



Social Media Influencers & Transgressive Celebrity Endorsement in Consumption Community Contexts

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to elucidate instances whereby celebrity endorsements by social media influencers (SMIs) embedded within online consumption communities are perceived as transgressive by their fellow community members. In doing so, this research provides insights into the new challenges and considerations that such community contexts present for celebrity endorsement.

Methodology: The research team conducted a longitudinal, netnographic study of the YouTube beauty community, involving an initial phase of netnographic immersion followed by an investigative netnography that examined community members' response to celebrity endorsements by twelve SMIs within the community.

Findings: This research identifies five recurring celebrity endorsement transgressions, each violating an established moral responsibility within the community. The paper explores how community members attribute responsibility for transgressive endorsements and identifies consequences for both the SMI and the endorsed brand.

Research limitations: This study focused on a single consumption community, developing a deep understanding of the distinct moral responsibilities that shape the reception of celebrity endorsements within this context.

Originality/value: Our analysis extends prior research on celebrity endorsement by SMIs by explaining when and why SMI endorsements are likely to be perceived as transgressive by the community, and providing new insights into community member responses to transgressive SMI endorsements. It also extends wider theories of celebrity endorsement by highlighting the influence of consumption community contexts upon endorsement reception and examining consumer responses to celebrity endorsements perceived as transgressive in and of themselves.

Practical implications: The paper presents managerial recommendations that will aid both SMIs and brands in implementing celebrity endorsements that avoid communal perceptions of transgression.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, celebrity transgressions, social media influencers, influencer marketing, consumption communities, online communities, netnography, YouTube

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Social media has given rise to new breeds of celebrity, and consequently to new forms of celebrity endorsement. Our study seeks to elucidate new challenges and considerations presented by an increasingly prominent form of celebrity endorser – social media influencers – by exploring instances in which their endorsements are perceived as transgressive by members of the online consumption communities in which they are embedded.

Companies are investing growing sums in online ‘influencers’ – celebrities with large online followings - in return for the endorsement of their brands and products on social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. Indeed, global expenditure on ‘influencer marketing’ is predicted to reach \$15 billion by 2022 (Schomer, 2019). Influencer marketing can involve endorsements by traditional celebrities whose fame transcends and predates their social media presence. However, influencer marketing also involves celebrity endorsements by ‘social media influencers’ (SMIs), defined as “ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles” (Abidin, 2015, p.1). Recognised as celebrities in their own right due to the scale of their fame and influence (many SMIs have hundreds of thousands, even millions, of online followers), SMIs are also referred to as ‘micro-celebrities’ (Khamis et al., 2017) or ‘social media celebrities’ (Hou, 2019). Unlike traditional celebrities, SMIs’ fame does not predate their social media presence, but rather stems from it. Research indicates that many consumers – younger generations in particular – are more influenced by SMIs than traditional celebrities, placing greater trust in their recommendations (O’Neil-Hart and Blumenstein 2016). Consequently,

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3 SMIs have attracted significant interest and investment from marketing practitioners,
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5 who have recognised their potential as celebrity endorsers (Elmhirst, 2019).
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9 Whilst a celebrity endorser has traditionally been defined as “anyone who
10 enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good
11 by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p.310), Bergkvist and
12 Zhou (2015, p.644) offer a broader definition: “a celebrity endorsement is an agreement
13 between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a
14 brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity.” SMIs regularly
15 engage in a variety of such celebrity endorsements, using their social media presence
16 to promote products/brands to their large online followings. Brands frequently pay
17 SMIs large sums to create advertorial social media posts promoting their product/brand
18 (Elmhirst, 2019), whilst many have signed SMIs as long-term brand ambassadors (e.g.
19 Mind, 2016; Hailes, 2018). Furthermore, marketers regularly ‘gift’ SMIs free products
20 and experiences to encourage them to feature their product/brand favourably in their
21 social media content (Elmhirst, 2019). Thus, SMIs have emerged as a prominent and
22 influential form of celebrity endorser.
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42 However, whilst recent research provides valuable insights into factors that
43 impact the effectiveness of SMI endorsements (Childers *et al.*, 2019; Lou and Yuan,
44 2019; Shan *et al.*, 2019), these studies do not equip us to understand the new risks and
45 challenges involved in using SMIs as celebrity endorsers. Specifically, these studies do
46 not acknowledge the new considerations raised by the consumption community
47 contexts within which many SMIs are situated. Many SMIs are embedded in online
48 consumption communities that played a significant role in their rise to fame (Scaraboto
49 and Fischer, 2013; Mardon *et al.*, 2018). When SMIs emerge within consumption
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3 communities and act as celebrity endorsers, their fellow community members become
4 the target audience for their endorsements. Whilst existing celebrity endorsement
5 literature has yet to consider how such consumption community contexts influence the
6 reception of SMI endorsements, prior research on online consumption communities
7 highlights a complex moral dimension that is little understood (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010;
8 Mardon *et al.*, 2018). This research indicates that celebrity endorsements by SMIs may
9 be perceived as transgressive within community contexts (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010;
10 Mardon *et al.*, 2018), however we lack both a systematic examination of the *types* of
11 endorsements that community members perceive as transgressive and an explanation
12 as to why this might be. Furthermore, we have a limited understanding of how
13 communities respond to these transgressions, and the implications of such transgressive
14 celebrity endorsements for both the endorsing SMI and the endorsed brand.
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32 This study addresses this research gap by answering the following research
33 questions: 1) When and why are SMIs' endorsements perceived as transgressive by
34 their fellow community members? 2) How do community members respond to
35 transgressive celebrity endorsements by SMIs? 3) What implications do transgressive
36 SMI endorsements have for both the endorsing SMI and the endorsed brand? We
37 answer these research questions by drawing from a longitudinal, netnographic study of
38 the YouTube beauty community, which identified five recurring celebrity endorsement
39 transgressions - 1) underhand endorsement, 2) over-endorsement, 3) over-emphasis, 4)
40 over-saturation, and 5) over-indulgence – each underpinned by an established moral
41 responsibility within the community.
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56 Our research contributes to literature on SMI endorsement in several ways.
57 First, whilst previous research on SMI endorsement has tended to focus on the factors
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3 that enhance an endorsement's desirable outcomes (e.g., Childers et al., 2019; Lou and
4 Yuan, 2019; Munnukka et al., 2019; Shan et al., 2019), we instead highlight its risks,
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6 revealing the community-level moral responsibilities that must be negotiated in order
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8 to avoid perceived endorsement transgressions. Furthermore, whilst previous research
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10 indicates that SMIs are held responsible for transgressive endorsements (Kozinets et
11
12 al., 2010; Mardon et al., 2018), we demonstrate that community members often engage
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14 in situational attribution (Um, 2013) to reduce the SMI's perceived responsibility, and
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16 show that the endorsing brand may also be considered culpable for transgressive SMI
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18 endorsements. Additionally, whilst prior work has largely focused on the implications
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20 of transgressive SMI endorsements for the endorsing SMI's reputation within the
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22 community (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Mardon *et al.*, 2018), our study highlights a range of
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24 negative consequences faced by both SMIs and the brands they endorse. In addition to
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26 extending research on SMI endorsement, our study also contributes to broader theories
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28 of celebrity endorsement by highlighting the influence of consumption community
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30 contexts upon endorsement reception, recognising circumstances under which celebrity
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32 endorsements may be perceived by consumers as transgressive in and of themselves,
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34 and documenting the distinct ways in which consumers attribute responsibility for such
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36 endorsement transgressions. This research has important implications for marketing
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38 practitioners, and we present a series of managerial recommendations that will aid SMIs
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40 and brands in avoiding communal perceptions of transgression, and thus the negative
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42 consequences of transgressive endorsements.
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52 **Celebrity Endorsement by SMIs**

54 A substantial body of research has explored the various factors that impact the
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56 effectiveness of celebrity endorsement, including celebrity characteristics (Ohanian,
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58 1990; Kamins, 1990) and associations (McCracken, 1989); celebrity-brand match-up
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3 (Kamins, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994); self-endorser match-up (Choi and Rifon,
4 2012) and consumer-celebrity attachment (Ilicic and Webster, 2014). Research has also
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6 considered the effects of various endorsement situations, including a single celebrity
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8 endorsing multiple brands (Tripp *et al.*, 1994), multiple endorsers of a single brand (Hsu
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10 and McDonald, 2002; Rice *et al.*, 2012), and the relative prominence of the celebrity
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12 vs. the brand in an endorsement (Ilicic and Webster, 2014). This body of work has
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14 investigated how these factors impact the achievement of desirable endorsement
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16 outcomes, such as improved brand awareness, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions
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18 (e.g. Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Liu and Brock, 2011; Rice *et al.*, 2012).
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25 This research has focused almost exclusively on traditional forms of celebrity
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27 endorser appearing within traditional endorsements (paid TV or print advertisements),
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29 despite calls for research to consider celebrity endorsement's broader scope (Keel and
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31 Nataraajan, 2012; Bergkvist and Zhou, 2015). Whilst recent studies have considered
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33 celebrity endorsement in a social media context and recognised SMIs as a new type of
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35 celebrity endorser, this work has followed traditional celebrity endorsement research in
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37 examining how factors such as endorser characteristics (Lou and Yuan, 2019) and
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39 degree of 'match up' between SMI and brand (Childers *et al.*, 2019) and SMI and
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41 consumer (Shan *et al.*, 2019) impact endorsement effectiveness. For instance, research
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43 has found that SMIs' trustworthiness, attractiveness, and perceived similarity (to their
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45 followers) positively influences their followers' trust in endorsements (Lou and Yuan,
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47 2019), whilst high congruence between the SMI's image and the consumer's self-image
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49 produces more favourable brand attitudes (Shan *et al.*, 2019). This emergent body of
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51 research has also considered the influence of new factors in the context of SMIs,
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53 acknowledging the positive impact of parasocial relationships (Horton and Wohl, 1956)
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55 on traditional measures of endorsement effectiveness, including perceived endorser
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3 credibility (Munnukka *et al.*, 2019), brand perceptions, and purchase intentions (Chung
4 and Cho, 2017).
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9 Whilst this work provides valuable insights into the factors that impact the
10 effectiveness of SMI endorsements, it does not recognise the distinct risks involved in
11 using SMIs as celebrity endorsers. Much of this work has been undertaken in
12 experimental settings, involving fictional endorsements for fictional brands and/or
13 endorsements by SMIs with which the majority of participants were unfamiliar (Chung
14 and Cho, 2017; Munnukka *et al.*, 2019), rather than exploring existing followers'
15 responses to SMI endorsements in situ. Consequently, existing research does not
16 consider the distinct challenges presented by the online consumption communities
17 within which many SMIs are embedded. Prior research on online communities indicates
18 that commercial activities by SMIs may be perceived as transgressive within
19 consumption community contexts (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Mardon *et al.*, 2018).
20 However, existing research on celebrity endorsement does not explain when or why a
21 celebrity endorsement may be perceived as transgressive by consumers, either within
22 consumption community contexts or more broadly.
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43 **Celebrity Endorsement & Celebrity/Brand Transgressions**

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45 Prior research has examined consumer responses to broader moral transgressions by
46 both celebrities and brands, and has found that where they are linked through celebrity
47 endorsement activities, transgressions by one party have important – and usually
48 negative – implications for the other, who may be deemed guilty by association.
49 Although recent work by Carrillat *et al.*, (2019) and Sääksjärvi *et al.* (2016) has
50 identified specific contexts whereby endorsement by a transgressive celebrity produces
51 positive outcomes for the endorsed brand, previous research has typically observed
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3 negative outcomes when using a celebrity endorser involved in a transgression. Indeed,
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5 studies have found that celebrity transgressions can result in less favourable evaluations
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7 of the endorser (Thwaites *et al.*, 2012), which may ‘transfer’ to or otherwise become
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9 ‘associated’ with the endorsed brand, leading to more negative brand evaluations
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11 (White *et al.*, 2009; Till and Shimp, 1998). Conversely, in the case of brand
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13 transgressions, consumers may hold the brand’s celebrity endorsers partially
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15 responsible through their association with the brand, resulting in a decline in their
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17 attitude toward the celebrity (Thomas and Fowler, 2016). Thus, the association of
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19 celebrity endorser and endorsed brand via celebrity endorsement may result in negative
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21 outcomes for both parties when either commits a moral transgression.
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28 Prior research indicates that the consequences of transgressions for the
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30 endorsing celebrity and endorsed brand are influenced by each party’s perceived level
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32 of responsibility. For instance, Louie *et al.*, (2001) found that the impact of celebrity
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34 transgressions on the financial performance of the brands they endorse is dependent on
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36 the celebrity endorser’s perceived level of blameworthiness. Previous studies have
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38 explored the role of consumers’ attribution style, observing that consumers who
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40 attribute a celebrity transgression to the celebrity’s personality, character or disposition
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42 (dispositional attribution), judge both the endorser and the endorsed brand more
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44 negatively than those who attribute blame to situations or circumstances external to the
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46 celebrity (situational attribution) (Um, 2013; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). Indeed,
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48 situational attributions of responsibility may elicit sympathy for, and improve the moral
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50 reputation of, the celebrity endorser (Um, 2013; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). Thus, the
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52 consequences of transgressions are shaped by consumers’ attributions of responsibility.
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3 Whilst this body of literature has shed light on how consumers respond to
4 transgressions by celebrity endorsers and endorsed brands, it focuses on transgressions
5 within celebrities' personal or professional lives and transgressive business practices
6 by brands; transgressions that are separate from the celebrity endorsement itself. In
7 these instances, either the celebrity or the brand is typically the guilty party, whilst the
8 other is merely guilty by association. This work does not explore instances in which
9 celebrity endorsement activities are perceived as transgressive in and of themselves. As
10 such, we have a limited understanding of when and why celebrity endorsements may
11 be viewed as transgressive, and how consumers make sense of and respond to
12 transgressive endorsements. How might consumers attribute responsibility for
13 transgressive celebrity endorsements, where both the celebrity and brand might
14 reasonably be considered culpable?
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32 Furthermore, previous research has studied traditional celebrity endorsers rather
33 than SMIs within community contexts, consequently focusing on transgressions of
34 wider societal norms, rather than the transgression of specific community norms, and
35 thus the more personal betrayal of consumers as fellow community members.
36 Additionally, this research overwhelmingly centres on consumers' responses to
37 celebrity transgressions reported in – and portrayed as transgressive by – the mass
38 media, rather than community members' judgement of, and responses to, transgressions
39 witnessed first-hand, without such mediation. Consequently, this body of work does
40 not equip us to understand when and why SMIs' fellow community members may judge
41 their celebrity endorsement activities to be transgressive, nor how they might respond
42 to such perceived transgressions. To do so, we must consider the wider consumption
43 community within which these endorsements are situated.
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SMI Endorsement in Online Consumption Communities

Consumption communities “are comprised of consumers who share a commitment to a product class, brand, activity, or consumption ideology” (Thomas *et al.*, 2013, p.1012).

Drawing from sociological literature, Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001, p.413) propose three “core community commonalities” that characterise all communities, regardless of their focus. First, community members experience consciousness of kind – a shared sense of belonging to, and identification with, the wider collective. Second, communities exhibit rituals and traditions that perpetuate the community’s shared history, reinforcing consciousness of kind. Third, community members experience moral responsibility towards both the community as a whole and to individual community members, which can prompt them to defend the community and take action when communal norms are transgressed. Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) observe that contemporary consumption communities are almost always, to some extent, imagined communities. In other words, whilst community members may experience consciousness of kind and moral responsibility towards specific community members that they have personally interacted with, they also form “a well-developed sense of vast, unmet fellow community members” towards which they may experience consciousness of kind and moral responsibility at a more abstract level (Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001, p.413) Indeed, as consumption communities become less geographically bounded, facilitated by the rise of digital media, this imagined dimension becomes more prominent (Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001).

Social media platforms, in particular, provide spaces for geographically dispersed consumers to congregate surrounding various consumption-related practices and passions (Kozinets, 1999). Within these online consumption communities, certain community members may develop celebrity status, exhibiting significant influence over

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3 the consumption behaviours of other community members (Mardon *et al.*, 2018; Cocker
4 and Cronin, 2017). In such instances, these community members may become SMIs;
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6 ordinary community members who have developed a large online following, and who
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8 commercialise their influence over their followers via celebrity endorsements (Abidin,
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10 2015). Not all SMIs are embedded within consumption communities in this way – it is
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12 possible for SMIs to develop an online audience without engaging actively with any
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14 single online consumption community. However, many SMIs do exhibit such
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16 community origins and enduring community ties (Mardon *et al.*, 2018; Gannon and
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18 Prothero, 2018). This distinguishes these SMIs from other celebrities, since this
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20 community context presents new risks and challenges for celebrity endorsement that
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22 are little understood.
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31 Prior research has found that SMIs engaging in celebrity endorsements may be
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33 accused of “selling out” by prioritising their own interests, and those of the marketer,
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35 above the interests of the community (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010), which can be interpreted
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37 as a lack of loyalty to fellow community members, provoking anger and contempt
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39 within the community (Mardon *et al.*, 2018). However, whilst this research recognises
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41 that SMI endorsement may be perceived as transgressive it does not explore in detail
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43 the *types* of endorsement that are perceived as transgressive. Furthermore, whilst SMI
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45 endorsement activities involve both the SMI and the endorsed brand, prior work has
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47 focused primarily on the implications for the SMI (e.g. Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Mardon
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49 *et al.*, 2018), and does not consider how consumers attribute responsibility for
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51 transgressive endorsements. Research is therefore needed to identify the types of SMI
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53 endorsement activities that are perceived as transgressive by the community, and
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55 explore the ways in which community members attribute responsibility for
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57 transgressive endorsements, to better understand their implications for both SMIs and
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3 the brands they endorse. To respond to this research gap, we engaged in a longitudinal
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5 netnographic study of the YouTube beauty community (hereafter YTBC).
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8 9 **Research Context – The YouTube Beauty Community**

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11 The YTBC is an online consumption community united by a shared interest in beauty
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13 consumption. The YouTube platform, like other social media sites, is designed to
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15 encourage interaction via both video uploads and corresponding video comments
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17 (Lindgren, 2012) and provides an online space where likeminded individuals can
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19 congregate to discuss shared consumption interests, unconstrained by geographic
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21 boundaries (Rotman and Preece, 2010). The platform is home to many consumption
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23 communities, relating to a wide variety of consumption interests such as literature
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25 (Sorensen and Mara, 2014) and gaming (Harwood and Garry, 2014). These
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27 consumption communities typically congregate across multiple YouTube channels but
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29 are characterised by a shared sense of community identity and purpose (Rotman and
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31 Preece, 2010). In the YTBC the YouTube channels of beauty ‘vloggers’ (video
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33 bloggers) are the community’s central gathering point, where community members
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35 interact. Beauty vloggers upload beauty-related videos, including tutorials and product
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37 reviews, to their YouTube channels, where they are watched by the rest of the
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39 community, who can interact with the vlogger and with other viewers via the videos’
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41 comments sections. In Table 1 we apply Thomas *et al.*’s (2013) 9 consumption
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43 community dimensions in order to further shed light on the structure and dynamics of
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45 the YTBC.
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53 The YTBC was selected as the research context for this study for several
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55 reasons. First, several studies have evidenced that both YouTube beauty vloggers and
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57 their viewers experience a sense of community (Gannon and Prothero, 2018; Mardon
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3 *et al.*, 2018). While this research does not explicitly apply Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001)
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5 framework, the reported findings provide evidence of their proposed community
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7 characteristics (see Table 1 for further details). Thus, whilst we ascertained in the
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9 immersive phase of our netnographic study that the community did indeed exhibit
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11 Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) core community characteristics, this prior evidence of
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13 community from previous research informed our selection of the YTBC as a relevant
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15 context for our study.
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21 Second, we selected this research context due to the large number of community
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23 members that had become SMIs and were acting as celebrity endorsers when the study
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25 commenced. Whilst not all beauty vloggers become SMIs, many vloggers within this
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27 community have hundreds of thousands, even millions, of YouTube subscribers. SMIs
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29 from this community have featured on the covers of leading women's magazines and
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31 appeared on primetime TV programmes. These SMIs have turned vlogging into a
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33 lucrative career, and a significant portion of their social media content includes
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35 celebrity endorsement, whether it be a paid advertorial, a brand ambassador role, or the
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37 inclusion of 'gifted' PR products or experiences. The eminence of SMIs within this
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39 community (see Gannon and Prothero, 2018; Mardon *et al.*, 2018), enabled us to study
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41 community members' response to celebrity endorsements by multiple SMIs within a
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43 single consumption community, identifying recurring endorsement transgressions that
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45 were not specific to a single SMI but indicative of wider community norms.
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51 Finally, existing research indicates that celebrity endorsements within this
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53 community may be perceived as transgressive (Mardon *et al.*, 2018), though it does not
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55 identify specific endorsement transgressions. This prior evidence of communal tensions
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3 surrounding SMI endorsements presented the YTBC as a fruitful context for our study
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5 of transgressive SMI endorsements.
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8 9 **Methodology**

10 We conducted a netnographic study of the YTBC in order to observe communal
11 responses to SMIs' celebrity endorsements "in situ", "in native conditions of
12 interaction" (Kozinets, 2015, p.5), and to contextualise these responses through an
13 immersive understanding of the community (Kozinets, 2020). Following the guidance
14 of Kozinets (2020), we conducted our netnography in two phases – an exploratory
15 'immersive' phase that provided a rich understanding of the community, followed by a
16 more focused 'investigative' phase of data collection and analysis.
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30 *Immersive Phase*

31 Netnographic immersion involves gathering rich, descriptive and highly contextualised
32 data by recording detailed observations, as well as the researcher's own reflections, in
33 an immersion journal (the netnographic equivalent of ethnographic fieldnotes)
34 (Kozinets, 2020). The research team conducted the immersive phase of the study from
35 December 2016-December 2019, producing a rich, contextualised understanding of the
36 YTBC through the observation and documentation of online vlogger-to-vlogger,
37 vlogger-to-viewer and viewer-to-viewer interactions. Data collection primarily focused
38 on interactions occurring on the YouTube platform via beauty vloggers' YouTube
39 videos and their corresponding video comments. We also observed interactions in other
40 online spaces (e.g. vloggers' websites/blogs, vloggers' profiles on other social media
41 platforms, and 'gossip' websites dedicated to the discussion of vloggers) and consulted
42 additional media sources that provided insights into the emergence and evolution of
43 beauty vloggers as SMIs (e.g. vloggers' autobiographies, vlogger interviews in
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3 mainstream media outlets and on podcasts). Whilst data collection began in 2016, we
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5 accessed data pre-dating the study's commencement, enabling us to document prior
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7 community interactions. Each researcher kept a separate immersion journal, and the
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9 research team held regular meetings throughout the 3-year immersion to compare
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11 observations.
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16 This netnographic immersion served several purposes. First, it enabled the
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18 research team to establish the extent to which this collective exhibited the core
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20 community characteristics identified by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001). Second, it enabled
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22 the research team to familiarise themselves with the community, providing insight into
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24 its structure, history, norms, terminology, rituals, and moral responsibilities. In
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26 particular, our longitudinal approach sensitised us to changes within the community,
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28 such as the introduction of new regulations, shifts in the quantity, type and execution
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30 of SMIs' endorsements, and changes in community responses to these endorsements.
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32 In doing so, it contextualised the investigative phase of our netnography. Finally, this
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34 netnographic immersion informed the design of the subsequent investigative phase of
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36 netnographic data collection. In particular, this immersion led us to refine the
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38 boundaries of the data site by sensitising us to localised sub-sections of the YTBC. It
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40 became apparent over the course of this immersive phase that community norms,
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42 endorsement practices and endorsement regulations varied, depending on the beauty
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44 vloggers' location. Beauty vloggers typically developed close ties to other vloggers
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46 within the same locale, whilst their audiences tended to be dominated by viewers from
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48 their country of residence (as evidenced by their video comments, and by beauty
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50 vloggers' own discussion of their audience statistics). We therefore focused on the UK
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52 sub-section of the community, enabling us to identify more consistent norms and
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54 responsibilities, and to explore the impact of UK-specific regulatory changes.
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Investigative Phase

We conducted an investigative phase of data collection in 2019. Whilst immersive netnographic data collection is exploratory and focuses on capturing the wider context of a research phenomenon, investigative netnographic data collection is more structured and selective, with researchers engaging in a filtering process to select a smaller subset of data of direct relevance to the study's research questions (Kozinets, 2020). In order to generate this investigative dataset, we narrowed our focus to 12 of the UK's leading beauty vloggers (see Table 2). The primary consideration when selecting these focal vloggers was their relevance to the study. First, the vloggers that we selected were considered part of the community, by both themselves and their community members. Secondly, we ensured that our focal beauty vloggers were SMIs, selecting those with both a high number of YouTube subscribers and a history of celebrity endorsement. Thirdly, we selected beauty vloggers with a long history of YouTube uploads, enabling us to document the evolution of community responses to SMI endorsements.

We considered all videos (and corresponding viewer comments) posted to YouTube by our focal beauty vloggers prior to the end of December 2019, enabling us to observe direct interactions between community members. From this large quantity of available data, we captured an investigative dataset of direct relevance to our research questions. Specifically, we captured video comments that expressed disapproval of SMI endorsements, and therefore provided insight into community responses to transgressive celebrity endorsements. We captured the number of 'likes' that each comment had received and noted when the comment was amongst the top 10 'most liked' comments on the video, providing insight into the level of community consensus surrounding the commenter's expressed opinion. We also captured direct replies to these comments – which included replies by both other viewers and the

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3 vlogger themselves - enabling us to study interactions between community members
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5 surrounding perceived transgressions. Throughout the investigative phase of
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7 netnographic data collection and analysis, all members of the research team remained
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9 immersed within the community, ensuring that our analysis was informed by an
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11 understanding of the wider research context.
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16 Our investigative dataset was collated into a single document and subjected to
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18 established techniques of hermeneutic analysis, involving repeated iteration between
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20 analysis and interpretation (Thompson *et al.*, 1994). Initially, we engaged in a process
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22 of inductive coding that sought to identify emergent categories, patterns and
23
24 relationships within our data. Specifically, we sought to identify recurring categories of
25
26 transgressive SMI endorsement, to document how community members respond to
27
28 each type of perceived transgression, and to capture common consequences for
29
30 community members' perceptions of, and behaviour towards, both the SMI and the
31
32 endorsed brand. Then, in line with our hermeneutic approach (Thompson *et al.*, 1994),
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34 we engaged in repeated iteration between analysis and interpretation, relating our
35
36 emerging interpretation of the data to prior theory, and drawing theoretical links that
37
38 informed subsequent analysis. For instance, during this process, we noticed that
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40 endorsement transgressions were underpinned by communal expectations as to how
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42 SMIs *should* and *should not* engage in celebrity endorsement within the community -
43
44 what Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) term 'moral responsibilities'. We therefore returned
45
46 to our data to identify the specific moral responsibilities underpinning each of our
47
48 identified endorsement transgressions. Similarly, our initial process of inductive coding
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50 revealed interesting variations in how community members attributed responsibility for
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52 these transgressions, prompting us to engage in further coding informed by prior work
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54 on attribution styles (Um, 2013). As a research team, we regularly debated and
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3 challenged our emergent interpretations, engaging in repeated iteration between
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5 analysis and interpretation until we arrived at an agreed-upon interpretation of our data.
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8 9 **Findings**

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11 To contextualise our findings, it is necessary to first explain the emergence and
12
13 evolution of SMI endorsements within the YTBC. At its inception, no community
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15 members profited from the community. As YouTube's popularity grew, it enabled
16
17 vloggers to monetize their videos via display advertising, creating a financial incentive
18
19 for community members to pursue an SMI role. However, since SMIs had no control
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21 over, and did not appear in, these display advertisements, they did not constitute
22
23 celebrity endorsement. As SMIs' fame and influence grew, however, celebrity
24
25 endorsement practices began to emerge, though they were initially largely unregulated
26
27 and often undisclosed. Initial celebrity endorsement involved brands sending SMIs
28
29 small PR samples and inviting them to local PR events, though these incentives were
30
31 not always disclosed to the viewer. Similarly, whilst SMIs sometimes mentioned
32
33 'working with' or 'collaborating with' brands, it was often unclear whether they had
34
35 been paid to do so. In 2015, however, the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)
36
37 introduced new regulations requiring SMIs to disclose paid advertorials, making their
38
39 existence more apparent to community members. Later UK regulatory changes in 2019
40
41 also demanded the disclosure of brand partnerships or ambassadorships, as well as the
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43 receipt of complementary or discounted products, services and experiences, which were
44
45 deemed to constitute a non-monetary incentive to produce positive coverage. These
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47 regulatory changes, and the consequent increase in the disclosure of SMI endorsements,
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49 revealed the prominence of celebrity endorsement within the community to its
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51 members.
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3 When SMIs' endorsement activities first became apparent to community
4 members, many expressed concerns that the receipt of incentives from brands
5 contradicted SMIs' moral responsibility to provide unbiased product recommendations
6 for the community. However, SMIs justified their engagement in celebrity endorsement
7 activities, explaining that they provided free video content for community members and
8 needed to monetize their YouTube channels in order to continue doing so. In particular,
9 SMIs highlighted the skill and effort involved in the creation of their video content,
10 further justifying their deservingness of financial compensation and other non-
11 monetary rewards. Consequently, the community became more open to endorsements
12 by SMIs, however new moral responsibilities emerged within the community that
13 bound SMIs to only produce celebrity endorsements that met certain moral standards.
14 Where these moral responsibilities were violated, SMIs' endorsements were perceived
15 as transgressive by members of the community, who expressed their disapproval in the
16 vlogger's video comments. Thus, rather than an outright rejection of all SMI
17 endorsements, community members began to identify and articulate specific
18 endorsement transgressions that violated established moral responsibilities within the
19 community.

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43 Within our investigative dataset, such endorsement transgressions began to
44 emerge in 2014, and increased significantly following the introduction of the new ASA
45 regulations in 2015. In total, 132 of our focal SMIs' endorsements were deemed
46 transgressive by community members; an average of 22 transgressive endorsements per
47 year during the 6-year period from 2014 to 2019. Some of the focal SMIs in our study
48 transgressed more frequently than others; for instance, five SMIs transgressed more
49 than 15 times during this 6-year period, whilst two did not transgress at all. However,
50 whilst the quantity of transgressive endorsements varied across our focal SMIs,
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3 transgressive endorsements were a frequent and widespread occurrence within our
4 dataset. Furthermore, we observed significant community consensus surrounding the
5 endorsement transgressions articulated by community members, indicated not only by
6
7 the presence of multiple viewer comments identifying the perceived transgressions, but
8 also in the high quantity of 'likes' that these comments received from other community
9 members. Indeed, video comments identifying endorsement transgressions received a
10 significantly higher number of 'likes' (an average of 29 likes per comment) than other
11 viewer comments (an average of 4 likes per comment). In particular, comments that
12 articulated perceived endorsement transgressions in greater detail typically received a
13 higher number of likes from community members (the most 'liked' comment within
14 our dataset received 881 likes), and many were amongst the videos' most 'liked'
15 comments. In 'liking' these comments, community members exhibited agreement with
16 the endorsement transgressions articulated by the commenter, indicating a level of
17 community consensus.

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36 Our analysis of viewer comments on these transgressive endorsements revealed
37 five distinct and recurring forms of endorsement transgression: 1) underhand
38 endorsement (49 instances), 2) over-endorsement (57 instances), 3) over-emphasis (29
39 instances), 4) over-saturation (25 instances), and 5) over-indulgence (24 instances).
40 Some transgressive SMI endorsements were deemed guilty of a single endorsement
41 transgression, whilst other endorsements were perceived by community members to
42 have simultaneously committed multiple forms of endorsement transgression. We
43 explore each form of endorsement transgression in turn, identifying the violated moral
44 responsibilities that underpin it, explaining how community members made sense of
45 and attributed responsibility for this transgression type, and identifying the
46 consequences of such transgressions for both the SMI and the endorsed brand.
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Underhand Endorsement

SMIs are considered by the community to have a moral responsibility to provide honest and unbiased reviews of products and services. Whilst community members initially expected SMIs to refrain from receiving incentives (financial or otherwise) from brands, which were perceived to bias their recommendations, they came to accept SMIs' need to monetize their content via endorsements. However, a new moral responsibility emerged - the community expected any celebrity endorsement activities by SMIs to be clearly disclosed to viewers. Failure to uphold this moral responsibility was viewed as transgressive, and we label this transgression 'underhand endorsement', referring to the perception that such endorsements were conducted in a secretive or dishonest manner.

Community members highlighted the occurrence of underhand endorsement to the SMI by commenting on transgressive videos, clarifying their expectations surrounding disclosure. In doing so, they often justified these expectations by making reference to UK regulations surrounding disclosure, and drawing comparisons with other SMIs' disclosure strategies:

Jamie, we all love you, but please understand that it's the law that you have to verbally, clearly state that content is sponsored. <3 (3 likes)

(JG, 2017)

I love your channel but I do find it a bit odd nothing is ever marked as gifted (like I've seen with others) when some of it clearly has been sent to you. It's just sort of putting me off because I don't feel you're being upfront and I think we deserve that. (36 likes, 1st most liked comment)

(AL, 2019)

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3 *I love you and your videos! I know the description says ad, but it would be*
4 *nice for you to say out loud “hey this is an ad” or “I was gifted these” etc.*
5 *Just being open...kinda like Louise Pentland. (2 likes)*
6
7

8 (AE, 2019)
9

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11 In each of the comments, we see that the SMI has not met the community
12 member’s expectations surrounding disclosure, resulting in a perceived endorsement
13 transgression. It’s important to note that whilst viewers often used UK regulations to
14 justify their expectations surrounding disclosure, their expectations often went beyond
15 current legal requirements. For instance, many community members expected SMIs to
16 verbally disclose endorsements in their video content, something that is not required by
17 law. Thus the community established its own standards for endorsement disclosure,
18 which SMIs were expected to meet.
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29 We found that the community held the SMI, rather than the brand, responsible
30 for underhand endorsement. However, as the above comments illustrate, rather than
31 immediately condemning the SMI, community members initially clarified their
32 expectations surrounding endorsement disclosure in a polite and friendly manner, often
33 simultaneously expressing support for the SMI and their content. Indeed, we often
34 observed evidence of situational attribution (Um, 2013), with community members
35 implying that underhand endorsements were not a deliberate or intentional
36 transgression but the result of a mistake or a misunderstanding of the community’s
37 expectations:
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50 *You forgot to type AD in your title which is a must to do. (20 likes)*
51

52 (AL, 2018)
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54 *Fleur, just so you know the video description says it's not sponsored xxx Love*
55 *you lots. (3 likes)*
56
57

58
59 (FDF, 2016)
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3 Some SMIs responded to these observations of underhand endorsement by
4 clarifying the current UK regulations in an attempt to alter community members'
5 expectations surrounding disclosure and avoid future perceptions of underhand
6 endorsement. In other instances, SMIs responded by altering their endorsement
7 practices to meet the community's existing expectations:
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15 Viewer: *Girl you need to make it clearer that this is an AD in the title or visibly*
16 *on the thumbnail. (32 likes, 6th most liked comment)*
17

18 JG (replying): *I'm sure the laws are that it just has to be in the description bar*
19 *but I've changed it to be totally transparent. Sorry for the confusion! (29*
20 *likes)*
21
22

23 (JG, 2017)
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26 Here the SMI implies that the community member has misinterpreted the current
27 regulations, but nonetheless adapts her disclosure to meet the commenter's
28 expectations. We found that both responses – altering disclosure to meet community
29 expectations and attempting to negotiate these expectations – were positively received
30 by members of the community, interpreted as an indication that their concerns were
31 being acknowledged and considered by the SMI. However, we observed negative
32 communal responses when SMIs did not respond to community members' observations
33 of underhand endorsement and failed to alter their disclosure practices. Such repeat
34 transgressions led community members to engage in dispositional attribution (Um,
35 2013), interpreting SMIs' repeated engagement in this transgression as intentional and
36 thus representative of the SMI's character. In these instances, community members
37 accused SMIs of being greedy and dishonest, deliberately misleading their fellow
38 community members, and showing a lack of respect or consideration for others within
39 the community:
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58 Viewer: *No mention of it being sponsored anywhere even in the description*
59 *box, are you kidding me?! (55 likes, 8th most liked comment)*
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3 Viewer (replying): *The rules are in the UK that it used to have to be in the title*
4 *(not sure if thats changed) AND the description box. It's not in either; it's*
5 *incredibly insincere because it's like fooling people into watching the video*
6 *for money because generally AD videos get fewer views. (3 likes)*
7
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9

10 (SM, 2016)

11
12 *They paid for the hotel, gave her a Dior bag, a Dior dress, in return for her*
13 *sticking a load of sponsored links slyly listed with other brands, It should be*
14 *listed as an ad and the links should be disclaimed as sponsored what a greedy*
15 *sly woman she is. Shows what she really thinks of her subscribers. Shocking.*
16
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19 *(11 likes)*
20

21 (FDF, 2017)

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24 Thus, where repeated perceptions of underhand endorsement led community members
25 to engage in dispositional attribution, community members expressed negative
26 sentiment towards the SMI. Whilst underhand endorsement was not blamed upon the
27 endorsing brand, this endorsement transgression negatively impacted endorsement
28 reception since viewers questioned the credibility of the endorsements posted by SMIs
29 deemed guilty of repeated and deliberate underhand endorsement.
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39 *Over-Endorsement*

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41 Whilst community members came to appreciate that SMIs needed to earn a living from
42 endorsements, they felt that SMIs had a moral responsibility to ensure that the majority
43 of their videos remained organic (i.e. not featuring endorsements), thus providing the
44 community with continued access to content unbiased by endorsements. SMIs were
45 accused of the transgression of 'over-endorsement' when they violated this moral
46 responsibility:
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55 *Does anyone else wish we could see fewer Ad videos? I know Fleur has to make*
56 *a living but I feel like all her videos are Ads these days :((20 likes, 2nd most liked*
57 *comment)*
58
59
60

(FDF, 2019)

My trust level with your reviews is declining because lately all your videos are Ads. (151 likes, 2nd most liked comment)

(EL, 2019)

Here, community members indicate that the proportion of the SMIs' video content that contains endorsements exceeds communal expectations. Indeed, through their immersion within the community, its members accumulated detailed knowledge of SMIs, enabling them to readily identify the ratio of endorsed vs. organic content on their YouTube channel, which they often reported in the video comments to support their accusations of over-endorsement. For instance, community members questioned SMI Estée Lalonde's credibility after observing an increase in endorsements on her YouTube channel:

80% of your videos are paid advertorials...wtf??(38 likes, 9th most liked comment)

(EL, 2015)

When 4 out of your last 10 vids contain a paid advertorial I can't help but feel used. I understand that bills have to be paid and that this is your JOB at the end of the day but I am starting to get mixed feels – I subscribed for your honesty [...] now I am afraid that you will sneak up on me trying to sell me something at any moment. (63 likes, 3rd most liked comment)

(EL, 2016)

We found that the SMI, rather than the endorsed brand, was held responsible for over-endorsement. As with underhand endorsement, viewers would initially clarify their expectations (i.e., appropriate ratios of organic vs. endorsed content). However, repeated over-endorsement led community members to engage in dispositional attribution, branding the SMI 'greedy', 'dishonest', and 'inauthentic', reporting a lack

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3 of trust in the endorser's recommendations. In such instances, community members
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5 often reported avoiding SMIs' endorsements and watching only their organic content,
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7 whilst some unsubscribed from the SMI's YouTube channel altogether:
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10 *I am done with all your ad videos. I know it's part of how youtubers make*
11 *money, but I am no longer willing to spend my time watching commercials.*
12 *Someone please correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't your last new in beauty*
13 *vid an ad too? I won't be watching this video. I only clicked in order to leave*
14 *this message. I'll be back for non-sponsored content. (25 likes, 10th most liked*
15 *comment)*
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20 (FDF, 2017)
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24 *So truly disappointing...Ads ads ads. I am your loooongest fan and have always*
25 *thought you are one of the most unique, funniest and down to earth youtubers*
26 *with a genuinely original style. But recently I feel like you have lost so much of*
27 *that originality to brands taking over and you selling your viewers something*
28 *video after video. What a shame, I will have to unsubscribe. (264 likes, 3rd most*
29 *liked comment)*
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34 (EL, 2019)
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37 These findings support prior research on multiple brand endorsements, which
38 suggests that as the number of endorsements by a celebrity increases, consumers'
39 perceptions of endorser credibility become less favourable (Tripp *et al.*, 1994). We
40 extend this work by recognising that community members may strive to uphold
41 established moral responsibilities by actively highlighting over-endorsement to other
42 community members and to the SMI. Consequently, over-endorsement not only
43 negatively impacts individual consumers' perceptions of SMIs' credibility, but
44 community members' attempts to raise awareness of over-endorsement amongst less
45 observant community members creates more widespread concerns surrounding
46 endorser credibility.
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3 These concerns surrounding endorser credibility reduced the credibility of the
4 SMI's endorsements, prompting community members to question whether SMIs
5 perceived as guilty of over-endorsement actually used or liked the endorsed products:
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10 *I love watching Patricia's videos – I just wish there wasn't an ad in every*
11 *single one of them! Makes me wonder if she actually uses the products she*
12 *talks about. (109 likes, 3rd most liked comment)*
13
14

15 (PB, 2017)

16
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18 *All other YouTubers I watch put ads in their videos too which is totally fine,*
19 *but every video seems a bit excessive. It also makes us question which*
20 *products you genuinely like. (532 likes, 1st most liked comment)*
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24 (EL, 2019)

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26 Thus, whilst prior research on celebrity endorsement indicates that whether the
27 celebrity actually uses the endorsed product is a relatively unimportant consideration
28 for marketers (Erdogan *et al.*, 2001), our findings suggest that this is an important
29 consideration in the SMI context. Here we see that although endorsement by SMIs
30 perceived as guilty of over-endorsement did not result in retaliation against the brand,
31 which was not considered culpable for this endorsement transgression, it lowered the
32 perceived credibility of the brand's endorsement.
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43 *Over-Emphasis*

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45 SMIs have a moral responsibility to provide valuable (informative and/or entertaining)
46 content for the community. Whilst community members have come to accept that some
47 of SMIs' content will contain endorsements, community members deem the SMI to
48 have a moral responsibility to ensure that these endorsements do not detract from the
49 audience's enjoyment of their content. Where this moral responsibility is violated, we
50 label this endorsement transgression 'over-emphasis'. Community members'
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3 comments frequently drew attention to instances where an endorsed product/brand was
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5 visibly and/or verbally over-emphasized in SMIs' content:
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8 *I expect a fair amount of branding in these videos, but this was EXCESSIVE*
9 *on Clinique's part. Whoa. They hashtagged every surface and it seemed they*
10 *expected their products to make an appearance in every passage of speech!*
11 *(61 likes, 2nd most liked comment)*
12
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15 (AL, 2018)
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17 In addition to overly scripted or staged endorsements, the community also responded
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19 negatively when the endorsed product/brand was the sole focus of a video.
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23 *There is absolutely nothing wrong with paid videos. The problem is that*
24 *you present only one brand in the video. I think you should include only*
25 *the products that are really amazing along with products from your usual*
26 *skincare routine. It looks more genuine in this way. (7 likes)*
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30 (EL, 2018)
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32 Thus, community members were quick to highlight transgressive over-endorsement
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34 that reduced their enjoyment of SMIs' video content, and clarified their expectations
35
36 surrounding the integration of endorsements.
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39 Whilst SMIs typically played an integral role in the integration of endorsements
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41 into their video content, we observed that community members often engaged in
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43 situational attribution, reducing the SMI's perceived responsibility by shifting blame
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45 instead onto the endorsed brand. In particular, the brand was often portrayed by
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47 community members as having demanded a high level of creative control over the
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49 video:
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52
53 *Loved the vlog. Hated the OTT mentions of the product. At first I was*
54 *interested in it but after the third mention I was thinking "how bad can this*
55 *product be to need to pay for X number of mentions". Once or twice would*
56 *be enough. But I assume the company asked to be named more than*
57 *necessary. (5 likes)*
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(LP, 2016)

Everyone @Waitrose: stop trying to make "Waitrose and partner" happen, it's not going to happen! Bless you Anna, I can only imagine it was an obligation to say it every time but good lord that was a lot (46 likes, 6th most liked comment)

(AE, 2019)

Here we see the above commenters engaging in situational attribution – the SMI is assumed to be over-emphasizing the product because they have been instructed to do so by the brand. In line with prior research (Um, 2013; Zhou and Whitla, 2013), we see how such situational attributions of responsibility can lead community members to sympathize with SMIs for having to meet the brand's demands. Whilst this transgression did not typically result in retaliation towards the brand, brands were instead portrayed as community outsiders who had transgressed due to a lack of understanding of community norms and expectations.

Over-Saturation

As discussed above, the community came to accept the need for SMIs to engage in celebrity endorsements to financially sustain their role as an SMI, but held the SMI morally responsible for ensuring that these endorsements did not detract from the community's enjoyment of SMIs' content. Whilst some endorsements violated this moral responsibility via the transgression of over-emphasis, others did so via the transgression of over-saturation. Over-saturation occurs when brands partner with multiple SMIs within the same community, and commission them to post similar endorsements for the brand in quick succession, eroding community members' enjoyment of SMIs' video content, which was perceived as repetitive and boring:

Second YouTube ad I've seen in 2 days for this toothbrush, what a bore. (3 likes)

(SM, 2016)

*Hello Fresh seems to sponsor a good 80% of the people I watch. It's overkill.
(21 likes)*

(AE, 2018)

As with over-emphasis, community members tended to engage in situational attribution, reducing the SMI's responsibility for over-saturation by shifting blame onto the brand. Indeed, community members often portrayed SMIs as victims of the brand's wider endorsement strategy:

This is the third video I've seen with the same AD in the space of a few days...I know it's not their [the SMI's] fault but it's just so boring for us as the audience. I'm not criticising Sam at all, I love her vlogs! (16 likes)

(SM, 2018)

Several SMIs reinforced this situational attribution of responsibility, confirming their own lack of control over the brand's multiple endorser strategy, as illustrated by the below exchange in the comments section of an endorsement for brand 'Hello Fresh' by SMI Lily Pebbles:

Viewer: *I always love your videos and vlogs! I am so bored of so many vlogs (not just yours!) being so centred around hello fresh though - it's getting really boring and repetitive - not a dig at you at all I love your videos and won't stop me watching, just to let you know - I just skip through them now. Loved the rest of the vlog (150 likes, 1st most liked comment)*

Viewer (replying): *Yeah, it's not her fault and she needs to make an income, but Hello Fresh is sponsoring seemingly everyone. They're overdoing it with the sponsorships... feel like I hear about Hello Fresh constantly, which really turns me off the company. (14 likes)*

LP (replying): *I get that it's frustrating if a lot of people you watch do the same ads (sometimes the audience don't overlap but in your case they obviously do), but unfortunately we don't have control over how many creators a brand works with and who they choose to work with. (23 likes)*

(LP, 2019)

Here we see community members agreeing that the SMI is not to blame for over-saturation, instead treating the brand as the culprit, something that the SMI reinforces in her response by denying responsibility for this transgression. This exchange provides insights into the implications of over-saturation for the brand, with community members claiming that such over-saturation “turns [them] off the company”. Indeed, many community members reported that such over-saturation rendered them unlikely to purchase from the transgressing brand. These findings contrast with prior research, which suggests that the use of multiple endorsers can reduce audience boredom (Hsu and McDonald, 2002) and produce more favourable brand attitudes (Rice *et al.*, 2012). Instead, we found that the use of multiple SMI endorsers within a single consumption community resulted in perceptions of transgressive over-saturation for which brands were held responsible, resulting in negative sentiment towards the brand, negative brand perceptions and even claims of brand avoidance.

Though SMIs were not considered responsible for over-saturation, they were often negatively impacted by this transgression since creating similar content to other SMIs reduced community members’ enjoyment of their video content:

Love this! But my only concern is that it's the 3rd "Autumn Haul" via Zalando as a paid advertorial. I just feel like these videos are so disingenuous, as a way for YouTubers to market the brand, which for the brand is great but for the YouTube person in front of camera makes you look unoriginal. (42 likes, 10th most liked comment)

(EL, 2015)

Thus, whilst community members do not blame SMIs for over-saturation, this transgression can inadvertently lead viewers to perceive the SMI’s content as unoriginal, repetitive and boring.

Over-Indulgence

Whilst community members accepted the need for SMIs to engage in endorsements, they deemed SMIs to have a moral responsibility to only endorse products/services that they genuinely use and like. Furthermore, as with all community members, SMIs were perceived to have a responsibility to avoid engaging in activities that would negatively impact other community members. These moral responsibilities were violated when SMIs received excessive incentives from brands that community members perceived to risk biasing their opinion, and to therefore potentially disadvantage other community members by reducing their access to honest, unbiased product recommendations. We refer to this endorsement transgression as ‘over-indulgence’.

In the context of paid endorsements and brand ambassadorships, the financial incentives that SMIs received from brands were typically undisclosed, making it difficult for community members to evaluate the scale of the incentive. However, the scale of ‘gifted’ PR products, services and experiences was more readily observable, particularly once regulatory changes in 2019 obligated SMIs to disclose these incentives. Lavish, all-expenses-paid press trips and excessive PR packages have become commonplace within the YTBC. For example, cosmetic brand Benefit flew SMIs to a luxury Maldives resort to launch their new mascara, whilst their competitor Nars flew SMIs to Ibiza and Bora Bora to launch their new products (a mascara and an eyeshadow palette respectively). These lavish trips were perceived to jeopardise SMIs’ credibility; many community members believed that the scale of these incentives left SMIs obligated to share a positive review, even if they did not like the product:

I would love to have this opportunity but the thought of Benefit being so up all these beauty gurus asses giving them this amazing trip just so they can give a mascara a good review?? I mean if Benefit gave me this trip and this

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2
3 *experience I would feel bad to say they came out with a shit mascara. (4*
4 *likes)*

5
6 (SM, 2018)

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8
9 Viewer: *I now see why makeup companies charge us so much for their*
10 *products. No shade on you...I would go too!!! (58 likes, 5th most liked*
11 *comment)*

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14 Viewer (replying): *plus, there is no way any of those influencers give a bad*
15 *review after Benefit buys them that trip. (29 likes)*

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18 (JG, 2018)

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21 Thus, whilst beauty vloggers rose to fame due to their impartial product reviews, this
22 'over-indulging' of SMIs with enticing non-monetary incentives caused community
23 members to doubt their credibility. Furthermore, we see that these incentives were seen
24 to favour some community members (SMIs), at the expense of others (SMIs' viewers),
25 who were seen to shoulder the costs of these lavish trips via increased product costs.
26 Thus, community members' comments highlighted that these excessive incentives
27 violated established moral responsibilities within the community, jeopardising SMIs'
28 commitment to providing honest, unbiased reviews whilst simultaneously
29 disadvantaging other community members.
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35 However, as in the case of over-emphasis and over-saturation, we found that
36 community members typically made situational attributions that reduced SMIs'
37 responsibility for over-indulgence and instead considered the brand culpable for this
38 transgression. Indeed, many community members acknowledged that they too would
39 be tempted to accept these incentives:
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45 Viewer: *All of this for a mascara?!?! Not hating on Sam at all - who would*
46 *turn this down? But this certainly puts me off Benefit. Ridiculous (103*
47 *likes, 9th most liked comment)*

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3 Viewer (replying): *I agree, I know its a business and advertising PR and all*
4 *the rest of it, but it does stick in the throat a bit cos that's what we're*
5 *paying for. However as a blogger who would turn down this opportunity!*
6
7 *(2 likes)*
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10 (SM, 2018)

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12 Viewer: *The amount brands give to YouTubers actually puts me off that*
13 *brand... Love Jamie and Jack though, killing it as always xx (48 likes, 7th*
14 *most liked comment)*
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19 Viewer (replying): *I know, that's why I won't purchase them! I get that the*
20 *budget they used to use on traditional advertising is now used to give*
21 *bloggers the chance to advertise it but it's so excessive and vulgar xx (3*
22 *likes)*
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26 (JG, 2018)

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29 In the above exchanges we see how community members developed negative
30 perceptions of those brands perceived as guilty of over-indulgence, and even expressed
31 negative consequences for their purchase intentions.
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35 36 37 **Discussion**

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39 Our findings extend extant research on the reception of celebrity endorsements by SMIs
40 in several ways. Whilst prior research on SMIs as celebrity endorsers has focused on
41 factors that enhance celebrity endorsement's desirable outcomes (e.g. Childers *et al.*,
42 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Munnukka *et al.*, 2019; Shan *et al.*, 2019), our study
43 highlights the new challenges and risks presented by SMI endorsement. Looking
44 beyond the dyadic parasocial relationships between SMIs and their followers that have
45 been the focus of prior research (Chung and Cho, 2017; Munnukka *et al.*, 2019), we
46 recognise the impact of the broader consumption community contexts within which
47 many SMIs are embedded. Whilst extant literature acknowledges that SMI
48 endorsement in community contexts may be perceived as transgressive and has broadly
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3 recognised that SMIs' communal ties introduce a moral dimension to celebrity
4 endorsement (Kozinets et al. 2010; Mardon et al. 2018), we provide additional insight
5 by identifying five recurring celebrity endorsement transgressions – underhand
6 endorsement, over-endorsement, over-emphasis, over-saturation and over-indulgence
7 – each underpinned by a distinct moral responsibility surrounding SMI endorsement.
8 In doing so, we explain when and why community members perceive SMI
9 endorsements to be transgressive, and reveals the moral responsibilities that must be
10 negotiated in order to avoid such transgressive endorsements.
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23 Furthermore, our study sheds light on the ways in which consumers identify and
24 articulate these perceived transgressions within the community. Whilst scholars have
25 previously expressed concerns surrounding consumers' advertising literacy in the
26 context of new forms of 'embedded' or 'native' online advertising (e.g. An *et al.*, 2014),
27 the consumers in our study not only identified SMI endorsements, but actively
28 highlighted perceived endorsement transgressions. They often used industry jargon
29 such as "long-term partnership", "gifted", "paid advertorial", and "sponsored content",
30 identified specific ratios of endorsed vs organic content, and supported their articulation
31 of perceived transgressions by drawing comparisons with other SMIs' endorsement
32 activities and by making reference to specific regulations governing SMI endorsement.
33 We observed in particular that community members were often able to articulate clearly
34 and constructively what they would consider an acceptable SMI endorsement. In
35 communicating perceived transgressions, and articulating their expectations, these
36 community members served to reinforce and protect established moral responsibilities
37 within the community.
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3 Our findings also provide insights into community members' attribution of
4 responsibility for endorsement transgressions. Prior research indicates that SMIs are
5 held responsible for transgressive endorsements (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Mardon *et al.*,
6 2018). However, we find that whilst some endorsement transgressions (underhand
7 endorsement, over-endorsement) are blamed on the SMI, other transgressions are
8 blamed primarily on the endorsed brand (over-emphasis, over-saturation, over-
9 indulgence). Thus, whilst brands are not considered community members, our research
10 demonstrates that they can nonetheless be considered culpable for transgressive SMI
11 endorsements in which they are involved, even in instances where the SMI is not held
12 responsible. Indeed, we found that community members often attempted to excuse the
13 SMI for their role in endorsement transgressions. For instance, where over-emphasis
14 occurred, community members often sympathised with SMIs, who they portrayed as
15 being forced into this transgression by an overly controlling brand. Similarly, in
16 situations of over-indulgence, community members empathised with SMIs, recognising
17 that they too would be tempted to accept the enticing incentives offered by brands.
18 Thus, community members engaged in various forms of situational attribution (Um,
19 2013) in order to limit the SMI's perceived responsibility for the transgression. Notably,
20 engaging in situational attribution as a means to reduce the SMI's responsibility for the
21 transgression simultaneously involved community members placing increased blame
22 on the endorsed brand. However, where the community initially engaged in situational
23 attribution to excuse the SMI for their role in a transgression, continued transgressions
24 by SMIs often led community members to switch instead to dispositional attribution,
25 interpreting repeated transgressions by an SMI as intentional, and thus as representative
26 of negative character traits.
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3 Our research also highlights the negative outcomes faced by both SMIs and brands
4 when their endorsement activities fail to successfully negotiate moral responsibilities
5 within the community. Prior work has largely focused on the implications of
6 transgressive SMI endorsements for the endorsing SMI's reputation within the
7 community (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Mardon *et al.*, 2018), providing limited insight into
8 the implications for endorsement reception or for community members' perceptions of
9 the endorsed brand. Our research indicates that whilst the endorsing brands are not
10 community members, they may nonetheless suffer negative consequences when moral
11 responsibilities within the community are violated. Where the brand is blamed for the
12 transgression, as is the case for over-indulgence, over-saturation, and over-emphasis,
13 community members express negative sentiment towards, and may even threaten to
14 boycott, the brand. However, even when the brand is not held responsible for the
15 transgression, as in underhand endorsement and over-endorsement, these transgressions
16 negatively impact endorsement reception, with endorsements perceived to lack
17 credibility. We also demonstrate that transgressive endorsements have negative
18 consequences for the SMI. Where the SMI is blamed for a transgression, as in instances
19 of persistent underhand endorsement and over-endorsement, community members may
20 express negative sentiment towards the endorser, doubt their credibility, avoid their
21 social media content, unsubscribe from their YouTube channel, and even report their
22 content for breaking regulations. Furthermore, we see that even when the SMI is not
23 held responsible for an endorsement transgression, they may face negative
24 consequences since such transgressions may erode community members' enjoyment of
25 their content and negatively impact their perceived credibility. Thus, our study
26 highlights the negative consequences of SMI endorsements for both the SMI and
27 endorsed brands, and demonstrates that although attributions of responsibility lead to
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3 more severe consequences, both parties experience negative consequences even when
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5 they are not perceived as culpable by the community.
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9 In addition to extending research on SMI endorsements, our research also
10 contributes to the broader celebrity endorsement literature. Our findings indicate that
11 consumption community contexts may shape endorsement reception in ways that are
12 not accounted for by extant research. For instance, whilst prior research has found that
13 the use of multiple endorsers can reduce audience boredom (Hsu and McDonald, 2002)
14 and produce more favourable brand attitudes (Rice *et al.*, 2012), we find that the use of
15 multiple SMI endorsers within a consumption community can produce transgressive
16 over-saturation that results in brand fatigue, negative brand attitudes, and even threats
17 of brand avoidance. Furthermore, prior work has argued that celebrity endorsements
18 should single-mindedly communicate the brand-celebrity pairing, avoiding other
19 elements that may serve as a distraction (Till, 1998). However, we find that for SMI
20 endorsements, community members expect the brand-celebrity pairing to be just one
21 element within a video featuring other recommended products/brands, and that failing
22 to meet this expectation may lead to transgressive over-emphasis, producing negative
23 consequences for both the SMI and the endorsed brand. Thus, our study provides
24 insights into the ways in which consumption communities' distinct characteristics
25 shape endorsement reception.
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49 Our findings also provide new insights into the implications of celebrity and
50 brand transgressions for celebrity endorsement. Prior research explores how moral
51 transgressions in celebrities' personal and professional lives impact the brands that they
52 endorse (Carrillat *et al.*, 2014), and conversely how brands' transgressions may
53 negatively impact their celebrity endorsers (Thomas and Fowler, 2016). We contribute
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3 to this work by demonstrating that SMI endorsements in consumption community
4 contexts may be perceived as transgressive in and of themselves, with the celebrity and
5 the brand therefore complicit in this transgression. For each of the given endorsement
6 transgressions that we identify, we provide insight into the perceived responsibility of
7 both the celebrity and the brand, and explore the implications of attributed culpability
8 for both parties. Our findings present several departures from previous literature. For
9 instance, whilst prior research has suggested that consumers tend towards either
10 situational or dispositional attribution styles (Um, 2013), we find that community
11 members may alter their attribution style over time, in response to repeated
12 transgressions. Additionally, whilst Um (2013) found that consumers' attempts to
13 reduce celebrities' responsibility for a transgression through situational attribution
14 reduces the negative outcomes for both celebrity *and* brand (Um, 2013), we found that
15 community members' engagement in situational attribution to reduce the SMI's
16 responsibility for the transgression shifted blame *onto* the endorsed brand, resulting in
17 increased negative consequences for this brand. Furthermore, prior research tends to
18 associate reduced perceptions of responsibility with reduced negative consequences
19 (Louie *et al.*, 2001; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). Our research indicates that in the case of
20 endorsement transgressions – where the endorsement is perceived as transgressive in
21 and of itself rather than due to some external celebrity/brand transgression – attributions
22 of responsibility tend to amplify the negative consequences for the 'guilty' parties, yet
23 innocent parties may still suffer undesirable outcomes from transgressions for which
24 they are not deemed responsible.

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 *Managerial Recommendations* 57 58 59 60

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3 Drawing insights from the endorsement transgressions identified in our study, we offer
4 recommendations for both brands utilising SMI endorsements and SMIs engaging in
5 endorsement activities (see Table 4). We propose that following these
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10 recommendations may reduce the likelihood of endorsement transgressions, and thus
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13 produce a more favourable communal response.
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16 Many of our recommendations for brands involve simple changes in how brands
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18 plan and execute celebrity endorsements involving SMIs (e.g. avoiding scheduling
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20 endorsements by multiple SMIs within the same community in quick succession,
21
22 constructing creative briefs that allow the SMI a level of creative control over
23
24 endorsement execution). However, other recommendations may require a more
25
26 significant investment of time and effort from brands' management teams. In particular,
27
28 our study suggests that brands should inspect prospective SMI endorsers' social media
29
30 content, and corresponding viewer comments, prior to endorser selection in order to
31
32 avoid endorsement by SMIs perceived by the community to be guilty of underhand
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34 endorsement or over-endorsement. Whilst marketers have been found to base the
35
36 selection of SMI endorsers primarily on brand-celebrity fit (Childers *et al.*, 2019), our
37
38 findings indicate that conducting this additional research during the endorser selection
39
40 phase will enable brands to reduce the likelihood of transgressive SMI endorsements
41
42 that have negative consequences for endorsed brands. This research can be performed
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44 in-house by a member of the brand's marketing team, and indeed many brands now
45
46 have in-house staff responsible for collaborating with SMIs. Alternatively, many social
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48 media marketing and influencer marketing agencies enable brands to outsource such
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50 research, should they not have in-house capabilities.
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3 Our research also provides insights to guide SMIs and their management teams in
4 their celebrity endorsement ventures. Many of our recommendations involve simple
5 changes to endorsement execution (e.g. avoiding over-emphasising a single
6 product/service/brand within an endorsement), scheduling (e.g. interspacing
7 endorsements with organic content, rather than posting multiple endorsements
8 consecutively), and disclosure (e.g. disclosing endorsements in line with both local
9 regulations and community expectations). Other recommendations involve more
10 significant shifts in how SMIs collaborate with brands when planning endorsements
11 (e.g. requesting a level of creative control over endorsement execution; asking brands
12 to disclose their schedule of planned endorsements by other SMIs within the
13 community). However, SMIs have management teams that represent them in
14 discussions with brands, who can (and increasingly do) make such requests. We propose
15 that more effective communication with endorsing brands during the planning stages of
16 celebrity endorsements can enable SMIs to produce more favourable endorsements that
17 avoid community retaliation.
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39 *Limitations and Future Research*

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41 Engaging in an immersive, longitudinal study of the YTBC enabled us to develop a
42 deep understanding of the established moral responsibilities that shape the reception of
43 celebrity endorsement within this context. However, it is possible that other online
44 consumption communities may exhibit distinct moral responsibilities surrounding SMI
45 endorsement, or may respond differently to perceived endorsement transgressions.
46
47 Thus, future research might compare communal responses to SMI endorsement
48 transgressions within multiple online consumption communities in order to evaluate the
49 generalisability of our findings. Such research can establish whether community
50 characteristics such as duration, dispersion, marketplace orientation and structure of
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3 resource dependency (Thomas *et al.*, 2013) have implications for community members'
4 identification of, and response to, endorsement transgressions. Do different types of
5 community perceive different endorsement qualities as transgressive? Do different
6 community types vary in how they respond to perceived endorsement transgressions,
7 and how might this shape the implications of such transgressions for the SMIs and
8 brands involved? Answering such questions would contribute to theories of SMI
9 endorsement, and celebrity endorsement more broadly, by extending our understanding
10 of the way in which community contexts shape endorsement reception.
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21 Furthermore, whilst our netnographic approach captured the reactions of vocal
22 community members who commented on SMIs' social media content, as well as the
23 wider community consensus indicated by the 'liking' of these comments, it did not
24 capture the responses of those community members that did not express their opinions
25 online. Future studies could use interview or survey research to capture the views and
26 experiences of these individuals in order to provide additional insight into the responses
27 of more peripheral community members who infrequently post online. Such research
28 would contribute to the SMI endorsement literature by exploring variations in how
29 different types of community members perceive and respond to SMI endorsements.
30 Furthermore, speaking directly to members of an online consumption community may
31 provide insight into the role of other community members in shaping their perceptions
32 surrounding endorsement transgressions. For instance, how does reading other
33 community members' online comments regarding a perceived endorsement
34 transgression shape the individual's own perceptions of the endorsement? Prior
35 research on celebrity and brand transgressions often documents consumers' individual
36 responses to transgressions reported in the media (e.g. Um, 2013; Carrillat *et al.*, 2014),
37 however in the context of online consumption communities it becomes apparent that
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3 we must acknowledge and understand the collective way in which community
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5 members' perceptions of, and response to, endorsement transgressions evolves.
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Table 1: The YouTube Beauty Community – Consumption Community Characteristics and Dimensions

Consumption Community Characteristics (Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001)	Evidence from Prior Research on the YouTube Beauty Community
1. Consciousness of Kind	Community members use the term ‘community’ to describe the collective, refer to the collective as ‘we’ and ‘us’, and exhibit a shared understanding of practices and identities – a shared sense of “who beauty bloggers and YouTubers are and of what they do” (Gannon and Prothero, 2018, p.602).
2. Shared Rituals and Traditions	Beauty vloggers and their viewers engage in shared rituals and traditions and exhibit a shared vocabulary (e.g. ‘vlogs’, ‘hauls’, ‘collabs’, ‘dupes’, ‘get ready with me’, ‘empties’) (Gannon and Prothero, 2018).
3. Moral Responsibility	Beauty vloggers are expected to demonstrate honesty and trustworthiness at all times, show gratitude towards their viewers, and respond to constructive feedback and requests from viewers (Gannon and Prothero, 2018; Mardon <i>et al.</i> , 2018).
Consumption Community Dimensions (Thomas <i>et al.</i>, 2013)	Observations from our Study of the YouTube Beauty Community
1. Focus	Primarily centered on a consumption activity (beauty consumption), rather than a focal brand or ideology, although community members also cohere around, and forge strong connections with, key figures within the community (influential beauty vloggers, many of whom become SMIs).
2. Duration	An enduring community that has been active for over 10 years.
3. Appeal	The community has broad appeal, since beauty consumption is a popular consumption activity worldwide (e.g. beauty-related video content generated more than 169 billion views on YouTube in 2018 (Statista, 2019))
4. Access	Consumers can easily join the community as viewers by accessing beauty vloggers’ free video content online, and are able to participate by liking and commenting on these videos. Consumers can also upload their own beauty-related video content to the YouTube platform with relative ease, though some equipment costs may be involved when filming high quality content (e.g. cameras, lighting equipment, video editing software). However it is difficult to attract the large audience required to become a successful beauty vlogger with SMI status within the community.
5. Dispersion	The community exists primarily in a dispersed online environment. The YouTube channels of beauty vloggers are the community’s central gathering point, where

	community members meet and interact, however community members also congregate on other social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, gossip forums) and, occasionally, at offline events (e.g. at offline conventions and ‘meet-ups’).
6. Marketplace orientation	When beauty vloggers first began collaborating with brands, viewers were highly resistant to commercial involvement within the community. However, over time the community has become more open to commercial activity and endorsements by beauty vloggers are now commonplace. SMIs are perceived to have a moral responsibility to produce endorsements that meet certain moral standards, and endorsements may be perceived as transgressive when these standards are not met.
7. Structure of resource dependency	Beauty vloggers provide entertaining and informative video content that benefits viewers and thus attracts a large audience, which vloggers commodify via celebrity endorsements targeting their viewers. This resource dependency structure enables beauty vloggers to profit from their audience without charging viewers directly for access to their video content, and both the viewer and vlogger mutually benefit from this arrangement.
8. Collective belonging	A sense of collective belonging exists for community members, particularly amongst those most invested in the community (i.e. vloggers and regular viewers, rather than infrequent/ casual viewers). There is a sense of community both between the vloggers themselves (who often interact with one another online and offline), and the vloggers and viewers more broadly. Both vloggers and viewers refer to the collective as a ‘community’. Offline conventions and ‘meet-ups’ serve to enhance a sense of collective belonging amongst community members.
9. Heterogeneity	A heterogeneous rather than homogeneous consumption community. Community members take on different roles (e.g. beauty vloggers as SMIs and their viewers). Some viewers are highly vocal and express their opinions in the video comments, whilst others are more passive but may express their opinions by liking and disliking videos and by liking other viewers' comments.

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Table 2: Focal Beauty Vloggers

YouTube Channel Name*	Number of Subscribers**	Date of Earliest Available YouTube Video**	Available Videos***
Zoella (ZL)	11.5 million	2009	930
Tanya Burr (TB)	3.5 million	2009	111
Patricia Bright (PB)	3 million	2010	910
Sam & Nic Chapman (SNC)	2 million	2008	931
Samantha Maria (SM)	2 million	2009	1,219
FleurDeForce (FDF)	1.5 million	2009	1,923
Estée Lalonde (EL)	1 million	2011	950
Inthefrow (ITF)	1 million	2013	605
Jamie Genevieve (JG)	1 million	2014	430
Amelia Liana (AL)	0.5 million	2013	666
Lily Pebbles (LP)	0.5 million	2012	800
The Anna Edit (AE)	0.5 million	2010	816

*Vlogger's primary YouTube channel (some have multiple YouTube channels).

Researcher's label in parenthesis

**As of December 2019

*** Across all of the vlogger's YouTube channels, as of December 2019

Table 3: Additional Illustrations of Perceived SMI Endorsement Transgressions

SMI Endorsement Transgression	Example Video Comments
Underhand Endorsement	<p><i>Does this not have to say Ad in the title?? (11 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I want to know before I click on the video that there's an ad in it. (5 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I'd also like to know when there's an ad in a video before I watch it. There's no hate, I'm just fairly sure that's the law for youtube these days so I'm wondering what's changed. (0 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(EL, 2017)</p> <p><i>Not trying to be rude or anything, but aren't you supposed to clearly state that this is an ad somewhere in the title (although I do see it in the description box)? (93 likes, 4th most liked comment)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I definitely agree! (0 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>Yup, it's supposed to be in the title. It's recommended that you report the video so YouTube can notify her to update it. (2 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I have reported it, cause it's just lame. It would not hurt anybody to type two more letters - AD – DONE (4 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(AL, 2018)</p> <p><i>Shouldn't you be disclosing this as an ad? (94 likes, 4th most liked comment)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>She did :) it came up on the bottom right hand corner when she started talking about it x (7 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I spotted that (after some searching around) but full disclosure means clearly labeling both in the title and the description...not good! (52 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(SM, 2016)</p>
Over-Endorsement	<p><i>Why do you keep posting ADs lol. (11 likes)</i></p>

	<p>AE (replying): <i>It happens that they've all been set to go live around a similar time. As always I only partner with brands I genuinely like and would recommend and I post them on a Wednesday so that they are additional content.</i> <i>X (31 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>It's a shame because I do like your what I eat in a day [a video series regularly posted by the SMI], but hate that it's always an AD so I skip them. (3 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(AE, 2018)</p> <p><i>Is every video you do an AD these days? (54 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(EL, 2018)</p> <p><i>Almost every video of yours says 'ad', this kiiiinda puts me off, just sayin (58 likes, 2nd most liked comment)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>from the people I am subscribed to, she has the most sponsored videos. (7 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(FDF, 2015)</p>
Over-Emphasis	<p><i>:(I usually love your content but this just felt so scripted to me and not your true self by how many times you had to say you were excited to work with the company but it didn't come off as genuine. (342 likes, 7th most liked comment)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I've watched a few other youtubers talk about it and the issue is also that companies aren't loosening the reigns and letting the influencer go off script. If they had just given her some talking points and let her talk about her own experience with the product and not make her follow an exact script then it would feel more natural. (2 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(EL, 2018)</p> <p><i>Reading out loud the "facts" from the paper given from the marketing department is pretty ridiculous. (45 likes, 5th most liked comment)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(SNC, 2019)</p> <p><i>Bloody hell how many times did they ask you to mention the product in the video. (94 likes, 3rd most liked comment)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(LP, 2016)</p>

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<p><i>Over-Saturation</i></p>	<p><i>I am honestly so tired of watching youtubers eating their hello fresh meals... It's just not as fun to watch (188 likes, 2nd most liked comment)</i></p> <p>AE (replying): <i>Thanks for the feedback Rikke X (20 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>AGREED. Soooooo overdone. (14 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying): <i>I love Anna so much but feel the Hello Fresh thing is being done to death (22 likes)</i></p> <p>Viewer (replying to AE): <i>Thank you for listening x (13 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(AE, 2018)</p> <p><i>The advertising for the Simple miceller water is just too much, it's got to the point where I actually don't want to try it because of how much promotion for it is being shoved down my throat (30 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(FDF, 2015)</p> <p><i>I wish influencers would stop accepting so many Hello Fresh sponsorships. It's quite boring to watch someone making a meal from a box. They've become so annoying that even if I do ever use a food delivery service I'm not going to use Hello Fresh! (136 likes, 3rd most liked comment)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(LP, 2019)</p>
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46	<p><i>Over-Indulgence</i></p> <p><i>And this explains why Nars products are so expensive. Someone has to pay for all that extravagance and unfortunately it's the consumer. (70 likes, 2nd most liked comment)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(LP, 2018)</p> <p><i>Who need 30 FULL SIZE bottles of foundation? I'm sick of companies with "more is more" approach. The WOW factor must be in the products (quality, efficacy etc.) and not the hype around it. (66 likes, 4th most liked comment)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Viewer (replying): <i>I agree, I wanna know what YouTubers do will full size bottles of every shade. (0 likes)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(SNC, 2018)</p> <p><i>How serious can we take reviews from NARS and Benefit after these trips from these reviewers though? They will always subconsciously remove negative comments because they got these trips and don't want to sound ungrateful. (19 likes, 6th most liked comment)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(ITF, 2018)</p>
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Table 4: Managerial Recommendations

Related SMI Endorsement Transgression	Recommendations for SMIs	Recommendations for Brands
<i>Underhand Endorsements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMIs should clearly disclose all celebrity endorsements. Beyond following legal regulations surrounding endorsement disclosure, SMIs should monitor comments posted by community members in order to establish whether they have additional expectations surrounding disclosure that must be either adhered to or further negotiated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When considering SMIs as prospective celebrity endorsers, brands should examine comments on their prior social media content, enabling them to identify and avoid SMI endorsers perceived by the community to be guilty of underhand endorsements. For endorsements over which brands have a level of creative control (e.g. paid advertisements), they should ensure that the endorsement is disclosed in a way that both adheres to legal regulations and meets communal expectations surrounding disclosure (which can be established by observing community members' comments on previous SMI endorsements).
<i>Over-Endorsement</i>	<p>SMIs should carefully manage the ratio of endorsed vs organic content on their social media channels. They should ensure that the majority of their content remains organic and that endorsements are not posted consecutively, but rather interspaced with organic content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When considering SMIs as prospective celebrity endorsers, brands should inspect their prior social media content, paying particular attention to the ratio of organic vs endorsed content and avoiding those who post consecutive endorsements and/or primarily post endorsed content. When considering SMIs as prospective celebrity endorsers, brands should also examine comments on their prior social media content, enabling them to identify and avoid SMIs who are perceived by the community to be guilty of over-endorsement. When implementing SMI endorsements over which the brand has some level of creative control (e.g. paid advertorials), the brand should request that the SMI post the endorsement following an organic post, rather than another endorsement. This request can be incorporated as a requirement within the SMI's creative brief.

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<p><i>Over-Emphasis</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMIs should avoid over-emphasizing a product/brand in their endorsements (e.g. too many verbal mentions, the inclusion of scripted promotional messages, focusing on a single brand/product), and ensure that the endorsement does not erode the informational and/or entertainment value of their social media content. • When engaging in SMI endorsements over which the brand has some level of creative control, SMIs should ensure that they retain a level of creative freedom over how the product/brand is featured in their content and should avoid collaborating with brands that will not allow this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When implementing SMI endorsements over which the brand has some level of creative control (e.g. paid advertorials), brands should construct creative briefs that grant the SMI a level of creative freedom over how the product/brand is featured in the content and avoid prescriptive requirements surrounding endorsement execution (e.g. requiring a specific number of brand mentions, the integration of scripted promotional messages, a set amount of ‘screen-time’, or that no other brands are featured in the social media post).
<p><i>Over-Saturation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When collaborating with brands to produce SMI endorsements, SMIs should ask brands to disclose which other SMIs they are working with within the community and to share their schedule of planned endorsements. • SMIs should consider declining SMI endorsements where the brand is working with a large number of other SMIs within the community simultaneously. • When involved in a multiple endorser campaign, SMIs should ensure that their own endorsements are not posted immediately following those of other endorsers within the community. SMIs should also discuss plans for endorsement execution with both the brand and with other endorsers within the community, to ensure that their own endorsement is sufficiently distinct from those of the other endorsers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If adopting a multiple endorser strategy, brands should consider whether SMIs are part of the same online consumption community and therefore likely to share the same audience. Where possible, brands should avoid selecting a large number of SMI endorsers within a single consumption community. • Where multiple SMIs from a single consumption community are used in a multiple endorser strategy, brands should pay particular attention to the scheduling of endorsements (ensuring that SMIs are not posting endorsements in quick succession) and endorsement execution (ensuring that SMI endorsements are sufficiently varied).

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<p><i>Over-Indulgence</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMIs should consider asking brands’ PR teams to scale back incentives (e.g. only sending a small number of shades of a makeup product, rather than all shades in the range). SMIs can also request that their management teams require SMI approval before accepting PR products from brands. • When accepting lucrative incentives from brands (e.g. lavish press trips and excessive PR packages), SMIs should consider collaborating with brands to ensure that these endorsements also benefit the community (e.g. running related competitions for their audience, in collaboration with the endorsing brand). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brands should consider scaling back SMI press trips and PR packages. • Where brands do provide more lucrative incentives for SMIs (e.g. lavish press trips and excessive PR packages), they should ensure that these activities also benefit the wider consumption community (e.g. combining endorsement activities with competitions open to the SMI’s audience, giving them the chance to win similar products or experiences for themselves).
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European Journal of Marketing

Response to RE comments

- Thank you for submitting your revision to EJM. Your review team are happy with your progress - well done! This is an interesting piece of work. I have identified a number of 'polishing' points that I would like to see addressed.

We're glad to hear that the review team are happy with our progress, and that the paper has been conditionally accepted for publication. Thank you for taking the time to provide additional suggestions to further refine our paper in preparation for publication – we appreciate your guidance and respond to each point below.

Introduction

- Please can you ensure that your first paragraphs sets out the identified problem and the aim of the research. This really helps in framing the work for the reader.

We appreciate your suggestion that we should identify the research gap and aim early on in our introduction section. On page 3 we clearly set out the research gap and the aim of the research as follows:

However, whilst recent research provides valuable insights into factors that impact the effectiveness of SMI endorsements (Childers et al., 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Shan et al., 2019), these studies do not equip us to understand the new risks and challenges involved in using SMIs as celebrity endorsers. Specifically, these studies do not acknowledge the new considerations raised by the consumption community contexts within which many SMIs are situated. Many SMIs are embedded in online consumption communities that played a significant role in their rise to fame (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Mardon et al., 2018). When SMIs emerge within consumption communities and act as celebrity endorsers, their fellow community members become the target audience for their endorsements. Whilst existing celebrity endorsement literature has yet to consider how such consumption community contexts influence the reception of SMI endorsements, prior research on online consumption communities highlights a complex moral dimension that is little understood (Kozinets et al., 2010; Mardon et al., 2018). This research indicates that celebrity endorsements by SMIs may be perceived as transgressive within community contexts (Kozinets et al., 2010; Mardon et al., 2018), however we lack both a systematic examination of the types of endorsements that community members perceive as transgressive and an explanation as to why this might be. Furthermore, we have a limited understanding of how communities respond to these transgressions, and the implications

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3 *of such transgressive celebrity endorsements for both the endorsing SMI and the endorsed*
4 *brand.*

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7 *This study addresses this research gap by answering the following research questions: 1)*
8 *When and why are SMIs' endorsements perceived as transgressive by their fellow*
9 *community members? 2) How do community members respond to transgressive celebrity*
10 *endorsements by SMIs? 3) What implications do transgressive SMI endorsements have for*
11 *both the endorsing SMI and the endorsed brand?"*

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16 This explanation cannot be placed earlier in the introduction section as it must be prefaced by
17 an introduction to, and definition of, SMIs, and a justification of our treatment of SMIs as celebrity
18 endorsers, both of which were previously requested by our reviewers. However, in response to your
19 suggestion, we have added a sentence to the first paragraph of the introduction that briefly summarises
20 the purpose of our paper, in order to better frame the work for the reader at the outset:

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25 *Social media has given rise to new breeds of celebrity, and consequently to new forms*
26 *of celebrity endorsement. Our study seeks to elucidate new challenges and*
27 *considerations presented by an increasingly prominent form of celebrity endorser –*
28 *social media influencers – by exploring instances in which their endorsements are*
29 *perceived as transgressive by members of the online consumption communities in which*
30 *they are embedded.*

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36 We believe that this addition communicates our paper's purpose sufficiently to enable the reader
37 to make sense of the subsequent paragraphs, until they arrive at our more detailed explanation of
38 the research gap and aim.

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42 • For your last paragraph, please ensure this is clearly a statement of contributions. Currently, it
43 is halfway between a method and a contribution statement. This should reflect how you have
44 set out your contributions in the discussion.

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47 Thank you for this observation. To avoid any confusion, we have now separated the summary of our
48 method and findings from our statement of contributions – each now features in a separate paragraph.
49 We have also provided a more detailed overview of our contributions, following the order in which
50 these contributions are presented in the discussion, as you suggested. Our statement of contribution
51 paragraph in the introduction now reads:

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56 *Our research contributes to literature on SMI endorsement in several ways. First, whilst*
57 *previous research on SMI endorsement has tended to focus on the factors that enhance an*
58 *endorsement's desirable outcomes (e.g., Childers et al., 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Munnukka*
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3 *et al., 2019; Shan et al., 2019), we instead highlight its risks, revealing the community-level*
4 *moral responsibilities that must be negotiated in order to avoid perceived endorsement*
5 *transgressions. Furthermore, whilst previous research indicates that SMIs are held responsible*
6 *for transgressive endorsements (Kozinets et al., 2010; Mardon et al., 2018), we demonstrate*
7 *that community members often engage in situational attribution (Um, 2013) to reduce the SMI's*
8 *perceived responsibility, and show that the endorsing brand may also be considered culpable*
9 *for transgressive SMI endorsements. Additionally, whilst prior work has largely focused on the*
10 *implications of transgressive SMI endorsements for the endorsing SMI's reputation within the*
11 *community (Kozinets et al., 2010; Mardon et al., 2018), our study highlights a range of negative*
12 *consequences faced by both SMIs and the brands they endorse. In addition to extending*
13 *research on SMI endorsement, our study also contributes to broader theories of celebrity*
14 *endorsement by highlighting the influence of consumption community contexts upon*
15 *endorsement reception, recognising circumstances under which celebrity endorsements may be*
16 *perceived by consumers as transgressive in and of themselves, and documenting the distinct*
17 *ways in which consumers attribute responsibility for such endorsement transgressions. This*
18 *research has important implications for marketing practitioners, and we present a series of*
19 *managerial recommendations that will aid SMIs and brands in avoiding communal perceptions*
20 *of transgression, and thus the negative consequences of transgressive endorsements.*
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34 **Discussion**

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36 • Your opening paragraph over uses the term 'extends' previous research. You could simply
37 state that your research extends prior research in a number of ways once and then explain the
38 various ways. I am wondering if you need this first paragraph or whether you can merge the
39 text here with the relevant contribution paragraphs?
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43 Thank you for this suggestion, which has enabled us to improve the flow of our paper's discussion
44 section. We have removed several references to 'extending' previous research, now using this phrase
45 only twice in our discussion (1. at the beginning of the section, to note that we are discussing
46 extensions to research on SMI endorsement, and 2. towards the end of the section, to highlight that we
47 are moving on to a discussion of extensions made to the wider celebrity endorsement literature). We
48 have also merged the first and second paragraphs, as you suggested.
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- 53 • **Future Research**

54 Your points here are valid but require further explanation. I would like to see more
55 explanation as to how these future research ideas would help to build on the knowledge base
56 (rather than addressing limitations in methodology).
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3 Thank you for this suggestion. We have expanded each of our suggestions for future research,
4 explaining the types of insights this work may produce, and how such research would contribute to
5 existing literature. This section now reads as follows:
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9 *Engaging in an immersive, longitudinal study of the YTBC enabled us to develop a deep*
10 *understanding of the established moral responsibilities that shape the reception of celebrity*
11 *endorsement within this context. However, it is possible that other online consumption*
12 *communities may exhibit distinct moral responsibilities surrounding SMI endorsement, or*
13 *may respond differently to perceived endorsement transgressions. Thus, future research might*
14 *compare communal responses to SMI endorsement transgressions within multiple online*
15 *consumption communities in order to evaluate the generalisability of our findings. Such*
16 *research can establish whether community characteristics such as duration, dispersion,*
17 *marketplace orientation and structure of resource dependency (Thomas et al., 2013) have*
18 *implications for community members' identification of, and response to, endorsement*
19 *transgressions. Do different types of community perceive different endorsement qualities as*
20 *transgressive? Do different community types vary in how they respond to perceived*
21 *endorsement transgressions, and how might this shape the implications of such*
22 *transgressions for the SMIs and brands involved? Answering such questions would contribute*
23 *to theories of SMI endorsement, and celebrity endorsement more broadly, by extending our*
24 *understanding of the way in which community contexts shape endorsement reception.*
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34 *Furthermore, whilst our netnographic approach captured the reactions of vocal community*
35 *members who commented on SMIs' social media content, as well as the wider community*
36 *consensus indicated by the 'liking' of these comments, it did not capture the responses of*
37 *those community members that did not express their opinions online. Future studies could use*
38 *interview or survey research to capture the views and experiences of these individuals in*
39 *order to provide additional insight into the responses of more peripheral community members*
40 *who infrequently post online. Such research would contribute to the SMI endorsement*
41 *literature by exploring variations in how different types of community members perceive and*
42 *respond to SMI endorsements. Furthermore, speaking directly to members of an online*
43 *consumption community may provide insight into the role of other community members in*
44 *shaping their perceptions surrounding endorsement transgressions. For instance, how does*
45 *reading other community members' online comments regarding a perceived endorsement*
46 *transgression shape the individual's own perceptions of the endorsement? Prior research on*
47 *celebrity and brand transgressions often documents consumers' individual responses to*
48 *transgressions reported in the media (e.g. Um, 2013; Carrillat et al., 2014), however in the*
49 *context of online consumption communities it becomes apparent that we must acknowledge*
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3 *and understand the collective way in which community members' perceptions of, and*
4 *response to, endorsement transgressions evolves.*
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7 Once again, we would like to thank you, and the rest of the review team, for the constructive feedback
8 and guidance provided throughout the review process.
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