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Instagramming for a Better World: Corporate Co-creation and a Fully Functioning Society

Abstract:

Using Glossier, an online-only makeup company with a fervent social media following, as a case study, this paper explores the potential of Instagram to facilitate brand co-creation and the potential of Instagram for achieving a fully functioning society. Specifically, this study focuses on the 2014 release of Glossier's Perfecting Skin Tint and the subsequent social media call for an expanded range of shades appropriate for darker skin tones. Glossier's corporate marketing strategy, their emphasis on Instagram and corporate co-creation, and their recent release of an expanded range of Perfecting Skin Tint have positive implications for a fully functioning society and mark a new age of corporate co-creation through Instagram.

Introduction

Founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 and acquired by Facebook in 2012, the picture-sharing platform Instagram today counts more than 300 million daily active users (Ting, Cyril de Run, & Ling Liew, 2016, p. 43). In addition, many of these daily active users are age 29 or younger, with 59% of internet users aged 18-29 using the platform (compared to just 33% of Internet users age 30-49) ("Percentage of US Internet," 2016). As social media becomes an ever-more important marketing tool, and companies develop new strategies to advertise and interact with customers, Instagram, with its rapidly growing user base and younger demographic

skew, represents an important new tool for corporate marketing and public relations and an important avenue for customer co-creation of corporate identity.

The online makeup retailer Glossier has capitalized on the advertising and community-building potential of Instagram, constructing a fervent base of consumers and fans who use Instagram to learn about new products, share photographs of products, and communicate with one another (Tiku, 2016). Glossier's innovative combination of digital marketing techniques has paid off; the company is expected to grow 600% in 2016, with a similarly large growth rate projected for 2017 (Tiku, 2016). This growth can be attributed to Glossier's success at cultivating a community of users--young, professional women--through digital media and allowing those users to authentically influence the direction and digital aesthetic of the company. The 2014 release of Glossier's Perfecting Skin Tint, which ignited a flurry of user comments highlighting the limited range of the product (only appropriate for skin tones in the lightest part of the skin-tone spectrum), provides a good example of how customers work with Glossier to co-create the company and an example of the potential of Instagram to facilitate a fully functioning society.

In this paper I will begin by describing the online retailer Glossier. Then I will give an overview of the process of value co-creation and explore Robert L. Heath's theory of a fully functioning society and provide an analysis of Glossier's Instagram account and digital strategy, with particular focus on the 2014 release of skin perfecting tint and Instagram posts relevant to this product.

Literature Review

Since its founding in 2014, Glossier's extensive digital marketing strategy and its emphasis on creating a friendly, personal relationship with customers, as well as its 2014 Perfecting Skin Tint controversy, suggest an inclination towards corporate co-creation of the brand. Value co-creation of corporate brands is a concept that spans marketing, PR, and design disciplines, as consumers work in conjunction with brands to define how and to what extent products are valuable (Agrawal, Kaushik, and Rahman, 2015, p. 443-444). According to Normann and Remirez (1993), as consumers move from their traditional passive capacity as purchasers towards dynamic functions that involve the magnification and dissemination of brand value in co-creation networks, the concept of value becomes "denser"--no longer limited to the brand value formally advertised by the company. The ideal outcome of value co-creation is a more invested and loyal consumer base, a brand narrative written with more complex or authentic levels of meaning, and a highly-relevant brand identity that carries well across and among target user groups. Payne et al. (2008) also emphasize that "greater opportunities for co-creation and result in benefits (or 'value') being received by the supplier by way of revenues, profits, referrals, etc." (p.84). As consumers and companies work together to create and negotiate product meanings, effective co-creation results in a more complex, nuanced conception of brand value and can lead to significant monetary and social gains.

The concept of co-creation originated in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a juxtaposition to traditional corporate-customer relationships, which began to change as companies came to acknowledge the unique brand meanings created by consumers (Ind and Coates, 2013, p. 4). Before this time, organizations believed they alone controlled brand meanings and were solely responsible for "writing" brand "narratives," ignoring any social meanings that arose within

consumer groups (Nonaka, 1994; Karreman and Rylander, 2008). As brands increasingly interact with consumers online through social media channels, co-creation becomes an ever-more important and rich concept, departing from this earlier facile and shallow understanding of brand identity and allowing room for consumers to contribute substantively to the way publics perceive a brand's value (Ind and Coates, 2013, p. 4).

In recent literature, the concept of co-creation refers to an interaction between consumers and companies in which both actors work to co-write a product or brand's narrative of value. C. K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy (2004) juxtapose co-creation against the traditional notion of one-way value creation, saying co-creation is a "new starting premise" in which "the consumer and the firm co-create value, and so the co-creation experience becomes the very basis of value" (p. 14). Adrian Payne, Kaj Storbacka, and Pennie Frow (2008) describe co-creation as a process in which a company creates "superior value propositions" that leave room for a customer to "determine [their own conception of] value when a good or service is consumed" (p. 84). Ind and Coates (2013) describe co-creation as a "process that provides an opportunity for ongoing interaction, where the organization is willing to share its world with external stakeholders and can generate in return the insight that can be derived from their engagement" (p. 10). Co-creation occurs when brands relinquish some of the power to write their own narratives of value to the consumer, allowing consumers or communities to impose their own ideas of the brand's meaning, utility, or significance and define a new, co-created paradigm of value.

In their 2004 book *The Future of Competition: Co-Creating Unique Value with Customers*, C. K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy describe co-creation at length, identifying

both the different types of co-creation and the factors that define co-creation experiences.

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy, co-creation can occur in a spectrum of capacities; it can take place between one firm and one consumer, between one firm and a community of consumers, or it can take place between multiple firms and multiple communities (2004, p. 11). Therefore co-creation can occur on a few different scales and may involve sharing responsibility for value-creation with consumer communities and incorporating the value narratives of other brands. In addition, Prahalad and Ramaswamy also identify the “building blocks of co-creation,” which include dialogue, access, risk assessment (“the probability of harm to the consumer”), and transparency (2004, p. 19-31). Co-creation occurs according to some combination of these building blocks as companies and consumers negotiate new paths of dialogue and access with one another (especially through social media) and as companies are forced to reconsider how they present potential product risks and manage company transparency for these new, important co-creators of and stakeholders in brand value. According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy, these opportunities for co-creation occur at “points of interaction” between the consumer and company which “provide opportunities for collaboration and negotiation, explicit or implicit” (2004, p. 33). Social media presents a new and very important “point of interaction,” allowing consumers to converse with companies and other co-creators in ways that were not possible before.

If companies are willing to establish these building blocks and allow co-creation of their brands, invested publics can contribute co-creation in a few different capacities. According to Hope Jensen Sachau, Albert Muniz Jr., and Eric Arnould (2009), “customers can co-create value, co-create competitive strategy, collaborate in the firm's innovation process, and even become endogenous to the firm” (p. 30). According to a survey of various companies with strong user

communities, Sachau et al identify specific pathways through which brand value is co-created.

The first pathway is social networking among the brand community, which includes things like welcoming new users, empathizing with one another, and governing amongst the community.

The second pathway involves impression management, including evangelizing and justifying the product/brand as an “ambassador.” The third co-creation pathway involves community

engagement in which community members document and/or highlight their use of the brand,

“stake” out their role as a brand user (e.g. by delineating which products/aspects of the brand they engage with), and mark personal or brand milestones. Sachau et al.’s final pathway for

brand co creation involves communities’ dynamic brand use practices, which might include

sharing improved product maintenance strategies, tools for customizing products, and

“commoditizing” products by encouraging distribution of the brand/product that is “deemed to be community building” (2009, p. 35).

In addition, other important factors for value co-creation include the level of access granted to communities/consumers by the company and the significance of good PR and

outreach for maintaining effective co-creation pathways. Payne et al. emphasize the importance

of “each and every encounter between customer and supplier, and how together these encounters make a cumulative contribution to co-created value” and suggest that this makes effective

marketing communication and dialogue very important for co-creation (p. 93). Payne et al.

(2008) also emphasize that their research “highlights the benefit of customer involvement at every stage of product or service development” (p. 93).

Value co-creation can take place on or offline; however, much co-creation occurs digitally. Social media is especially important to this dynamic, allowing consumers and

companies to engage in authentic “two-sided” communication through channels like Facebook comments (Gillian, 2009). For example, all of the brand communities studied by Sachau et al. existed through online chat rooms, forums, or corporate websites with only a few tangential in-person community events (e.g. hosting a tailgate party before a concert for fan chatroom users to meet up) (2009, p.33). Kristine de Valck, Gerrit van Bruggen, and Berend Wierenga (2009) also explore this significance of digital communities for online marketing, saying that “Rather than being mere recipients of the information that is disseminated by marketers, a rising number of consumers use the Web 2.0 to express and disseminate their knowledge, experiences, and opinions about products and services.” In addition, companies now “have to deal with consumers who increasingly interact with each other through electronically based discussion forums, bulletin boards, list servers, chat rooms, newsgroups, email, personal Web pages, social networks, and blogs” (De Valck et al., 2009). This means that brand community members can have great influence on purchasing decisions within the brand community, and on the purchasing decisions of first-time consumers seeking the advice or expertise of the brand community through digital media.

When brand communities exist on social media (rather than in cloistered private forums), brand co-creation can also function as a particularly effective advertising strategy. Invested consumers can act as free advertising and publicity for the brand, giving co-created companies a competitive advantage over those that rely on traditional models of purely paid-labor advertising and traditional one-way value creation (Agrawal et al., 2015, 444). For example, Glossier consumers function as unpaid advertisers and co-creators of the Glossier brand every time they share Instagram photographs of Glossier packaging, branding, or selfies appropriately tagged to

indicate the Glossier products they're wearing. As of December 2016, there are 34,686 uses of the #Glossier hashtag on Instagram, with an additional 5,844 uses of #GlossierPink and 2,015 uses of #GlossierGirl. Robert Lusch and Stephen Vargo (2006) suggest that future marketing programs will be entirely co-created, involving partnerships with brand communities and new pathways for consumers to influence both the products a company makes and the brand identity of those products.

In a case study of TOMS shoes', Ana Roncha and Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas (2015) explore Instagram specifically as a platform for corporate co-creation. Using a qualitative case study approach, Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas undertake a full media review of the TOMS shoes "One Day Without Shoes" campaign, a content analysis of TOMS social media platforms, and a series of semi-structured interviews with TOMS marketing and retail managers (p. 309). In their review of TOMS shoes social media and the "One Day" campaign, Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas identify various ways that TOMS works to co-create value with its customers, including encouraging storytelling, socialising, advocacy, and emphasizing the experience of posting photos that may be re-posted by the official TOMS shoes account. Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas conclude that, "These internal and external stakeholders represent the driving force behind the brand and were one of the key drivers of the campaign, for instance in organising walks during the #withoutshoes day and sharing the brand's values with the Community" (2015, p. 312). According to Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas, the Instagram facilitated dynamic between brand and consumer in which consumers actively participate in the construction of brand identity, which "brings the brand closer to the consumer" and makes them an active stakeholder in the brand (2015, p. 314-315).

Corporate co-creation has important implications for Heath's theory of a fully functioning society. According to Heath, "The fully functioning society theory of public relations argues that it is a force (through reflective research and practice) to foster community as blended relationships, resource distribution, and shared meanings that advance and yield to enlightened choice" (2006, p. 106). Heath emphasize the significance of community for a fully functioning society, saying that relationships between a corporation and the community must be symmetrical, allowing people to "see themselves and the organizations in the community as bound together in what may be described as symmetry and mutual benefit" (2006, p. 106). In other words, a fully functioning society is one in which "relationships are mutually beneficial; stakes are exchanged for the good of the whole community" and communities are able to collectively resist corporate exploitation (2006, p. 106). In a fully functioning society, a company and the communities it serves have an equal and symmetrical relationship that is mutually beneficial (rather than exploitative, as is standard) and in which communities and companies see themselves as fundamentally linked and bound together. This vision of a symmetrically balanced company and community relationship is achievable through authentic value co-creation, and especially as companies come to increasingly rely on social media as an advertising and community building channel, as in the case of Glossier.

Method

This study defines co-creation according to a PR and advertising understanding (rather than according to criteria that emphasizes value formation or corporate management strategy, such as Payne et al., 2008). Focusing on the building blocks of co-creation as identified by Prahalad and Ramaswamy and the pathways through which consumers engage as co-creators as

identified by Sachau et al., this study employs a qualitative method of content analysis, described by Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas (2015) as a “summative content analysis, moving beyond quantifying data and seeking to develop meanings through interpretation” (p. 309). As in the Roncha, Radclyffe-Thomas study, this study employs first a media review of Glossier’s website and digital marketing strategy and a case-study content analysis of Instagram posts advertising Skin Perfecting Tint for evidence of co-creation.

Research Questions:

1. How does Glossier facilitate corporate co-creation through Instagram?
2. How does a Glossier’s reliance on Instagram for marketing and their tendency towards co-creation suggest a move towards a fully functioning society?

Analysis

Digital Strategy

Glossier was founded in 2014 by Emily Weiss, former fashion assistant at *W* and *Vogue*, and a brief character on *The Hills* (Tiku, 2016). Weiss introduced Glossier in a letter posted to her already popular beauty blog *Into the Gloss* (Weiss 2014). In her letter, Weiss describes the challenge (and inherent falsehood) of maintaining a perfectly manicured appearance on social media and the other unique challenges faced by women when it comes to the beauty industry. The post features images of early Glossier product prototypes, a photo of Weiss overseeing production in an industrial factory, and screenshots of the brand’s Instagram feed--which had 11,000 followers even before officially launching products. Weiss describes Glossier towards the end of the post saying, “Glossier is about living in—and embracing—the now, not the past, and not the future. It’s about fun and freedom and being OK with yourself today. It’s about being nice

to people and knowing that a smile begets a smile. Snobby isn't cool, happy is cool" (Weiss, 2014).

In keeping with the lighthearted, friendly aesthetic of this initial blog post, Glossier's current website features copy promoting the open, user-centered atmosphere of the company and their minimalistic philosophy towards skincare, and photos of products modeled not by professional models, but by Glossier's (conveniently model-like) employees. The Glossier homepage proclaims, "We stay in constant communication with real Glossier users to give you what you want (and because we enjoy it)" ("Glossier," 2016). The "About" page describes a similarly friendly and user-centered attitude towards makeup, emphasizing Glossier's belief that women are beautiful without applying heavy full-coverage makeup and striving for "perfect" skin, saying, "We're laying the foundation for a beauty movement that celebrates real girls, in real life. Glossier is a new way of thinking about (and shopping for) beauty products. Because "beauty" should be fun, easy, imperfect, and personal. Above all, we believe that you give life to products-products don't breathe life into you" ("About," 2016). In a section titled "_trust us," the about page goes on to suggest that Glossier is composed of employees who are "like you" and who "get it," stating that, "Geeking out over beauty is fun, and we're lucky to have a community of likeminded Glossier girls who get it. We're the beauty brand that wants to be friends with you—mostly because we're not so much a brand as we are real people over here just trying to rethink the beauty industry and have a good time doing it" (Ibid.). Through website copy that promotes Glossier's relatability and accessibility to young women, Glossier cultivates an image of being a company with a horizontal, transparent, and respectful relationship with its consumers.

Outside of its website, Glossier rigorously maintains social media accounts through Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Facebook, and Twitter. On all of these platforms, Glossier is truly active, posting a variety of content--not just product advertisements--every day. Through Instagram, Glossier has attracted more than 345,000 followers who see two to three posts each day, showing photos of everything from Glossier products, Glossier stickers (included with every purchase), and Glossier packaging to cats, objects the shade of “Glossier pink,” and fashionable Glossier users. On Facebook (with 69,917 likes), Glossier posts articles on skincare from founder Weiss’ beauty blog *Into the Gloss*, shares videos and photos of Glossier products, and responds to user comments asking questions about products and shipping. On Twitter, the Glossier account retweets users’ endorsements of Glossier products and customer service at least as much as it shares its own memes, photos, and announcements about the company. On each of these platforms, Glossier account managers promptly respond to users questions and comments; Glossier’s Facebook page estimates the average response time to a direct message at 1 hour. In addition to providing open communication channels directly to Glossier, these social media platforms also allow Glossier users to communicate with one another, offering advice, endorsements, or commiserations about the brand.

Glossier’s implementation of social media moves beyond advertising towards a channel for co-creation of the Glossier brand. Through social media--specifically Instagram and Snapchat--Glossier has promoted not only its line of skincare products, but also its fundamental identity as a relatable, hip brand, encouraging users post pictures of Glossier products lovingly adorned with stickers or photos of objects the shade of “Glossier pink.” Of the most recent 10 posts on Glossier’s Instagram feed, 7 are photos of products, products in use, or fashionable

women generated by Glossier, while 3 are photos reposted from other Instagram users. One of these reposted photos features a bathroom counter littered with Glossier products, one is a photo of a Glossier user wearing Glossier products, and one is a photo of a pink parrot, reposted from a professional wildlife photographer. All of these three reposted photos link back to their accounts of origin, and all photographs of Glossier products, as modeled by real Glossier employees, are tagged to link back to those employee's personal accounts. Through this complex network of linked accounts and reposting from user-generated photos, Glossier invites an openness to user's photographic input and suggests a horizontal relatability, implicitly saying "we're just like you." This strategy has been successful; Glossier's hashtags (#glossier, #glossiergirl, and #glossierpink) have thousands of uses each.

In addition to maintaining the high levels of communication, access, and transparency required for brand value co-creation, Glossier's Instagram account provides evidence of co-creation community practices as evidenced by Sachau et al.. Glossier users communicate with one another in post comment sections, fulfilling both Sachau et al.'s social networking, impression management, and engagement pathways. For example, a recent Instagram post promoting Glossier's "Generation G" lipstick shows evidence of social networking among Glossier users. Of the 98 comments on this post, most serve as endorsements of the lipstick or lament Glossier's lack of international shipping (adhering to Sachau et al.'s impression management pathway). In addition, one user posted asking for help matching the lipstick to her skin tone and another user replied directing her to the Glossier website where swatches showing products on different skin tones are available, showing the willingness of Glossier followers to network with one another and offer helpful advice about the brand. Other commenters on this

post commiserated about the tendency of the “Generation G” lipstick to fall out of the packaging tube and asked Glossier to address its defective packaging, fulfilling Sachau et al.’s engagement pathway. Other Instagram posts on Glossier’s feed feature user-generated packaging modification and selfies, including many photos of Glossier products adorned with stickers, photos of the Glossier packaging bag, and photos of empty Glossier products, including an empty bottle of Perfecting Skin Tint that has been sliced open in order to remove product residue. User photos and comment sections like these show evidence of user engagement with the Glossier brand and Glossier’s openness to these user-generated brand narratives.

In addition to a horizontal flow of images and conversation among Glossier users and the brand on social media, Glossier’s effective merchandising of their signature pink bubble-wrap packaging pouch serves as further evidence of value co-creation. Released originally as attractive, brand-colored packaging to protect products during shipping, Glossier’s pink pouches became popular with consumers who use them to store liquids when traveling through airline security, to organize cosmetics products, and even to carry as small purses (Payer, 2016, April 27). Catching onto the popularity of their packaging (or perhaps as part of an effort to engineer the ubiquity of the packaging to begin with), Glossier began to sell these pink pouches as a separate product; you can currently buy a set of three bags for \$12 through Glossier’s website. In this instance, Glossier recognized the popularity of their packaging with consumers and, in an act of value co-creation, began to recognize and market the packaging as its own cool, useful product.

Glossier’s expansive digital marketing strategy, including its highly active social media sites and attention to the way consumers use Glossier products provides an example of value co-creation. In addition, Glossier’s digital strategy and corporate attitude focuses on promoting the

existing beauty of women, acknowledges the unique pressures women face when it comes to maintaining their appearances, and subverts the unwarranted prevalence of skin care products that promote a single idea of beauty perfection. Therefore, it seems natural that multiculturalism and an unbiased and fair approach towards a wide spectrum of skin tones would fit naturally with Glossier's mission and apparent attention to user attitudes. As the 2014 release of Perfecting Skin Tint and the subsequent social media reaction shows, Glossier has not always maintained the attitude of understanding and inclusiveness they project; however, due to Glossier's intense focus on co-creation, their open communication channels, and their invested, evangelizing user base, Glossier has been able to co-create a more inclusive corporate identity.

Co-Creation Case Study

In 2014 Glossier launched a new product called Perfecting Skin Tint. The sheer skin tint is in keeping with the company's mission of developing products that highlight natural beauty, and the website's product page describes the tint as an "imperceptible wash of color" that won't "hide your freckles, spackle your pores, or erase any other evidence that you are, in fact, a real human being" ("_Perfecting Skin Tint," 2016). When the product launched in 2014, it was available in only three shades: light, medium, and a beige-olive color called "dark." Customer reaction to this product release ranged from inquiries as to when darker shades would be available to anger that the darkest of the three original shades (a beige, olive) was called "dark." Given the friendly, positive comments that dominate the rest of the Glossier feed, these comments stand out as unusual.

The original Instagram post announcing the release of Skin Perfecting Tint features a close-up shot of the medium shade tint as it drips down a glass ledge and a caption promoting the

product's sheer, brightening qualities and its current availability. The post garnered 90 comments, most of them positive; however, a few comments addressed the limited range of available shades. One commenter writes that she was "super excited until I realized you didn't have a tint for people with melanin" (Glossier, 2014, Oct 4). The Glossier account immediately responded to this user saying, "the 3 Perfecting Skin Tint shades we started with are meant to cover a wide range of skin tones. You can see from the portraits toward the bottom left of the product page that they're quite adaptable. However, we know that these shades may not be for everyone! Which is why we're already in the process of extending the shade range across a wider spectrum" (Ibid.). Other commenters also posted defending Glossier, leading to a disagreement in which one commenter says, "perhaps you should let women of colour decide for themselves about whether they think the rationale for the limited range is acceptable" (Ibid.).

Following this original launch post, the Glossier Instagram account went on to share more posts promoting Skin Perfecting Tint, all of which inspired a similar composition of comments, most are positive or neutral, with a few comments addressing the limited range of shades. On a post depicting an array of Skin Perfecting Tint packages, one commentor writes "I think it's important that quality products be made in a variety of skin tones. Is your line just for white chicks, then, [@glossier](#)?" while another commenter simply asks, "Would any of these match darker brown skin? Do you plan to make darker tints?" (Glossier, 2015, Jan 2). On another subsequent post promoting Skin Perfecting Tint, a commenter writes "Your deepest shade is called "dark" and isn't even dark enough to cover my hands. You need to rename your colors or give them numbers or something. Most black women the shade of your "dark" color are on the light spectrum of black skin. Do. Better" (Glossier, 2015, June 4).

In 2015, Glossier added two darker shades to their original three (named “Deep” and “Rich”) and began to promote the line with a renewed focus on diversity and specific celebration of skin tones suited for these new shades. Introducing darker shades of Skin Perfecting Tint solved one immediate problem, but comments throughout Glossier’s feed also address the homogenous whiteness of the models featured in photos. Of the 1,627 photos currently posted on Glossier’s instagram approximately 50% feature pictures of people (the rest are pictures of products, packaging, etc.), of those approximately 813 photos, only 50 feature models with skin tones that would be suited to the “Deep” or “Rich” shades.¹

Despite this persistent problem with authentic diversity (which is not limited to Glossier), it seems that the company is not completely deaf to user’s comments. Indeed, after commenters questioned the limited range of colors, Glossier did release darker shades of Skin Perfecting tint. Though it’s difficult to link user comments directly to the expanded range of shades (Glossier could have had these additional shades in development before releasing the original three shades), other recent marketing strategies suggest heightened attention to diversity. The Instagram post promoting this expanded line of Skin Perfecting Tint features drips of each shade of the product running down a “Glossier pink” background with a simple caption of the repeated OK hand sign emoji in every possible skin shade. Other posts from the last year feature similar diverse emoji captions (see Image 1). In addition, when posting photos that demonstrate products in use, Glossier is careful to include examples of products on very pale as well as very dark skin tones (see Images 2-3). This attention to diversity, though it is still minimal, and models with fair

¹ Estimate of photos with people produced from a sample of 40 photos; number of photos depicting models with deep/rich skin tones counted from entire Instagram feed by author

to medium skintones still dominate Glossier’s Instagram feed, is more than appeared in their feed prior to the 2014 Skin Perfecting Tint controversy.

When faced with the controversy of its Perfecting Skin Tint, Glossier’s focus on social media and its openness to co-creation allowed the company to both communicate with unhappy consumers and incorporate these consumers concerns into later iterations of the product. Since Perfecting Skin Tint was originally released, Glossier has introduced darker shades of the product and has begun to promote diversity as part of its corporate identity, making sure to advertise products modeled on a range of skintones and posting Instagram photos with captions that promote diversity. In this case study, Glossier’s embrace of value co-creation allowed the company to address a controversy, learn from its mistake and go on to imbue its products and message with the idea (however authentic it actually is) that Glossier is an inclusive, diverse company for all women.

Conclusion

Glossier’s tendency towards value co-creation marks a new, digitally-driven marketing strategy that has important implications for Heath’s theory of a fully functioning society and provides justification for extension of the theory to incorporate the potential of value co-creation through digital media. Heath’s fully functioning society involves PR as forces that fosters community as blended relationships, balanced resource distribution, and shared meanings that “yield to enlightened choice” (2006, p. 106). Glossier’s focus on social media, including their frequent reposting of user-generated content, the social media communities that exist around Glossier’s accounts, and Glossier’s evidenced willingness to adjust product offerings in response to user requests show this company's willingness to blend its relationship with consumers, giving

them a powerful voice in the direction of the company. After the release of Perfecting Skin Tint in a limited range of light shades, Glossier consumers used this powerful voice to effectively co-create a more inclusive and diverse direction for the company by advocating for the addition of darker shades. Since this time, Glossier has emphasized diversity in its Instagram post captions and has been careful to advertise products modeled on a more diverse range of skintones, thereby contributing to a fully-functioning society in which consumers are able to guide companies towards more fair and moral practices.

Providing an expanded line of makeup products appropriate for dark skin tones is an act more radical than a simple cosmetics marketing decision may seem; Glossier's willingness to listen to consumers in this case study signals the powerful applications of value co-creation in achieving a more fully-functioning society. Indeed, Glossier's release of additional shades of Perfecting Skin Tint--and their oversight in not releasing shades appropriate for dark skin tones to begin with--reflects a larger cosmetics (and social) legacy that has often totally ignored the possibility of designing and selling shades of makeup for darker skintones and represents a much deeper cultural prejudice that favors pale, white skin (Hope, 2016). The equal availability of appropriate shades of makeup is a step towards a less singular, less prejudiced social construction of beauty.

In addition, if consumers are able to create their own narratives of product value, for example, by promoting alternative uses of packaging, sharing tips for using products, or requesting that products be made to accommodate diverse users, then consumers may also be able to demand that companies change manufacturing or labor processes, become more financially transparent, or begin using renewable energy and recycled packaging; consumers may

be able to demand that companies engage in practices that rank increasingly higher on the scale of corporate social good. If companies' PR and marketing models are designed around horizontal relationships and social media communities, these companies will continue to be beholden to consumers as they navigate controversies or if they attempt to make unethical decisions. Through co-creation of value, consumers have more agency in sculpting how companies operate and the power to demand adherence to a democratically-derived understanding of value, thereby yielding increased consumer power, the possibility of enlightened consumer choice, and a more fully-functioning society.

Images

Image 1

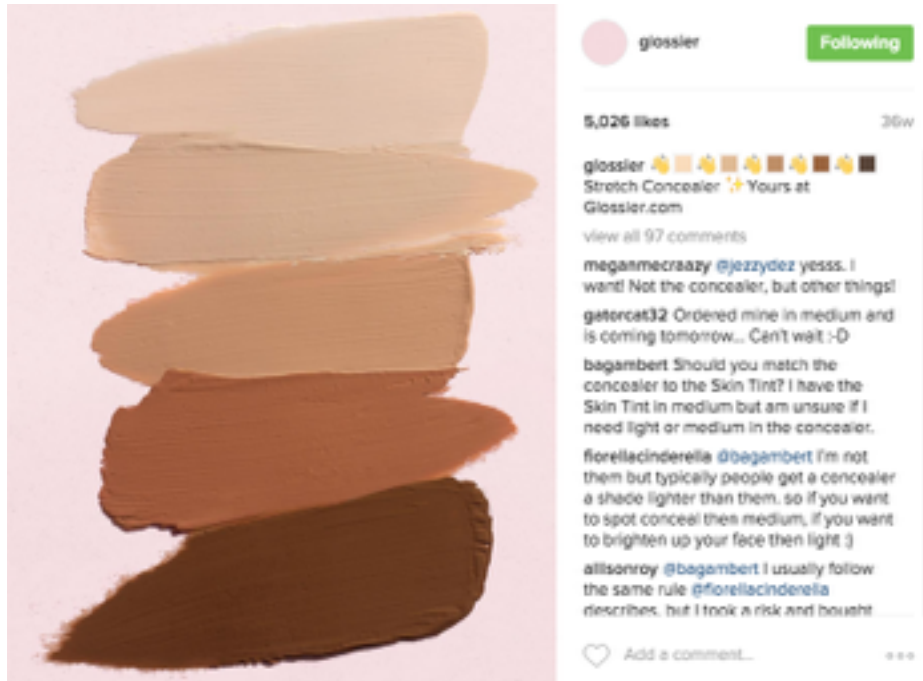
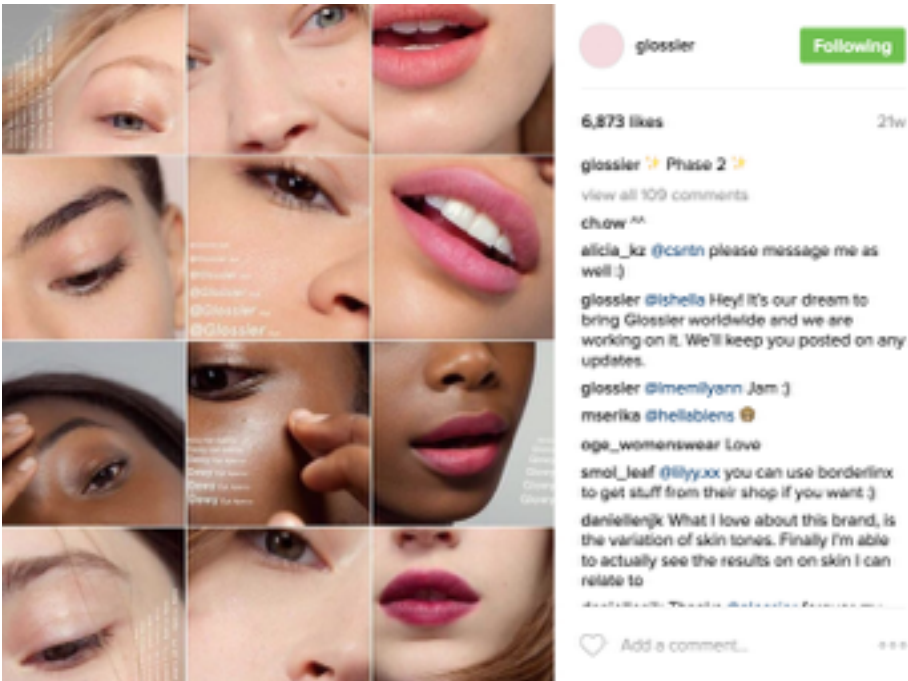


Image 2



Image 3



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