

Emotional and Social Drivers of Growth in Celebrity-Founded Makeup Brands

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Abstract. In recent years, the number of celebrity-founded makeup brands in North America has increased rapidly, capturing significant attention from consumers and the media. Singers, actors, and influencers are leveraging their personal branding to launch their own makeup product lines. While these ventures benefit from raising visibility, traditional makeup brands continue to launch new products but face increasing competitive pressure. This paper takes celebrity identity as the core research variable and explores its role in shaping brand growth, communication strategy, and brand health within celebrity-founded beauty ventures. The paper adopts three models for analysis. First, beginning with using the Social Media Value Chain model, the study finds that celebrity brands generate more user-driven content and higher engagement rates. Then, the Brand Health Radar model reveals that celebrity-led brands excel in emotional connection and community vitality. In conclusion, this paper argues that celebrity identity reshapes brand performance through enhanced visibility, user participation, and deeper emotional attachment and symbolic association.

Keywords: Celebrity identity, beauty brands, qualitative analysis.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the beauty industry has witnessed a significant resurgence of celebrity-founded brands. From Elizabeth Taylor's pioneering fragrance line to Rihanna's disruptive launch of Fenty Beauty in 2017, celebrity participation has grown from endorsement to ownership [1]. As of 2023, celebrity beauty brands generated over \$1 billion in U.S. sales, marking a 58% year-over-year increase, which is far outpacing the overall beauty category [2]. This momentum is further underscored by continued launches from major figures such as Michelle Phan and Selena Gomez, alongside acquisition deals like Hailey Bieber's Rhode, which was purchased by e.l.f. Beauty for \$1 billion in May 2025 [3]. These developments not only reflect shifting consumer preferences but also highlight the growing influence of parasocial relationships and digital visibility in brand success [1].

Despite their commercial success, celebrity-founded brands remain controversial. Critics argue that many such ventures lack authenticity. Skeptics argue about whether celebrities genuinely use or develop the products [1]. Concerns about market saturation, unsustainable growth, and ephemeral hype have further fueled doubts. While some brands such as Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty, continue to demonstrate strong performance and innovation, others fade quickly due to weak consumer trust or poor differentiation. This raises a key question: "Is the success of celebrity brands a result of systematic advantages rooted in their brand structure and marketing model, or is it merely circumstantial?"

Although media and industry reports frequently document the rise of celebrity brands, academic research on this phenomenon remains limited. In particular, few studies compare the early-stage growth, digital engagement, and consumer perceptions between celebrity-backed and non-celebrity beauty brands. This paper aims to address this gap by systematically analyzing how celebrity identity shapes brand growth mechanisms, digital engagement, and consumer perception within celebrity-founded makeup brands. To achieve these goals, this paper adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis. Drawing from industry reports, market data, and social media metrics, the study compares multiple celebrity-founded makeup brands to identify the common growth mechanisms behind their success. Analytical frameworks such as the Social Media Value Chain (SMVC) and the Brand Health Radar are employed to systematically capture emotional drivers,

digital visibility, and consumer perception. By integrating theoretical models with publicly available data, the paper provides a comparative evaluation of celebrity-founded brands' early-stage performance and explores how emotional engagement and parasocial relationships contribute to their market differentiation. This methodological approach helps bridge the current academic gap and generates insights relevant to marketing strategists, brand managers, and scholars interested in celebrity entrepreneurship.

2. Research Hypothesis

The rapid rise of celebrity-founded makeup brands is often attributed not only to marketing investment but also to the unique social capital contained in celebrity identity. Prior research suggests that a celebrity's perceived attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness can enhance consumer-based brand equity by shaping brand associations and perceived quality [4]. Unlike traditional endorsements, when celebrities act as founders, their identity is more deeply blended into the brand's symbolic meaning, allowing for a stronger and more enduring consumer connection [5]. This connection is further strengthened by parasocial relationships (PSRs) formed through social media, which enable consumers to feel emotionally bonded to the founder, thereby increasing brand engagement and loyalty [6].

Based on these insights, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Celebrity-founded beauty brands experience significantly faster early-stage growth compared to non-celebrity brands.

H2: Parasocial relationships help strengthen consumer interaction and community vitality in celebrity-founded brands. This variable is measured by the proportion of user-generated content (UGC) shared across social platforms [7].

H3: Founders with higher perceived credibility enhance brand sentiment and engagement. Credibility is measured based on professional background levels (e.g., licensed makeup artist = 3; internet influencer = 1), using classification methods from prior media research [8].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach, focusing on the visual and communicative strategies of celebrity-founded beauty brands. The analysis draws on publicly available media content, official brand channels, and social media visuals. This design is suitable for examining how brand identity and emotional resonance are constructed and perceived in digital environments.

3.2. Case Selection and Justification

The analysis focuses on several representative celebrity beauty brands that have gained considerable attention in the global market, including Rare Beauty, Fenty Beauty, and Kylie Cosmetics as the primary case. These brands are selected based on factors such as founder prominence, social media presence, and availability of visual materials. By comparing multiple cases, the study aims to reveal recurring strategies and emotional patterns in visual branding.

3.3. Visual Analysis Framework

To further investigate how celebrity-founded makeup brands communicate identity and build emotional resonance, this study incorporates a visual analysis framework informed by the Social Media Value Chain (SMVC) and the Brand Health Radar [9, 10]. These models provide a structured lens through which to interpret the emotional, symbolic, and strategic dimensions of digital content. Specifically, the SMVC helps trace how visual and narrative assets on platforms like Instagram are transformed into consumer engagement, while the Brand Health Radar captures perceptions of authenticity, relevance, and trust shaped by these visual cues. The analysis focuses on how brands

encode meaning through visual elements such as color palettes, facial expression, styling, and the founder’s presence or absence in promotional imagery. These visual choices are then interpreted in relation to the brand’s identity claims, emotional appeal, and parasocial messaging. Rather than testing hypotheses through formal modeling, the approach identifies recurring symbolic strategies and narrative patterns that distinguish successful celebrity brands. This qualitative synthesis aims to illuminate how emotional storytelling and digital aesthetics contribute to early-stage brand differentiation and consumer connection.

4. Case Studies of Celebrity Beauty Brands

4.1. Comparative Sales Performance

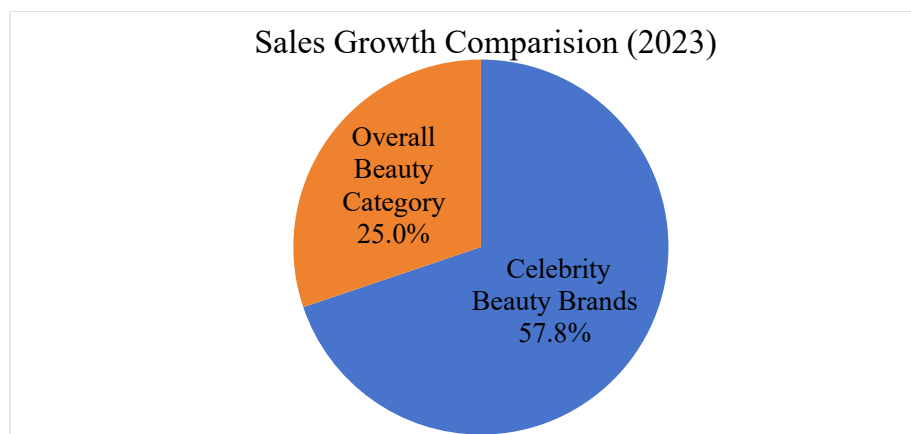


Figure 1. Sales growth of celebrity beauty brands vs. overall beauty category in the U.S. in 2023 (Picture credit: Original)

In 2023, celebrity-founded beauty brands demonstrated significantly stronger growth than the overall beauty category in the United States. According to NielsenIQ data, celebrity beauty brands experienced a 57.8% year-over-year sales increase, while the total beauty market grew by only 11.1%, as shown in Figure 1. This substantial gap illustrates the marketing and consumer resonance advantages celebrity brands have leveraged, potentially driven by stronger digital engagement, parasocial loyalty, and media visibility. The disparity also underlines a growing consumer preference for personal-brand-driven products over traditional corporate offerings, which will be explored further in subsequent case analyses.

4.2. Comparative Brand Health Analysis of Celebrity Beauty Brands

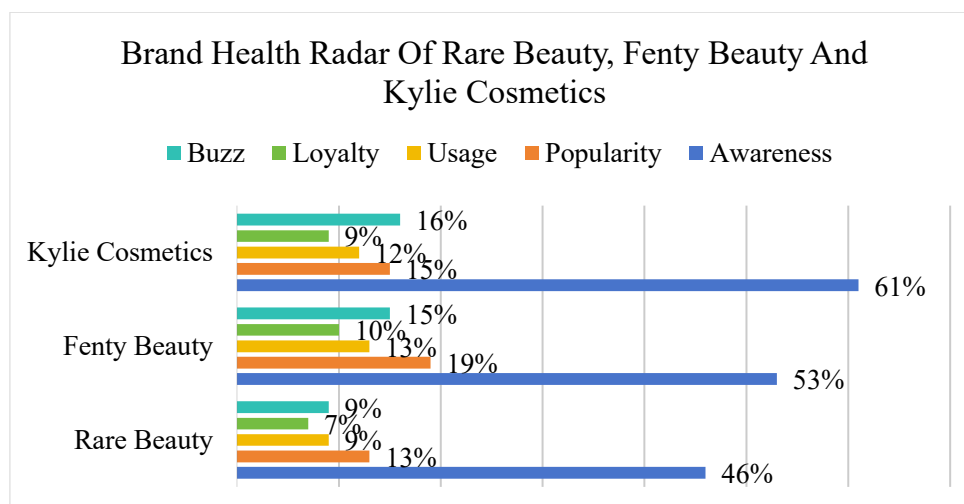


Figure 2. Brand health radar profiles of rare beauty, fenty beauty, and kylie cosmetics (2023) (Picture credit: Original)

To complement the regression-based findings discussed earlier, the Brand Health Radar framework provides a multidimensional lens to assess how celebrity-founded beauty brands resonate with consumers. Drawing on 2022 North American survey data from Statista, the radar profiles in Figure 2 visualize five key consumer-facing dimensions—awareness, consideration, purchase intent, usage, and advocacy. These indicators reflect brand cognition and behavior and capture the symbolic and emotional mechanisms activated through founder visibility and identity transmission.

Kylie Cosmetics shows strong awareness but relatively weaker engagement, which may relate to audience fatigue or changes in platform trends. Fenty maintains high popularity and trust, likely influenced by Rihanna's visibility in both music and fashion. Rare Beauty performs well in connection and engagement, even though it's a newer brand. This suggests that founder storytelling and audience alignment can create strong consumer bonds regardless of market entry time. The differences across these brands show how the founders' backgrounds and digital behavior shape brand performance in distinct ways.

Across Rare Beauty, Fenty Beauty, and Kylie Cosmetics, there is a shared emphasis on emotionally affective dimensions. Each brand demonstrates disproportionately high scores in at least one such metric, such as consideration or advocacy. Rather than purely reflecting functional product traits, these elevations are likely shaped by the founders' digital prominence and narrative consistency. Within the SMVC model, such visibility activates symbolic transfer from founder to brand, fostering user-generated dialogue and emotional alignment that reinforce sustained advocacy and purchase intent. These brands benefit from the continual circulation of symbolic content through parasocial dynamics. Consumer interaction spans both the product itself and the emotionally resonant narratives projected by the founder.

While each brand presents distinct peaks across the five dimensions, their radar chart configurations converge toward an emphasis on emotional resonance over utilitarian positioning. This visual pattern suggests that celebrity-founded brands follow structurally differentiated engagement trajectories. The radar framework thus bridges descriptive brand metrics with the conceptual pathways outlined in the SMVC model, offering empirical grounding for how founder identity helps shape brand health across affective and cognitive channels [11].

4.3. Discussion and Constraints

This study finds that celebrity-founded makeup brands tend to show stronger digital engagement and emotional connection compared to non-celebrity brands, especially when parasocial relationships and founder credibility act as mediating factors. This reflects the unique advantage of celebrity identity in the beauty sector, where consumer choices are highly emotional and visually driven. The results also demonstrate how the symbolic association between the founder and the brand enables a deeper consumer attachment, making celebrity-led branding more than a marketing tactic; it becomes part of the product's meaning itself. This is particularly effective in internet-native environments, where social media presence and founder storytelling play a critical role in shaping brand narratives and community behavior. Digital-native celebrity brands such as Rare Beauty and Fenty have maintained higher consumer interaction scores across awareness, usage, and advocacy metrics, validating the explanatory power of models like the Brand Health Radar. However, it is important to note that the lack of direct survey data limits the ability to observe deeper psychological mechanisms, and the current model may not fully capture offline reputation or long-term brand equity shifts. Future studies may include experimental or longitudinal designs to trace how parasocial engagement evolves over time, and to what extent it sustains commercial performance.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the growth dynamics of celebrity-founded makeup brands by focusing on emotional connection, parasocial relationships, and perceived credibility. Drawing from both theory and data, it finds that these brands tend to perform better in digital engagement, community

interaction, and overall sentiment when compared to non-celebrity brands. Hypothesis 1 is supported by higher brand health indicators observed in celebrity-founded brands, suggesting stronger symbolic resonance with consumers. Hypothesis 2 is also consistent with the data, as platforms with more user-generated content (UGC) and higher consumer interaction scores often match stronger parasocial relationships. Hypothesis 3 connects credibility to engagement outcomes, which is partially supported by the observed pattern: founders with more professional or relatable backgrounds tend to attract higher sentiment scores and loyalty metrics. Across the selected brands, the radar profiles consistently show elevated scores in consumer recognition metrics such as awareness and consideration. This trend is closely tied to the high online visibility of their founders, whose personal stories and digital presence circulate alongside the brand itself. As these narratives gain traction, they help cultivate emotional familiarity, which appears to encourage further consumer engagement through dimensions like usage and advocacy. Rather than relying on product utility alone, these brands maintain presence through storytelling and sustained media exposure. Within the SMVC framework, such repeated emotional cues reinforce symbolic association and promote longer-term interaction patterns with consumers.

This study helps clarify how symbolic capital and emotional branding work together in the context of celebrity-founded businesses. Rather than being a superficial promotional strategy, founder identity can serve as a long-term emotional asset that shapes brand perception and consumer behavior. However, the analysis is limited by the scope and granularity of available data. Many variables such as parasocial intensity or personal credibility, rely on proxies like UGC or founder tiering, which are interpretative rather than direct measures. In the future, studies could combine consumer-level survey data with platform metrics for greater precision. This research offers a framework for understanding why some celebrity beauty brands scale quickly while others struggle, highlighting the power of emotional mechanisms in shaping market success.

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