

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Instagram has carried function not only as a personal platform to share photos or videos but also as a business platform to introduce and promote products or services. Instagram is considered an effective business venue to engage with consumers and has helped 80% of its users in the buying decision process (Mohsin, 2020). Many industries have utilized Instagram as their marketing tool, for instance, the beauty industry. The cosmetics industry that falls within the realm of the beauty industry has a particular attribute in its promotional images, employing close-up photographs on the facial appearance of the models wearing cosmetics products. Cosmetics companies for instance Fenty Beauty has utilized the platform to showcase promotional images embedded within them the philosophy of racial inclusion, manifested through their products and representative models.

Fenty Beauty as a cosmetics brand born from the collaboration between worldwide pop star Rihanna and French luxury group Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (Vivien, 2016; Friedman, 2019) has claimed to propose a solution to the issue of colorism prevailing in the cosmetics industry by extending the foundation shades available in the market (Frisby, 2019). Besides introducing the brand signature product which is the Pro Filt'R soft matte foundation in 40 shades later become 50 shades, Fenty Beauty is keen in hiring models whose skin complexion match with the foundation shades they produce. Models from diverse races – Caucasian, Negroid, Mongoloid, etc– are photographed in close personal up to

intimate distance, emphasizing facial features, neck, and shoulder all of which project the direction of objectifying gaze (Fredrickson et al, 1997).

The portrayal of women in cosmetics advertisings encodes the stereotypical concept of beauty (Mills, 2017), which often indicated by strong facial features, flawless –no wrinkles, no hyperpigmentation, no blemishes– and glowing skin. As these images of perfection promoted and prevailed in society, models in this industry are coerced into internalizing and adopting the widespread conception of beauty (read: so does women whose socio-cultural group identity is signaled by these models) by constantly monitoring their outward appearance especially facial appearance to align with the concept (Fredrickson et al, 1997). Although alignment allows these models to be present in the industry the source of their financial gain, they are associated with certain products promoted and are treated as objects traded for money (Wani, 2016).

As the audiences attracted solely on the idealized images of women in advertisings, women's bodily parts –facial appearance will be detached from the entire functionality of women as persons (Bartky, 1990, as cited in Fredrickson et al, 1997). Since cosmetics advertisement composed by textual sources (read: the visual text and the written text) that carry rhetorical purpose (Harrison, 2003), when the audiences excessively consume the portrayal of women in advertisings and even decide to purchase certain products promoted, it is where the company succeeded in deliberately detaining the audiences or consumers under the veil of mystification (Marx, 1977, as cited in Lutz, 2009). The imagery of inclusivity that is bought to render them (read: audiences or consumers) independence from the preceding

beauty discourse that focuses on exclusivity, the power to play a part in the discourse and society has blindfolded them from the repercussions of objectification, the vulnerability in which the company relies on to maximize their profit and perpetuate the capitalist system.

Racial congruency in Fenty Beauty advertisings that can be seen in their Instagram account has the power to assemble wider audiences and is deemed to bring commercial success to the company. Watching ethnic representation in advertisings has positive effects on the self-concept of the ethics (read: ethnic minority or ethnic majority consumers) member being represented, and the constant practice may lead to purchasing the products and emulating the concept of beauty portrayed (Forbes-Bell et al, 2019). The collaboration between Rihanna and LVMH has engendered public enthusiasm upon the inclusive product, which bounced back and compel the beauty industry to reproduce its discourse which indicated by the Fenty Effect, where other beauty companies comply with producing more inclusive product (Schallon, 2018). This, nevertheless, denotes the emulation of beauty conception initiated by racial congruency in cosmetics advertising account for the impeccable exercise of objectifying gaze among audiences (Fredrickson et al, 1997).

The beauty companies' decision to utilize certain image of women to be depicted in advertisement (read: women with strong facial features, flawless –no wrinkles, no hyperpigmentation, no blemishes– and glowing skin) and prevent different images of women to appear projects their functional intervention to strictly divide the binary division of what defines beauty and otherwise (Foucault, 1995).

The very reason for the production and distribution of cosmetics products to occur is to cover imperfection and enhance facial appearance, implicitly declare that certain physical state as normal and the other as abnormal which needs to be fixed and transformed. Taking the role to provide aid for correcting the abnormalities, any given information derived from beauty companies will be construed positively by audiences and will appear as a moral obligation for audiences to comply (Foucault, 1995, p. 210; Fredrickson et al, 1997).

Compliance with the ideal portrayed is considered essential as it is constantly linked to favorable treatment and access in social, economic, and political fields (Muller, 2017; Dakanalis et al, 2015, as cited in Greenfield, 2018). Physical attractiveness is fused with upward social mobility and economic prospect. On the other hand, physical unattractiveness is associated more with job discrimination and lower economic attainment (Fredrickson, 1997). Contrasting experiences women with different physical appearances have gone through later suggests that there is a coercive assignment applied to different categories of women, those who comply with, and opt-out from the idealized image of women (Foucault, 1995).

Regarding the process of physical correction, the companies' control over women's physical appearance is broken down into a flexible method of control that can be transferred to and adopted by the audience (Foucault, 1995). Since women have been pressured by observer's objectifying gaze, have been trained to enact objectifying gaze toward beauty advertisings, and have been familiar with unfair beneficial treatments physically attractive women have experienced, women take

the role to detach their physical appearance from the own selves, and adopt observer's perspective on assessing their physical appearance, this as Fredrickson called as self-objectification, infusing self-consciousness which leads to habitual monitoring of outward physical appearance (Fredrickson, 1997).

Fredrickson's self-objectification indicates a convergence with Foucault's concept of panopticon, disciplinary machine to generate docile bodies (read: women or consumers). While women claim their membership in the beauty discourse (Costanzo, 1992, as cited in Fredrickson, 1997) and anticipate the effects of their appearance (Fredrickson, 1997), they monitor their physical states in accordance with the disciplinary power (read: dominant conception of beauty established by beauty companies) (Foucault, 1995). Constant personal inspection denotes the state of consciousness that beauty companies have succeeded to induce among women, which makes them docile to the companies' dictation of the conception of beauty. Women are herded into a concept of prison as Foucault called the panopticon. Where double subjection (read: objectification and self-objectification) (Foucault, 1995) among women has rendered the beauty companies permanent visibility, thus confirm the pervasiveness of the companies' control in consumers' lives (Foucault, 1995).

Nevertheless, the permeation of constant body or appearance monitoring by the beauty industry and among women has been responsible for the ultimate downfall in psychological conditions among women (Fredrickson, 1997). Failure to meet standard depicted will stimulate the demand for an adaptive response from women to suit themselves with construction of femininity generated by the



company, a realization of moral obligation (Fredrickson, 1997). Nevertheless, the preoccupation toward outward appearance among women will contrive women become insensitive to inner bodily cues (Fredrickson, 1997), leads to the increased risk of depression, mental disorders, and eating disorder among women.

Detrimental effects from the objectification toward physical appearance are overlooked by women since the beauty industry has depicted the emulation of construction of femininity in this case the practice of makeup as power over the self and in relation to other people (Foucault, 1995). The imagery of women in advertisings which women are compelled to align is the reification of power relations, social relationships compulsory for women to buy (Marx, 1977, as cited in Lutz, 2009). Through this association between power and objectification, these women (read: the models in the promotional image, and their function to attract more women into participate in the practice) are mystified to the exploitative relationship among beauty companies and women (Marx, 1977, as cited in Lutz, 2009).

Fenty Beauty has employed an ensemble consisting of the social status of Rihanna and influencers, inclusive products, social media, diverse models, and AAVE (African American English Vernacular) to participant in performing a seamless mystification and domination over women of different races (Marx, 1977, as cited in Lutz). For marketing strategy, Fenty Beauty has been relying on Rihanna's status as a pop star, collaborating with popular beauty influencers, and utilizing social media for the promotional purpose (Gray, 2017; Schallon, 2018; Wall, 2019). The Barbadian singer does not only serve a function as the founder of

the brand, but also the face of the cosmetics brand, which has an embedded commercial attribute and be traded for promotion and publication. Rihanna plays a central role as the image of the brand in approaching wider audiences whose particular feature is represented, who wish to echo certain lifestyle, or who are supporters that purchase or approve the brand in order to fulfill psychological balance (Greenfield, 2018; Ismail, 2018, p.37; Forbes-Bell, 2019). Besides, the credibility that is rendered by influencers has made influencer marketing effective in attracting wider consumers to bring more revenue to the company (Ismail, 2018).

The distinctive feature of Fenty Beauty is its use of vernacular language or African American Vernacular English in naming their products, making Instagram captions, and communicating with their consumers (Fenty Beauty, n.d.). This way to engage with consumers has established a nuance of authenticity, in which they opt-out from the conventional way of communicating with consumers that often appear dehumanizing (Wall, 2019).

Cooperation between Rihanna as one of women of color and Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy a white-owned luxury group in creating cosmetics brand incorporating brand philosophy on inclusivity manifested in the product and advertising campaign and effective marketing strategies through social media, celebrity status, and beauty influencers has opened the door even wider for greater audiences to participate in the culture that objectifies women (Vivien, 2016; Friedman, 2019; Schallon, 2018; Fenty Beauty, n.d.; Ismail, 2018; Fredrickson, 1997). Vulnerability is infused to the larger crowd yet the company's grasp of the crowd become firmer, lending them the power to take over the wheel of the beauty

industry, dominating the market and without any restraint constructing the conception of femininity convenient for them (Fredrickson, 1997; Marx, 1977, as cited in Lutz, 2009; Foucault, 1995).

A study has been done by Cynthia M. Frisby entitled *Black and Beautiful: A Content Analysis and Study of Colorism and Strides toward Inclusivity in the Cosmetics Industry* (2019) demonstrates colorism had been an issue in cosmetics industry which manifested through the traditional six foundation shades, but progress has been made since the production of broader range of shades become omnipresent. Inclusive products and models then suggest a movement that may change the narrative of what constitutes beauty.

In accordance with inclusive model representation, Shakailla Forbes-Bell et al (2019) in their work *Testing the Effect of Consumer-Model Racial Congruency on Consumer Behavior* propose that consumers are willing to spend more money on product or service represented by models that belong to the same race. The racial representatives in advertisement serve the function to foster the economic development of beauty companies and engender positive self-concept within individuals of BEME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic).

Furthermore, the study from Amiira Ismail (2018) entitled *International Marketing Strategies in The Celebrity Cosmetics Industry: A Dual Case Study: Huda Beauty and Fenty Beauty* illustrates that while Fenty Beauty is a brand founded by pop singer Rihanna, Huda Beauty is a brand founded by make-up artist, beauty blogger and influencer named Huda Kattan and is launched in 2013 initially gaining recognition for its fake eye-lashes collection and since has expanded the



range of another beauty products. The study shows that social media is an effective tool in promoting products for global audiences, and the status of the founder of the respective cosmetics line as a celebrity or influencer takes on a huge role in determining the process of consumers' decision-making.

This study provides a social semiotic perspective and employing Foucauldian panopticon to reveal the efforts of the company through beauty advertisings on Instagram to implicitly normalize the constant objectification instilling the need to pursue idealized imagery of femininity portrayed in advertisings ideologically and economically rewarding to the company. Moreover, Descriptive analytical interpretative method will be employed to examine the visual and written texts.

Furthermore, the present study will examine 9 Fenty Beauty Instagram posts that are selected through stratified purposive sampling to provide representation of three dominant races to demonstrate the manifestation of inclusivity which is racial congruency in advertisings, using the lens of social semiotics by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Three kinds of meta-semiotics tasks that are representational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and compositional metafunction (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996, as cited in Harrison, 2003) will be employed to trace whether the visual text and the written text work together to make meaning for readers, enhance or detract one another, and serve their rhetorical purpose. In addition, Michel Foucault (1995) theory of panopticism, which is introduced in his work of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*, will also be employed to complement the analysis utilizing social semiotics theory, and to reveal the

potential that the company manipulates its consumers to ensure the company's continuity and the reproduction of capitalist system by normalizing personal habitual monitoring over the physical self to make the consumers or women become the docile bodies. Such ends can only be achieved by implementing disciplinary power through 1) functional intervention of the discipline 2) the swarming of disciplinary mechanism and 3) the state control of the mechanisms of discipline

### **1.2 Research Question**

How objectification is normalized through the promotional images in Fenty Beauty Instagram account?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

This present study aims to disclose how the textual resources, the images and the captions, used in Fenty Beauty Instagram posts, contribute to normalize objectification.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This present study will analyze nine Fenty Beauty Instagram posts, which are chosen based on stratified purposeful sampling. Furthermore, the study is conducted through qualitative method with descriptive-analytical interpretative approach employing Kress and Leeuwen's Social Semiotics and Foucault's Panopticism.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the study conducted may contribute to future research and be drawn upon as an additional reference in regard to the issue of normalization of objectification in cosmetics industry. Moreover, this study

proposes to provide lens in seeing how Instagram as an appearance-based social media is used by the cosmetics industry to exercise their power, perpetuate the societal idealized beauty and a particular construction of femininity, and eventually normalize the objectification, therefore to encourage Instagram users to be more critical on perceiving contents in the social media. Besides of being critical, the writer wish so that the readers be more attentive on perceiving promotional images as they carry an errand in subtlety to lead its customers to the consumer capitalism.

