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GlossiSHARE: How a Company Went from Selling Blush to Being the Cool-Girl's Best Friend

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Abstract

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By Abigayle Mazzocco

In my research, I examine how storytelling, branding, and language create community identification within the digital brand Glossier and what online participation does for the brand's culture. I do this by looking at three pivotal moments in the company's lifetime: the creation of the business, the brand's first brick-and-mortar store, and the brand's most influential time on social media. In these three moments, Glossier has developed its own branded narrative and created a distinctly loyal community. By analyzing these three moments, I examine the constructed relationship between a consumer and a company. Shopping at Glossier is both about buying a tangible item and entering an immersive experience.

I use semiotics to (1) break down the visual/linguistic rhetoric and the symbols in Glossier's Instagram posts and (2) focus on symbols utilized in Glossier stores. This research is needed for (1) the increase in use of social media and (2) desire among Millennials and Generation Z to belong to a community. Glossier has successfully developed and implemented a distinct narrative surrounding the brand that consumers have latched onto when developing their own personal brand. My thesis examines the strategies used to create community within Glossier and reveal the brand's close ties to people's personal identity. The results reveal the increasing desire for community among Millennials and Generation Z and analyze how this desire translates to an increase in brand loyalty. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of the narrative of a specific brand and how a consumer correlates their identity with this brand.

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Introduction

The summer of 2019 I spent a week with my best friend in Los Angeles. After a day sightseeing, we decided to get a coffee and were distracted by a line of young girls around our age waiting to go into a store. Entertaining this line was a girl in a light pink tailored jumpsuit. Entranced, my friend and I decided to get in line. While we waited, the girl in the pink jumpsuit (or, as she called herself, “in-store editor”), asked us our names and about our trip to Los Angeles before offering some free samples. As we talked, the “in-store editor” began to explain where we were: Glossier.

Throughout my college experience, I have heard and interacted (in varying levels) with the brand Glossier. I have been able to experience the company as part of its target demographic and better understand how the marketing and story of the brand was created to entice me and my peers. As I began to research this brand, however, I began to understand many of the nuances and complexities that lie begin Glossier’s constructed lifestyle and narrative. Through writing this thesis, I gained a deeper understanding of Glossier to investigate some of the moral and feminist critiques that lie within the brand.

My thesis analyzes the creation of the digital brand Glossier as a means to better understand digital communities and community identification with brands via social media. By performing a case study on the development of the brand Glossier, as it was overseen by former CEO Emily Weiss, I will break down the creation and loyalty within digital communities, especially as they relate to online brands for Millennial and Generation Z women. Glossier's intentionally developed narrative has created a distinct form of community for its followers as a group of “Glossier girls” who work to embrace the values and aesthetic of a Glossier lifestyle.

This community works as a substitute or addition to more traditional communities that are less popular among Millennials and Generation Z, such as religious organizations or neighborhood gatherings.¹

This research is based on the work of two scholars, Sut Jhally and Casper ter Kuile. Jhally, a scholar on communications and advertising, breaks down the importance of advertisements when a brand is creating their own narrative.² Ter Kuile, a fellow of theology and gatherings at Harvard, and Thurston, a Ministry Innovation Fellow, discuss the replacement of traditional communities with new groups like workout classes or companies.³ Their work is an extension of the idea that community is currently being discovered in new ways that focus on aesthetics and beauty from scholars like Carroll.⁴

Glossier, as it is now known, started with the blog *Into the Gloss* and was spearheaded by the Executive Chairwoman of the brand, Emily Weiss.⁵ While Glossier has changed many of its marketing and business strategies within the past year, the focus of this thesis lies in the community-building and narrative constructed by Emily Weiss. This means the thesis will follow Glossier from its inception until Weiss officially stepped down as Glossier's CEO on May 24, 2022.⁶ Also, it is important to note that this thesis cannot cover every piece of media put out by the brand or every person following the brand. Instead, this thesis focuses on a careful selection of different images and an analysis of the general zeitgeist surrounding the brand.

¹ "Nones on the Rise," Pew Forum, 2012. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise>.

² Jhally, Sut. "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture." In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, ed. Gail Dines, 199-203. California: Sage, 2003

³ Casper ter Kuile and Angie Thurston, "How We Gather," n.d.

⁴ Carroll, John. "Beauty contra God: Has aesthetics replaced religion in modernity?." *Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 2 (2012): 206-223.

⁵ Emily Weiss, "LinkedIn," <https://www.linkedin.com/in/emily-weiss-49014571/>.

⁶ Alisha Haridasani Gupta, "Glossier's Emily Weiss, Among the Last of the Girlbosses, Steps Down," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/style/glossier-emily-weiss.html>.

With the rise of social media, businesses have been able to communicate their values, both civic and aesthetic in a more relational manner than has been seen before. In order for a company to maintain a loyal customer, they begin to create a brand. In this thesis, I set specific definitions for a brand and branding that may have different meanings across other academic articles. I define a brand as the combination of marketing, a business's products, and a business's "personality," including the subconscious or stereotyped associations that come alongside a brand due to the brand's reputation. This is different from the business itself, which is defined as the products and the physical items put out by a company. A business promotes themselves as a brand by marketing, the strategy used to promote products. This strategy includes the conduction of market research and advertisements put out to help promote a product, line, or the company.

A narrative is the way words, plots, values, and characters are connected to create a compelling arc of a story, and for a company to immerse a customer in their brand's culture a business must build a compelling narrative around their items.⁷ Branding creates a narrative for a business and also has the opportunity to give a brand anthropomorphic qualities. Anthropomorphism is defined as possessing humanlike qualities.⁸

Additionally, I have made slight distinctions between a consumer and a follower while still emphasizing their relationship to each other. Harnessing the ideals or structure of a community is more important than the products itself. Just as powerful as anything that is bought from the store are the people who loyally, actively, and purposefully support the brand. A consumer is someone who purchases the items from a brand while a follower is someone who

⁷ Ferrell, Odies C., Michael Hartline, and Bryan W. Hochstein. *Marketing strategy*. Cengage Learning, 2021.

⁸ Urska Tuskej and Klement Podnar, "Consumers' Identification with Corporate Brands: Brand Prestige, Anthropomorphism and Engagement in Social Media," *The Journal of Product and Brand Management* 27, no. 1 (2018): 3–17, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-05-2016-1199>.

admires the values and marketing put out by the brand. Not all Glossier followers are consumers, but typically being a follower of the brand leads to one becoming a consumer.

These followers and/or consumers group together to create communities. Communities “are constructed, not natural” and represent the “identity, history, resources, or defining characteristics of a group.”⁹ Communities are created through social interaction and work to serve as a type of fulfillment for humans.¹⁰ This fulfillment provides meaning, connection, and the social interaction to help develop a persona. Community identification is a way of signaling to other members or non-members of a specific community that a person is a part of this community. Glossier consumers do this by wearing branded merchandise or featuring stickers with the company’s name.¹¹

My research will focus on three main phases of Glossier’s creation as a store. I will analyze Glossier’s evolution from a blog into a business, Glossier’s Instagram posts, and several of Glossier’s brick-and-mortar stores. These three factors work as a way of understanding the technicalities of the brand and how they created such a robust community for the company. Glossier serves as an ideal case study as it is a highly valued brand by Millennial and Generation Z women. The brand has succeeded in an incredibly oversaturated market by using social media marketing and communities to create a personality surrounding the brand.¹² By creating this brand, Glossier has curated a compelling narrative and encouraged followers to become voices for the brand on their own. Generally, the community and interaction within Glossier has been

⁹ Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (NYU Press, 2007), 57.

¹⁰ Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 57.

¹¹ Painsil and Kim, “Sharing Personal Experiences and Online Consumer Engagement.”

¹² Simona Vinerean, Luliana Cetina, Luigi Dumitrescu, and Mihai Tichindelean. “The effects of social media marketing on online consumer behavior.” *International journal of business and management* 8, no. 14 (2013): 66.

incredibly loyal and outspoken about support of the brand.¹³ Under Emily Weiss, Glossier has established itself as one of the most talked about and beloved brands. Its message is embraced by consumers of the product, who have elevated the company to a cult status. Through Glossier's development and popularity as a brand, I ask the research question: How does Glossier use branding and language to create community identification, and what does online participation in this brand do for its culture? Glossier's developed narrative has created a distinct form of community for its followers. This community works as a form of replacement for other, more traditional, communities that are decreasing in popularity.

¹³ Ashley Paintsil and Hye-Shin Kim, "Sharing Personal Experiences and Online Consumer Engagement: A Case Study of Glossier," *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2021.1947150>.

Chapter One

I. Weiss, Into the Gloss, Glossier

Into the Gloss and Glossier's success can be largely (if not completely) attributed to Emily Weiss, a well-connected, New York art school graduate. Before Glossier was a business, it took shape as the blog *Into the Gloss*. This blog, the idea to move into a business, and Glossier's vision all came from Emily Weiss.¹⁴ She knew from the beginning of creating *Into the Gloss* that she wanted the blog to become a business.¹⁵ Weiss's creative process for establishing the brand came from vision boards and aesthetic-based ideals instead of a product, need, or even specific mission statement in mind.¹⁶

Weiss began making public appearances on the reality television series "The Hills" as a "Super Intern" before deciding she wanted to spend her time pursuing business instead of becoming a reality television personality.¹⁷ At this time, she was interning for *Vogue* and was able to talk with models, actresses, and celebrities on a daily basis as a part of her work. Better understanding the lives of these people allowed her to leverage the little-known information she gathered as content for a blog. She named her blog *Into the Gloss* to reference the behind-the-scenes, unreported, and exciting events that occurred between the "glossy" pages of a magazine.¹⁸ By reporting on these elusive, apparently glamorous moments, Weiss also tapped

¹⁴ Amy Larocca, "The Magic Skin of Glossier's Emily Weiss," *The Cut*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/01/glossier-emily-weiss.html>.

¹⁵ Larocca, "The Magic Skin of Glossier's Emily Weiss."

¹⁶ Hiten Shah, "How Glossier Turned Into a \$400 Million Business in Four Years," *Product Habits*, May 28, 2018, <https://producthabits.com/how-glossier-turned-into-a-400-million-business-in-four-years/>.

¹⁷ "One Big Interruption," *The Hills*, February 12, 2007.

¹⁸ Larocca, "The Magic Skin of Glossier's Emily Weiss."

into her ideal audience. *Vogue* provided Weiss with a network of contacts who were “in the know” enough to spread the word about *Into the Gloss* outside *Vogue*. With this following vouching for the brand, *Into the Gloss* was almost immediately certified as a legitimate resource for “cool” people (or people who wanted to be labeled as “cool”), and at the center of this cool-girl brand was Weiss. Describing *Into the Gloss* as “Born from content, fueled by community,” Weiss became a face, voice, and aesthetic readers of *Into the Gloss* trusted.¹⁹ Weiss marketed herself as a “cool,” affluent, connected girl telling the reader about the incredibly inaccessible world of celebrity. Weiss was the person who could go undetected behind the scenes to gather information. When interacting with others on *Into the Gloss*, she expressed “gestures of intimacy deployed alongside strategic walls. She [got] right in there on the comment boards, replying to her customers one-on-one.”²⁰ She presented *Into the Gloss*’s information in a confidential, excited manner that was curated around her as the ideal model of this information. These “gestures of intimacy” worked to solidify trust and communication with her audience.²¹ Weiss knew exactly what the current market needed. It wasn’t an explicit product but an overall aesthetic for young women to latch onto and discuss together. As these discussions progressed, community began to take shape. By beginning her business as a blog, Weiss built the foundation of *Into the Gloss*, and later Glossier, on open communication and trust to foster community. While this may seem to have naturally developed, Weiss’s mood boards, creation, and conception of Glossier that is addressed later in this section reveals some of her ability to craft and stage the curated world of Glossier.

¹⁹ Jessie Boxin Mou, “Study on Social Media Marketing Campaign Strategy -- TikTok and Instagram” (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020), <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/127010>.

²⁰ Larocca, “The Magic Skin of Glossier’s Emily Weiss.”

²¹ Larocca, “The Magic Skin of Glossier’s Emily Weiss.”

While she was not educated in cosmetic chemistry, attending art school provided her with the ideal opportunity to create and craft the aesthetic narrative for *Into the Gloss*. In an interview, Weiss conceded that when creating products someone could “just hire a chemist” and what she brought to the brand was more necessary: Weiss brought a vision and a clear understanding of future trends to Glossier.²² The necessity of Weiss’s vision reveals the true product being sold within Glossier: community.

Weiss was careful to communicate and interact with her audience by developing and forming trust through *Into the Gloss*. Creating a digital community is a difficult task, and in order to build a strong foundation over an intangible medium (Instagram and other social media platforms), Emily worked to make the brand seem as open and accessible as possible. This accessibility is the first important step taken to understand *Into the Gloss*, and later, Glossier’s developed narrative. The blog worked as a platform that symbolized the brand caring for its followers, reaching out and responding to people’s posts. After establishing *Into the Gloss*’s community, Weiss asked the blog’s followers to decide what they needed when looking for beauty products.²³ Instead of launching a specific, trademarked product, Weiss’s method for launch is rooted in open communication and relationship with the consumer. Weiss was able to incorporate the consumer, in a way that solidified Glossier’s stance as a communicative brand, one whose focus was not to only support a capitalistic business but to hear and make good on their desire to supply exactly what their consumer demands. Simultaneously, Weiss was able to gain first-hand accounts of what her target audience felt was a gap in the market. Ali Weiss, the Chief Marketing Officer at the time (and of no relation to Emily Weiss), notes that

²² Shah, “How Glossier Turned Into a \$400 Million Business in Four Years.”

²³ Larocca, “The Magic Skin of Glossier’s Emily Weiss.”

“Development [for Glossier] started on *Into The Gloss*. Comments on the open thread helped decide what the product would be, and we were able to bring the customers on the journey with us.”²⁴ When bringing products to new Glossier consumers, Weiss created a sort of open access within her blog. Weiss’s goal was for “Consumers [to] see Emily as a close friend, and they feel like they have symbolic access to her through the way that she speaks through the brand.”²⁵ In addition to giving her access to the direct desires of her potential (and most likely) consumers, this step allowed followers to feel heard, which is important in the business’s decision-making process. Instead of simply purchasing from a brand, consumers felt they held some stake in what had been created. This step was paramount for Weiss transitioning *Into the Gloss* followers into Glossier consumers.

At the time, markets were becoming progressively more intertwined with shareholder value.²⁶ When looking for funding, it was important that Glossier catered to the increasingly important service economy.²⁷ Weiss went to venture capitalists and leveraged *Into the Gloss*’s 2 million unique visits per month and over 120k followers on social media. Weiss’s positioning based itself on how Glossier was able to connect with its audience and create an open, authentic community among members, something *Into the Gloss*’s followers felt didn’t otherwise exist in the cosmetic industry. Led by Forerunner, Lerer Hippeau Ventures, and several angel investors, Glossier secured \$2 million in funding.²⁸ After receiving this funding, Weiss decided the next important move was to develop products and create distinct social media channels for her new brand before launching any of the products being created.

²⁴ Shah, “How Glossier Turned Into a \$400 Million Business in Four Years.”

²⁵ Jill Avery, “Glossier: Co-Creating a Cult Brand with a Digital Community,” *Harvard Business School Publishing* 519, no. 1 (2019), <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=57986>.

²⁶ Davis, Gerald. *Managed by the Markets*.

²⁷ Davis, Gerald.

²⁸ Shah, “How Glossier Turned Into a \$400 Million Business in Four Years.”

Weiss created the Glossier account and posted over 125 photos promoting the business on Instagram. The pictures on Glossier’s Instagram appeared to be a relaxed, “carefree, I-woke-up-like-this feel. But the collection is actually a carefully narrated story Ms. Weiss put together over Labor Day in the Hamptons. She gathered and printed hundreds of images that inspired the brand, including a shot from the movie “Clueless,” and combined them with photos she took.”²⁹ When recounting the branding and photos on Glossier’s Instagram, Weiss notes she “mapped it all out, laid them down on the floor and came up with a cadence that felt like it would work.”³⁰ Glossier had amassed 13k followers and gained an additional 5k followers overnight when products were listed for sale.³¹ Weiss’s ideas illustrate the thought that Jhally reports where if the product itself cannot bring happiness, advertising and branding behind the product will try to sell happiness to the consumer.³² The world surrounding Glossier was Glossier’s Instagram, and Weiss’s vision targeted happiness for Millennial and Generation Z women. Glossier is a direct example of many of Jhally’s ideas surrounding advertising. Glossier’s advertising reveals that one cannot become a “Glossier girl” simply by buying a product, but a consumer must also participate in the community and identity. Purchasing a product as a “Glossier girl” extends to purchasing an aspirational lifestyle. This element to Glossier further differentiated the company from other cosmetic brands. Instead of relying solely on specific identities or packaging, Glossier elevated these concepts to be part of the identity of the “Glossier girl.” Using Glossier products is not simply about utility but embodying the lifestyle and values of someone who uses Glossier.

²⁹ Elizabeth Holmes, “How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram,” *Wall Street Journal*, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/how-founder-of-beauty-brand-glossier-crafted-the-launch-on-instagram-1412709998>.

³⁰ Holmes, “How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram.”

³¹ Holmes, “How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram.”

³²Jhally, Sut. “Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture.”

This identity is further reinforced through Glossier’s social media, where the photos perpetuate this lifestyle (as addressed in the Chapter 2 of this thesis) and supported as followers interact with the brand and each other to promote this identity (in a way similar to open threads on *Into the Gloss*).³³ One example of a conversation is when Glossier releases photos of location-specific items they release only in stores. In the comments is when @mo.breaux asks her friend “@hattisellers what’re the chances you can get one of those passport holders 🤔” to which she responded “@mo.breaux I can genuinely go look for you if you want!!!” and “@mo.breaux said “@hattisellers please 😊.”³⁴ Another major example of people tagging each other on Glossier is when the company posts giveaways where friends interact with each other by posting comments like “@didi_em3 🤔” and having responses like “@aleclam_ i waaaant.”³⁵ Interactions like this build relationships on the mutual understanding of the excitement surrounding Glossier products. These interactions also fuel excitement among other followers as people can view the entirety of their online conversation on Glossier’s Instagram page. In short, choosing Glossier was not just about choosing an aesthetically pleasing product but also about adopting a part of an aesthetically pleasing lifestyle with a group of people who had chosen the same identity. The support of this community was about a place to meet other people and build a group of friends who had similar a similar sense of style (and a similar idealized lifestyle).

Instead of focusing on creating a brand that consumers are attracted to for aspirational motives, Glossier focused their brand and Instagram on a community fueled by relatability.

Andrew Stephen a L’Oréal professor of marketing at the University of Oxford’s Saïd Business

³³ Ashley Paintsil and Hye-Shin Kim, “Sharing Personal Experiences and Online Consumer Engagement: A Case Study of Glossier.”

³⁴ @glosser, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CbQjP3yvCKl/?hl=en>

³⁵ @glosser, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/COxpEYxMJ-V/?hl=en>

School, says, from the beginning, Glossier “has a much more youthful look and feel than if you compared it to, say, a L’Oréal Paris or a Lancôme or a MAC, even, or an Estée Lauder (...) It looks fresher, it looks more modern.”³⁶ This modernity is not a result of Glossier; instead, it was a careful calculation of communication and accessibility with an enhanced element that came from the brand’s “cool-girl” aesthetic.³⁷

On Glossier’s Instagram, Weiss focused on interacting with followers liking, following, and commenting on the brand’s content.³⁸ By creating a distinct story through mood boards and social media accounts, Glossier’s social media became a unifying thing for people to gather around. As people began to gather, Glossier’s community felt more real. The step to create a clear narrative and world for Glossier was a pivotal one. It established an identity for the brand and an idealized world. For the people who chose to follow (and eventually be consumers of) the brand, there was a space open for a new type of idealized, popular, and cool community. The first mention of products being sold with Glossier was in the company’s Instagram page. One of Glossier’s followers sent Weiss an image on social media that focused on a mouth with a pink background. Weiss reposted this image on Glossier’s Instagram and captioned it “PS- we’re making products.”³⁹

After this post, Glossier began releasing products and generating excitement for the brand. The Glossier website was established with the mission to “give voice through beauty (...) by building products, growing community, and making decisions in inclusive, customer-devoted, curious, courageous, and discerning ways. [Glossier] believe[s] in the power of the individual

³⁶ Juno Calypso, “How Glossier Turned Itself into a Billion-Dollar Beauty Brand,” *WIRED UK*, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/how-to-build-a-brand-glossier>.

³⁷ Paintsil and Kim, “Sharing Personal Experiences and Online Consumer Engagement.”

³⁸ Holmes, “How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram.”

³⁹ Holmes, “How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram.”

and see[s] beauty as an incredible conduit for connection.”⁴⁰ After a careful curation of the brand’s identity, *Into the Gloss* leveraged their followers as a base for the new brand. Built on this community and with a clear vision for the brand, Glossier was able to build an aspirational lifestyle surrounding the image of the ideal “Glossier girl.”

⁴⁰ Glossier, Inc., *LinkedIn*,” <https://www.linkedin.com/company/glossier/>.

II. What Would a Glossier Girl Do?

After launching the brand, one of Weiss's first statements about the consumer of Glossier was "It was about establishing a certain mood and a certain kind of girl and a certain spirit."⁴¹ It is through this "certain world," the visual and aestheticized brand Glossier has curated, that people are drawn to Glossier.⁴² Once this attraction occurs, followers embrace the use of symbols to prove their identification with the brand as consumers try to be like the "certain kind of girl" Weiss mentioned.⁴³ These signifiers include language, posting photos on social media, purchasing Glossier products, and visiting Glossier stores. This section will analyze the values Glossier promotes and Glossier's anthropomorphic relationship with its followers.

Followers who avidly consume Glossier's brand are motivated by Glossier's values. These values infuse part of Glossier's anthropomorphic quality and help encapsulate the Glossier identity. According to an Instagram post in the early stages of Glossier's career, the brand describes its community as "inclusive, innovative, clever, fun, and thoughtful."⁴⁴ Another group of values to analyze are on Glossier's career page that describes the brand as "inclusive, devoted to curiosity, curious, courageous, discerning."⁴⁵ However, it's not just these explicit qualities that make the brand. If participating in Glossier meant believing in a community with these attributes, there would be no reason to purchase the products, as the internal values listed are more in line with a system of beliefs than the use of cosmetics. The difference between implicit and explicit values within Glossier reveals the tension of the company between the taught "morals" of the company and the actual prioritization of aesthetics within Glossier. The difference between the

⁴¹ Holmes, "How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram."

⁴² Holmes, "How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram."

⁴³ Holmes, "How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram."

⁴⁴ @glossier, Instagram, October 6, 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BLOZI8xj0yl/>.

⁴⁵ "Life.Glossier - Careers at Glossier," <https://life.glossier.com/>.

implicit and explicit values within the company exposes some level of hypocrisy within the company, as Glossier states it will promote what seemed to be the values of its target demographic. Instead of taking actions in accordance with these statements, however, Glossier prioritizes a certain type of exclusivity and lifestyle with the aesthetics the brand promotes. Glossier will prioritize the implicit value when an explicit value (i.e., inclusivity) is put against an implicit value (i.e., aesthetics). For example, in Glossier's advertising, especially around the brand's inception, the social media posts and website advertisements featured mostly white women.

When looking at Glossier products, very little is promised with the released lines of Glossier items. For example, "boy brow," "cloud paint," and "lash slick" are three of Glossier's best-selling products, yet the products promise little in terms of results.⁴⁶ The closest to any promise regarding special formulation or unique qualities was the description of "fluffy, instantly groomed brows, the most user-friendly blush under the sun, extensions without the extensions."⁴⁷ Glossier products are dermatologist tested and cruelty free, but so are many drugstore brands for a lesser cost. With this understanding, there must be implicit, additional elements that give the brand its cult value. Glossier's products have made the impact they have because of Glossier's branding, especially, the value system Glossier has set in place. As a part of Glossier's image, the ideal shopper of Glossier is active in their community, curious to try new things, and effortlessly cool. The models on the Glossier website are "naturally" pretty but hold fast to the current understanding of beauty standards. Even the photos solely featuring products on the website add some new and interesting dimensions to the brand.⁴⁸ This reveals another key

⁴⁶ "Bestsellers," <https://www.glossier.com/collections/bestsellers>.

⁴⁷ "Bestsellers."

⁴⁸ "Glossier," <https://www.glossier.com/>.

element about Glossier's branding that is less tangible and harder to define. Glossier has borrowed from the existing ideals found among Millennials and Generation Z like "coolness" and branded minimalism and woven these values with many preexisting standards of beauty. Glossier is a direct example of what Jhally notes in his ideas on advertising. The company is not working to simply advertise a product; Glossier is working to sell the surrounding lifestyle, happiness, and culture of Glossier with the product.⁴⁹ (It is also important to note the standard of beauty for cosmetics started as mostly female and white, but as Glossier received pushback that will be later addressed briefly in this thesis, they pivoted to incorporate a more inclusive brand.)

The first step Weiss made in deciding the brand is who the "Glossier girl" is *not*. As the first four products were launched in 2014, Weiss introduced a facial mist, moisturizer, skin tint, and lip balm, she backed the brand as a "no-makeup, makeup look," and Weiss commented "Just because you say you love beauty, it doesn't mean you look like a prom queen."⁵⁰ This statement is the first explicit comment about how Glossier's ideal audience is exclusive, signaling to consumers that while the brand is "cool," it's not popular. Instead, the qualities prioritized are those that stem from the elusive "cool girl." They are fun, smart, naturally beautiful, and chronically (but candidly) online. One of the most important factors of the Glossier girl is that this girl reaches incredibly high standards effortlessly. Instead of being the archetype of an increasingly popular teenager, Glossier's ideal consumer is an artistic, beautiful Instagrammer like Weiss. With these values in mind, labeling oneself as a "Glossier girl" means assuming Glossier's implicit and explicit qualities.

Another way to look at this "cool girl" would be through examples of who the brand considers to be their ideal brand representative. The first "Glossier girl" is Weiss herself. She

⁴⁹ Jhally, "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture."

⁵⁰ Holmes, "How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram."

was a natural at creating cool, clear visions of both a brand and of herself, working with *Vogue*, appearing on television, and starting a company all before she was 30, Weiss was the first “Glossier girl.” Weiss was a figurehead for both the brand *Into the Gloss* and Glossier, and while media promotions did not make her the only face of the company, Weiss was the figurehead of the brand.

However, she expanded beyond just her own social capital, and at Glossier’s inception in 2014, the brand gifted merchandise to celebrities, not directly paying for publicity but providing free marketing materials. These sponsorships were uniquely helpful to the brand and celebrity in that it built “consumer trust” with the brand and provided “legitimacy” for the celebrity.⁵¹ As a result “the Victoria’s Secret model Karlie Kloss got over 26k ‘likes’ on a post where she is wearing a Glossier sweatshirt and the brand reposted this image.⁵² While many celebrities have endorsed the brand, from Ina Garten to Timothee Chalamet, the “Glossier girl” is distinct.⁵³ Glossier praises the endorsements of certain celebrities while still distancing themselves, saying they’re happy to be supported by these celebrities but excluding inclusive language when referencing these people (with the exception of Kloss, a young, female, “effortless” ambassador for the brand). Glossier worked to highlight its support of girls who fit the aesthetic of the brand while showing support of other celebrities without including them as part of their community. Instead, endorsements by people like Chalamet and Garten are seen as “cute” and valuable yet distinct from the coveted title of being a “Glossier girl.” By excluding certain celebrities,

⁵¹Sut Jhally, “Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture,” *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, ed. Gail Dines (2003) 199-203.

⁵² Holmes, “How Founder of Beauty Brand Glossier Crafted the Launch on Instagram.”

⁵³ Sara Spellings, “Ina Garten Goes To Glossier,” *The Cut*, <https://www.thecut.com/2020/01/ina-garten-goes-to-glossier.html>.

Glossier reinforces the barrier of entry to the Glossier community and highlights that there is a certain type of individual who fits as a “Glossier girl.” This idea adds to the prestige and cachet of being a “Glossier girl,” as Timothee Chalamet may be excluded from a group that a consumer (like a 16-year-old girl from a suburban area) is accepted into. While this may not be comforting to all, being accepted promotes an excitement and desire for certain consumers. “Glossier girls” received a sort of clout for their inherent coolness.⁵⁴

When accepted into the community, Glossier’s brand messaging is consistent above the line and below the line, designed around its brand identity of being authentic and approachable, the brand communicates to its consumers in a way as if they are talking to a friend. An example of that is the marcom ‘Trust us, we’re you,’ which is being featured a lot in Glossier’s communication.⁵⁵

The interchangeable relationship between Glossier and the followers establishes a level of trust. The phrase “trust us we’re you” emphasizes the brand’s accessibility and proposes a sort of relatability, giving Glossier a humanlike quality and a position of leadership. This leadership worked as a directive, as it encourages interaction and communication among followers.⁵⁶ When Glossier seems more humanlike, the relationship between a consumer of the brand and the brand feels more natural.

“Glossier girls” are a direct example of what scholars ter Kuile and Thurston have noted about the need for meaning and community among Generation Z and Millennials.⁵⁷ Notably, these groups have been moving away from other, more traditional forms of community like

⁵⁴ Painsil and Kim, “Sharing Personal Experiences and Online Consumer Engagement.”

⁵⁵ Mou, “Study on Social Media Marketing Campaign Strategy -- TikTok and Instagram.”

⁵⁶ Rosenthal, Benjamin. "Brand image co-creation and individual identity extension in online environments: A Facebook investigation." PhD diss., 2014.

⁵⁷ Mark Oppenheimer, “When Some Turn to Church, Others Go to CrossFit," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/28/us/some-turn-to-church-others-to-crossfit.html>.

religion. Their book *How We Gather* notes the change in gatherings to create community among Millennials.⁵⁸ In their research they found that six main “themes” are related to creating a group with meaningful connection: personal transformation, accountability, community, creativity, purpose finding, and social transformation.⁵⁹ Glossier’s mission statement immediately addresses personal transformation, community, creativity, and social transformation.⁶⁰ As the meaning of what a “Glossier girl” is becomes more defined, other themes will also be fulfilled. The “Glossier girl” belongs to a community that can be bought into by consuming the brand, and when a consumer actively participates with the brand, they are accepting values and personalities based on the aspirational qualities of the brand.

Glossier set new expectations for followers of the brand to signal that a follower was a part of the “Glossier girl” community. Photos are encouraged and shared through personal Instagram accounts. Follower accounts of Glossier extend from @glossierboyfriends to @dogsofglossier.⁶¹ People take their support and excitement of the brand to another level, creating accounts and interacting with other similar feeds in order to foster this feeling of community within Glossier.

As Glossier’s values are accepted, a consumer may be able to further identify with Glossier’s values (like inclusivity and cleverness) and constructed narrative (which Weiss ideated at the brand’s inception). Certain people have noted how this may even be able to play into situations like decision-making, as “being able to say ‘I’m a Glossier girl’ softens the burden and responsibility of having to make so many independent choices about what you think and

⁵⁸ Casper ter Kuile and Angie Thurston.

⁵⁹ ter Kuile, “How We Gather.”

⁶⁰ ter Kuile, “How We Gather.”

⁶¹ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/sghmtkvyV5/>.

who you are.”⁶² Instead, “you can simply ask ‘What would a Glossier girl do?’ And base your day’s decisions on that framework.”⁶³ These choices and their ultimate decisions are both value and aesthetically based, and they support a distinct community of people, as ter Kuile and Thurston have noted.⁶⁴ By basing everyday decisions on the life of a “Glossier girl,” a consumer is curating their life to fit within the set aspirations of a “Glossier girl.” These aspirations are limiting and have the potential to be different from what the consumer truly wants. However, if the consumer chooses to fully participate in the lifestyle of a “Glossier girl,” they are working to be included in the community through the adoption of aesthetics that are not truly their own. Since the targeted audience is quite young, their identity formation, whether conscious or not, is altered by the values and aesthetics of a “Glossier girl.”

The context of Glossier’s history and Glossier’s values come together to create a more complete image of Glossier’s target audience. *Into the Gloss* attracted followers that valued the aesthetics of *Vogue* and the exclusive information the blog provided. These followers interacted with each other via the open channels of communication on the blog and were able to bond. With *Into the Gloss* and Glossier’s presence on social media, this audience grew. Weiss made sure there was a clear lifestyle and set of values in place for the “Glossier girl.” These values included a “cool,” aestheticized, and effortless lifestyle. Glossier worked to be relatable, and Glossier’s beginnings created a system for consumers to feel like they were a part of the Glossier community. This value system supports ter Kuile’s themes of community and personal transformation, as people interacted with each other to emulate the Glossier lifestyle, and this interaction formed community. The Glossier community was solidified by purchasing Glossier

⁶² Amanda Montell, *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 25.

⁶³ Montell, *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism*, 26.

⁶⁴ ter Kuile, “How We Gather.”

products but also existed (to a lesser extent) as following the brand on social media or commenting on *Into the Gloss*'s blog posts. Understanding the values of Glossier (the “cool,” aestheticized, influential, and effortless lifestyle) and community of Glossier works as a basis to better understand the messaging behind Glossier’s branding both on Instagram and in their stores.

Chapter Two: Instagram

Images work as a form of social capital that proves the “coolness” of Glossier’s Instagram. To expand on this aspect of developing Glossier’s community, Weiss initiated and fostered a new community through Glossier’s Instagram account. Since advertisements are sent to consumers as a signal of the brand’s “personality,” Glossier’s posts reveal their ideal representation. Jhally writes about how companies have trained viewers to be able to associate deeper meanings with quick videos and still images. He notes that “speed and fragmentation are not particularly conducive to *thinking*. They induce *feeling*.”⁶⁵ Instagram is a selection of quick images that the viewer pieces together to create a cohesive narrative surrounding the user. Glossier’s curated feed creates a emotion or feeling tied to their posts. This feeling is directly linked to the “Glossier girl” and her aspirational life. Before the physical Glossier stores were created, Weiss developed not just a space but a world for Glossier, and Instagram proved to be the perfect medium for this idea. When deciding what and who to put on Instagram, Weiss looked at her target audience and concluded that she could benefit from the social capital of her consumers if her models and consumers were interchangeable. Weiss’s work on social media expresses that

bringing consumers into commerce in a way that feels very natural and very relational, recognizing that the value of a customer is not coming just from the profitability from that particular customer’s purchases, but also from their social value, Glossier focuses on aspirational realness, a strategy that uses *real* women showing the products in *real*

⁶⁵ Jhally, “Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture.”

locations, supported by a mode of direct address that seems refreshingly *real* in another way, by the writing assuming the familiar tone of a girlfriend.⁶⁶

By paying special attention to the text, images, and symbols within each piece of media, performing a semiotic analysis on these stamps of the brand's identity allows exposure of the implicit and explicit messaging in many of Glossier's advertisements to gain a more complete idea of the brand's ideal representation and serve as proof/justification for the values listed in Chapter 1, Section 2.⁶⁷

Given Glossier's posts and interactions on social media, I am able to use semiotic analysis to deduce the ideal target audience and compare this ideal audience to those who interact with each post.⁶⁸ Glossier began its social media campaign by focusing on Instagram, a site most used by Millennials and Generation Z during the time of Glossier's inception.⁶⁹ Interactive social media channels provide the most reliable depiction of the zeitgeist at a particular moment for the company, and since Instagram is the most harnessed social media channel for Glossier, my main focus will be on these advertisements.

The below image was originally posted by a consumer and was then reposted on the official Glossier Instagram (@glossier). Figure 1 is of the image with the tagged accounts by Glossier, and Figure 2 appears as it originally falls in the consumer's feed.

⁶⁶ Paintsil and Kim, "Sharing Personal Experiences and Online Consumer Engagement."

⁶⁷ Arthur Asa Berger. "Semiotic Analysis." *Media analysis Techniques* 3, no. 3 (2004).

⁶⁸ Arthur Asa Berger. *Media Analysis Techniques*. Sage Publications, 2017.

⁶⁹ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/glossier/>.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The caption to the photo is: “You deserve this 🍷 20% off 📱 Glossier.com (with code FOG22) + in-store through Tuesday ✨ @juliannaicholz”⁷⁰

This post is an ideal portrayal of the way Glossier integrates its consumers into the concept of its business. The text reveals five different components to interpret. The most obvious use of text in the image is the word Glossier, on both the walls of the building and the bags the girls are holding, explicitly advertising the brand. Secondly, looking at the image on the left, the photo has been taken directly from a consumer, and this consumer is then rewarded for originally posting the photo by being tagged (@juliannaicholz). The only other account tagged is Glossier’s main account (@glossier), intrinsically linking the brand and @juliannaicholz. The original poster’s username is featured: in the caption, in the tags, and is written on the bag. Third, the caption of the image uses text that the Instagram user is expected to read. This text does several things. It adopts a casual tone, using emojis and the second person you. This sort of casual style invokes a conversational element to the caption. The text in the caption does its best

⁷⁰ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CeJgzI5ri2E/?hl=en>.

to mimic that of a conversation between two people who would purchase from Glossier. Again, this caption references Julianna by giving her the initial credit for posting the image. Not only does this action encourage people to continue posting images of the brand in hopes that the brand may reach out and identify with them in return, but it again mimics a relationship, as it is common for friends to tag each other in the posts. Fourth, Glossier's caption provides a promotional code of "FOG" which stands for "Friends of Glossier."⁷¹ By using this promotional code, a consumer is typing their personal relationship to the brand. The last important use of text in this image is the names of the girls who purchased items from Glossier. In this image there is the personalization of each girl who has adopted the Glossier brand. In a way the Glossier brand is rewarding these consumers by taking the time to call them out by name. It is important to note that the only way a person can get their name written on a bag is by purchasing items from the brand. This post implies that in order to fully be accepted and welcomed by the brand, a consumer must purchase an item (another distinction between the Glossier consumer and follower). Glossier highlights its humanlike nature with the relational language and emojis used in Instagram posts. This post limits the accessibility of the brand, as only people who are able to spend money to consume Glossier products are fully welcomed within the community.

Next, the images or visuals in the photo help to communicate Glossier's ideal image. There are the hands of three girls, with light/lightly tanned skin, and most of their fingernails are manicured. The hands are stretching out to grab the Glossier bag, showing that what they want to reach for/obtain is Glossier and its products. Also, the three hands are grouped closely together, reinforcing the same type of community and importance of friendship that Glossier states is one

⁷¹ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CeJgzI5ri2E/?hl=en>.

of their primary values.⁷² It is through taking a photo like this, posting the photo to their social media channels, and buying the products that these girls are seen as “Glossier girls.” There are two shades of pink in the photo: the pink of the wall and the pink of the bags. Millennial pink is a key part of Glossier’s branding and color scheme, as Glossier piggybacked on the popularized forms of feminism during its launch in 2014.⁷³ The perpetuation of the pink with the brand gave Glossier a way to show they are proud of the “feminine” brand, as Glossier worked to “commodify and construct femininity as a process of self-making premised on choice and the neoliberal imperative to ‘have it all.’”⁷⁴ This pink also ties Glossier in with the white, girl-boss era of feminism from when the brand began. Having this specific shade of pink in the background shows the aesthetics of Glossier, and the girls are hugged by the surrounding pink walls. The pink on the bags again brings back the idea that the girls are actively searching and reaching out for Glossier as a brand.

The symbols in this image come from the use of tagging the original account @juliannaeicholz, the emojis in the caption, and the bags themselves. The tagging links back to the idea above that the girls are in a sort of relationship with Glossier, where they can interact on social media as friends do. The emojis in the caption function in a similar way. Emojis are frequently used in messages between friends and express a casual, fun sort of relationship between people. The use of emojis takes the tagging of one account a step further. It suggests that the Glossier account is linked in a friendly relationship with the reader of the caption. The use of emojis tries to induce this phenomenon and increases the parasocial relationship between

⁷² “Careers at Glossier,” <https://life.glossier.com/>.

⁷³ Caroline Bayne and Zosha Winegar-Schultz, “Think Pink: Cosmetic Capital from Mary Kay to Glossier,” *Console-Ing Passions 2022*, June 25, 2022, <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cp2022/program/blue/3>.

⁷⁴ Bayne and Winegar-Schultz, “Think Pink: Cosmetic Capital from Mary Kay to Glossier.”



Figure 5

The caption of these photos is: “#dadsofglossier we love you! 🙌

@california_martian.”⁷⁵

Each of the photos is relatively text-heavy, whether it be text added by the Glossier Instagram or text that exists within the Glossier store. The text in Figure 3 reads “I took our daughter to @glossier on Melrose and had a great time. This place is so cute and their selection is impressive. I had to pick up a cute Flip Phone keychain” from the caption posted by @california_martian. Pulling this caption initiates a dialogue between Glossier and @california_martian, as the quotation marks imply that this is something @california_martian directly said. The fact that @california_martian tagged Glossier in this caption expresses a desire to capture the brand’s attention or signal to the brand that he is interested in the company. When Glossier responds with its own caption of “#dadsofglossier we love you!” the company is

⁷⁵ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdgJNH3s2iD/?hl=en> .

signaling that they appreciate @california_martian’s interest and interaction with the brand while also distancing themselves from him as a consumer.⁷⁶ By providing this hashtag, Glossier is explicitly noting that this person is a parent of the typical Glossier consumer, not the consumer themselves, even though it may be assumed @california_martian purchased the products for his daughter. The hashtag also reminds followers of the young age of the true “Glossier girl.” In this moment, it is clear that @california_martian is a supporter of a community he does not have access to. The hashtag distances @glossier from @california_martian while still showing him appreciation and interest. This interest, however, is not the same attention and familiarity the brand expresses with the brand’s targeted consumers and demographic as noted in the “we” that includes the consumers of Glossier. This photo initiates a dialogue between this image and the photo’s caption and uses @california_martian’s words as a recommendation to the brand, not from a relatable perspective for consumers but from the perspective of a parent.

Figure 4 text includes the Glossier mirror labeled “YOU LOOK GOOD” and the text on the giant Cloud Paint statue that reads “Cloud Paint,” “seamless cheek color,” “blush aérien,” “Haze,” and “Dawn.”⁷⁷ This is the one image in the carousel that only has text from the original post. While some of Glossier’s store architecture will be analyzed in Chapter 3, this section of the store is unique to this Glossier location. Glossier stores have exhibits specifically designed to be photographed and reposted on social media. In this exhibit, the mirror displays Glossier’s signature “YOU LOOK GOOD” in the mirror and the product branding behind

⁷⁶ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdgJNH3s2iD/?hl=en>.

⁷⁷ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdgJNH3s2iD/?hl=en>.

@california_martian.⁷⁸ The phrase “you look good” is trademarked by Glossier and consistently featured throughout their stores, on their website, and throughout their social media feeds.

Figure 5 text reads “california_martian: @glossier our daughter convinced me to visit your store. She’s the beauty expert in the family. She had a blast. Loved the new stickers and samples that came in the bag. Nice surprise ❤️.”⁷⁹ This text provides another writing by @california_martian as he interacts with Glossier. The first sentence of the caption implies he may not have initially wanted to visit the Glossier store, as his daughter is “convincing” him to go. He then spends the next two sentences talking about his daughter and her time at the store. The final sentence does not contain a noun, and the reader can reasonably infer that his daughter loved the sticker and samples, although the lack of noun also reflects that @california_martian also loved that Glossier added these things to their purchase. He concludes this message with praise to the store and a red heart emoji, providing a contrast to his first sentence where he stated that he had to be “convinced” to go into the store. The text in Figure 5 shows that Glossier is a welcoming, fun space, but even as the text is written by @california_martian, the focus is placed on his daughter’s experience in the store.

Images from Figure 3 include @california_martian holding a Glossier branded flip phone keychain to his ear and, in the same hand, holding a Glossier bag. He has a large smile on his face, and the background of the image is not immediately identifiable as Glossier or another location. It is clear @california_martian is holding onto the Glossier bag from his (or his

⁷⁸ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdgJNH3s2iD/?hl=en>.

⁷⁹ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdgJNH3s2iD/?hl=en>.

daughter's) earlier purchases and keychain to show that he went to the store and interacted with the "Glossier world."

Images from Figure 4 include @california_martian, his cell phone (in a mirror selfie-taking position), and three massive sculptures of Cloud Paint. The sculptures show that @california_martian is at the store and interacting with the brand. The Cloud Paint sculptures feature Glossier's signature minimalistic packaging and unique design (which was constructed to look like a paint tube). As @california_martian is taking a selfie in the photo, there is a contrast between his humanity and the large, overpowering size of the Glossier sculptures.

Images from Figure 5 include @california_martian's daughter, Glossier's three-eyed sculpture, the background of the Glossier store, and @california_martian's typed response to Glossier (@glossier). It is in this image that the viewer is able to identify who @california_martian is talking about as well as relate to who the Glossier consumer is supposed to be. Glossier tethers @california_martian's daughter to the post in order to show that they appreciate their consumers and the people they think are the ideal audience for their brand. The post is not just about @california_martian coming into the store so he can see what the workings of Glossier look like or participate in the Glossier store experience. Instead, @california_martian's visit is about him having a sense of awe around the brand because his daughter (who seems to identify and belong with the brand) has made him come. While there is something wholesome about creating and promoting the #dadsofglossier, Glossier is sure to add the image of @california_martian's daughter, to reinforce their audience and show that the post is not made just for @california_martian.

The symbols in Figure 3 are: the Glossier keychain, @california_martian's wedding band, and his smile. While incredibly different elements, each symbol plays into Glossier's ideal portrayal of the brand. The Glossier keychain is held by @california_martian like a real phone might be. This humorous pose may be considered a form of "dad joke," especially since in this post it has been mentioned several times that @california_martian is a "dad of Glossier." His wedding band shows that he is married and part of a relatively "typical" white American domestic household. He is smiling with these items which implies that he had a good time when purchasing them (as he still is holding the bag, implying that he recently went shopping) and is having a good time while using the products (since he is currently holding the key chain). Again, this idea supports what Jhally argues in that products are not purchased only as a utilitarian item but also to provide happiness.⁸⁰

The symbols in Figure 4 are the branded Cloud Paint statues, the Glossier trademark on the mirror, and @california_martian's gesture when holding out his hand to the sign. The large Cloud Paint tubes are another signifier that the brand is larger than life. He is holding his arm out, as if to reference both the size of the sculpture and where he is. Again, this reinforces the idea that @california_martian finding the Glossier store a unique environment. The statues seem to be a more exciting and unique entity than something you would see in a typical store, Glossier is different and @california_martian's body language highlights the fun/playful nature of Glossier. The Glossier trademark in the mirror is the only thing placed in front of @california_martian, and while the phrase references a piece of @california_martian's identity, it also ties him to the brand. By placing the phrase in front of him, @california_martian is

⁸⁰Sut Jhally, "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture."

reminded that he is in a place where Glossier is at the forefront (and has simply chosen to recognize him).

Symbols in Figure 5 include: the placement of @california_martian's daughter and the globe. In the last photo on this carousel, Glossier makes sure to place the daughter at Glossier and promote her as a part of their community, as if to remind the Instagram following that this is who the "Glossier girl" is. In contrast to the previous two photos where her dad is highlighting the novelty of the brand, this image shows @california_martian's daughter casually leaning against a podium with the Glossier statue. She is in an element she understands and does not need to point out that she is surprised or fascinated by the world around her. By posting this picture, Glossier is acknowledging that she is the "Glossier girl," and her dad is the father of their intended audience (not the audience itself). The size and unique imagery of the sculpture is also a symbol in this image. Glossier is large and the store has created a distorting effect, as noted with @california_martian's body language in Figure 5. The three-eyed smiley face is a weird, fantastical object. However, when looking at how @california_martian's daughter is interacting with the sculpture, it is clear she is more at ease than @california_martian and seems to understand Glossier. It is @california_martian's daughter's identification with the brand that reminds the consumer of Glossier's ideal audience and places a distance between @california_martian and the person looking at Glossier's Instagram page.

The following image was promoted by Glossier in its winter/holiday campaign of 2020. The idea was that three random flavored lip balm (Balm Dotcom) are placed into the box (at the regular price of three of the Balm Dotcoms from Glossier.com).⁸¹ The main difference here is

⁸¹ "Balm Dotcom," <https://www.glossier.com/products/balm-dotcom>.

that the brand is giving a collector box and card. The box and card are limited edition, but the promotion is a sort of roulette because the buyer doesn't know what flavors they will receive.



Figure 6

The caption to the photo is: “Step right up and try your hand at Balm Dotcom Roulette! Inside each deck-of-cards-inspired pack are three balm flavors—but which remains a mystery! Surprise yourself, surprise your friends. But know this: Every balm’s a winner. Now on Glossier.com 🎰”⁸²

The text in this photo is limited, giving most of the context for the image with the caption. The caption plays on a cheesy, almost carnival-like saying and immediately calls out whoever may be viewing the post, directing them to “Step right up and try [their] hand.”⁸³ By

⁸² @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIS6Bh1sPtb/?hl=en>.

⁸³ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIS6Bh1sPtb/?hl=en>.

coining the idea of Balm Dotcom Roulette, Glossier has established a game before explaining the rules. The next sentence works to describe what the promotion is before returning to Glossier's idea of community. The promotion was done in the winter, for the holidays, and the caption reminds the viewer that they may be buying the item for themselves or their friends. It's interesting to note here that family is not mentioned, again reinforcing the idea that this brand may be something a child asks for, but Glossier's Instagram is not directed toward parents. The caption closes by returning to the game-like tone of voice, calling "every balm a winner."⁸⁴ The writing on the box plays with this idea, telling the viewer to "Pick a balm, any balm" in a way that mimics the phrase "pick a card, any card" and highlights the brand Glossier's playfulness and fun use of language, as if to mimic a joke two people would say to each other.⁸⁵

The images in Figure 6 include the deck of cards box and the gold background. The box contained detailed art, with two cherubs surrounding a branded, Glossier 'G,' hearts, and are surrounded by a series of three-eyed smiley faces. On the side of the box, an open hand and another three-eyed smiley face appear. The photo is taken on what appears to be a Photoshopped gold background for these pictures.

The symbols in Figure 6 include the allusion to gambling and the use of the three-headed smiley face and the angels on the deck of cards. The typical Glossier consumer is relatively young, and the card game and allusion to gambling shows a different element than what would typically be portrayed in day-to-day life. The gold cards highlight a glamorous, playful element to this photo. The angels and three-headed smiley face show a mystical element to the cards and

⁸⁴@glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIS6Bh1sPtB/?hl=en>.

⁸⁵@glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIS6Bh1sPtB/?hl=en>.

play into the fantasy in the brand. The symbols in this image create an imaginary, playful world for the holidays and emphasize that this item is meant as a gift.

The following images were posted by the Glossier team to show the mood boards that supported the creation of Glossier's Lavender Balm Dot Com. The photos appear chronologically in the order they were posted on the Instagram carousel.

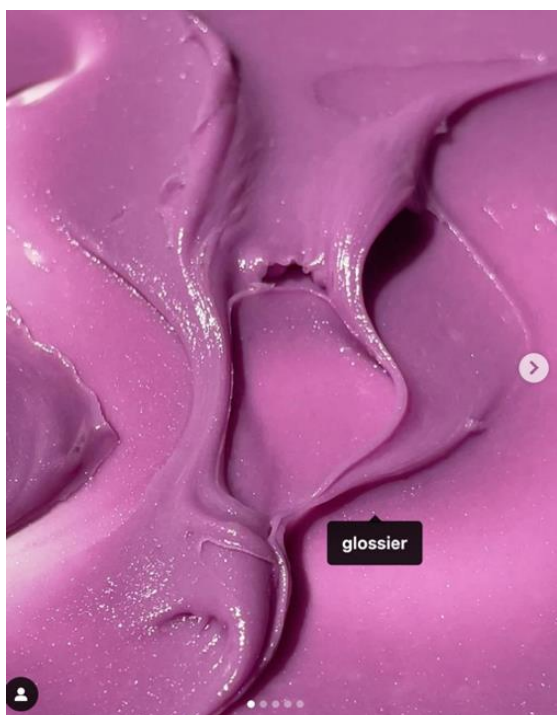


Figure 7



Figure 8

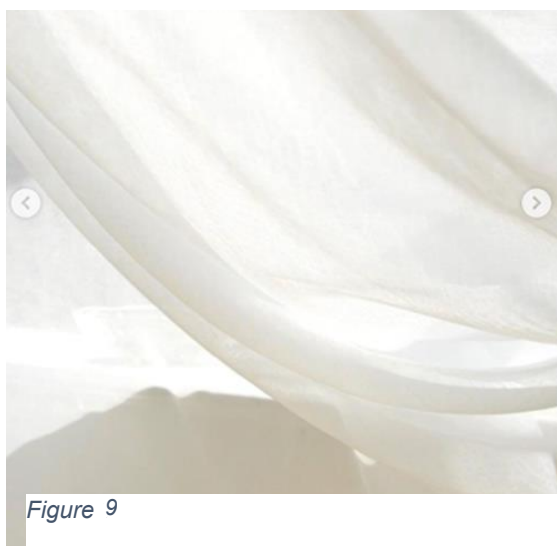


Figure 9

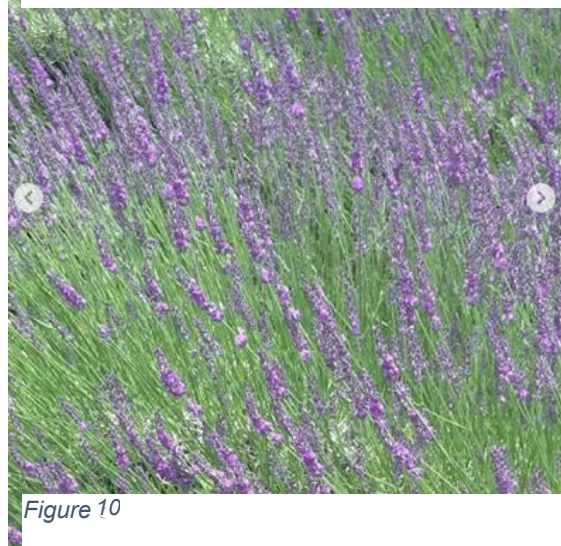


Figure 10



Figure 11

The caption to these photos is: Smells like a sweet dream. The world of Lavender. Coming tomorrow 🍷⁸⁶

The text on these photos is limited. Figure 7 has the brand @glossier tagged and the Figure 11 has the labeled text on the Polaroid of “Twentynine Palms, USA Mon, Sep 23rd, 2019.”⁸⁷ The writing in this image is messy and in a similar purple to the lavender fields in the photo. The caption in the post labels the new lip gloss as a “sweet dream” and its own “world.”⁸⁸ Both ideas tie into the worldbuilding and narrative of Glossier. Jhally notes “advertising doesn’t always mirror how people are acting but how they’re *dreaming*. In a sense what we’re doing is

⁸⁶ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdEQhZUvLNT/>.

⁸⁷ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdEQhZUvLNT/>.

⁸⁸ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdEQhZUvLNT/>.

wrapping up your emotions and selling them back to you.”⁸⁹ While normally this idea is more implicit, this photo and the dreamlike state that comes with it is the most direct connection between these two ideas. The lavender balm dot com is not just a product but its own “world” and is like a “sweet dream.”⁹⁰ The product itself is a dream, an idealistic, wholesome place to be. Also, the caption uses a purple heart emoji to reference the lavender color.

The images within these images provide the follower with some insight on the mood board process for Weiss and Glossier. Each of the images works to create a comprehensive story and possess varying levels of relevance to the actual product. Figure 7 is an image of the physical product, a textured wave pattern of the lip gloss which serves more as a fluid, lavender picture than anything else. Figure 8 is of a model, presumably wearing the product. Figure 9 is of white sheets. Figure 10 is of lavender fields. Figure 11 is the last image in the carousel and a Polaroid of lavender fields. Figures 9, 10, and 11 are abstract photos that tie into the cool, natural feel of the product. While Figures 7 and 8 hold the product, they do not explicitly show the tube or someone applying it. Instead, Figure 7 is an unrealistic layout of the lip gloss in a wave-like texture and Figure 8 is of a model whose face is cropped to focus on her nose and lips. She is wearing natural makeup and her lips are the highlight of the image, and while they shine there is little pigment to alter the face of the model. This image plays back into the clean, dreamlike aesthetic of the product.

The symbols in these photos are harder to determine because they are more abstract than other promotional information from the brand. The messaging behind these images is elusive and effervescent, tying to an unknowable sort of coolness with the product. A viewer could link the

⁸⁹ Larocca, “The Magic Skin of Glossier’s Emily Weiss.”

⁹⁰ @glossier, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdEQhZUvLNT/?hl=en>

two trends from certain photos like the natural fields of the lavender or clean, crisp sheets. Additionally, the facial expression of the model in Figure 8 ties in with this messaging. She looks happy but is still relatively hard to read, avoiding eye contact so much her left pupil is not visible. She also has a slight smile to show that she knows something the viewer may not. This facial expression works to focus on her lips (for the lip gloss) but also the smile and lack of eye contact show a type of mischievousness that's unique to this photo in the carousel. Figure 8 adds another layer to the calm, serene lavender world and makes it so the Lavender Balm DotCom is also a fun, playful product.

Figures 1-11 were selected because they show a balance of Glossier's Instagram. Figures 1 and 2 portray the typical image a "Glossier girl" would post while reinforcing the community and friendship that Glossier fosters. Figures 3, 4, and 5 are an example of someone who is not directly correlated with Glossier but experiencing the novelty of the brand. Figure 6 is released from the Glossier team to generate excitement around a product. Figures 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 provide an insight to Glossier's ideation process for creating and marketing the aesthetic of products. Each of these images holds a different purpose in the Glossier Instagram feed, and they develop the world Glossier has established. These images come together to create the life and aesthetic of someone who exists within Glossier's branding. The comments and tags on these images reinforce how Glossier fosters community with the brand as a symbiotic relationship between Glossier and the original poster (in Figures 1-5) or a symbiotic relationship between followers of the brand as they communicate via comments on the post. The elements to community that ter Kuile addresses in Glossier's Instagram include creativity and community.⁹¹ Some of the posts like Figures 1 and 2 also include the themes of personal transformation and

⁹¹ ter Kuile, "How We Gather."

social transformation.⁹² Instagram works as an outlet for Glossier consumers, and the creative work put out is then put into an online dialogue surrounding Glossier. This dialogue reinforces the projected authenticity Glossier works to promote within the brand. Semiotic analysis of these photos reveals the deeper meaning behind each Figure and post.⁹³ These posts emphasize that becoming a “Glossier girl” is a “cool” person to be seen as and an enjoyable life to live. By capturing stills of an exciting, aesthetic, “cool” life, Glossier grants permission for the viewer to imagine themselves in this idealized world as a “Glossier girl.” Instead of just expressed values Glossier promotes, semiotic analysis of Glossier’s Instagram reveals more of the practiced values within the company.⁹⁴ Glossier’s Instagram reveals levels of exclusion to promote the brand’s aspirational aesthetic.

⁹² ter Kuile, "How We Gather."

⁹³ Arthur Asa Berger. *Media Analysis Techniques*.

⁹⁴ Arthur Asa Berger. "Semiotic Analysis."

Chapter Three

I. Architecture

Glossier's designs and architectural layouts are specifically constructed with both Glossier's target audience and current demographic in mind. This chapter will explain the function of community and address some of the novelties within Glossier stores. Many of Glossier's stores are designed to push consumers and people entering the store into a mindset that is wholly distinct from shopping. In an interview with *Architectural Digest*, Glossier's deputy creative director, Adriana Deleo, says every store is "ambitious, they're playful, and not what you'd traditionally expect from a 'beauty store.' Through design, [Glossier] want[s] to make meaningful connections beyond a transaction. We want you to have fun, be surprised, and leave the store feeling connected to the Glossier community."⁹⁵ In this moment, Glossier is highlighting the mission of the store. Instead of focusing on a consumer making a singular purchase, the Glossier stores are designed to create connection and increase community with Glossier followers. Before the creation of stores, Glossier had worked online to foster loyalty through digital communities and social media interactions. The Glossier stores focus on still embracing the narrative these social media accounts and posts have curated while creating a physical space for consumers to gather. Again, this element of gathering moves back to the idea of new communities replacing traditional groups.⁹⁶

Glossier has moved into a space that promotes the Glossier narrative and supports the community's growth by creating physical stores.

⁹⁵ Mayer Rus, "Glossier's New Flagship on Melrose Avenue Is Peachy Pink Perfection," *Architectural Digest*, November 19, 2021, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/glossier-melrose-avenue-flagship-store>.

⁹⁶ Mark Oppenheimer, "When Some Turn to Church, Others Go to CrossFit."

Whether it be from comparing a major element of their store to its city or interactive display tables, the draw of Glossier stores lies in their ability to pull in customers and connect them to the surrounding community. Glossier stores devote themselves to branding, centering on specific, feminine-coded color palettes, and the ability to take a social media-ready image at almost any stop within the store. The Glossier stores allow for the physical development from the online communities the brand has created on social media.

Glossier stores are not about bringing a consumer into a place solely for consumerism. Instead, the stores focus on incorporating the Glossier world with the world the consumer already lives in. Glossier stores focus on merging seamlessly (or as seamlessly as possible) with the lives of the consumer. Respecting and paying tribute to the space a consumer lives is one important element to proving a consumer may partake in the world around them while also being an avid user of Glossier, or a “Glossier girl.” Glenn Fajardo, a lecturer at Stanford’s design school studying rituals in the virtual workplace states that “Part of what you’re doing with ritual is creating these chunks people can remember, creating this element of something familiar and something new.”⁹⁷ Glossier stores combine the “something familiar” and “something new” by merging shopping with a branded, interactive experience.⁹⁸ When consumers come together to purchase something from Glossier, they are participating in this ritual. When groups of this size come together to participate and interact, they are providing another level of legitimacy to the brand.⁹⁹ By experiencing the creative elements and participating in the ritual of shopping at a Glossier store, community continues to grow. Followers of Glossier connect with moments of

⁹⁷ Nellie Bowles, “God Is Dead. So Is the Office. These People Want to Save Both,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/business/remote-work-spiritual-consultants.html>.

⁹⁸ Casper ter Kuile, *The Power of Ritual: Turning Everyday Activities into Soulful Practices*, (HarperCollins, June 23, 2020).

⁹⁹ Pickering, W. S. F., and Jacqueline Redding. *Durkheim on Religion: A Selection of Readings with Bibliographies and Introductory Remarks*. 1st ed. The Lutterworth Press, 1975. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1cgf6tc>.

“collective effervescence.”¹⁰⁰ The idea behind this concept is that when people come together in a sort of ritual there is an “electricity” shared and participants now consider themselves united in a new way.¹⁰¹ This combination increases the connection, loyalty, and trust within the brand.¹⁰²

Glossier’s store plans follow a relatively formulaic design strategy. First, the store opens a pop-up to test the success of the market in each location. Next, Glossier uses this information and feedback about the pop-up to continue to revamp and update their store design. Two to three years later, Glossier opens a new store in the city. The following sections address Glossier stores in Seattle and Los Angeles as well as the displays, designs, and consumables given within Glossier stores.

Seattle

Pop-Up

¹⁰⁰ Pickering, W. S. F., and Jacqueline Redding.

¹⁰¹ Pickering, W. S. F., and Jacqueline Redding.

¹⁰² ter Kuile, *The Power of Ritual: Turning Everyday Activities into Soulful Practices*.

Glossier's Seattle store originated as a pop-up in June of 2019. After the success of this store, Glossier later built a permanent location in Seattle in August of 2021.¹⁰³ This section will begin by addressing Glossier's pop-up before moving to its permanent location.

Figure 12 is of Seattle's architectural layout and Figures 13 and 14 are from Seattle's

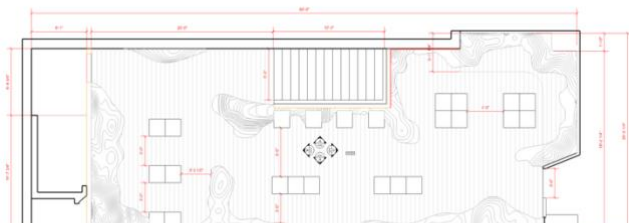


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

pop-up location. The pop-up is designed around the flowers and nature within Seattle, emphasizing purple flowers and the green moss that crawls up the walls of the store. In the Glossier pop-up, the main choice of colors was a deep shade of purple and green. Both colors create a sort of calming effect on the customer and are used to exude a sense of luxury.¹⁰⁴ To

¹⁰³ Kendall Latham, "Glossier Seattle Permanent Location," *Kendall Latham*, <https://kendalllatham.com/Glossier-Seattle-Perm>.

¹⁰⁴ Hunjet Anica and Vuk Silvija "The Psychological Impact of Colors in Marketing," *International Journal Vallis Aurea* 3, no. 2 (2017): 42–54.

build on this idea, green supposedly exudes harmony and sophistication while purple emits top quality and prestige.¹⁰⁵

Additionally, the windows are lightly frosted which serves to enclose the customer in the space and place them in the world of the Glossier store. The displays are low and easy to look over, and interior design devoted to the green landscape of the Pacific Northwest covers the walls. Products are openly displayed, and a significant amount of space is left open for the customer to walk around the store and interact with the in-person Glossier experience. The aspect of trying to buy something in the store is minimized, as a central theme of shopping at this location is the exciting and unique surroundings instead of solely highlighting the purchase. The experience works to generate emotion, excitement, and connection. The store experience relates back to Glossier's main goal of the stores—to extend the interaction within stores beyond purchasing a product. Instead, stores are meant to excite to the customer. The goal of this design was to incorporate the natural flora of the area into the Glossier store as a homage to its location. Kendall Latham, who now oversees Glossier in-store designs said, “the design marries industrial elements with meadow-like hills full of locally sourced flowers, creating an immersive and community-centric experience.”¹⁰⁶ This purpose reinforces the idea earlier that Glossier stores connect the online Glossier community with the city consumers are currently experiencing. Instead of trying to place them solely in the world of Glossier, there is an idea to merge Glossier's world and a whimsical element of the city where a consumer is physically located.

The pop-up won the Dezeen Award in 2020, which is given to the “world's best architecture [and] interiors.”¹⁰⁷ Upon winning, a judge commented “the narrative and connection

¹⁰⁵ Hunjet Anica and Vuk Silvija “The Psychological Impact of Colors in Marketing.”

¹⁰⁶ Kendall Latham, “Glossier Seattle,” *Kendall Latham*, <https://kendalllatham.com/Glossier-Seattle>.

¹⁰⁷ “About Dezeen Awards,” *Dezeen*, <https://www.dezeen.com/awards/about/>.

to the local area is lovely and it's a beautifully executed project.”¹⁰⁸ The overall feeling of this store was set to show Glossier’s interaction with the Pacific Northwest, a place the brand had not originally focused on, but it also succeeded in creating a place where people interact with a world they’re already used to. This store is a physical embodiment of Glossier’s goal to enhance the best version of the consumer.¹⁰⁹ It is not simply about adopting a new set of rules but combining what consumers are used to in stores and incorporating a novelty that shows the follower of Glossier is placed as an ideal within the shopping experience. This combination ties back into the idea of ritual, combining the new and familiar, and serving as a meeting place for the Glossier community.¹¹⁰

Seattle

Permanent

Just a year later, the permanent Glossier store opened in Seattle.¹¹¹ This was the first permanent store opening after the Covid-19 pandemic. The permanent Glossier store in Seattle holds some of the same focus toward natural landscape within the Pacific Northwest. However, instead of a purple, floral environment, the brand latched onto a mushroom theme, keeping the same greens and swapping the purple for Glossier’s signature pink.¹¹² Figures 15, 16, and 17 come from the Permanent Glossier Seattle store.

¹⁰⁸ “Glossier Seattle,” *Dezeen*, <https://www.dezeen.com/awards/2020/winners/glossier-seattle/>.

¹⁰⁹ Nast, “Glossier’s New Flagship on Melrose Avenue Is Peachy Pink Perfection.”

¹¹⁰ Bowles, “God Is Dead. So Is the Office. These People Want to Save Both.”

¹¹¹ Latham, “Glossier Seattle Permanent Location.”

¹¹² Latham, “Glossier Seattle Permanent Location.”



Figure 15



Figure 16

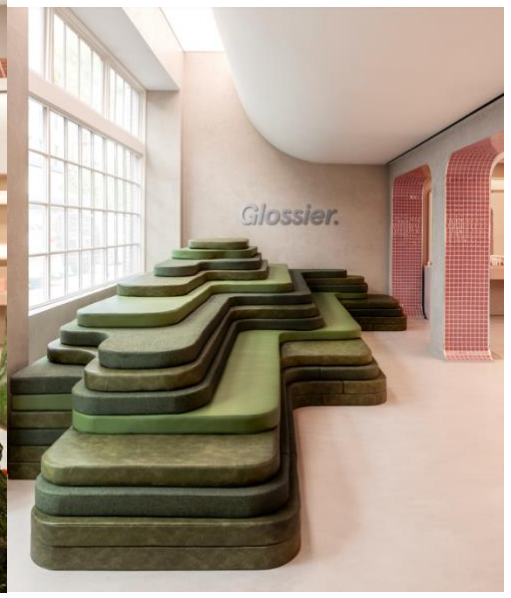


Figure 17

The pink and green colors build on the earlier importance/influences of green while keeping the importance of Glossier's pink as explained earlier. Glossier is focused on encapsulating and embracing the consumer in their carefully curated, playful, and feminine brand.¹¹³ This focus is also a unique choice as there are implications upon entering the store similar to going on a "trip." This store embodies a world described by the architect as a "Willy Wonka-esque environment."¹¹⁴ Arches and courtyards of ancient Greece and "rosy glass-tiled arches, troweled plaster, and fluorescent light fixtures inspired by Le Corbusier's La Tourette"

¹¹³ Hunjet Anica and Vuk Silvija "The Psychological Impact of Colors in Marketing."

¹¹⁴ "Glossier Seattle," *Dezeen*.

fill the space (elements clearly pictured in Figures 18 and 19).¹¹⁵ Figure 16 functions both as a decoration for the store, a photo opportunity, and a seat for people to relax. This space opens an



Figure 18

Figure 19

opportunity for people to talk together about their experience within the Glossier store. The large shrub statue in Figures 17 and 18 is a towering statue that catches the shopper's eye. When walking around products, this design is placed in the middle of the displays to encourage photos and generate excitement. These options are designed to work as another tool to build community for shoppers.¹¹⁶

The stores created by Glossier suspend reality, creating a fantasy the consumer is fully immersed in when going through the store. Much like Weiss's curated mood boards and online personality, stores work as a physical representation for the world of Glossier—the fantasy of what Glossier is selling. However, when looking at Figures 18 and 19, there is also an emphasis on the natural element of the Pacific Northwest. Even though the marketing and use of color is

¹¹⁵ Latham, "Glossier Seattle Permanent Location."

¹¹⁶ Latham, "Glossier Seattle Permanent Location."

distinct between the Seattle pop-up and permanent location, these stores were placed in a similar regional location and attributed to pay homage to the natural landscape.¹¹⁷ Their color differences imply different emotions and feelings. The permanent location creates a sort of “journey” for the customer. The idea is that the consumer is going on a trip, which highlights the exciting, fun nature of Glossier instead of the peaceful, relaxing qualities the store has. The movement and change within the pop-up to permanent Glossier store places a growing emphasis on Glossier (moving from a fantastical tribute to the Pacific Northwest to the fantasy of Glossier with influences from the Pacific Northwest). The aspect of a trip also seems to be more of a community-focused event, that people may want to go on with friends instead of through a peaceful field (or field-looking store) which they may want to do alone. Both the pop-up and permanent location focus on the necessary elements of ritual, combining the familiar and new.¹¹⁸ As Glossier becomes more influential, there seems to be a growing emphasis on trusting the brand and fostering the community as a consumer enters the store.

Los Angeles

Glossier’s first permanent Los Angeles store also paid tribute to Southern California, as Weiss describes the store as a “wink to the L.A. lifestyle.”¹¹⁹ Figures 20 and 21 come from the Los Angeles store.

¹¹⁷ Kali Hays, “Glossier Opening Permanent Retail Space in L.A.,” *WWD*, April 12, 2018, <https://wwd.com/feature/glossier-opening-permanent-store-los-angeles-melrose-avenue-1202647687/>.

¹¹⁸ ter Kuile, *The Power of Ritual: Turning Everyday Activities into Soulful Practices*.

¹¹⁹ Hays, “Glossier Opening Permanent Retail Space in L.A.,”



Figure 20



Figure 21

Weiss mentioned this store's design takes form through making the walk through the store like driving through a "California desert." This is especially notable in the materials used on display construction that mimics the stucco material to build houses in the Valley (with these displays dyed in a Glossier shade of pink). Additionally, the use of flowers and brush throughout the store add to a desert-like feel alongside the Frank Lloyd Wright-style architecture.

The store was met with cult-like praise (deserving of the cult brand), with articles coming out from *Architectural Digest*, *Forbes*, and *WWD* before the store opened. The store was meant to be another immersive experience, as "sound, light, and space, [bring the consumer] to another environment." Lines stretched out the door for the first year, and the store was regulated with an "offline or in-person editor" trained to talk with customers waiting to get into the store.¹²⁰

This line and "offline editor" are what originally attracted me and my friend to the store in 2019.

¹²⁰ Kimberly Cruzalta, "Lauren Tappan on A Day in the Life As a Glossier Offline Editor," *Beauty By Us*, May 6, 2020, <https://beautybyus.co/glossier-offline-editor-lauren-tappan-shares-a-day-in-the-life/>.

Figure 22 comes from the main exhibit within this store--the desert hallway that leads to a branded, mirrored room at the end of the store and has later been titled the “selfie Canyon” or the “Glossier Canyon.”¹²¹

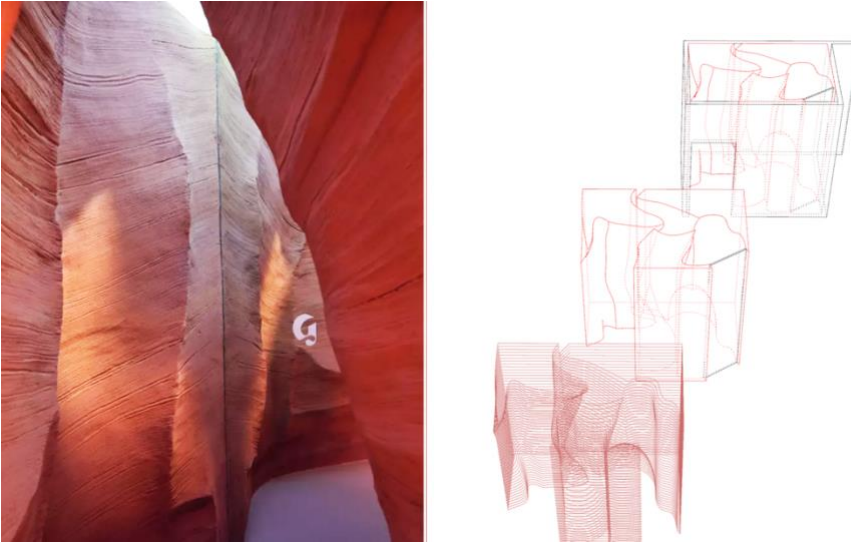


Figure 22

Here, it’s important to note that the actual architectural designs are centered around Antelope Canyon, which is in the state of Arizona. Again, this inaccuracy reveals Glossier’s priority of aesthetics over factual accuracy. With the “Glossier Canyon” Glossier attempts to connect with its audience, promoting the already-existing communities and values it claims to support. However, at the center of the brand, more than factual accuracy or clear research, is aesthetic appeal.

¹²¹ Hannah Huber, “Glossier Los Angeles Is Here and There Are 5 Things We Want to Copy,” *Architectural Digest*, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/design-ideas-glossier-los-angeles-store>.

The ideas lying behind this design are unique. The “Glossier Canyon” was set off from the store, with a series of corners and twists to separate the consumer from the rest of the Glossier experience. While this may seem counterintuitive, there is an element of surrender that occurs by going through this exhibit. At the end of the hallway, there is a mirror with the Glossier “G” in the middle. The exhibit is another fantasy-like experience, and there is a journey that leads to Glossier at the end. Meditative sounds are played throughout the hallway distinct from the rest of the store, and consumers are encouraged to take pictures at the end of the hallway and post about their experience. The space directly fosters the type of aesthetic-focused community written about in Cimino’s work.¹²²



Figure 23



Figure 24

Figures 23 and 24 come from my trip in 2019 to the Melrose Glossier store. Figure 23 was taken at the end of the “Glossier Canyon” and Figure 24 was taken when going through the

¹²² Richard P. Cimino and Christopher Smith.

“Glossier Canyon.” I came into the store with my friend, and we were encouraged to go with each other and take photos throughout the process. Unless you went by yourself through the line, groups were separated to keep friends together and the experience was meant to foster friendship and community. People who came by themselves were allowed to go in by themselves or meet up with other people that had come into the store alone (think a Single Riders line at Disneyland). When entering the hallway, my friend and I were encapsulated by calming, meditative sounds. The lighting changed to be softer, and as we progressed through the walkway, we could look up to see massive walls of red rock lining our entire path (as shown in Figure 24). At the end of the walkway, we were able to see the mirror with the Glossier logo (Figure 23). Almost immediately, we started taking pictures. This experience introduced both of us to Glossier and was an exciting, new exhibit that neither of us had experienced anything like before (or since). The Glossier store remained a topic of conversation for the rest of the day and was an exciting event for us to see. It is important to note this experience within the store. My friend and I were the target demographic for Glossier, and our uncertainty of the brand was met with excited explanations from “offline editors” and people within the store alike. The experience of shopping at Glossier was generative for conversation, community building, and our understanding of the brand.

II. Displays, Uniforms, and Bags

Additionally, Glossier display cases are specifically designed and patented for Glossier stores. The style is chosen as “a design solution for creating a scalable, intuitive display to try products and provide supplemental information to visitors, while seamlessly suggesting a visual standard” and the spacing of the wave design “has a specific radius and depth as to fit the

majority of Glossier's products."¹²³ The displays show the balance of function, aesthetics, and functionality that tie into Glossier's system. Additionally, the displays are "made from recycled post-industrial plastics" and "the material used for this system is 100% recyclable" which reinforces Glossier's value-based mission.¹²⁴ The displays are an interesting example of

Glossier.

Date: 2020.0819
 Drawn By: Kendall Latham
 GLOSSIER WAVE
 2020
 MILLWORK FOR TESTER SURFACES

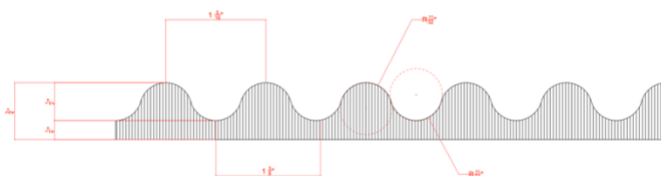


Figure 25



Figure 26

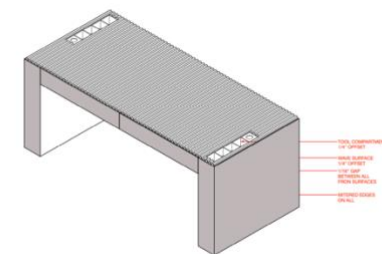
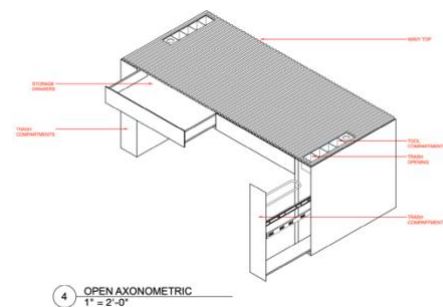


Figure 27

Glossier's attention to detail and desire for items to appear more photogenic. The color is Glossier pink and unique to the brand, but there is a seamlessness about how products, displays, and the consumer work together in these cases. Figures 25, 26, and 27 show how the simple and seemingly minimal details are carefully thought out and implemented throughout Glossier stores.

¹²³ Kendall Latham, "Glossier Testing System, Kendall Latham," <https://kendalllatham.com/Glossier-Testing-System>.

¹²⁴ Latham, "Glossier Testing System."

Glossier “editors” (retail associates) are also outfitted with Glossier pink, one-piece uniforms. Each of the editors layer pieces or wear different shoes to make the outfit their own, but there is a utilitarian element to the outfit. The internet described “The uniform of Glossier store employees is the most coveted look amongst every girl in New York. It’s as if Rosie the Riveter took a bath using Cloud Paint in Puff.”¹²⁵ These uniforms balance a utilitarian feel with the minimal, fun aesthetic Glossier puts out. The uniforms are a special piece of knowledge given to people who are able to go to the stores and see the coveted jumpsuits. Online, few are resold and are priced at around a mean of \$480, as “editors” are fully in-the-know members of the Glossier community.¹²⁶

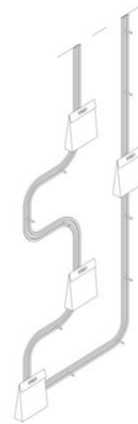
¹²⁵ Tara Gonzalez, “Wait — Is Eva Longoria Dressing Like a Glossier Employee?” *Yahoo*, <https://www.yahoo.com/video/wait-eva-longoria-dressing-glossier-194500710.html>.

¹²⁶ “Glossier Jumpsuit Rare,” *Poshmark*, <https://poshmark.com/listing/Glossier-Jumpsuit-RARE-63e34aa9cd6d909b2ac2c803>.

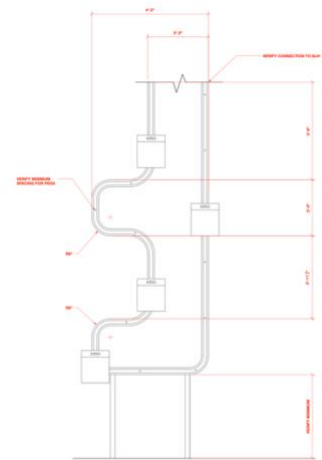
Another important use of a display within the Glossier stores is the hanging system at the checkout in the Brooklyn, New York store shown in Figures 28 and 29.¹²⁷



Figure 28



1 AXONOMETRIC
T=2'-0"



1 ELEVATION
T=2'-0"

Figure 29

This display hangs bags in a curved pattern that is visually appealing and also highlights the name written on the bag. The process to buying a product in Glossier goes as follows: an editor comes up to someone purchasing a product. The consumer will list the items they want and pay on an iPad the editor is carrying with them. The consumer can continue to walk around, are encouraged to take photos while waiting, and then their name is called at a check out booth where they receive a Glossier bag with their name hand-written on the front. Especially when hanging on display, a consumer's name is linked with Glossier and in return, Glossier proudly displays that they believe the consumer belongs to the brand. Much the way a Starbucks coffee cup gained a sort of clout or notoriety in the early 2000s, the Glossier bags are a stamp of

¹²⁷ Kendall Latham, "Glossier Brooklyn," *Kendall Latham*, <https://kendalllatham.com/Glossier-Brooklyn>.

interaction with the brand.¹²⁸ Not only is the consumer excited about having just purchased an item from the brand, but they are also singled out and rewarded by having their name written on an in-store only experience. This experience adds to the appeal of visiting a Glossier store in-person. The display in the store takes this social gratification a step further. After certain customer's names are called, their bag is hung up on this rack, displaying the interaction and participating with the brand, linking the consumer to the brand's community. This display could be seen as an example of purpose finding and accountability as the most extreme or community as the least extreme theme in ter Kuile's definitions.

In every Glossier purchase there is at least one sticker, and products are packed in Glossier's signature Pink Pouch. This pouch, which is Glossier's shade of pink, "has become symbolic of community membership opening up opportunities for social interaction as consumers can instantly recognize the brand on social media and in offline interactions with Glossier followers."¹²⁹ Each of these items work as a sort of signal to those around them that the consumer interacts with the Glossier brand.

The experiential element to these stores creates a new memory for followers to experience with those around them. The exhibit-like infrastructure and planning of the stores encourage people to post about their time at Glossier on social media, increasing brand loyalty and generating content for the brand. The spaces feel exciting yet supportive, and encourage the social transformation, creativity, and community that ter Kuile says is required for the replacement of traditional communities. The space works to focus on aesthetics, as people are drawn to Glossier to satisfy a type of desire for beauty within their community.¹³⁰ The stores

¹²⁸ Paintsil and Kim.

¹²⁹ Paintsil and Kim.

¹³⁰ Cimino, Richard P., and Christopher Smith.

develop the fantastical, playful world of Glossier and distance themselves from traditional beauty brands by being a place for someone to experience the brand instead of just shopping for the products. The intentional design of Glossier bags naming their customers works to reinforce loyalty and the feeling of a relationship with the brand. The Glossier stickers and Pink Pouch create a connection between Glossier followers. Each of these elements works to promote community and relationships for people who are Glossier followers. As the community is promoted and encouraged within Glossier, the connection of followers grows with a sense of mutual understanding and excitement in participating in the experience (or ritual) of shopping at Glossier.¹³¹

¹³¹ Pickering, W. S. F., and Jacqueline Redding.

Conclusion

In the beginning of 2022 Glossier faced a number of criticisms, and several sites predicted the company's downfall. After recognizing that there were serious issues with the treatment of people of color within the company, Glossier was momentarily seen as a hypocritical company. The brand touted values of inclusivity and curiosity, yet the company proved to be close-minded and exclusive in many ways. Most of the models and people represented within Glossier were young, white women. The lack of people of color, queer, non-female identifying, and older people became progressively more apparent. The Instagram account @outtathegloss, an anonymous Instagram page voicing the complaints of several ex-employees, came as a reaction to this pushback, calling for Glossier to reform.¹³² Amidst these major social issues for the company, about a third of the employees working with Glossier were laid off from their jobs due to the company's valuation being greater than profits.

While this pushback did hold some traction, it seemed to go away relatively quickly. A few articles from major magazines were released detailing the racism and firing occurring within Glossier alongside @outtathegloss before these sources went silent for unknown reasons.¹³³ There was no major reference to this again until Emily Weiss stepped down from her position as CEO.¹³⁴ Her leaving was never publicly related to the pushback. Instead, she cited having a child as her reason for stepping down. She currently still works as Glossier's Executive Chairwoman.¹³⁵

¹³² @outtathegloss, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGc1x8gF6cK/>.

¹³³ @outtathegloss, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGc1x8gF6cK/>.

¹³⁴ Gupta, "Glossier's Emily Weiss, Among the Last of the Girlbosses, Steps Down."

¹³⁵ Gupta, "Glossier's Emily Weiss, Among the Last of the Girlbosses, Steps Down."

After Weiss stepped down, Glossier has made some significant changes. After hiring singer Olivia Rodrigo to be the face of Glossier, the company announced that they would be opening booths in Sephora to allow customers who were not near a retail location to try out products.¹³⁶ These two changes are massive shifts in Glossier ideals, and further research may want to address how the brand's shift away from online and store communities to a more generic selling approach has altered the brand's community and appeal. Additionally, further research may question if a value-based brand can every truly prioritize their set values and the consumer while still selling a product and maximizing the brand and profit.

To replace some of the more traditional forms of communities, many Millennials and people in Generation Z have sought connection in new groups.¹³⁷ The brand Glossier has worked as a substitute for traditional forms of gathering like religious communities or neighborhood meetups. Glossier's developed narrative has created a distinct form of community for its followers. This community and Glossier's distinct branding led me to ask the question: How does Glossier use branding and language to create community identification, and what does online participation in this brand do for its culture?

After analyzing Glossier's history, it's easier to gain an understanding of Glossier's developed narrative. Weiss put careful consideration into each of her marketing strategies when creating the brand, highlighting the "Glossier girl" identity as a part of the product. Instead of differentiating her *Into the Gloss*'s community from Glossier's community, Weiss used *Into the Gloss* to have a loyal, trusting audience for her business. This audience felt connection to the brand and quickly followed Glossier.

¹³⁶ Tiffany Dodson, "Glossier x Sephora Launch 2023," *Harpers Bazaar*, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/skin-care/a40718167/glossier-at-sephora/>.

¹³⁷ Carroll, John.

Glossier's social media posts work to perpetuate the identity of the ideal "Glossier girl." Semiotic analysis breaks down the explicit and implicit messaging behind each image to understand its function and purpose. Glossier's Instagram is one of the main ways to perpetuate the lifestyle and idealized narrative Glossier puts out about the brand. As Glossier interacts with its followers and followers interact with each other, Glossier establishes an open channel of communication. This communication is imperative to the open community of Glossier and fosters relationships between followers. When consumers feel their voice is heard and understood, they feel more invested and at home within the Glossier community.

By creating physical stores, Glossier is extending their reach and creating an actual space for the Glossier world to come to life. Social media has made being a follower of Glossier a complete identity, and Glossier stores are now a place to understand, learn, and embrace (by taking photos) the "culture" of Glossier's narrative and world. Glossier stores work to bring the narrative surrounding each of their items to life. In its stores, Glossier is giving a physical representation of what each of its products do and the narrative created around a physical item. Glossier has injected values, personality, and a backstory into an inanimate object. Glossier stores create a type of ritual for consumers to follow. Consumers are encouraged to interact with the stores, and in doing so, increase their enthusiasm, loyalty, and community in Glossier.

Glossier works to create and maintain a narrative for their brand. The world of Glossier is set through their Instagram, reinforced through their stores, and perpetuated through their followers. The influence of Glossier illustrates the power of the brand as the "Glossier girl" becomes an identity and provides a community to belong. Glossier's developed narrative has created a distinct form of community for its followers. Glossier replaces traditional communities

rejected by Millennials and Generation Z by giving consumers a space to find support, build their identities, and have a positive outlet for personal growth.

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