

Beyond Binary Beauty: The Role of Non-Binary Influencers in Shaping Beauty Advertising

Online advertising has experienced significant growth in recent years, with social media influencers serving as a vital marketing tool (Hassan, 2021) for beauty brands seeking to promote their advertising campaigns and persuade their target audiences to purchase their products. While previous research has explored the influence of gender on online consumer attitudes towards particular brands or products (Lim & Yazdanifard, 2014; Szymkowiak & Bąk, 2018; Kartal, 2022), traditional gender categories have been challenged in recent years, and numerous brands have adopted a gender-neutral advertising approach to promote inclusivity, with a positive impact on digital consumers (Tomazic et al., 2022). In this context, as previously noted, influencer personas play a crucial role, as they represent both the user and the promoter of a brand or product. With the increasing presence of non-binary influencer personas on social media, many brands, particularly in the beauty industry, have turned to them to promote their products.

This paper focuses on beauty advertisements posted by three non-binary Instagram influencers, in order to investigate how emotions and narratives related to their non-binary self-discovery are employed to promote a brand or a product. The study employs a twofold method combining visual grammar by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and appraisal theory (Martin and White, 2005). The analysis will focus on the three subsystems of attitude - affect, judgement, and appreciation - to investigate the attribution of positive, negative, or ambiguous valence in both verbal and visual elements of the advertisements.

The research aims to investigate how non-binary influencers use their personal stories of self-discovery, suffering, and redemption to convey an advertising message to their audience. The findings may shed light on the complex relationship between gender identity, emotions, values, and advertising in the digital age. By exploring the intersection of non-binary identity, personal storytelling, and advertising, this research aims to provide insights into the ways in which non-binary influencers navigate the “tension” between self-expression and brand promotion.

Primary author: PAGLIALUNGA, Letizia (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Presenter: PAGLIALUNGA, Letizia (Università degli Studi di Milano)