brand owner Charlotte Tilbury tells Beauty of Fashion that the Charlotte Tilbury innovates, not imitates the other brands (Kilbane, 2025). Also, in the past, the luxury brand Olaplex counteracted the dupe movement with a similar strategy, illustrating that no other brand can dupe Olaplex. They made their own dupe and called it "Oladupe,"

communicating the message that even though other brands imitate Olaplex products, only Olaplex can create its unique products, hence they duped their own product to crystallize this message (Montemayor, 2023). As these cases illustrate, the brand meaning of "uniqueness", which is crafted by the marketing team, is communicated as a counterbalance against the dupe trend. However, in this dissertation, I demonstrate the importance of market created brand meanings rather than in-house created meanings. By exploring and understanding market-created meanings, brands can capitalize on them and resonate with their consumers on a cultural level. For instance, to counter the dupe movement, luxury brands who do not solely focus on their crafted brand meanings but turn to the market to get insights about the changing meanings can capture the rise of smart consumer meaning in the dupe practice. Then, luxury brands can communicate the importance of being a smart consumer rather than solely focusing on its crafted meaning of uniqueness. In other words, by understanding that consumers acquire the meaning of "smart consumers" by substantiating their product choices, luxury brands can show that their unique formula can be an input to confirm consumers' brand preference and can be used to symbolize the smart consumer's meaning. In summary, this dissertation draws attention to market-created meanings that consumers value. To resonate with consumers, brands can focus on discovering and understanding those emerging meanings in a consumer community. This dissertation also argues that online trends are embedded with market-created cultural meanings; seeing trends from this perspective opens up possibilities for brands to resonate with their consumers. Thus, other online trends such as de-influence, underconsumption, or self-expression trends, such as brat summer or demure, could be interpreted similarly. They could be treated as practices to uncover underlying meanings.

One limitation of this dissertation is its use of non-participatory netnography, which relies solely on observing and analyzing the comments of relevant YouTube videos without participating in the comments section as a researcher. It is advised to join the conversation to entirely capture the cultural norms prevailing in the community (Kozinets et al., 2010, 2014). Conducting participatory netnography would then necessitate the researcher, in the dupe case, not only to post comments under the relevant YouTube videos but also to join the conversations on other online platforms, such as online forums. This is because engaging in dialogue with community members is possible via forums, as consumers tend to reply to each other in forum threads rather than replying to comments to other users' comments on YouTube. Hence, engaging with the community members through forums would enable me to achieve diversity among data collection sites. In other words, rather than choosing YouTube as a relevant site to collect data, I could broaden the data collection sites by including forums, which may enrich my findings. So, future research may consider collecting data from multiple online sites using participatory netnography. Another limitation is analyzing and interpreting online archival data as a part of netnography. However, netnography could be enriched by integrating semi-structured interviews with SMIs, which would enable gathering elicited data. Thus, future research may analyze the phenomenon of online trends by conducting in-depth interviews that reveal deep insights from SMIs' perspectives. Also, for future research purposes, the practice view of dupe videos involving resistance acts can be extended to other real-world online phenomena involving consumption, such as de-influence trends or self-expression trends like brat summer or demure. In other words, these online viral trends can also be conceptualized as a tactical practice towards the powerful. For instance, the de-influence trend stands against

overconsumption; hence, analyzing it from a tactical resistance and a practice perspective may help researchers unveil changing meanings in a specific consumption culture. Thus, future research may explore this online phenomenon and contribute to the non-marketers meaning creation literature in consumer culture.



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