Boys That Blend: How Men in Makeup Can Affect Social Media Marketing Efforts

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Boys That Blend:
How Men in Makeup Can Affect Social Media Marketing Efforts

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Introduction

Within recent times, society has seen an enormous growth surrounding the conversation of gender and gender expression, as the conceptualization of gender and its implications for greater society have been challenged and broken down. Within the LGBTQ+ community, giant leaps have been made in the form of representation within media, politics, and overall American society. Recent legislation like the passing of the right for marriage among LGBTQ+ people in 2015, as well as subsequent laws regarding other legalities, have brought gender and sexuality into the forefront of discussions. Popular shows like “Queer Eye” and “Rupaul's Drag Race” have introduced queer figures into stardom and fanhood, promoting self-care, makeup skills, and living a life true to oneself. On social media, men using makeup as an expression of themselves has proliferated, creating some of the most influential social media influencers of the current age. These men, labeled “men in makeup,” have become the face of many top cosmetic and beauty brands, and are becoming more and more integrated into the communication strategies of these beauty brands. However, as gender expression and fluidity is still a relatively taboo and controversial topic across many different communities and factors, true commitment to the transparent promotion of men in makeup by beauty brands has been slow and ambiguously done, leading consumers to draw their own conclusions on the status of support for these companies.

The purpose of this analysis is to evaluate if the sentiment and consumer feedback expressed through Instagram comments for a company's posting of male beauty influencers aligns with the perceived goal or strategy created and articulated (or not) by each company for using them. This will include the lack of overtly expressing support for gender neutrality or the
concept of “men in makeup” within the company’s owned media (social and digital), or earned media through trade press. The three levels of support that are analyzed include:

- None to very little mention of company support in regards to “men in makeup” or gender expression
- Ambiguous mentions through the company’s social platforms, owned media, or speculation by third party sources
- Overt and articulated support for this movement that is exemplified by company’s actions and promotions

A second aim for this analysis is to draw conclusions for and make recommendations to beauty brands on potential expectations of consumer sentiment and response these brands can have depending on their level of transparency and promotion of the “men in makeup” and gender fluidity and expression, as well as provide next steps for research regarding the subject.

**Background Information**

*Historical Reference of Makeup*

With some of the earliest recordings of makeup being used by men dating back to around 4000 BCE (16), the notion that men wearing makeup is inherently new or profound is somewhat of a stretch. Up until around the 18th century, men were the main proponents of makeup and cosmetic use, forged in tradition and religion. In ancient Egypt, men used black pigment to create “elaborate cat-eye designs” (16) as a form of religious expression. This later expanded into “kohl eyeliner, green malachite eyeshadow, and lip and cheek stains made from red ochre” (16) used as both a religious evocation to deities like Horus and Ra to prevent illness (16), as well as a status
symbol describing the person’s wealth within society. This use of makeup within this religious
and cultural setting played great importance with men displaying their masculinity in society,
showing devoutness and status of their cultural gender roles by doing so. Men dominated the
fields of commerce, agriculture, and religious services (much like today) (2), with gender roles
enforcing much of behavior back then as it does now. In addition to this symbol of status,
religious devoutness, and masculinity, makeup played an important role in Egyptian society in
health and wellness for both men and women. Archaeologists have described kohl eye makeup,
noted as the inspiration for the modern day trend of “smokey eye makeup” (22), as having a
“toxic, lead-based mineral that formed its base would have had anti-bacterial properties when
mixed with moisture from the eyes” (22). This indicates the versatile use that cosmetics, similar
to their multi use function in today’s society, and makeup played in their own cultural contexts
and times, with men actively participating in their use.

As the years progressed, this phenomenon of men using makeup manifested itself
throughout numerous cultures, from Roman men using red pigment on their cheeks, to men using
white powder to powder their face during the rule of Queen Elizabeth I (16). This was further
aided by the French men's use of painting on beauty marks as a sign of status (16). However,
between this period in time and modern day, a cultural shift changed the way men used makeup
(if at all), engendering the product with primarily effeminate characteristics. Amanda Montell,
author of “Wordslut: A Feminist Guide to Taking Back the English Language”, deemed this shift
to the Victorian era, where she described how “makeup was considered "an abomination" by
both the crown and the church, creating strong, widespread associations between makeup, vanity,
femininity, and "the Devil's work"” (16). This, she states, caused the mainstream
conceptualization of masculinity to change, deeming makeup as a womanly or effeminate product.

In the U.S., makeup picked up a strong user base with women, as more and more women were moving to the big cities, where men with money dominated society, and women needed a way to pique their interest (18). Lisa Wade, a sociology professor at Occidental College, stated that this was because “women had to start appealing to men to get men to pick them for dates. So women began wearing makeup” (18). It wasn’t until the “emergence of modern movie-making” that makeup for men reemerged as somewhat of an accepted concept (18). Clark Gable, Elvis Presley, and John Travolta are just some notable cinema stars that are attributed with bringing vanity and its byproduct of using beauty enhancing products like makeup to the forefront of cinema culture (25; 16). This then launched the early beginnings of the modern male cosmetic sector, catering to this newfound (re-)interest in beauty products (25). Even with this reemergence, makeup was still considered underground and not within mainstream culture, reserved for rock-n-roll stars and pop figures, allowing culture to create the widely adopted term of “metrosexual” into culture for men who used makeup products (16). Since this edging towards acceptance, beauty brands have bolstered their (albeit minimal) efforts to produce products specifically for men, due to the proliferation of men adopting the use of makeup due to a shift in culture (16).

**Gender Differences in the Media and Society**

Where this shift in makeup is one smaller indication to the changing societal views of gender, sexuality, and the roles each play within the overall society, gender still plays a role in
important fields like commerce and media, where gender norms contribute to inequality within society. Men and women are still differentiated among a wide variety of gender norms and cultural habits, some more impactful (pay gaps, violence, and housing, to name a few) than others, but the conversation around these gender differences, and their effects on society, is starting to break down these hindrances and create a more equitable society. As reported in the J. Walter Thomas report “Gender Bias in Advertising”, “In 2006, 43.6% of all commercials featured women on screen for 20% or less of their duration. In 2016, the figure was 44.2%” (14). This shows that although considerable work is being done in efforts to increase women’s visibility within media platforms, minimally positive changes are being made. Where the conversation of establishing women’s equality is creating support within mainstream culture, an emerging conversation around gender fluidity and gender norms is becoming a booming topic, bringing to light the observance of a growing sentiment of a freer concept of gender. This concept pushes forward the notion of gender equity, with pushing for gender differences as a whole to become obsolete, especially as more men and women take up non traditional roles in society in addition to the increase in awareness of LGBTQ+ populations such as transgender people.

**Consumer Overview**

*Gen Z Consumers & Gender:*

With this new generation quickly growing into their buying potential, as the oldest of this generation are just now entering their early- to mid-twenties (7), the makeup industry is having to readjust its communications strategies and product development in response to the changes
occurring with this new market. For influence and recommendations, these Gen Z-ers look to each other in peer interactions and support, which has garnered efforts by marketers to bolster efforts among micro influencers (10), described as influencers with a following ranging from ~5,000 to 100,000 followers and are known for “highly specific, highly engaged audiences” (10). Apart from these micro influencers, brands all over, especially beauty and cosmetic brands, are also using younger models and celebrity influencers to appeal to this group and their want to see themselves represented in the content produced both by beauty brands and in the influencers they look to on popular content platforms like Instagram and Youtube (10).

Most markedly and specific to the scope of this analysis, Generation Z-ers are known for the separation from traditional gender norms and being easily contained in demographic descriptors (10). Using figures from the U.S. Census Bureau as their basis, many industry reports are stating that this generation is the most ethnically diverse that its ever been, which has been a huge driver to the recent trend for ethnic and skin tone diversity used within beauty and makeup advertising to try and resonate more with this demographic (10). Beyond this, multiple sources have reported the changing views of and identifications with gender fluidity, with marketing research from J. Walter Thomas Intelligence Group reporting that “only 48 percent of Gen Zs identify as exclusively heterosexual, compared to 65 percent of millennials”(27; 24). In addition to this, J. Walter Thomas also reported that only “44 percent say that they only buy clothing designed for their gender” (10), meaning this generation is experimenting more with gender expression and looking to brands to be able to represent this want for exploration. Brands have caught onto this trend, with major online retailer ASOS (among numerous others) releasing gender neutral or non-specific clothing lines. This trend is now spreading widely to cosmetic
companies as well, with these Gen Z consumers looking to both male and female beauty for guidance for their beauty questions, and brands have since enlisted more men and gender fluid individuals to their roster of influencers used to accommodate.

As previously discussed, the traditional gender roles specific to men are shifting and changing, widening the definition of what it means to “be a man” for this new generation. In addition to more drastic expressions of this, such as the proliferation in acceptance and expression of being transgender or gender fluid, more subtle societal shifts are taking place with men internally. Research published in the April 2018 edition of the *Journal of the Psychology of Men and Masculinity* led by the University of British Columbia proposed that young men are adopting more traditionally effeminate characteristics, like sociality, over more masculine characteristics, like competitiveness (21). According to the study, “younger men tended to value selflessness, social engagement, and health over traditional male ideals like physical strength and autonomy” (21). This helps explain how the cultural shift in gender roles and norms is not only a physical, external manifestation, but also an internalized manifestation with potential behavioral implications.

*Men and the Beauty Industry*

This newfound shift in gender expression, identity, and acceptance for men is revolutionizing their experience within the makeup and beauty industry. In 2016, YouGov conducted a survey around men and their preferences to makeup, and reported finding that “almost half of younger consumers surveyed thought it acceptable for men to wear cover-up
makeup, compared with less than one-quarter of those ages 55 or over” (29). The results of this survey are displayed in Figure 1.1.

![Percentage of Respondents Saying that It Is Either “Very Acceptable” or “Somewhat Acceptable” for Men to Use Cover-Up Makeup or Foundation, by Age Group](source: YouGov)

(Figure 1.1)

This changing perception of men’s acceptability of makeup has since re-launched its use on a wider scale, drawing in more and more companies to partake in the trend and try to increase their profits. In 2017, the male beauty business was valued at $57.7 billion, with reports projecting it to grow “exponentially” (11). Cultural manifestation like Covergirl naming James Charles as its first “CoverBoy” in 2016 (8), as well as the esteemed popularity of LGBTQ+ friendly shows like Queer Eye on Netflix (18), has helped to expand how men conceptualize the way that beauty products can be and are used. These examples just mentioned range in their use from performative or more “effeminate” uses, to bringing in daily skin care through beauty as a convention of health and wellness. Where this has since created a wider spectrum of product availability and use for the modern man, still a marginal amount of makeup and beauty companies actually sell men-centered products (18). These companies opt more for men
adopting the use of conventional products that are “made for women,” and marketed using male figures.

As more men have been introduced to the idea of using makeup in some capacity to their lives, some beauty brands and researchers alike have highlighted more on this “makeup for self care” idea previously mentioned, moving the conversation around makeup from feminine to functional. Daniel Gray, founder of British makeup brand War Paint, encapsulates this idea best, stating that “what we want men to realise is that, when you say makeup, we don’t just mean red lipstick. Makeup is putting a nice base on so that you can have an even skin tone and feel the best you can” (11). Included in this is a product listing of things such as bronzers, concealers, facial creams, brow gels, and more (6; 11), all in the name of covering up unwanted appearances that have become notoriously associated with “being a man.” This trend is even being recognized and supported by professionals in dermatology and general health care as well. Dr. Bradley Glodny, a dermatologist based out of New York, reported an increase in interest from men in cosmetic products and makeup surrounding dermatological needs (8). These professionals recommend dermatological products like “tinted moisturizers with SPF to male patients,” suggested as “a nonintrusive, impermanent way for them to conceal skin issues” (8).

*Men Beauty Gurus*

Over the past years, the rise in male interest of makeup has allowed for the exponential growth of male beauty influencers, once looked on as part of “fringe” or LGBTQ culture, to being some of the most influential influencers on the market. As Gen Z ers are more akin to look to influencers for product recommendation, it makes logical sense for marketers to use male
beauty influencers within their marketing strategy. From James Charles (previously mentioned) to Jeffree Star, these influential “men in makeup” are driving the conversation, and sales, of the male makeup and beauty category, with brands capitalizing on their influence. In 2018, Star, known for his androgyny and being “fearlessly glamorous” (12), was one of the highest paid YouTube stars, earning over $18 million in that year alone. Darnell Bernard, an aspiring actor and model (3), was used as L’Oreal’s first male spokesperson (17); Black Opal enlisted entertainer Somizi Mhlongo to be “the first African man to be the face of a cosmetics line” in 2018 (17); and even David Beckham can be seen sporting green eyeshadow on the cover of Love magazine (11), showing brands’ approach for seeking sales through dawning familiar and diverse men’s faces as campaign leads. However, as Bel Jacobs, an author for BBC, demonstrates, the majority of influencers and celebrities used are more effeminate in nature; what society would deem as “typically gay” (11). When describing the emergence of “Boy de Chanel” in 2019, Jacobs describes the primary use of effeminate men, calling them “boys,” in makeup: “And the boys in makeup? They’re mostly beautiful, gay, prone to hyperbole – and up to 80% of their million-strong fanbase appear to be young girls (11).

Some of the most notable of these “beauty boys” or “#meninmakeup” include the following (4):

- Zach Zenga (Instagram Followers: 44.1k)
- Manny MUA (Instagram Followers: 2.6 M)
- MakeupByKeenan (Instagram Followers: 123k)
- Aidens Empire (Instagram Followers: 138k)
- Patrick Starr (Instagram Followers: 2.5 M)
Potential Negative Effects of “Men in Makeup”

Where the majority of speculation surrounding this increased use of men both purchasing and being used to market makeup is overall positive and centers around the positive change that evolving gender norms can bring, some people in the field speculate more on the potential negative effects that wearing makeup can entail. Jules Lipoff, MD, an assistant professor of clinical dermatology at the University of Pennsylvania, has been cited as stating that she has seen “an increased pressure in recent years for men to maintain youthfulness” (18), with men being more inclined to seek out “aesthetic treatments” and skincare as a solution. This is thought to be a byproduct of a potential increase in the “pressure to live up to unrealistic beauty standards” (18) that come with an increased attention to the notion of beauty; already experienced by women through society’s definition of gender roles. Vox reports that even though there is a decreased amount of judgement that men are expected to receive in regards to their looks and appearances (especially concerning makeup), “increased focus on men’s looks could have an impact on their mental health” (18). Lipoff further presents that “[she] wouldn’t be surprised if with time, you start to see more body dysmorphic disorder, more eating disorders and other things increasing in men” (18). Although this is a potential negative effect, most industry leaders and influencers alike corroborate on the positive effects that bringing “men in makeup” to the forefront of the discussion in beauty has had and will continue to have.

Present Industry Conversation
Currently, most research in the industry focuses around the changing sentiment and relationship to the younger Gen Z demographic and gender expression, with a specific focus on Millenial and Gen Z mens’ higher proclivity to use cosmetic products. In regards to social media usage and this concept of gender expression with makeup, very little research has been conducted or discussed within scholarly and trade press sources alike. The focus mainly centers on the rise of male beauty influencers and how they are dominating the industry (4; 17), though it is normally discussed through the lens of its effects on social media as a whole and company’s basic use of it in their social strategy. Meri Hjort & Vilma Komulainen, in their thesis entitled “Men in Makeup: Performances of gender transgression in male beauty vloggers’ makeup consumption,” provide an analysis of how beauty bloggers (primarily on YouTube) break gender norms, providing a categorization of beauty bloggers based on the behaviors that make up these “transgression” (9). Where this research acknowledges how the beauty influencers are driving social change, as well as carving out a space for men in the beauty category, little is discussed on how brands are using the influence from these posts to drive their own social content and connect with their own online communities.
Methods

Platform Selection

For this analysis of consumer and audience sentiment to the appearance and apparent endorsement of “men in makeup”, Instagram was selected as the appropriate vehicle for data collection due to its visual nature and interface. According to the nature of makeup and cosmetic products being displayed visually by influencers, Instagram was decided as a platform that could provide a large enough amount of posts to analyze, while providing multiple posts to select from. Instagram was also identified as a main tool used by beauty influencers and beauty retailers alike, allowing for the natural encompassing of both types of posts to be included in the analysis, through functions like “reposting” a post created by beauty influencers by beauty retailers to use on their own Instagram account. This would allow a combination of both organic influencer content as well as sponsored content featuring beauty influencers to be used on the company’s singular account.

Company Selection

After analyzing the beauty and makeup industry, specific companies were selected to extract and analyze posts from. This selection process spanned multiple rounds of revisions following specific criteria. For preliminary consideration, these companies had to:

- Post a male or male-presenting figure in a post on its Instagram within 5 months from the latest post collection date (February)
- Sell beauty products that include makeup and other cosmetic products (not simply skincare products)
An initial round of companies was selected based on cultural and social impact of their pages, as well as being top-of-mind as industry leaders (Ulta, Sephora, etc.) based on researcher selection and trade press reporting, in addition to the above criteria. This selection yielded a collection of 6 companies that included both beauty/cosmetic brands themselves (having a dedicated line or “family” of products), as well as generic beauty retailers (selling multiple beauty brands across multiple product categories). These companies were then monitored over the course of the 5 months, archiving posts that featured male-beauty artists. Specific criteria for what qualified these posts for use will be discussed in the Post Selection section.

After collecting and archiving posts across this selection, the companies were then re-evaluated based on their perceived target markets/consumer audiences as well as business function (generic retailer vs. beauty brand) to narrow the posts analyzed. Three companies emerged as valid candidates for the analysis:

- Ulta
- Milk Makeup
- e.l.f. Cosmetics

These companies were selected based on their inclusion within the beauty brand category (Milk Makeup, e.l.f. Cosmetics) and generic retailer category (Ulta) to allow an analysis of differentiation between consumer online behavior between companies that provide multiple or one brand of products. Additionally, these companies were selected based on the size of their consumer base, with Ulta having the largest following, followed by e.l.f. Cosmetics and Milk Makeup, respectively. Beyond the size of consumer base, these companies were also selected based on the potential demographic makeup of their consumer base. After the trade press and
industry analysis was conducted, these companies diverged among their current consumer bases (as well as their target markets), which would provide a rich analysis to record differences in audience makeup and sentiment between the companies. The speculated target audiences of these companies will be discussed next in the *Company Profiles* section.

*Company Profiles:

The following descriptions provide a brief overview of the companies selected to analyze posts from. Specifically, these descriptions provide information on the perceived target markets for each company and their current consumer bases, as well as a brief description of their endorsement of gender expression or “men in makeup” in relation to their strategic efforts/marketing efforts as a company.

**Ulta**

As presented by Ulta’s website, Ulta Beauty, Inc. is the “largest beauty retailer in the U.S.” (28), carrying a vast variety of skin care and cosmetic products, with additional products like fragrances and hair care products. Ulta was founded in 1990, and has since grown to expand all across the U.S., as well as expanding services into in-store salon care (28). In 2017 alone, Ulta reported having just under $6 Billion in sales (2017; 28), which is reported as a 21% increase from the year before. Since 2015, Ulta has also reported increasing their associate base to over 35,000 associates across their stores, stating that 15,000+ of these jobs were created since 2015 (28).
Under the topic of gender within the beauty and cosmetic industry, Ulta boasts that 92% of its sales associates are women (28), alluding to a social nod at hiring and creating a culture that is women-centric and specific. Where industry professionals and reports have noted that the average consumer of Ulta’s is in fact women, this leaves room for a potential disparity in being able to serve male consumers looking for someone to help them that represents them (5). After an analysis of the company’s main culture and “Our Story” page, as well as a content search from trade press, no strong supporting evidence or articles emerged overtly stating a strategy or intended stance the company was taking to incorporate more men in product offerings, marketing, or hiring practices.

(Figure 1.2)

Additionally, according to Numerator, these primary consumers index heavily within the below 24 year old (index: 209; 5) and between the 25-34 year old demographic (index: 127; 19),
with 45-55 year olds also indexing slightly above average for Ulta (index: 103; 19). Additional research from Statista validates this notion as well. This research indicates that Ulta has a large range of age within its consumer base, meaning a need to satisfy a multitude of generational and psychographic trends that differ within this large age range. However, this also indicates a much larger draw towards a younger demographic, shown in the brand’s recent in-store experience changes, as well as their expansion into a wider variety of “indie” brands (31).

On social media, Ulta (@UltaBeauty) has a following of 5.9 million followers, and promotes consumers to post their products and tag posts with “#UltaBeauty”.

**Milk Makeup**

Built out of a creative studio in New York City, Milk Makeup has very recently (in 2016) come to rise within the vast beauty and cosmetic category (30). While this is a very recent launch in comparison to the other companies contained in this analysis, Milk Makeup has already made a name for itself within the cosmetic world, winning Allure’s “Best of Beauty 2017” award and Teen Vogue’s “Coolest Beauty Brands” award in 2016 (15). In
the few short years after its launch, Milk is “now in 150 stores, with an expansion to Canada and Europe planned for the near future” (30).

In regards to its use of diversity and gender expression, Milk Makeup is one of the leading brands to effectively use the growing trend of gender neutrality and expression within its marketing efforts, with numerous sources reporting on Milk’s efforts to allow the beauty world to encompass both men and women (and everyone in beauty or outside). Where company cofounder Mazdack Rassi describes the ideal Milk shopper as a “girl” that “takes five minutes to put on her makeup in the back seat of a cab as she’s being ferried between chic events” (20), Razzi has also been heavily quoted as a main driver of the gender fluidity trend in makeup, stating in a WWD article that “The idea is to make it [gender] a moot point,” (23). The article further describes Razzi’s motives through explaining Milk’s “purposefully obscured” use of gender in its model hiring and usage, as well as its motivation for this push in attracting a younger audience: “It’s taking the labels off. This new generation doesn’t think it should be a topic, so it’s not worth bringing up” (23). This sentiment expressed by Razzi is shared in other industry articles, bolstering the brand as a leader for the movement, while reinforcing this claim of not overtly broaching the topic, with very little messaging on its website toward the claim.

In regards to Milk’s Instagram (@milkmakeup), the company is followed by 1.4 Million followers (the least of the companies in this analysis), with promoting its use of cruelty-free, paraben-free, and 100% vegan” products. On their posts, it uses hashtags such as #milkmakeup, #makeuplook, #motd, and #dressyourface to connect its posts to a wider conversation around makeup.
e.l.f Cosmetics

E.l.f. Cosmetics was founded based on providing a low-cost, affordable, and accessible way to purchase makeup. Founded nearly 17 years ago, the brand was heralded as one of the first digital cosmetic brands (26), with their mission being “We make luxurious beauty accessible for all” (1). The most recent information projected their net revenue in 2017 to be at around $270 Million, boasting an increase in product launches as a main way to keep their consumers (1).

When describing the company in documents and on owned media, e.l.f. uses primarily gender neutral language, not specifically showing support for one gender’s use of the product over any others’. However, in its 2017 investor relations document, when describing both its company and consumer, it makes the claim that “Our company is like our consumer / there are alot of women here (and some men too) / we are young / we are diverse” (1). As shown by this statement, e.l.f acknowledges, in some part, its growing male base of makeup users, though true efforts to support this outside of posting men on its social media is obsolete. Trade press sources like Cover Girl corroborate this sentiment of e.l.f. targeting a younger demographic, encompassing the Millenial and Generation Z age range (13).

In 2017, e.l.f. revamped its marketing strategy by more intensely incorporating the use of micro-influencers into its social media channels as a way to further build community. This follows the growing trend for marketers to increase spending and investment within these micro
influencers, due to their increased engagement with their own respective communities (26). On Instagram, e.l.f. Cosmetics (@elfcosmetics) has a following of 4.4 million followers, and uses hashtags like #vegan and #crueltyfree to promote an innate sense of social responsibility, potentially feeding into its younger demographic’s want for environmentally and socially sustainable companies.

Post Selection

From the finalized selection of companies, specific Instagram posts were chosen to be collected based on the following criteria:

- Inclusion of a male beauty influencer as the main thumbnail or image, and as the subject of the content
- The posts’ perceived appeal to a specific target audience
- The posts’ perceived support of gender neutrality or “men in makeup”

Within the second of these three criteria used, considerations for selection were based on both the perceived target audience for each of the companies and the current perceived consumer base of the company’s online presence in order to analyze the effect of audience makeup on the response to the perceived endorsement of “men in makeup”.

The original comment or caption of the post created by each company was used to evaluate the perceived audience as well as the company’s support for “men in makeup”. This would include the use of gendered terms like “boy”, overt phrases that showed support for LGBTQ identities, or overt phrases that stated specific comments towards the idea of “men in makeup.” In addition to the caption, the photo, video, or thumbnail itself was evaluated to
categorize the overtness of the use of makeup or beauty products by the artist. This was to reduce ambiguity between the use of makeup and skin care products, which potentially could have different implications for audience sentiment when used by men.

After analyzing for these criteria, posts were selected for each company that represented the perceived strategy or focus of each of the company’s in tackling the concept of including men in makeup. Two posts were selected from each company to be analyzed to provide a wider base of potential data. However, these posts were not selected in relation to each other, meaning the posts would not be analyzed against each other, but in tandem to each other. This is to create a cohesive analysis of the beauty brand’s strategy as a whole with using “men in makeup”, not the differentiated use of potentially different appeals between posts of the same company. This was also selected to analyze the company’s voice and tone when using men across multiple posts.

The selected posts can be found on the following page, with a brief description for their selection.
Ulta:

These posts from Ulta were selected based on their endorsement of the values of gender expression, supported through the caption. This endorsement was selected to represent an ambiguous endorsement of the values of gender expression and “men in makeup,” used to analyze a potential confusion or inconsistency with consumers’ perceptions of the brand’s stance on the matter.

“@ultabeauty:
Behind the scenes spotlight: Beauty blogger @vinoastraonovo appeared in our commercial. We asked him his thoughts on beauty: "We should think of beauty as something internal like having a good heart and being kind, rather than what people think is normal or looks good on the outside. We should also think of beauty in all its shapes, sizes, and colors. Breaking traditional gender boundaries and social constructs, choosing your definition of beautiful and standing in it with full confidence." #ultabeauty”

“@ultabeauty:
#Repost @cohlsworld
・・・
Sultry & Smoke 😊😊😊

Created this look featuring the new Morphe 9N Palette. It has the perfect shades for an on-the-go pop of color or holiday party glam! It’s available online and in store now @ultabeauty! Click the link in my bio to watch the full tutorial! #ad #ultabeauty”
Milk Makeup:

These posts from Milk Makeup were selected to represent the company’s lack of mentioning overt support for the “men in makeup” movement within the post caption and nature, though overtly expressed within trade press and by the company’s core values and leadership practices.

“@milkmakeup:
Are y’all ready for this? @captaingabex is slaying our souls RN on insta stories using ALL #milkmakeupgoodies. Go peep it 😍”

“@milkmakeup:
Do you like me? ☺
✔Yes or ☒Yes (check one)
-
Watch @marcelogutierrez create this BOY CRUSH look, *new* on our YouTube channel -- link in bio”
e.l.f. Cosmetics:

These posts from e.l.f. Cosmetics were selected to demonstrate e.l.f.’s lack of overt messaging around support for “men in makeup” through their social media posts featuring men in addition to their lack of overt endorsement of the movement in other owned media spaces and within the earned media category.

“@elfcosmetics:
@trevor.j.barrett used our Opposites Attract Palette to create this gooooodgeous emerald eye look, perfect for the holidays! Leave a ❤️ in the comments if you love this look as much as we do! #elfcosmetics”

“@elfcosmetics:
Casually slaying holiday looks like it's NBD @ryanbpotter used our @targetexclusive kits to get the look - #linkinbio to shop them all! #elfcosmetics#target”
**Figure 1.3 Post Selection & Comment Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ulta Beauty</td>
<td>Nov. 18, 2018: <strong>ulta beauty</strong>: Behind the scenes spotlight: Beauty blogger @vinastronovo appeared in our commercial. We asked him his thoughts on beauty: &quot;We should think of beauty as something internal like having a good heart and being kind, rather than what people think is normal or looks good on the outside. We should also think of beauty in all its shapes, sizes, and colors. Breaking traditional gender boundaries and social constructs, choosing your definition of beautiful and standing in it with full confidence.&quot; #ulta beauty</td>
<td>80 Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov. 24, 2018: <strong>ulta beauty</strong> #Repost @cohlsworld Sultry &amp; Smoke 😊😍😍😍 Created this look featuring the new Morphe 9N Palette. It has the perfect shades for an on-the-go pop of color or holiday party glam! It’s available online and in store now @ulta beauty! Click the link in my bio to watch the full tutorial! #ad #ulta beauty</td>
<td>257 Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk Makeup</td>
<td>Jan. 11, 2019: <strong>milkmakeup</strong>: Are y'all ready for this? @captaingabex is slaying our souls RN on insta stories using ALL #milkmakeupgoodies. Go peep it 😍</td>
<td>200 Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb. 10, 2019: <strong>milkmakeup</strong>: Do you like me? ☺️ ✔️ Yes or ☑️ Yes (check one) - Watch @marcelogutierrez create this BOY CRUSH look, <em>new</em> on our YouTube channel -- link in bio</td>
<td>131 Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.l.f. Cosmetics</td>
<td>Dec. 17th, 2018: <strong>elfcosmetics</strong>: Casually slaying holiday looks like it's NBD @ryanpotterused our @targetexclusive kits to get the look - #linkinbio to shop them all! #elfcosmetics#target</td>
<td>143 Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 19, 2018: <strong>elfcosmetics</strong>: @trevor.j.barrett used our Opposites Attract Palette to create this gooorgeous emerald eye look, perfect for the holidays! Leave a ❤️ in the comments if you love this look as much as we do! #elfcosmetics</td>
<td>854 Comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post Analysis & Evaluation

When analyzing the posts, attention was paid to specific comments left under each of the posts at the time of archival. Each company’s posts were analyzed in tandem to the other post belonging to that company to attempt to derive themes linked across the posts. A preliminary round of analysis was conducted where each post was analyzed for: comment sentiment (positive, negative, neutral, or ambiguous), comment themes (etc. religion, love, disgust, etc.), and for comment reference (reference to the post, the artist featured, the brand/company, “the look”, the product, another comment, or found as an ambiguous reference). Each of these elements was derived from the combined use of the words and emojis expressed by the commenter, then evaluated by the subjective understanding of the researcher in context to cultural and industry understanding of potential meanings. Pertaining to the comment’s reference, the following is an explanation of how each of the references is defined:

- **Reference to the Post.** This reference is characterized by the commenter using words such as “post” or by phrases that are in response to the post’s structure, such as the use of a specific song or other elements.

- **Reference to the Artist.** This reference is characterized by comments where the meaning derived by the words or emojis used are attributed to the artist featured in the post. This was commonly characterized by the use of “he” or other pronouns used in reference to the subject of the post, as well as comments made on about physical beauty or characteristics.

- **Reference to the Brand/Company.** This reference is characterized by comments where the meaning derived by the words used in the comment could be attributed to sentiment
expressed or ideas expressed about the company itself. This included positive, negative, or neutral comments addressing the company's use of “men in makeup”, marketing strategies, or its use of “ads”, as well as expressing action towards the company like “unfollowing” or “supporting.”

- **Reference to the Look.** This reference is characterized by comments attributed to the aesthetic, overall finished product, or elements of the specific makeup trend or makeup “look” created by the artist. This reference was typically characterized by the use of the word “look” or specific elements like “color” or “style”.

- **Reference to the Product.** This reference is characterized by comments attributed to the product(s) specifically used in each of the posts. Examples of this include asking questions like “What (product) is this?” as well as comments of any sentiment about the commenter’s opinion on the specific product used.

- **Reference to Another Comment.** This reference is characterized by comments that were made in response to older comments made on the posts. These comments typically held numerous themes of all sentiments, as well as held other references in them as well. However, they were identified within this category due to the reasoning for their creation as a response to another comment being made prior.

- **Reference Ambiguous.** This reference is characterized by a lack of context given to what element of the post the comment is referencing. Whether positive, negative, or neutral, a reference for the target of the sentiment and meaning of the post could not be derived. This was commonly used in comments that contained one to two words or emojis.
Following this initial round of analysis, where comments under each post were tagged with the preceding characteristics, a second round of analysis was then initiated to derive overarching themes from the posts within each company’s selection. Additionally, these were then compared between each of the company’s noted themes to generate a list of themes that transcended one particular post. The results of this evaluation of the posts are available in the following Results section.

Although each post was analyzed within the first round analysis for content and sentiment, specific posts were marked as “exempt” from the evaluation portion of this analysis. Following is a list of comment types that were marked as “exempt” of analysis:

- Self promotion comments. These posts were used to either promote the commenter’s own page (whether that be personal, for business, or other content specific page), or for other businesses’ posts promoting services.
- Comments in a language other than English.
- Comments with content labeled as “Ambiguous”. These posts included posts with singular words or using emojis that, after a preliminary round of analysis was conducted, sentiment, meaning, and intent could not be derived from.

These posts were discarded from any further analysis and did not contribute to any of the posts’ themes, unless otherwise noted within the Results or Recommendations sections.

Coding Schema

Due to the nature of social media use, “Emojis” (or formally known as “Emoticons”) are used as an expression of sentiment and emotions within the world of electronic communication.
Instagram allows these to be used within their posting and commenting structure, and their massive presence within the posts examined for this analysis warranted creating a coding schema to create a sense of uniformity in their tagging for sentiment, content, and reference. These schemas were created in the first round of analysis of the posts, and were revised and solidified to the following schema as a means to evaluate the use of emojis across all of the posts:

- 🙏🏻, 🙌🏽, 👏🏻 = Praise
- 💕, 💜 = Heart + Love
- 😍 = Heart + Love
- 🤣, 😂 = Humor
- 👍🏾, 👌🏼, 🔥, 💯 = Approval
- 🙅🏻, 🙈 = Disgust
- 💪 = Strength
- 😳, 😱 = Shock
- 👎, 😞 = Disapproval
- 😞, 🗿 = Anger, Disapproval
- ✨, 🌟 = Magical
Results

The following section outlines the results from the analysis and evaluation of the company’s selected posts featuring “men in makeup.” These results are built from the specific themes captured through the evaluation of each company's post, with a discussion that places the theme in context of the company’s position on and proximity to supporting gender fluid ideas in makeup or supporting “men in makeup” within their marketing strategy. This section is divided into two sections. The first section includes the overarching results and themes that were represented within each of the posts. These serve as a basis for comparison that fuels overarching recommendations that can be found within the Recommendations section of this analysis. The following section includes a discussion of specific themes that were attributed solely to the posts of each individual company.

Overarching Themes

Common Codes

When coding for each of the posts, common themes or coded words emerged as general sentiment expressed within the posts. Where exact numbers of appearances were not collected, below are some of the most actively coded for themes present in the comments across the posts analyzed:

● Common Positive Themes: Approval, Love, Beauty or Appearance, Praise
● Common Negative Themes: Disgust, Disapproval
● Common Neutral Themes: Religion, Gender Expression, Gender Demarcation
**Gendered Terms**

All three companies’ posts contained what was coded as “gendered terms,” or language that insinuated one a gender to its use. These terms were used in reference to the artist, with other commenters, or in describing the “men in makeup” trend within society as a whole. Posts containing these terms were coded with both positive and negative sentiment, where they were used as positive names or praise for the artist, as well as used in negative definitions, or overtly defined the gender of the artist to negatively prove a point about the discrepancy of gender identity and gender norms. These gendered comments gave insight into how the commentators responded to the concept of using makeup in a more effeminate sense for men, potentially giving insight into how the consumers conceptualized gender when gender norms were broken, as well as how they attribute gender. These gendered terms included:

- **Sis**
  
  “@desertrose480_: @daughter_on_fire thank you Sis at least some of us have sense💯💋”

- **Boy**
  
  “@ceciliakreplak: You’re just like Cover Girl n other cheap makeup lines. Showing effeminate boys applying makeup is not cool👎🤮”

- **Men**
  
  “@ineselizondo377: 😧SO SAD!!!men do not want to be men anymore❤❤❤❤”

- **King**
  
  “@autumnmeyerr: king”

- **Queen**
  
  “@stariie.spams: queen 😞👏👑”
Common trends that emerged with these gendered terms was that terms that referred to things like royalty (“king” and “queen”) were responses with positive sentiment, while comments with “men” and “boy” in them were normally more divided in their use, used more in reference to the post and the brand posting the content instead of a direct call to the artist.

Also contained in this theme was the notion of assumed sexuality and gender, which occurred sporadically throughout the posts of all companies analyzed. This portion of the theme tapped into how consumers connect the concepts of gender and sexuality together based on similar social cues and gender norms expressed, or broken. Within this theme, homophobia and transphobia can be demonstrated by the language used by the commenters in expressing their perceived disinterest, disapproval, or a lack of understanding of the brands showing men in makeup. Below are a collection of posts to provide explanation to this theme:

“@rojmira_india: He is she”

“@Canceriana5490: @mlynj right! I have nothing against gay, lesbian, bi or transgender but if you put on makeup better than I do and use false eyelashes and you're not a woman, then you you are gay, why not admit it but still they deny being gay but just like to do makeup looks?....DUDE, YOU'RE GAY!”

“@__nathanwebb: gay”
“@ceciliakreplak: @jessicapeters1989_ No Jess, it’s because transgenders want to be accepted like it or no . Well, I don’t like them ok ?”

As exhibited in these comments, followers use both overt and ambiguous language and words to assume and bring to light the sexuality and gender identity of the subject of the post, which is not an overtly expressed idea within the post itself (apart from one of Ulta’s explicitly using language regarding this).

*Primarily Positive*

As expected, across all 3 companies and all 6 posts, positive sentiment and supportive themes were expressed in relation to gender fluidity and the concept “men in makeup.” These comments created the majority the comments section under each posts, expressed in the form of both emojis and words. Common sub themes within the general positive sentiment expressed included:

- **Acknowledgement of gender roles and norms**

  This subtheme was characterized a positive acknowledgement of how the company was supporting the expression of changing gender norms in society; i.e. supporting “men in makeup.” An example of this is shown in the following comment, where the commenter acknowledged multiple gender norms in the name of showing support for more open expression of makeup:

  “@satinboys: @o_modzelewskalmaooo there's nothing wrong with girls not shaving their legs. I'm done talking to you, there's no helping stupid. Goodbye! 👋”
• Historical References to validate changing gender norms

This subtheme was characterized by a reference to historical examples of men using makeup (i.e. the ancient Egyptians, Romans, etc.) or a change in gender norms within a temporal context. These comments were normally made in response to another comment that negatively remarked on the notion of “men in makeup”, where these historical examples were used as a validation of the normalization of men using makeup.

“@alissagilson_x: @donna.obryan oh honey, it’s not the 1950s we don’t have gender stereotypes anymore. Guess you’re too close minded to see that nobody else has a problem with it and he’s expressing himself. Plus he’s slaying.”

“@tissyyyy:...Second of all, @desertrose480_, people aren't sick for posting a pic of a boy in makeup. Sure, while makeup was originally marketed for women, it's not 1952 anymore. It's 2018, where it's socially acceptable for guys to wear makeup if they do wish. It's not an evilness that should be feared.”

• Brands receiving praise for their inclusion of “men in makeup”

This subtheme was characterized by the use of commenters placing a reference to the brand and their efforts of promoting “men in makeup” when expressing positive sentiment revolving around the movement. This included both overt acknowledgements of the brands direct actions as well as insinuations of what the intentions of the post were. This subtheme was
experienced across all brands, and was a main proponent in showing that overall, the sentiment surrounding brands (no matter their commitment to the movement) would receive positive feedback for including “men in makeup.”

“@raeanne11998:...I am so proud of E.L.F. for vocalizing such beautiful expression and will continue to use their brand on the daily. ❤”

“@fenixmgray: ULTA is about expressing the beauty within on the outside. And ulta is so inclusive they have a large selection for anyone, even your everyday macho man can find his inner beauty at ulta.”

• Assumption of business intentions/strategy

Although similar to the above sub theme, this sub theme is characterized by the overt expression of positive sentiment in relation to acknowledging the post’s connection to advertising or marketing strategy of the company. This is shown through the use of words like “campaign”, where there is an open insinuation of strategy or goal aimed by the company. This can be seen in the following examples:

“@Jocettecoles: I love the message of this ad campaign. Thank you Ulta for promoting the beauty within everyone.”

“@danaappelfeller: I love your new campaign ❤❤”
Negative Feedback

Although the majority of the sentiment expressed by the comments was positive, comments with negative sentiment were present and differentiated in the themes they expressed. Common sub themes among the negative posts included:

- **Brands receiving criticism for showing “men in makeup”**

  This subtheme was characterized by an overt expression of pointed blame for the company to use “men in makeup” in the post. This was the general expression found within the comments with negative sentiment expressed, where if a reference was used in the comment, it included the use of calling out the brand specifically (using a tag or not). Included in this was the acknowledgement of purpose and insinuation of strategy, similar to the theme regarding positive sentiment. Examples of these comments include:

  “@aretha787: A dude though really come on now @ultabeauty !!!!”

  “@stay_c_lee_: A guy?? Really?? What's wrong with you people? Maybe I won't shop at ULTA anymore! RIDICULOUS”

  “@c.nicole.l: @rivkahleah69 pushing a sick agenda”

- **Pathologizing men wearing makeup**

  This sub theme was characterized by coded language that expressed disapproval or disgust, and characterized the use artists featured as well as the company for using them as
having inherent negative qualities or insinuating an aversion from normalcy or morality. This language was subjectively determined, but common words like “disturbed” or “evil” were common indicators of this sub theme. Examples of this can be seen below:

“@mikkeys151: @death_andthe_girl yeah it’s become a plethora of abnormal, weird and disturbing posts and viewpoints by individuals, such as yourself.”

“@desertrose480_: Posting pre teen boys in full faced makeup...yeah I won't be partaking in that level of evilness people are sick af these days bye💯”

“@mikkeys151: @mfollmer44 yeah - its called identity crisis!”

- Acknowledgement of negativity in opposition to cultural trend

This sub theme is characterized by the open acknowledgement that dissenting to the idea of “men in makeup” is inherently against the ongoing cultural trend. This is normally done through a precursory statement or blatant admission of not subscribing to this ideal; whether that bolster the poster’s negative sentiment or cause a sense of shame. This subtheme was also used as a type of deflection of people responding to the post, with the thought that if the commenter already acknowledged that their opinion was not in line with the overall cultural trend of including “men in makeup,” that it may prevent people from openly discussing.
“@mikkeys151: @_jessicapeters1989_ why is that stupid? Oh I get it, just cram this mess down the throats of the majority and eventually it’ll be accepted as normal! So I’ll continue to stand by my views and hope that others don’t fold to the pressures of the minority.”

“@donna.obryan: Nope sorry maybe I am stuck in my ways but this is not for myself. Boys in makeup (I know I will be getting hate on this)”

“@di.ann.28: This is a boy?? Call me what you want but this isn't right.. 👎”

**Being a “Real Man”**

Among the negative comments left, a theme found primarily within Ulta’s and e.l.f.’s posts was the commenter’s inclination to give definitions of what they conceptualized as being or not being related to the identity of man. This was created using terms like “real man/men” to describe the socially appropriate behavior these commenter’s deemed to fall within this conceptualization. This further demonstrates the still present sentiment of makeup being made predominantly for women, meaning men who use it are not considered “real men” or the societal norm of “man.” Examples of post fulfilling this theme include:

“@aretha787: @zombiehooligan you should practice not trying to be a woman and practice being a man I was just saying God didn't meant for you to be that way you took that up on your own so stop trying to correct people ok!!!”
“@ineselizondo377: 😞 SO SAD!!! men do not want to be men anymore.💔💔💔💔”

“@jessica_catherinexo: @christopherkmoulton No I see a boy wearing makeup. Which is meant for women. God created him to be a boy. This is what is ridiculous. Because boys are not boys anymore”

Change is Coming

Within the comments posted for each of the posts, a theme emerged that was characterized by followers acknowledging the change in societal norms and trends that allowed for men to be wearing and used in marketing efforts wearing makeup. Where this acknowledgement consisted of comments with both positive and negative sentiment, both sides acknowledged the overarching changes happening in society in relation to gender expression and diversity. For the comments with positive sentiment regarding the matter, these commenters were using the fact of changing norms as a way of “calling out” the posters of comments with negative sentiment for having “bigotry” or other derogatory terms. For the posters of comments with negative sentiment, this acknowledgement was used as a base for their dissention, relaying how they didn’t support this notion and felt that they were being overwhelmed by a society and brands trying to “shove it down [their] throats.” Examples of this theme are demonstrated in the following comments:

“anusha_gupta8: @stay_c_lee_ are you actually serious? Just because ladies do it doesn’t mean men can’t do it! Like sports, men play sports but now women and men play sports like rugby and
basketball! Duh stop going off stereotypes geez. And one gender doesn’t go to one whole chain of stores”

“@jessica_catherinexo: @christopherkmoulton It's affecting not just me but all of society. They slowly introduce things like this into the mainstream to break down moral barriers and the importance of the family.”

*Freedom of Opinion*

A theme that was mainly demonstrated within comment threads under each of the posts was the notion of opinion oppression or suppression (“Freedom of Speech”). This was a common defensive tactic used by those engaging in discourse within the comments section, with its purpose in defending the commenters’ (normally) negative sentiment towards the notion of men in makeup. This response was also used as a tactic employed in tandem with the previous theme, using this notion of opinion suppression as a social critique of how these commenters felt within the general society promoting “men in makeup.” This theme can be displayed in the following comments:

“@burnett_girl: @jollie_poussey well dear. When you keep attacking me then yes, I am going to respond. You talked of cyberbullying but yet you are the one doing the exact thing. I am every bit of a human just as you are. Maybe one day you can find that is ok for others to have a difference of opinion from your own and the world will still be ok. I shouldn't have to conform my ways to think it is acceptable for a guy to wear make up.”
“@jollie_poussey: @davesgirl_59 People do not have to tolerate negative comments/opinions/views. People also don’t have to care about what you prefer. I highly suggest you learn about your shadow and how to own it. The haters do not need to constantly voice their ignorance based on their bigoted preferences.”

“@gigglesj25: @davesgirl_59 Ok and I said what I said because it’s a “free country” so there was no point in writing me byeey️”

Also contained in this theme were supporters of “men in makeup” using language in their comments that emerged as a form of policing comments when they dissented against the post. This was normally done in the name of ensuring that “only positive” comments were posted, or that “hate” shouldn’t be allowed to be commented.

“@blaisejaidyn: @donna.obryan why would you even comment on here? Keep your opinion to yourself. It's 2018/2019 and freedom.to be who you are is where we are.!”

Conflicting Feelings

A final overarching theme expressed across the posts examined was the occurrence of a perceived “ambivalence” expressed by some commenters and their relation to the concept of “men in makeup”. This split in their support was divided by having positive associations and support for the brands and the brands’ products themselves, but negative support for the use of
“men in makeup” in the posts supporting the products. These commenters seemed torn in whether to endorse the post in support of the brand and artistry, or to refrain from doing so because of preconceived notions of gender norms in relation to makeup. The following posts show examples of how this ambivalence was expressed within the comments:

“@kurdish_bb: Good work but so weird to see guys putting makeup on..*>(*)”

“@just_jeanette94: Tired of seeing kids in full faces of makeup. I obviously don't know his exact age but he looks about 15 and is wearing makeup for a 20+ year old. Come on, Elf. I love your brand but you're becoming like the makeup companies I fled from - ones that use children for their branding...yuck.”
Company-Specific Themes

Ulta:

*Wishy-Washy Response*

Unlike the other two brands analyzed in this work, between both posts analyzed, Ulta never made any mention to or of comments with negative sentiment regarding the idea of men in makeup, showing neither support or defense for endorsing the idea. The lack of addressing this by the company supports the perceived notion that the company has a muddled, undetermined, or unsupportive view in their use of men in makeup, pairing with the brand’s silence regarding other promotional and owned media. However, among the positive comments expressed under both posts, numerous followers commented with comments that contained references to the brand and company, attributing positive use of “men in makeup” as a company strategy, actually using the hashtag “#meninmakeup”. This potentially means an assumption of intention is given by consumers seeing the posts, assuming and attributing a promotion of social justice or endorsement of the changing gender norms by the company. This is aided by the selected posts’ captions, one very openly addressing the artists’ experience with being featured as a male artist and the societal implications of that statement. This unsupport of the company towards dismissing negative comments made at the company may potentially create a conflicting view of the company on the topic by consumers.

*#NastyWomen in Makeup*

An interesting phenomenon that was heavily observed within Ulta’s posts was the inclusion of comments made at other members of the comment thread, specifically in terms of
gender. There was a high prevalence of terms such as “insecure females” and “nasty women” used in reference of women expressing negative opinions or dissenting opinions about “men in makeup” or “gender expression” overall. Comments like these included:

“@musicglitterrock: Look at all these insecure females. Getting their nasty panties in a bunch cause there's a guy with make up. Get over it.”

“@gigglesj25: To see all these closed minded, critical and self righteous ppl is shocking(especially the women)! You all that are throwing stones must live in ‘glass houses’ in other words, you’re all perfect and love being judged smh. Women literally saying they won’t shop at Ulta because Cohl is doing a tutorial lol.”

In these examples, it is expressed that commenters are addressing the high user base of women, as well as a potential insight into how women are perceiving the posts made with men in them. This exhibition of commenters addressing other women as their target for criticism specifically may also reveal a potential “self-policing” of the comments section created by the users and followers themselves, with commenters taking it upon themselves to generate the conversation around the inclusion of men in makeup, and not the brand itself.

*Internal Support*

Another phenomenon expressed solely within Ulta’s posts was the high presence of support for the company expressed by company’s employees (“associates”) that were men
themselves. More lengthy posts created were done so in giving praise and taking pride in working for Ulta by these male employees, using words like “community” and “proud” when referencing the company's actions of showing a male in the post. One such commenter stated:

“@caeljharden- “I think it’s so great you guys are giving my fellow #MenInMakeup a spotlight and a platform to share our art!! It makes me so proud to say Ulta Beauty is the company I work for and have been for going on 3 years now.”

In this comment, we can see the original commenter take pride in the efforts Ulta in supporting the “#MeninMakeup” movement. Later in the post, the commentator describes his experience and struggle as a man in the beauty industry, stating things like “This industry isn’t the easiest for men to work in and so many VERY talented young male artists...keep their art hidden away because we are so used to receiving dirty looks..” and “I hope in the future, Ulta continues to feature more of us and show that makeup has no gender and the beauty community accepts everyone, regardless of age, sexual orientation, race, etc.” Where this praises Ulta’s efforts in using their large following to promote this commenter’s identity as a man in makeup, it is also a call to action for continuation of this practice made by a representative of this community; a community not referenced at length or acknowledged by the company in owned media.
Milk Makeup:

*Few But Mighty:*

The overall sentiment for Milk Makeup’s posts consisted of mostly positive, neutral or ambiguous comments, with negative comments interspersed within the comment sections of both posts. A majority of these comments were simple phrases or singular words/emojis that conveyed a negative sentiment, with additional more developed expressions of negative sentiment created within comment threads between commenters. Apart from these, negative sentiment was minimally expressed within the two posts.

*Artist Over Brand*

When evaluating the references designated to each of the posts, a pattern emerged with the attribution of comments to include more discussion around the artist and products used then around the brand itself. This indicated that there may potentially be very little to no attribution to the brand using the men included within their posts as a “tactic” or part of their “advertisement” strategy. This is shown in the use of words like “Y’all” in conjunction with positive or negative sentiment, such as in “@miimiibibi: I STAN BOTH OF YALL UGH”. The inclusion of “YALL” indicates an addressment to two or more entities, narrowed down to the artist and the brand (speaking as a persona) due to the nature of the post. Additionally, this is seen in other expressions with a more ambiguous “boo” (used in a personalized, endearing way) or “you” used in numerous times throughout both posts. This “you” can indicate an address to either the brand or the artist, but is more frequently found being used in addressing the artist used, as in: “@wrentar: @captaingabex this look is soooooo good. You make it look easy babe 😍”. This
potentially leads to the notion that users within this base do not see the use of these “men in makeup” as a marketing tactic, but potentially a more normalized post from the brand; akin to the brand’s statement of not discussing the conversation since it is more expected and commonplace to include men in the beauty world.

Response to Comments

When reviewing the comments left by Milk Makeup in response to other comments underneath their posts, it was found that Milk responded back to a comment that originally was endorsing the notion of “men in makeup” and defending it. The simple recognition of this comment and reply with a positive sentiment showed an inferred agreeance with and support of the commenter’s support, further extending the company’s support for the idea as well. This solidified ambiguity on the brand’s stance towards movement, now voiced by the post’s actual endorsement, the brand’s external endorsement through other sources, as well as the brand’s voice through Instagram being used to validate others’ endorsement of “men in makeup.” Below you can see the original comment that was posted and Milk’s response:

Original Post: “@satinboys: Yes! Makeup is for EVERYONE, and gender roles are passé!”

Reply: “@milkmakeup: @satinboys couldn’t have said it better 😊😊😊😊😊”
**True Transparency**

Although not a pattern seen throughout either of the other companies, and only exhibited on one of Milk Makeup’s posts, a unique event that sparked negative sentiment by a commenter on the post was expressed in accusation of the brand deleting comments that “don’t agree with them.” The full comment is as follows:

“[@kt1836:H]mmm... looks like @milkmakeup is deleting comments that don’t agree with them.”

This was then followed up by the same poster of the above comment, using negative terms such as “intolerant” to describe the brand and expressing an implied acceptance, disregard, or silencing of dissenting opinions about the post:

“[@kt1836: @kt1836 quite ok, you can handle people’s OPINIONS, no matter what side of this they are on, then I no longer will be purchasing from you or following. Opinions are just that. And the question you asked yesterday was, do you like me yes or no....not yes or yes. Seems you are the intolerant ones.”

Implied in this post is an implication of action, unfollowing and discontinuation of purchasing, which could affect the company’s sales if experienced by a wider amount of people. This accusation of potential deletion brings into question the validity of the company’s comment stream, as viewers such as the researcher are not able to validate whether these claims are true.
However, the posts above never explicitly stated what the posts were removed for or what the opinions expressed contained, which allows the maintenance of validity of the positive expressions made and the themes they entailed.

More Mature?

In comparison with the other two companies, the artists used as the subject of the posts both appeared to be the oldest out of the figures used across the entirety of the posts. Where no singular artists’ age was explicitly stated by the company, this older appearance was corroborated by comments made in the posts, with the attribution of more sexualized terms like “Father” being used in description. Without providing a discussion of the sexualization of this word, “Father” can be used as a way to express sexual interest in a man by contextualizing him as an older, more dominant figure than the person stating the comment. In addition to this, use of the term “King” was used several times to describe the artist, a play on the “royalty/gay slang” theme found in the other companies’ posts. Where Milk’s posts also contained the gendered “Queen” as well, this use of the gendered “King” was exclusive to Milk’s post, which may be indicative of the the age of the artist used. This insinuates that age is noticed by the target audience in the post.
e.l.f. Cosmetics

Negative Sentiment

Across the three companies analyzed, e.l.f.’s posts received the most amount of negative comments, even when controlled for amount of posts versus negative sentiment expressed. Where the themes and sentiment that represented a “negative” comment did not differ drastically, it is still worth noting that this company’s comments section under both posts had higher amounts of negative sentiment comments. This negative sentiment was assigned based on sentiment, with negative posts relaying negative themes around the company and its support of “men in makeup.”

Positive Comparison

Specific to posts created by e.l.f., commenters consistently compared the subjects of the posts (the male makeup artists) to either other male makeup artists or celebrities. These included multiple references to male makeup artist superstar James Charles, as well as celebrities like Taylor Swift, Scarlett Johansson, and Charlize Theron. These comments all contained positive or neutral sentiment, expressing that these associations they had with these specific celebrities were positive and were considered as “compliments” or “points of information.” This theme commonly went back to references to the “look” itself rather than the artist, being a byproduct of the makeup and the specific “look” the artist was trying to achieve. However, some of these posts were in reference to the artist themselves, drawing specific physical points of similarity, especially between the artists and James Charles. Additionally, these posts primarily used the gendered terms of “he” and “his” in relation to explaining the similarity, not misgendering the
artist use even with the presence of feminine expression. Below are examples of the posts people used as descriptors:

- James Charles-
  “@hilliedawn: Omgosh! Is this baby @jamescharles ??”

- Taylor Swift-
  “@mfollmer44: He looks like Taylor swift.”

- Scarlett Johansson:
  “@lisac_dephergirl: I thought @ryanbpotter was Scarlet Johansen for a second. Beautiful!”

- Charlize Theron:
  “@lynn.morris.3760: Reminds me of Charlize Theron in the huntsman....so gorgeous”

These references may provide an idea for the influencers and other celebrities that followers of e.l.f. are familiar with and look to, which could be used in future influencer partnerships that could elicit positive sentiment.

*From “Man” to “Boy”*

When analyzing the language used within these posts, a noticeable difference was recorded in how the commentators use gendered terms to identify the artist. Where posts in the other company’s used an array of terms across all genders to describe the artist or concept of “men in makeup,” like “men”, “queen”, and “sis,” a dominating majority of commentators used gendered terms that reflected a younger conceptualization of the artist. These commenters
heavily used the term “boy” over “man” to describe the artist, referring to the artist and gender fluid concept as “boys in makeup.” This theme can be shown in the following post:

“@donna.obryan: Nope sorry maybe I am stuck in my ways but this is not for myself. Boys in makeup (I know I will be getting hate on this)”

This use of a younger form of the gendered term was spread across both positive and negative sentiment posts, and took multiple forms beyond the use of “boy.”

Within the posts that showed a negative sentiment, one of the numerous themes that emerged was an acknowledgement of the age of the artist, and that being a deciding factor in the sentiment and feelings expressed towards the post. In the following post, you can see where the use of “pre teen” in front of “boys” bring attention to the age of the boy, shifting the full attention away from “boys” to the age of the artist.

“@desertrose480_: Posting pre teen boys in full faced makeup...yeah I won't be partaking in that level of evilness people are sick af these days bye💯”

As well as in this post:

“@just_jeanette94: Tired of seeing kids in full faces of makeup. I obviously don't know his exact age but he looks about 15 and is wearing makeup for a 20+ year old. Come on, Elf. I love
your brand but you're becoming like the makeup companies I fled from - ones that use children for their branding...yuck.”

As shown, the use of “boys” in comparison to an assumed “men”, is causing negative reactions for some of the commenters, driving users to create negative perceivals of the brand.

However, this use of boys in not always used within a negative light, as previously stated. Posts containing positive or neutral sentiment and themes. This can be found in comments like:

“@alexandriawineing: When boys can do makeup better than me 😫”

The sentiment expressed here is positive, emulating a sense of self comparison and potential “jealousy.” A more neutral and ambiguous use of this idea of “boys” in relation to the identification of the artist can be found in the following post, where the commenter compared the artist to Peter Pan, a common literary figure that is associated with youth and “boyhood.”

“@sheis.microcosmic_: He reminds me of Peter Pan ..”

Response to Comments

Similar to Milk, e.l.f. also showed their support for “men in makeup” by responding to posts that defended the idea as the commenters were engaged in conversation. Though not explicitly stating the support using overt language, acknowledging the post and responding to it with positive sentiment subtly identified the sentiment expressed by the company, which is
important to e.l.f considering their lack of outwardly expressed strategy or support for the concept of men in makeup. The company received no direct backlash from this show of support, though negative sentiment was expressed overall towards the endorsement through the post.

Original Post: “@jmom528: Thanks @elfcosmetics for being inclusive of all people! #loveislove #lovetwins”

Reply: “@elfcosmetics: @jmom528 Always ❤️❤️”

However, within this same post was a call to action created by a commenter for e.l.f. to clean up the comment section and not allow for negative comments made about the artist to be posted. This was presented in an effort to prevent a “young” person from seeing the negative comments made about them on the platform. This is in direct opposition to the feedback that Milk received, where policing their comments section was a discouraged activity resulting in a proposed lack of transparency and support. The following tweet shows the mentioned phenomenon:

“@kat.buhr: @elfcosmetics I love that y’all promote people of all genders but I really wish you’d clean up this comments section. There’s so many bigoted comments that a 16 year old shouldn’t be subjected to reading!”
Comparison of Genders

In addition to the differentiation in age within the posts of e.l.f., another theme that emerged was the inherent comparison between genders. Though linked to self-comparison, this theme was different in that commenters were comparing “men” versus “women” apart from their own gender as well as with their own. The following comment shows this theme in the form of a reply to a comment, where the commenter compares the skills of the artist to that of other “female makeup artists”, not other “male makeup artists”:

“@_abelle_chette_: @jamieglavesabdnor he does creative looks and applies makeup just as well as the female makeup artists ♀”

Another example of this theme is exemplified by the following comment:

“@reyhauna: Guys always excel so much better at makeup then women to me 🤷‍♂️❤️”

Similar to the first example, the commenter juxtaposes men against women in their skills with makeup in a positive light in favor to men, but negatively to women. These comments were noted as having positive sentiment in relation to supporting the idea of “men in makeup”, but could also be interpreted as having negative sentiment in relation to women’s use or skill of makeup.
Self Comparison

In addition to the above theme of comparison between men and women apart from self, this comparison could also be found in relation to the commenters’ own gender identity. Where this phenomenon occurred minorly within Ulta’s posts as well, the large majority of comments supporting this theme were found under e.l.f.’s posts specifically. This theme is characterized by a comparison of the commentator about the skill of the makeup artist or the physical features of the artist in relation to themselves. This was coded as “self-deprecation” as almost every example of this theme was in the detriment of the commenter and in praise of the artist. Examples of this are exemplified in the following:

“@feliciamorton8418: SMH on all the hate...some things may be strange but so what you do you and be happy with who you are!! I'm just jealous he does make up better than me lol I love Elf make up its the only brand I wear and use!”

“@oooh_geee: @tracersss and I cant even apply my foundation:(”

“@alexandriawineing: When boys can do makeup better than me 😞”

Most of these posts containing this theme framed the skills in relation to the artists’ identity of being male, and the commenter’s identity of being female, as exemplified by phrases like “When boys can.” After analyzing for common threads, it is noted that these posts seemed to
be derived out of some form of disbelief in the ability for a male makeup artist to be as skilled or more skilled than a female makeup artist, noting on the gender norm that women should be dominant in the skill of applying makeup. This appears to promote the acknowledgement of the breaking of gender norms by men not only applying makeup, but being skilled at it, which induces potentially self-reflective, deprecative, and negative feelings in women.
**Recommendations:**

Across the brands, negativity was experienced in various forms, with each brand receiving a critique in their use of “men in makeup” and apparent support for the movement. This is indicative of the slow nature of the societal and cultural shift towards accepting “men in makeup”, and brands who want to advocate for this use should be cognizant of this non-uniform acceptance. Where this can be looked at as a discouraging factor, as a potential reason to change this use, brands should contextualize this negativity in relation to the positive expressions surrounding the idea. Brands should collect quantitative and qualitative data in analyzing the content among their comments for their posts, and look for metrics such as positive to negative sentiment ratio, as well as perform their own content analyses on what negative and positive themes exist. Since these themes differed among the brands, individual analyses should be performed in lieu of a “one size fits all” approach to grappling negative feedback. After analyzing these comments for such content, the brands should then make decisions on whether to continue their use of men in their social media communications strategy. Although these recommendations can be used as a guide to potential inspiration for these strategies, individual analysis is key in effectively monitoring the specific communities for each brand.

In addition to this research, brands may want to dig deeper into the psychographics of the commenters within their comment section, both for comments in support of and in dissent of using “men in makeup.” This could be used as a rich form of data in deciphering ambiguous comments, such as the high number of negative comments using only emojis or few words. By analyzing the publicly available profiles of these commenters, these brands can develop a better sense of motivation for these comments, and better cater the content to these consumers.
Additionally, the brands can engage in further research with the consumers by using the messaging function within Instagram to ask consumers questions regarding their posts. Using neutral language that neither shows support nor dissent for the concept, this further probing can provide more concrete evidence for brands in figuring out why these consumers do not support their specific use of the movement and how to alter their content to be more inclusive.

Apart from gathering more research to bolster the effectiveness in using “men in makeup” on social media product promotion, brands need to more clearly define their stances and create a brand voice surrounding the matter. As exhibited in the amount of negative responses towards the movement within the three brands examined in this analyses (including the sentiment and common themes previously discussed), an apparent correlation between negative sentiment and the degree of intentionality and integration of the core concept of expanding the conceptualization of gender identity (i.e. using “men in makeup”) was found among the brands studied. Milk, whose brand identity aligned strongly in support of “men in makeup”, received less critical negative sentiment and themes overall, with more followers expressing positive sentiment for the brand and for the artist used. However, as previously mentioned, the more prominent display of positivity towards the artist can be inferred that users may find this use to be inherent to the brand and not a special exhibition of diversity by the brand, therefore warranting less praise of the brand as this would be “expected.” Comparing this feedback to e.l.f.’s feedback, a stark comparison can be found within the amount of and type of negativity expressed towards the brand. More commenters attributed their negativity towards the “men in makeup” movement to the brand, instead of attributing it to the artist themselves. Where this may be a byproduct of differences in audience base between the two brands on Instagram, a
lack of overt support for the movement may cause the brand to be seen as “pandering” or utilizing a “cultural trend.” In Ulta’s case, mixed responses lead to an assumption of support, leaving room for ambiguity for the brand. This can be problematic in that consumers are unsure of how the brand supports the movement, potentially leading to negative sentiment felt by a lack of solidity. For all brands discussed, the audience needs to be analyzed more in depth to ensure that these ideals will most likely be received positively and that consumers are understanding of the brand’s stake in the promotion of the movement.

Where the “fanhood” of the brands themselves was made apparent in both negative and positive examples within the scope of this research, one lacking “fandom” that was not highly seen was the specific artists’ fans. @ryanbpotter (the artist used in one of e.l.f.’s posts) has over 360k followers on Instagram, providing a wide base of followers to potentially interact with the post and tap into for support of the brand promoting the artist. Across the 6 posts, the brands tagged the artist used as the subject of the post, whether this was a repost or organic post to the brand’s page, but did not appear to use any hashtags specific to the artist or ask for participation from these groups. By analyzing more heavily how the consumers interact with the individual influencer, and how the influencer brands themselves and their following, brands can better tap into these user bases. This could potentially be manifested in a more intentional use in the connection that the brand makes with the influencer, asking for the influencer to direct their followers to the page and comment things like why they came there, who they heard about it from, etc. Another potential iteration of this could be sponsoring specific sweepstakes, contests, or providing early content to specific fan bases through the influencers to engage with the featured posts, which would use these communities to build engagement with the intent of
making them brand advocates themselves. This would further gauge and utilize the impact and influence that these artists can have in driving brand engagements.

As examined in this analysis, more effeminate uses of makeup (or makeup looks) may lead to more negative responses in comparison to a potential masculine use of makeup. Further research is recommended regarding this, observing responses to men using makeup or beauty products in more masculine ways as described in the industry overview section of this analysis. Where this is not recommended as a replacement to using “men in makeup” in more effeminate ways, as that would be a divergence from the true meaning of the “men in makeup” movement, showing different ways that men can use makeup than by creating performative, self-expressive, or outward-expressive “looks” may be able to better normalize the use of makeup by men, showing the wide array of ways that makeup can be used. This would be particularly helpful for beauty brands like Ulta that sell different brands with a vast assortment of products, including skin care and more neutral-use products. Additionally, brands like this (as noted in the Ulta example) may have differing age ranges and consumer psychographic types that subscribe to the brand, where opening up the content used could appeal to this difference in age and beliefs experienced by these consumers. One potential way to incorporate this idea would be to feature content similar to the video content produced by these brands that detail the routine or process for making the featured “looks” in this analysis, but feature different men using it in more corrective ways, such as content that shows how to apply foundation to cover up skin imperfections. Additionally, more content could be centered around skin care and skin care products that are versatile for both men and women. This would help create more inclusive
content for men wherever they are in their masculinity and comfort with the concept of “men in makeup,” as well as the general audience found within the comment sections of these brands.

Another recommendation that would potentially benefit beauty and cosmetic companies using men in makeup would be to consider the guidelines developed for the comment section of their posts. Where this goes hand in hand with how overt the company is with expressing their support for “men in makeup,” potentially establishing guidelines for discourse would help show their support in another fashion. Whether that be an overt comment from the company stating the guidelines, or by responding to comments as they appear, this action would further bolster the efforts of the company in showing their support, while creating transparency with their actions. Considerations for this recommendation should be looked at in the user base and their reaction to this potential acceptance of community guidelines, as exemplified by the trend for commenters to discuss their feelings of opinion suppression with other commenters. Where the brand would not want to suppress opinions (as in Milk’s case with comment deletion), the brand would want to establish a space that prevents negative harm from occurring to the artist themselves, as well as supporting the dissenting opinions. This could take the form of an overarching comment left directly under the post stating “We support our artists and their work featured, and encourage dialogue among the ______ community. However, comments relating to harmful topics and conveying concepts like transphobia, homophobia, or other potentially mentally harmful subjects will be deleted.” The brand then would need to develop a guide for themselves that comprehensively states what language falls under each of these categories to be able to consistently follow these guidelines. This would both provide transparency as well as a more positive environment for the artist in wanting to be featured with the brand.
In addition to this community management, brands using “men in makeup” and showing support for different gender expressions should educate their consumers on what these concepts potentially mean and the implications behind them, addressing the presence of negative comments surrounding homophobia and transphobia. This could work in tandem with community management, but would provide consumers with actual knowledge behind the people they are using in the promotion to further develop a sense of awareness and tie to the movement in expanding gender expression.

Lastly, brands should be cognizant of the age of the artist being shown in the promotion. This was shown in the analysis to be a potential cause of negative sentiment for the commenters, exhibited when the artist featured looked “younger” or was perceived as someone below the age of 18. Even though the artists featured were predominantly older than 18, the use of the makeup seemed to direct people to believe that they were young, which fueled already negative sentiments of using “men in makeup” with morality claims around using “children” in this same way. Brands should analyze their audiences when using influencers to ensure that the influencer best represents the audience and connects with their interest, while also ensuring that appropriate messaging is used around this artist.
Research Considerations and Future Research Implications:

Sarcasm/Lack of Context

As a commonly deemed problem with online, electronic, and written communication, non-verbal cues unrepresented plainly by the words used to convey the author’s meaning can cause unclear analysis and assumption of intent. With this, context also can be missing or lacking from the post, comment, or statement, limiting the amount of evidence based and “accurate” information able to be considered. Because of this, the coding schema and insights drawn from this analysis should take into consideration this lack of a “full picture” that may provide better insight into the true intentions of the research “participants.” Additionally, insights and meaning taken from the posts should be considered regarding the potential implicit biases, prejudices, and pre-conceived notions of the researcher, a consideration for accuracy and bias. A recommendation to mitigate this would to have inter-researcher validity, where posts would be coded for sentiment and meaning by numerous researchers to corroborate on establish a basis for the meaning of the comments/posts.

Date of Collection

These post were analyzed off of their initial collection date, which ranged from January to February, creating a 2-3 month span of time where additional comments could have been created under the posts that would be inconsistent with the comments analyzed for this research. Even though the posts were not coded or measured for amount of engagement or content, additional comments or sentiment could have accumulated since the original posting of these posts. Additionally, all 3 companies used have not experienced any intense criticism or
wide-spread disapproval of the brand (potentially created by public opinion deeming them negatively, such as “insensitive” or “pandering”) between the initial collection point and point of analysis, allowing for the comments to still be considered an accurate representation of the sentiment of the commenter’s towards the movement and the brands at the time of their archival.

Only Based on Instagram

Instagram was the only social media platform analyzed with context to this phenomenon of “men in makeup”, meaning the recommendations, results, and themes pulled out from these brands’ Instagram posts can only be contextualized to that one platform, and unable to be applied to other platforms. Since the nature of other social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter is inherently different with different audiences for each, coherency in the themes found as well as the behaviors exhibited is unknown. This means that for a comprehensive understanding of the brands’ use of this movement, a full social media analysis surrounding the phenomenon needs to be executed to be able to propose fully developed recommendations to the comprehensive social media strategy of these companies.

Psychographic Analysis

As mentioned earlier, to fully understand the motives behind the posts and to understand the audience that has made up the comments for which this analysis was conducted, a more in-depth psychographic analysis would need to be taken place to dig deeper into the profiles of the commenters. The researcher performing these psychographic analyses should analyze the individuals’ profiles to better understand the points of view and psychographic/demographic
information behind the comments. This could include solidifying the analysis of how age, gender, perceived socioeconomic status and lifestyle identifiers could have influenced the result of this analysis as well as others conducted similar to it.
Informational References


https://www.journalism.co.uk/press-releases/the-male-beauty-market-is-thriving--and-her-e-s-why/s66/a724838/


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Graphical/Image References
