Theorising Modern Marketing in a Socially Digital Global Community

Edited by

Elaine L Ritch, Daria Morozova, Liru Jiang and Sohan Babu Khatri

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This book is dedicated to our students past, present and future with whom we have shared, and will continue to share, insights and knowledge. The book emerges from our teaching at Glasgow Caledonian University, which is the University for the Common Good, and we are based within the Glasgow School for Business and Society. Our focus within the teaching and learning experience is to encourage curiosity and critical thinking, leaning on verified and authentic sources to carve out topics, ideas and the relationships that interconnect with markets and society, and the myriad of actors involved. This book is a consequence of that process, because after all:

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose"

Zora Neale Hurston

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Author Biographies

Aarya Acharya is a 'Global MBA' candidate at Ace International Business School, Nepal; in affiliation with Glasgow Caledonian University. She brings a unique blend of academic and professional experience to her work, serving as the Administrative and Operations Head in the pharmaceutical industry. Her interests focus on the intersection of business management and leadership, with an emphasis on applying theoretical concepts to real-world challenges. Her academic and professional interests also extend to the study of modern culture, particularly how digital influences and societal norms construct contemporary beauty ideals and perpetuate the illusion of perfection. She is passionate about understanding the ways in which external forces shape individual perspectives and identity.

Mia Sika Atabu is a recent graduate of Glasgow Caledonian University, where she earned a First Class BA (Hons) in International Marketing. She values opportunities that push her out of her comfort zone and has a strong passion for travelling, which led her to complete an exchange semester in New York, where she interned during New York Fashion Week. Alongside this, she has gained industry experience working on organic social media content, which has strengthened her interest in inclusive, creative, and consumer-focused brand strategies. Mia is now continuing her education with a MSc in Digital Marketing Management, aiming to deepen her expertise and build towards a successful career in digital marketing with brands that value meaningful connections with their audiences.

Holly Creelman is a recent graduate of Glasgow Caledonian University, where she earned a First-Class Honours degree in International Fashion Branding. With four years of experience at Schuh, progressing from in-store roles to her current position as Brand Partnership

Assistant, Holly brings a deep understanding of retail and brand dynamics. She is passionate about marketing and committed to strengthening brand relationships through creative collaboration and strategic alignment.

Lauren Brash graduated from Glasgow Caledonian University with a First-Class BA (Hons) degree in International Fashion Branding. With retail experience at leading brands including Hugo Boss and GANT, Lauren has developed a strong understanding of consumer behaviour and brand identity. She is particularly interested in brand activism and the role of fashion marketing in driving positive change. Her focus includes ethical practices, conscious consumption, and greater inclusivity. Lauren aspires to create campaigns that connect brands with consumers while advancing social and environmental wellbeing in the fashion industry.

Molly Fiddes is a recent graduate from Glasgow Caledonian University, where she achieved a First-Class BA (Hons) degree in International Fashion Branding. Her dissertation, '*Circular Threads: Unravelling Gen Z's Attitudes Towards a Sustainable Fashion System*', explored whether sustainable purchasing behaviour stems from genuine concern or the influence of trend culture, reflecting her wider interest in how and why consumer trends emerge. She is particularly interested in how cultural revivals, such as the return of the mullet hairstyle, reveal the ways trends emerge, adapt, and circulate in contemporary society.

Dr Liru Jiang is a senior lecturer in marketing at IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems. She got the PhD degree from the University of Manchester in 2024. Liru has a keen interest in understanding the dynamics of fashion consumer behaviour and the impact of celebrity endorsements on marketing strategies. She has contributed to several conferences and publications in her field, showcasing her dedication to advancing marketing knowledge.

Laura Johnston is a first-class graduate from Glasgow Caledonian University, where she earned a BA (Hons) degree in International Fashion Branding. Currently working in retail, she brings a strong interest in the creative industries, particularly in areas such as magazine design and fashion show production. She's especially passionate in how fashion, media, and art come together, and hopes to build a career that lets her fully explore her creativity.

Sohan Babu Khatri is a seasoned management consultant, educator, and entrepreneurship mentor with over 18 years of experience across diverse sectors in Nepal. He is a faculty member at Ace Institute of Management and Ace International Business School, where he teaches MBA and EMBA courses including Strategic Management, Strategic Marketing, and Entrepreneurship & Innovation, as well as Global MBA modules such as New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society and Crisis and Operational Resilience. A published writer with more than 50 articles in leading newspapers and business magazines, he has also supervised over 200 graduate research projects. Passionate about bridging knowledge, practice, and creativity, he continues to contribute to Nepal's entrepreneurial and business ecosystem as a consultant, mentor, trainer, and coach. An artist, cook, and gardener at heart, he brings a creative edge to everything he does.

Hannah Knox holds a 2:1 BA (Hons) degree in International Business Management with Marketing, specialising in gender, diversity, and brand marketing. With a background in both retail and hospitality, she has developed strong customer service skills and a deep understanding of consumer needs. She currently works as a Communications and Digital Executive for a PR and marketing company in Ireland, where she applies her practical marketing management experience to support client campaigns and creative brand strategy across a wide variety of industries. Passionate about branding, inclusivity, and diversity within consumer markets, she is particularly interested

in how gender identity and portrayal influence marketing strategy and consumer engagement. She is eager to continue exploring these intersections through research and practical application in the marketing and communications fields.

Emily Katherine Lynskey is a recent graduate with a First-Class Honours degree in International Marketing from Glasgow Caledonian University, where she was also recognised as Best 4th Year International Marketing Student (2024/2025). The University's guiding ethos, 'For the Common Good', strongly resonated with Emily and shaped her academic journey. This was most evident in her dissertation which was influenced greatly by Social Marketing, a widely accepted sub-discipline of mainstream marketing. Social marketing aims to influence behaviour by promoting a set of values, norms and practices to benefit the individual and the society in which they are a part. Driven by a genuine passion for creating a positive impact through marketing, Emily is eager to pursue a career that reflects these values and contributes to meaningful change.

Shannon McClafferty holds a 2:1 BA (Hons) degree in International Fashion Branding. Her dissertation ''*Investigating the factors that influence the buying and selling of second-hand clothing on Vinted amongst Glasgow Students*'' explores students' motivational drivers behind second-hand clothing buying and selling participation on Vinted, and the intersection of digital communities, sustainability, and the sharing economy. Shannon brings unique insight into how digital communities influence marketing. After spending the summer in Ireland, Shannon is eager to pursue further studies and her interest in marketing and sustainable fashion.

Dr Daria Morozova is a Lecturer in Fashion and Marketing at Glasgow Caledonian University. Daria's PhD focused on wearable technology and its everyday use, exploring a potential for more sustainable consumer practices. Daria's research interests include techno

fashion and digital possessions; gender expression through clothing (particularly by queer consumers); and creative entrepreneurship. Recently, Daria has been experimenting with data collection by incorporating wardrobe studies into her research. Daria's works have been published in *International Journal of Consumer Studies, Journal of Consumer Culture, Cultural Studies and Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management.*

Joe Murray is a recent First-Class Honours graduate in BA (Hons) International Marketing from Glasgow Caledonian University. During his studies, Joe was a finalist for the Star Marketing Student Award, shortlisted for the Nil by Mouth student marketing campaign, and successfully progressed through the Saltire Scholar internship assessment centre. Professionally, Joe has gained experience through internships with The HR Practice, Atto, and McGowan Marketing, where he developed skills in social media management, content creation, website design, SEO, and copywriting. Alongside his studies, he has served as Convenor of the City of Glasgow College Marketing Society and is a member of Marketing Society Scotland. With a deep passion for marketing, Joe is eager to build a career where he can create campaigns that connect with audiences in meaningful and powerful ways.

Dr Elaine L Ritch is a Reader in Fashion, Marketing and Sustainability at Glasgow Caledonian University. She teaches '*New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society'* and has coedited three books to support this module: '*New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society: A Contemporary Essay Collection'* (2024), '*Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation'* (2023) and '*New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society'* (2021). Elaine has presented her research at international conferences and has published in international journals and contributed to numerous book chapters. Her research spans a

fashion – marketing – consumer behaviour - sustainability lexicon and she has made significant contributions to the sustainable fashion literature over the last decade. She has adopted novel methodologies to explore consumer perceptions, including photo elicitation with young children as they reflect on Eco-School activities and a World Café approach. Elaine is also a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and leads the research group 'Consumer Lifestyles and Experiences'. Her approach to research and teaching is very much driven by the 'Common Weal' (Scots for Common Good) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Safiyah Trache is a recent Glasgow Caledonian University graduate of BA (Hons) International Fashion Branding.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Welcome to our edited collection "Theorising Modern Marketing in a Socially Digital Global Community". This book follows on from previous books "New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society'" (Ritch and McColl, 2021), "Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation", (Ritch, Canning and McColl, 2023) and "New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society: A Contemporary Essay Collection" (Ritch, Brown, McColl and Shields, 2024).

This book builds on those earlier concepts and theories to explain how brands, marketing, and consumer markets are evolving in a technologically and socially dynamic world; one in which information is co-created, contested, deconstructed, and reconstructed. This book reflects emerging perspectives in society; shaped by social exchange, market development, and evolving ideals; that underpin our research and teaching. None of this would be possible without our enduring curiosity of people, societies and systems and our appetite to discuss the nuances of these intersections. As our book series demonstrates, the myriad of topics that can be examined through a marketing lens is extensive, and curiosity can open distinct avenues for investigation that meet individual interest. We are delighted to have explored these concepts with our students and especially pleased to bring to you in this book, those co-created ideas. We hope this book sparks reflection and curiosity, helping you advance your research agenda, "*poking and prying with an agenda*", and illuminating new ways to view the dynamic spaces and intersections of people, technologies, planet, and economic systems for the common good.

This book is useful to those who want to think about the numerous ways, in which marketing influences and impacts businesses and societies. We live in globalised era, supported (and even driven) by technology, where innovation and connectivity are increasing evolving and impacting on society. Trends move faster, influencing consumer culture and buying behaviours, and this book reflects on those dynamic influences and interactions. Our authors were invited to critically reflect on a topic of their choice, and to consider the ways in which this reflects on consumer culture, globalisation, technology, EDI (equality, diversity and inclusivity) principles, gendered implications, sustainability, or the zeitgeist of pseudo-modernity. We were delighted by the diversity of responses and felt compelled to share them more widely.

Chapter two maps how the 'illusion of perfection' in beauty marketing is built and circulated across time and media, then shows how these global currents meet Nepal—situating them within a society transitioning from least-developed to developing status. This context makes the case particularly salient for brand and marketing management, given the potentially lucrative opportunities for market leverage. Acharya organises the analysis around four lenses—consumer culture, globalisation/glocalisation, commodification of identity, and gender/body politics—drawing on Veblen's conspicuous consumption (1899); Baudrillard's consumer society and sign-value (1970); Appadurai's global cultural flows (1996) and Robertson's glocalisation (1992); alongside Goffman's impression management (1959), Butler's performativity (1990), and Foucault's technologies of the self (1988). Through this framework, the chapter traces a historical arc from early hygiene/moral appeals to today's filter-mediated influencer economy; it shows how Western, Bollywood, and K-beauty ideals intersect with indigenous traditions and emergent Nepali brands, reshaping hierarchies of tone, texture, and 'authenticity.' Concrete cases like AR-polished aesthetics, K-beauty routines, influencer self-branding, and

local labels localising global trends, illustrate how beauty shifts from product to identity performance, who gains visibility, and who is excluded. The discussion integrates branding and marketing perspectives (including the roles of brands and influencers) alongside the implications for individual wellbeing and cultural expectations. The chapter closes with strategic implications: authenticity, inclusivity, localisation, and ethics are not campaign add-ons but preconditions for durable brand trust and cultural relevance.

Chapter three follows on the theme of conspicuous consumption and social status, focusing specifically on quiet luxury with toned down logos, which are discreetly discerned to a knowing audience. Atabu also draws on the seminal work of Veblen (1899), demonstrating that theories around the leisure class continue to evolve despite being conceived over a century ago. Quiet luxury denotes a change is societal discourse, but as Atabu explains, this is also a reflection of 'dupes' being created of luxury products and growing concern for the climate crisis. Quiet luxury focuses on timeless quality, craftsmanship, and slow consumption, reducing the strain on planetary resources and ensuring products are in circulation for longer, rather than languishing in landfill. Demonstrating the drivers of the shift from ostentation to 'quiet luxury,' the chapter underscores the influence of various factors like social media, specially TikTok, on consumer perceptions. Chapter three also highlights shifting preferences for authenticity in branding and marketing management as a response to social media and influencer fatigue and preferences for slower pace, as experienced in the minimalist movement.

Chapter four further develops concerns for sustainability, with a focus on fashion and opportunities for expanding garments lifespan. Influenced by growing reports on the detrimental environmental consequences of accelerated fast fashion production and consumption, Brash adopts consumer culture theory and the theory of planned

behaviour to make recommendations of how fashion marketing management can be responsive. Brash indicates that fashion is symbolic of identity and values, and that second-hand fashion offers pathways for consumers to indicate their value for sustainability while also presenting a creative identity, which in turn will influence other consumers to follow this emergent trend. Expansion of the resale market has been supported by technology, including swapping and economic exchange platforms such as 'Vinted', an online marketplace and on social media. As the chapter demonstrates, while some fashion brands are adopting initiatives, the circular economy is being driven by consumer-to-consumer sites. For marketing management, however, as noted in the previous two chapters, authenticity is pivotal on gaining consumer trust in advancing resale markets.

In chapter five, Creelman asks if sex is still a relevant tool for marketing management in an era where Generation Z reject gendered stereotypes and ideals. Utilising social identify theory, the chapter examines fashion brand marketing that has promoted sexualised content and how this has shaped consumers aspirations and construction of the self. However, Creelman argues that progressive values and social discourse has moved beyond performative gendering. The chapter explores the commodification of sex in an era of social media, which is a site most used for marketing these days, but is also a space for consumer discourse. The conclusion highlights that controversy can be expected when utilising contested sexual imagery which can be considered as harmful.

In chapter six, authenticity in marketing management is explored through the lens of the 'mullet' hair style, as a cultural phenomenon, symbolising self-expression, individuality and diversity, spanning gender and sexuality. The chapter posits that popularity of the mullet emerged as a post-COVID cultural shift, utilising social identity theory as a means to explore subcultural groups and identity forma-

tion. Meaning is contested and exemplifies the 'trickle up' of fashion trends that often originate from street style before being adopted by high end fashion brands. This expands cultural nuances into the mainstream, as Fiddes argues, building on diversity and progressive inclusive values. However, while Fiddes warns of the potential for backlash within polarised societies, where being progressive can be considered as superficially 'woke', Fiddes also indicates that social media becomes a site for influence, especially for younger consumers who hold more progressive values. As the chapter demonstrates, this has relevance for exposure to new and old ideas, where commodification and marketing hold less control. As such, social media can be disruptive to marketing messages when consumers seek more autonomy and authenticity.

In chapter seven, Johnstone explores notions of toxic masculinity in fashion marketing, arguing that menswear can become a site for expression by defying entrenched conventions of hegemonic masculinity. The chapter looks back to how menswear shifted from being more flamboyant and colourful to become more restricted with less decorative styling and colour palettes. Through the lens of consumer culture theory and social identity theory, the chapter explores how actors have challenged this hegemonic masculinity discourse, with some positive examples from fashion and the media. However, as evident in the previous chapter, this is a contested site for masculinity that plays out on social media. Additionally, another emergent theme underpinning this book is that younger consumers are considered as more progressive and are challenging what they perceive as outdated stereotypes and gendered norms.

Chapter eight builds on gendered binaries, exploring how this informs the creation of self-identity and how gender is represented in marketing campaigns. The chapter includes empirical evidence to answer the research questions established in the introduction. Knox

explores the concepts of gender and biological sex, indicating the importance of conceptual clarity and cultural socialisation, building on social identity theory, as used in previous chapters. The seminal work around this theory was initially established by Tajfel and Turner (1987) and continues to remain relevant as polarised social discourse debates the meaning of gender and biological sex, along with the conflicting views on how this should inform behaviours and attitudes. Knox examines social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and Bem's Gender Schema Theory (1981), alongside identity theory (McCall and Simmons, 1978) alongside identity theory, to capture the personal construction of identity and its social performance within categories, and to consider how advertising has influenced these dynamics. The empirical evidence presented in the chapter demonstrates preferences for more fluid marketing, and preferences to avoid gender stereotypes, especially for women. In conjunction with the chapters above, younger consumers were also found to be more open to gender fluidity and there were preferences for authentic marketing and brand consistency.

Chapter nine explores another cultural phenomenon, the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, through a consumer culture lens, and specifically McCracken's model of meaning transfer and Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality framework. Lynskey explores how the Coachella festival co-creates socially constructed meaning around the space and how commodity acquisition supports one's sense of belonging and acts as a performative statement. The chapter explores how this expands from the physical space onto online social media platforms, as micro-presentations to a wider global audience. This aligns with the role of social media influencers publicising micro-narratives for economic gain that perpetrates the cultural phenomenon of Coachella. Lynskey debates the success of these tactics, questioning if the sanitised imagery is representative of hyperreality or authenticity. The chapter also examines how Coachella responds to

other concerns in social discourse: equality, diversity and inclusivity; and sustainability, noting that all collectively form perceptions of the brands meta-narrative.

Chapter ten adopts a novel perspective in examining the BookTok community that emerged on TikTok. McClafferty explores how this phenomenon has impacted on the literary industry, led to increased book sales by popularising titles and influenced film production. Just as Chapter six reports that TikTok revived interest in Kate Bush's 'Running Up That Hill' nearly four decades after its release, it has also introduced younger audiences to foundational works of literature. Linked to this, the chapter exemplifies the importance of community in influencing choice and consumption practice. However, authenticity comes into question again, as criticisms are levied at 'bookinfluencers' who promote literature for aesthetic or social capital, rather than literary skills, while the ability to make a purchase within a couple of clicks encourages impulsive consumption. Yet conversely, bookinfluencers have also ignited discourse around underrepresentation in literature, such as minority cultures and bisexuality. As McCafferty argues, bookinfluencers can reclaim culture or call out cultural appropriation.

Chapter eleven focuses on the brand Arc'teryx, arguing that the success of this brand lies within careful management and marketing around themes of globalisation, sustainability, technology and consumer culture. While not an obvious brand that would catch the attention of supermodels, Arc'teryx has been worn by the globally influential Hadid sisters in Paris, and other celebrities who have influenced Gorpcore as fashion trend. Murray examines how the brand has achieved global success through ensuring their marketing strategy is tailored to each bespoke market, providing a specific example of engaging with Chinese consumers. Consistent with the brands relationship with the outdoors, Arc'teryx addresses sustainability, and Murray connects this to Triple Bottom-Line (TBL) theory (Elking-

ton, 1999). Murray also warns that Arc'teryx could do more to ensure transparency in production in relation to those making the products. Another core feature of Arc'teryx branding is the role of technology for research and development into producing innovation and durable products. The chapter concludes with recommendations for marketing management that build on cultural symbolism, sustainability, transparency and continued innovation.

Chapter twelve explores the cultural phenomenon of American TV programme 'Sex in the City' that has penetrated social influence with notions of fashion, friendship, relationships and gendered expectations. Trache critically analyses the discourse and imagery of the show in relation to consumer culture theory. The chapter is rich with the nuances of what it meant to be a woman in New York during the 1990's and the role of fashion in curating self-identity and as cultural narrative that is performative for the audience. Trache argues that while the show promoted third wave feminism, it lacked equality, diversity and inclusivity in terms of race, social class and sexual orientations. In recognising some of the dated discourse and representation, the chapter makes recommendations for marketing management that reflects current progressive values.

Chapter 2

Flawless or Filtered? The Illusion of Perfection in Beauty Marketing

Aarya Acharya

Introduction

The contemporary beauty industry is built not merely on products, but on the powerful illusion of perfection it constructs; an ideal that is, by design, unattainable. In an era dominated by social media platforms, augmented reality filters, and algorithm-driven advertising, beauty marketing has evolved from selling cosmetics to crafting aspirational lifestyles and identities (Elias and Gill, 2018; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2018). This illusion exerts significant influence on both consumer behaviour and cultural norms, shaping ideas of self-worth and belonging in markets around the world. As explored through cultural, sociological, and marketing theory lenses, this phenomenon has implications that extend far beyond the beauty aisle.

From a marketing perspective, beauty is a uniquely potent category. It operates at the intersection of functional utility, emotional resonance, and cultural symbolism. For professionals, it offers fertile ground for brand building, loyalty creation, and trend leadership. Yet this same potency brings ethical responsibility, as campaigns that capitalise on insecurities or narrow ideals can shape societal values for decades. These stakes are amplified in a globalised digital era, where beauty standards travel instantly across borders, shaping aspirations and identities in diverse cultural contexts.

This chapter critically examines how beauty marketing constructs, sustains, and circulates the illusion of perfection, with particular attention to its socio-cultural consequences. It integrates both global and Nepali case examples, demonstrating how local contexts intersect with international trends. Nepal, nestled in the Himalayas between China and India, is a nation of rich cultural diversity, blending over 120 ethnic groups and languages. Currently in the midst of an economic transformation, Nepal is preparing to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status to that of a developing nation by 2026, having met United Nations criteria on human assets and vulnerability, and is implementing a Smooth Transition Strategy to navigate the opportunities and challenges of this shift. Its beauty market reflects both deep-rooted traditions and the accelerating influence of global consumer culture, making it a revealing microcosm for understanding broader shifts in beauty marketing.

The chapter draws on historical, sociocultural, and marketing theory lenses to provide a layered analysis. Historically, the chapter traces beauty marketing's journey from early 20th-century hygiene and morality campaigns to the influencer-driven, filter-saturated environment of today. Socioculturally, it engages with theories such as Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous consumption, Appadurai's (1996) global cultural flows, Foucault's (1988) notion of the self as a socially shaped project, and Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. From a marketing theory perspective, it evaluates how these forces influence consumer culture, commodification, and brand strategies in ways that perpetuate or challenge existing ideals.

The analysis is organised around four interlinked macro concepts: Consumer Culture, which positions beauty as a marker of identity and status; Globalization, which both broadens access to trends and narrows diversity in beauty ideals; Commodification of Identity, where individuals become brands in themselves through digital

self-presentation; and Gender and Body Politics, which locates beauty marketing within broader struggles over representation, inclusion, and power. By applying these concepts in tandem, the chapter illuminates how the illusion of perfection is manufactured and maintained across time, markets, and media.

In doing so, the discussion not only interrogates the industry's strategies but also considers implications for marketing professionals and policy-makers. For learners, it offers a framework for understanding the interplay between commerce, culture, and identity in one of the most dynamic sectors of global marketing. For practitioners, it underscores the urgent need to reconcile commercial objectives with authenticity, inclusivity, and social responsibility. In an environment where beauty is increasingly mediated through pixels, filters, and algorithms, the challenge and opportunity for marketers lies in shifting from selling aspiration to cultivating authenticity.

Historical Evolution of Beauty Marketing

The evolution of beauty marketing over the past century reveals a consistent core message: while media platforms, stylistic expressions, and promotional strategies have transformed, the underlying purpose of selling aspiration, has remained constant. Across different historical eras, marketing campaigns have not only mirrored prevailing cultural values but also actively shaped beauty ideals in ways that transcend geography. This interplay is particularly evident when global trends intersect with local contexts such as Nepal.

Early 20th Century: Hygiene, Morality, and Social Respectability

In its early form, beauty marketing was anchored in narratives of hygiene, virtue, and social standing. Campaigns by brands such as Pond's and Lux Soap in the West promoted cleanliness and fair skin as indicators of moral character and respectability (Peiss, 1998). These advertisements were text-heavy, often featuring idealised images of slim, white women whose appearance signified both beauty and propriety.

Similar notions entered Nepal, through the influence of Western and Indian products in urban centres like Kathmandu, the capital city. Products such as Fair & Lovely dominated the market for decades, embedding colourism into beauty discourse. Advertisements in newspapers and magazines positioned fair skin not simply as an aesthetic preference, but as a prerequisite for social mobility and acceptance.

Post–World War II to Mid-20th Century: The Glamour Era

By the 1950s, beauty marketing shifted towards glamour and allure, influenced by Hollywood's global reach. Campaigns celebrated the hourglass silhouette, bold red lips, and highly stylised femininity. This was a period where beauty ideals were aspirational yet tightly controlled, reinforcing gender norms through idealised cinematic icons.

While Hollywood's influence was indirect, the post-1990 media liberalisation following the Jana Andolan (People's Movement) movement opened Nepal to a surge of television, radio, and print media. Bollywood's (Hindi-language sector of the neighbouring Indian film industry) glamour, filtered through female stars such as Madhuri Dixit,

significantly shaped bridal makeup styles and salon services in Kathmandu, reinforcing the fusion of Indian and Western beauty templates.

1980s–1990s: The Supermodel and Lifestyle Branding Era

The late 20th century brought the rise of the 'supermodel' as the central marketing figure. Brands like L'Oréal and Estée Lauder leveraged celebrities such as Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell to personify both beauty and aspirational lifestyles (Mears, 2011). Advertising narratives began to shift from product utility to lifestyle association, presenting beauty as part of a broader identity package.

This era overlapped with Nepal's growing exposure to international consumer goods, facilitated by cross-border trade and increasing urban affluence. Imported brands such as Lakmé, Revlon, and Sonata gained popularity, while beauty parlours in Kathmandu expanded services to include skin lightening facials and Bollywood-inspired bridal makeovers. This marked the beginning of beauty marketing in Nepal as a cultural performance rather than a purely functional service.

21st Century: Digital Platforms and the Influencer Economy

The advent of digital media radically decentralised the sources of beauty influence. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allowed individuals, particularly influencers, to shape trends outside traditional brand hierarchies (Nabirasool et al., 2024). Marketing became less directive and more participatory, with consumers themselves becoming co-creators of brand narratives.

One defining feature of the digital era is the integration of augmented reality filters and algorithm-driven content curation, creating what can be termed 'flawless yet filtered' beauty. Here, the line between

authenticity and manipulation blurs, and consumer engagement is built on both aspiration and relatability.

The digital shift has been particularly influential among urban youths of Nepal. The popularity of Korean dramas and K-pop culture has driven demand for K-beauty products such as COSRX toners, Laneige sleeping masks, and Innisfree cleansers. These products are marketed not only for their functional benefits but also for their association with globalised aesthetics like 'glass skin' (Wang and Lee, 2021); a Korean beauty trend that describes a complexion that is very smooth, luminous, and clear that it appears poreless and reflects light like a pane of glass. It is achieved through a multi-step skincare routine focused on deep hydration, exfoliation, and layering of lightweight, moisturizing products. At the same time, Nepalese beauty influencers leverage social media to merge personal branding with product promotion, demonstrating how globalised ideals are localised in unique, culturally specific ways.

From early soap advertisements promoting moral virtue to algorithmically targeted Instagram reels, the evolution of beauty marketing reflects shifting socio-economic and technological landscapes while preserving a consistent aspirational core. Each era has redefined what is considered beautiful, how it is communicated, and who gets to define it. Yet across time and context, the marketing of beauty has always been less about the products themselves and more about selling the promise of transformation; whether in the form of social acceptance, glamour, lifestyle, or digital validation.

Consumer Culture: Beauty as Identity and Social Signal

Consumer culture refers to a social system in which the acquisition and display of goods transcend basic needs, becoming central to expressions of identity, aspiration, and belonging (Baudrillard,

1970; Slater, 1997). Within this framework, products are imbued with symbolic value: they communicate social position, cultural affiliation, and personal taste. Beauty marketing thrives in such a system, elevating items like lipstick, foundation, or skincare serums from functional commodities to powerful social signals.

One of the most influential theoretical lenses for understanding this phenomenon is Thorstein Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption (1899). Veblen argued that individuals often consume goods not primarily for their utility, but to display wealth, status, or refined taste. In beauty marketing, this manifests in the relentless pursuit of 'flawlessness' through high-status brands and exclusive product lines. A luxury lipstick from Chanel or a fragrance from Dior is sold not merely for its sensory qualities but for the prestige of ownership (Finkelstein, 2007). This symbolic capital is as central to the product's appeal as its physical attributes.

In the global marketplace, beauty brands leverage consumer culture by creating aspirational identities around their products. The global success of K-beauty exemplifies this trend. Korean skincare products such as Laneige sleeping masks or COSRX toners promise not only visible skin improvements but also affiliation with the cultural sophistication of South Korea's global entertainment influence. The meticulous, multi-step skincare routine marketed with these products signals self-care, cosmopolitanism, and alignment with global beauty discourse (Wang and Lee, 2021).

Similarly, heritage luxury brands sustain their status through controlled scarcity, heritage narratives, and high-profile endorsements. Limited-edition collections, for example, function as markers of exclusivity, further embedding beauty consumption in the social currency of rarity and distinction.

In Nepal, consumer culture operates within a dual framework: the aspirational pull of global brands and the cultural resonance of emerging local labels. Imported products from Indian fairness creams to international makeup brands are often chosen as much for the status they confer as for their perceived performance. Yet, a parallel movement is redefining beauty consumption through authenticity, cultural rootedness, and ethical positioning.

Scrubs Nepal, for instance, promotes handmade, powder-based skincare made from locally sourced herbs, appealing to consumers seeking minimalism and sustainability. Avani positions itself as a luxury Nepali skincare brand that rejects parabens, silicones, and artificial chemicals, framing itself within the global 'clean beauty' movement while maintaining a distinctly Nepali identity (Avani, 2023). Herveda Botanicals blends modern science with traditional Himalayan plant formulations, emphasising ethically sourced ingredients and eco-friendly packaging (Herveda Botanicals, 2021).

These brands have developed visually cohesive and emotionally resonant identities on platforms like Instagram, using minimalistic product photography, customer testimonials, and educational content. By blending aesthetic appeal with transparent storytelling, they cultivate not only trust but also a sense of community among followers. In doing so, they signal a shift from beauty as mere adornment toward beauty as a marker of personal values, environmental awareness, and cultural pride.

Inequality and Accessibility

While consumer culture empowers individuals to express identity through beauty, it also exacerbates inequalities. Premium cosmetics, whether imported luxury items or high-end local products, remain accessible primarily to affluent consumers. This dynamic is visible in

Nepal, where international products are priced beyond the reach of much of the population due to import duties, and locally produced 'luxury naturals' target upper-middle-class urban buyers.

Moreover, consumer culture often reinforces exclusionary standards. In both global and Nepali contexts, beauty marketing can subtly or overtly suggest that personal worth is tied to adherence to specific ideals, whether Eurocentric features, lighter skin tones, or certain body shapes. Even in campaigns promoting 'authenticity', aspirational cues are often calibrated to middle- and upper-class lifestyles, thereby narrowing the scope of inclusivity.

Consumer culture positions beauty products as more than functional goods; they are identity markers and social currencies. While global brands amplify this through exclusivity and lifestyle associations, emerging Nepali brands demonstrate that local cultural narratives can coexist with, and even challenge, globalised ideals. However, the aspirational nature of beauty consumption, whether imported or locally crafted carries the risk of reinforcing socio-economic divides and narrowing the definition of acceptable beauty. This duality sets the stage for examining the next macro concept: Globalization, and its role in shaping both the breadth and the uniformity of beauty ideals worldwide.

Globalization: The Global Circulation and Local Adaptation of Beauty Ideals

Globalization, in its broadest sense, refers to the increasing interconnectedness of nations, cultures, and economies through the flows of goods, people, information, and ideas (Robertson, 1995). In the realm of beauty marketing, this process is especially potent: it enables beauty ideals, trends, and products to travel rapidly across borders, influencing perceptions of attractiveness far beyond their places of

origin. As Arjun Appadurai's (1996) framework of global cultural flows suggests, these exchanges occur through multiple, intersecting 'scapes', including mediascapes and ideoscapes that shape both the content and the meaning of beauty. In this way, media images and cultural narratives migrate, carrying with them specific aesthetic codes, often derived from Eurocentric or regionally dominant standards, that then become embedded in local contexts.

Global Standards and Their Infiltration of Local Markets

One of the most visible outcomes of globalization in beauty is the spread of uniform ideals. Traits such as lighter skin tones, poreless complexions, symmetrical facial features, and slim physiques are recurrent in global advertising, often presented as universally desirable. This aesthetic has deep historical roots in Western fashion and media industries but has been reinforced by contemporary mass media, from Hollywood films to K-pop music videos (Elias and Gill, 2018).

Global Inclusivity vs. Homogenisation

While some global brands actively challenge these narrow standards, others perpetuate them in subtler ways. Fenty Beauty's launch in 2017 is widely cited as a milestone in promoting inclusivity, offering a foundation range that accommodated an unprecedented spectrum of skin tones. This strategy not only met an unmet consumer demand but also pressured competitors to broaden their offerings. Yet, even within such progressive campaigns, the dominant visual aesthetic often remains aligned with Westernised beauty norms, revealing how inclusivity can coexist with homogenisation.

From Media Liberalisation to Market Saturation

In Nepal, the effects of globalization on beauty ideals became particularly pronounced after the media liberalisation following the 1990 People's Movement. The expansion of television channels, FM radio stations, and imported print media brought exposure to Bollywood glamour, Hollywood celebrity culture, and later, K-pop aesthetics. This new media environment accelerated the adoption of globalised beauty practices, from Bollywood-inspired bridal looks to multi-step Korean skincare routines.

The entry of multinational brands such as Revlon, Lakmé, and Maybelline into South Asian markets further shaped consumer preferences in Nepal, creating aspirational benchmarks tied to global advertising imagery. The rise of e-commerce platforms has now made international brands, from Estée Lauder serums to Innisfree cleansers more accessible to urban consumers, even if price points remain a barrier for many.

Local Adaptations and Hybrid Narratives

Globalization does not merely overwrite local beauty cultures; it also stimulates hybrid forms that merge global trends with indigenous traditions. Emerging Nepali beauty brands have strategically harnessed this dynamic. Herveda Botanicals, for example, draws from Himalayan plant-based remedies while employing sleek, globally recognisable packaging and digital marketing techniques. Avani positions itself in the premium 'clean beauty' category, aligning with international discourses on ingredient transparency while rooting its identity in Nepali heritage (Avani, 2023). Scrubs Nepal similarly merges global minimalist aesthetics with traditional, herb-based formulations, appealing to consumers seeking both modernity and cultural authenticity.